

# CATALYTIC COMMUNITIES: THE BIRTH OF A DOT ORG

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by **Theresa Denise Williamson**  
Department of City and Regional Planning  
University of Pennsylvania School of Design  
[theresa@theresawilliamson.info](mailto:theresa@theresawilliamson.info)

**Doctoral Committee:**  
Seymour Mandelbaum (Chair)  
Marja Hoek-Smit  
Thomas Reiner  
Sidney Wong

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**Dedicated to Denise and John: my best friends, my parents.**

## **Acknowledgements**

At the dinner table growing up, when we had guests over, I would occasionally count the number of languages spoken among us. Out of twelve people it was not unusual to have seven or eight languages represented. Maybe a Russian, a Peruvian, a Haitian, a Kenyan, and a Taiwanese would sit around the table jointly with my parents – my Brazilian mother and English father – and us kids. As I grew up, I found the same to be true within my own circle of friends. The conversations that bloomed and the opportunity for coexistence this inherently created in my imagination were no doubt fundamental to bringing me where I am at today: completing this “risky,” as one doctoral advisor described it, doctoral dissertation, about an organization I founded to bring communities together to exchange solutions across borders.

Most of those sitting around the dinner table were economists like my parents. People who believe in numbers – and what they tell us – about the world in which we live. I lived my life to the point of preparing my Ph.D. proposal believing it was mainly through numbers that new ‘scientific’ knowledge could be created. But then I took another direction – one that, in truth, better reflected my style and my instincts about the kind of knowledge that can be used to make the world a better place.

In preparing this doctoral dissertation I would like to thank five distinct groups of people who inspired and supported me in very different but entirely complementary ways. The work that follows would not have been possible without all of them, simultaneously, enforcing and reinforcing its approach from multiple perspectives.

My parents – Denise and John – have trusted me to organize and manage my life for as long as I can remember while at the same time providing incredible inspiration as

to who I could be, and every type of imaginable support for me to get there. Their love of education passed to us as children led me to see a Ph.D. as a natural step in the growth process. And so here I am today. My brothers – André and Daniel – older brothers whom I always admired and whose every word I respected growing up (much to my detriment, at times!), taught me to make good arguments, to be clear about my thoughts, and to be strong-willed.

It is my family that sent me along the Ph.D. track, intentionally or not. But it was Professor Seymour Mandelbaum I first met when I arrived there, in his Planning Theory class in which all new doctoral students enroll. From that first semester on through the process, his encouraging yet (I expect unintentionally) slightly intimidating posture set me on a course that may be creatively termed “careful risk taking,” if such a thing exists! He, along with Professors Marja Hoek-Smit, Thomas Reiner, and Sidney Wong encouraged me to take on the project that follows – a risky one that I hope will go beyond describing a new type of organization to stimulate more detailed research, other similar ‘risky’ research projects, and plenty of criticism that will lead to better approaches. All four professors have provided very different and important insights into this process: Thomas Reiner with a focus on civil society and the not-for-profit sector; Marja Hoek-Smit as an expert evaluator with a lifelong history of work with housing in the developing world; and Sidney Wong with his interests in ICTs, cities, and deep concerns regarding research methodology. These professors, along with fellow doctoral students – in particular Lynn Mandarano and Dan Campo – were my community at Penn, and I will be forever grateful to them for long conversations that helped me maintain focus and perseverance.

My inspiration in starting Catalytic Communities and the secret of its success to date are beyond a doubt the community leaders that met me with open arms when I first began my research in Rio de Janeiro – Bezerra from Asa Branca, Henrique and Carlos Roberto from Jacarezinho, and the entire crew from the CONGESCO coalition. Since then, they and others have taught me life lessons and involved me in their important struggles, for which I am eternally grateful.

On a practical note, it was Catalytic Communities' incredible staff and volunteers: Roseli Franco, Edson Cardoso, Rosa Zambrano, Angelo da Silva, Thais Portela, Armando Ibarra, Ricardo Ferracini, Andrew Genung, Mike Niedermeier, and Brett Joly, among others, that not only provided much of the energy and important feedback for the organization as it has been built (and which is incorporated into the topics and discussions that follow), but that made it possible for me to take time away from CatComm – my “baby” – to give birth to this baby – my dissertation – over the past year.

Finally, Marcos Alvito kept me calm throughout this entire process, helping me maintain my conviction and determination. As an accomplished anthropologist, he is a physical manifestation of the Dreyfus Brothers' ‘novice-expert’ theory, someone that shows that a researcher, in experiencing and living a situation, can develop an expertise beyond that which the study of numbers can bring and that should be valued. In seeing the Brazilian reaction to his work I also realized that in Brazil good qualitative research is generally more respected than it is in the US. The importance of conducting and valuing qualitative, non-evaluative research grew indisputable as I prepared this dissertation in his presence over the past three years. I hope to show this in the pages that follow.

## ABSTRACT

### CATALYTIC COMMUNITIES: THE BIRTH OF A DOT ORG

Theresa Denise Williamson

Seymour Mandelbaum

This dissertation describes and analyzes six themes that emerged during the first three years' development of Catalytic Communities, a community development organization meant to operate strictly in cyberspace, thus reaching a global audience, though legally based in the US and Brazil. I founded this organization with minimal experience and, through this dissertation, describe my learning during its pilot and maturation phase, as an idea was transformed into a viable organization, from September 2000 through December 2003.

My basic question was: what can be learned about a new type of civil society institution – the Dot Org – during its early years? The six themes that naturally surfaced, and which I then explore, fall into three broad categories: (1) those that explain its creation (the history of technology, the Brazilian reality, social network theory); (2) those that help describe what the organization came to look like (the concept of the Dot Org, the effect of the development of a physical space on the virtual organization); and (3) those that describe the management processes used to keep and develop such an organization (staff management and fundraising lessons).

Rather than attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of Catalytic Communities, I describe the results of a learning process, providing more qualitative and deep knowledge

that only the protagonist in an academic function can provide. This dissertation is therefore a study of “learning by doing,” for which the lessons learned are not only those referring to the six themes that surface but also those that help define a new research approach that I call Protagonist Action Research (PrAR).

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## **Preface**

### ***A New Organization***

This dissertation tells the story of one particular Dot Org – Catalytic Communities (CatComm) – an organization that I founded in September 2000 with the intention of operating solely in cyberspace. The pages that follow tell my story of CatComm’s early years. Others, I’m sure, will tell the story in a different way. I have tried to link these accounts by keeping a detailed and extensive journal and by interviewing my colleagues as a detached observer might have done. Topics were explored ranging from business management to social networks, as was necessary in order to determine what Catalytic Communities can tell us about the fundamental nature of a new type of civil society<sup>1</sup> organization – the Dot Org.

Just as a true “dot com” is a company that came to be because of an entirely new opportunity<sup>2</sup> created for private enterprise due to the existence of the World Wide Web (“the Web”), a “Dot Org” is a not-for-profit organization that arose due to new opportunities presented to civil society by the Web and the new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), more generally.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term “civil society” is defined in relation to government. Civil society is “a sphere of association in society in distinction to the state, involving a network of institutions through which society and groups within it represent themselves in cultural, ideological and political senses” (Kurtz 1999: 269). For further reflection on this term, see footnote 111.

<sup>2</sup> Though there exist “copy cat” dot coms in private enterprise that utilized the models of early dot coms to develop their services, the services they offer are nonetheless only possible due to new opportunities created by the Web. That is what defines a dot com as compared with a traditional company.

<sup>3</sup> “Dot com” and “dot org” are the only two terms referring to Web address suffixes that I have found in usage. “Dot edu” and “dot gov” do not appear in academic or mainstream usage. Both “dot org” and “dot com” suffix Web addresses can be purchased by any private citizen, so simply having such an address does not imply the nature of the organization (for legal reasons CatComm owns [www.catalyticcommunities.com](http://www.catalyticcommunities.com), for example). On the other hand, the organizations referred to as “Dot

Some argue that the Web does not actually make anything “new” possible, that it simply makes certain activities more efficient or easier to achieve. This kind of thinking has in my mind been put to rest by the pursuits of dot coms, digital government initiatives, and virtual not-for-profits that take advantage of new opportunities created by the Internet to expand and change the face of their sectors’ work. Before Ebay, a person with a particular taste – say for frog memorabilia – wanting to simplify her life and give up that collection had two options: throw them out or hold on to them. With Ebay, no item is wasted. There is a potential buyer out there for just about any item one might own, though unlikely someone close by.

Digital government initiatives and proposals show how democracy can be strengthened in places with populations spread out or of a size that previously made individuals’ direct involvement in governance prohibitive.<sup>4</sup> And in the not-for-profit arena, organizations like [idealists.org](http://idealists.org), [oneworld.net](http://oneworld.net), and [moveon.org](http://moveon.org)<sup>5</sup> have significantly augmented the traditional ways information is shared among members of civil societies. In 2003 the world witnessed the fastest anti-war response<sup>6</sup> in world history, due to the Web. What all of these ‘new’ applications have in common is their use of the Web’s potential for many-to-many communication, the Web being the first technology invented by man that facilitates decentralized interaction at a large scale.<sup>7</sup>

The idea and objective behind Catalytic Communities is represented in its name. Taken from a term in chemistry, when applied to human endeavors “catalyst” refers to

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Coms” or “Dot Orgs” are, in fact, distinct from other private or not-for-profit companies. See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of this.

<sup>4</sup> Coleman 1999: 202.

<sup>5</sup> For more on [moveon.org](http://moveon.org) see page 62.

<sup>6</sup> Smith 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See page 5 for more on the uniqueness of the Web’s many-to-many communication.

“One that precipitates a process or event, especially without being involved or changed by the consequences”.<sup>8</sup> A “community,” in the least theoretical or refined of senses, refers to “1. A group of people living in the same locality...2. A group of people having common interests”.<sup>9</sup> **Catalytic Community** can therefore be taken to mean “a group of people sharing a common place or interests and acting collectively in the interest of their shared place or interests, whose (effective) actions precipitate future actions elsewhere.” Catalytic Communities, the organization, was founded to make it possible for a struggling community to better approach its challenges by encountering stimulating solutions developed by peer communities. These solutions would be made available through a centralized database online.

Later it became clear that the community of origin is actually affected by the sharing of its innovation. The solutions developed by such communities made available online are shared not only with peer communities who consult them but also with non-peers interested in supporting those communities’ initiatives, including the press, volunteers, and potential funders (who often strengthen them in perceptible ways). In addition, when two communities interact it becomes clear that both have much to share and learn, so rarely is the interaction one-sided as might be interpreted from a literal

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<sup>8</sup> *American Heritage* 1992: 300.

<sup>9</sup> *American Heritage* 1992: 383. Clearly the term “community” can be held subject to a much more complex discussion, focusing, for example, on the nature of communities as originating in a compact, as recruiting, socializing and disciplining members, and on encouraging a communitarian sensibility, one which creates a moral order (see Mandelbaum 2000). However interesting such a discussion may be, the use of the dictionary definition of this term when defining its use in CatComm’s name remains preferable. The organization’s name has to be easily understood by the communities it serves, and has to reflect *their* notion of the term’s meaning. The only common meaning across diverse groups is that which is described in the simplified dictionary definition.

reading of the term “catalytic.” Rather, as they exchange there is a “mutual catalysis” going on, whereby both are precipitating effects in one another.

Unlike Google.com and other online search engines, CatComm functions to help communities organize, centralize and publish their knowledge *in a way that is useful to peer communities and potential supporters*, rather than simply providing links to community websites as they are presented, in ways variable in content and limited in translation. And unlike a community website which will only attract those Web users with a prior sense of the community or program they are interested in, CatComm’s site centralizes information in such a way that general surfers will know where to go to locate information without having the details of what they are searching for clear in their minds.<sup>10</sup> In addition, CatComm’s site informs visitors of what CatComm, the organization, is certain about with reference to the legitimacy of posted community programs.

Catalytic Communities builds on the opportunity presented by the Web to compile collective community intelligence<sup>11</sup> regarding solutions to local problems, and make this information available to peer communities elsewhere, and to a wider ‘community of solidarity,’ including the press, volunteers, and funders who would like to support them. With a focus on low-income communities and their solutions to development challenges, CatComm’s website is a tool for community self-help and planning.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, someone interested in volunteering with a community in Rio is more likely to know of CatComm’s website and search its database for a project to work with than to locate a community group through its own website.

<sup>11</sup> See page 4 for more on the concept of “collective intelligence.”

The organization's broad **mission**<sup>12</sup> is to empower and engage low-income communities around the world to develop their own local improvements by providing a set of online tools to foster and strengthen leadership and innovation in their communities. These include the Community Solutions Database (CSD) where a community can<sup>13</sup> describe its local innovation to communities elsewhere; a Mural to display campaign materials; and a series of other tools, currently available in English, Portuguese and Spanish and maintained by a growing network of virtual volunteers.

### *A Unique Approach*

Since September 2000 I have been spending approximately nine months each year in Rio de Janeiro where I became deeply involved in building Catalytic Communities.<sup>14</sup> The following story is one that reflects a research approach different from most traditional qualitative "involved" research techniques that include Participatory Action Research, participant observation, auto-ethnography, and case research.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the researcher is studying herself and her own invention. But unlike typical autobiographical accounts, I was aware from the beginning that I would be writing about this initiative. This brings certain facts to bear upon the nature of the content in the

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<sup>12</sup> An organization's mission is "the most succinct reflection of (the) shared understanding (of and ambition for an organization's work)" (Allison and Kaye 1997: 55). It is the guiding principle that, though changing with time, is essential to a not-for-profit's forward momentum. According to Brinckerhoff (1994: 37), it is a management tool, a staff motivator, a volunteer recruiter, and a fund raiser, reflecting what the organization *does*. Without a monetary "bottom line," not-for-profits need something else to guide them. The mission provides the focus around which the organization can determine whether new ideas are relevant, and just how relevant, to the organization's core objectives.

<sup>13</sup> This assumes Internet access and the availability of our website in an accessible language.

<sup>14</sup> I spent the bulk of my first five years in Brazil but was largely raised in the United States. I am equally comfortable in both countries.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 7 for a more detailed reflection of the characteristics of the research approach taken.

dissertation, which is based on continuous note taking, detailed records, and other sources of primary data.

In conducting the research for this dissertation, I was careful to document events in such a way as to avoid some of the more dubious characteristics of a typical storytelling approach. An approach, as described by Mary Catherine Bateson<sup>16</sup> in which:

We...edit the past to make it more intelligible in cultural terms. As memories blur, we supply details from a pool of general knowledge. With every retelling, words that barely fit begin to seem more appropriate as the meaning slips and slides to fit the stereotype...What about the smoothing that denies the painful parts of happy memories and even makes nightmares more consistent? What about the inappropriate emotions denied and the **anomalies** that drop out of our storytelling? Even for the recent past and in situations where there would seem to be little motivation for distortion, memories are modified and details supplied to fit cultural expectations.

Particularly important with regard to this dissertation is the inclusion of failures, or what Bateson terms ‘anomalies.’ These are the ‘dead ends’ that I might otherwise have neglected or those poor choices I might have forgotten.

Fortunately, as I have been aware that I would be writing a qualitative account of Catalytic Communities’ evolution since early in the process, significant primary data are available. I was able to document the early steps: data were collected in 307 pages of journal entries over a period of three years; all email exchanges have been archived; daily logs were kept over this same period of my time spent hour-by-hour on a handheld device; board meeting minutes are available for all meetings during this period; in-depth accounts of contacts made and expenses and in-kind contributions were kept; all funding and related proposals have been stored; note-taking occurred throughout this period

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<sup>16</sup> Bateson 1989: 32. Emphasis added.

during monthly meetings of community leader coalitions and organizational staff meetings; visits to local initiatives took place throughout this period and were documented; and one-on-one meetings and interviews were conducted and documented with NGOs in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, London, New York, San Francisco, and Washington. In addition, in May 2002 I conducted structured, in-depth taped interviews with a subset of 5 community leaders and 4 organizations for a related conference paper on capacity-building programs in Rio de Janeiro. And in June 2003 7 one-on-one interviews and one larger focus group with 13 community leaders were conducted to provide much of the content for Chapter 4.

The research presented in this dissertation relies on one case study and what is learned from that case experientially using these tools. I have scanned other cases that have been written about or with which I have interacted so that some vicarious learning is also incorporated. These are the resources that will be used in order to ensure an account unbiased by the editions Bateson tells us we naturally make as we tell stories. In some chapters, for example, journal entries from specific moments are utilized: moments at which I did not know what was going to happen next or where the organization would go; moments that reflect false paths taken and that describe confusions that were sustained for short or long periods of time.

### ***Strengths and Weaknesses of Conducting a Self-Analysis***

The following story is presented theme-by-theme detailing what was learned during the first three years of the organization's evolution: an organization that was intended to work flexibly, fluidly, taking advantage of what the Web offers low-income

communities around the world. It is the account of a project to provide empowering online content useful to low-income communities as they gain access to the Internet. The aim during the period under discussion (September 2000 – December 2003) was to create a viable institution beginning to meet the aforementioned mission. During this period the organization's Board of Directors drafted this mission statement and I designed an organization and product with this framework in mind. This dissertation does not attempt to evaluate the organization's success or failure, but to describe what was learned during this period. This is an account of my learning and the attempt to relate this learning to what others have said and done, so as to build a base of qualitative knowledge that may stimulate and inform future inquiries.

Certainly I wanted Catalytic Communities to succeed, but this account does not depend on that. The story would be valuable regardless. It is an experiment in self-reflection, so that others can learn from the enclosed experience. I am both the storyteller and the subject of this account. Conducting a self-analysis in this way presents both research strengths and weaknesses.

The benefits of this type of research are numerous – many will become clear as the story unfolds and will be discussed in Chapter 7. Two more straightforward benefits include: (1) the intimate connection to the formation of Catalytic Communities revealed relates of the story that would have been closed to a distant or detached observer. Symmetrically, (2) my attempt at detachment helped the project itself.

As with typical PAR, which aims to utilize research to benefit the group under study, a benefit of this self-analysis is that Catalytic Communities was strengthened in many ways from my role as researcher. The dissertation research provided space in which to reflect on

the failures or barriers to the not-for-profit's development in such a way that (a) when these barriers were internal, I could see them and develop approaches for them based on the research I was conducting, and (b) when they were external I was able to move on and not dwell on them ("When something frustrating happens I can just go home and write about it"). The research also kept me hammering at building the organization even after the first year yielded very limited progress, because this dissertation depended on it. The fact that I was writing a dissertation provided me with a certain distance from the organization – distance that allowed me to make sounder choices. It also guaranteed that this was one well documented not-for-profit, from expenses and spending to meeting summaries and lists of contacts. Finally, when the time came, writing the dissertation forced me to take the important step of depending more on others in the organization to 'take the load off,' an important step towards organizational sustainability.

There are also obvious weaknesses with regard to research involving self-analysis. For one thing, it is extremely difficult to find a "voice" that produces a balance between personal and academic writing. I struggled with this for many, many months and even felt like the difficulties associated with finding that voice would impede me from completing the dissertation.

Another limitation with regard to self-analysis is that one may not obtain truly balanced testimonies from others involved in the object of study. For example, interviews with the community leaders affected by CatComm's initiatives almost universally yielded positive responses. First, they were in my presence and therefore likely to limit their responses. Second, particularly in the case of community leaders in Rio, they often had a direct interest in ensuring CatComm's success due to their own relationship with the

organization, and were therefore already skewed in their interpretation of the organization's actions. For this reason I only utilized quotations from community leaders when describing, and not evaluating, particular projects of the organization. A self-analysis therefore limits one from evaluating the success of the object of study and in some ways chains one to a descriptive approach.

In performing a self-analysis I cannot accurately ascertain, in most cases, why a foundation chose not to support CatComm's efforts. Hints may be provided by the foundation itself in their response letter, by colleagues in the foundation world, through foundation literature, and other sources. I could not, however, pretend to be a detached observer were I to attempt to interview the program officer responsible. It is entirely comprehensible that, if I chose to interview them, the person responsible for turning down a grant request would spare me the details of the decision. So an inside researcher is also limited in this way: they cannot interview all parties that ultimately affect the organization, because some of them will be 'outsiders' unlikely to provide complete testimony.<sup>17</sup> For this reason in certain parts of this dissertation, the chapter on fundraising for example (Chapter 6), I tend to focus more on my own reflections and clues I discover in the literature.

Finally, one's memory provides a formidable barrier to the correct interpretation of events. Journals and other primary data sources provide some escape from this, but a fresh perspective from an outside researcher could be even less influenced by the games memory plays on how we interpret and view series of events.

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<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, a self-analysis means testimony from the primary protagonist affecting the organization's development – myself – *is* readily available. Research by an 'outsider' may be able to attract more testimonies from other organizational outsiders, but is unlikely to have such a deep level of understanding of the goings-on among insiders.

Though these weaknesses are significant, the strengths of a self-analysis outweigh them in this case, where the objective of the research is to describe the *learning process* that yielded a certain type of institution – in this case a particular Dot Org. The guarantee that all sorts of qualitative data at the source of the learning itself are made available, and feelings that influence events have been incorporated as data makes for a stronger account. Such an account depicting the *details* of the construction of a new institution will make for more grounded knowledge on which to base future research.

### ***A Qualitative Approach***

Yin points out that, “a common concern about case studies is that they provide little basis for scientific generalization.” This is incorrect, however, as “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.” He continues, “(In) the case study...the investigator’s goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)”.<sup>18</sup> This dissertation relies on case research because of the important application of cases “to explain the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies”.<sup>19</sup> A generalizing analysis is what is needed here – in order to call attention to important micro-level qualitative details in a new phenomenon – that of the Dot Org – that might allow future researchers to focus in more detail or generalize based on additional research.

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<sup>18</sup> Yin 1994: 10.

<sup>19</sup> Yin 1994: 15.

Put another way, one might compare my focus on a qualitative account of one case to an ethnographic account. And, as Geertz tells us,

The methodological problem which the microscopic nature of ethnography presents is both real and critical. But it is not to be resolved by regarding a remote locality as the world in a teacup...It is to be resolved...by realizing that (individual) social actions are comments on more than themselves; that where an interpretation comes from does not determine where it can be impelled to go. Small facts speak to large issues.<sup>20</sup>

Flyvbjerg<sup>21</sup> argues that “it is only because of experience with cases that one can at all move...(up) in the learning process,” from ‘competent performers’ to ‘experts,’ whose behavior is “intuitive, holistic, and synchronic”.<sup>22</sup> These experts, due to a deep understanding of a particular context, can begin articulating appropriate solutions in other contexts.<sup>23</sup>

The aim in the pages that follow is to provide knowledge of one case that, in combination with comments about other cases inside and outside of this text, will allow readers to become more familiar with the nature and formation process of the Dot Org, its subtle management principles, and its capabilities.

### ***Organization of Chapters***

I have organized this history around six themes that emerged during the organization’s first years, rather than in an integrated chronology or a synthetic evaluation. Chapters 1 and 2 describe the basic history and social networks that made CatComm possible. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on what Catalytic Communities looks and

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<sup>20</sup> Geertz 1973: 23.

<sup>21</sup> Flyvbjerg 2001: 71.

<sup>22</sup> Flyvbjerg 2001: 21.

<sup>23</sup> Again, for more information on research methodology, see the conclusion, Chapter 7.

feels like in practice: as a virtual organization and, later, how physical elements influenced its previously virtual nature. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the two key management issues that I confronted in developing this organization: staff and fundraising. The final chapter then concludes by looking back at what the research project can say as a whole: that there is a role in academic scholarship for protagonists researching their own inventions.<sup>24</sup>

More specifically, Chapter 1 is an introduction born of seeing Catalytic Communities as, in some sense, an inevitable fact of history. I believe given the current state of technology and the world, that it would have been only a matter of time before a similar-minded organization was created to fill the same niche as CatComm. This chapter, written in May 2002,<sup>25</sup> summarizes the history of modern ICTs leading up to increasing technology access in Brazil and how those events, and others, led to the founding of CatComm at the time, place, and in the way it did. In this way the chapter also provides a sense of what I set out to do.

In Chapter 2 social networks are discussed. This chapter was written in April 2003 and aims to provide a sense of how I used social network theory to rationalize Catalytic Communities' work and to understand my ability to set an idea in motion and

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<sup>24</sup> Most researchers do not have near complete access to “how” things happen but, rather, conduct evaluations and then try to determine how those results came to be. In this case, because of the nature of the researcher as protagonist, the research focuses on discussing the why and how things happen within the organization. Future evaluations will benefit incredibly from this background of knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> I have chosen to maintain much of the content of the chapters as they were at the moment in which their writing took place because in this way the dissertation provides another sense, imbedded in its text, of the evolution of the organization. Chapter 2 on social networks, for example, would clearly be different if it were written today – both in terms of analytical angle and in terms of data availability (all of the networks in question have expanded over time). But leaving it as it is provides a sense of the organization at that moment, a moment when such networks were at the forefront of my thinking in terms of their relevance and importance to the growing organization. Similarly, all of the chapters of this text were written when those issues they reflected on were at their peak relevance.

create an organization from it. Reflections as to the limitations of communities to act are presented. Social networks were, I conclude, *the* vital factor in bringing the organization forward to date.

The dissertation's third chapter highlights the components I have found, over time, that comprise the virtual organization – the “Dot Org.” Written in January 2004, this chapter, more than the others, required a significant amount of hindsight and comparison with similar organizations in order to make its claims.

Chapter 4 moves beyond the virtual to the physical realm, describing in detail the effect that renting and organizing a physical space – the Casa do Gestor Catalisador – had on Catalytic Communities, including the effect this had on its virtual nature. Written in June 2003, this chapter was presented at the 2003 AESOP/ACSP Congress and has been published in the *Journal of Urban Technology*.<sup>26</sup>

Chapters 5 and 6 are more involved in describing my learning process than the previous four.<sup>27</sup> Both involve issues of management. Prepared in November 2003, chapter 5's heavy focus on journal entries allows me to tell the story of my experience in handling a physical staff and the lessons I learned in doing so.

The sixth chapter, written in December 2003, then focuses on the long process I went through to learn how to fundraise in general, and for a Dot Org in particular. This chapter highlights what may well be the area in which I experienced the steepest learning curve over the past three years and for that reason I think its insights may be of particular interest to readers.

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<sup>26</sup> Williamson 2003.

<sup>27</sup> In chapters 5 and 6 some names are fictitious in order to protect the identity of those involved.

As chapters prepared along independent thematic lines of thought, each of these six reaches its own conclusions. I therefore have not tried to summarize these chapter-by-chapter conclusions in Chapter 7. Instead, the work concludes with the introduction of yet another topic – one that unites the entire dissertation – that of Protagonist Action Research (PrAR). PrAR is what I term the new approach that surfaced as I prepared and conducted research for, and then wrote, this dissertation. In introducing many new terms such as this in the pages that follow, I hope to spark lively debate and stimulate future researchers to take ever more risks in searching for paths to make research more reflective of and useful to today's world.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Elements Leading to CatComm's Formation**

### ***Technological Developments: Groundwork for a Revolution***

In the Fall of 1960 my father began his doctoral program in the Department of Economics at Princeton University. Today, over forty years later I watch as he chuckles over dinner, recounting a story from the time. He describes a lecture by his then professor, Oskar Morgenstern (co-author<sup>28</sup> of *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*, the book that founded game theory) describing the future that computers would one day make possible. “He told us that computers were going to revolutionize the way the world worked and we all thought he was a bit off his rocker!” my father recounts.

Morgenstern’s lecture was delivered 16 years after the University of Pennsylvania produced the first electronic computer, the ENIAC,<sup>29</sup> and 9 years after the first commercial version of this machine processed the 1950 US Census.<sup>30</sup> Yet it was 11 years before the first microprocessor was developed,<sup>31</sup> and 9 years before the first computer network was established. Morgenstern was one of a few insiders who had a sense of the possibilities that might come to be from the advent of the computer. But even he could not foresee the social implications that the future combined inventions of the microcomputer (beginning in 1971), user-friendly interfaces (1984 onwards), and networks organized by information, rather than location (the World Wide Web was

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<sup>28</sup> With John Von Neumann.

<sup>29</sup> The 30 ton ENIAC (electronic numerical integrator and calculator) was produced in 1946 by Mauchly and Eckert at the University of Pennsylvania (Castells 2000).

<sup>30</sup> In 1951 the same team at the University of Pennsylvania produced the UNIVAC-1, the first commercial computer (Castells 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Micro-electronics altered the previous course, in which “the industry organized itself in a well-defined hierarchy of mainframes, (bulky) minicomputers..., and terminals, with some specialty informatics left to the esoteric world of supercomputers” (Castells 2000: 42). In 1971 the microprocessor brought with it the capacity to put a computer on a chip (Castells 2000).

invented in 1990), would bring. For a summary of the primary technological turning points that have led to a computer-initiated “revolution in the way the world works” that not even Oskar Morgenstern could have predicted, see Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Time-line of Technological Turning Points of the ‘Computer Age’<sup>32</sup>**

1946	Mauchly and Eckert produce the <b>first general purpose computer</b> , the ENIAC, at the University of Pennsylvania.
1951	<b>First commercial computer</b> , a version of the ENIAC, called the UNIVAC-1, was produced by the Penn team and used to process the 1950 Census.
1960-4	Rand Corporation designed a <b>communications system</b> – predecessor to the Internet <sup>33</sup> – invulnerable to nuclear attack by virtue of its independence from command and control centers. The universality of digital language and pure networking logic of this communications system created technological conditions for horizontal, global communication.
1971	<b>Microprocessor</b> invented with the capacity to put a computer on a chip
1976	The development of new <b>software</b> (e.g. adaptation of BASIC in 1976) was a fundamental condition for the diffusion of microcomputers.
1980	<b>TCP/IP</b> became the <b>standard for computer communication</b> in the US; its flexibility brought it acceptance as the common standard for computer communication protocols <sup>34</sup> .
1983	Berkeley researchers adapted to UNIX <sup>35</sup> the TCP/IP protocol, giving birth to <b>networking on a large scale</b> as local area networks and regional networks linked to one another, spreading wherever telephone lines and computers were equipped with modems.
1984	Apple Macintosh launched: the first step towards <b>user-friendly computing</b> .
~1985	Computers began performing in <b>networks on the basis of portable computers</b> with increasing mobility.
1990	The <b>World Wide Web</b> was invented in Europe, <sup>36</sup> <b>organizing the Internet sites’ content by information rather than location</b> , providing users with easy navigation systems to locate information.
1994	Netscape produced and commercialized the first reliable <b>Internet browser</b> in October.
1990s	Shift from centralized to networked, <b>interactive</b> computer data storage, processing and <b>power-sharing</b> and related change of social and organizational interactions.
1990s	Advances in opto-electronics (fiber optics and laser transmission) and digital packet <b>transmission technology broadened the capacity</b> of transmission lines. Various forms of utilization of the radio spectrum, coaxial cable and fiber optics offered a diversity and versatility of transmission technologies and made possible the ubiquitous communication among mobile users.
1990s	<b>Data mining, data warehousing</b> capabilities developed.
2000s	Proliferation of <b>wireless</b> technologies.

<sup>32</sup> Adapted from Castells (2000: 42-51). See also Brate 2002.

<sup>33</sup> The “Internet” is the “electronic network of networks that links people and information through computers and other digital devices allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval” (DiMaggio 2001).

<sup>34</sup> From then on, computers were able to encode or decode for one another data packages traveling at high speed on the Internet.

<sup>35</sup> UNIX is an operating system invented in 1969 but only used after this 1983 adaptation (Castells 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Berners-Lee 2000.

## ***Theoretical Considerations: Imagining the Social Revolution***

Whereas a few “off their rocker” insiders theorized about the future “revolutionary” applications of computer technology in the 1960s a much greater number of individuals do so today, from a variety of fields. These authors spell out the positive<sup>37</sup> and negative<sup>38</sup> potential consequences of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for society. Of interest for this dissertation is the growing sense that these technologies are particularly useful to civil society,<sup>39</sup> assuming that they become widely available. For a summary of arguments as to why the Internet, the ICT component of particular interest here, offers a unique opportunity *particularly* to traditionally marginalized civil society groups, see Figure 2.

### **Figure 2. Arguments Favoring the Internet’s Potential for Civil Society**

- Many-to-many communication<sup>40</sup> allows individuals and groups to widely distribute information without relying on media or other traditionally mainstream support;<sup>41</sup>
- “By removing the central control points, the Web enabled a self-organizing, self-stimulating growth of contents”<sup>42</sup> and in this way allows users to post information for the most part in a way that bypasses authority;
- Minimal travel and time costs for interaction online;<sup>43</sup>
- Communities with limited social capital/networks beyond their own can extend their awareness and build links;<sup>44</sup>
- The Internet facilitates voluntary association;<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> For references to positive social consequences of the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) see Lévy (1997, 2001), Berners-Lee (2000), Weare et al. (1999), DiMaggio (2001), Servon (2002), Weinberger (2002), and Wright (1999).

<sup>38</sup> For references to negative social consequences of the new ICTs see Turner (1996), Straus (1997), Kraut (1998), Davis and Meyer (1998), and Ebo (1998).

<sup>39</sup> Civil society can be effectively thought of as “the space of uncoerced human association” (Walzer 1991). For more information see footnotes 1 and 111.

<sup>40</sup> Lévy 1997.

<sup>41</sup> Coombs 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Weinberger 2002: ix.

<sup>43</sup> Weare et al. 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Weare et al. 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Weare et al. 1999.

**Figure 2, cont...**

- Individuals are unlikely to be discriminated against; it is difficult to deprive select individuals of information online: “virtual communities do not use disenfranchising criteria for community-building”;<sup>46</sup>
- The Internet allows for the inexpensive and rapid propagation of information, providing a dissemination avenue for fringe groups traditionally ignored by media;<sup>47</sup>
- Communities can give validity to their experience by making it visible to others;<sup>48</sup>
- The Internet is a medium uniquely capable of integrating modes of communication and forms of content;<sup>49</sup>
- The anonymity of the online world allows for information exchange and networking among individuals who would otherwise feel uncomfortable expressing opinions;<sup>50</sup>
- “The ability to safely talk about subjects that may be judged more harshly by closer ties appears to be beneficial”;<sup>51</sup>
- Data democratized such that low-income communities that have access can strengthen their approach of bureaucrats, private firms, and other powerful bodies;<sup>52</sup>
- The Internet offers the potential for a previously infeasible accumulation of collective intelligence;<sup>53</sup>
- The Internet and related ICTs have stimulated the creation of a new “type of computer application and a new type of social institution:” the CTC, or community technology center. CTCs now provide job training, network-building, and many other services bringing communities closer to jobs and empowerment networks in the US and around the world.<sup>54</sup>

Particularly relevant to us here is the concept of collective intelligence. Coined by Pierre Lévy,<sup>55</sup> this term reflects the ability of the Internet to be a cost effective storage

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<sup>46</sup> (Ebo 1998: 2); Princeton University sociologist Douglas Massey found that with telephone contact, real estate firms discriminate against women and minorities in Philadelphia (Smith 2001).

<sup>47</sup> Ebo 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Harris 1998: 68.

<sup>49</sup> DiMaggio 2001.

<sup>50</sup> “Physical invisibility could...create self-liberating identities for groups that have been isolated or ostracized from mainstream discourse” (Ebo 1998: 3). “It is not at all unusual on the Web for someone to ‘try on’ a personality and to switch personalities” (Weinberger 2002: 3).

<sup>51</sup> Wright 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Coleman 1999. Also could interpret Krumholz and Forester 1990, Forester 1989, and Sawicki and Craig 1996 to encourage such uses.

<sup>53</sup> Lévy 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Servon 2002: 55.

<sup>55</sup> Collective intelligence “is a form of universally distributed intelligence, constantly enhanced...and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills... The basis and goal of collective intelligence is the mutual

space for all kinds of knowledge previously unrecorded. Two aspects of digital technologies provide an unprecedented opportunity with regard to collective intelligence building. First, “digital technologies do not simply reproduce and distribute messages, but enable us to create and modify them at will, interact with them, retain and modify aspects down to the fraction; they thus reestablish sensibility within the context of somatic technologies<sup>56</sup> while preserving the media's power<sup>57</sup> of recording and distribution”.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, the nature of the Internet's many-to-many communication,<sup>59</sup> allowing any individual to make information contributions at practically no cost to a global audience, increases the potential for knowledge to be put to use, making use of information that has in the past often been disregarded or wasted.<sup>60</sup> As a result, Lévy predicts a future need for “the design of intelligent tools for filtering data, navigating within the information stream, and simulating complex systems; tools for lateral communication; and the mutual recognition of individuals and groups on the basis of their activities and skills”.<sup>61</sup> Data warehousing and data mining are two services that today exist to this end.

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recognition and enrichment of individuals... No one knows everything, everyone knows something, and knowledge resides in humanity (Lévy 1997: 13-14).

<sup>56</sup> Somatic technologies are those that are multimodal, always unique, inseparable from a changing context; e.g. speech, dance (Lévy 1997: 49).

<sup>57</sup> “Media technologies focus and reproduce messages so they travel farther, transmit messages without the presence of their creator, so they reach a scale somatic methods could never achieve, though losing their ability to adapt due to their decontextualization” (Lévy 1997: 49).

<sup>58</sup> Lévy 1997: 49.

<sup>59</sup> As opposed to the traditional one-to-many noninteractive (television, radio) or one-to-one interactive (telephone) forms of communication, the Internet brings with it the first many-to-many interactive communication medium in history (Lévy 1997: 63).

<sup>60</sup> See Edgar Cahn's (2000) discussion of “throw-away people” whose important skills are not recognized in the formal market economy.

<sup>61</sup> Lévy 1997: 61.

In contrast with those hoping for a technology-induced social revolution are various researchers who warn of the potential dangers associated with an increasing dependence on ICTs by society. They point out that Internet-based news services are often not as dependable as traditional news sources.<sup>62</sup> Others emphasize a psychological element.<sup>63</sup> They complain that the Internet encourages individuals to live in “online otherworlds,” fostering a form of “addiction” leading to rejection of traditional neighborhood activities (thus encouraging the erosion of social fabric). Still others are primarily concerned with the implications of the Internet for individual privacy. This is particularly the case as US security has been boosted after September 11 through the Patriot Act.

Parents’ concern over their children’s access to offensive online content is also an issue. This may even include physical access that the Internet permits to illegal substances.<sup>64</sup> Finally, the Internet may facilitate all sorts of social interaction – positive and negative for society – including the organization of terrorist organizations.<sup>65</sup>

In developing countries a logical concern with regard to Internet use in low-income communities is that this technology will lend itself to abuse as a tool for distraction, much as television has done. In fact, 75% of users of the new Internet-access

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<sup>62</sup> Turner 1996.

<sup>63</sup> Straus 1997, Kraut 1998, Ebo 1998.

<sup>64</sup> A University of Pennsylvania professor of Psychology, Robert Forman, has recently shown that the Internet puts illicit prescription medicines in the hands of children, when those drugs are searched for and ordered from overseas providers (“The Internet” 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Thibodeau 2002.

center called Estação Futuro (“Future Station”) in Rio de Janeiro’s Rocinha *favela*<sup>66</sup> are children and the most common site visited by them is that of the Cartoon Network.<sup>67</sup>

The arguments presented above in favor of and concerned with the potential effects of the new ICTs on civil society have all been recorded by researchers. They exist. There is not an “either/or” scenario, in which either these technologies will benefit us or not. Rather, they do both. Their use, whether history will record it as primarily positive or negative, is like that of all other technologies and is *contingent on* other factors: the velocity and reach of Internet penetration across a society, tools made available for parents and others to trace the use of their machines, privacy policies created to safeguard the user, a guarantee that these technologies are maintained decentralized and that their democratic nature is maintained,<sup>68</sup> and so on. What is important to us here is a recognition of the potential of the new ICTs as a tool to transform and strengthen civil society.

### ***Brazilian Reality: Making Good on the Promise***

It is well and good to theorize as to the social promise brought about by a combination of ICTs<sup>69</sup> that appears to democratize computer technology and access to information and markets. But what is really of concern to us here is how these

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<sup>66</sup> The term *favela* dates back 100 years when soldiers on a campaign to put down a peasant revolt in the North of Brazil encamped on a hill named after its flowering bushes called *favelas*. The soldiers became known as *favelados* and, when they returned to Rio without money, jobs, or a place to live, they built the shantytowns which became known by this term (“Rio’s urban renaissance” 1997). Today, slums, squatter settlements, and other irregular occupations are often referred to under the one heading, *favela*.

<sup>67</sup> Perlingeiro 2001.

<sup>68</sup> A main concern of Tim Berners-Lee, the World Wide Web’s founder (Berners-Lee 2000).

<sup>69</sup> Mainly microcomputers, user-friendly software and Internet browsing, and the invention of the World Wide Web.

developments fit into a broader reality. What good can they do *in practice*, within social contexts characterized by poverty and capitalistic<sup>70</sup> globalized<sup>71</sup> competition where nations are struggling to become more efficient?

For example, though the potential for positive effects in low-income communities utilizing the Internet appears great, there are several important and well-documented constraints on its potential. The “digital divide” has been widely documented in the United States,<sup>72</sup> Brazil,<sup>73</sup> and other nations. This results from various hurdles that exist to low-income access and use of new ICTs (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Hurdles to Taking Advantage of ICTs in Low-Income Areas**

- Education – basic literacy
- Education – computer literacy
- Time – for learning; particularly for online activities at CTCs
- Time – competing priorities on time: making a living, caring for families, etc.
- Expectation – subjective evaluation by potential users of use and effectiveness
- Technology – cost, access
- Telecommunications – cost, access
- Content – development, user-friendliness, interactivity, empowerment potential
- Censorship – in some contexts
- Privacy – concerns over privacy, particularly in the United States
- Multiple user issues – sharing of equipment limits types of use
- Justifying investments – role of information not clearly studied; potential not clearly proven; proving importance of investing in information and access as compared to investments for more immediate needs.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This is relevant because the tendency towards privatization and similar weakening of the State in many countries might appear to imply an increasing trend to “let the people help themselves,” which would well preclude them from gaining access to ICTs.

<sup>71</sup> Globalization, as defined by Anthony Giddens (1990: 64) refers to the following process: “In the modern era, the level of time-space distancing is much higher than in any previous period, and the relations between local and distant social forms and events become correspondingly ‘stretched.’ Globalisation refers essentially to that stretching process, in so far as the modes of connection between different social contexts or regions become networked across the earth’s surface as a whole. Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”

<sup>72</sup> *Falling* 2000.

<sup>73</sup> *Sociedade* 2000.

<sup>74</sup> Harris 1992: 50.

Fortunately in Brazil, where much of the story told in this dissertation takes place, the context proves quite suitable for making good on the proposed promise of the Internet and related ICTs for social development. The Brazilian government is perhaps among those most emphatic about taking advantage of the opportunities presented by ICTs, due to mounting concerns over both inequality and future economic growth. In Brazil, the increasingly organized poor, particularly in urban settings where 82.2% of the nation's residents live,<sup>75</sup> are thoroughly aware of "what they're missing." And the rich, who live side-by-side with them, are wholly aware of the dramatic difference between them.<sup>76</sup> Following a military regime (1964-1985) that left Brazil competing with two African nations for the title of world's worst income distribution,<sup>77</sup> the new democracy experienced widespread and thorough decentralization<sup>78</sup> that helped to strengthen a dynamic civil society.<sup>79</sup> Along with increased access to information,<sup>80</sup> democratization and decentralization have empowered the evolving Brazilian not-for-profit sector. Within this context one thing is clear: inequality must decline if the country is to offer the stability required of a modern nation.<sup>81</sup>

Despite such severe inequality, Brazil has been able to grow to be the world's 8<sup>th</sup> largest economy<sup>82</sup> by relying on industrial and agricultural goods whose production does not require high levels of general education. With the increased importance of ICTs in

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<sup>75</sup> *ICT at a Glance: Brazil* 2003.

<sup>76</sup> Much of the violence for which Brazil's large cities are known is arguably a result of the visibility and proximity of the nation's inequality.

<sup>77</sup> *World Development Report* 2001.

<sup>78</sup> Afonso and Lobo 1996, Peterson 1997, Tandler 1997.

<sup>79</sup> Landim 1998, Landim and Scalon 2000.

<sup>80</sup> Produced from analyses of military and post-military era data, quick adoption of the Internet, and freedom of the press.

<sup>81</sup> Souza 1997.

<sup>82</sup> *World Development Report* 2001.

the global economy, however, the nation is unlikely to retain its economic status without widespread increases in computer literacy.<sup>83</sup> In 2000, 10 million personal computers<sup>84</sup> were in the hands of predominantly middle- and upper class citizens. Only 8% of these computers were in the hands of lower-income individuals and families.<sup>85</sup> By 2001, Brazil had 11.1 million Internet users.<sup>86</sup> According to the United Nations, at the end of 2003 Brazil ranked 65<sup>th</sup> with regard to access to ICTs.<sup>87</sup> In 2001 there were approximately 879,600 computers in Brazil's schools.<sup>88</sup>

Due to the severe digital divide both within Brazil (and outside in relation to other nations), and the perceived importance of narrowing it, Brazilians in key positions are framing a new possibility: the digital leap. Technology *could*, according to this thinking, be a tool to help ailing communities leap over some of the most painful stages of an inequality-reducing scheme. Following two years of computer training, an individual without a high school degree could in theory earn a better salary than would normally be afforded to a college graduate.

As a result of these various issues and perspectives, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), city and state governments, national governments and international lending institutions are investing significant sums into the provision of ICT *access* and *training*, including access to the Internet among the poor. Figure 4 lists a range of initiatives being implemented at the local, regional, and national levels in Brazil

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<sup>83</sup> "The idea is to reduce the exclusion of 160 million Brazilians who are outside of the fastest growing sector in the world," explained the Brazilian Planning Minister in 2001 (Rebêlo July 2001).

<sup>84</sup> Rohter 2000; the most recent census counted approximately 170 million people nationwide.

<sup>85</sup> Vargas 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Rebêlo July 2001.

<sup>87</sup> "Por Dentro da BPH" 2004.

<sup>88</sup> *ICT at a Glance: Brazil* 2001.

by the public, private and not-for-profit sectors throughout the course of this study. There has even been discussion by the federal government of creating a free Internet Service Provider (ISP) covering the entire country, including very difficult-to-reach areas in the Amazon and the countryside.<sup>89</sup>

Heavy – and perhaps more importantly – *creative* investments are being made in developing Internet access points in Brazil. Cybercafés, in comparison with well-meaning social programs, are relatively rare in Brazil relative to other developing countries (except in tourist meccas like Salvador’s Pelourinho neighborhood), perhaps because of the nation’s severe inequality.<sup>90</sup>

Also interesting and equally important, Brazilians of all stripes are taking to the Internet with great interest, in some ways similar to the description provided by Miller and Slater<sup>91</sup> of their research findings in Trinidad. In PopBanco’s public access terminals in São Paulo, where 500 to 600 people use each terminal daily, the initiative’s spokesman said, “It has become a sort of routine for people”.<sup>92</sup> This is especially true with regard to youth.

In Brazil’s case the attraction of people to the Internet appears somewhat different to that described by Miller and Slater in which they detail family relationships and cultural activities that are amplified by using the Internet in Trinidad. Instead, at least

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<sup>89</sup> Rebêlo July 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Some have suggested to me that the “haves” are wealthy enough to have computers at home, while the “have-nots” are unlikely to have enough money to spend at a cybercafé.

<sup>91</sup> Miller and Slater (2000: 2) found that “Trinidadians have a ‘natural affinity’ for the Internet. They...take to it ‘naturally,’ fitting it effortlessly into family, friendship, work and leisure; and in some respects they seemed to experience the Internet as itself ‘naturally Trinidadian.’ The scale and speed of diffusion was remarkable, and regarded as inevitable... We found very little negativity or technophobia. The Internet has reached a level where people can focus on content and ignore the technology, and furthermore there was very little anxiety about either the content or its impact.”

<sup>92</sup> Bianconi 2001: A12.

**Figure 4. Internet Access Initiatives in Brazil by May 2002**

Affected Region(s)	Initiative Name	Description	Funding Source / Organizer	Stage in May 2002
All	Virtual Library <sup>93</sup>	Free high-speed Internet access provided in thousands of centers in low-income communities around the country; books donated from the National Library	FUST - Fund set up by a federal law passed in 2001 whereby all privatized telecommunications companies must invest 1% of their annual profits every year	First Virtual Libraries being established
All	Post Office Access Terminals	Free access provided to all citizens for 15 minutes each day by way of computers in their local post office	Federal government	First Access Terminals being established
All	"Volkscomputer" <sup>94</sup>	A computer skeleton with only the basics (Internet and Linux software) will be sold for US\$300, a price that many Brazilians can afford in monthly installments	Federal government subsidized University students to produce a computer with only the basics that is now being mass produced	Still waiting for market sales
All	Information Technology and Citizenship Schools	Computer training (Windows, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet) provided by community member trained in this with an emphasis on citizenship-building activities. Internet access provided at some locations.	An NGO, the Center for the Democratization of Information Technology (CDI) <sup>95</sup> provides computer training and computers to community groups willing and able to establish centers in their communities.	120+ computer training (many with Internet access) centers established across Brazil (70 of them in Rio)
All	Orelhao.net	Fast Internet access at public telephone terminals located in protected spaces to avoid vandalism (gas stations, airports); a US\$.90 phone card buys 10 minutes of access <sup>96</sup>	Telemar telephone company setting up public Internet-access telephone "booths" where a regular phone card (used in Brazil to make phone calls from phone booths anyway), can buy time online	At least 30 in Rio

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.socinfo.gov.br/bibfust.htm>

<sup>94</sup> DasGupta 2001.

<sup>95</sup> [www.cdi.org.br](http://www.cdi.org.br)

<sup>96</sup> Bianconi 2001.

**Figure 4. Internet Access Initiatives in Brazil by May 2002, cont...**

Affected Region(s)	Initiative Name	Description	Funding Source / Organizer	Stage in May 2002
All	PopBanco	Internet access booths established in bakeries where people come to buy bread and groceries daily; offer free e-mail and online banking services through Caixa Economica <sup>97</sup>	Backed by the venture capitalist NetCash, Brazil's largest savings bank - Caixa Economica Federal, and pay TV and Internet group Globo Cabo	At least 67 installed in São Paulo (500-600 people using each one daily); 100 earmarked for the pilot program
São Paulo	Acessa São Paulo <sup>98</sup>	Community InfoCenters with free Internet access and computer training, Public Access Terminals for access in strategic locations (e.g. Metro), and Municipal InfoCenters located in all municipalities throughout the State.	Public phone company provides Internet connections, Microsoft provides software, and the state government funds the rest.	First center established; plan to have 60 by the end of 2002
Capão Redondo (neighborhood in São Paulo)	Sampa.org <sup>99</sup>	Computer courses for individuals and groups; cultural projects; free Internet access and email accounts for community members	Research not-for-profit Florestan Fernandes	At least 1 of an expected 20 centers set up with 10 computers
Rio de Janeiro	Estação Futuro ("Future Station")	Affordable (US\$.70/half hour) high-speed Internet access and computer training courses integrated with business services, a community-oriented website, <sup>100</sup> and other services.	Viva Rio, a large (US\$3 million annual budget) local NGO, with funds from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), established and maintains these comprehensive high-tech centers. Internet connection provided in partnership with Israeli firm, Taho, which established a radio cover over these <i>favelas</i> .	3 Established in Rio favelas in 2002. More to come.

<sup>97</sup> Bianconi 2001.

<sup>98</sup> [www.acessasaopaulo.sp.gov.br](http://www.acessasaopaulo.sp.gov.br)

<sup>99</sup> [www.sampa.org.br](http://www.sampa.org.br)

<sup>100</sup> [www.vivafavela.com.br](http://www.vivafavela.com.br)

**Figure 4. Internet Access Initiatives in Brazil by May 2002, cont...**

Affected Region(s)	Initiative Name	Description	Funding Source / Organizer	Stage in May 2002
Rio de Janeiro	Rio Online	Computer centers with courses, most with Internet connection in 28 different favelas	Municipal Secretary of Labor's office	28 established by 2001 but program now sitting idle because of shift in administration
Amapá (Amazon region)	Project Navigate	Wooden boat tours an archipelago in the Amazon, training people from the region in Windows and basic Internet use. Visitors use the Internet to chat, research and are planning to sell regional products over the Internet. <sup>101</sup>	State of Amapá government	106 individuals have passed through the courses and are acting as "multipliers" of information in their communities
Minas Gerais	Rural Access	Internet access and computer training using free software to the poorest rural communities in Minas Gerais	Partnership between NASA programmer and local NGO	Planning phase

three factors appear to be driving the acceptance and diffusion of the Internet in Brazil's low-income communities.

First, a history of poor public sector involvement in and governance of *favelas* has left communities fending for themselves. Low-income citizens are the present-day result of generations of rural and, more recently, urban residents living by their bootstraps, succeeding by making do and pulling resources together. Brazil is characterized by an especially adaptive culture. For these reasons Brazil's low-income communities are characterized by a high level of innovation, self-help schemes and other initiatives that result from what can be described as an extreme form of self-governance.<sup>102</sup> When a new tool – like the Internet – comes along and proposes to ameliorate some of their individual

<sup>101</sup> Gomide 2002, Rebêlo August 2001.

<sup>102</sup> For better or worse, the extreme form of "self-governance" that occurs in the *favelas* even includes 'security' provided by drug traffickers or vigilante death squads.

and common problems, or even just provide a new source of entertainment and diversion, community members are for the most part very open to it.

Second, the high level of urbanization in Brazil (82.2%),<sup>103</sup> means that new tools, like the Internet, are heard of quickly. It also means that government, NGOs and businesses can expect a high return on investment in access points, whether their hope is for a social or monetary return.

Finally, the strong family networks in Brazil end up producing a fair amount of wealth, if perceived collectively, even in poor communities.<sup>104</sup> In all *favelas* one can see antennas set up for access to cable television, and expensive stereo systems. When they became available, cellular phone purchase rates soared in these communities.<sup>105</sup> These are indicators of the interest that low-income Brazilians have in technology, particularly when they perceive its use and/or recreational value. Computers are no different though, unlike other technologies, they require investment in learning their use. This implies that as computer prices drop, their usefulness becomes captivating and, as general computer knowledge develops, consumers – even in low-income communities – are likely to drive some private demand as occurred in the United States.

In fact, the Internet is witnessing one of the fastest adoption rates of any technology in human history. George Day writes that an “acceleration can be seen in the increasing compression of technology adoption curves...With the Internet...at the

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<sup>103</sup> (*ICT at a Glance: Brazil* 2003). As compared to the United States’ 75% urban ratio (*World Development* 2001). Keep in mind, though, that the “urban” statistic includes suburbs, which in Brazil are essentially as dense as downtown regions. If taken into account, Brazil is significantly more urban than the United States.

<sup>104</sup> This does vary from region to region, however.

<sup>105</sup> In 2001 there were 167 cellular phones for every 1000 Brazilians as compared to 218 mainline telephone lines (*ICT at a Glance: Brazil* 2003).

leading edge of this intensification in time pressure”.<sup>106</sup> According to Day, overall trends toward free markets, globalization, and deregulation are adding fuel to the acceleration of technological change.

### *Catalytic Communities: Born of a Moment*

The history and context provided to this point help set the stage for the birth of Catalytic Communities (CatComm), a virtual not-for-profit organization, or “Dot Org”,<sup>107</sup> founded by myself with the help of a volunteer legal team in September of 2000.

CatComm was created in response to the new opportunity the Internet creates for developing collective intelligence as described by Pierre Lévy.<sup>108</sup> Within the Brazilian context described in the previous section, a set of conditions were found in Rio de Janeiro (see Figure 5) that yielded a perfect occasion for a pilot application that I called “Catalytic Communities”.<sup>109</sup>

Basically, the level of community innovation I witnessed during my first fieldwork visits to Rio’s *favelas* from June to August 2000,<sup>110</sup> combined with the level of investment I

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<sup>106</sup> Day 2000: 6.

<sup>107</sup> As “dot com” refers to those private sector entities which surfaced only because of the new business opportunities created by the Internet, a “Dot Org” is a not-for-profit entity arising solely in response to and as a result of the opportunities which surfaced for civil society as the Internet came to fruition. See Chapter 3 for a detailed analysis and explanation of this term.

<sup>108</sup> 1997.

<sup>109</sup> Interestingly enough, in the first funding proposal prepared on behalf of CatComm in October 2000, I predicted the pilot period in Rio de Janeiro would require three years. That proved to be exactly the case (this doctoral dissertation covers exactly the ‘pilot’ phase of CatComm’s work during which it was focused on and based in Rio de Janeiro).

<sup>110</sup> In Jacarezinho *favela* a local artist I met was teaching children about art through watercolors and oil paints, murals and banners, while taking them on trips to Picasso and Afro-Brazilian art exhibits in the city center. In Asa Branca a community leader struggling with the causes of dengue in his community brought local masons together to build the neighborhood’s rudimentary sewerage system. In Cidade de Deus a one-time soccer star began teaching soccer under the community’s viaduct only to have the project grow to work with over 100 boys, several of whom left the drug traffic because of the influence of their coach. In

### Figure 5. Conditions in Rio that Prompted CatComm's Creation in 9/00

- Over 70 of the city's 750+ *favelas* had some degree of public Internet access.
- Rio's 750+ *favelas* offered a broad diversity of local conditions and contexts, and could thus provide an enormous body of information on innovation in different contexts for both outsiders and insiders.
- Rio presents an interesting diversity of ethnic, historical, political, and cultural considerations. Inherent problems with the Catalytic Communities concept could be ironed out because they would be more likely to present themselves in such a diverse context.
- A number of capacity-building programs had been carried out in recent years that invested natural community "managers" with skills and networks to help them innovate. This means there were both natural networks of community innovators for Catalytic Communities to work with, and plentiful cases of innovation. And I already had contact with some of these networks.
- The city boasted thousands of non-governmental organizations, churches, and other third sector<sup>111</sup> institutions serving many of the more than one million citizens in the city's *favelas*.
- The scale and nature of the city make it difficult for individuals in the same city to physically locate one another and interact.
- Studies had been published that listed hundreds of third sector entities in Rio, their contact information and area of action.<sup>112</sup>

saw in Internet *access* (as opposed to content) in these communities (and other projects in the pipeline as described in Figure 4), led me to develop the idea of [CatComm.org](http://CatComm.org). Catalytic Communities would provide a set of online services to low-income communities to empower them to improve existing projects and/or elaborate new

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Manguera programs attend to the elderly. In Dique AIDS is confronted by a group operating a 'condom bank' supported by the federal Ministry of Health.

<sup>111</sup> Numerous terms have been devised – charitable sector, independent sector, voluntary sector, tax-exempt sector, non-governmental sector, nonprofit sector, not-for-profit sector, and more – to describe what is also called the “third sector.” In this discussion, “third sector” shall be relied upon because it represents all that which is not comprised by the public or private sectors and, as such, is all-encompassing (despite some arguments against this term that insist if anything civil society should be “primary”). That is to say, third sector includes all aspects of organized civil society, which can be effectively thought of as “the space of uncoerced human association” (Walzer 1991: 293), from baseball leagues and churches, to activist groups and soup kitchens.

<sup>112</sup> The Institute for the Study of Religion (ISER) and the city government's Agenda 21 initiative were among larger institutions that had published such studies.

grassroots solutions to local problems, regardless of their location on the globe.<sup>113</sup> In this setting, each community is both a consumer and provider of innovative ideas and solutions.

The organization's main service would be its Community Solutions Database (CSD) where community residents or leaders can document the solutions they develop locally which they deem worthy or needy of publicity. Each project documented in the CSD answers those questions its organizers deem applicable from among a large number of CatComm-generated questions. Questions range from standard data like the community and city in which a project is located, to open-ended information describing what the project looks like to the user, and how the program evolved. Project objectives, results, and necessities are listed. The final, in depth description also includes photographs and documents uploaded to the CatComm site, and links to articles. Once a project is documented, CatComm staff edits and revises it, then sends it on to translators, most of whom are volunteers. All of this is done in a dynamic database format. This means a project can be documented by anyone with access to the CatComm site, and that editors and translators can also be located anywhere around the globe.

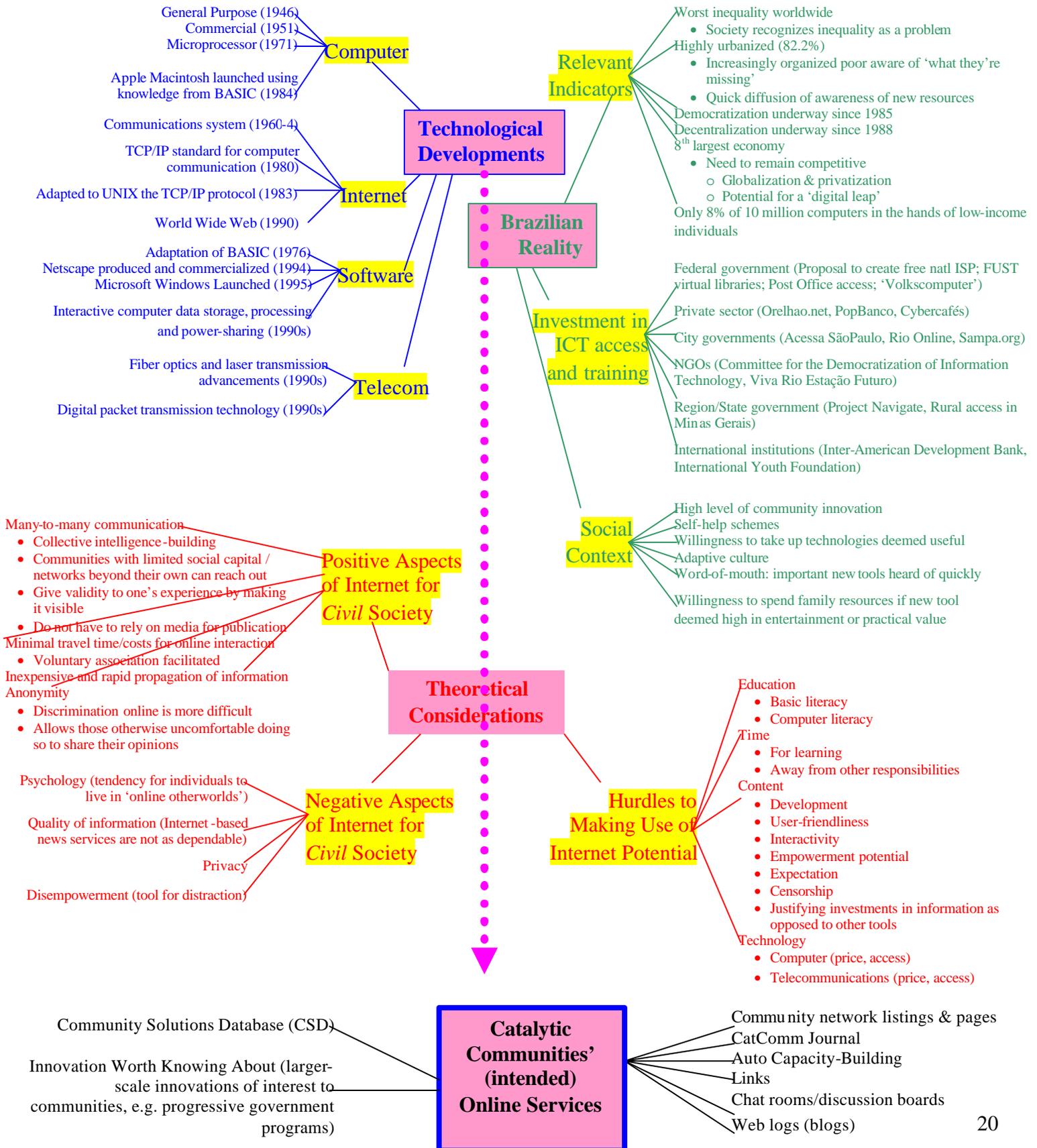
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<sup>113</sup> Catalytic Communities' first official mission statement was to "help low-income community members worldwide solve their local problems and share their practical solutions through an easy-to-use Internet database and networking services." The idea was to build upon the work of leaders across the city of Rio de Janeiro, where community managers tackle the local problems they encounter with minimal external support, often no funding, and little ability to share their experiences. Some attend the occasional meeting of leaders from various communities. But even there, there are seldom opportunities for sharing their project-building experiences. If the community leaders that work solidly to build local projects cannot find the time or resources to divulge their projects within their own communities, what are the chances of leaders across Rio's 750+ *favelas* knowing about their work? What, then, is the likelihood of other communities outside of Rio or Brazil, for that matter, learning from these leaders' experiences? Catalytic Communities' intention in its pilot phase was to use Rio as a base from which to create a viable organization taking advantage of the Internet to make the sharing of such solutions at a large scale possible.

CatComm also began developing (and continues to do so) online resources for: (1) the auto (self) capacity-building of communities in places where leadership training is limited, (2) e-mail and online discussion groups to hammer at tough community problems faced across borders, (3) web space designated for pre-existing inter-community networks to use and learn about one another and form larger networks, (4) thorough links, and (5) translation assistance (via a worldwide network of volunteer translators). Information would be captured horizontally, among communities historically isolated from each other, and divulged across boundaries. Figure 6 provides an overview of how the various points made in this introductory chapter interacted to produce CatComm. A full list and description of CatComm's online services is available at the bottom of Figure 6 ("Catalytic Communities' Online Services").

With this background in mind, a story will now be told. Not in a chronological sequence but, rather, thematically. Each chapter focuses on a theme that emerged as interesting and relevant during the natural evolution of the organization during its pilot period. The services mentioned above will not be the focus of the dissertation. In fact, most of them will not be touched on again unless they are of relevance in discussing the self-announced themes – social networks, virtuality, physicality, staff management, and fundraising – that emerged during CatComm's early years.

**Figure 6. Summary of the relationship between technology, the Brazilian reality, and theoretical perspectives leading to CatComm's emergence**



## **Chapter 2: The Central Role of Social Networks**

Any way you slice it, the story begins with networks. Networks are the *raison d'être* of Catalytic Communities. Not only the obvious infrastructure networks – Internet and telecommunications – that make it all possible. But, just as important, there are the social networks that supported CatComm's creation and development, and the potential that social networks offer civil society. It is for this reason I have chosen to begin with this theme.

Networks form the basis for communities – and Catalytic Communities – to connect in a way beyond that fostering individual opportunity to create opportunities for collective mobilization. Prior networks of contacts provided me with both the courage and ability to implement Catalytic Communities' vision. Today those involved in CatComm's growing network, which the organization has come to call a “community of solidarity in support of grassroots innovation,” direct much of the website's content. They include translators, community organizers, journalists, and others. CatComm's primary purpose is to facilitate the networking of community-based initiatives: to help them exchange horizontally with one another, and to help them build weak ties with supportive outsiders.<sup>114</sup> And as more communities utilize the organization's online resources, “network effects” begin to occur.<sup>115</sup> See Figure 7 for an illustration of this concept.

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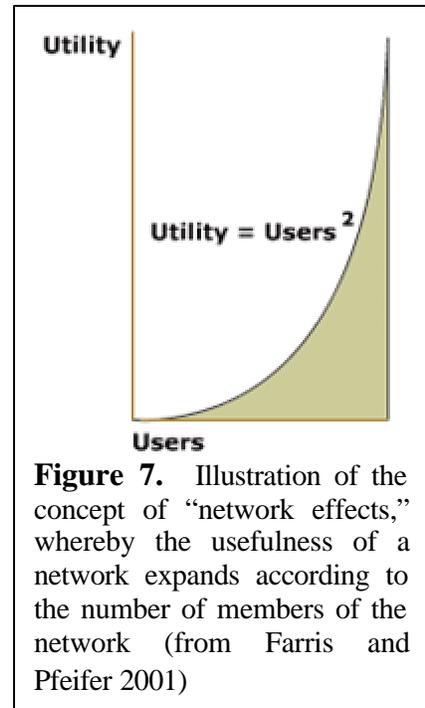
<sup>114</sup> See the next section for a discussion of ties.

<sup>115</sup> The term “network effects” refers to the fact that “the value of networks increases as the number of people who belong to and actively participate in the network increases” [Servon 2002: 3 with information taken from Civile (1995) and Brock (1994)]. “This idea is captured in what has become known as Metcalfe's Law: the value of a communications network is proportional to  $n^2$ , where  $n$  represents the number of members of the network,” Farris and Pfeifer (2001) tell us, “Telephones are a good

The historic inequality some groups face in accessing broader social networks is a major issue that Catalytic Communities aims to address. In this chapter these inequalities are described, an analysis is conducted of CatComm’s use of networks to establish itself, and the potential of utilizing CatComm’s unique position in network building for community empowerment is highlighted.

### *The Nature of Community Ties*

The first newsletter Catalytic Communities printed for fundraising purposes was designed to explain, in four pages, CatComm’s rationale, what it offered to communities, and to highlight some of the community initiatives described in its Community Solutions Database (CSD). In that newsletter, published in December 2001, I wrote a piece based on an argument that had emerged in my public speaking, but which had not yet been put in writing, rationalizing CatComm’s work in line with Mark Granovetter’s<sup>116</sup> theory of weak ties. I applied this theory, based on my intuitive understanding of Rio’s communities, to CatComm’s own objectives (see Figure 8).



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example...With two phones, two calls are possible. Three phones make six calls possible (each of the three parties can call the other two). Four phones enable twelve calls. As this pattern shows, the total value of the network increases geometrically as phones are connected to the network.” This is an important aspect of the potential of the Dot Orgs as discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>116</sup> 1973.

**Figure 8. *The Challenge*** (From December 2001 *Catalytic Communities Newsletter No. 1*)

Why does the distance between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in most countries continue to grow? Among the dozens of reasons is one that all of us can grasp. Just think about how the “haves” react when they encounter a new challenge. Virtually without failure the first thing they’ll do is contact a friend or colleague who might know something about the problem at hand. That person, though most likely not having a solution at arm’s reach, will be able to recommend first steps or someone who will. In a short time, the person experiencing the initial problem will have identified alternative courses of action, potential solutions, and so on. They might even quickly become experts on that subject. It is even possible they bypass certain problems in the first place by observing friends and acquaintances confront similar challenges.

In low-income communities, particularly in developing countries, strong networks also exist. But these networks are characteristically local and kin-based. As such, people know others within only a limited geographic area (sometimes a microcosm of one community) and employed in the same trades.

In these communities, when a new challenge arises, individuals set out to counter or solve them just as their higher income neighbors might, but without access to the same diversity of experience and breadth of contact. As such, communities often find themselves coping with problems from scratch. The end result? Over generations individual communities develop solid, effective, and innovative solutions to local problems. But when new problems arise, they must begin yet again, while their middle- or upper-class compatriots leap ahead.

Though historically this fact has meant constant hardship for communities in countries where government has been ineffective at providing public services, today a fantastic opportunity presents itself not only to turn the information disparity around, but to use it to fuel innovation, entrepreneurship, empowerment and sustainable development around the world.

A new technology – the Internet – allows us to meet the challenge of solution-sharing and horizontal networking among these communities at relatively low cost, and introduces new tools that can be used to help people improve their lives. Fortunately, these efforts can count on an increasing investment in low-income computer and Internet access in certain developing countries (including Brazil, India, Trinidad, and China).

During public presentations of CatComm’s work I often began by asking audience members what they do when they encounter a new challenge in their lives.

Interestingly enough, no matter who is present,<sup>117</sup> there has been essentially one universal response – “I ask people I know”.<sup>118</sup> One middle-class Brazilian respondent even told

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<sup>117</sup> This presentation was made at least 25 times, among audiences of donors, communities, and students in the United States and Brazil.

<sup>118</sup> Fascinating is that the one exception to this rule is the very occasional reply, “I go online.” This implies that the Internet is already providing information and links in people’s lives comparable to those previously acquired through human contacts.

me about his grandmother, who over fifty years ago always advised that “when you have a problem to solve, the first thing you do is tell *everyone* you know.”

Though respondents universally expressed the importance of making use of one’s ties<sup>119</sup> when confronting new challenges, there is a well-documented class-based discrepancy between the strength of ties available and utilized.<sup>120</sup> Simply stated, “Poorer people rely more on strong ties<sup>121</sup> than do others.”<sup>122</sup> Ericksen and Yancey<sup>123</sup> found that in Philadelphia, “strong networks seem to be linked both to economic insecurity and a lack of social services.” In terms of job-searching, “family plays a far bigger role in low-skill populations”.<sup>124</sup> Consistent with this, in the three *favelas*<sup>125</sup> in Rio de Janeiro studied by Janice Perlman in the late 1960s, “When asked where their best friends and favorite relatives lived, over half the favelados<sup>126</sup> said ‘within the same community.’ Two-thirds have very frequent (daily or weekly) social contact with these persons”.<sup>127</sup> This relationship between strong ties and low-income communities occurs for a variety of reasons.

The simplest reason is that strong relationships are more available in such communities. For one thing, where “primary families are large, more of the total contacts of an individual are likely to be absorbed by them”.<sup>128</sup> Related to this, “since

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<sup>119</sup> Ties throughout this chapter refer to human relationships.

<sup>120</sup> Tie strength was classified by Granovetter (1974) as a function of four characteristics: (1) Duration; (2) Emotional intensity; (3) Intimacy; and (4) Exchange of services.

<sup>121</sup> Generally put, strong ties refer to family and friends. Weak ties are those to acquaintances.

<sup>122</sup> Granovetter 1982: 116.

<sup>123</sup> 1977: 28.

<sup>124</sup> Degenne and Forsé 1999: 112.

<sup>125</sup> See footnote 66 for an explanation of the origin of this Brazilian term for slum, or shantytown.

<sup>126</sup> “Favelado” is the Portuguese term for slum-dweller.

<sup>127</sup> Perlman 1976: 133.

<sup>128</sup> (Pool 1980: 5). Why would a large family inherently limit one’s social network? Because “There seems to be some limitation built into us either by learning or by the design of our nervous systems, a limit

the class structure of modern societies is pyramidal and since we...expect individuals at all levels to ...choose as friends those similar to oneself, it follows that the lower one's class stratum, the greater the relative frequency of strong ties...and lower-status individuals are so numerous that it is relatively easier for them to pick and choose as friends others very similar to themselves".<sup>129</sup>

Second is the relatively higher dependability of strong tie-based relationships for those in insecure predicaments, those who "believe themselves to be without alternatives".<sup>130</sup> Pool<sup>131</sup> explains that "the utility of weak links is a function of the security of the individual, and therefore of his wealth. A highly insecure individual, for example, a peasant who might starve if his crop fails, is under strong pressure to become dependent upon one or a few strongly protective individuals. A person with resources on which he can fall back can resist becoming dependent on any given individual, and can explore more freely alternative options."

Confirming this, among low-income job hunters, "those in urgent need of a job turned to strong ties since they were more easily called on and willing to help, however limited the information they could provide".<sup>132</sup> In fact, with regard to job searching, for

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that keeps our channel capacities in this general range (of seven)," the psychologist George Miller explains, in his essay "The Magical Number Seven" (Miller 1956). Simon (1950: 94-95) describes the same phenomenon in a work setting: "When an individual enters an organization he finds that he works with certain people much more than he works with others. If he were to chart his contacts with other employees in the organization he would find that there was a fairly small and definite group of them with whom he had a great number of contacts every day." "Take a minute," Gladwell (2000: 176-7) encourages us, "to make a list of all the people you know whose death would leave you truly devastated. Chances are you will come up with around 12 names...our sympathy group. Why aren't groups any larger?...To be someone's best friend requires a minimum level of investment of time. More than that, though, it takes emotional energy."

<sup>129</sup> Granovetter 1982: 113-114, summarizing arguments by Peter Blau.

<sup>130</sup> Granovetter 1982: 116.

<sup>131</sup> 1980: 5.

<sup>132</sup> Granovetter 1974: 54.

many groups strong tie networks are critical: “the economic chances of the individual are strongly affected by his or her membership of a particular kinship group. Kinship networks operate in modern western society as both employment information systems and employment sponsorship systems”.<sup>133</sup>

On a more practical and less theoretical note, Stack<sup>134</sup> studied African-Americans in urban areas and found that these families “need a steady source of cooperative support to survive. They share with one another because of the urgency of their needs...Kin and close friends who fall into similar economic crises know that they may share the food, dwelling, and even the few scarce luxuries of those individuals in their kin network...Non-kin who live up to one another’s expectations express elaborate vows of friendship and conduct their social relations within the idiom of kinship.”

Lomnitz, in studying a Mexico City shantytown, came to similar conclusions: “Since marginals are barred from full membership in the urban industrial economy they have had to build their own economic system. The basic social economic structure of the shantytown is the reciprocity network...defined by an intense flow of reciprocal exchange between neighbors. The main purpose (of which)...is to provide a minimum level of economic security to its members”.<sup>135</sup>

Lisa Peattie<sup>136</sup> describes a similar reality. In La Laja, the *barrio* community where she lived in Ciudad Guyana, Venezuela:<sup>137</sup>

Relations based on kinship or assimilated to kinship are dominant in the social network. People are likely to have relatives living nearby. In this *barrio*, to

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<sup>133</sup> Ahlawat 1995: 18, summarizing Margaret 1987.

<sup>134</sup> 1974: 32, 33, 40.

<sup>135</sup> Lomnitz 1977: 209.

<sup>136</sup> 1968.

<sup>137</sup> Peattie 1968: 40-41, 51.

which nearly half the adults have migrated within the last five years, two-thirds of the households are connected by kinship with at least one other household in the barrio. People...interact with their kin. People aid their kinfolk economically.

The sort of kinship structure seen in La Laja...seems to operate as a system of social and economic welfare in an environment otherwise uncertain in the extreme...This welfare function of the kinship network in turn serves to draw kinfolk into physical proximity; because claims are made in quite personalized terms it is hard to assert a claim in the absence of personal contact and a personally developed relationship.

Despite the usefulness of strong ties among low-income communities, however, the related lack of weak tie-networks among these communities may constitute a significant threat to the long-term improvements of such neighborhoods. Granovetter questions the long-term practicality of a strong tie-based approach: “The heavy concentration of social energy in strong ties has the impact of fragmenting communities of the poor into encapsulated networks with poor connections between these units; individuals so encapsulated then lose some of the advantages associated with the outreach of weak ties. This may be one more factor that makes poverty self-perpetuating”.<sup>138</sup> In Rio’s communities this exact pattern is observed. Although there are over 750<sup>139</sup> unique low-income *favelas* in the city, many of them are subdivided into even smaller units in which neighbors have strong ties but outside of which individuals maintain few ties. Anthropologist and historian Marcos Alvito<sup>140</sup> describes the Acari<sup>141</sup> *favela*’s social networks:

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<sup>138</sup> (Granovetter 1982: 116). Peattie (1968: 52) inadvertently supports Granovetter’s conclusion that diversifying ties is ultimately an important aspect of one’s security: “If the successful people of La Laja were to be captured by doctrines of mobility success, were to save their money and educate their young,” she asks, “what would become of everyone else?”

<sup>139</sup> Schmidt 2003.

<sup>140</sup> 2001: 62-63.

<sup>141</sup> Acari is the area with the lowest Human Development Index ranking of Rio’s hundreds of neighborhoods.

The identity and solidarity ties stretch out in concentric rings...

The level of segmentation within each micro-area of the favela is as or more important than the divisions into micro-areas...Each one of these 'little pieces' in actuality contains within itself a network of relations that are firmly tied, whose starting point is the neighborhood. Neighborhood in a very restricted sense: each micro-area is made up of a few dozen homes and families...

Very often dating and marriage occur within one micro-area...When the kids get married, they look for a home nearby, with preference in the same micro-area. The ties of friendship and neighborliness, already quite narrow, in this way become reinforced through kinship ties...

(The result) is the existence of a cohesive and important solidarity network.

Why are weak ties so important? To understand the theory encompassed in the Strength of Weak Ties<sup>142</sup> (SWT), it is worthwhile to review the basic workings of networks as emphasized by Granovetter. Granovetter<sup>143</sup> was the first to formulate a theory along the lines cleanly summarized by Degenne and Forsé:<sup>144</sup>

Consider three persons. A, B and C. We shall assume A has strong discrete links to B and C. If this is so, there is a good chance B and C have met, because both B and C spend a lot of time with A. This raises the probability of chance trilateral encounters in the company of A. And once in the company of a common friend, they will tend to establish a link. Moreover, any two people sharing a strong link tend to resemble each other and share a number of common tastes and interests. So if B and C resemble A, they will tend to resemble each other too and share certain traits, which in turn will promote the establishment of strong links between them. Psychological arguments also apply. If B has a strong link to A and no strong link to C but C has a strong link to A, this generates a dissonance that will lead B and C to make the system coherent by establishing closer relations...Inversely, if A has a strong link to B but a weak one to C, B and C stand a poor chance of meeting. If they do meet, they stand a poor chance of discovering common traits and will have no special reason to establish closer relations.<sup>145</sup> The link between B and C has a strong chance of being weak or non-existent.

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<sup>142</sup> The theory, described in the article of the same name by Mark Granovetter in 1973.

<sup>143</sup> 1973.

<sup>144</sup> 1999: 109-110.

<sup>145</sup> Why do human beings not establish closer relationships with people who are less like them? One potential reason is an intrinsic numerical limit to our ability to form closer relationships. Footnote 128 provides some clues regarding this. Evolutionary biology also explains, as S. L. Washburn (1973) tells us, that "most of human evolution took place before the advent of agriculture when men lived in small groups, on a face-to-face basis. As a result human biology has evolved as an adaptive mechanism to conditions that have largely ceased to exist. Man evolved to feel strongly about few people, short distances, and relatively

But the most vital element of this theory comes next, with the introduction of bridges.<sup>146</sup> “A bridge...is a line in a network which provides the *only* path between two points...Since, in general, each person has a great many contacts, a bridge between A and B provides the only route along which information or influence can flow from any contact of A to any contact of B, and, consequently, from anyone connected *indirectly* to A and anyone connected indirectly to B”.<sup>147</sup> Of course, in real life, true bridges are rare because ultimately between any two people there is more than one route. However, “some links amount to bridges for all practical purposes in that a chain becomes much longer, and more likely to fail, if we do not go through a particular person...Beyond a certain length, chains may even become ineffective...An efficiency principle is at work that turns a ‘local bridge’ into a *de facto* bridge”.<sup>148</sup> “It is through these (bridging weak tie) networks that small scale interaction gets translated into large scale patterns and these in turn feed back into small groups,” Ahlawat<sup>149</sup> tells us.

It is important to remark that in fact there are two types of weak ties. There are those that for all practical purposes can be considered jointly with strong ties, for they are “embedded within each individual’s already existing set of strong ties, rather than bridging to other groups”.<sup>150</sup> Granovetter suggests that “in lower socioeconomic groups,

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brief intervals of time; and these are still the dimensions of life that are important to him.” Dunbar (1992) argues that what correlates with brain size among primates is group size – “If you belong to a group of twenty people...there are...190 two-way relationships to keep track of (to understand the personal dynamics of the group, juggle different personalities, and so on)” Gladwell (2000: 179) tells us, in summarizing Dunbar.

<sup>146</sup> Granovetter 1973: 1364.

<sup>147</sup> One might also choose to use other terms from network theory, like “articulation points,” whereby particular nodes perform the function of articulating diverse nodes (see Figure 9).

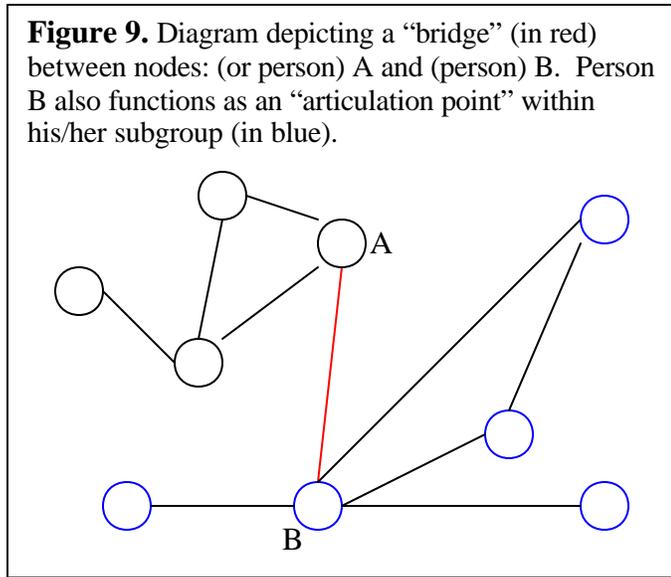
<sup>148</sup> Degenne and Forsé 1999: 110.

<sup>149</sup> 1995: 17.

<sup>150</sup> Granovetter 1982: 108.

weak ties are often not bridges, but rather represent friends' or relatives' acquaintances; the information they provide would then not constitute a real broadening of opportunity".<sup>151</sup> And there are those weak ties that constitute bridges.

An increase in weak tie



formation may be seen as one of the benefits of urbanization because an urban environment affords less frequent communication with greater numbers of people. “‘Truly rural’ societies are characterized by close-knit social networks in which everybody knows and interacts with everyone else,” Ahlawat<sup>152</sup> tells us, “while in urban situations social networks are loose-knit and allow greater anonymity and independence of action.”

Jane Jacobs, when she first moved to New York from a small city, played a game called Messages with her sister, similar to a fictional version of Milgram’s studies (described later in this chapter). Later, when Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she developed a theory around “hop-skip” people – “people who know unlikely people, and therefore eliminate the necessity for long chains of

<sup>151</sup> Granovetter 1982: 112.

<sup>152</sup> Ahlawat 1995: 17, summarizing Frankenberg 1966.

communication”.<sup>153</sup> “Once a good, strong network of these hop-skip links does get going in a city district,” she told us, “the net can enlarge relatively swiftly and weave all kinds of resilient new patterns”.<sup>154</sup>

I began to view this background information as critical in describing the benefits of Catalytic Communities’ strategy. The rationale I outlined in my public talks, based on the above discussion of weak and strong ties, was that low-income communities’ tendency to depend on strong ties, though with their set of benefits (including dependability), is unlikely to get them far when a *new* problem surfaces. New problems<sup>155</sup> will be difficult to tackle with a small, closed existing network in which no members have had prior experience addressing that problem. Those social groups associated with “weak ties” – ties that connect to or even provide bridges to a large network of diverse individuals – have an upper hand.

The idea, then, was that Catalytic Communities’ website provides perhaps the first concerted means by which low-income community members can systematically form weak ties with and learn from one another and outside supporters, regardless of distance and at minimal cost.

The initial concept for CatComm had taken shape during a period, in the middle of 2000, in which I had been visiting diverse low-income communities in Rio and documenting community innovations. Interestingly enough, all the leaders I spoke with mentioned *other* problems they had still to confront besides those they were already

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<sup>153</sup> Jacobs 1961: 135.

<sup>154</sup> Jacobs 1961: 136.

<sup>155</sup> Plastic pollution, narcotics-related violent crime, and HIV are examples of problems communities in many parts of the world have only begun to confront in recent years. Other challenges – like illiteracy – have existed for generations but may be deemed ‘new’ when only recently have they been viewed as significant.

dealing with. A leader who had developed a community sewerage scheme, for example, pointed out some young boys leaning idly on a wall, and expressed dismay: “I need to find a way to occupy these boys so they won’t get involved with drug trafficking,” he told me, “The narcotraffic hasn’t reached our community yet.” I had previously been in the Jacarezinho *favela* where a community artist teaches youth to paint with the intention of diverting their attention from criminal activities. In the meantime I saw myself – a middle-class youth going into the *favelas* for essentially the first time – having more access to information about different communities than they themselves had. The SWT theory I had learned of in a planning course immediately surfaced as a promising component of the explanation.

### ***Beyond One’s Direct Circle: Limitations to Establishing the Weak Tie***

A basic issue with regard to strong ties, then, is that despite their enormous value in desperate times, their presence tends to limit one’s use of those particularly strategic (in the long-term) weak ties. Knowing this, however, there remain a number of internal and external limitations to the effective development and use of weak ties by residents of low-income communities.

Rose Coser’s<sup>156</sup> research tells us that persons “deeply enmeshed in a *Gemeinschaft*<sup>157</sup> may never become aware of the fact that their lives do not actually depend on what happens within the group but on forces far beyond their perception and hence beyond their control. The *Gemeinschaft* may (therefore) prevent individuals from

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<sup>156</sup> 1975.

<sup>157</sup> This term refers to German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies’ 1887 distinction between the “traditional kinship-based world of ‘community’ (*Gemeinschaft*), and the modern, impersonal world of ‘association’ (*Gesellschaft*)” (Barnard and Spencer 2002: 606).

articulating their roles in relation to the complexities of the outside world”.<sup>158</sup> In other words, first and foremost, to those in strong tie-based communities it often feels<sup>159</sup> irrelevant to invest in the ability to interpret, understand, and work within the guidelines of a distant world.

Coser goes on to cite a second limitation – “In a *Gemeinschaft* everyone knows fairly well why people behave in a certain way. Little effort has to be made to gauge the intention of the other person”.<sup>160</sup> In discussing Coser’s conclusions, Granovetter comments that Coser “argues that the social structure faced by children of lower socioeconomic backgrounds does not encourage the complex role set that would...facilitate the development of ‘intellectual flexibility and self-direction’”.<sup>161</sup> The lack of cognitive flexibility that results from a sense that one’s social needs are met sufficiently within one’s local area limits the ability of such communities to fully grasp and confront the forces that shape their world. On the other hand, someone born into a world of overlapping networks will develop these cognitive skill sets much more easily, thus allowing them to grasp the logic and utilize the mechanisms of weaker social networks.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Coser 1975: 242.

<sup>159</sup> Or, more likely, it does not ‘feel’ anything because it just simply does not occur.

<sup>160</sup> Coser 1975: 254.

<sup>161</sup> Coser 1975: 258 cited in Granovetter 1982: 108.

<sup>162</sup> That said, it is important to note that in other vital ways low-income citizens prove themselves to be extremely flexible, perhaps even more so than their middle- or upper-class compatriots. As the proverb says, “necessity is the mother of invention.” This is clearly the case in the Brazilian context where the informal economy generates enormous amounts of wealth and is largely responsible for the nation’s high entrepreneurship. In the year 2000 when the London Business School first included Brazil in its Global Entrepreneurship Monitor ranking, Brazil came in first in entrepreneurial initiative. Two years later it ranked fifth, due to the presence of newcomers. However, Brazil continues to rank number one in terms of “entrepreneurship by necessity.” 55.4% of Brazil’s entrepreneurs are so because of lack of opportunity in the job market (“Empreendedorismo” 2002). Hernando de Soto (2000) estimates that “If the United States were to hike its foreign-aid budget to the level recommended by the United Nations—0.7 percent of national

It is important to take note, however, as Granovetter himself points out, that “there is no special reason why such an argument should apply only or even best to lower socioeconomic groups; it should be equally persuasive for any set of people whose outlook is unusually provincial as the result of homogeneous contacts. In American society,” he tells us, “there is thus some reason for suggesting that upper-class individuals as well as lower-class ones may suffer a similar lack of ‘cognitive flexibility.’...Halberstam<sup>163</sup> has suggested that such a social structure generates inflexibility in the form of arrogance and a sense of infallibility (among the wealthy)”.<sup>164</sup>

One of the factors potentially limiting many communities’ weak tie-formation is thus a limited cognitive flexibility in the ability to interpret and understand responses from other ‘cultures’.<sup>165</sup> In the development of Catalytic Communities a specific event summarizes nicely this difficulty with regard to Rio’s community groups. In late February 2003 CatComm launched a public access community technology center (CTC) for community leaders throughout the city of Rio.<sup>166</sup> The group of community leaders CatComm is closest to – CONGESCO<sup>167</sup> – was the only group utilizing the center before the official launch, for meetings and other gatherings.

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income—it would take the richest country on Earth more than 150 years to transfer to the world's poor resources equal to those they already possess” (2000: 5).

<sup>163</sup> 1972.

<sup>164</sup> Granovetter 1980: 108-9.

<sup>165</sup> “Culture” here is being used to mean “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns...as the expression of a particular...community, population or individual” (Adapted from *American Heritage* 1992: 454).

<sup>166</sup> The subject of Chapter 4.

<sup>167</sup> CONGESCO is the coalition of community leaders most closely involved with Catalytic Communities in Rio de Janeiro and whose meetings I have been actively participating in since July 2000. They are today good friends. The Conselho de Gestores Comunitários do Rio de Janeiro in English might be translated as Community Managers’ Council of Rio de Janeiro. CatComm and CONGESCO’s relationship will be discussed later in this chapter as one of “Bottom-up Mutual Incubation” (see page 49).

When the official launch came, however, CONGESCO members conflicted for the first time in two and a half years with myself and Catalytic Communities.<sup>168</sup> They expressed that they “were not feeling at home in the Casa”.<sup>169</sup> This was a shocking blow to our attempt to build a “space for dialogue, relationship-building and exchange in which everyone can feel at home, whether they be from communities, foundations, governments; whether they are Brazilians or foreigners.” It turned out the community leaders’ feelings came in response to small details – that we were asking people to use glass cups that each could use and wash during a visit so as to be more resource efficient; that it had occurred to us we should make the Casa a shoe-free setting (though this idea was almost immediately thrown out); that we were concerned with maintaining the cleanliness of the Casa; and so on.

It was alerting to myself and Rose<sup>170</sup> that such small ultimately insignificant process decisions could create conflict with a group of leaders we had become so close with. As Crenson<sup>171</sup> found with regard to one community organization in which members had become friends, “Close personal ties that developed in organizations...helped to convert seemingly minor disputes into explosive...conflicts...Friendship itself may not have triggered these disagreements, but it provided the inflammable material that fed them—feelings of personal betrayal, a desire for personal revenge, or personal loyalties that prompt a fierce defense of one’s

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<sup>168</sup> Though upon discussion the conflict was quickly resolved.

<sup>169</sup> “Casa” throughout the dissertation refers to the Casa do Gestor Catalisador, the CTC CatComm set up in Rio de Janeiro to provide public Internet access to community leaders in February 2003.

<sup>170</sup> Rose is Roseli Franco, a friend from my first days in Rio in June 2000 who joined the CatComm team to help with administration and Portuguese content for the site in November 2002.

<sup>171</sup> 1978.

friends when they are under attack”.<sup>172</sup> In the case of the Casa, the community leaders had grown to feel part ownership in a space whose decisions were being made along a different philosophy – that of Catalytic Communities as inspired by its diverse international staff and Board of Directors.<sup>173</sup> One must then wonder – if such small discrepancies in approach and, ultimately, culture, could leave these community leaders feeling uncomfortable, how would larger rifts in approach affect the process? After all, CatComm and CONGESCO ultimately have complementary objectives and moral stance.

Fortunately, as Ahlawat<sup>174</sup> tells us that “Social networks are an ongoing process, they may change with time and situation,” so does cognitive adaptation change with time. Following the original misunderstanding, the relationship with CONGESCO leaders was only strengthened, due to open discussions to confront and clarify the issues.

Marcos Alvito<sup>175</sup> told us about Acari: “I always found the same people in the same locations, except for the community leaders.” Community leaders are a particular category of low-income community resident who tend to draw more strongly on weak ties than do their neighbors. “Community leaders are the mediators,” Alvito tells us, with regard to “diverse relationships: with politicians, with the authorities, with the narcotraffic, with the press, with NGOs”.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Crenson 1978: 592.

<sup>173</sup> At the time, the Catalytic Communities staff was comprised of Theresa Williamson (a Brazilian-British-American), Roseli Franco (a Brazilian philosophy teacher by training), Andrew Genung (an American college student from the mid-West who had traveled throughout Latin America and Asia); Michael Niedermeier (also from the mid-West, a future doctor who had lived in Nepal, among other places); and Angelo Silva (a Rio-based community leader now on staff part-time with the function of instigating network-building among Rio’s communities).

<sup>174</sup> 1995: 19.

<sup>175</sup> 2001: 63.

<sup>176</sup> Alvito 2001: 132.

In my experience those community leaders who form fewer weak ties often find it difficult to strengthen their initiatives over time or simply depend on close relationships with specific individuals,<sup>177</sup> particularly politicians, or NGOs outside their communities, in a way that forms strong ties and leaves little room for a broader base of weak ties.

In addition to the two internal cultural limitations described by Coser, there are also external structural limitations<sup>178</sup> posed to an individual's ability to form weak ties, some of which are based on the particular power and cultural dynamics of one's whereabouts on the globe.

In the case of Brazil, for example, there is at least one limitation to the formation of weak ties that came to be only in the past two decades. In fact, Janice Perlman's data on Rio's *favelas* in the late 1960s showed that 54% of those she interviewed had experienced some contact with at least one of the types of people she inquired about in her "Heterogeneity of contacts" questioning.<sup>179</sup> Perlman painted a very positive picture of people from the *favelas* moving about the city, "mak(ing) full use of the city context and gain(ing) exposure to a wide variety of urban experiences".<sup>180</sup> Today, however, the circulation Perlman spoke of has been made much more difficult: "Residents and even community leaders (today) avoid circulating or maintaining any type of ties with people or institutions from other *favelas* controlled by the other faction (of the drug traffic)".<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> A likely consequence of the traditional patron-based patriarchal and clientelistic systems on which much of Brazilian politics centered for centuries.

<sup>178</sup> The term "structural" is used here loosely in a general sense: e.g. "concerned with or resulting from political or especially economic structure" (*American Heritage* 1992: 1782). The implication is that structural limitations are those imposed by external, larger-scale circumstances not determined or easily altered by members of the community themselves.

<sup>179</sup> When asked if they had ever had the chance to speak with a foreigner, 32% said yes; industrialist, 26%; army official, 25%, political leader, 14%, and student leader, 7% (Perlman 1976: 138-9).

<sup>180</sup> 137.

<sup>181</sup> Alvito 2001: 82.

Today, the leadership of the local drug traffic keeps residents and leaders within communities from circulating freely within their community, to other communities, and even throughout the wider city. This limits residents' and leaders' ability to form ties with their peers in other communities that could then perform the role of bridging them to others – lawyers, doctors, and other professionals, for example.

In addition, when Perlman conducted her research in the late 1960s, Brazil was entering a period of economic growth, when unemployment was low and fairly low-skill industrial jobs were available. At the time, *favela* residents were likely to come into contact with certain external groups through their jobs. They could meet a lawyer due to their participation in a labor union, for example.

What has not changed since Perlman's study is that regardless of the openness on the part of *favela* residents to meet people of diverse backgrounds, the wider society does not accept them. They are treated as marginal, whether or not they actually adhere to the principles that define marginality. Hence, to some extent, it may well be primarily outsiders that in many developing countries impose a dependence on stronger ties among community residents.<sup>182</sup> For example, Perlman published a vignette from the diary of a *favela* resident, Maria Carolina de Jesus, who went looking for government support when she got severe kidney pains while carrying scrap iron decades ago, in 1962:

So as not to see my children hungry, I went for help to the famous Bureau of Social Services. It was there that I saw...the coldness with which they treat the poor...[After getting no response] I went straight to the Governor's Palace. The Palace sent me to an office [on the other side of town]. They in turn sent me to the Social Service Institute at the Santa Casa Charity Hospital. There I talked with a woman who listened to me, said many things, yet said nothing. I decided

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<sup>182</sup> Though, of course, this argument would not preclude *favela* dwellers from forming weak ties with residents in peer communities.

to go back to the Palace...I said: 'I came here to ask for help because I am ill...Now I've spent all the money I have on transportation'.<sup>183</sup>

Unfortunately, this reality described in 1962 remains. I often hear similar stories told by community leaders in Rio. As a result, one leader described his peers as a group of “scalded cats.”

Other limitations also exist. As Jacobs tells us: “It takes surprisingly few of these hop-skip people...to weld a (city) district into a real Thing...But these people must have time to find each other, time to try expedient cooperation—as well as time to have rooted themselves, too, in various smaller neighborhoods of place or special interest”.<sup>184</sup> In other words, time and basic transit fare are necessary in order for people to appropriately tend to their weak tie-building. But both of these are limited resources among people of low income.

Up until this point we have seen that a lack of weak-tie formation may pose a significant barrier to development in low-income communities. We have learned that certain limitations – internal to the culture of the communities themselves, and external within the broader society – keep those communities from forming weak ties. We have also witnessed that this phenomenon plays an important role in establishing the need – a potential demand – for CatComm’s services.

It is therefore now a good moment to step back and look at Catalytic Communities’ own networks. Different from community-based institutions, CatComm is an international not-for-profit NGO. Its networks are different to those of a geographic, locally-grounded community. What exactly is the nature of the social networks that have

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<sup>183</sup> Perlman 1976: 140-141, reprinted from Jesus 1962: 42-43.

<sup>184</sup> Jacobs 1961: 134.

built CatComm? What can this tell us about the type of networking that should be undertaken in order to empower traditionally strong tie-based communities? What, then, does this imply about directions for the development of CatComm's services? With the background provided above on limitations to community networking, we will now move on to look at Catalytic Communities' network characteristics and how these can be used to break the limitations on forming weak ties discussed above.

### *Catalytic Communities: Introducing the Internet*

Born of opportunity and in a bed of overlapping networks, Catalytic Communities was made possible largely because of a network of weak-tie bridges and a number of long-term direct ties. That said, there were also a small number of important strong-tie bridges involved.<sup>185</sup>

To illustrate the nature of the networks that allowed CatComm to develop, I performed a rudimentary analysis of 201 of the most useful contacts in the realization of CatComm through March 2003. By identifying the tie that brought me to them, I categorized these 201 people according to whether that linking tie was strong or weak and whether it was bridging, non-bridging, or direct. Contacts made through a non-human intermediary (e.g. a networking event or the Internet) are included as bridging

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<sup>185</sup> Though I think that Granovetter's general theory is extremely useful to help understand the importance of cultivating diverse relationships, particularly when new problems surface, I differ with some of the underlying premises on which he bases his theory (and which help turn it 'neat'). One of these is the concept that strong ties cannot be bridges. My family is scattered on three continents, I have traveled to dozens of countries, and I went to school with people from all regions of the United States and the world. Now I live in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where I work with low-income communities, circulate the NGO circuit, and participate in academic conferences. I have been an activist and a doctoral student, and have lived in three cities in Brazil and two in the United States. It is entirely conceivable – in fact, expected – that someone like myself would have strong ties that do not heed to the transitive principle – that I would have two strong ties that do not know each other and that one of these ties could well be a bridge. This becomes increasingly the case as time goes by, migrations increase, and the Internet becomes ubiquitous.

weak ties – the intermediary plays the role of a weak bridge – unless other contacts exist in common (in which case the intermediary is deemed non-bridging). Bridging ties here are those that “if we do not go through (that) particular person (or intermediary, are more likely to fail)”.<sup>186</sup> Direct ties are those that already existed when CatComm was founded in September 2000. The following breakdown occurs:<sup>187</sup>

**Figure 10. Breakdown of CatComm Contacts by Category, Tie Type in March 2003**

Contact Categories		Bridging	Non-bridging	Direct
<b>Advisors / Directors / Partners (n=23)</b> (13.04% of advisors, etc. met at events; 0 Internet)	<b>Strong</b>	8.70%	8.70%	<b>30.43%</b>
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>34.78%</b>	<b>17.39%</b>	0%
<b>Fundraising Contacts (n=57)</b> (3.51% of fundraising contacts met at events; 0 Internet)	<b>Strong</b>	7.02%	0%	<b>29.82%</b>
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>35.09%</b>	1.76%	<b>26.32%</b>
<b>Volunteers &amp; Staff (n=62)</b> (48.39% of volunteers & staff met on Internet; 0 events)	<b>Strong</b>	12.90%	4.84%	11.29%
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>64.52%</b>	3.23%	3.23%
<b>Community Leaders (n=37)</b> (24.32% of leaders met at events; 5.41% via Internet)	<b>Strong</b>	8.11%	2.70%	0%
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>83.78%</b>	2.70%	2.70%
<b>Press Contacts (n=22)</b> (22.73% of press contacts met at events; 22.73% via Internet)	<b>Strong</b>	9.09%	0%	0%
	<b>Weak</b>	<b>59.09%</b>	4.55%	<b>27.27%</b>
<b>KEY</b>				
<b>Red</b> indicates highest percentage(s) in each contact category, given that they fall within a 10% radius of the highest				
<b>Blue</b> indicates significant numbers of ties in a category, but which do not reach within a 10% radius of the highest grouping				

<sup>186</sup> Degenne and Forsé 1999: 110.

<sup>187</sup> These data are as of March 2003. Whitten and Wolf (1970) suggest the importance of “freezing time” in order to study social networks. This is effectively what has been done here.

Several important points surface from this analysis. Press, community, and volunteer contacts are those that were most distant to me when I began building CatComm. This is clear by looking at the above data.

I met 59% of press contacts through weak bridges – these bridges being mainly non-human intermediaries. In fact, 76.92% of weak bridges linking me to press contacts were non-human intermediaries (networking events and the Internet). Another 27% of press contacts were direct weak ties – people in the press I took the liberty to research and then contact directly in order to solicit coverage of an event.

Community contacts are by and large made available via a network of weak bridges – individuals in communities I am in touch with who send others to CatComm or networking events. Community contacts outside of Rio de Janeiro for the most part discover Catalytic Communities on the Internet, thus 5.41% of our most utilized community contacts discovered us online. To date not one community leader featured and/or participating in CatComm's programs came about through a strong direct tie, though various have become strong direct ties over time. This implies that one can start an organization based on an idea without yet having confirmation of the work and strong direct links to those that organization hopes to attend to. However, as we will discover in Chapter 6, external support from funders and others often comes only once the project is being carried out and therefore the population attended to has been incorporated into the process.

With regard to volunteers and staff, a strong bias in favor of weak tie contacts also surfaces. This is due primarily to the importance of the Internet in CatComm's

volunteer-seeking outreach efforts. 78.38% of the weak ties bringing volunteers into contact with CatComm were Internet-based. None were introduced to CatComm purely through events.

Looking at the role of the Internet is one of the most interesting aspects of analyzing the ties that form the network of contacts that built Catalytic Communities. Thirty-six of the 201 contacts “met” CatComm through the Internet (primarily through the [idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)<sup>188</sup> site, CatComm’s site, or online press coverage). The bulk of these are volunteers on various continents who offered to help with translation. Pool has argued that “the number of weak ties is increased by the development of the communications system, bureaucratization, population density, and the spread of market mechanisms”.<sup>189</sup> The advent of the Internet is key in this process.

Without the Internet, it is much more difficult to search for volunteers. One must at the very least invest significant time in outreach, which may include publishing brochures, conducting trainings, or establishing relationships with universities or other institutions that facilitate the building of such relationships. The Internet significantly streamlines volunteer recruitment. CatComm has simply posted occasional messages on the Idealist website or on its own site. Responses follow. Most of these responses are from individuals in diverse locations that were attracted to the possibility of providing support on their own time from their own homes. The responsibility that belies CatComm at that point is organizing these individuals, keeping them informed of the

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<sup>188</sup> [Idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) is a website that provides support services to not-for-profit initiatives. Also a “Dot Org,” Idealist allows not-for-profits to list volunteer or job opportunities, which they then make available to a network of people interested in working in not-for-profits from around the world.

<sup>189</sup> Granovetter 1982: 113.

process, and ensuring their receipt of assigned tasks in need of work. There will be a greater discussion of volunteers in Chapter 3.

Most traditional in the contact breakdown described in the above table is the relationship between myself and the contacts that play advisory roles or that are involved as funders or with fundraising. None of the contacts in either case were introduced to CatComm through the Internet, and few were the result of networking events.

Instead, CatComm's directors and advisors were in almost 35% of cases the result of weak bridging ties, just over 30% of cases the result of strong direct ties, and, interestingly, 17% came about through non-bridging weak ties. Particularly in the beginning, CatComm's advisors were the result of strong direct ties – they were people in whom I had confidence, whom I knew from prior experience could not only be trusted, but would be willing to stick by the organization. Soon thereafter, the heads of other NGOs and other individuals met through weak non-bridging and bridging contacts were incorporated into the advisory network. Due to the strong need to *trust* advisors and, even more so, directors, these individuals were chosen based on face-to-face interaction and on intuitive reactions to them as the relationships developed.

What is most significant about funders and fundraising contacts through March 2003 is that 56% of them were people I already had direct contact with before founding CatComm. Though I spent a significant amount of effort formally approaching foundations and business leaders for support during the first year and a half of CatComm's existence, all of our funding has come through individual contributions or the contributions of institutions with whom I have developed friendly direct contact. And of those individuals, only 5 of 33 funders were people with whom I did not have direct

contact prior to starting CatComm. Interestingly enough, CatComm is listed on several fundraising support websites on the Internet,<sup>190</sup> and offers funders the opportunity to donate through its own website. Yet by March 2003 only one individual had utilized these services, and it was someone with whom we were already in contact.

The diversity of ties by which contacts are made is of particular interest here. As is true with regard to related studies in other areas, the above analysis implies that depending on the type of need, different types of ties are ultimately useful in varying ways. This case implies that fundraising and advising often expand from a network of strong ties outward. And in this case, the direct action component – work with community leaders and acquiring volunteers – along with attracting the press, began by drawing on weak ties which then may or may not develop into stronger ties. Finally, today, it is possible to draw on a new tool – the Internet<sup>191</sup> – as a surrogate weak tie to provide a bridging function to contacts in areas one may not previously have had one's own contacts in. In this case the Internet was mainly used to develop volunteer and press contacts, though it is hoped that the Internet will over time play a greater role in providing weak ties to community leaders, as CatComm performs outreach to a more global audience.

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<sup>190</sup> These include the Funders Network on Trade and Globalization ([www.fntg.org](http://www.fntg.org)), GuideStar ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)), and Do the Good ([www.dothegood.com](http://www.dothegood.com)).

<sup>191</sup> An important observation with regard to CatComm's rationale.

### *Reflecting Back on Communities*

When a community leader begins a community program he or she may well begin from essentially the opposite vantage point. (S)he may begin with strong ties to community leaders and volunteers. But unlike these contact groups, with whom I found it easiest to develop networks, community-based groups may find it more difficult to break down the social barriers that exist throughout society, that limit their ability to form an advisory network or to attract funders. Of course an advisory network can be comprised of individuals from all walks of life, including key figures in low-income communities themselves. But in the case of CatComm, the Advisory Board, for example, has played a role of legitimizing the organization in the eyes of outsiders, by incorporating community leaders and NGO leaders, academics, and others. The construction of this sort of an advisory network may be more difficult for many communities due to the social barriers that exist, both within their own minds and amidst the wider society, limiting their access to “outsiders.”

Since funders rely so heavily on direct personal ties, it makes it particularly difficult for community-based groups to outreach to them. They then rely on and compete for access to a small pool of government and NGO-driven funds.<sup>192</sup> I do not have high hopes for most efforts at Internet-based fundraising except in a supportive role, however, because personal contact will remain very important in this regard.

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<sup>192</sup> Lynne Twist (2001), an expert on fundraising from individual donors, discusses the importance of relying on large networks of individuals as opposed to a smaller number of funding sources to support social initiatives. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Community-based groups may also find it difficult to contact the press, particularly since they rarely have access to the Internet, the primarily tool utilized in CatComm's case for developing its press network.

In addition, because community-based organizations often have locally, from the get-go, the two key ingredients to establishing a social program – proximity to the client base and volunteers to realize the program – they can carry on their initiatives without venturing out too far from their existing networks. The downside of this is that beginning with these two groups in place – clients and volunteers – may limit community organizations' ability to develop further. That is, in being ensured a bare bone existence through clients and volunteers, it will feel less urgent to develop the more complicated long-term networks required to gather funds, diverse advisors, and to guarantee press coverage. A basic program may exist for years in that community, but the project may find itself “stuck,” unable to develop further.

In building CatComm, on the other hand, I could not have provided any services if I did not make an active effort to branch out from pre-existing direct ties. The communities I hoped to serve had to be essentially recruited in the beginning – they needed to be discovered, convinced of my (and later our group's) dedication, and incorporated into the organization's decision-making process. All of this before we even began providing services.

### *Creating the Opportunity to Connect*

This basic analysis lends support to a relatively recent strategy incorporated by Catalytic Communities: that of using the website to provide community initiatives a way of reaching individual funders and the media. When CatComm was founded, my idea was to provide a way for communities to stretch out and form ties with one another. What the above analysis shows, and what also happened naturally with the evolution of the organization, is that the CatComm website also serves a particularly important need for communities to form ties with outsiders – particularly potential funders and the press.

In March 2002, Caroline Simon took me out to lunch. Caroline is a neighbor of my parents' for whom I babysat as a teenager and who has, since November 2001, been making financial contributions to CatComm. She was the first funder to visit Rio, and continues to tout CatComm to friends and family. On this particular day, she took me out to lunch with her aging mother, Adele, at a Washington-area Inn. Adele is the widow of a deceased successful businessman and invests heavily in social causes. I sat and described CatComm to Adele, at Caroline's suggestion. Adele, perhaps because of her relatively little experience with the Internet or limited interest in international causes, was not particularly interested in supporting CatComm herself, though she enjoys hearing my stories. I already knew this from a previous encounter, and told those stories happily. One of the day's stories was about how few US dollars are needed to do something socially worthwhile in Rio. I told Adele and Caroline about Henrique, the community artist for whom US\$500 buys art supplies for an entire year. Without a flicker, Adele hunched up and said, "Well is that all? I'll give him \$500!" It turned out Adele supports a similar community arts program in Southeast Washington, D.C. We worked out a way

for Adele to make her donation and deduct it from her taxes by donating through Catalytic Communities, that then transferred the funds to Henrique's program in Rio. And with this event the potential of using CatComm to provide financial support directly to community programs was born.<sup>193</sup> Catalytic Communities today encourages funders to select community programs described in its Community Solutions Database to support directly.

Similarly, it was in sitting with John Maier, an American journalist expatriate living in Rio whom I met through another journalist friend (who in turn I met at an event organized by an international NGO in Rio), that the idea of using the site for community networking with journalists arose. John suggested that CatComm develop an email list of journalists working on any of a number of issues that can be targeted every time projects are documented in the CatComm database in line with their area(s) of interest. Though this is not yet being done, it has become one of CatComm's objectives.

Another model developed organically by Catalytic Communities which offers a 'way out' is a phenomenon I term Bottom-Up Mutual Incubation. This process refers to the potential for two organizations, normally founded around the same time (or one component of an organization founded at the time of another) mutually reinforcing each other throughout the early period. "Bottom-up" does not refer to hierarchy but, rather, to the start-up period within the organization(s). Catalytic Communities can be seen to have developed in this way jointly with the CONGESCO community coalition in Rio.

CONGESCO leaders each organize community-level initiatives to benefit their individual

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<sup>193</sup> As a 501[c][3] tax-exempt not-for-profit organization in the United States, CatComm can promise US donors tax exemption while allowing them to support grassroots community programs abroad directly. This requires that CatComm conduct proper accounting in the both the United States and Brazil, however.

communities but return to this network of leaders in order to discuss common problems. CatComm's early period counted on CONGESCO participation in documenting projects and, more importantly, informing CatComm of community needs as we developed our website. CONGESCO benefited from CatComm's growth through outreach and publicity offered by the website and resources garnered through CatComm's contacts for CONGESCO participation in events. More recently, many of CONGESCO's projects have been written and funding approved due to the resources available at CatComm's community technology center in Rio. We hope this will prove a model for networking among community organizations in the future, so that individual groups with limited assets can work together, joining their strengths and mutually reinforcing one another until they come to fruition, and beyond.

***Additional Reflection: A Predilection for Weak Ties***

An outsider might be more appropriate than myself to observe that the development of Catalytic Communities institutionally, as well as the development of its services, may have been made possible by a personality characteristic of mine involving a predilection for forming weak ties. According to Malcolm Gladwell<sup>194</sup> there are three types of people who help ideas reach a "tipping point".<sup>195</sup> Though I certainly would not argue that CatComm has yet reached some sort of tipping point, one of his categories of 'tipper' is of particular relevance in understanding the relative achievement of CatComm in a short period of time given the little starting infrastructure I had. "The success of any

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<sup>194</sup> 2000.

<sup>195</sup> The tipping point is that moment of critical mass when a simple idea transforms into a social epidemic, a phenomenon (Gladwell 2000).

kind of social epidemic is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of social gifts...This is the Law of the Few,” he tells us.<sup>196</sup> I expect that these ‘gifts,’ however, are in actuality determined by people’s upbringing, the behavior of those that surround them, and primarily, the opportunity to make good on those instincts.

Gladwell cites Stanley Milgram’s studies, repeated many times since with other populations, in which a chain letter was handed to 160 people in Omaha, Nebraska. Those people were then asked to write their names on the letter and forward it to a friend or acquaintance they thought would get the packet closer to a specific stockbroker in Boston. Most of the letters reached the stockbroker in five or six steps, with only three people responsible for delivering half of the letters.<sup>197</sup> These three people, according to Gladwell, are Connectors – “a very small number of people (who) are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few”.<sup>198</sup>

Gladwell then continues, describing the characteristics of successful Connectors he met over the years:

Horchow...didn’t think of his people collection as a business strategy...It was who he was. Horchow has an instinctive and natural gift for making social connections. He’s not aggressive about it...He simply likes people, in a genuine and powerful way, and he finds the patterns of acquaintanceship and interaction in which people arrange themselves to be endlessly fascinating.<sup>199</sup>

For his seventieth birthday, (Mickey Shannon) attempted to track down a friend from elementary school...He keeps on his computer a roster of 1,600 names and addresses, and on each entry is a note describing the circumstances under which

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<sup>196</sup> (Gladwell 2000: 33). This well describes Jacobs’ “hop-skip people,” too.

<sup>197</sup> 36.

<sup>198</sup> Gladwell 2000: 37.

<sup>199</sup> Gladwell 2000: 43.

he met the person...‘If I met you and like you and you happen to mention your birthday, I write it in’.<sup>200</sup>

Gladwell finishes his discussion of Connectors by contemplating.<sup>201</sup>

Most of us, I think, shy away from this kind of cultivation of acquaintances. We have our circle of friends, to whom we are devoted. Acquaintances we keep at arm’s length. The reason we don’t send birthday cards to people we don’t really care a great deal about is that we don’t want to feel obliged to have dinner with them or see a movie with them or visit them when they’re sick. The purpose of making an acquaintance, for most of us, is to evaluate whether we want to turn that person into a friend; we don’t feel we have the time or the energy to maintain meaningful contact with everyone.<sup>202</sup> Horchow is quite different. The people he puts in his diary or on his computer are acquaintances—people he might run into only once a year or once every few years—and he doesn’t shy away from the obligation that that connection requires. He has mastered what sociologists call the ‘weak tie,’ a friendly yet casual social connection. More than that, he’s happy with the weak tie. After I met Horchow, I felt slightly frustrated. I wanted to know him better, but I wondered whether I would ever have the chance. I don’t think he shared the same frustration with me. I think he’s someone who sees value and pleasure in a casual meeting...Perhaps it is best to call the Connector impulse simply that—an impulse, just one of the many personality traits that distinguish one human being from another.

What are the important functions of Connectors? Besides being the bridges through which society communicates, Connectors are important in other ways, particularly with regard to leadership. The Harvard Business Review’s publication on *What Makes a Leader* has several articles which describe the importance of Connectors in providing leadership and, if you will, “tipping social epidemics.” When Goleman<sup>203</sup> describes the results of his research on successful leadership, he concludes that “Effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: they all have a high degree of emotional intelligence.” Emotional intelligence, as he defines it, is composed of five factors: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Of these elements,

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<sup>200</sup> Gladwell 2000:45.

<sup>201</sup> Gladwell 2000: 45-46.

<sup>202</sup> A practical description of George Miller’s “magical number seven” theory previously mentioned (see footnote 128).

<sup>203</sup> 2001: 3.

Goleman finds that “social skill is the culmination of the other dimensions of emotional intelligence”.<sup>204</sup> He describes socially skilled people as those with “a wide circle of acquaintances, (that have)...a knack for finding common ground with people of all kinds...Socially skilled people...don’t think it makes sense to arbitrarily limit the scope of their relationships. They build bonds widely because they know that in these fluid times, they may need help someday from people they are just getting to know today”<sup>205</sup> – a Connector, in other words. Goleman goes on to tell us that “social skill (is) considered a key leadership capability in most companies...People seem to know intuitively that leaders need to manage relationships effectively...After all, the leader’s task is to get work done through other people”.<sup>206</sup>

The concept of “Connector” moves one step beyond Granovetter’s ‘weak tie’ to imply that there are select people that derive enormous pleasure and naturally take to forming weak ties,<sup>207</sup> such that their networks bloom substantially and they become the bridges that link the bulk of society and provide enormous leadership potential. Though I feel uncomfortable self-identifying as a Connector after all the grandeur Gladwell associates with the role, I have to admit to having just the instincts and characteristics described above. As of writing, I have 1,778 people and institutions listed in my Palm Pilot, many with birthdays and annotations of where I met them, what the encounter was like, and so on. I have always pursued friendships of the greatest diversity being attracted, in fact, to those that are different. Since a very young age I write letters and

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<sup>204</sup> 2001: 19.

<sup>205</sup> (Goleman 2001: 19-20). Again, a great approximation of Jacobs’ hop-skip “people who know unlikely people” (Jacobs 1961: 135).

<sup>206</sup> Goleman 2001: 21.

<sup>207</sup> And, I would add, strong bridges.

maintain contact with family and friends on five continents. And it was a reliance on these networks and other corollary advantages of being some sort of Connector that I attribute my ability to form Catalytic Communities and build it to the point where it now stands.

### ***Concluding on Social Networks***

If asked to list the most important factors that explain Catalytic Communities successfully reaching the stage where it is now, three come to mind. The most important factor is something entirely unrelated to my abilities and circumstances. Rather, it is as Rose once put thoughtfully, “that there is a clear and obvious (and potentially unlimited) demand” for the work CatComm does. This demand went unaddressed because prior to the advent of the Internet the expenses associated with developing networks in a comparable way would have been prohibitive. In addition, the work CatComm does would have appeared, much as it did to some early skeptics, as luxurious and ignoring the more pressing needs of communities. The truth is that the demand for CatComm’s work is what has really triggered its growth: during 2003 most of the network building happened as outsiders searched for us, as opposed to the other way around. Related to the *idea making sense* and therefore inspiring a demand was my conviction that the organization was being built and that it would, in fact, work out. This no doubt helped convince many people of CatComm’s potential.

The two other factors I would cite relate to social networks as described in this chapter. First is related to the circumstances where I sat when I founded Catalytic Communities. These circumstances gave the young organization access to weak ties

capable of assisting in as diverse areas as legalization, marketing, questionnaire elaboration, basic Web design, and strategic planning. The second factor relates to my predilection for making connections with people of all stripes. This facilitated the growth of the original network and, combined with the vitality of the original idea (above), convinced people to get involved. These three factors brought people into the organization and it is their involvement that has brought it forward.

In this chapter we have seen that, for very good reasons, low-income community groups have a tendency to develop and rely on a network of strong ties. A dependence on strong tie-based networks, however, can limit an individual's or community's ability to significantly improve their livelihoods. This is because weaker ties play a strategic role in bringing about greater access to new information and knowledge, and may bring individuals closer to the loci of decision-making and power structures, thus lending essential support with regard to community change.

In Rio de Janeiro the community residents most likely to branch out and pursue weaker ties are local leaders who often form a link between a wider network and his or her strongly-tied community. These leaders, however, are also limited in their ability to form weak ties. In a few cases<sup>208</sup> they may not have developed a cognitive flexibility to adapt to and interact with the diverse nature of individuals from other cultures.<sup>209</sup> They may not find it important or particularly necessary to form a wider net of ties in

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<sup>208</sup> I say that in a few cases cognitive flexibility may be limited in this way because in my experience community leaders tend to be particularly interested, though often shy about, making connections with those of different 'cultures' as defined in footnote 165.

<sup>209</sup> Again, it is important to remark that limited cognitive flexibility with regard to differences in culture is not unique to low-income communities but, rather, is described by Granovetter as being the case for anyone with a provincial outlook, regardless of class. Also, as discussed in footnote 162, cognitive flexibility for some things, like entrepreneurship, may be relatively high in underserved communities in countries with little access to safety nets.

implementing their community programs. Economic difficulties may alter the level of contact some have with people outside their communities. More common, I expect, community leaders and residents are limited in their effort to develop weak ties by the very outsiders with whom they would like ties to develop. Government officials and middle- or upper-class citizens often regard low-income residents as marginal, and avoid interacting with or assisting them. Finally, there exist culturally-specific barriers to community networking. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, community leaders are often physically inhibited from circulating by drug traffickers representing a given faction.

Ultimately, at least in many developing contexts, it is a lack of opportunity to form weak ties that most limits weak tie formation among community leaders, who have a natural impulse to form such networks when the opportunity is made available. One might compare this with the opportunity I was granted by birth to make good on my predilection towards “connecting” – having been born with access to diverse networks and other basic necessities – like enough income to facilitate transporting myself from place to place. Today, a potential equalizer has been invented – the Internet – that functions in many ways like a weak bridge, providing direct contact to individuals one would otherwise never be able to contact. CatComm was created to make good on the potential of the Internet for such activities: by developing a website with tools to build ties among communities and to the press, potential funders and outside volunteers.

If this analysis is correct, we can conclude that limited weak tie networks within and between low-income communities themselves and supportive outsiders constitute a significant barrier to developing solutions that truly combat poverty. For this reason Catalytic Communities’ goals began forming around the potential of utilizing the Internet

to increase weak tie formation among these communities, thereby allowing community initiatives to network amongst themselves, forming weak ties with their peers elsewhere successfully conquering the most diverse social issues. And in addition, CatComm would be publicizing initiatives that otherwise might not be able to reach funders and the media – two groups to whom it has been established above communities have very limited natural access – funders because their support is heightened via direct relationships, and the media because they can be attracted directly through the Internet. In fact, these are the two groups that naturally surfaced during discussions with community groups and others about how the website could be most useful to them. The hope is that CatComm’s site grows in its service as a central networking space for communities to support one another, and for outsiders to support their programs.

Important to note is that in applying social network theory in this way, and undertaking an analysis of Catalytic Communities’ ties leads to conclusions as to new features that the CatComm site should incorporate if it is to utilize the network-building potential of the Internet for community improvement. In particular, utilizing the website to facilitate community weak tie formation with media and potential funders is necessary. Interestingly enough, however, both of these began occurring naturally, without these studies, through interactions with funders and the media who suggested such improvements to the website.

### **Chapter 3: A Virtual Organization**

Now that the technological developments, local conditions (in Brazil), and social networks that made Catalytic Communities possible have been presented, it comes time to discuss what the organization actually *looks, or feels, like*. In this and the next chapter virtual and physical aspects of the organization will be discussed.

Of interest now is the question: What does a virtual organization “look” like? What are its characteristics? In building Catalytic Communities I have found that virtuality carries implications for the organization’s operations and structure. It influences the breadth of organizational objectives and encourages a stronger reliance on networks and role sharing with other institutions. Evaluation requires different sensibilities in a virtual setting. In addition, the effects of media attention may impose greater pressure on the organization than in traditional institutions. Finally, virtuality creates new opportunities for volunteerism and alters the course of fundraising. These are a subset of the sixteen characteristics that I have found typify a Dot Org and that will be described in this chapter.

To begin sensing how virtuality significantly shifts the nature of not-for-profit work it is worthwhile to look at an example. Foundations pride themselves on being up-to-date on social issues and the institutions that address them. Even so, in 2000 when Catalytic Communities was founded, foundation funding sources for online content-providing initiatives were difficult to come by. In case after case that I researched, it seemed CatComm fit perfectly into the broad objectives of many foundations – empowerment, strengthening opportunities for solution-sharing, innovation, and so on –

but once I read further I discovered barriers that existed *due to the nature of CatComm as a virtual organization*. On July 24, 2001, I described my research of the Kellogg

Foundation in this way:

*All I find are foundations that fit (CatComm) perfectly in their stated one liner (like Kellogg's "To help people help themselves") then when I dig in they have: 1) Separate program areas in which CatComm doesn't fit neatly because it is cross-area (e.g. health, environment, sustainable development, community development); 2) Separate geographical areas (CatComm is virtual); 3) No seed money or funds for operations (all we need since there's only one major project that will innovate naturally as it expands).<sup>210</sup>*

Interestingly, all three of these observations relate to Catalytic Communities' constitution as a virtual entity. *Because* CatComm is a virtual organization, given the characteristics that typify this new sort of organization, we were automatically outcast in the mainstream foundation world.<sup>211</sup>

This is one of the many considerations relevant for a totally new type of organization – the Dot Org. In order to reflect about the potential for organizations of this kind, it is important to begin defining the term. It is this I set off to do in this chapter. Figure 11 provides a list of the characteristics I will elaborate on that typify the “Dot Org” in relation to more traditional not-for-profits, in the pages that follow.

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<sup>210</sup> From July 24, 2001 Dissertation Journal entry with no title. Italicized indented font throughout this dissertation is used to represent entries made by myself in my Dissertation Journal.

<sup>211</sup> This feeling was confirmed on October 5, 2001 during a conversation with Ami Dar, the Founder and Executive Director of Action Without Borders, the NGO whose central service is the very successful website [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org). According to him virtual initiatives have several things working against them. First, web-based NGOs are young organizationally, often with inexperienced management but always with inexperienced managers in terms of running a virtual initiative with the little experience acquired to date in that area. Secondly, being Internet-based appears to funders as if our services are “virtual, not real.” Thirdly, the web-based work of Action Without Borders, as that of CatComm, does not fall into specific thematic or issue areas, and foundations tend to focus in specific areas (like health or education). Finally, web-based initiatives are by their nature not normally regionally-specific or, at least, one of the most promising aspects of them is that they need not be.

**Figure 11. Features of the Dot Org** (such organizations are characterized to a lesser or greater extent by each of the following characteristics):

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Important Aspects / Implications of Feature</b>
Founded Due to Opportunities Created by the New ICTs	Without ICTs, organization's work would be, in effect, prohibitive or impossible to carry out
No "Headquarters"	A physically-rooted "headquarters" is not essential, though it may prove useful, among such organizations
Organizational Birth is the Website Launch	In practical terms, the organization only exists once it has been "launched" in cyberspace, even if work has been done beforehand
Importance of Accessibility	Clarity and attractiveness of site are important; in addition, it is difficult to 'stumble' on the organization or 'guess' of its existence given its creative and non-geographically-based services (rather, visibility must be given through search engines, media, and other forms of outreach)
Focus on Content	Because organization's services are informational and not face-to-face, transparent and effective content development is key
Centralized Control of Image	Website administrator has a high level of control over the face of the organization viewed by its visitors because s/he approves all content before publishing
Lack of Hierarchy	Network mentality, small staffs, and similar professional caliber among staff members keep hierarchy to a minimum
Nature of the Board of Directors	Boards of directors that meet virtually may be able to attract important people with limited time, but may also suffer from low levels of involvement
Potential of Virtual Volunteers	Locating and attracting high-quality (though often busy and dispersed) volunteers may be easier done online
Care with Regard to Media Attention	An avalanche of new responsibilities results from the snowballing effects of media attention because a Dot Org is easy to find when the word gets out
Narrow Focus of Activity	The focus of activity (not necessarily thematic) is usually limited to one niche which has been identified and can grow in an unlimited way due to the Dot Org's broad geography
Broad Geographic Focus	Potentially unlimited, global
Innovation Arises from the Content and Often Cannot be Predicted	The connections that occur through the services provided are likely the greatest result, yielding innovation, but unlikely to be predicted
Potential for Collective Intelligence-Building	Many-to-many communication of the Internet creates an environment many Dot Orgs use to centralize "universally distributed intelligence," to which everyone has something to contribute
Increased Potential for Networking	By focusing their activity and being located in distanceless cyberspace, organizations expand often by partnering with others providing complimentary services, regardless of location
Difficulties of Conducting Evaluations	Dot Orgs often provide public goods without having access to the names of their service users, making evaluation difficult

### ***Organization Founded Due to Opportunities Created by the New ICTs***

As “dot com” refers to those private sector entities which surfaced only because of the new business opportunities created by the Internet, a “Dot Org” is a not-for-profit entity arising solely in response to and as a result of the opportunities which surfaced for civil society as the Internet came to fruition. Though pre-Internet not-for-profit organizations now offer online “faces” with websites like [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org), these are not pure “Dot Orgs,” though they increasingly use the Internet to provide new services and therefore may have “Dot Org” components. Instead “Dot Org,” as with the term “dot com” refers to organizations whose central mission is made possible by the new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).<sup>212</sup>

In summary, new opportunities for civil society organizing have resulted from the development and increasing ubiquity of the new ICTs, and the organizations that sprout from these opportunities are the “Dot Orgs.”

The “Dot Org” newsletter, a product of [www.dotorgmedia.org](http://www.dotorgmedia.org), offers not-for-profits strategy with regard to utilizing online tools in order to broaden their reach in ways that could not be done before the development of the new ICTs. Their first newsletters in 2001, for example, presented “techniques and tools that allow you to differentiate and segment your audience. The objective is to help you e-mail specific content to different subscribers based on what they care about. This... ‘narrowcasting’ ... is a communications trend that is very popular...with large Web portals such as

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<sup>212</sup> A firm that sells in stores and catalogues, for example, is not dramatically transformed by selling online (e.g. [www.llbean.com](http://www.llbean.com)). But the Internet *does* create new opportunities exemplified by dot coms like Ebay and Amazon.

Amazon.com...the content is customized for the select audience and therefore of far more interest and value to the reader”.<sup>213</sup>

The limitations to the growth of private enterprise online, as evidenced in the dot com crash are not likely to affect the not-for-profit sector in the same way. For one thing, the tight niches and important role for networking with like-minded organizations that will be discussed as important features of Dot Orgs in the coming pages are sharply opposed to private sector philosophy. The dot coms’ emphasis on “Get Big Fast”<sup>214</sup> and severe competition is very different from the natural use of the Internet by not-for-profits. In addition, Dot Orgs do not necessarily expect to earn their money through service provision.<sup>215</sup> As is true with their bricks-and-mortar relatives, Dot Orgs raise funds from members, foundations, corporations, and other sources. And Dot Orgs have the added advantage that much of their work can be done without high overhead costs because no headquarters is needed (see the next section) and with a small staff (because many services are automated), keeping costs down. Moveon.org, for example, has grown into one of the most influential political organizations in the US today, with 1.5 million members and the “ability and credibility to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars and move tens of thousands of people to action within hours,” with a staff of six, each working from home.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> From Dot Org newsletter Issue No. 2, May 21, 2001. See [www.dotorgmedia.org](http://www.dotorgmedia.org).

<sup>214</sup> Spector 2002.

<sup>215</sup> Though some Dot Orgs, like idealist.org have been very successful at maintaining themselves and growing by charging for certain services.

<sup>216</sup> Hazen and Moses 2003: 42.

As network effects<sup>217</sup> drive demand and use of their services, and staff and overhead are kept low, Dot Orgs will increasingly offer an enormous cost-to-output ratio for investors/contributors. And if they can develop their work abroad (given their often global nature), costs can also be kept low through lower operating costs in developing countries. I often tell CatComm's supporters this as I explain how we can provide so many services with an annual budget of less than \$50,000.

***Service can be Provided Without a "Headquarters"***

The nature of such organizations as virtual service providers means that a physical headquarters is *not essential* to making the organization work. Even so, such organizations may continue to find, particularly as they grow, that a physical space is useful. In particular, those organizations *that target information towards low-income communities* may well find that a physical presence in the form of a community technology center (CTC), not a headquarters *per se*, is a natural complement to their virtual face (see Chapter 4 for more on this).

The key point is that a physical headquarters is not *essential* to the Dot Org. They can be organized instead around a loose network of professionals operating from diverse locations and interacting through the online medium. This loose network relies on a relatively flat, non-hierarchical management model, also common in the dot coms, since staff members in such an organization tend to be of a similar professional caliber. Virtual organizations rely on staff with self-discipline, organization, creative thinking skills,

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<sup>217</sup> Refer back to footnote 115 for an explanation.

capable of thinking “outside the box,” and effective when working in teams. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, a traditional hierarchical management model does not suit these organizations.

Catalytic Communities was developing without a central headquarters of any kind. Today, we continue saying that our “headquarters is in cyberspace.” We are comfortable with the fact that if need be, the organization can return to such a state, that it is not dependent on a physical manifestation. In fact, one very positive consequence of the Dot Org’s non-reliance on physical space is that were funds to dry up, the organization would continue to exist regardless. Sure it would grow at a much slower rate, but the most basic infrastructure of website hosting and domain registration could be kept up indefinitely by a private citizen.

On the other hand, the physical space that was incorporated in early 2003, the Casa do Gestor Catalisador (or “Casa”) has improved the effectiveness of Catalytic Communities in multiple ways (this is the subject of Chapter 4). Though its main function is as a CTC, the Casa also functions to bring staff together in physical space, to build community amongst ourselves, to dialogue, and exchange ideas with each other and with the community leaders who take part in CatComm’s network. As is true with the community technology movement in the United States, we have found that “it has become...difficult to separate ‘centers’ from ‘networks’”.<sup>218</sup> Increasingly, “those committed to community networking appreciate the value of center-based access as the

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<sup>218</sup> Servon 2002: 58.

key approach for providing technology to people who are generally without access, skills, and opportunities to use it”.<sup>219</sup>

Managing the interface between Catalytic Communities as a purely informational (virtual) versus a community organization (physical) has arisen as an important issue among early supporters of CatComm who interpreted the incorporation of a physical space to be in conflict with regard to the organization’s original mission.<sup>220</sup> In fact, the incorporation of a physical space did not conflict with the mission<sup>221</sup> but, rather, conflicted with the approach I had originally conceived of to meet that mission – an approach based on a fully virtual network. I had not grasped the importance of a physical access center in bringing the organization’s mission to life, given our target audience of low-income community members, when the organization was first idealized.<sup>222</sup> Since the Casa’s inception members of CatComm’s Board of Directors have asked, on more than one occasion, why the Casa was a relevant investment for CatComm, as did several of the organization’s early financial supporters. The advent of the Casa, I explain, has significantly strengthened and sped up the organization’s outreach and relevance. Being able to *show* through photographs and face-to-face encounters the dynamic of the space

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<sup>219</sup> Miller 1999: 1.

<sup>220</sup> Catalytic Communities’ current mission is to “empower and engage low-income communities around the world to develop their own local improvements by providing a set of *online* tools to foster and strengthen leadership and innovation in their communities.”

<sup>221</sup> Refer to footnote 12 for the definition and explanation of the importance of a not-for-profit mission statement.

<sup>222</sup> Because, as was summarized in Figure 5, I made the assumption that the city’s existing CTCs would provide the access needed. Why this assumption does not hold true is discussed in the following chapter on the Casa itself. It turns out that the *type* of access existing CTCs provided was not conducive to the work of community leaders.

(which brings to life the dynamic of the website), has brought new funders and generated a much broader interest in the organization and its intentions.<sup>223</sup>

After two years of investing in both Rio and global outreach I realized the organization would only succeed if it took off first in Rio, and given my commitment to the communities there already, I decided to focus organizational efforts on just that. Therefore, during 2003, with Catalytic Communities' emphasis on the development of the Casa and local use of the website in Rio de Janeiro, the organization's network of virtual volunteers, which was of central importance before the acquisition of funding, faded (temporarily) as the organization restructured in order to administer a small paid staff and a physical Rio-based space (see Figure 15).

I deem the correct decision was made because it did consolidate our presence in Rio, prove the relevance and demand for the site's services, and lead to word-of-mouth outreach, which dramatically facilitates future work. It also ensured greater loyalty from the city's leaders than a purely web-based presence could. In 2004 the intention is to take the stability and knowledge about the website's use generated by a strong presence in Rio de Janeiro with a physically-rooted staff and utilize this staff now to administer a growing network, primarily virtual, of volunteers and partner institutions conducting translation and outreach activities. The year 2004 began, in fact, with a visit by staff to the World Social Forum in India where new communities were contacted and volunteers

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<sup>223</sup> Again, for more information see Chapter 4.

recruited.<sup>224</sup> Figure 15 provides a strong sense of the evolution of volunteer and paid, virtual and physical involvement of individuals over time.

Since the primary face of the Dot Org is online, where its services are located, it is of fundamental importance that such organizations make their websites (1) available from the outset; (2) accessible in terms of attractiveness and usability; and (3) content-rich. Depending on the initial wealth of the organization, these three attributes may come in a logical sequence or all at once. Visitors will judge the organization based on the virtual face, since they do not for the most part have other sources of information about the organization or its personnel. It is therefore vital that their websites inspire trust, as well. These subjects, influenced by the lack of a necessary headquarters, are therefore the next three subjects to be discussed.

### ***Organizational Birth is the Website Launch***

When I made the decision to found Catalytic Communities in August 2000, one of the first steps I took was to develop an initial website, so that the organization would effectively begin to exist. Unlike physically-rooted organizations that begin to exist when they open a physical space, Dot Orgs require an online space to “come to be.” However, unlike many physically-rooted organizations that can often begin providing vital services and growing after opening their doors, virtual organizations require a significant amount of technical infrastructure, and use of that infrastructure, before their

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<sup>224</sup> One of the new contacts in India is a young woman from the Himalayas who became particularly excited about the application of the CatComm CSD for recording and sharing traditional peoples’ knowledge, another example of how CatComm’s services adapt organically, and of how new uses are constantly developed and cannot be predicted. These are themes relating to the Dot Orgs that will be discussed later.

services are of any use at all. Network effects<sup>225</sup> must occur before their services are deemed useful, something CatComm is still, in early 2004, three years after its founding and almost two years after acquiring initial funding, working on. Without a working dynamic database and a good number of community programs listed, CatComm's site would be of relatively little use. Even so, a static website that described the organization's intentions was much better than nothing, since it provided a "location" for people to access information about and know that such an organization was in the works.

More established organizations with Dot Org components, particularly physically-rooted ones that introduce a virtual element, often develop their full website before launch, and then conduct extensive media campaigns when the launch actually occurs. Due to the difficulties CatComm had in acquiring initial funding (see Chapter 6), this was not an option. In October 2000 I used the simplest layman's website-building program I could find – Microsoft FrontPage – and began. A preliminary, though very unattractive and ineffective, website was up simply to create a web presence and place the core ideas of what I would be attempting to build in the public realm. Shortly after, I researched and submitted CatComm's site, though preliminary, to a host of search engines, and listed CatComm on the [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) website, a resource website for the not-for-profit sector which includes volunteer recruitment tools. These links would bring initial traffic to the site. A few months later I added an element to the site making it possible for visitors to access information only by posting their names, email and countries (see Figure 12). This way, those who visited the preliminary site out of an interest in the

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<sup>225</sup> Again, for an explanation of the term please refer back to footnote 115.

vision presented would leave contact information before entering the site and realizing it was only very rudimentary. By the end of 2001, people from over 26 countries registered visits to the site.<sup>226</sup> I could later contact those individuals to invite them to visit a new, more developed site.

Because I had to develop the initial website myself, without any experience in site design or development, the initial site's use would be limited. I could not develop the underlying database, for example, that the website would need in order to serve thousands of community visitors. Such a database would involve an administrative section with login and password where visitors could ultimately document their own initiatives directly to the website's Community Solutions Database, and where staff and volunteers could enter to edit, translate, and publish those solutions from any computer on Earth. What I was able to develop online was a simple questionnaire whose results would be directed to my email address and which I would then post in html, a static code (not dynamic), to the website.

After waiting one year (from mid-2001 through mid-2002) for a volunteer web designer who had taken responsibility for developing CatComm's database *pro bono* but did not rise to the task, I realized that a database programmer would need to be hired. Fortunately, in June 2002 CatComm's first grant was acquired (see Chapter 6 for more information) and a database programmer was hired in Brazil, where costs are cheaper. With this work came CatComm's first official "website launch." When the new

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<sup>226</sup> Those that registered their visits included people from: Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, England, Germany, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Lithuania, Northern Ireland, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, USA & Puerto Rico, and Yugoslavia.

Portuguese database-based website was ready to publish, a formal launch process took place. A few months later, in April 2003, the same occurred with CatComm's new English website, after the Portuguese database had been translated by a volunteer. A press release was sent to PR Newswire, and CatComm entered a phase in which it could effectively "launch" updated sites.

Now, at the beginning of 2004, the website welcomes approximately 4000 unique visitor sessions per month, often yielding over 13,000 page views and 100,000 hits.<sup>227</sup> Most North American viewers, to our knowledge, are from California. In Europe the majority of traffic is from Portugal. However, the vast majority of visits are in Brazil. According to the limited data we have access to, more than half of the site's current visitors are Brazilians.<sup>228</sup>

### ***Importance of Accessibility***

As discussed, Catalytic Communities' website was quickly entered into as many online search engines and not-for-profit networking sites as possible. During 2000 and 2001 these included the obvious search engines like Yahoo! and also not-for-profit agglomeration sites like Guidestar, Idealist, and the Stockholm Partnerships. These were early means to get the word out about the organization, without creating a demand for its services just yet. It is difficult to 'stumble' on a Dot Org or 'guess' of its existence as is often possible with physically-based community-based organizations. They must

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<sup>227</sup> See Figure 16 later in this chapter for a bar chart depicting growth in the website's visits over time.

<sup>228</sup> The site statistics we have access to indicate total numbers that visit the website but are limited in their ability to indicate geographic distribution of visitors. Only 20% of traffic to the site yields information as to geographic whereabouts.

therefore be given visibility through search engines, the media, and outreach campaigns.<sup>229</sup> Until the organization could effectively offer a useful online platform, it was better to keep online outreach restricted to websites that would attract volunteers and a few community groups, at most.

As was mentioned above, the initial website was neither attractive nor accessible (user-friendly). I did not have any experience in website-building and had not developed an eye for what would be effective. Of great value to CatComm was a volunteer who came after an interview with me was published in an online magazine for the Brazilian third sector. In January 2002, in the *Revista do Terceiro Setor* (The Third Sector Magazine) an 8-page interview was published that led to various important contacts for CatComm. One of them was Ricardo Ferracini, a young, energetic marketing whiz who at the time worked for the social philanthropy branch of a large Brazilian corporation. Ricardo had experience in building websites and a dedication to social causes and to using marketing tools to support communities. We met for lunch in March and began a conversation that, over several months, would lead to the general site design that Catalytic Communities employs today (see Figure 13). He would print out websites he thought were making effective use of space and language and bring them to my attention. I would go home to my computer and make changes to our site design. Ultimately, when a database programmer was hired, he did not alter the visual design of the site as inspired

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<sup>229</sup> See Chapter 4's discussion of Bricks and Clicks' for reference to one of the benefits of bricks-and-mortar institutions: customer acquisition is less expensive and easier.

by Ricardo but, rather, created a dynamic database for interaction beneath those changes that Ricardo had already inspired (see Figure 14).<sup>230</sup>



**Figure 12.** Static English website in September 2001, work done by myself using FrontPage program



**Figure 13.** Static Portuguese website in June 2002, inspired by ideas from volunteer Ricardo Ferracini



**Figure 14.** Website in 2004 after professional database programming, whereby visitors began providing main content

### ***Focus on Content***

Though a difficult task, it is important that a Dot Org come across as trustworthy through its website, since, again, the website constitutes (what is often) the sole contact point with the organization. Mission descriptions, background information on staff and Board of Directors, budgets, and sometimes even receipts can be seen on the websites of Dot Orgs and other technology-related not-for-profits hoping that in attaining a greater degree of transparency trust will be garnered.

Beyond providing content that instills in visitors a sense of vision, dedication, and transparency, virtual organizations must move quickly with regard to content-building

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<sup>230</sup> None of this is to say that CatComm has developed the most effective visual display possible. In fact, new ideas arise regularly about how to improve on it. What Ricardo did do was take CatComm's website from a visual design that appeared *ad hoc* and unprofessional to one that inspired a greater level of clarity and attractiveness.

within their service areas. Whether this means developing ‘connecting content,’ like tools to help people self-publish, connect and exchange (e.g. CatComm’s Community Solutions Database, chat rooms), or static content provided by and developed by the organization itself, regularly updated content is necessary to sustain the attraction of new and repeated users.

After launching our database in late 2002, the emphasis of the organization became the development of content and establishing the usefulness of our work at the ground level in Rio de Janeiro. Over fifty community projects were documented in 2003, and this number will increase from one year to the next through an ever-expanding network of volunteers.<sup>231</sup> The organization’s next task is to grow this network. Through 2003, in an effort to develop content, CatComm staff spent time directly with community leaders documenting projects. As the organization grows and network effects are produced, however, the focus of staff will expand to administering networks of volunteers who document community innovations, as opposed to the initial emphasis on documenting initiatives ourselves.<sup>232</sup>

### ***Centralized Control of Image***

When an organization is entirely virtual, the administrator of its website has a great degree of control over what is seen and the impression made on visitors. In physically-based organizations, where contact with the organization can take place

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<sup>231</sup> Catalytic Communities hopes to grow in the long term not through staff acquisitions, but through an expanded and efficacious volunteer network, in some ways similar to that used by the Girl Scouts of America.

<sup>232</sup> See section later in this chapter entitled “Virtual Volunteers” for more.

through a number of individuals, the organization's administrator lacks such a level of control. Similarly, email as a form of communication allows for greater control than face-to-face or telephone conversations, because discussions can be deliberated on, recorded, copied, and shared.

### ***Lack of Hierarchy***

A better sense of how Catalytic Communities operates with minimal hierarchy is given in Chapter 5, on staff management. Virtual organizations tend to remain small, in large part because so many of their services are automated.<sup>233</sup> In contrast with physically-rooted service organizations, a virtual entity does not need to grow its staff in the same way. A certain point increase in virtual service provision does not necessarily require a proportional increase in human resources.

Given their small staff size, on the one hand, and the high quality of staff, on the other (work in Dot Orgs typically requires a similar professional caliber among staff members), a severe hierarchy does not naturally exist. Hierarchy is also traditionally limited in many dot coms, often described as 'flat' in their administrative approach. The approach of many Dot Orgs is one of stimulating network-building, dialogue and exchange. This philosophy is generally inconsistent with a hierarchical management model.

Finally, Dot Orgs tend to have limited hierarchy because the creative development of their services is well suited to team environments.

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<sup>233</sup> A good example, already mentioned, is [Moveon.org](http://Moveon.org), which organizes 1.5 million members with a staff of three (Hazen and Moses 2003).

### *Nature of the Board of Directors*

Catalytic Communities' Board of Directors is comprised of four individuals and the Executive Director (who only votes in cases of tiebreak). Three board meetings have taken place each year since 2001, all online, through the use of Yahoo! Instant Messenger (IM) software. Since the organization's founding only one case of face-to-face contact has taken place between two of the board members (other than myself with each of them), though a certain degree of familiarity has been built through the IM software. The strengths of this meeting approach include: (1) Attracts to the Board individuals with little time and with strong reputations who might otherwise not get involved; (2) Geography is unimportant so this meeting style facilitates a geographically diverse set of Directors; (3) Meetings are free to administer, without costs of hotels, facilities, transportation, or the like; (4) Meeting minutes are kept automatically, since the entire meeting takes place in writing; (5) It is easy to call emergency meetings when the need arises; and (6) Meeting in this way allows instant access to resources, materials, sources and records that can be shared instantly.

On the other hand, virtual board meetings mean that: (1) Members cannot get as in-depth as might be useful, since the interface is tiring after a couple of hours and meetings are scheduled to be quick and to-the-point; (2) One is unlikely to involve the Board heavily due to this first feature; (3) Only individuals with Internet access and a willingness to use IM will join the Board;<sup>234</sup> and (4) The absence of face-to-face contact

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<sup>234</sup> As one board member pointed out, there is a discrepancy between younger users who "have grown up behind the keyboard," and older ones. Those who learn to use ICTs early in life may feel more at home behind a computer screen (which may involve faster typing, more fluency with certain programs, and more knowledge about "netiquette" – the "dos and don'ts of online communication").

may stimulate misunderstandings when certain language or abrupt typing styles are used. In particular, depending on the person's 'IM culture,' certain individuals tend to type online in ways that are fundamentally different from the ways they would speak face-to-face; this is true with regard to courtesy and "small talk," for example.

The ideal, as is the case with organizational development (via a network of virtual and physical staff and volunteers) is to incorporate opportunities for face-to-face contact but to maintain the virtual meetings as the mainstay of the organization. In 2004, CatComm hopes to incorporate one two-day face-to-face Board meeting in Rio de Janeiro. Now that the organization has matured, and Board members have had more contact with one another and the organization, there is an interest in taking the time out to hold such a meeting, which I felt was lacking in the organization's early days.

### ***Potential of Virtual Volunteers***

As to the use of virtual volunteers within Catalytic Communities,<sup>235</sup> this has in fact changed with time. Early on, when I posted volunteer opportunities on the website [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org), a significant number of volunteers offered themselves – from South Africa, Kenya, Australia, Colombia, Italy, France, Canada, the former Yugoslavia, South Korea, the Philippines, and the United States – during the 2001-2002 period. Offers came in particularly for help with translation (for everything from French to Tagalog), but also for help with website design and, in one case, community outreach.

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<sup>235</sup> For an analysis of the origins of CatComm's volunteers, see Chapter 2 section entitled "Catalytic Communities: Introducing the Internet."

In those early days, though I wanted and could use the help, I was not ready to orient volunteers. That is, to provide them with sufficient rewarding work to do. Regarding translators, there was not enough content yet on the website. For those interested in website design, by June 2001 I had settled on a volunteer (though it did not work out) whom I had met through face-to-face meetings. And the one person who offered himself for early community outreach lost interest almost immediately.<sup>236</sup>

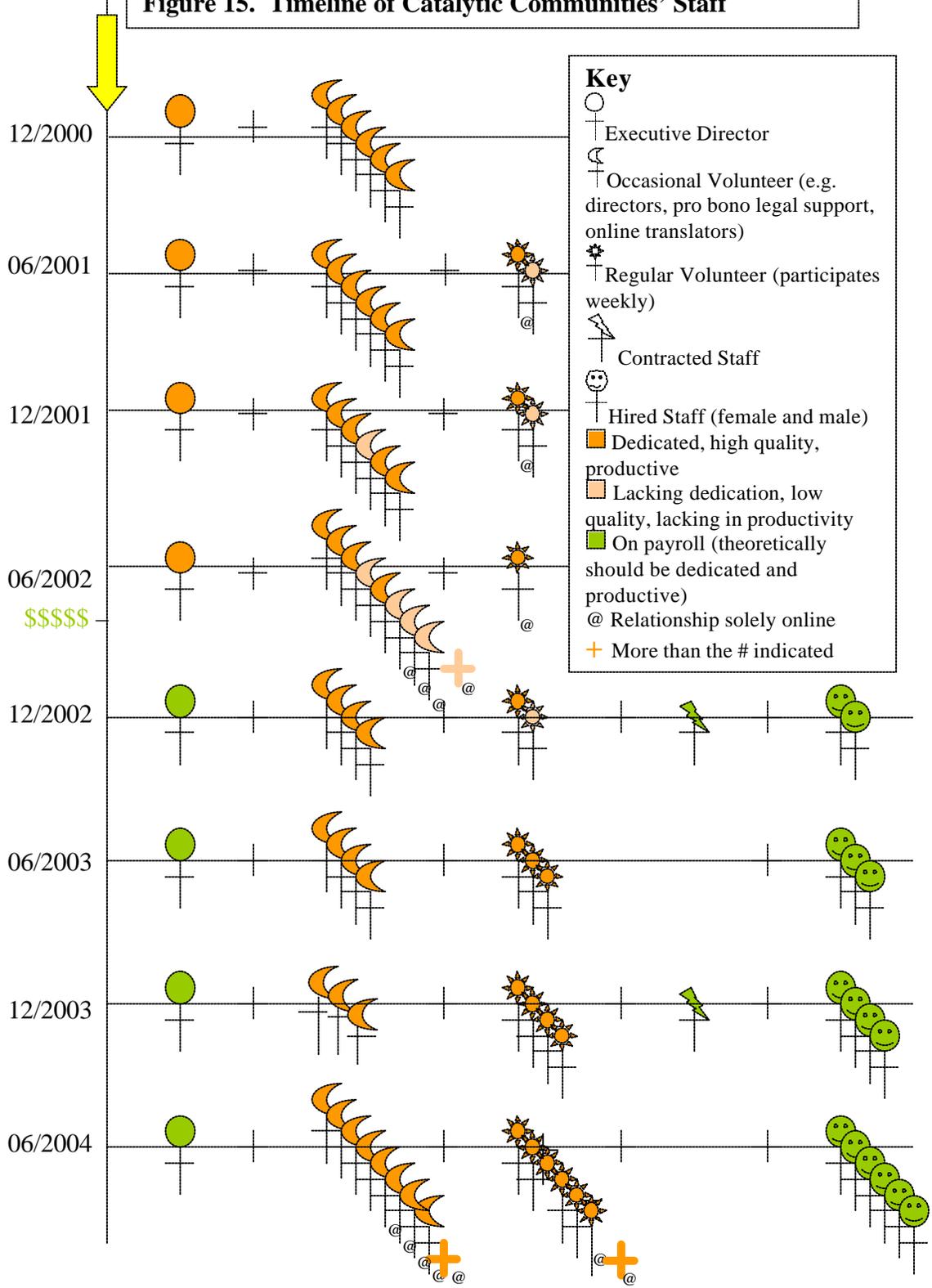
The virtual volunteers who “stuck,” showing a willingness and determination to get involved, were all translators, particularly one – Armando Ibarra – a retired economist in Colombia who was remaking a career through translation and volunteered 20 hours per week over a year and a half to CatComm for English-to-Spanish translation. Others included individuals interested in translating to Italian and French. As the organization was following an “organic” evolution, I welcomed all these individuals. However, I was not prepared to give them the background training, support, oversight, and acknowledgement that they needed.

The evolution of Catalytic Communities’ volunteer and (later) staff network can be seen in Figure 15. There was an increasing involvement of virtual volunteers up until the first staff was hired in late 2002, at which point it was necessary that I invest my time on them. During this time, feeling overwhelmed, I made the mistake of not getting in touch with the original volunteers in order to explain the new developments that were taking place. One reason for this mistake was my lack of foresight to predict when and

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<sup>236</sup> My experience with face-to-face versus virtual volunteers has been mixed. There is no clear distinction in my mind as to whether one is more effective than the other. What I *have* found is that the effectiveness of volunteers, virtual or not, varies with their personalities, interest and dedication, and, even moreso, with my ability and effectiveness in orienting and encouraging them.

**Figure 15. Timeline of Catalytic Communities' Staff**



how I would be able to work with them. The number of virtual volunteers decreased after that, though one can observe that the intention is, now that a solid staff is in place, to grow the volunteer network once again. The role of the staff will change from one in which our small staff is primarily concerned with direct provision of services to one of organizing and administering a growing virtual volunteer network. This way the organization will increasingly meet its mission without significant increases in the number of staff and funding needs.<sup>237</sup>

In the future, my hope is that CatComm reaches a point where outreach is conducted primarily through community word-of-mouth; where increasing demands on our online services are met through a network of virtual volunteers; and where the Casa increasingly serves as a model CTC for cross-community network strengthening, as an incubator for new ideas, and as a source of community input to the CatComm website. In order to do this, a strategy will be elaborated for building and maintaining a strong volunteer community to perform outreach, translation, and editing functions, and through word-of-mouth outreach. This will involve the development of an attractive approach, including a special packet, to nurture online volunteers (incorporating a slideshow, mailing with CD Rom and other materials).

In practice, the early use of volunteers by Catalytic Communities was *ad hoc*. I did not intend that to be the case at the outset, but early volunteers served primarily to bulk up the not-for-profit's appearance: demonstrating to outsiders (including potential

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<sup>237</sup> This will be done by developing an inspiring online equivalent of the approach that the Girl Scouts of the USA have used to grow their volunteer base. Today, Girl Scouts counts 100 volunteers for every paid staff member. This sort of ratio is maintained by "mak(ing) sure that volunteers are given responsibility; they must be able to spread their wings...they start as troop leaders...receive...assignments,...(then) move into leadership positions" (Drucker 1990: 151).

fundings) that others, beyond myself, were involved and were interested in the vision; and adding content in other languages (particularly Spanish) to the site which helped to clarify the organization's intention to operate globally.

With time volunteers, both virtual and physical, have played an important role in Catalytic Communities, given the organization's limited budget, in opening up new areas of action beyond the budget.<sup>238</sup> Had Armando not appeared, CatComm would not have developed a Spanish site early on or perhaps would not even be doing so now (today CatComm has one part-time staff person – out of five – responsible solely for this). Without Ricardo Ferracini, the website design improvements would not have taken place when they did, which later facilitated the development of an underlying database. New types of content for the website, particularly the English website, have been developed due to the involvement of American volunteers in Rio, like Andrew Genung, Mike Niedermeier and Melissa Gormley, whose tasks were molded to their talents and/or interests – Andrew and Mike writing about Rio-based projects that Americans can support through CatComm for the website's Mural; Melissa writing a column based on her impressions of various events that go on in and around the Casa in Rio. Finally, the Casa benefits dramatically from new projects taken up by volunteers, who have come to the space to teach community leaders how to use ICTs, speak English, set up community radio stations, and more.

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<sup>238</sup> One may see volunteers as offering a type of non-financial “mission reserves” for the low-budget not-for-profit. “Mission reserves” are funds set aside “to respond to local needs as they occur, not when someone far away with control of the dollars finally recognizes the problem” (Brinckerhoff 1994: 154).

I am still clearly involved in a learning process with regard to developing both online and physical volunteers. However, some lessons I have learned can be shared in the approximate order in which they occurred.

First, when volunteers initially contact the organization, the appropriate staff person should get back in touch with them right away showing interest in learning more about them and what they are looking for. More than once I have lost the opportunity to work with devoted volunteers because those who are most interested are often in touch with several organizations and are actively looking for placement.

Second, because they join the organization as volunteers, not staff, I ask them to dictate the time and to point me in the direction of the activities they are most interested in.

Third, at least in the beginning I do not ask anything of volunteers that is *necessary* to the effective running of the organization, since they are not paid staff and are not bound to the organization. I learned this while waiting patiently over one year for a volunteer website designer to develop CatComm's database. On the other hand, the work of a volunteer should *never* be shallow. Volunteers get involved because their payback is emotional and psychological, and so the tasks they are associated with should be particularly enriching. One important application is to utilize volunteers to try out new areas that inspire them and in doing so expand the organization's services and reach.

Fourth, once the conditions of their work are established – time and task – volunteers should be *expected* to work, just as one does with staff. If they sense otherwise, they will not view their own work as valuable and are likely to desist. Those

that do not respond well to this approach are likely to desist regardless, or do ineffective work (which will waste management's time and potentially risk the organization's image).

Finally, as is the case with staff (see Chapter 5), time needs to be dedicated by managers to volunteers, ensuring they have the appropriate means to perform their jobs and acknowledging them.

### ***Care with Regard to Media Attention***

Anyone with Internet access, anywhere in the world, can find and, should they choose, utilize a Dot Org's services at the touch of a mouse. By establishing sophisticated dynamic databases that do much of the work in "receiving guests" on their websites, such organizations can cope with the (what they hope will be) growing demand for their services.

When possible, such organizations should be careful in timing the attention that brings people to their websites, particularly media attention that may attract larger numbers of visitors. Catalytic Communities experienced this at various moments when some form of outreach conducted by myself or through the media brought on an avalanche of new responsibilities that we were not prepared for. Both the website and the staff should be prepared before significant outreach is conducted.

The preparedness of an organization to deal with these increases in demand is seen as an important indicator of its quality. For this reason planning around media and

other types of attention is an important aspect of Dot Org work. Those interested, who take the time to drop an email, will expect and deserve a prompt response.

### *Narrow Focus of Activity*<sup>239</sup>

Due to their broad geographic reach (a characteristic that brings with it a need to focus in other ways so as to avoid being pulled thin),<sup>240</sup> virtual not-for-profit organizations tend to develop a narrow area of expertise dedicated to a particular unmet need and to focus intensely on that niche. They tend to deepen their level of specialization and tailoring of the services that fit within their missions.

There is, however, “another hand:” an opportunity to overlap thematically with other organizations in cyberspace (overlap is less likely to occur in physically-rooted community development organizations, for example, since they are for the most part aware of one another). Should this occur, virtual organizations can, often more easily than others, partner with those providing related services, providing links and developing joint programs (see section later in this chapter, “Increased Potential for Networking”).

In Catalytic Communities’ case, the specialization is not thematic but, rather, with regard to a focus on solution-sharing and outreach around community innovation. What distinguishes our work is the focus on initiatives that originate in communities themselves and the level of detail with which we describe them. CatComm focuses on initiatives that, as I often tell people, “*were they explained to her*, would inspire an illiterate housewife in a low-income community to feel she could make a difference.”

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<sup>239</sup> Though this does not necessarily imply a narrow thematic focus.

<sup>240</sup> See next section for more on the broad geographic reach of Dot Orgs.

The idea in our case is to call attention to and document initiatives that do not require significant levels of education, funding, or outside support in order to attend to the needs of a community. In this way, CatComm is developing a database meant to empower those who traditionally feel voiceless and incapable of changing their reality: those who already are or who can become community innovators.

With regard to our lack of thematic focus (education, environment or housing, for example), it would not make much sense to develop an online tool for community project exchange and dialogue to be used with regard to only one topic. First of all, the technology, once developed, can be used across topics, so why limit it to one? In addition, this type of action would ignore the interrelationships among community problems: that solutions for crime may come through culture or job creation; that solutions for environmental problems may come with infrastructure or with education, and so on. Finally, community innovators for the most part do not think in terms of issue areas. In my experience they are not solely “environmentalists” or “housing advocates.” Rather, they rise to the occasion as dictated by the local reality: when there is flooding, they will be concerned with infrastructure and health issues; when there is an epidemic, health and environmental issues, and so on.

### ***Broad Geographic Focus***

Prior to the Dot Org, never before in history could small organizations serve global audiences with relatively few resources. Catalytic Communities is clearly a community development organization, though it is not set up as a community-based

organization (CBO) serving one geographic area. To date I have not learned of another locally-based organization focused on community development goals yet serving communities globally. This is a virtue of the Internet's borderless quality. It potentializes an unlimited, global reach.

As is the case with dot coms, a Dot Org can be based legally in one country and conduct much of its operations in another country,<sup>241</sup> saving resources while at the same time (in the case of not-for-profits oriented towards developing world communities) being closer to the communities served.

Virtual NGOs that aim to be global in scope, like Catalytic Communities, have a particular responsibility to ensure that they are not duplicating the efforts of other organizations. This is the case for two reasons. First, and relevant to all third sector institutions, is the discrepancy between the availability of social services and the demand for such services. Providing identical services to another organization reaching the same audience is wasteful when considered in this light. Second, relating particularly to virtual NGOs, is that such organizations are not inherently limited by geographical limits and as such have the potential to be reached by and to benefit individuals just about anywhere. Unlike place-based institutions, which may duplicate efforts in different neighborhoods or different cities where their services are meeting the needs of distinct groups, virtual

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<sup>241</sup> It often feels odd and cumbersome to have legal status, always based in geographic space, in a borderless Dot Org with no headquarters. But clearly, as a not-for-profit organization CatComm is required to have legal status somewhere. In this case, we chose to base the organization legally both in the United States, where it has 501[c][3] tax-exempt status as of June 2001, and Brazil, where an affiliate exists as of November 2002. International philanthropy is a tradition that exists in the United States, and not in Brazil. As such, given CatComm's ultimate intention towards a global orientation, it made sense to found the organization in a country where fundraising for its purposes would be possible. But given the organization's on-the-ground pilot focus in Rio, it was also important to establish Catalytic Communities legally in Brazil.

organizations operating globally will only prove wasteful if offering identical services on different websites. This is particularly the case for organizations concerned with building collective intelligence,<sup>242</sup> for which centralizing information produces enormous gains for clients.

That said, due to each organization's "home base" and institutional history, efforts are unlikely to be "duplicates," *per se*, though if they are close enough the innovative quality of either program is lost (and with that goes an important argument in fundraising efforts). This is particularly dangerous given virtual organizations' narrow niches. Presumably, were this to occur, the logical step would be for the organizations to discuss the potential of combining efforts and/or for them to diversify in logical and complementary ways.<sup>243</sup>

### ***Innovation Arises from the Content and Often Cannot be Predicted***

Lisa Servon summarizes well how difficult it is to predict outcomes among technology organizations when she tells us about the results she encountered among CTCs in the United States: "Staff members are likely to tell stories rather than to produce numbers. These stories are about connecting people who previously did not know each other; helping people stay in touch with faraway friends and relatives; watching people learn how to use new technology and create things with it".<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> See description of this term in later section entitled "Potential for Collective Intelligence-Building."

<sup>243</sup> See later section entitled "Increased Potential for Networking".

<sup>244</sup> Servon 2002: 69-70.

As the following chapter illustrates, Catalytic Communities' website (online space) and Casa (physical space) have the same broad means and objectives. Both aim to bring community innovators together in such a way that they can exchange ideas with regard to challenges, approaches, resources, and more. Both aim to bring outsiders in contact with community innovators with whom they can get involved – by writing articles in the case of the press, doing fundraising or providing financial support in the case of funders, and undertaking capacity-building and investing time, in the case of volunteers.

What Servon finds with regard to CTCs is therefore not much different to what Catalytic Communities finds with regard not only to its CTC – the Casa – but also with regard to its website. Attempting to predict numerical outcomes is not only unrealistic,<sup>245</sup> because the organization's nature is not one of determining specific goals but of developing a stimulating environment in which broader concepts and change can be reached. It is also stifling, because the tendency when specific goals are developed is to focus so much on those that new, truly innovative uses of the organization's resources may not be detected or cultivated.

Drucker<sup>246</sup> makes the point clear:

One strategy is practically infallible: Refocus and change the organization *when you are successful*...The best rule for improvement strategies is to put your efforts into your successes...Look *inside* your organization and search for the...unexpected success....See it as a call to action...Look at a change as a potential opportunity instead of a threat.

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<sup>245</sup> This also influences the findings discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>246</sup> 1990: 66-68.

It makes sense for some organizations to detail specific quantitative targets for their work. With regard to the work of CTCs, however, and networking virtual NGOs more generally, it may be counterproductive to focus on this. The nature of such organizations is to provide a *space as a service* and administering that space is its call to action. The uses of that space cannot for the most part be predicted. And if one tries to predict them and focus all one's energy on meeting specific goals relating to such targets, the innovative future uses of these spaces may go unnoticed.

One of the difficulties for Dot Orgs with regard to funding involves their nature as spaces, rather than services: spaces that inspire innovation but that are not necessarily innovating themselves. Of course all organizations have room for development, growth, and change, and should be working towards constant improvement of services. However, most funds available from foundations and large donors to not-for-profits are meant, as is discussed later in Chapter 6, to support *new* services in *existing* organizations. Among such institutions there is little seed funding available, and funds for operations are lacking. In organizations whose nature is to inspire innovation through the connections they facilitate (common among Dot Orgs) and which aim to grow themselves in order to reach larger numbers of "clients" (therefore producing network effects), however, the need and promise is often not in the development of new services (which will broaden their reach beyond what is healthy for the organization – see "Narrow Focus of Activity," above) but, rather, in the maintenance of existing services. For this reason Dot Orgs should find alternative funding sources, as foundations are typically not designed to provide general operating support (see Chapter 6 for an explanation as to why).

### ***Potential for Collective Intelligence-Building***

Many of the true Dot Orgs – those organizations that form due to the potential of the new ICTs for civil society – come to be because of a particular characteristic of these technologies: their promise for the building of collective intelligence. Collective intelligence, as described by French sociologist Pierre Lévy in his 1997 book *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, “is a form of *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills...The basis and goal of collective intelligence is the mutual recognition and enrichment of individuals rather than the cult of fetishized or hypostatized communities”.<sup>247</sup> Lévy’s premise is based on the notion of a universally distributed intelligence: “no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity...knowledge is simply the sum of what we know”.<sup>248</sup> The idea, in essence, is that the Internet provides the first chance in human history to document and organize human knowledge in such a way that very little goes to waste, and it makes the documentation and distribution of information increasingly available to anyone on the globe.

Before the advent of the Internet, Lévy tells us, all forms of communications technology were one-to-one (e.g. telephone) or one-to-many (e.g. television, print). The Internet provides a many-to-many medium that never before existed. With this new medium comes the first realistic opportunity for the creation of spaces for collective

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<sup>247</sup> Lévy 1997: 13.

<sup>248</sup> Lévy 1997: 14. Again, see Edgar Cahn’s (2000) discussion of “throw-away people” whose important skills are not recognized in the formal market economy. A web-based medium may provide one solution to such a waste in human knowledge resources.

intelligence-building, where information on certain topics can be shared by average people from all over the globe in a way that others can locate and make use of, add to and even modify. Many of the not-for-profit organizations that have come to be solely because of the opportunities created by the new ICTs are responding in particular to this opportunity. Idealist.org provides a space where not-for-profits and those interested in working or volunteering in them can post information and find one another. Oneworld.net makes it possible for not-for-profits around the world to post news articles in a central location – online – effectively creating an alternative media source from the combined intelligence of hundreds of separate of local organizations. Many of those organizations founded in order to address the digital divide in their communities develop community portals where voices from throughout the community can dialogue and discuss common issues. Efforts like the West Philly Data and Information Resources<sup>249</sup> project centralize demographic, geographic, and other data from a range of sources in one space where community members can access them easily.

### ***Increased Potential for Networking***

With the generally narrow range of activity inherent in virtual not-for-profits' work (see "Narrow Focus of Activity" above), and the lack of geographic distance between them, Dot Orgs inspire an increased need and potential for networking. They can focus on developing a specific tool or set of tools around a specific mission. If other organizations that meet related or even the same needs are discovered, partnerships can

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<sup>249</sup> <http://westphillydata.library.upenn.edu>.

form and links can be made such that organizations can build a joint movement relying on, adding to, and benefiting from the tools developed by others. Combined with the automatization of many of their services, networking also creates opportunities for keeping organizational bureaucracy low by allowing Dot Orgs to remain small, by linking with others to grow the use of their services.

It would be a waste of the already limited efforts of the third sector if, rather than charting new territory and forming networks with related organizations, multiple providers of a given service come to be,<sup>250</sup> assuming that service could just as easily be met by one provider (this is especially true among Dot Orgs, since the tendency is that once the basic infrastructure for the organization's service provision goes online, that with network effects, the budget-to-output ratio of the organization falls dramatically).<sup>251</sup> But to do this, not-for-profits need to bicker less, lose existing competitive edges, work together more, and value one another. The added value from network effects will benefit all the organizations and, most importantly, their members.

Related to this is CatComm's encouragement of "Bottom-Up Mutual Incubation" (see page 49) as a networking approach, whereby Dot Orgs can partner by hyperlinking and sharing resources and knowledge with one another in certain ways that encourage the

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<sup>250</sup> This is not to detract from the "let many flowers bloom" belief that many organizations providing similar services yet based in different ideologies is a positive aspect of the third sector.

<sup>251</sup> That said, if two organizations (or more) do exist providing virtually the same service in cyberspace, it becomes all the easier for clients to abandon one provider given the ease of access to another provider of that service. If an organization replicates the work of another one may be deemed redundant. In cyberspace, one website is just as "distant" as another. Geography is no longer relevant. For this reason (and the others mentioned), it is important that Dot Orgs avoid providing identical services. In fact, one of the benefits of the Internet is that civil society can be more efficient, utilizing its limited human and other resources to meet more needs, since some services (particularly informational) can now be met with fewer organizations or individuals across space. Another potential strategy, at least among organizations with low-income community clients, is to build client loyalty through a physical space; this approach will be discussed in Chapter 4.

strengthening and growth of the individual efforts that make up the partnership while providing a greater range of tools to visitors.

The networking potential of Dot Orgs, though positive and at the heart of their usefulness as new members of civil society, also comes with its share of challenges. First, with networking effects comes the potential for exponential growth. Infrastructure needs to exist and an organization needs to be mature and ready in order to cope and grow with the effects of networks. It may also be wise for the organization to take its time and not conduct significant outreach until the mechanisms are in place to deal with the consequences.<sup>252</sup> Of course, a chicken-and-egg problem emerges. Without use of the organization's services, which takes some networking and outreach, a case cannot be made to maintain the organization, the funds from which are necessary in establishing the needed infrastructure to prepare for growth.

### *Difficulties of Conducting Dot Org Evaluations*

One area in which there appear to lie significant difficulties for Dot Orgs in relationship to “bricks-and-mortar” organizations is in establishing mechanisms and measurements for evaluating their efficacy and efficiency. This is in large part because of some of the characteristics already mentioned. The beneficiaries of Dot Org services are spread out across physical space, potentially around the globe, utilizing their services. They are therefore not people the organization will “run into” at its facilities, unless mechanisms are set up on the organization's website for that interaction to occur. Even if

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<sup>252</sup> See section “Care with Regard to Media Attention” above.

such mechanisms are set up, however, some Dot Orgs, as is the case with Catalytic Communities, have a philosophy of open access, not wanting to require that users sign in to access information and, instead, facilitating a broader use and stimulating the collective-intelligence building potential of the Internet. In this way many Dot Orgs are providers of services that can be considered public goods.<sup>253</sup> Visitors of the site who want to document their projects must sign in, but everyday visits of those learning from the website's contents are not recorded unless visitors choose to do so. In this way, as providers of public goods Dot Orgs are limited in the information they can acquire about the uses and benefits of their services.<sup>254</sup>

The only information guaranteed for all visitors are the "site statistics" that come with many website hosting services. "Site statistics" reports will feature the number of hits, page views, and sessions (see Figure 16 for a summary of Catalytic Communities' hits and user sessions<sup>255</sup> over time), and may record information on the location of (some

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<sup>253</sup> "Public goods in their pure form exhibit three technical characteristics: non-rivalness in consumption; non-excludability; and non-rejectability" (Barr 1998: 104). CatComm's (and many virtual) services hold fast to at least the first two of these characteristics. The organization's philosophy of "open access" means that no one can be prevented from utilizing its services (heeding to the non-excludability principle). In addition, one person utilizing a given service does not impede another person of utilizing the same service in the same way; hence, CatComm's services are non-rival. However, since users can reject the services offered or simply not know of them and not benefit from them, CatComm does not heed strictly to the third principle. Our services are not a true public good, but may be deemed close to it.

<sup>254</sup> Most economic public goods are so not by choice but by nature. A good – like national security or clean air (if one can call it a "good") – is public because no one can be excluded from gaining access to it. It is therefore impossible to charge a fee for its use. Catalytic Communities, however, provides its services in this way by *choice*. It would be possible to charge communities in order to add their projects to the Community Solutions Database, or to charge membership fees of those wanting to access the website. But to do this would sabotage the very objective of the organization: that of empowering and providing visibility to community organizations with the most limited means.

<sup>255</sup> A "hit" represents "the retrieval of any item, like a page or a graphic, from a web server. For example, when a visitor calls up a web page with four graphics, that's five hits, one for the page and four for the graphics. For this reason, hits often aren't a good indication of Web traffic" (<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/H/hit.html>). A "user session," on the other hand, is "the session of activity that a user with a unique IP address spends on a website during a specified period of time. The

of) the site's visitors around the globe. These are useful indicators that Dot Orgs have, but the interest of many such organizations is not simply in knowing how many people visit the site but, rather, what sorts of relationships and community effects these visits translate to on-the-ground. This juxtaposition between the availability of quantitative data for Dot Orgs, in contrast with the unavailability of qualitative data, is one of the issues facing Dot Orgs as they make appeals to funders. The introduction of a physical space, a CTC like CatComm's Casa, can play an important role in rendering this situation less difficult (Chapter 4 discusses this further).

For this Dot Orgs need to carefully develop mechanisms that interest visitors in leaving feedback. Catalytic Communities still has not done this but we are working on this now, in early 2004.<sup>256</sup> Visitors need to be asked a range of questions, starting with where they learned of Catalytic Communities through to the uses they have made of its resources. Their nationality, age, and other basic information will be documented. But this needs to be done in a way that can lead to useful answers in a concise, inviting format, since they will be 'asked' to do this virtually, without the social pressures associated with face-to-face dialogue. A very difficult job!

This process is further complicated by the fact mentioned in the above section entitled "Innovation Arises from the Content and Often Cannot be Predicted," that the

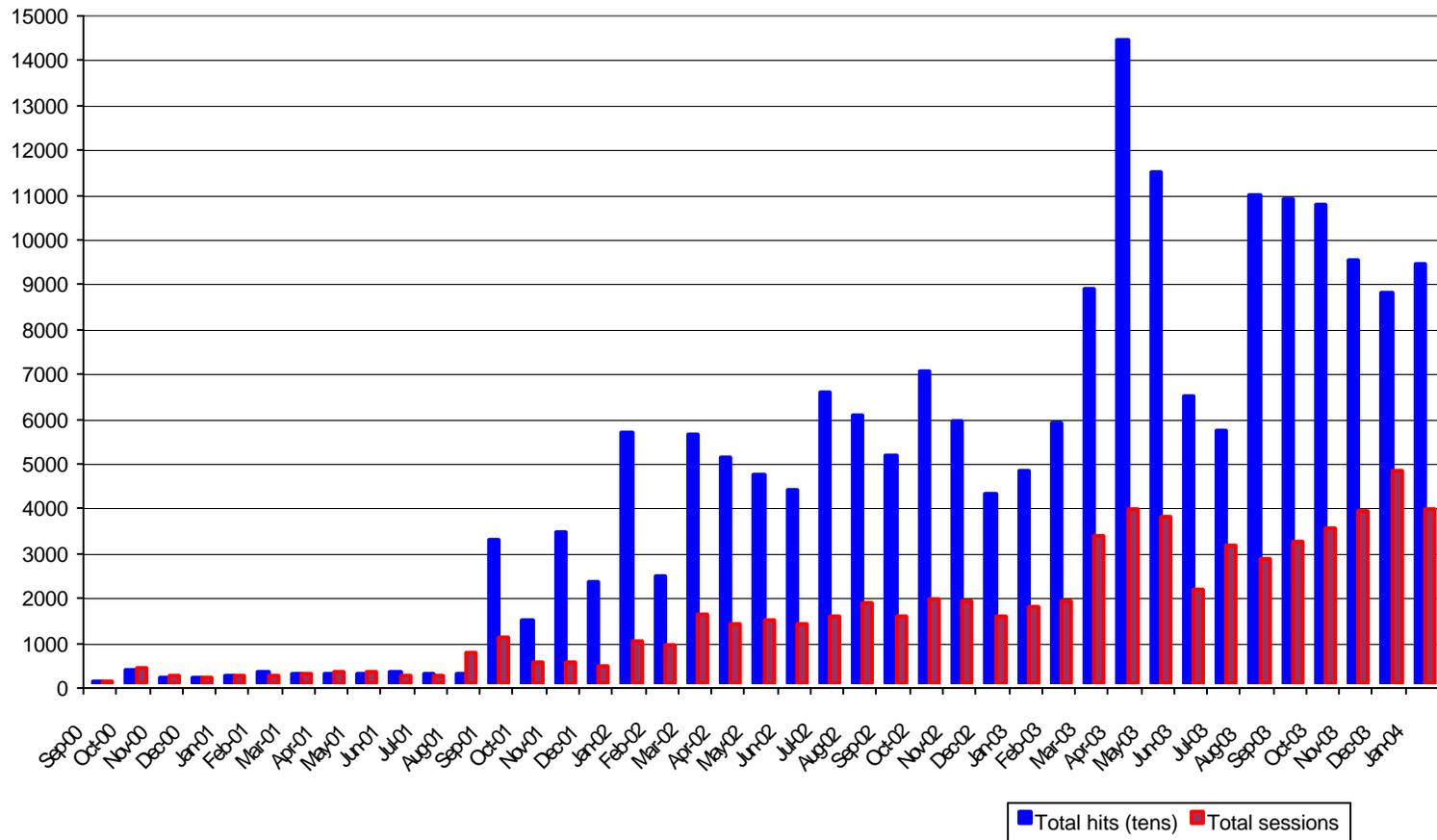
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number of user sessions on a site is used in measuring the amount of traffic a Web site gets. The site administrator determines what the time frame of a user session will be (e.g. 30 minutes). If the visitor comes back to the site within that time period, it is still considered one user session because any number of visits within that 30 minutes will only count as one session. If the visitor returns to the site after the allotted time period has expired, say an hour from the initial visit, then it is counted as a separate user session" ([http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/U/user\\_session.html](http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/U/user_session.html)).

<sup>256</sup> As was mentioned in the Preface, this dissertation is not meant to evaluate, in any way, Catalytic Communities' efficacy or efficiency in providing services. Rather, it is meant to describe what has been learned during the incubation and pilot period of CatComm. Evaluations that the organization is beginning to conduct will likely be the subject of future papers and articles, but are not being utilized here.

innovative uses of Dot Orgs' services often cannot be predicted. Preparing an evaluation ahead of time in such a way as to draw out such uses can be difficult. These are some of the issues CatComm is struggling with today.

**Figure 16. Catalytic Communities' website's visitors over time**



## **Chapter 4: The Casa and the Impact of Physical Space of Vision**

Catalytic Communities (CatComm) was founded in 2000 and operated as a Dot Org, in the strictest sense presented in the preceding chapter. Its mission was clearly stated: to “empower and engage communities around the world to develop their own local improvements by providing a set of *online tools*<sup>257</sup> to foster and strengthen community-based leadership and innovation.” CatComm’s main service was to be its web-based Community Solutions Database (CSD),<sup>258</sup> a tool made possible with the advent of the Internet.

Though in the very beginning I imagined Catalytic Communities would have a headquarters, and even what at the time I called a computer ‘library’ for community members to visit and obtain information from the database (see Figure 17), in little time I realized that the efficiency introduced by a virtual organization would allow Catalytic Communities to function with little if any overhead. This would also allow the program-to-administration ratio of CatComm’s services to be quite high, something attractive to funders.

The description of how Catalytic Communities would handle its physical presence therefore evolved over time. The initial idea, depicted in Figure 17, was quite traditional. I assumed, without any question, that it would be necessary for CatComm, the

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<sup>257</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>258</sup> The CSD is an online database where community innovators around the world, particularly those in low-income communities, can share, exchange, and outreach around solutions they develop for local problems in their communities. These include local sewerage schemes, day care centers, after-school programs, literacy, environmental initiatives, and community planning, among others.

organization, to have a central office. I also addressed the lack of access of communities to the Internet in a very predictable way: we would have a few computers available,

**Figure 17. What Will Catalytic Communities do For Those Who Simply Cannot Access the ‘Net?’ (From CatComm’s first funding proposal, October 6, 2000)**

Despite intense efforts on Catalytic Communities’ part to make its website user-friendly and tailored to a specific client group, the characteristics of this group make it likely that many of those we most want to reach simply cannot gain access to [www.CatComm.org](http://www.CatComm.org). These individuals may be illiterate, entirely immobile, or simply computer illiterate. They may not have access to computers with Internet capability. For those individuals and groups, Catalytic Communities is preparing three different outreach strategies.

First, a toll-free hotline will be made available where interested individuals and groups can call to speak with a Catalytic Communities hotline operator. This person will ask them a set of questions geared to understanding their particular need. They will then receive a hard copy of useful innovations in the mail.

Second, a computer “library” will be established next to Catalytic Communities’ central office. This library will hold four computers and will be staffed by one full-time “librarian.” The librarian will be available to help visitors learn to use the Internet as a tool in finding solutions to local problems, with an emphasis on the use of the [www.CatComm.org](http://www.CatComm.org) site. Bus tokens will be available for those visitors who find the cost of transportation to the library to be prohibitive.

Finally, after one year of operation, Catalytic Communities will host a one-day workshop. This workshop will bring interested community residents from around the city to a central location where they can spend a full day learning about innovative projects responding to a variety of local needs in an interactive setting.

somewhere central, where community residents interested in consulting our database but who did not have their own Internet access could come and talk with a ‘librarian’ who would assist them. This approach assumed the least possible of the visitor. They could be illiterate or computer illiterate. We would even give them bus change. And for those who could not make it downtown or preferred not to do so, they would consult our database through a toll-free telephone number.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Some level of telephone access – at least public telephones – is near universal in Brazil today.

This idea was turned on its head as I confronted the very real problem of acquiring funding for an organization such as this – an organization with inexperienced management<sup>260</sup> and several other barriers to acquiring funding. As Ami Dar, the Founder and Executive Director of Action Without Borders, the NGO whose central service is the very successful website [www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org) told me in October 2001, initiatives like ours have several things working against them.<sup>261</sup>

As Catalytic Communities was intended to serve communities around the world through cyberspace, even though I was physically located in Rio and documenting initiatives of community leaders there,<sup>262</sup> it seemed best to maintain the organization virtual. I took it for granted for quite a long period – from early 2001 through late 2002 – that there was no need for an office or computer ‘library’ as I had originally conceived of them. The organization’s philosophy with regard to a physical space during that period is exemplified by the Executive Summary of our first business plan, republished in Figure 18 (see italics, in particular). The feeling during this low-budget period was that a physical presence and all that is associated with it (in terms of finances, bureaucracy, maintenance, and the philosophical effect that would have on the organization) would be useless and perhaps even detrimental to the organization as it was being conceived. Our success in finding virtual volunteers to operate from their homes in different places on Earth also made it seem feasible to develop a full organization in cyberspace.

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<sup>260</sup> Though over time the initial inexperience of management has proven a plus because the organization’s management processes were therefore less traditional, more flexible and creative than is true of traditional organizations.

<sup>261</sup> Refer back to footnote 211 for his remarks.

<sup>262</sup> Return to Figure 5 for an explanation of why Rio seemed a logical choice.

In June of 2002 Catalytic Communities acquired its first grant of \$10,000 that came with a promise of matching funds through the following June. This grant allowed the organization to hire a much-needed programmer to complete automating the CSD and, following that, for the first staff to be hired.

As fundraising became more viable towards the end of 2002, an idea that had been planted as a seed in the middle of 2000 began germinating. At that point, before even starting Catalytic Communities, community leaders of CONGESCO (Community Managers' Council of Rio de Janeiro) had expressed their frustration over a lack of meeting space for them to physically get

together and exchange ideas. Over three years I attended CONGESCO's monthly meetings and became a part of their Commission, being the only non-favela (shantytown)

**Figure 18. Business Plan Executive Summary** (From CatComm's first business plan, prepared in June 2002)

Catalytic Communities® is a virtual not-for-profit organization catering to low-income community leaders and residents worldwide. We document the collective intelligence of community innovators around the world, enlisting the added value of the Internet for information storage, access and exchange. Rarely do such communities have a way of finding out what has been successful in communities just a few miles away, let alone across the world. We provide an online space where, by utilizing any of a variety of services, they can exchange their innovations and provide one another with insight, in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Community leaders use this space to publicize and call attention to the projects they develop locally. They also consult the site when a new problem arises in their community.

*Through a highly qualified volunteer staff, organizational partners and corporate software donations, Catalytic Communities has accomplished much to date with virtually no monetary investment. Volunteers are managed through a trust-based system over the Internet. The organization's decentralized, 'virtual' framework accentuates cost savings, diversity and our ability to perform effective outreach. From four continents, our volunteers have set up a framework on which to build a vibrant, healthy organization.*

Through this investment of time and commitment, Catalytic Communities has been peaking the interest and curiosity of communities around the world since it started building its pilot website in October 2000. Individuals from over 40 countries have visited the site, and the number of visitors increases each month. In recent months our work has been described in articles on 3 continents. Most importantly, out of the 8 projects listed in our initial pilot database, 4 have experienced positive results like accessing funds, publicity, or helping their peers, simply from listing their information on our website.

participant of this group of 12 leaders. Otherwise CONGESCO is comprised of community leaders from over 30 of Rio's *favelas* who get together monthly to exchange ideas, publicize events, discuss city policy, and otherwise (perhaps mainly) to let out their frustration and console one another regarding the difficulties of the work they do. Each of CONGESCO's members has his or her own community program to attend to – soccer with youth, literacy for the elderly, HIV prevention, and so on.

Over those three years, through regular site visits to over 30 *favelas* (with CONGESCO and non-CONGESCO leaders), three themes surfaced repeatedly during discussions with hard working community leaders who felt unassisted by local government and NGOs. The first thing I realized is that community leaders in the city of Rio have little knowledge and awareness of one another's projects, what has failed and succeeded, and how successful initiatives took off. It is clear, also, that this is not just the case for Rio as it is for leaders in cities around the world. This was the foundation for starting Catalytic Communities.

Secondly, community leaders regularly complained of a lack of meeting space. Coalitions of leaders generally find it difficult to meet together due to a lack of space. They rely on the willingness of large NGOs, official government or quasi-governmental bodies to provide space to them, often without being able to depend on this space over the long term. Though I did not imagine doing anything about this right at the beginning, it did occur to me during 2001 that a central community center might constitute a service Catalytic Communities could eventually provide. I soon became turned off to the idea, however, due to the bureaucracy I found as I tried to legalize Catalytic Communities in

Brazil. “If it is that difficult to formalize an organization, how would it be to formally administer a space?” I thought. Financially, too, the idea was a long shot. With the difficulties we had had acquiring funding, looking for support to maintain a space and the staff that would require seemed extravagant. Finally, with our increasingly virtual-only nature (as the Business Plan piece published in June 2002 and reprinted in Figure 18 shows), the idea of a community center in physical space in one city on Earth seemed peripheral and costly given our ultimate objective: to build a borderless online community.

Third and finally, despite Brazil (and particularly Rio) being fairly advanced in providing Internet access to low-income communities,<sup>263</sup> the amount of access in the hands of community leaders (those residents most likely to use the Internet to benefit a collective group) was minimal. This was in part because leaders tend to be adults for whom information technology is not as intuitive as it might be for younger community residents. This was also because of the busy nature of the lives of community leaders, who are unlikely to use a new tool unless they have become convinced of its practical use. Community leaders are unlikely to visit a community technology center as most community residents who access them do: to partake in the Web as a source of entertainment. On the other hand, community leaders have all heard of the Internet and understand in a general sense what it can do. They have heard of the Internet’s capability as a mechanism for getting the word out about an event, for general communication, and

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<sup>263</sup> In fact, this was one of my original justifications for setting up the organization when I did and where I did, choosing Rio as the pilot at that time because of the increasing access being made available (refer back to Figure 5).

for research. But access was always limited. Today less than 10% of Rio's *favelas* have one public Internet facility.

So, in late 2002, Catalytic Communities found itself in a new situation: there was money in the bank, a new dynamic database on the website (ready to welcome community projects *en masse*), and a small staff of four in Rio de Janeiro operating on the ground. Staff meetings were held weekly in my apartment and otherwise each staff member would be out in the field working to document projects, translate content on the website, and so on. During this same period a Rio-based worker's cooperative called Estruturar lent Catalytic Communities a small office, and CatComm bought a computer. This provided a location where staff and volunteers without computer access could go to document projects or access the Internet. The space at Estruturar also made monthly CONGESCO meetings less difficult to organize than they had been at prior institutions, as Catalytic Communities, CONGESCO's primary organizational partner, could schedule and be responsible at each of these meetings.

It was during this period, in late 2002, that Catalytic Communities began to take a more human form. It was then that the relationship with community organizations began to mature and that the organization complemented its occupation of the virtual realm by establishing a physical space. The organization at that point became recognized primarily in Rio de Janeiro and not virtually.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Though I did not realize this until very recently, when community leaders helped me reflect.

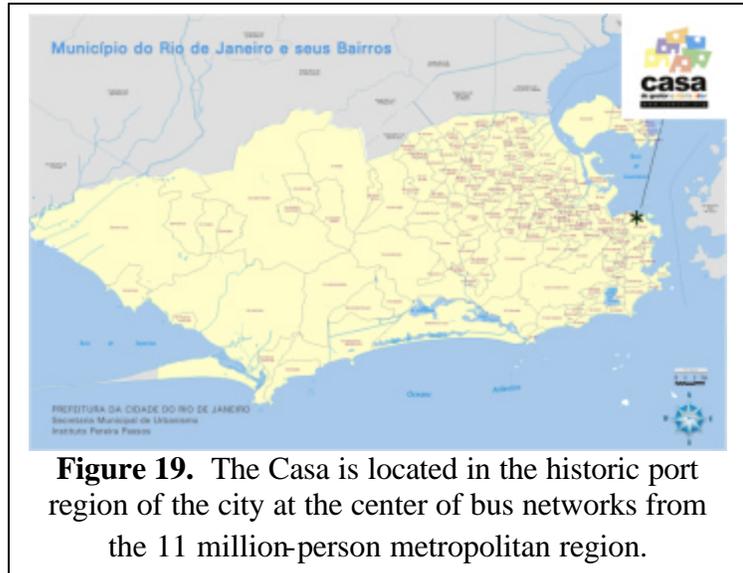
I totally underestimated the importance of face-to-face interaction and team-building.<sup>265</sup> It was during this period, when a staff came to be, that the entirely virtual nature of the organization ceased to be most effective. A volunteer network works well online, particularly for translation and outreach functions. But a full-time staff is better able to coordinate approaches, build organizational identity, and ensure effectiveness through a face-to-face working environment, even if virtual web-based content is the objective. This experience has been confirmed by leaders of other Dot Orgs I spoke with.

As all of these transformations were taking place, one day I was introduced to a new neighborhood in the city of Rio called Morro da Conceição. A historic area on a hillside at the edge of downtown Rio, Morro da Conceição was one of the first hillsides inhabited in Rio by the Portuguese and the birthplace of Rio's samba. The bay used to reach its edges and the slave trade occurred at its feet. Today it is a charming run-down lower middle-class neighborhood perfectly located at the center of bus routes from throughout the 11 million-person metropolitan region. It is a reflection of how Rio could be: no class rivalries and minimal violence and crime. Neighborliness and a real sense of community, unlike the city's wealthy areas, without the violence and despair found in the city's *favelas*. It occurred to me that very afternoon that a community center for the city's *favelas* should be developed *in this very place*, as a reflection of the world Catalytic Communities was trying to help build. And with only one bus ticket, anyone from anywhere in the city and most of the region would have access to the center.

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<sup>265</sup> It is interesting to reflect here that before the Web era, the importance of face-to-face interaction would never have been questioned. But in practical terms, since the advent of the Web, many people have ceased making this assumption.

A few weeks later I began touring the neighborhood looking for a suitable location. When I discovered the house that would later become the community center, or *Casa do Gestor Catalisador*<sup>266</sup>



**Figure 19.** The Casa is located in the historic port region of the city at the center of bus networks from the 11 million-person metropolitan region.

(“Casa”), I knew it was perfect. It needed a lot of work – painting, cleaning, setting up the electric, telephone and Internet infrastructure, and so on. But it became the next project of Catalytic Communities. From December, 2002 through February, 2003, CatComm’s main task was preparing the Casa for launch.

In his description of collaborative housing schemes in Denmark, Dorit Fromm explains how many of the positive effects of collaborative housing in Europe were not envisaged beforehand: “The early communities...were not built with the idea of organizing tasks efficiently. They were seen as an alternative to the isolation of single-family homes and a way of sharing amenities. As the group members became well acquainted with each other, they began to realize this new possibility”.<sup>267</sup> Similarly, the Casa was a response to three factors: (1) The need for a space for communities to organize and work together in Rio; (2) The need for a space for community leaders to

<sup>266</sup> *Casa do Gestor Catalisador* literally means “Catalytic (Community) Manager’s House,” named in recognition of the group of community leaders – the *gestores comunitários* (community managers) – with whom CatComm had a strong partnership and friendship, and that provided invaluable insight into implementing CatComm as an organization.

<sup>267</sup> Fromm 1991: 18.

gain access to the Internet to benefit their programs and help build and inform our website; (3) The need to bring our staff together in a physical space so that we could work more efficiently. What else would come from it was unknown. The rest of this paper will discuss what, in the eyes of the house's users, surfaced from the space during its first three months. Only time will tell of future successes and failures of the space.

### ***A Step Back for Context: The Clicks-to-Bricks Debate***

Between 1999 and 2001, when technology stocks began crumbling, a lively debate ensued between the proponents of “old economy bricks and mortar,” versus “new economy” ways of doing business, ultimately concluding that a healthy mixture of bricks and clicks would be the best approach for both web-based and place-based businesses.

In late 1999 *Time* magazine wrote of the “retail- vs.-e-tail battle” in describing whether Toys “R” Us would beat out eToys in online Christmas sales that year.<sup>268</sup> The debate concluded, particularly in its early days, with the sentiment that “off-line players had no choice but to go cyber”.<sup>269</sup> The sense was that traditional companies that did not have a strong web presence would lose out to new web-based companies and it was therefore essential to invest in a strong web presence. It was found that though “the pure plays certainly understand and leverage the Net faster and better than the bricks-and-mortar guys”,<sup>270</sup> the traditional companies were better able to brand and provided the

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<sup>268</sup> “Clicks and Bricks” 1999: 26.

<sup>269</sup> “Clicks and Bricks” 1999: 26.

<sup>270</sup> “Clicks and Bricks” 1999: 26.

convenience of allowing buyers to visit a store in order to make returns, something very important in some markets (particularly toys).

What was seldom discussed at first, however, was the importance of “Bricks” for those companies based on “Clicks:”

At least one e-tailer has cashed in on this off-line gold rush. CEO Soon-Chart Yu of health-products site [Gazoontite.com](http://Gazoontite.com) – he calls it the ‘breathe happy’ site – has opened an actual shop in San Francisco to sell blankets, air purifiers and other products for asthma and allergy sufferers. Yu says having a bricks-and-mortar location lowers the website's customer-acquisition cost to one-fifth of what it costs virtually. Television and billboard ads are expensive. With a store, a customer walks in and acquires himself. Yu may be the first Internet entrepreneur to discover the sidewalk; if his experience is any indication, he won't be the last.

There is one confusing by-product of the off-line store. ‘When we were planning it, we hoped it would break even,’ Yu recalls. ‘But it's actually profitable.’ Yu may have discovered the secret to steering his e-commerce company into the black: build a store.<sup>271</sup>

*Billboard* magazine<sup>272</sup> also describes a similar phenomenon with small Dusty

Groove America:

Most music retailers either start in the world of bricks and mortar and then open an online version of their stores or they specialize as an Internet-only operation. But Chicago-based indie Dusty Groove America stands out for going in the opposite direction. The company started as a pure-play E-commerce Web store five years ago and has slowly transformed itself into a bricks-and-clicks operation.

Rick Wocjik, Dusty Groove's co-founder, explained that the company "found ever-increasing demand and a strong synergy between online and brick sales".<sup>273</sup>

Banking is another business that has realized the importance of combining bricks with their clicks. In March of 2000 *Computerworld* wrote about “ETrade's deal for Portland, Oregon-based Card Capture Services Inc. – the largest independent network of

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<sup>271</sup> “Clicks and Bricks” 1999: 26.

<sup>272</sup> *Billboard* 2001: 20.

<sup>273</sup> *Billboard* 2001: 20.

centrally managed ATMs...part of a growing trend in which Internet-only banks find alliances or acquisitions that give them real-world access to customers”.<sup>274</sup>

Finally, after experimenting with online classes, educators in many community colleges across the United States conclude that “‘hybrid’ courses – ‘bricks and clicks’ together – exemplify the best of both worlds”.<sup>275</sup> Whereas online courses require more self-discipline on the part of students, they also teach professors to work as facilitators, rather than simply lecturers, favoring more student-centered approaches.<sup>276</sup>

So as with many new trends, a stabilizing influence eventually tiptoes in and supports a hybrid of old ways and new, taking the best of two worlds or building something new from the combination of diverse possibilities.

When Catalytic Communities decided to open a community center in downtown Rio, no reflection went on with regard to whether new trends indicated that Internet-only operations should go hybrid. In fact, it was a difficult psychological shift to move out of the web-only world in which the organization had been developing for all of its existence and create a very real, very human space to stimulate face-to-face interaction, network-building and exchange among people of the most humble of origins. Perhaps it should have been obvious that it would take a physical presence for people from the sorts of backgrounds that Catalytic Communities was working with in Rio to fully grasp the organization’s objectives.

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<sup>274</sup> (“ETrade” 2000). On a related note, these days it is not uncommon to find automated tollbooths next to those manned by people on American highways, giving users the choice.

<sup>275</sup> “Clicks Vs. Bricks” 2001: 15.

<sup>276</sup> “Clicks Vs. Bricks” 2001: 15.

But it hadn't previously been so clear. People from Brazil's low-income communities are known for a high level of entrepreneurship<sup>277</sup> and quick learning in confronting the difficulties of everyday life. A history of poor public sector involvement in and governance of *favelas* has left communities fending for themselves. Low-income citizens today are the result of generations of rural and, more recently, urban residents pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, succeeding by making do and pulling resources together. For this reason Brazil's low-income communities are characterized by a high level of innovation and self-help schemes largely responsible for the nation's high entrepreneurship ranking.<sup>278</sup> When a new tool – like the Internet – comes along and proposes to ameliorate some of their individual and common problems, or even just provide a new source of entertainment and diversion, community members are for the most part very open to it, similar to what Miller and Slater<sup>279</sup> describe in Trinidad. For these reasons, I had presumed that community leaders, once having grasped the usefulness of CatComm's website, would search out Internet access points near them in order to make use of these resources, since a certain level of Internet access already existed in the city's communities.

That may well have been the case *if* they had grasped the usefulness of the website. But I later discovered they had not totally grasped this. For frequent web users, those who have developed an affinity for the Internet over time, it is easy to grasp the potential of what Catalytic Communities has been building. Those who have not yet

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<sup>277</sup> "Empreendedorismo" 2002.

<sup>278</sup> Refer back to footnote 162.

<sup>279</sup> 2000.

developed an innate understanding of the usefulness and potential of this technology, however, will have a much more difficult time grasping the real use of CatComm's site or the Web in general. Community leaders for the most part are adults for whom the Internet is not an instant attraction. For this particular group to seek out Internet access and spend money, already limited, on access, is much to ask of the majority of these hard working, busy people.

So, as Soon-Chart Yu found when he created a physical store, customer acquisition becomes much more feasible through the development of a physical space that attracts visitors, even for primarily online initiatives. Similarly, attracting visitors to the Casa turned out to be much simpler than undertaking the previous process of outreach. Previously, community outreach had been conducted by visiting capacity-building programs in low-income communities and speaking with the leaders undergoing training, through visits to coalitions of community leaders, contact with specific community programs that we heard about through seminars, online, through events, and so on. Community leaders in these contexts were interested, many would even seek out CatComm after its presentations, but the distance of the Internet to their *actual* world, that in which they live, was tremendous. Free access and a supportive, inviting and encouraging environment was missing.

Today, due to the installation of the Casa, the organization's community outreach is conducted primarily by word-of-mouth from community leader to community

leader.<sup>280</sup> Between February 27 and June 13, 2003, over 170 different people visited the Casa,<sup>281</sup> only 52 of whom we had had some contact with previously. The rest were new visitors, people who heard of the house entirely through word-of-mouth (there had not yet been any intentional publicity related to the house).<sup>282</sup> One hundred of these visitors were community leaders or managers of community programs from over 20 communities and who work in or have contacts with dozens more. Six of the house's visitors were Catalytic Communities staff or volunteers. Thirty-one visitors over this period were representatives of Rio-based NGOs that provide various services to people from the *favelas*. Eleven visitors were university students or professors. And 22 other visitors were documented, including a local government representative, foundation representatives, foreigners interested in the space, journalists, and more. Dozens of new projects entered the CSD. One was invited by a British Broadcasting Corporation crew to take part in a feature story.

Attracting visitors to the Casa where they can be introduced to the functions of the house (which are the same as those of the website) and then sit down at a computer for the first time and be similarly introduced to the functions of the website, is infinitely

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<sup>280</sup> As Roseli Franco (Rose), responsible for the Portuguese content on the website, described, "These results are coming without any publicity, through word-of-mouth. It's the natural way. There is no forced publicity...The projects that have arrived here came through indication. The *Madureira* project came through Crispim. Crispim was introduced by Deley. Mauro Vianna came to us through the local Neighborhood Association here. The Baianas do Abarjé also came through this association. And Morar Bem I don't even remember where the project came from!"

<sup>281</sup> For comparison, this number as of the one-year anniversary of the space, February 27, 2004, was at approximately 500.

<sup>282</sup> No publicity was undertaken after the inauguration of the house because it was expected that news of the space would spread by word-of-mouth. News of CatComm's website-based services had already begun spreading effectively by word-of-mouth among community leaders and, in particular, among their capacity-building instructors, in Rio de Janeiro before the launch of the house. With the apparent interest on the part of community leaders in the space we expected this would occur even faster with the house.

more inviting and fulfilling for the organization's clients than the previously-used alternatives. Previously, contact with CatComm came solely in the form of our documenting communities initiatives, and included: (1) visiting communities and documenting their initiatives on paper, then returning to our home offices and typing them up; (2) distributing questionnaires and depending on community groups to fill them in and return them to us; or (3) inviting community leaders to CatComm's small office where they could sit at a computer with one staff person and spend hours filling in a fairly dry-sounding questionnaire.

Today, community leaders enter a comfortable setting – a house – and learn about the uses of the house for their work. Here they can hold meetings, pick up information brochures distributed by diverse NGOs and local groups. They can post notices to other leaders on a message board, organize workshops or participate in workshops organized by their peers. They can take computer courses, dance courses, project elaboration courses, all taught by volunteers, including the leaders themselves, who are using the space to make a contribution to their city by supporting these leaders.

The installation of the Casa has made it clear that in practice CatComm is not a service-providing NGO. Really, it is a space-providing NGO, developing and administering spaces – online and off – where community leaders can find online network-building tools to help themselves, work together, and find networks of solidarity outside their communities to help them build their programs. I am finding this approach to be much more empowering for community residents than traditional service provision programs.

The Casa has added a whole new dimension to CatComm, a new understanding of the organization, its philosophy, and its potential. CatComm defined the Casa, but the Casa redefining CatComm in return. In a short period it became a new heart of the organization. And it is now difficult to imagine the organization without this physical manifestation that brings everything together. The Casa is a portal in itself – the missing link between the communities served and the online community being built to support them. The Casa provides community leaders with access to one another, to broad networks of solidarity within their own city, and a wider world of solidarity beyond. It centralizes the energy of community leaders who can build on one another’s strengths and form a network of solidarity. It also brings them closer to the organization’s staff that is designing tools to lend them further support.

### *Home Sweet Home*

In his classic book *A Casa e a Rua* (“The House and the Street”), Roberto DaMatta, one of Brazil’s foremost social anthropologists, discusses the relationship between the public (individualistic) world of the street and the private (personalistic) world of the house in Brazilian society. Rather than think of street and house as geographical or physical places, he



**Figure 20.** The Casa is a Portuguese-style home built *circa* 1905.

focuses on them as symbols of moral universes. DaMatta tells us that in Brazil it is normal that “the *house, street and other world*<sup>283</sup> strongly demarcate differences in attitude, gestures, clothes, topics, social roles and the manner in which existence is perceived”.<sup>284</sup>

DaMatta also tells us that the dominant discourse across society is that of the street (the public world dictated by the elite). But the “talk of the subordinates is much more the talk of the ‘house’ and the family...always overflowing with moral connotations and an appeal to moral limits to social exploitation”.<sup>285</sup> Through these excerpts, one gets a sense that in the Brazilian context the space dictated by the house and the familiar environment represented therein is particularly distinct relative to the public world represented by the street, and that underserved citizens feel most comfortable utilizing the language and culture of home, relative to that of the street.

“I think the fact that we (now) have a physical space is important...Perhaps even speaking more metaphorically, because (a physical space) is a...piece of the Earth. We are not only in the virtual space. We have a (point of) *reference*,” Rose commented to me. Rose coordinates Catalytic Communities’ Portuguese website and works out of the organization’s office above the Casa. She then speaks of Crispim, whom she met for the first time after the Casa was launched when Deley, a community leader who has known of CatComm for over two years brought him by. Shortly thereafter she documented

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<sup>283</sup> The ‘other’ world refers to the “space in which both moral systems come together...(where) all people...stand as individuals before God and are judged on their individual merits” (Hess 1995: 14).

<sup>284</sup> DaMatta 1991: 53.

<sup>285</sup> DaMatta 1991: 24.

Crispim's project, Argilano, through which Crispim teaches young people bronze sculpting to help them gain access to the job market.

On a recent visit of Crispim's to the Casa, Rose saw him sitting quietly on the veranda. She described their encounter to me: "I asked him, 'Crispim,' I was pulling his leg, right, because he comes to the house so often, 'today you came here to meditate, isn't that right Crispim?!' He turned and told me, 'Yeah, I'm having some problems. I came here to think things out.' I thought that was fantastic, that he really finds it to be a comforting environment."

Crispim's level of comfort in the Casa is typical of its frequent visitors. Ana Cláudia, a community manager in Mangueira *favela* and coordinator of sports and other programs in the community, expressed her feelings about the Casa to me during a recent CONGESCO meeting: "I go practically twice a week, and it feels like the house is mine...I have started to *feel* like the space *belongs* to CONGESCO."

Conceição, present when Ana Cláudia spoke, confirmed that, "In the Casa do Gestor Catalisador, I feel like I'm in my own house. I feel at home."

Finally is the case of Neuza, who is the member of CONGESCO that most uses the Casa. When I asked her what she thought of the space, she said, "The fact that I am there (so much) that there is nowhere left on the (presence) list to put my name (says it all)...I have a great relationship (with each of the staff members). It's like I am at home...I get there and don't need to ask you if you're busy, I don't need to ask anyone to get on the computer, to go to the kitchen and grab some water, to do anything. So I really feel like I'm at home...I'm really very happy."

The high degree of comfort of community leaders in the Casa is a key to the space's success and its attraction. As DaMatta makes clear, house is a very important domain, the one in which low-income community residents feel comfortable expressing and being themselves.

Deley is a poet from Acari, the *favela* in Rio lowest with regard to the city's neighborhood-by-neighborhood human development index ranking. At the end of our interview I asked Deley if there was anything he wanted to add. He told me, "I think it's the question of feeling comfortable. I think (I feel comfortable here) because the house feels like a *house*, really. That's interesting because (elsewhere) things are changing. You go to the Worker's Party headquarters and the office space has all these little divisions, there's a glass you have to knock on to see people and then they are all (stuck) in meetings. Even in the Areal Livre (community) NGO inside Acari it's now full of these divisions. It looks like an office, a firm, a company. The truth is that NGOs are no longer entities involved in the social movement and are transforming themselves into businesses with closed divisions. The Casa is still a house. And we hope it stays that way."

In his essay "Religion as a Cultural System," Clifford Geertz discusses three factors that lead people to seek religion. According to Geertz one of the reasons people seek religion is to explain things they do not understand: "In all probability, most men—are unable to leave unclarified problems of analysis merely unclarified, just to look at the stranger features of the world's landscape in dumb astonishment or bland apathy without trying to develop, however fantastic, inconsistent, or simple-minded, some notions as to

how such features might be reconciled with the more ordinary deliverances of experience”.<sup>286</sup> Or as Langer said 16 years before Geertz’s analysis, “[Man] can adapt himself somehow to anything...but he cannot deal with Chaos...his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe—the ‘uncanny’”.<sup>287</sup>

Simply put, people find it important and comforting to understand the world around them. For people who live in Brazil’s *favelas*, not only do they understand the content of what happens in the context of home, as DaMatta explained, as being theirs (as opposed to the ‘street’ context determined by the elite and through which they are forced to navigate). But residents of the *favelas* also have a deep understanding of house, in the physical sense, and suffer from a corresponding lack of understanding related to larger urban structures, those that require extensive engineering. Not only do they feel most socially comfortable in the environment of home, but they literally build their homes from the ground up, and know what is involved in building and maintaining the physical structure called house. Developing the CatComm community center in a house, making reference to it being a house in naming the space, and treating it as such has undoubtedly added to the comfort level of its users.

When visitors arrive at the Casa for the first time, they are welcomed and “received,” as Rose puts it. Coffee is served, they are taken on a tour of the physical and virtual components of CatComm. Visitors are treated as they would be when they arrive at someone’s home, rather than at someone’s office. The door is left open. There are lockers where they can leave their things: a space for their own possessions to stay safe.

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<sup>286</sup> Geertz 1973: 100.

<sup>287</sup> Langer 1957: 287.

The personal nature of a house revolves a bit around the issue of trust.

Community leaders are accustomed, unfortunately, to false promises and lack of integrity among those with power who apparently aim to support them. As a house, the Casa provides a strong contrast with the traditional institutions that close their doors on these leaders. Institutions that have, for as long as the Brazilian memory exists, treated people like Carolina Maria de Jesus in the way described in her 1962 diary excerpt reprinted at the source of footnote 183.

The fact that the space CatComm developed is, in fact, a house, and has been intentionally developed as one, is symbolic.<sup>288</sup> People are to feel welcome when they arrive. “You are at home,” we often tell newcomers. This is a space where they can develop their community programs and know that those there to support them will empathize and provide a carefully crafted space to help them succeed (within our abilities as human beings). It is a physical space where, unlike in virtual ones, they can judge the trustworthiness of those who claim to be there to help them.<sup>289</sup> CatComm frames its philosophy as one of no promises and therefore no *assistencialismo*, preferring to build what it sees as a longer term solution: a network of cooperation and solidarity from which these community organizations can draw inspiration and support, and can give in return.

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<sup>288</sup> It is akin to the concept mentioned in Chapter 2 of *Gemeinschaft*, the traditional “kinship-based world of ‘community,’” as opposed to the bureaucratic *Gessellschaft*, or “impersonal world of ‘association’” (Barnard and Spencer 2002: 606). Also mentioned in footnote 157.

<sup>289</sup> This is especially important for those from communities where they are used to doing things through personal relationships and that is the way used to determine levels of trust, rather than relying on legal or other impersonal instruments used in the ‘street’ domain to ensure legitimacy.

## *Welcome to Cyberspace*

In her 1999 essay on community computing,<sup>290</sup> Anne Beamish speaks of the successes and failures of past community computing projects.<sup>291</sup> The project category Catalytic Communities first belonged to was strictly that of content provision. “Without engaging and relevant content,” the proponents of this approach believe, “low-income groups would have little reason to use this technology”.<sup>292</sup> On the other hand, I would add based on what CatComm is observing with its Casa, that without a certain degree of contact with the technology, low-income groups will not fully grasp the usefulness of content.

As Angelo<sup>293</sup> summarizes beautifully:<sup>294</sup>

Before the Casa, CatComm was you and a website<sup>295</sup> and the possibility that we had of accessing a network of partners by passing our projects on to you for you to post on the site, so that others could access them.

With the Casa, this work was amplified in various ways. First, the direct relationship between us (community leaders) and the actual site, of us being able to access it, change it, open it, and not just virtually but physically. As if the

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<sup>290</sup> “Community computing” is the “process to serve the local geographical community—to respond to the needs of that community and build solutions to its problems. Community networking in the social sense is not a new concept, but using electronic communications to extend and amplify it certainly is” (Morino 1994). Also quoted by Anne Beamish (1999: 352).

<sup>291</sup> “Community computing projects...are most frequently involved in providing hardware and training, and information. Less often, they provide the network infrastructure or online access, and rarely are they involved in developing software, hardware, or public policy” (Beamish 1999: 353).

<sup>292</sup> Beamish 1999: 361.

<sup>293</sup> Angelo da Silva is a representative of the CONGESCO coalition who also works two days a week at the Casa, providing support to community groups preparing funding proposals, introducing them to the Casa, and building networks among those leaders who utilize the space.

<sup>294</sup> And as Conceição and Paz also expressed: “(My understanding of CatComm) is very different now, much better than before,” Conceição told me. Paz, sitting next to her added, “Seeing and participating (in the organization) I think (my understanding) has improved significantly. 100%.” Conceição continued, “Yes, before it was something that was on paper but I couldn’t distinguish it. (CatComm) wasn’t clear. Now it is. Because we didn’t have access (to the Internet).”

<sup>295</sup> Before launching the Casa, CatComm had already had a staff of four for four months, but the nature of the organization before the launch of the community center was such that contact with community leaders was always made in my presence, so it appears that leaders perceived my presence as more central than they currently do – a positive sign with regard to the organization’s growth.

Casa were a part of the website. When you go into the Casa it's like you are navigating the site. We run into a colleague, sometimes in the corridor. Sometimes our group meets here. We articulate. We speak not just with those who modify the site, with those that have projects on the site, those who plan to put projects on the site, partners from other communities, but also with foreigners, with potential funders. Everyone ends up running into everyone else, and we also meet on the Web, because we end up also using email and accessing the site. So we end up with a much better vision of what CatComm proposes.

For us in the beginning it was quite complicated. Even I had a hard time understanding what CatComm proposed to do. 'What's the deal, just grab our project and post it to the site, is that it?' And since we almost didn't coexist with the Internet for us there was a question, 'Does this really make sense? Will people see it? What weight does it have to publicize a project online?' And when we come to the Casa, since we don't have access in the community, and here we do have access, we start coexisting with this, and then we start to perceive the importance of it (the Internet). It's not just the site, not just putting a project on the site, not just using the Internet. When we send an email to a person and schedule a meeting here at the Casa, and then are able to meet face-to-face, the website comes alive, it lives.

I asked six of the community leaders interviewed<sup>296</sup> in Rio de Janeiro to tell me about the first time they accessed the Internet. For three of these respondents, the first time they accessed the Internet was at the Casa. "I heard about the Internet more than two years ago...when I took a basic computer course," Henrique tells me. There was public Internet access in his community, Jacarezinho, installed by the city government. But Henrique did not make use of it. He found he was too busy to take the time. A community artist, Henrique now visits the Casa weekly for a computer workshop and downloads art photographs from museum websites onto diskette to show to his art students in the community where he now lives. Since the space opened in February of 2003, he has created an email account, sold art exhibited in the Casa's rotating community art exhibit to international visitors, enrolled in a volunteer-organized

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<sup>296</sup> All community leaders interviewed for this chapter were those who had close contact with CatComm over its first three years and who currently utilize the Casa.

computer workshop taking place in the space, prepared pamphlets describing his work, attended CONGESCO meetings, and even received an offer to paint a mural in a private home, all based on his use of the Casa.

Conceição also first heard of the Internet in 2000 when she took a basic computer course. But her first time accessing the Internet was on the day of our interview. “What was your impression?” I asked her. She turned and said, “Very neat, because it’s a much faster means of finding information. I didn’t find it confusing. The question is sitting down to learn.” Since the Casa opened in February Conceição has used it primarily for face-to-face exchanges. “I came for the inauguration (of the space), and I’ve been here for meetings and now for the (computer) workshop,” she told me.

The computer workshop Conceição and Henrique are enrolled in is being organized by Rogério, a young engineer who got his undergraduate degree and then spent time living abroad, primarily in Germany. Rogério returned to his native Rio wanting to contribute to empowering the people in the city’s *favelas*. He searched online and discovered CatComm, enrolled himself as a volunteer through the website, and visited the Casa. On that very day he began brainstorming a computer course he could offer, free of charge, to community leaders interested in



**Figure 21.** CONGESCO members during IT course offered by Rogério Navarro, a volunteer and engineering Masters student.

learning more. His course is a hit. Paulinho, who has taken several computer courses before, said this one “stimulates a much deeper comprehension” of computers than do others, that Rogério has a way of teaching that allows those participating in his workshop to understand how the computer and its components work, rather than just teaching the superficial aspects of utilizing a handful of computer programs.<sup>297</sup>

Paz visits the Casa up to 3 times a week, “When there is a need,” she told me. She first heard of the Internet in 2001 through her son who has a computer, but logged on for the first time at the Casa. Today she uses the space “for meetings, and also for the Community Solutions Database.” She tells me, “I put my project in the database. I’ve already had results (from that), or at least I think so, because CIACOM (my community group) is being recognized much more (now). The number of emails we’ve gotten (has grown).” Despite being among the community leaders most in touch with CatComm over the years, it was only with the launch of the physical space that Paz took interest in posting her project to the CSD.

This has been a common trend. “Before the Casa, despite our knowing CatComm since it was founded, and despite our having provided our ideas and experiences to help establish the Casa, the majority of CONGESCO’s (community) projects only entered the site after the Casa’s launch,” Angelo tells us.

Others who had accessed the Internet previously began to make more habitual, regular use of this technology with the launch of the Casa. “For example,” Ana Cláudia

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<sup>297</sup> This relates, once again, to Geertz’s reflections, described in the last section, on the importance for human beings of understanding the workings of the world around us.

told me during the focus group, “CIATE<sup>298</sup> (my community group) had an email (address) ever since the (computer) course (we took) at UERJ.<sup>299</sup> Today CIATE has two emails. The one for the coordinator, and the one for CIATE in general. I mean, today I just arrive (at the Casa), sit down, and start reading my email, and I haven’t even told people the address!” A roar of laughter from others in the focus group surfaced at this point, and Ana Cláudia continued: “I’m starting to publicize (the address). This for me is progress, because I had an email address already but I just wasn’t interested. So now (with the Casa) we are becoming interested. The first thing we do (at the Casa) is open our email.”

Angelo is the one community leader with whom I have had regular contact over the years who had acquired Internet access for his community group before the Casa’s launch. His community group, CIADS,<sup>300</sup> has been connected to the Internet since 2002. Their experience reveals some of the enormous barriers to connectivity among Rio’s community-based organizations:

(We got online in order to) facilitate our work, though being online quickly turned into an endless source of expenses...I received a disk from a ‘free ISP’ and installed it to receive one month’s worth of free access, then the bills started arriving. I have memberships with UOL, AOL, but we weren’t able to keep paying. So they cut us off. I’m not even sure if my name has been sent (to the credit agency) because of this.

Then at the end of March a colleague of mine installed IG that is free. I thought that would benefit us, but it does not because the telephone bill cries with IG. Then it took months for me to discover this. I’m going to cut the Internet connection this month.

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<sup>298</sup> CIATE is the Integrated Center for Action in Telégrafos. Telégrafos is a particular neighborhood in Mangueira, a *favela* known for its large and accomplished carnival samba school.

<sup>299</sup> UERJ is the State University of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>300</sup> CIADS, the Integrated Center for Action and Social Development, is a community NGO based in the North Zone of Rio, in the Jardim América neighborhood.

When the truly free Internet Service Provider (ISP), a company in Brazil known as IG, was installed, the slow connection speeds made for enormous telephone bills.<sup>301</sup> In the case of CIADS, the access provided by the Casa has made it possible for this organization to continue utilizing the Internet – a tool that they already recognized as valuable and which they had already become dependent on – but without accumulating debts they could not afford to pay. “Now I use the Internet...two days a week here (at the Casa), and three days there (at CIADS). Except that there I only open it to see if there is an email message waiting for CIADS...or if I have to send an emergency message. So if I need to send a longer email, or one that goes to more people, or open a website, I use the Casa.” CIADS has also received foundation funding through an opportunity learned about on CatComm’s homepage and replied to while at the Casa.

Deley, the community poet mentioned earlier, first heard of the Internet at the Earth Summit in 1992, and did occasionally access the Internet before the launch of the Casa. But, as is the case with most leaders who have access, it was *ad hoc*. “My access was very rare,” Deley informs me, “I would go to a friend’s house to see a specific website...but I was always depending on the availability of the person or institution. It had to be outside of regular working hours. They would only let me access for things that had to do with them. There was a certain surveillance.”

Now Deley visits the Casa twice weekly and no longer feels excluded from the opportunities derived from having frequent, dependable, and regular access to the Internet. “Three months ago I participated in an event, a national seminar by the

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<sup>301</sup> In Brazil, even local telephone costs are dictated by the cost ‘per pulse,’ rather than a flat rate.

Worker's Party's National Environment office, and there were more than 300 people there, from all over Brazil," Deley begins. "All 300 people signed a (presence) list. Of the 300, only another gentleman and myself did not have an email address. That's when it hit me what it is to be digitally excluded...People don't give their telephone numbers or addresses anymore, they give their emails."

Deley has also used the Casa to heighten his networks. He organized a lyric-writing workshop for youth involved with hip hop<sup>302</sup> at the Casa in May and formed a partnership with Wallace, involved in the community radio movement, to record future workshops such as this. Wallace, in turn, organized a workshop in August to teach community leaders how to set up community radio stations. Deley has also been helping the Neighborhood Association President from the neighborhood where the Casa is located, Damião, to plan a community garden. Both of these relationships developed as a result of Deley's use of the Casa. Finally, Deley prepares invitations to events he organizes in his own community, Acari, on the computers at the Casa. In fact, three community leaders during their interviews commented on the importance of the basic support that the CatComm staff lends in the space, correcting grammar, translating emails to English, and assisting with graphics. Rose told me that "People also come here for support. 'Let's prepare an invitation!' They come here to prepare an invite, a program, something visual, a text, to publicize their (community) work." CatComm in turn announces these and other events organized by the Casa's visitors on its website's rotating Mural.

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<sup>302</sup> Hip hop in Brazil has taken a particularly politically engaged form that makes it an attractive way to involve youth in discussing the issues that affect their lives.

In her essay, Beamish goes on to discuss the current problems with community computing. She emphasizes that content providing initiatives often start well, but that “Ironically, (though they) have the greatest potential, they often suffer from a fatal flaw—a lack of content...(C)reating and maintaining a Web site takes a tremendous amount of work and energy that they cannot always sustain”.<sup>303</sup> For this and other obvious reasons, it is important that content provision programs for these communities “ensure that users are producers of information as much as consumers”.<sup>304</sup> The Casa was the missing link between CatComm’s website in cyberspace and its work on the ground in the communities of Rio. Through the Casa community leaders now contribute content to the website, empowering themselves and improving the quality of CatComm’s ability to serve these and other communities. Of the members of the CONGESCO community coalition, which helped inform CatComm’s development since 2000, only one of the thirteen community projects by its members currently in the CSD on CatComm’s site was there before the launch of the Casa. The others have been entered by these leaders as they’ve gained access to the technology and gained an understanding of the usefulness of posting content to CatComm’s site.

The Casa appears to be uncovering an advantage over both traditional content-providing community computing initiatives and access-providing CTC initiatives. Content providers, as Beamish explained, often fail in attracting relevant content in part because they lack a dedication to or a mechanism for the production of online content by

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<sup>303</sup> Beamish 1999: 361.

<sup>304</sup> Beamish 1999: 366.

the communities served. Telecenter<sup>305</sup> initiatives, on the other hand, tend to be open to broad segments. All the residents of a low-income community with a given telecenter generally do (and should!) have access to it.

Setting up community telecenters in all neighborhoods across a city or region is an intimidating proposition for most public officials, however.<sup>306</sup> They may start with a handful and move beyond that or they may simply choose not to provide this service because of the high set up and maintenance costs involved with such a program as it grows. In addition, the experience with community telecenters in Rio shows a tendency for users to use the Internet for entertainment purposes: cartoons for children, chat rooms among teens, and pornography among adults, for example.<sup>307</sup>

A targeted investment such as that which CatComm has undertaken provides a less intimidating approach to that of a large multiple telecenter scheme and encourages uses that are more in line with the objectives of public budgets.<sup>308</sup> The result is a downtown telecenter that attracts a specific group of low-income community resident – those that are developing community projects for collective benefit – and provides them with a set of spaces and services to help them make viable their community betterment initiatives. The useful characteristics of this space include: a website through which community leaders can access networks of support; a space that is inviting and comforting in which they feel both a sense of ownership and support; spaces in which to

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<sup>305</sup> “Telecenter” is the term used internationally for a community technology center, where community residents can acquire Internet access.

<sup>306</sup> The city of Rio alone has approximately 750 *favelas* (Schmidt 2003).

<sup>307</sup> See source of earlier footnote 67 for details.

<sup>308</sup> A more targeted approach such as this may be the most effective starting point for telecenter initiatives in places where government funds are limited but should not function in isolation where such an approach, in combination with a broader community telecenter initiative, is possible.

set up meetings with one another; other leaders at their side struggling with similar problems and exchanging approaches as discussions emerge; a small staff that is there to assist them with their online research, to set up an email account, and to document their projects in the CSD; a network of community-based and outside volunteers that offer workshops through the space; the production and exchange of written materials; and so on. In this environment, surrounded by their peers, the tendency is that community projects will be strengthened through a sense of common purpose, recognition, and exchanges made that bring new resources to these programs. On one afternoon in late 2003, several community leaders had gone to the Casa individually to use the space's computers to work on their community programs. One of them took notice of a listing on the CatComm Mural, a spot for events and information listing on the organization's website. It was of a foundation calling for community proposals, ten of which would be chosen for a R\$10,000 grant. The three leaders sat and prepared proposals, each for the program he managed, helping one another. A few weeks later we received word that one of those three had been accepted.

As a result of launching the Casa and observing the effects it has had on our operations, Catalytic Communities is now thinking about the importance of the implementation of similar centers elsewhere. For CatComm to truly make its website global, providing a source of empowering Internet content to community innovators around the world, it will be important to multiply the concept of the Casa. Through partnerships with NGOs and local government in different cities, the hope is that an international network of such downtown telecenters emerge, each run by a local

organization, bringing leaders from each city-region together in physical space and then providing them an outlet, through CatComm’s website, to share their work with their peers around the globe.

In fact, some talk of this has already emerged. Rose spoke of a “mission from Mozambique (that) came here to the Casa and the young woman...said, ‘I can’t stop thinking, millions of ideas are coming to my mind!’” about the possibilities for similar efforts in her country. Similarly, a World Bank official from the Brazilian city of Fortaleza discussed the possibility of encouraging that local government instituting a similar space, as did a representative from an NGO that works specifically with schools. In that case, the idea was to develop these sorts of centers for the teaching profession in different small towns in Brazil. More recently and likely to lead to something is a discussion CatComm is currently having with EarthTrain, an organization that has decided to develop a CTC along the Casa model in Panama.

### ***Organizational Staff, Product, Philosophy***

Now we have seen how the introduction of the Casa has brought with it a new understanding of Catalytic Communities as an organization in the eyes of the community leaders we work with. We have seen how this space has kindled an interest in a tool – the Internet – of which Rio’s community leaders for the most part had only garnered at best a superficial understanding. The thought that goes into all aspects of Catalytic Communities’ influence on the communities it serves also went into the Casa. As the organization’s Fulbright Fellow, Michael Niedermeier wrote in a recent Mural piece on

the organization's website, the physical space is colorful and inviting,<sup>309</sup> demonstrating the kind of detailed thought going into it. Once inside, community leaders feel at home, like they have found one place where their initiatives are supported in a deeper sense. "Much more than the money, than CatComm being an NGO that passes on money, which it isn't, it provides us with... a nudge, giving us an opportunity to build on our projects," Angelo explains.

The fascinating thing, however, is that the Casa has done, in a short time, much more than its organizers had imagined. It opened up all sorts of possibilities for exchange and interaction, and the products of such an exchange, that could not have been imagined prior to its existence. Angelo was contacted by the BBC in June 2003 to take part in a story about community-based responses to violence in the city's *favelas* due to his organization's listing on the CatComm site. Articles were published about CIADS' recycling and other programs by journalists who found these projects on the CatComm site. Wallace is writing a project that will create an opportunity for community radio content generation at a national scale. Henrique's family has benefited from the publicity that the mural he designed and elaborated with community youth on the Casa's largest wall has brought to him, being invited to paint children's nurseries elsewhere in the city. Angelo has helped write six funding proposals, all successful, for community projects

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<sup>309</sup> Michael Niedermeier wrote, in May 2003: "The windows are sunflower yellow, doorways swing open in an arc of green, and sky blue trims the walls around our busy computers, but what brightens the house is much more than the creative paint job. It's the smile on Henrique's face as he opens a package full of artistic children's books, sent from Holland for kids in his Art Room project; it's the energy of a rap performance by 'the Fifth Element,' during their creative workshop on rhythm, poetry and self-expression. Catalytic Communities' community house, our 'Casa do Gestor Catalisador,' is buzzing with activity and with the positive attitude of people working together to make a difference."

listed on CatComm's site, utilizing the resources of the Casa and his days working on CatComm's staff. Neuza discovered a potential funder during a conversation with another leader at the Casa which appears to be coming through. Monthly chat sessions are held between CONGESCO members in Rio (utilizing the Casa) and members of Community Voices Heard (CVH), a community organizing not-for-profit in New York.<sup>310</sup>

But beyond adding these victories to the list of what was possible solely by way of CatComm's website, the Casa has transformed CatComm, the organization. The organization's staff, product, and philosophy have been modified.

The relationship of CatComm's staff to the tasks they perform has been altered. "In my case," Rose tells me, "since I'm responsible for the content of the Portuguese website, the Casa divides my attention (from my primary task). I'm here (at the Casa) and someone arrives. Obviously I have to give them my attention...And it is a pleasure to do this: to go downstairs, have a cup of coffee, talk about life. So I don't think this is a negative (aspect) but it does divide my attention." Rose has found that being based at the Casa has altered but also complemented her work. Her primary role in the organization is to document community projects to the database and manage the website's content.

Before the Casa, she would do this by visiting community programs, returning with the information obtained to a computer, and sitting down to document what she had uncovered. Today Rose finds herself distracted from her primary task by visitors, old and

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<sup>310</sup> CONGESCO members met members of CVH at the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre, a city in the south of Brazil, in January 2003. CatComm acquired funding to take 23 CONGESCO members from Rio to this event through help from two organizations, including a foundation, in the US. This is one example of how CatComm's attempt to "build a community of solidarity in support of community innovators" is coming to fruition.

new that visit the Casa and want to talk with her. Much of what they want to discuss cannot be applied as content to the website. On the other hand, new visitors that arrive without any outreach save her precious time contacting and recruiting projects. Those who come to the Casa for a second or third visit may bring with them notice of events to post on the CatComm Mural, and keep us up-to-date on their initiatives so as to facilitate network-building. They also provide necessary feedback as to the ways in which the website and the Casa are serving them, something very difficult to guarantee in a solely virtual initiative as was described in Chapter 3. The Casa also increases feelings of commitment and loyalty by community leaders – CatComm’s clients – with regard to the organization, strengthening CatComm’s long-term potential by maintaining a client base. Should other initiatives similar to CatComm’s pop up on the Internet, it is unlikely that members of Rio’s communities will be lost to them, though CatComm will happily encourage multiple listings by community groups to various sites.<sup>311</sup> And, of course, the organization would be comprised of heartless robots if its staff did not want to accompany the projects it details on its website to assist them as they progress.

Many times visitors to the Casa utilize the space’s resources in other ways, those which do not contribute directly to Rose’s job in providing content to the website. This is what concerns her with regard to meeting her objectives of developing online content. On the other hand, she admits that before the Casa, “It took much longer!” to document projects, having to visit them individually. And now, as Angelo put it earlier, the community leaders are able to accompany the placement of their projects on the website,

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<sup>311</sup> See Chapter 2’s discussion of “Increased Potential for Networking” among Dot Orgs.

and get a better sense of how this process works. Rose concludes that, in actuality, what the Casa did with regard to her job is make it easier to do outreach and maintain contact with new projects, though she has had to “develop a certain internal savvy...be more practical,” and develop better discipline with regard to structuring time.

Mike, Catalytic Communities’ Fulbright Fellow, called attention to what concerns him about the Casa’s effect on staff. Mike, originally meant to work with a large local NGO, ended up changing paths as a result of what he perceived as limited interest on the part of that institution. To CatComm’s benefit, he then spent the best part of a year documenting community programs, representing the organization at health-related events, writing articles for the website Mural, preparing outreach materials, and helping with project translation. As an outsider whose introduction to community work took place once he entered the organization, the visits that CatComm’s team regularly made to various community initiatives in Rio’s *favelas* was vital to his understanding of the context in which CatComm worked and the objectives of the organization. “I think that,” Mike explains, “for my own selfish purposes, the Casa has detracted from what I wanted to do when I came here only because it provides a central location for the community leaders to go...whereas before I was having more experience actually going and seeing the community projects and being exposed to their situations at a more personal level...For newcomers to CatComm at this point (the Casa) could mean that they will have less of an understanding.” At this point I reminded Mike that he could be utilizing the Casa to meet leaders whose projects he wanted to get to know in greater detail, and

that he could then make visits to the communities of those initiatives that most interest him.

Even so, Mike's observation is crucial for two reasons. First of all, it implies that staff members are less likely to schedule community visits given the convenience of utilizing the Casa as a central meeting space. Secondly, it reminds us of the importance of maintaining a certain level of exposure to community projects on-the-ground as a requirement for work in the organization, so that those who are involved in the organization have a deep understanding of the context in which the Casa's visitors and the website's users experience day-to-day. Both of these, in turn, call attention to the importance of maintaining community visits as a core component of staff activities, particularly for newcomers. This has, indeed, become a new objective among staff for 2004.

However, Mike adds that despite his interest in the organization's previous approach, "As far as detracting from the goals of Catalytic Communities, the NGO, I would say (the Casa has not done this) at all. It definitely serves the purpose it set out to of bringing people together and setting up networks and improving the communications between communities." He goes on to tell me:

It makes (CatComm) more real to people if you have a space they can go to that makes them feel like their efforts to document their projects are going to something that's tangible or something that has a physical manifestation that they can pursue. It's not just ephemeral out there – you know, this electronic Web – and I think that's an important mental aspect of the work. You give people positive reinforcement seeing that they are a part of this structure. Seeing that it's not just an idea of a network but it's actually the physical: you've got thirty people downstairs in the room and they're all talking to each other and they've never met before. They're discussing projects in areas ranging from education to health to providing proper nutrition. These are people who finally have an opportunity to interact with one another that they wouldn't have had, realistically

speaking, even through an Internet NGO. I mean, they're not going to be sitting online at home using a chat room to discuss things with one another. It's just not realistic.

Catalytic Communities' product has also changed as a function of the Casa. The original intention of developing the Casa was to support network- and movement-building among isolated community leaders across the Rio de Janeiro landscape by responding to a stated need of community leaders across the city: space. The idea was to join the need for meeting space remarked by diverse leaders, respond to the lack of awareness of one another's projects, and provide high-speed Internet access that would allow them to link to the outside world and utilize the CatComm website.

But at that point many of the other positive effects of the Casa had not been imagined. For example, it had not crossed our minds that: it would become significantly easier to develop content for the website, thus increasing the efficiency of the organization with regard to outreach and content-building;<sup>312</sup> workshops would be developed by community leaders, in addition to outside volunteers, in order to build local capacity; community groups would become engaged in informing the website's content, encouraging us to add/alter content and asking for clarification; having community participation on the Casa's staff would make it possible for successful proposal-writing on behalf of community projects; volunteer maintenance in the city of Rio would be made easier due to the attractiveness of working in the Casa environment with the energy inherent in face-to-face dialogue;<sup>313</sup> having the Casa would increase the sense of urgency

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<sup>312</sup> As Rose points out: "The Casa has only (existed for) three months. And there is already a natural movement. We just stay here, and the projects come (in)."

<sup>313</sup> The Casa helped to naturalize the volunteer-seeking process locally. Before the Casa, volunteers were already attracted to CatComm and its ideals on a monthly basis. However, without a physical space in

of our developing the website because we see, on a daily basis, community leaders searching for information on the site and looking to see what new items have been incorporated;<sup>314</sup> the Casa would become a center for community chat sessions with distant organizations, like the once monthly meeting between CONGESCO members and those of CVH in New York; community groups who feel ownership in the space and in CatComm would take responsibility for developing new approaches to deal with emerging problems, as CONGESCO is doing in developing the “CONGESCO Seal”.<sup>315</sup>

More ideas are now surfacing. For example, at some point in the coming year CatComm will add a blog feature to its website. A “blog” is a “Web Log,” a new Internet feature created to allow people to update and post their personal diaries and accounts to the Internet for others to view. Blogs can be indexed so that individuals can, with the click of a mouse, view entries into other people’s blogs that feature similar themes. The idea to include a blog feature on the CatComm site resulted from listening to the stories

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which to meet them, introduce them to the organization, and incorporate them, the process was handled through a monthly meeting. At this meeting, volunteers – old and new – would sit around a table and be (re)introduced to CatComm (reintroduced in the case of those who had been to previous meetings), and their activities as volunteers would be discussed. Maintaining volunteers was very difficult, as this process tended to lead many to lose interest. With the Casa, volunteers are introduced to CatComm on a one-on-one basis, incorporated into the daily life of the organization by using the Casa to provide whatever services they are interested in, at dates and times that suit them, in an environment that leads them to feel a part of an organization and useful immediately. Virtual volunteers and physical volunteers require very different management approaches.

<sup>314</sup> Angelo told me recently, “These days sometimes I become troubled with the site. I’ve established a routine of opening the site always...There was a period during which the website, at least the Mural, wasn’t changing...Like today when I asked you, ‘Theresa, is there something new in the CatComm Journal?’ I find it interesting to take a look.”

<sup>315</sup> One of the concerns CONGESCO has with regard to the Casa, which will be touched on in the next section, is that the Casa will begin attracting ‘the wrong kind’ of community leader – those who accept money from the drug traffic or corrupt politicians, for example. As a way to protect both CatComm as an organization and CONGESCO’s projects on CatComm’s site, the community coalition CONGESCO has developed a CONGESCO Seal, which will be placed on projects that pass this coalition’s strict requirements. Requirements will include participation in CONGESCO’s monthly meetings, a site visit to the project by CONGESCO Commission members, and more. If CatComm wanted to elaborate such a quality seal, it would have a much more difficult time to design and be responsible for such a program.

of community leaders visiting the Casa and discussing their daily realities, shortly after I had paid a visit to a group called PlaNetwork in San Francisco, CA, where I heard about this tool in more detail. In fact, during our interview, Deley told me that “one thing that we are looking to do beyond having information about our project (on the site) is to show the day-to-day.”

As Rose enjoyed repeating during our interview, “I think we have no notion of the types of results that could still come (from this).”

In *Collective Intelligence*, Pierre Lévy<sup>316</sup> makes clear that in utilizing the Internet to produce spaces for the sharing of collective intelligence, the centralization of intellectual resources produces social effects beyond a one-to-one relation. The Casa has shown that this is also true in physical space. “The most collective result of the Casa,” Rose commented to me, “is its role in promoting social inclusion, not just from the technological point-of-view, but...also by (creating)...a space in this city that brings these (community) projects together, values them, and that puts these people in touch with one another, increasing the value of the network of people who develop projects to improve the condition of these people.”

### ***Concerns to Consider***

Before concluding, it is important to take the time and space to call specific attention to a number of concerns that have surfaced with regard to the Casa and which should be considered by others attempting to build on this experience. Five negative

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<sup>316</sup> Lévy 1997.

aspects, some more important than others, have surfaced for the organization – Catalytic Communities – around the implementation of this space.

First, as the management guru Peter Drucker<sup>317</sup> puts it: “It is not enough for non-profits to say ‘We serve a need.’ The really good ones create a *want*.” The Casa has established various demands that did not previously exist, or that at least had not been expressed as such. Though this is emblematic, as Drucker says, of an effective organization, it also creates new needs for the communities served, and which should be considered: bus tokens to arrive at the space, access to a telephone to set up a meeting at the house, time to visit and make use of the space, to participate in a workshop, and so on. Conceição told me, when I asked her about negative aspects of implementing the Casa, “The problem isn’t CatComm. It’s the stability of our group that doesn’t have bus tokens available.” Because CatComm has developed a philosophy in which the organization only passes on material wealth in the specific case where a community group fundraises and needs our support to receive those funds, we are handling this problem without providing bus tokens or other hand-outs.<sup>318</sup> Instead, we attempt to provide long-term support for groups to develop other means.

A second negative aspect that surfaced with the implementation of the Casa is the effect that our launch had on the psyche of the group of community leaders we had worked closest with over the previous years, CONGESCO. Angelo described the

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<sup>317</sup> Drucker 1990.

<sup>318</sup> Though this may provoke resentment on one or another occasion, consistency in treatment of community leaders and the organization’s philosophy of exchange – providing services is viewed by us as a two-way street, as opposed to top-down as would be the case if hand-outs were given – actually keep community respect for the organization high.

frustration of the group when we met for our interview. He told me that they began questioning the value of their own work:

Why do NGOs, institutions, and movements like CatComm succeed in such a short period to take off, and we who are so many years on the street (working at building our community organizations) don't succeed? When you and CatComm arrived, we had already spent years battling it out on the road, right? And battling for the same goal. And you had an ideal but didn't have anything (resources, etc. You were) like us. And you succeeded, but we stayed behind. The same thing with (other institutions we know about)...They went ahead and we stayed behind. We ask ourselves, 'Why does everyone move forward, and we stay?' And this, at times, I feel like the older leaders feel this way too, when we arrive at the Casa, it hurts us a little bit. Not against CatComm. But the question hurts. Why don't we go forward, why don't we succeed? Is it because we don't have a college education? Is it because our work is of less value? Is it because we don't know how to speak (well)? Is it because we don't know how to sell (our work)?<sup>319</sup>

There were some significant growing pains that went into setting up the Casa and sensing a potential resentment on the part of some community leaders whom I have watched struggle since I began setting up CatComm in the year 2000. Fortunately, the Casa is doing as was hoped for, and helping to equalize the playing field a bit. In June, 2003, five projects that members of CONGESCO had written proposals for were approved for funding, the proposals written by Angelo using the time and resources made available through his work at the Casa. In February 2004 two more such projects received funding.

Third, and also brought to CatComm's attention through its close relationship with CONGESCO, is the risk of pressing for quantity over quality. It is clear, through observations of other Rio-based NGOs,<sup>320</sup> that CatComm, in hoping to maintain its empowerment philosophy, cannot fall into the trap of worrying about quantity: quantity

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<sup>319</sup> See Chapter 2 for a thorough discussion of why inequalities may inherently exist with regard to certain communities' ability to affect change.

<sup>320</sup> See Williams on 2002.

of projects on its website, of users of its Casa, and so on, over quality. Angelo

summarized the concern well, when he told me:

The Casa is very enticing. Just like we (CONGESCO) have discovered that it is possible to derive a thousand benefits, and that has made us interested (in the space), I think it will attract the interest of a lot of the wrong people (too). We know that there are a lot of people involved in (community) movements that are doing everything wrong...people who have (an apparently thought-out) talk, but who will do something else...That work with the drug traffic, for example, or with a partisan politician that is buying that community.

I am worried that these groups will approach the Casa...and take advantage of this space as they do with others. Thank goodness we haven't seen this here yet. The Casa (currently) counts with the participation of a good number of good people...A number of people that is good for the institution. And much more qualitative than quantitative. I think *this* is important. Sometimes it is better for you to have 30 leaders (visit) in a week who really do (good) work, and who get involved (with the Casa), rather than having 200 here who are going to leech and not multiply.

Angelo's call to pay attention to the importance of quality is also what inspired the group he belongs to, CONGESCO, to develop the CONGESCO Seal, a seal that they hope will encourage groups that make use of the Casa to take part in CONGESCO's monthly meetings, through which CONGESCO, a close partner of CatComm's, can judge the effectiveness and ethical fiber of those involved. As is the case now, all projects that meet CatComm's three basic criteria<sup>321</sup> will be eligible to enter the Community Solutions Database on its website, regardless of its legal status or some other sort of verification by

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<sup>321</sup> These three criteria are: (1) The project is helping to solve at least one community problem (in the eyes of community members). (2) The project was begun by someone *from* the community of interest or, if not, comes from an experience that could realistically be used as a model by members of a low-income community. (3) The project serves as a positive and ethical example for other communities. This last one is left undefined so as to facilitate culturally-specific application should the need arise.

CatComm of its validity,<sup>322</sup> but CONGESCO will be responsible for providing a special vouch of legitimacy to those groups that would like to benefit from this in Rio de Janeiro.

The final two negative aspects have to do more with the organizational dynamics, and less with the communities served. First is the concern of individual staff members of the effect of the Casa on their individual productivity, as Rose and Mike described in the last section.

Finally, appropriate staffing becomes much more critical as the face of the organization becomes concentrated in one physical space.<sup>323</sup> And getting a sense for the ideal qualities to be represented in those staff members takes some time.<sup>324</sup> People with the philosophy of a non-hierarchical, network-based NGO, but with the empathy and practical know-how of a place-based NGO are required for such jobs.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter, more than the others, shows how writing with a double eye, as both researcher and practitioner, can be invaluable. Writing it allowed me to step away from what appeared on paper to be a viable and ideal objective – of creating a web-based entity that would provide empowering online tools for low-income communities – to see that that objective could be best met by incorporating a physical space (and in doing so

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<sup>322</sup> CatComm provides a disclaimer on its site saying that the validity of projects listed in the CSD is not confirmed by the organization, though an authentication note allows readers to gauge some level of authenticity related to the project. This is a way of building on the potential of a website where visitors can document their initiatives to share from anywhere on Earth. It is also a way of ensuring that those projects who most need support with outreach – those without formal status or publicity – are able to post their work to the site. Finally, it allows visitors to the site from humble backgrounds, those the site is being built for, to research among projects that have been successful despite minimal structure, the projects that are most likely to help them feel empowered to make a difference.

<sup>323</sup> See “Centralized Control of Image” section in Chapter 3.

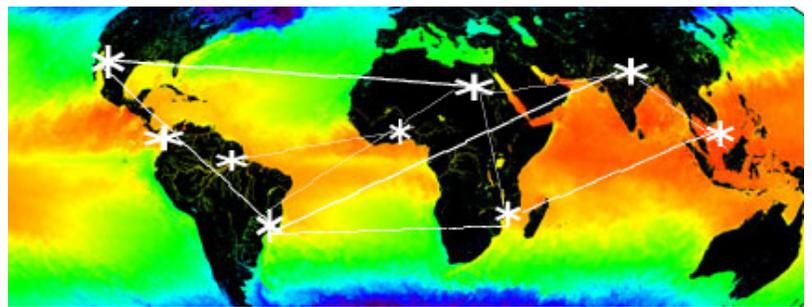
<sup>324</sup> See Chapter 5 for more on staff issues.

significantly altering the main concept). Catalytic Communities' website needs the Casa, just as the Casa needs the site. Community development Dot Orgs need a healthy mix of bricks and clicks. "The Casa is part of the site," Angelo told me. And vice versa.

The Casa has proven itself strategic with regard to meeting CatComm's objectives both at the micro and macro scales. At the micro scale the Casa inspires the natural development of content for CatComm's website by community leaders using the space, and therefore the website, and who develop an interest in contributing to the site.

At the macro scale the Casa serves as a model for CTCs elsewhere. A network of such centers, linked together, would allow previously isolated community leaders to network with others from their own region and strengthen one another's initiatives face-to-face, while helping them build confidence in their use of the Internet and consequently work within a broader network of peers online to learn from one another and exchange at a larger scale. This

could potentially be the first time a *practical*<sup>325</sup> means was developed through which communities could network in this way.



**Figure 22.** As a result of researching for and writing this chapter, I realized the full potential of CatComm's website would likely be achieved only by developing a network of CTCs like the Casa, each managed by a local partner NGO and joining leaders from its city-region to exchange with one another and beyond, using our site.

<sup>325</sup> Using a website alone, communities could *in theory* develop such a network. But, as this chapter highlights, many barriers – technological, financial, cultural, and educational – exist that can only be surpassed through the preparation of a physical space, the *practical way*.

## **Chapter 5: Lessons from Managing a Staff**

This dissertation's first two chapters gave a sense of the events and qualities that helped Catalytic Communities come to be. The second set of two then described what the organization came to "look like" virtually and physically. Now we move on to day-to-day operations: the organization's management. Two themes – staff development and fundraising – proved to inspire the most learning. In this chapter the organization's staff management style will be described over time. In Chapter 6, the same will be done with fundraising.

Catalytic Communities' management style has evolved over time. The initial expectation was that the organization would remain virtual, with a small staff, working from diverse locations online and accompanied by a large network of online volunteers. I never expected to find myself in the position of a *manager*, someone who would have to act like a *boss*. It was only a few months into 2003, when a young American intern working with us in Rio, Andrew Genung, lovingly referred to me as "the boss lady," that it occurred to me that I was, in fact, a boss.

This chapter tells the story, through a set of episodes,<sup>326</sup> of the learning process I went through during 2003 as I coped with a physically-rooted, Rio-based staff. Being a "boss" was not a role I was comfortable with initially, not a role I had sought out for myself. Many of the difficulties I experienced and that are described in this chapter are a result of this not having been a chosen role but, rather, a natural consequence of the

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<sup>326</sup> These episodes are described through a series of research notes (not polished prose) kept in my Dissertation Journal and characteristically noted the night of an event or on the next morning. Please note that some names have been altered to protect individual identities.

organization's growth. I have taken the liberty of including some additional text – that gives a sense for my emotions and the daily goings-on – beyond the basic text relating to staff. This is done in an effort to provide context for the diverse work that has been carried out by Catalytic Communities, including the way my own time is allocated between physical and virtual worlds, over various periods.

The chapter takes a parallel journey through the management literature to highlight the management lessons that surface as the story unfolds. Utilizing a format developed by Dee Hock<sup>327</sup> in *Birth of the Chaordic Age*, this parallel journey occurs within the body of the text, but is made separate. Discussions based on the management literature and relating to the chapter's story-telling are conducted in separate sections. As is true with Hock's book, the reader can follow the story by itself or the literature-based review on its own if he or she chooses. I have added an additional feature: a diagram at the end of each lesson providing a summary of what happened and/or what was learned. I found this to be the natural approach to handling the contents of the chapter.

Finally, an attempt is made to take what is learned here and briefly relate it to literature on the learning organization, as defined by Peter Senge. Senge will appear again in the following chapter, on fundraising.

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<sup>327</sup> Dee Hock is the founder of the Visa corporation who, in this book, tells the story of the early days in which he developed the company along an alternative paradigm, that of a *chaordic* institution.

## *Lesson I: Careful Recruitment*

### *The Story...*

During the course of 2003 a string of staffing decisions shed light on the diverse aspects of Catalytic Communities' managerial evolution. Other than Rose Franco, whom I have known for several years and knew to be of utmost qualification,<sup>328</sup> all of the hiring I had done before March of 2003 was either for temporary labor or, in the case of Angelo da Silva, community consultation.<sup>329</sup> The short-term nature of these relationships made it so that imperfect match-ups between them and CatComm did not weigh so heavily. In addition, only Andrew and Mike Niedermeier came to work with CatComm after it took on the Casa, meaning that before March working relationships were generally at a (relative) distance. Finally, other than Mike, none of these individuals came to represent CatComm in any major way at public events. And the luck we had in finding Andrew, who has an easy-going, yet responsible nature, made it such that only months later did I realize how important (and rare) these qualities are.

When I set out to hire for the first time, I was more concerned in finding people to liberate me from my overwhelming list of responsibilities than with staff quality. The qualities that would be necessary among permanent staff were still unclear, and I was too overwhelmed to consider them. Samantha Gonçalves (Sam), a professional performer and friend of Rose's was hired to manage the Casa after Andrew returned to the United

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<sup>328</sup> Rose was someone with whom I had a friendship that I knew would not interfere with our working relationship.

<sup>329</sup> Temporary labor consisted either in contracting (Sebastian, a database programmer) or in American volunteers and interns who showed an interest in working with us in Rio (Moises Cascante, Andrew, and Mike) for a limited period.

States. This decision came during a phase in which I felt overwhelmed with the expanding responsibilities of a growing organization. I wrote on March 24:

*Having to schedule courses and use of the house, figuring out what to do about the computers/network, the rain inside, making sure staff is there, cleaning...is just overwhelming. Especially when I take into account...that the English database should be priority right now...*

*I came up with two...solutions: (1) Hire Sam or someone to run the space IMMEDIATELY; and (2) Volunteers who want to offer courses have the space available to them, but we are not going to actively go after people to offer courses, set them up, coordinate them, etc.<sup>330</sup>*

In late March I was already taking note of Sam's qualities and feeling good about my decision. Besides her charisma, what I liked in her was the relief she provided in two main areas: cleaning and language. Sam had two obvious differences from Andrew: she is Brazilian and a woman. This meant both her Portuguese (for communication with the community leaders) would not be an issue and, what at the time I viewed as a female quality – she liked to see things tidy.<sup>331</sup>

*I have to admit I like the fact that Sam likes things clean and organized. That will save me the first half hour I've spent cleaning the Casa every single time I get there...just doing basic organizing – putting away computer covers, throwing out bits of trash on the floor, etc.<sup>332</sup>*

Since her career had always been based on her expertise as a professional performer, it took a certain level of training to teach and explain to Sam the importance of certain tasks, but I was up to it. I jotted to myself in mid-April, 2003:

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<sup>330</sup> From March 24, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "I don't want it anymore." The second solution was also adopted at this point, and contributes to my having realized that Catalytic Communities serves more as a 'space-providing' than 'service-providing' NGO. We develop spaces, online and off, where interested individuals can get involved in strengthening opportunities for community innovation.

<sup>331</sup> In retrospect, I realize I was paying attention to superficial qualities as opposed to more fundamental qualities that would be needed among staff.

<sup>332</sup> From March 26, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "As Deusas."

*Sam got the need to post everyone to the Excel spreadsheet, finally. I told her, “I cannot emphasize how important it is that you register everyone who comes to the Casa,” and explained why: that we need to know so we have a sense of who’s using the house for what, so we can improve our resources, so we know if we need volunteers to do certain things, so we have a sense if people are returning, can call those who only come once and ask why, so we know how people’s use of the house grows or changes over time, what days of the week it is used more, etc. She got it, said today it finally sank in.*

*...Today (Sam) asked me if I get annoyed when someone’s going so slowly with the computer since I am so fast. I said no...that people either get or don’t get the underlying logic of computers. That is more relevant than their speed because it doesn’t really matter how quick someone is...but, rather, if they don’t need constant supervision.<sup>333</sup>*

And when Sam was unable to come to work, due to occasional performances, I saw the good side in that, too:

*Friday was more community-building at the Casa – it was actually really cool to be the in-house rep for a day (and made me realize I should make myself available one day a week for this in general). Sam had to fulfill an obligation and Rose was out ill, so I agreed to be there Friday. And it was FANTASTIC!...*

*It was almost like the synthesis of a typical day at the Casa...the day started out with Wesley at the house – he’s doing his internship for the CENAFOCO course in Acari<sup>334</sup> with us one hour a day over a month. He came in the morning and watched me open up – open the windows, turn on the network, turn on the computers, put out the banner, put signs on the door, make coffee. Then we sat down to talk as Bia Cardoso<sup>335</sup> walked in. Bia asked questions about the house and about the capacity-building programs for community leaders. She began to exchange directly with Wesley since, of course, he had been through this training!*

*...After Bia left, two women from Palmeirinha<sup>336</sup> came in with their friend Ronaldo. The three came to research on the Internet for information related to recycling...I was filling in the raffle tickets for Angelo and, in the meantime,*

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<sup>333</sup> From April 16, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “Film.”

<sup>334</sup> CENAFOCO is a capacity-building course designed and funded by the federal government but implemented by local NGOs. In this case, the course is being taught in Acari favela, where Wesley, a young leader involved with Hip Hop lives.

<sup>335</sup> Bia Cardoso was recommended to us by André Urani, one of our board members. She represents an NGO in São Paulo, the Center for Education and Documentation of Community Action, and had scheduled a meeting with me that day to discuss their organization’s interest in establishing CTCs similar to the Casa but for exchange among educators.

<sup>336</sup> Palmeirinha is a *favela* located in the city’s North zone and whose first contact with CatComm was during this visit.

*asking...what it was they were hoping to discover about recycling. They told me about the program they wanted to set up: to obtain materials from community residents that could be recycled and transformed into toys, etc., to reduce the need to purchase items outside the favela...We sat down at the computer and did some research on recycling machines, organizations that support this sort of work...I showed them the Vigario project<sup>337</sup> and encouraged them to get in touch with (various groups)...I also helped them set up an email account...*

*Then Deley<sup>338</sup> strolls in and tells me he'd also like to open an email account. He also brings a newspaper article he'd like to scan about hip hop in Minas Gerais. Deley sits at the computer preparing the invites for his workshop in May<sup>339</sup> while I finish preparing the raffle tickets and pass them on to Angelo, who has just arrived.*

*By this point it's around 4 pm. Maybe a little later, I scan Deley's image and look for his pictures to accompany his project on the site upstairs on Andrew's old computer...I open an email account with Deley. Perhaps the highlight of the day... because when I send him his welcome email,...he replies to me (with a poem)...<sup>340</sup>*

As one can see in reading the journal entries above, it did not at any moment occur to me that Sam was not suited for the position. I perceived the day during which she had a performance, despite her alternative obligation of working with us, as an opportunity for me to have more direct contact with the day-to-day operations of the Casa. I focused on the fact that she kept things relatively tidy, that she was charismatic and happy to be there, and did not worry much about her limited computer skill or grasp of CatComm's mission. My tendency was to be grateful for the simple fact that someone was there taking the load off me, even if sometimes she missed work, or she did not have the skills to do the job as effectively as someone else might have (something that did not

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<sup>337</sup> Vigário is a *favela* known for extreme bouts of narcotraffic-related violence, which has a well-known community recycling initiative.

<sup>338</sup> Deley is a poet and community leader from the Acari *favela*.

<sup>339</sup> On May 5 Deley organized a "Word Workshop" at the Casa where youth leaders came together to write poetry that would then be converted into socially-concerned hip hop lyrics.

<sup>340</sup> From April 15, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "What a Week."

even occur to me at the time). It was only when I lost trust in her that I looked back and questioned. Trust is the first and most vital element with regard to staff.

To not require supervision one has to have a great deal of confidence in the ability of those with whom one is working. One has to trust their ethics and at the same time be convinced of their dedication and commitment to the organization's mission. One has to have a sense that the person understands the nature of the responsibility that is handed to them, and takes it very seriously. At CatComm, the trust-building process begins with my communicating my sentiments openly with staff, often asking for feedback on my management style and trying to ensure a high level of satisfaction with their work (in this way building their trust in me). What I quickly discovered during an episode of great frustration, however, was that trustworthiness was a quality that could not be built. It can unfold, become clearer with time, but cannot be fabricated. I described the episode, in which I discovered that for several days Sam had lied about having her Casa keys, then kept this information from me and even acted on it without informing me:

*(I should) write about the ups and downs, the ins and outs...So this morning I'm...sitting down to talk about the first time I'm going to have to fire someone...*

*...(The decision is) based on the fact that Sam told me lies. It's based on the fact that she broke my confidence in her. It's based on her lack of responsibility. Her neglecting to inform me of something vital to our organization and then trying to handle it her way, when it was something that by its nature involved me, and that I should be the one deciding how to handle...*

*So what did Sam do? (Though I didn't think of it this way at the time) it started months ago at Andrew's going away dinner when Sam...changed her personality (becoming excessively friendly) in order to enter the job. I thought at first this was her being nervous because she really wanted the job and would realize with time she could just be herself...*

*Months later, (at Pedra do Sal<sup>341</sup> this past) Sunday night, she was (being friendlier) than ever as she (performed beautifully), doing what she really loves, while she knew that her keys to the Casa were off somewhere, that she had lost them or they were stolen or “borrowed.” Just like nothing was going on.*

*When Rose arrived at the Pedra do Sal, Sam pulled her aside and asked for her Casa keys so that she could get in the next day to open up. Rose said they should tell me, but Sam said “No!” She (said she) would go home and find her keys.*

*...(It all started) on Friday night (when) she invited (someone) to stay at her place because he lives far away. She thinks (he) took her keys because the next day her house and Casa keys were gone, as were another friend’s keys from the purse next to hers. At first she thought her cats had moved them about. She borrowed her house keys from her mom. Later she couldn’t find the keys. Sunday still. Then came the...lie.*

*When I saw her at the Pedra do Sal and some Baianas<sup>342</sup> were needing to change at the Casa, I asked if she’d take them. She said her purse with the keys was in (someone’s) car. I almost gave her mine but then took the Baianas myself. When I got back to the Pedra...she had her purse with her. For something else I asked her about the keys. She (opened her purse, then) looked and looked and couldn’t find them. Said she only brought her house keys, not the Casa keys. In other words, she already knew the Casa keys weren’t there...but acted out a scene as if they were.*

*...Rose got there (the next day, Monday, to open up) and asked (the neighbor) if she’d seen anyone in the house Saturday night or Sunday morning. (The neighbor) said yes, around 10 am when she woke up.*

*Just as Rose was talking with (the neighbor), (a community leader) walked up. He overheard and Sam decided to talk with him and (the President of the local Neighborhood Association) about what happened! Now she involved the President of the local neighborhood association in defining their friend (the person who Sam had opened her house to on Friday night was a friend of theirs) as a thief! Without any warrant...*

*I explained on the phone with Rose last night that TRUST is the center of our work. Without that nothing else is possible. I spent three years building these relationships with communities and I intend to spend the rest of my life following*

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<sup>341</sup> Pedra do Sal is a historic point in Rio de Janeiro, where the slave and salt trades occurred and only one block from the Casa. During the latter half of 2003 a monthly samba event was occurring at the site, to renew interest in the cultural roots of the neglected city port region, and organized by the local Neighborhood Association. CatComm has been a partner in publicizing the event, and Sam’s work at the Casa brought her (and her performing abilities) to the attention of the local Association. Her band was therefore called to be the fixed act at the monthly event.

<sup>342</sup> The Baianas (traditional Afro-Brazilian women from Bahia State in the Northeast of Brazil) are a group of women whose project is documented on CatComm’s site and which focuses on cultural preservation. This group of Baianas was performing that evening at the Pedra do Sal event.

*up on that. And it is, so, my business, when someone working with our organization (undermines these years of work by) distrust(ing) someone we work with...(Only on Monday evening did Rose, not Sam, call to tell me that all of this had happened.).<sup>343</sup>*

As a result of this episode, I opened my eyes to the limitations inherent in hiring Sam to coordinate the Casa. I realized how potentially risky a poor hiring decision could be for Catalytic Communities as an organization, something that simply was not the case while the organization operated virtually. I also reflected on the past months and realized the Casa could accomplish much more, if only under the right leadership. Finally, in writing Chapter 4 about the Casa at this time, I began to take note of the important role the Casa was coming to have within CatComm. I came to the conclusion that in addition to the most important problem I had already encountered with regard to trust, that other qualities were lacking in my choice of Sam to manage the Casa. The level with which she made the relationships developed through the Casa into personal ones, a lack of vision relating to CatComm and the Casa, and other topics surfaced. On June 19 I described the difficult conversation I had with her the night before:

*So after we got off work at seven, Sam and I went walking along (the Avenue)... We agreed to stop for a Chopp<sup>344</sup> at the Amarelinho bar.*

*We got to the Amarelinho already feeling friendly, having just talked about personal things as friends, and then got into the conversation about how she was feeling. She told me she felt that given who she is, what she does (performing), she can't just separate things. I tried to explain that I, too, am involved with the projects... That I get to know their families, care about their lives. She wanted to know the difference... I said... that my involvement is always with the ultimate interest of helping them do their work better... That my... work influences (my) personal (life), and not the other way around.*

*...I said: you are not doing anything wrong. And neither am I. That is why this situation is so difficult. Because there is no good or bad, right or wrong. What I*

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<sup>343</sup> From June 10, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “Confiança” (Trust).

<sup>344</sup> Draft beer.

*can say is that this whole situation has made me think more, made me realize that what would be ideal in the role of the coordinator of the house is someone who wants to make that his or her universe, the center of their world. That would be using the house as a space to build a movement among community leaders, to make change, organizing and calling together workshops, meetings between community folks with similar interests recognized over time. Someone who has a long-term interest in this, for whom changing the world is seen by them as their main purpose in life...*

*Sam reacted amazingly well...Sam's first worry when I told her all of this was about the house. How people would react. Wouldn't it be better if she continues to go, if we tell people about this decision together? So that she wouldn't just disappear and people would not understand what had gone on?... We agreed that the change would be "organic," that she would leave slowly...That when we discover someone else they come in gradually, while she is there and then beyond.*

*I apologized for not having set some sort of testing period for this relationship...and that I hadn't known ahead of time better what would be best for the house...*

*This is the best way. Sam is the way she is, and she has many qualities. I could have focused on the problems she had in administering the house (and my loss of trust in her)...Instead I spoke of a real issue...even she couldn't disagree with, as to why this wasn't working out. But I gave her a safety net...a period in which she can...settle into new things, with flexible hours; my friendship that she can count on as a friend, and not as the head of Ca tComm; and access to the house... to come 'voluntarily, not necessarily as a volunteer' to hang out.<sup>345</sup>*

As one can see, I did not discuss the trust issue at all when I spoke with Sam. I did not want the discussion to turn nasty, which would undoubtedly have been the case had I done so. One can also sense that by this point, though trust was the initial issue that sparked my realization that Sam was not appropriate for the job, other issues surfaced. And I made a diplomatic decision, too, that explaining to visitors of the Casa (and others) why Sam had left would be easier if the focus was not on the incident surrounding the keys but, rather, on her long-term interests, dedication, and skills relating to the work at the Casa.

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<sup>345</sup> From June 19, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "No one's wrong."

### *What Managers Say...*

If there is one point of agreement in the management literature, regardless of the perspective, it is the importance of careful selection of staff. Whether this is done to ensure a similarity with the internal status quo, or with an eye to accentuate diversity of staff opinion, all managers recognize the importance of careful recruitment. Particularly “If...you...allow autonomy(,) you...have to be extremely careful how you select the person to whom you give responsibility. If you are not careful you can give autonomy to a person you have wrongly selected”.<sup>346</sup>

It is after this basic premise – that effective recruitment is important – that managers’ opinions diverge. What to do if a staff person does not fulfill expectations, whatever they may be?

One approach is to fire individuals who do not cleanly fit into their particular corporate culture. In a study of English family firms, Goffee and Scase’s<sup>347</sup> informants suggest that such firms fire individuals who do not buy into the owners’ ways of doing business. “The personality of the people sitting at the head of the company is all-important...unless your views are somewhat akin I don’t think you can live in a private company”.<sup>348</sup> In fact, Goffee and Scase noted that in such firms “shared values are extremely important since there is little potential for inter-personal rivalry. Either senior managers *accept* the owners’ prerogatives or they must leave; hence, the commonly-observed ‘happy atmosphere’ of family firms is partly a function of this selective

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<sup>346</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985: 62.

<sup>347</sup> 1985.

<sup>348</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985: 60.

process.<sup>349</sup> This is the way of life among family firms because, as one senior manager informed them: “In a private company you must have control at the center because, after all, the owner and his family have invested and they, quite rightly, don’t want to see all their investment dissipated”.<sup>350</sup>

In a public company, however, “responsibilities are more clearly laid down and you have the ultimate discipline of the share-holders to back you...personalities...(are) not quite as important”.<sup>351</sup> In fact, as Leonard and Straus<sup>352</sup> suggest, diversity of ideas and approaches is an asset to firms in today’s economy: “Innovation takes place when different ideas, perceptions, and ways of processing and judging information collide. And it often requires collaboration among players who see the world differently...(The goal is to) get different approaches to grate against one another in a productive process...call(ed) *creative abrasion*”.<sup>353</sup> They warn that “complete homogeneity in an organization's cognitive approach can be very efficient. But...no matter how brilliant the group of individuals, their contributions to innovative problem solving are enhanced by coming up against totally different perspectives”.<sup>354</sup>

One of the successes behind Amazon.com, in fact, was the founder’s dedication to staff recruitment quality and diversity: “From the beginning, Bezos said, he looked for ‘intense, hard-working, smart people,’ who were secure enough to ‘hire other great people.

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<sup>349</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985: 62, summarizing Curran and Stanworth 1979.

<sup>350</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985: 59.

<sup>351</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985: 60.

<sup>352</sup> 1999: 57.

<sup>353</sup> A heterogeneous working environment does not take naturally to creative abrasion, however. Expertise by managers, following protocols like those elaborated by Leonard and Straus, are necessary. If not, the tendency is for lesser degrees of agreement to increase the chances of subcultures emerging in such (heterogeneous) working environments (Koene et al. 1997: 291).

<sup>354</sup> Leonard and Straus 1999: 70.

When I interview somebody, I spend about a third of the interview asking them questions designed to ascertain whether or not they can hire great people...If (our managers) don't hire them, they'll be working for them down the road.'...He also wanted to attract people who had a talent or quality – unrelated to the job...'When you are working very hard and very long hours, you want to be around people who are interesting and fun to be with'".<sup>355</sup> Unlike in private family-type firms, in environments where diversity and creative abrasion are valued, someone not working out in one area of the firm may well be an asset to another.

Peter Drucker confirms that a Bezos-style approach is, in fact, very useful among not-for-profits: "It is a common complaint that many bosses (in not-for-profits) do not really want top-performing subordinates because they put pressure on them. That's just what an effective organization *does* want".<sup>356</sup>

In not-for-profit organizations there may be a special ethical argument in favor of keeping individuals once you have hired them. Drucker emphasizes the importance of developing the staff of these types of organizations. He tells us that "no organization...(can)...reasonably hope to recruit and hold much better people than anybody else, unless it is a very small organization"<sup>357</sup>...An effective manager *must*...get more out of the people he or she has".<sup>358</sup> "The successful institutions do as the Girl Scouts does. They measure themselves as much by the development of their staff and

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<sup>355</sup> Spector 2002: 106-7.

<sup>356</sup> Drucker 1990: 151.

<sup>357</sup> This may be true in resource-limited not-for-profits, but it conflicts with what [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)'s Jeff Bezos implied for private enterprise in the previous paragraph.

<sup>358</sup> Drucker 1990: 145.

volunteers as by the development of the young girls”.<sup>359</sup> “You may put somebody into a specific job and the chemistry is wrong...So, you try them in another job. The old rule is, if they try, work with them. If they don’t try, you’re better off if they work for the competition”.<sup>360</sup> The message is: develop staff, looking for their qualities rather than dismissing them, unless they do not make an effort.

Catalytic Communities has elements of all of the organizations described above – the family firm, the innovative start-up, and the not-for-profit. As the founder, for example, I will intuitively have some of the feelings of ownership associated with founders of family firms. One example is the difficulty I have of letting go of my current position with regard to information in the organization. It is very difficult, after dedicating three years of one’s life to the development of a mission, to accept the loss of control associated with a larger staff and autonomous workers: that not all decisions will be made by you. Even those of us who recognize intellectually the importance of decentralizing control have a difficult time doing this after such an investment.

On the other hand, CatComm resembles publicly-traded start-ups, particularly the dot coms, that sprouted from and value innovative thinking. It is vital that new projects sprout from staff reflection and discussion. For this reason, the importance of developing a diverse and creative, autonomous and non-hierarchical staff is essential to meeting the organization’s mission.

But Catalytic Communities is a not-for-profit organization. This brings with it certain ethical implications that cannot be ignored – staff, once hired, should be

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<sup>359</sup> Drucker 1990: 151.

<sup>360</sup> Drucker 1990: 150.

developed (assuming serious failures, like the breaking of trust, have not been committed). It would not suit our mission if CatComm hired and fired staff without plenty of investment in development. This, of course, brings us back to the importance of careful recruiting in the first place.

In the case of CatComm described above, without having read the recommendations of management experts ahead of time, a chicken-and-egg problem emerged. Before hiring and learning from one's hiring decisions, one does not have a clear sense of the characteristics to look for. Then, having made an inappropriate choice, a decision must be made. Should one: A) Develop the person further; B) Assign the person a different task; or C) Ask the person to leave.

When the issue that leads to this conclusion is that of trust or, Drucker would add, a lack of effort on the staff person's part, the answer should be C. Only with trust can responsibility be doled out. And at that point assigning responsibility and encouraging creative thinking are ways of building additional trust among staff and making them feel a greater stake in the organization and team.

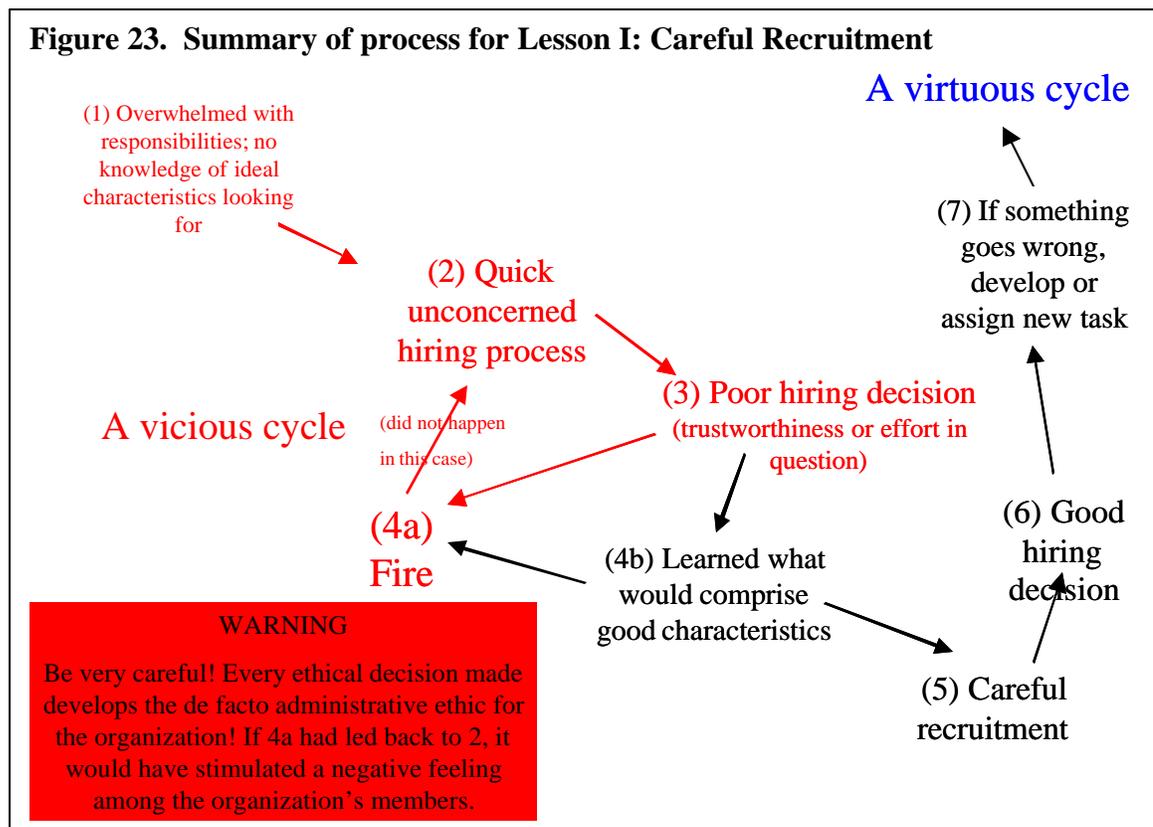
Cooper<sup>361</sup> informs us that, as administrators, ethical issues arise constantly and that there is often no right or wrong answer as to how we cope with them, that "We construct socially our values, beliefs, and ethical norms as we interact with each other over time".<sup>362</sup> It is important we are careful how those questions get answered, however, because "The answers we give to these questions over time amount to a de facto

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<sup>361</sup> 1998.

<sup>362</sup> Cooper 1998: 34.

administrative ethic (for the organization).<sup>363</sup> The organization will be marked by how its managers approach ethical issues. In the case of not-for-profit organizations, where the matching of means and ends is particularly important, consideration with regard to the handling of ethical decisions is particularly vital. Hence, again, the importance of making careful hiring decisions in the first place.



<sup>363</sup> Cooper 1998: 6.

## ***Lesson II: Expectations Govern Behavior***

### ***The Story...***

It was after this critical episode that my confidence started to increase and I began to realize that I could ask for more from staff. That, in fact, I had to. It would cost much more to have irresponsible staff, particularly now that CatComm was no longer virtual, even if it meant taking longer to recruit and select those individuals. I realized that appropriate staffing becomes much more critical as the face of the organization becomes concentrated in one physical space. The face-to-face element is what builds trust among Rio-based community leaders in CatComm. Who they encounter from the staff is therefore of utmost importance. A longer recruitment and selection process would also raise the expectations of those being hired.

The salary, I grew to realize, is not negligible by Brazilian standards.<sup>364</sup> I began to think with a bit more savvy and in a more entrepreneurial way. The replacement for Sam's position would not be hired by inquiring among friends or current staff. I would design a job description and ask for *it all*. I would email it to university professors and NGO managers that I knew. I would designate a 3-month trial period and promise a salary increase after six months, with potential increases as the organization grows. We would then select among the interested applicants, following the receipt of a CV, letter of

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<sup>364</sup> I had felt previously that given what Catalytic Communities was able to offer at that time – approximately US\$300/month – we had to cope with what we could get.

introduction, and formal interview. CONGESCO<sup>365</sup> would be asked for their approval among the finalists.

What impressed me during this process was the quality of the five applicants that came forward. They included: Jocelene, an Afro-Brazilian graduate student who had worked on numerous research and NGO assignments surrounding issues facing the *favelas*; Thelma Santos, a Thai-Brazilian city planning doctoral student who had been a volunteer with Catalytic Communities over the previous year, helping community leaders rethink and prepare funding proposals (Thelma was six months pregnant at this point); Edson Cardoso, a young, high-energy and entrepreneurial community leader working on his undergraduate degree (Edson was so outgoing that he had received funding from an international foundation which, due to his persistence, had created a new funding category solely to fit his needs); Rosa Zambrano, a Chilean who had lived in Brazil for more than half her life, had worked with environmental causes, teaching Spanish, and with *quilombos*;<sup>366</sup> and Maria, a professional journalist looking for a new direction in life.

### ***What Managers Say...***

Management guru Peter Drucker suggests that effective hiring begins with a strong diagnostic recruitment process that lasts for months. This process begins with “an assignment—not merely with a job description but an assignment. Next...look at more than one person...so (executives) have a safeguard against being blinded by friendship,

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<sup>365</sup> CONGESCO, once again, is the Community Managers Council of Rio de Janeiro, a network of community leaders from various parts of the city with whom Catalytic Communities had developed a close partnership.

<sup>366</sup> *Quilombos* are settlements, some of which still exist, originally established by escaped slaves.

by prejudice, or merely by habit. Thirdly, while reviewing candidates, the focus must always be on performance. Don't start with personality...does he get along with people, or does she have initiative?...The right questions are: How have these people done in their last three assignments? Have they come through? Then, fourth, look at people's specific strengths...The final step—(go) to two people with whom she has worked...(Then) ninety days later...(call the employee and ask her to) think through what she has to do to be successful...When she returns with her report, you can finally judge whether you have selected the right person".<sup>367</sup>

The extensive hiring process Drucker encourages is one way of instilling in new staff the seriousness of their tasks, and the importance of their effectiveness in meeting demands. It is an example of how an organizational manager demonstrates his or her expectations at an early stage in an effort to develop effective future behavior.

In his well-known book, *Leadership is an Art*, Max De Pree begins by telling us that "the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor".<sup>368</sup>

Utilizing expectations to govern behavior, therefore, involves a great deal of work on the manager's part. As the leader, a manager must set the tone that staff will follow and take responsibility for his or her actions. There are many tasks that leaders owe their staff if they expect results to follow: "Leaders owe a clear statement of the values of the organization...Leaders are responsible for such things as a sense of quality in the institution...Leaders owe the organization a new reference point for what caring,

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<sup>367</sup> Drucker 1990: 146.

<sup>368</sup> De Pree 1989: 11.

purposeful, committed people can be in the institutional setting...(because) what we can do is merely a consequence of what we can be”.<sup>369</sup>

De Pree’s specific mention of commitment is particularly relevant here. We have established that in Catalytic Communities’ case my role shares important elements with that of the founder of a family firm. As such, my organizational commitment is strongest because I have a ‘total stake’ in the organization, as one advisor described. Commitment to the organization therefore becomes an even more important expectation in my case with regard to staff. So, in addition to trust, commitment is a critical expectation.

There are many ways that leaders set the expectations of the organization’s employees high, so that behavior follows accordingly: “Leaders are *obligated to provide and maintain momentum*...Momentum comes from a clear vision of what the (organization) ought to be, from a well-thought-out strategy to achieve that vision, and from carefully conceived and communicated directions and plans that enable everyone to participate and be publicly accountable”.<sup>370</sup>

Reflecting on Drucker and De Pree, we learn that when it comes to staff, an effective manager should focus on a thorough recruitment process that leaves clear in the mind of the prospective employee the expectations placed on him and that, once the hiring process is complete, the manager has a *responsibility* to set his or her sights high – defining the reality, the expectations, including the organization’s values and mission, that will continue to guide the staff person’s behavior.

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<sup>369</sup> De Pree 1989: 14-15.

<sup>370</sup> De Pree 1989: 17-18.

Trust is also a vital element here. Only with trust can one cede responsibility that, in turn, increases productivity. As far back as the 1930s Hawthorne Studies, it has been found that “worker performance could be improved if workers were allowed freedom to control their work, were treated with respect, and were able to build group support”.<sup>371</sup> But to do this expectations must be guiding those workers.

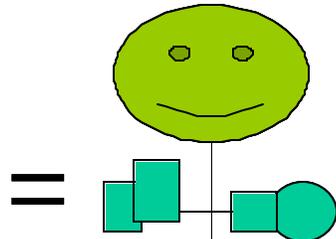
**Figure 24. Summary of process for Lesson II: Expectations Govern Behavior**

Extensive, detailed recruitment process (Lesson I)



Leadership that transmits carefully what is expected (Lesson II) by:

1. Setting the tone staff will follow (clearly defines reality)
2. Investing time to train, answer questions (serves)
3. Providing clear objectives, organizational values, and a sense of quality (owes)
4. Proclaiming gratitude (thanks)



Staff ready to work

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<sup>371</sup> Dyer 1984: 15.

### *Lesson III: Invest Time on Staff*

#### *The Story...*

After careful thought, Rose and I decided, for various reasons, that selecting two part-time people would be best. We realized that the three most appropriate candidates (the first three described above) were part-time students who would not be able to work full-time. We expected that more people on staff would diversify the opinions, networks, and skills on which we could count. As we saw in our own lives, the intensity of the work and pre-set hours at the Casa mean the job takes a heavier toll when it occupies a full-time schedule, particularly for those with other interests. At the same time, those who have dedicated their lives to community development but who at the same time are still studying and pursuing parallel interests will bring more energy and ideas to the table. We also realized that on a part-time basis those involved would be able to dedicate themselves 100% to the organization when they are there, without having to involve competing interests during their work hours. Finally, community leaders may prefer the approach of one of the two individuals, rather than the other.

Selecting two individuals would mean they would have to overlap some, to fill one another in on daily happenings. It might also be good to establish one of the two individuals as “in charge” in some sense, over the area of work – the management of the Casa, in this case – so that there would be someone ultimately responsible for coordinating difficult matters. Rose and I settled on Thelma and Edson for the position. Jocelene was already working very hard in other areas of her life, which had been clear at her interview. Maria realized at her interview that working at the Casa was not exactly

what she had in mind. And Rosa seemed more appropriate for other activities. In fact we also hired Rosa to develop the Spanish version of the website on a part-time basis.

The arrangement worked quite well. I was very happy to have such highly capable staff managing the Casa. It felt like I could finally have the distance I needed to resolve other aspects of my life: preparing CatComm's international outreach strategy, catch up on important partnership-related correspondence, settling bureaucratic issues, moving forward with new ideas for the website that had come along but which were not yet being implemented, and writing my dissertation. Thelma was full of ideas and Edson bubbling with energy. Rose found herself more able to dedicate herself to the Portuguese website, and now we had Rosa doing the same with Spanish. All that was missing was the international outreach strategy.

During the first month and a half with Thelma and Edson on the team it was clear to me that the choice we had made was a good one. Thelma brought with her a light aura of tranquility and expertise: she had ideas about managing the space, new workshops that she could offer, support she could provide in project elaboration for community leaders. Edson overflows with energy, enthusiasm, and is a bright go-getter. I could not have been more satisfied.

Despite the quality of these staff picks, however, by mid-September I found myself feeling unsatisfied. After some soul-searching, I got to the two roots of the problem. On September 18 I wrote about one of them, that Thelma and Edson were using their time at the Casa to do outside work:

*Something about the staff is bugging me...I think it's the way Thelma and Edson use their work time for other activities – studies, mostly.*

*(An advisor) made some suggestions: ‘Tell them how hard it was to get money, money’s not always going to be here and you need to use your time well now, show results, do with what you have’... ‘Have Thelma and Edson read all the projects in the site?’*

*(He) also reminded me that I hired them because they are people capable of doing all of the things I do, that jobs are not totally defined, are not limited to (a fixed number of) actions, that everyone will end up doing a bit of everything (which is great, consequently, for learning), and that there is always so much more to do that it is an opportunity to move beyond and be creative (in the interests of Catalytic Communities) when we have extra moments to ourselves.*

I imagined what I would say to them:

*When I hired you to work at the Casa the idea was that you would make it happen—when there are no visitors, you’ll call folks. When there’s free time, you’ll organize, clean, structure the presence list, take note of relationships between different projects, rethink the website, prepare content. Nothing should be done at the Casa that is not of direct relevance to the NGO. Only do school work if it’s something publishable on the website.*

*... Whoever’s in the house it’s (your) responsibility to sit and participate in the workshops, to know how they operate and be there, make sure there is coffee and biscuits during the breaks, explain to newcomers what the Casa is about.*

Then I pulled back once again and reflected:

*It’s important to be patient with aspects of personality, etc., but impatient with regard to basics about the role of staff – responsibilities, ethics, etc. Otherwise...the person will... (think) all they have to do is punch the clock. This is not a job about punching the clock. It is a job about creating a movement, with the few resources we have and time that we’re guaranteed now, that we may not be guaranteed a year from now.<sup>372</sup>*

At the time I felt like this was a personality flaw on the part of Thelma and Edson, despite their high qualification for the position, as if they were not taking the work seriously. I had hoped that I was hiring two individuals that would take on the role of managing the Casa as a personal mission, an opportunity to make change and, instead, it

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<sup>372</sup> From September 18, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “What’s Been Bugging Me.”

seemed to me that whenever they had a free moment they were preparing assignments for university or reading books.

Though it should have been clear that I needed to communicate effectively with them about this, at the time I felt instead like that would be “bossy.” I have such respect for them and have such a strong commitment to participatory, democratic processes, that I found it difficult to speak with them. Instead, at the next staff meeting, I only superficially addressed the issue:

*Yesterday at the staff meeting I gave them parts of the site to work on. What else can they be doing?*

- 1) Getting to know the site and noting changes we should make to the visual element/structure;*
- 2) Adding content to different sections, researching;*
- 3) Setting up meetings for new groups to get to know the house.<sup>373</sup>*

Though I identified three additional tasks they could pursue, I did not even mention those. During the staff meeting I only brought up that when the Casa is relatively empty, there was still work to be done on the website. This was my roundabout way of handling the problem. I then assigned Thelma and Edson to focus on a section of the site in addition to their work in managing the Casa. Essentially, I thought my task was simply to hire and tell them broadly what their work was about, and that they would then do the rest. I had a hard time following up.

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<sup>373</sup> From September 18, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “*What’s Been Bugging Me.*”

### *What Managers Say...*

Investment in the staff should not just occur during a careful recruitment process. It should go beyond, ensuring that new staff know what they need to know, are given the resources to do their job, are placed in the most appropriate role given their talents, are involved in decision-making, and are evaluated for performance. “The non-profit executive must learn how to *place* people’s strengths...Focus on strengths. Then make really stringent demands, and take the time and trouble...to review performance”.<sup>374</sup>

Only through time invested in staff development will staff understand the nature of their responsibility and take it seriously. No matter how qualified, without appropriate information and attention, from the beginning, they will no longer understand the nature of the responsibility that comes with the mission of the organization. “One of the great strengths of a non-profit organization is that people don’t work for a living, they work for a cause...That also creates a tremendous responsibility for the institution, to keep the flame alive, not to allow work to become just a ‘job’”.<sup>375</sup>

It is the responsibility of “Leaders (to)...deliver to their organizations the appropriate services, products, tools, and equipment that people in the organization need in order to be accountable”.<sup>376</sup> Once recruitment had occurred, my investment in staff had dwindled. My expectations had been made clear and I thought that was that. But what was missing was the regular and constant investment of attention the staff needed from me.

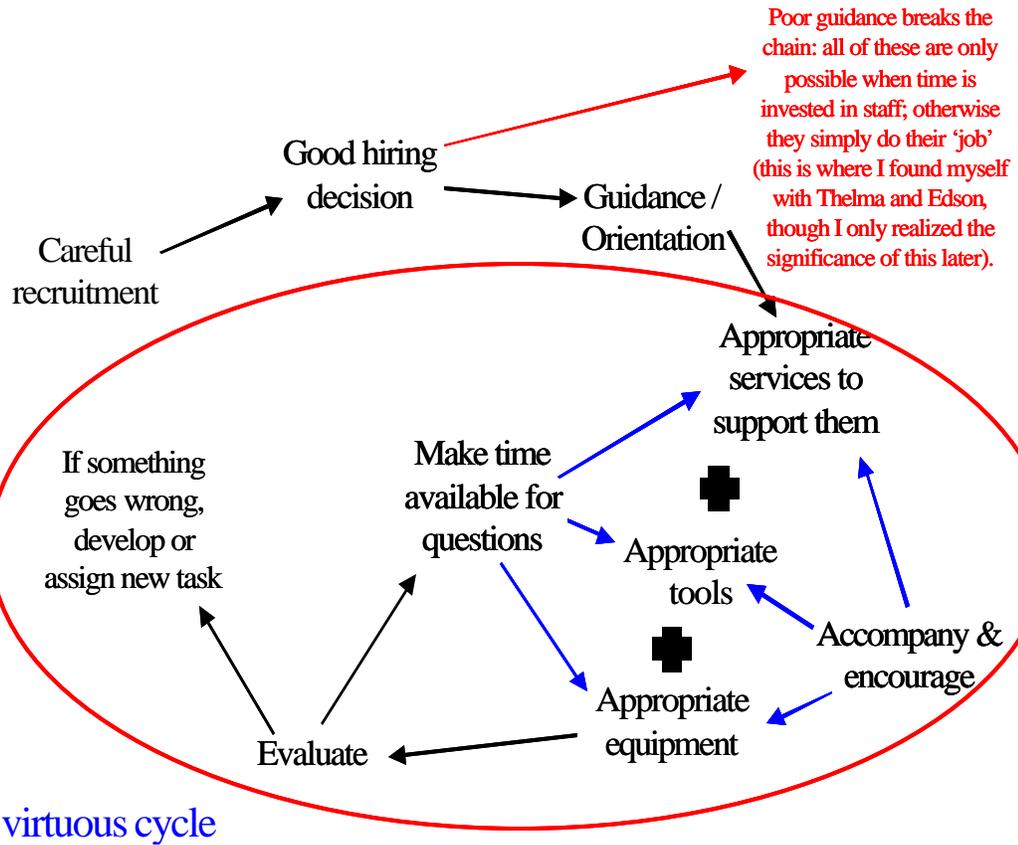
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<sup>374</sup> Drucker 1990: 149.

<sup>375</sup> Drucker 1990: 150.

<sup>376</sup> De Pree 1989: 13.

**Figure 25. Summary of process for Lesson III: Invest Time on Staff**



## *Lesson IV: Communicate*

### *The Story...*

Given the feeling I was having of being overwhelmed, I felt that taking on new projects without completing the dissertation would create additional stresses, rather than opportunities for savoring CatComm's development:

*I should(n't add other activities) to the pie right now. I like to enjoy each thing, savor it, and move on to the next. Don't want to fill my life with so much that I can't enjoy any of it.*<sup>377</sup>

I felt that I could not pursue new challenges until the dissertation was complete:

*I realize that I miss the 'we can do it!' feeling associated with new...objectives. I settled, because I know I have to prioritize my dissertation right now, because things are stable (and) progressing on their own.*<sup>378</sup>

I decided I would spend the month of November 2003 working on my dissertation from Philadelphia. In the meantime, I had three weeks in Rio in which to resolve a long list of tasks and leave things prepared for my absence.

A sense of guilt, no doubt, that I would be taking a full month off contributed to my stress. I worked over 60 hours each of those three weeks. It was a whirlwind. And then, all of a sudden, at a staff meeting in mid-October, it happened. I woke up. Thelma came to the staff meeting, despite already being out on maternity leave, in order to share the feelings she was having. The line that began it all was when she told us: "I've been thinking we should talk about the team (aspect). That I think a team does not exist (here), all that exists are a bunch of Theresa's employees."

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<sup>377</sup> From September 11, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "...Going to Fall."

<sup>378</sup> From October 13, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled "Crazy Phase."

I was taken aback. I had just been defending myself at this meeting. We had just been discussing a party CatComm had thrown for its third birthday that did not work out very well. The suggestion for the party as a fundraising opportunity had been made by an outsider who was not familiar with the local reality we operated in. As a result, not many community leaders attended (despite the cost for entry being approximately \$2). In addition, the two people who had come forward to help organize the party were not staff members but, rather, visitors of the Casa. Staff were not involved in deciding to throw a party or in deciding the way it would be organized. I had thought that this initiative on the part of outsiders was great, that it reduced what was asked of staff. This may have been poor thinking, however. Because, as a result, when it came time for staff to carry out what would be required of us – outreach ahead of time and logistics during the day of the event – staff participation was not genuine. The party was then criticized at this meeting, and to some extent I felt attacked. I defended myself explaining, vehemently, that one of the reasons the event did not attract many people was that the staff had not conducted any outreach, that I spent a stressful last day in Rio before a previous trip, and my hours at the airport, preparing and printing invitations for the event, then preparing an online version, for distribution in my absence. But that when I returned from that trip little outreach had been conducted and we were forced to do it all at the last minute.

It was then that Thelma brought up her feelings as to a lack of teamwork. That, in her eyes, the staff was “a bunch of Theresa’s employees.” She went on to insist that we spend time “thinking about how we will build (a team).” She also expressed the frustration she felt that when she did things in her way, at her rhythm, I would “arrive

(and ask, “Have you already documented these (new) people (to the presence list)? No? Oh, in that case I will go ahead and document them.” Thelma felt that I would watch over her and pressure her to do things my way, when her way was as effective. I realized at this point that I did that in part because of the frustration that I had that she did schoolwork on the job which I had only the week before finally found a (roundabout) way to mention.

That night I wrote one long Journal entry based on my feelings that day. I spoke of how I felt and how I handled it:

*I handled it well – explained that I wanted them to be frank with me, that when I ask for people to talk at meetings it’s exactly to vent this sort of thing, that I don’t enjoy nor does it make me feel good when I have to ‘order,’ but that sometimes the position puts me in that place. I said I thought Thelma was feeling this more than others...I said the reason she’s feeling it worse is because I really did ‘order’ (her) because I saw her studying without having documented people, etc.*

*...If what they want is a true team environment, everyone’s tasks need to be clearly defined, and we need to all feel comfortable sending tasks to that person who’s responsible for that thing. So let’s get to defining that!<sup>379</sup>*

What was remarkable during this staff meeting was that after my initial defensive reaction to Thelma’s comment, I calmed down and realized that this was good, that her opening up in this way would make it possible for me to reflect and be a more effective manager. I also realized that it was essential I give the impression (even if it was hurting me) of calmness and of being open to this, because that would make people comfortable expressing themselves in the future.

Over the coming weeks this experience made me more assertive, realizing that my position as *Executive Director* meant I was to direct and execute. Because I founded

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<sup>379</sup> From October 22, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “Não é equipe, somos empregados da Theresa.”

Catalytic Communities one might expect that I would have felt ownership much as the founder of a family business would. Though that might have initially been the case, by this point I had begun a transition to viewing my position as a *job* as part of an organization in which we were all in the same boat as staff<sup>380</sup> working towards a common mission. Within this context I am like other staff members, except that my particular role is one of directing and executing a team.<sup>381</sup> I realized at that meeting that one important tool I can use in the future is an objectives list that the staff will prepare on their own and that can be used to measure their own set of accomplishments. Such a definition of roles will help clarify future responsibilities.

At the same time, Thelma's confrontation made me realize I had been micromanaging, and that at least a partial solution would have been to bring up her studying at work weeks before, when I first observed it. Nip it in the bud, so to say, rather than living with it and letting it affect my treatment of her in other areas.

What is interesting is that when we are working beyond our natural capacity – during stressful moments when we have no moments to ourselves – the tendency is to become increasingly self-involved. I was so overworked and worried about all of my responsibilities that not only was I not seeing the humanity in myself – taking the time necessary to arrange my life in order to reduce those stresses – but I also did not see the humanity in others and took on an abrasive tone in my general interactions with people.

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<sup>380</sup> It is interesting that in Portuguese the word for team and staff is one and the same: *equipe*.

<sup>381</sup> Being likened to an “owner” reverted us to what I viewed as an earlier stage in the organization, prior to having staff, when I worked mostly in isolation as the sole full-time volunteer.

In addition, I realized I had grown increasingly critical of staff over time. In the beginning, I was so grateful to anyone that would help build CatComm that I accepted all the flaws that came with them. This was likely also due to the perspective that a less stressful existence allows. Though it is vital that we have high expectations of staff, we must also accept their basic humanity that, in reality, is an asset to the work. Rather than respond with lack of tolerance, managers need to respond with training, understanding, and communication.

### *What Managers Say...*

“How can one deal with...times of conflict? It seems natural to attempt to stop the person who is bothersome, whereupon he or she becomes a target of change. Feedback—informing the person that his or her behavior bothers us—is often initially employed in the hope that it will be sufficient impetus to provoke change”.<sup>382</sup>

Feedback between and among staff is vital to the effective, healthy development of a not-for-profit institution. Dissent should not be viewed as a barrier, as it might be in private family firms but, rather, as an opportunity for review and revision, of organizational culture formation. But, as Drucker points out, though “dissent...is essential for effective decision making(,) feuding and bickering are not. In fact, they must not be tolerated. They destroy the spirit of an organization”.<sup>383</sup>

Dissent and the discussion provoked by it, as is the case with other types of feedback, can be very healthy for an organization. Communication and information

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<sup>382</sup> Dyer 1984: 56.

<sup>383</sup> Drucker 1990: 114.

exchange by staff are necessary, but only when presented in a way that is constructive, in a way that furthers the organization's mission: "The most important *do* is to build the organization around information and communication instead of around hierarchy...Everyone needs to learn to ask two questions: What information do I need to do *my* job—from who, when, how? And: What information do I owe others so that they can do *their* job, in what form, and when?... (Today) we have enormous information capacity. This means that organizations can be much flatter and have many fewer layers".<sup>384</sup>

Communication therefore stimulates the building of an organizational culture, facilitates effective handling of one's job and that of others, and allows for less hierarchy. It is also essential for allowing us to see things from other angles. All of a sudden we remember we are not at the center of other peoples' worlds but only of our own. Until Thelma called attention to how *she* was feeling, the story in my Dissertation Journal spoke only of my feelings. Her communication created a shift of focus away from me. At the root of the problem had been my lack of communication with her in the past. When this meeting took place I still had not directly discussed with her my concerns over her utilizing her time on staff in order to prepare university papers. I also did not fully communicate the stresses that were influencing my behavior. All of this was affecting my relationship with her and the rest of the staff. It was when Thelma confronted me, expressing her dissent, that my eyes were opened and I began to reflect inwards. I then read a self-help book that tells the tale of a man who, in learning to take care of his own

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<sup>384</sup> Drucker 1990: 115.

needs, learns to take care of others, his family, and the world around him.<sup>385</sup> Rather than blaming staff for what were clearly other stresses in my life and my own inability to invest time in them and communicate, I should have been addressing those things that were stressing me.<sup>386</sup>

One of the major problems organizations face is exactly this, that “each of us (has) the propensity to find someone or something outside ourselves to blame when things go wrong”.<sup>387</sup> Senge diagnoses this as one of the primary ‘learning disabilities’ organizations face that keep them from reaching their full potential. This is linked to a lack of systems thinking. “‘Out there’ and ‘in here’ are usually part of a single system,” Senge tells us, “This learning disability makes it almost impossible to detect the leverage which we can use ‘in here’ on problems”.<sup>388</sup>

As was clear in the discussion of De Pree’s thoughts on leadership in Lesson II, it is through communication that a manager imparts to staff the importance of the work they are undertaking. Unlike transactional leaders who “exchange wages, gifts, votes, prestige, advancement, or other valued things,” not-for-profit organizations rely on leadership that is transformational in nature, in which “followers (are drawn) out of a narrow, parochial interest into a ‘higher’ purpose...Through the leader’s inspiring,

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<sup>385</sup> Johnson 1991.

<sup>386</sup> A simple way of doing this was to begin being “straight” with staff, which I have since done. Doing outside work during staff hours has been abandoned. Thelma realized that she could not handle so much and left Edson full-time in her place. Edson and Rosa are interested in making their roles in CatComm full-time sometime during 2004.

<sup>387</sup> Senge 1990: 19.

<sup>388</sup> Senge 1990: 20.

teaching, and modeling, the followers' motives and aspirations are transformed into higher-order needs and visions to achieve intended change".<sup>389</sup>

In order to succeed, there must be constant communication in the organization among staff. Employees need to understand the executive within his or her complex and demanding position: "The (executive) functions at a critical point in the process by which influence is converted to action. From one direction, he receives the demands of the external influencers, formally through the board and informally through the other external means of influence. And in the other direction, he stands formally responsible for the actions of the organization, for ensuring that it performs its mission effectively while satisfying its various influencers".<sup>390</sup> The executive is in this special position because only s/he coordinates conflicting demands "with a sense of the whole...At (other) levels...this complex totality is lost".<sup>391</sup>

On the other hand, each staff person is in a special position.<sup>392</sup> Though Mintzberg emphasizes the power relationships at play in organizations, I would argue that in a well-managed not-for-profit organization Mintzberg's *System of Ideology* brings the staff

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<sup>389</sup> Luke 1998: 25.

<sup>390</sup> Mintzberg 1983: 114.

<sup>391</sup> Papandreou 1952: 190.

<sup>392</sup> According to Mintzberg, there are four Systems that dictate power dynamics within an organization (the internal influencers). The *System of Authority* is that dictated by those individuals with formally recognized power—mainly the executive and other managers. Second is "the *System of Ideology* (which can serve to knit all of the insiders into a cohesive unit, although it does not derive from formal authority), (and is) based on traditions, beliefs, myths or stories of the organization that the different insiders share, as 'members.' Essentially this system draws on the *loyalty* of the insiders...(Then,) to the extent that the employees...are skilled and knowledgeable specialists, or 'experts,' in their own right, a *System of Expertise* arises (that)...serves to distribute power unevenly, on the basis of talent, giving rise to voice wherever it is found. Here coordination of the work is achieved...by virtue of the mutual adjustment among different experts or else from another body of standards, based on skills and knowledge...(Finally,) a *System of Politics* arises—one of illegitimate power...coupled with conflict...(that is used) to circumvent, resist, or even disrupt the other systems of influence in order to accomplish ends they personally believe to be important" (Mintzberg 1983: 117).

together while the other three Systems play lesser roles. The *System of Authority* will occasionally be called into play within a team environment when a centralized decision needs to be made, but will naturally be called into question by the *System of Expertise*. In such institutions, as Drucker alluded to, there is no room for the *System of Politics* to come into play.

The importance of communication in an organization cannot be understated, for this is what humanizes all individuals in one another's eyes and helps them return their focus to their commonalities – their mission, and how to get there.

Catalytic Communities benefits from all of the elements that Blair attributes to a successful team:<sup>393</sup> specific, interdependent roles; common objectives; shared values; mutual trust and bonding; frequent interaction; honest communication; definable membership; and the ability to act in a unitary manner.<sup>394</sup> Because time for honest communication was made during organizational staff meetings, Thelma felt comfortable coming forward. And through her dissent and the conversation it fostered, mutual trust and bonding occurred. The values of the organization were confirmed. And, as a result, membership boundaries became clearer. Ideally, then, by creating such environments for the development of a common understanding of the pressures faced individually and as a group, a team environment is, indeed, strengthened.

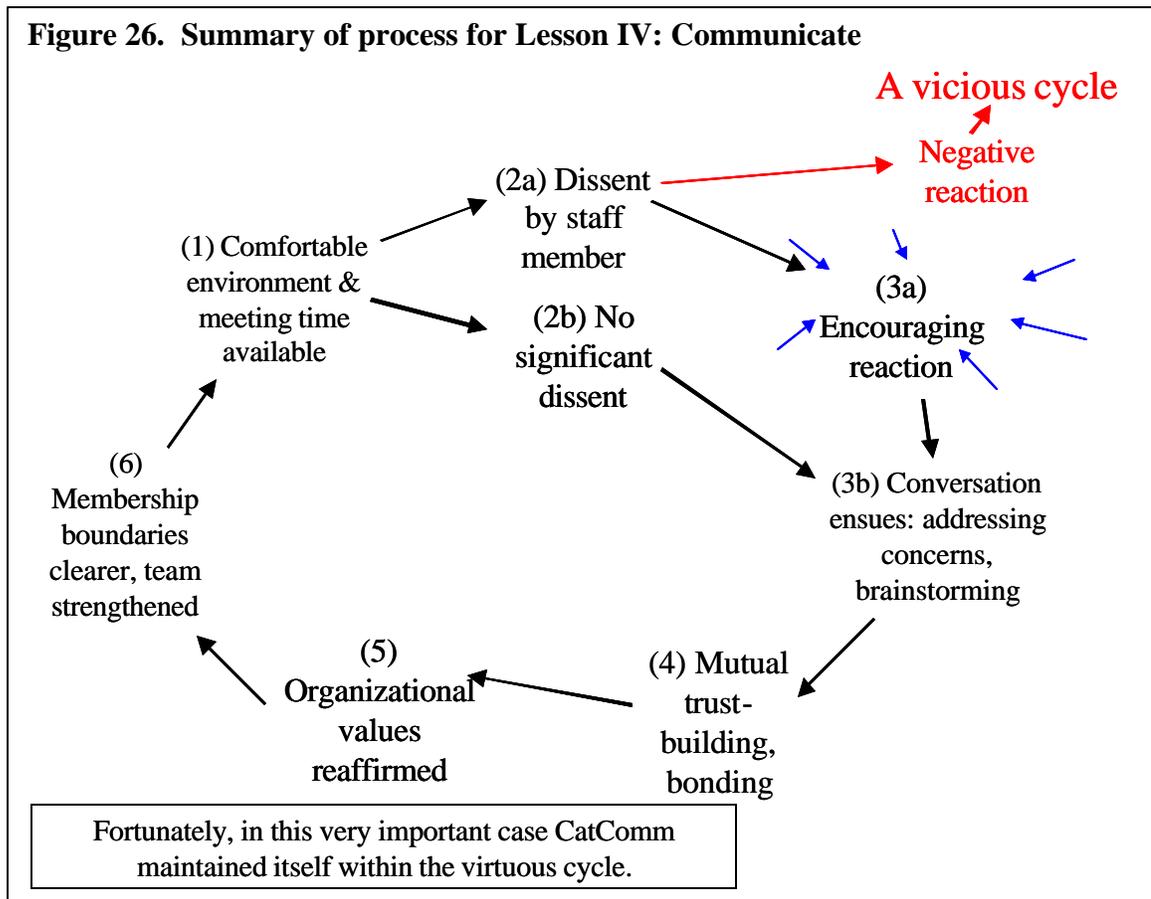
At this point staff roles and responsibilities, stimulated by autonomy and built on trust are fortified once again, by the trust-building process associated with open

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<sup>393</sup> A team is "a group of people (with)... a commitment to a set of shared values and objectives, together with an acceptance of how those objectives are to be met. In other words, they are not only in agreement as to where they are going but on how they are to get there" (Moore 1999: 211).

<sup>394</sup> Blair 1999: 15.

communication. In this environment the team can work effectively to address themes of concern in meeting a common mission.



## *Lesson V: Take it Easy, No to Micromanagement*

### *The Story...*

On the night of the conflict-ridden staff meeting I found a book on my shelf. It was one of Dr. Spencer Johnson's self-help books entitled *One Minute to Myself*. That sounded good, right about now, so I picked it up and began to read. The book provided a light and external perspective from which to look at that situation and, by the following week, I was feeling good towards staff again, taking what had happened in stride.

I was then off to spend the month of November working on this dissertation in Philadelphia. During that month, I had minimal contact with staff: a few emails exchanged and one staff meeting online. All I needed to hear from them is "everything's going well," and that was good enough for me. In fact, what I found was more than that. In my absence the staff is blossoming. I realized this would be the case before leaving Rio. On my last night in Rio I spoke in front of some fifty community leaders at a film launch about CONGESCO.<sup>395</sup> I realized after I spoke and Rose filled in a bit for me, that she would have done a *better* job than I had she been the one speaking. A year before I had spoken in public with her and noticed she was not engaging the public in the best way.<sup>396</sup> But now, clearly, she was feeling confident in her position with the organization

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<sup>395</sup> The film that was being launched is entitled "Voices from the Edge: The Favela Goes to the World Social Forum," and was produced by Fernando Salis and Daniela Broitman. "Voices from the Edge" follows CONGESCO's journey to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2003, and shows how the participation of 23 community leaders in such an international event affected the group. CONGESCO's participation in the WSF was made possible through grants and contributions acquired through my own fundraising efforts on behalf of this network of leaders.

<sup>396</sup> Again, rather than discussing this with her at the time, and "nipping it in the bud," I lived with that assumption all this time! It is always better to discuss things. Hence, the importance of open communication and incorporating opportunities for critiquing and developing a group's work jointly.

and entirely capable of handling the situation. I realized perhaps I did not need to be present – perhaps it would even be best if I were not – for many such presentations.

Two weeks later, at the online staff meeting we had on November 12, 2003, while I was in the United States, the Rio-based team filled me in on the latest goings-on. They had just returned from four days in Belo Horizonte, a city in the interior of the country, where they had represented CatComm at a networking conference. Some of that meeting can be followed here. Sense the energy:

*Brett:<sup>397</sup> Rose had to do two presentations of our talk, because of all the people.*

*Brett: Our talk and that of CONGESCO were full. Our talks were the most sought out!*

*Rose: We started with a select, small public and little by little other people arrived.*

*Rose: By the end, the (workshop) was full and I had to do two presentations.*

*Rose: There were also journalists.*

*Brett: It was really great!*

*Rose: Intellectuals interested in the question of networks.*

*Rose: And (community) leaders.*

*Brett: People who are doing very similar things.*

*Rose: The presentation had a good effect on the public, it was followed by a debate and roundtable.*

*Rose: Most people sought me out at the end of the workshop, I have those contacts.*

### ***What Managers Say...***

At this point, if one is (I) taking the time to carefully select staff (finding capable people with the right set of qualities one can build trust with), (II) expecting the best from them and transmitting this to them, (III) investing time in them and their development, and (IV) developing effective team-building communication – relax.

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<sup>397</sup> Brett Joly was a Rio-based volunteer of Catalytic Communities who taught English to community leaders and translated from Portuguese to English on the website.

Do not micromanage. When one micromanages, one provides disincentives to good work because s/he is undermining the 'Expectations Govern Behavior' rule and at the same time showing a lack of trust. With a carefully selected and trained team, micromanagement takes away their autonomy and sense of responsibility, their feeling that they are capable of doing the job.

Once trust is built, staff should be free to act autonomously with regard to meeting the objectives of their position. The job of the manager is to help them set these objectives, then help measure their results. Objectives-setting is an important tool. Though described for its negative uses by Goffee and Scase, "management by objectives" can also be used to strengthen autonomy in an organization. "Management by objectives...involves the joint determinations and review of objectives...Such agreements are...appropriate where work-tasks are not rigidly structured and (staff) can, to some extent, determine their own objectives...(This) can increase the motivation and autonomy (of staff), and also facilitate the measurement of their performance".<sup>398</sup> If this is done, staff will blossom.

Staff turnover, though inevitable, will be remarkably less frequent and will take less of a toll on the organization if the executive acts in the above, correct way, with regard to them. In a not-for-profit organization, as long as it is meeting a clearly identifiable and important social mission, and its development operates within strict ethical lines – with regard to treatment of its own staff and with regard to its mission – there will be others interested in getting involved. Perhaps not for the salary, but for the

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<sup>398</sup> Goffee and Scase 1985.

combination of the flexible, flat, and autonomous working environment and the organization's mission orientation.

There is no recipe for the correct staff. Usually people are hired at a moment when they seem to be offering the solution to staffing issues that currently exist. The organization's situation evolves. Is it better to have two part-time employees or one full-time employee for a position? This depends on the individuals, the moment, and a number of complex factors. Does an organization want quick turnover, with many different individuals getting involved, or a slow turnover, with individuals devoting themselves over years, even decades? Again, this depends on the needs of the organization.

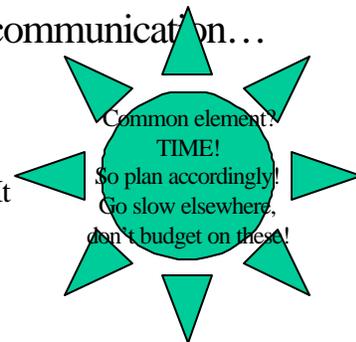
**Figure 27.** Summary of process for Lesson V: Take It Easy: No to Micromanagement

If you are...

1. Taking time to carefully select staff who are capable, dedicated, and with whom you can build trust;
2. Transmitting the organization's expectations of them clearly;
3. Providing the time and tools they need to be effective; and
4. Developing effective team-building communication...

...then RELAX.

Micromanaging undermines all you have accomplished. It undermines the 'Expectations Govern Behavior' premise; shows a lack of trust; decreases autonomy; decreases individual's sense of responsibility and relevance (as a stakeholder); and harms their sense of capability, self-esteem.



### *Final Lesson: Set Aside Time to Benefit from all Constituencies*

I have been aware since our first significant media coverage in the beginning of 2001 that every effort towards outreach, every new program area launched, and each funder acquired bring about offshoots that create significant additional work. One good example of this is sending out an email update to funders. I may sit down to prepare an update in two hours that I send to 20 funders. Chances are 5-10 of them will reply, a few will send a check. For each reply I have to set aside time to email back, individually. For each check received time is needed to enter them into accounting spreadsheets and prepare and mail back receipts. Now there are 90 funders. Because of mistakes made with out-of-control correspondence in the past, today I know to set aside two weeks to write and follow-up on fundraising updates.

In a December 6, 2002 Dissertation Journal entry entitled S-T-R-E-S-S I look back upon the influences that generated my deep sense of stress at that moment. I commented on how I had always been able to maintain a balance in my life but that at some point that balance broke, and I could not put my finger on the exact moment. I concluded that it was a series of events that had built up to the “state where I’m at now, where my schedule and timetable are produced by all these client groups constantly contacting me (funders, communities, staff/volunteers)”.<sup>399</sup> “Before when things were uncertain I just thought, ‘Well, this’ll be an experiment and it’ll make good material for the dissertation either way,’ and chilled out about it all. But now there’s just so much more riding on it. It’s become a reference and there are people funding it. More eyes

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<sup>399</sup> This is the time period during which I lost touch with Catalytic Communities’ virtual volunteers (see Figure 15).

watching over me.” “Not to mention no matter how much I work I’m always behind. Because just as I think I’m getting on top of things I receive more emails and requests from staff.”

An organization can only plan so much. The demand for its services, dedication on the part of staff, coverage by the media, and interest on the part of funders often fluctuate regardless of planning. On the other hand, all of these and other uncertainties are greatly influenced by organizational planning.

What I have found with Catalytic Communities is that not-for-profit initiatives with a potentially unlimited number of clients have to be particularly careful with regard to managing their growth patterns. Significant consideration is needed with regard to the timing and approach of outreach efforts. Unlike an organization that fundraises to provide a service to a fixed number of clients, and then proceeds to provide that service, CatComm, by nature, supports all those who seek it out. In fact, in theory the more people who seek it out, the more effective the organization is being, since its primary function is to develop a network of solidarity around community initiatives. CatComm then prepares a new budget, for the next cycle, based on a new reflection of its client base and after the demand has already been created. This may be one reason why such organizations often feel ‘behind’ and unprepared for growth.

In his book, *Power in and Around Organizations*, Henry Mintzberg discusses the role of *influencers* over an organization. He identifies a number of agents that influence an organization from the inside<sup>400</sup> and the outside. External influencers occupy a

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<sup>400</sup> Internal – staff – influencers were discussed in Lesson IV.

continuum, “from the most regular, general, and detached—in effect, the least direct and forceful—to the most episodic, focused, and personal—the most direct and powerful”.<sup>401</sup>

Outside influencers include: social norms, formal constraints, pressure campaigns, direct controls, and membership on boards of directors.<sup>402</sup> Mintzberg speaks in a way that reflects the mindset of many organizations—economic, governmental, and even some not-for-profits.

Among not-for-profits, however, it can be argued that thinking in these terms is damaging to the organization. In fact, Peter Drucker refers to groups that Mintzberg would term ‘influencers’ as ‘constituencies.’ He tells us: “One of the basic differences between business and non-profits is that non-profits always have a multitude of constituencies...a multitude of groups, each with a veto power. A school principal has to satisfy teachers, the school board, the taxpayers, parents, and, in a high school, the students themselves. Five constituencies, each of which sees the school differently. Each of them is essential, and each has its own objectives. Each of them has to be satisfied at least to the point where they don’t fire the principal, go on strike, or rebel...The first...(and) toughest—task of the non-profit executive is to get all of these constituencies to agree on what the *long-term* goals of the institution are. Building around the long term is the only way to integrate all these interests...Unless you integrate the vision of all

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<sup>401</sup> Mintzberg 1983: 48.

<sup>402</sup> Rather constant, **social norms** define the minimum levels of general norms and acceptable ethical behavior below which an organization should not fall. **Formal constraints** also set limits, in this case specific impositions that often constrain organizations in specific groups or even specific organizations. Episodes of focused influence, usually focused on specific actions and carried out by specific groups are **pressure campaigns**. **Direct controls** include direct and personal means of influence on specific organizations including use of direct access. Finally, **membership on boards** is personal, focused, and formal and is usually episodic, used to obstruct decisions. Adapted from Mintzberg 1983: 48-49.

constituencies into the long-range goal, you will soon lose support, lose credibility, and lose respect”.<sup>403</sup> From the above example we can decipher that among the constituencies of a not-for-profit organization are: clients (e.g. students), the clients’ communities (e.g. parents), staff (e.g. teachers), the board of directors (e.g. the school board), donors (e.g. taxpayers), and the wider society.

By viewing them as such, and then listening to one’s various constituencies and successfully incorporating their views into the organization’s long-term vision, a not-for-profit leader can actually improve the quality of his or her service. Assuming the effective articulation of a mission, at least in the third sector, an organization can benefit tremendously from its diverse constituents.

The third, or not-for-profit sector, is distinct in that it is “private but public.” As a private institution (not run by the State), a not-for-profit can focus on a particular, limited client group without falling prone to arguments, as a public institution would, of exclusion. On the other hand, not-for-profits are publicly-minded, with missions focused on addressing broad societal needs, rather than obtaining a profit. For this reason, if the groups that constitute the organization’s constituencies provide feedback in the hopes of heightening the organization’s mission, and this information is properly reflected upon and incorporated by the organization’s executive, constituencies are a productive asset for the organization. A not-for-profit executive can begin by reflecting on constituents’ suggestions as Drucker suggests: “In every move, in every decision, in every policy, the

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<sup>403</sup> Drucker 1990: 109-110.

non-profit institution needs to start out by asking, Will this advance our capacity to carry out our mission?”<sup>404</sup>

In a private institution, however, this may not be the case. No doubt many of the influencers of Shell Oil or Guess Jeans would like to see those companies close. At the same time, influencers of government programs often include those requesting tax cuts which will mean a reduction of spending on schools and public housing. These influencers, from the point-of-view of the institutions being influenced, are hardly an asset.<sup>405</sup>

Following these reflections, not-for-profit executives can develop a better perspective with regard to perceiving and handling the pressures associated with diverse constituencies. They then need to plan in such a way that accounts for and prepares to incorporate the novel ideas that these constituents bring that are, in the end, what leads to organizational growth.

Interestingly, only in setting aside the time to hear and incorporate all constituent demands is one capable of viewing those constituents as the assets they are. On the other hand, only in communicating the stresses and competing claims made on you frequently

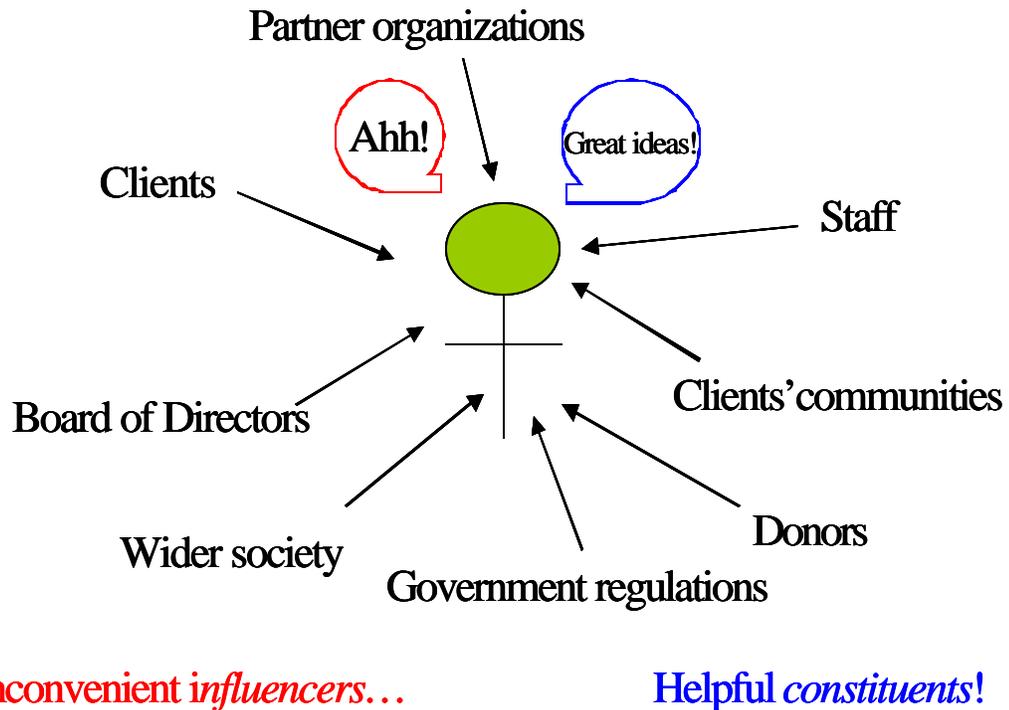
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<sup>404</sup> Drucker 1990: 114. That said, changes in an organization’s mission, or “mission creep,” can occur for many reasons, some of which are beneficial to the organization. Negative mission creep occurs when an organization does not utilize its mission as an organizing tool and lets it “creep,” or when it lets funders dictate new directions for the organization. Positive revision of a mission occurs when an organization consciously discusses – at board, staff, and community meetings – the mission’s usefulness in reflecting the organization’s efforts and objectives. A healthy organization will revise its mission statement regularly, so that it reflects fresh needs and opportunities.

<sup>405</sup> In not-for-profit institutions there tend to be few or no “influencers” and, instead, many “constituents” because the nature of their objective, summarized in a mission statement, is such that individuals subscribe to it, or exit. And unlike physically-rooted community development organizations which may try to address many different issues through diverse programs, CatComm’s mission provides a specific organizational focus making it difficult to find individuals involved that disagree with one another regarding what the organization’s objectives should be. See footnote 12 to better understand the essence of an organizational “mission.”

and openly with the board, supporters, and communities, can they understand these claims. Total transparency, a tool utilized by Gandhi and which humanized his face to the world, should be utilized. Nothing should be hidden.

**Figure 28. Summary of process Final Lesson: Set Aside Time to Benefit from Constituents**



The not-for-profit manager's interpretation of those who provide input as influencers (red) or constituents (blue) depends on his/her making time available to benefit from these groups.

### ***Conclusion: The Importance of Reflection***

It may seem somewhat premeditated, but it was not. The learning process that occurred as I prepared this particular chapter was exactly *that*, a learning process that occurred *as* I wrote the chapter. In returning to journal entries over almost a year-long period, it was as if I were reading through transcriptions I had prepared based on interviews with myself at various moments in time. That is to say, we change so much from one day to the next that journal entries based on our own experience should be more than admissible as primary reference material. They should be encouraged. Unlike typical research conducted outside of the self, such research can be more complete, because it involves a play between the other – the self at distant moments in time – and the self today, who has a sense of how the various selves over time play together and what might influence them. This information is lacking in traditional research techniques.

This chapter is therefore perhaps that which provides the most interesting argument in favor of the type of research I have conducted throughout this dissertation. Information is more complete as to the feelings of an administrator during the learning process. On the other hand, it is in my awareness that this chapter would be written, and worrying constantly about keeping ‘accurate’ and ‘complete’ information, that it can be said to have left me a bit crazy.

As I wrote on November 7, 2003:

*Sitting down to pull this together and looking back over the journal entries is incredible. I feel like a distant observer, like I'm reading interviews that I conducted in the past. The advantage is that I know the inside information, so I can confirm hunches I get about my own behavior as a result of looking over the*

*journal entries. Looking back and retelling the story also helps me notice aspects of my behavior I hadn't taken notice of, reflect more. Realize the mistakes I made and how they fit into the larger picture and learning process.*

*What is important is that I act in the correct way with regard to staff; then, whoever comes, we will ride with the changes. Writing this chapter helps me relax. Each person that comes and goes is part of the evolution. No problem. Chill. Edson may go one day – I hope it works out for as long as possible with him, but it might not – and if/when he does, that's OK. I'll be here. Rose will be here. Others will join at that point. As long as we're doing the right thing, there will always be people there. And with funding, even more the case...<sup>406</sup>*

According to a study quoted by Peter Senge, “the average lifetime of the largest industrial enterprises is less than forty years”.<sup>407</sup> Senge believes that the high mortality rate for even successful organizations is due to a set of deeper problems that afflict them all, based on a set of organizational learning disabilities. Senge also highlights five disciplines<sup>408</sup> that constitute the subject matter of a *learning organization*, an “organization where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together”.<sup>409</sup>

One could then say that successful organizations are those that learn from their mistakes, that are capable of seeing themselves as a whole and related to outside systems and in doing so determine the small, often invisible barriers that are truly limiting them. They are those that have the courage to look dissent in the eye and incorporate it. In short, those that learn with each passing year. The writing of a chapter such as this one, and the reflection it requires, is an excellent tool towards this end.

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<sup>406</sup> From November 7, 2003 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “Staff chapter.”

<sup>407</sup> Senge 1994: 17.

<sup>408</sup> These five disciplines include: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning.

<sup>409</sup> Senge 1994: 3.

## **Chapter 6: The Fundraising Conundrum**

### ***A Dead End? Disempowerment through Foundations and Large Institutional Donors: Risks Associated with Evaluations, Foundations, and the New Emphasis on Business Management***

Until the 1980s, the common feeling within the third sector<sup>410</sup> was that not-for-profit organizations, as philanthropic institutions with no monetary “bottom line,” were not to be managed. “Forty years ago, ‘management’ was a very bad word in non-profit organizations,” Peter Drucker tells us, “The one thing they were not was a business. Indeed, most of them then believed that they did not need anything that might be called ‘management.’ After all, they did not have a ‘bottom line’”.<sup>411</sup>

The response to this came in the 1980s and 1990s as business management principles were increasingly applied to not-for-profit organizations in an effort to increase their efficiency, efficacy, and sustainability. They would be made more efficient if costs and benefits of different activities were measured, more efficacious if greater numbers of people (“clients”) were attended to, and more sustainable if their finances were properly planned and accounted for. This occurred initially as “outside pressures – cuts in government support, more intense competition for private-sector giving – ...push(ed) nonprofits to think and act in a more businesslike way”.<sup>412</sup> The effect, today, has rippled throughout the sector. Many organizations have no doubt been made more accountable. On the other hand, this trend is changing the face of the sector. The largest

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<sup>410</sup> Refer back to footnote 111 for a definition of this term.

<sup>411</sup> Drucker 1990: xiv.

<sup>412</sup> Harvey and Snyder 1987: 14.

environmental activist organizations are now run by CEOs with six-figure salaries,<sup>413</sup> many of whom were trained in the private sector.<sup>414</sup> Some, like the Nature Conservancy, have even been involved in corruption scandals resembling those traditionally associated with the private sector.<sup>415</sup>

The Brazilian non-governmental (NGO) sector blossomed primarily during the past two decades and receives funding from public,<sup>416</sup> foundation, corporate,<sup>417</sup> and individual<sup>418</sup> sources as occurs in the United States. An important source of its funding is, in fact, foreign.

Much of the support for community-based organizations, in particular, comes from relationships that develop with government or particular politicians that may request

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<sup>413</sup> St. Claire and Issel 1997.

<sup>414</sup> By the same token there also exist corporate executives whose preliminary training occurred as managers in the not-for-profit sector.

<sup>415</sup> Stephens and Ottaway 2003.

<sup>416</sup> With regard to public sector support, “No one would ever typify the Brazilian government as a welfare state. There is no safety net of government-funded services...Nonetheless, not-for-profit organizations have been able to access government funds through three levels – city, state, and federal – and within each, through various departments. The government supports not-for-profits in a variety of ways: through contracts for services, the joint development and funding of programs, and the donation of land or facilities” (Canham 1999: 57-58). Unfortunately, however, few data are available as to amounts: “As (neither) income returns to public authorities nor public disclosure of finances are required, it is impossible to estimate the extent of these” (Canham 1999: 58).

<sup>417</sup> Domestic corporate sources of income for civil society initiatives are growing in Brazil. Several studies conducted in the mid- and late-1990s indicate that the total private corporate funding available for not-for-profits in Brazil is approximately US\$300 million/year (Canham 1999: 55). In comparison, foundation support is relatively limited. In a publication of GIFE (Group of Institutes, Foundations and Corporations), a Brazilian not-for-profit comprised of members from the private sector who encourage socially-responsible corporate investment, the number of domestic corporate foundations in Brazil numbers at 31 (Falconer and Vilela 2001). These, presumably, are the non-operating foundations, since another study (Canham 1999: 56) commented that “Over eleven thousand foundations are registered in Brazil. However, the would-be grant seeker should not become unduly excited by this news; almost all are 'operating' foundations that develop and implement their own programs.” In comparison, US-based foundations provided approximately \$21 million in contributions to Brazilian not-for-profit organizations in 1994 (Canham 1999: 57).

<sup>418</sup> Understudied and unappreciated until recently, private individuals make significant contributions to the third sector in Brazil. A study realized in 1998 and analyzed by the Rio-based Institute for the Study of Religions, a Brazilian NGO research institute, estimated that in that year approximately US\$1.7 billion in domestic individual (private) donations were made to not-for-profits operating in Brazil (Landim and Scalon 2000: 26).

formal proposals and evaluations from funding applicants.<sup>419</sup> Because of the sector's short history coinciding with the application of management principles in NGOs internationally, and the current nature of funding requirements from government, foundations, and corporations in Brazil, one finds proposal writing and evaluation at the core of Brazilian organizational management. From the smallest scale community organizations through large regional and national NGOs, the basic set of skills of managing an organization in Brazil have as a requisite proposal writing and evaluation. Whether that is done well or not, however, is another matter.

Community leaders at the most basic level have therefore learned to talk in the language of evaluations, even when no formal evaluation or measurement is conducted. "We represent 20,000 individuals from 80 communities," I have heard one group of leaders say repeatedly. They contradict themselves by saying this only moments after having complained of other *favela* leaders who say they represent entire communities, when in fact they reach hundreds or a few thousand individuals through their initiatives. They talk this way because they know they *must* in order to play the game, to acquire the minimal (often miniscule by even domestic standards) support they need to do the vital work they do in attending to the hundreds, if not thousands, they work with. The truth is

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<sup>419</sup> According to Canham (1999: 58), "There is usually not a formal application process for (government) funding, particularly at the state and local levels whereby a series of discussions ensue, and the not-for-profit is then asked to put the idea into writing. Sometimes government officials approach an organization with an idea for programs. It is not unheard of for a government official or agency that is underfunded to ask a favor of a not-for-profit seeking to secure a donation." This is, as she points out by omission, not the case for federal support, which does require an application process. In addition, putting "the idea into writing" is the essence of proposal-writing. Not-for-profits receiving government support are required to put their requests into writing. And with new laws (i.e. OSCIP) in place within the past two years, they are now, since Canham's essay was published, expected to operate with full transparency with regard to budgets and rule-making.

that, as is true with government services,<sup>420</sup> evaluation of costs and benefits is not as honest, clear and scientific as would be necessary and, even if it can be made to be, organizations find ways to overestimate their benefits. As long as there is no direct and constant supervision, they will continue to find ways to do so.<sup>421</sup>

As is true with their North American counterparts, organizations in Brazil also act in blatantly unethical ways. Community leaders informed me of one large Rio-based NGO that claimed to fund dozens of community programs over three cycles but actually did so over only two without telling the project's funder. This organization therefore received credit for the work of three cycles, while leaving community programs penniless in the last of these. A few short months after this quiet scandal (community programs are for the most part disconnected from one another and certainly from a large foreign foundation, and so have little power to fight back), the large NGO threw a showy party that further accentuated its public image. This organization was founded to empower community leaders in the *favelas*. Its evaluations procedure is apparently strict – surveys are conducted (multiple choice-type answers, mostly) – to appeal to funders. But discussions with the organization's clients yield sentiments of betrayal with regard to this

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<sup>420</sup> In his important June 2003 article in *Eurobusiness*, Bent Flyvbjerg describes the “lying game” that has come to characterize major urban projects. “Which projects get built?” Flyvbjerg asks. “We found it isn’t necessarily the best ones, but those projects for which proponents best succeed in conjuring a fantasy world of underestimated costs, overestimated revenues, undervalued environmental impacts and overvalued regional development effects” (Flyvbjerg 2003: 60).

<sup>421</sup> Flyvbjerg reminds us: “Enron and its successor scandals have shown that one should be skeptical of professionals and officials who promise to regulate themselves” (2003: 62). Related to this, Donald Schon describes criticisms that have arisen over time with regard to the professions. “The public predicaments of the society began to seem less like problems to be solved through expertise than like dilemmas whose resolutions could come about only through moral and political choice” (Schon 1983: 10). The truth is, Schon shows us, that “situations of practice are inherently unstable...that professions are now confronted with an ‘unprecedented requirement for adaptability’” (Schon 1983: 15). Devising strict evaluation procedures for social-oriented programs ahead of time ignores this reality.

large organization that does not maintain long-term relationships with its clients but, rather, in the words of one community leader, treats them as “sardines.”

Catalytic Communities’ development and fundraising strategy began developing immediately, while the initial incorporation of the organization was taking place in September 2000, as I sat down for conversations with several advisors. One particular advisor – writer and activist Jeremy Rifkin<sup>422</sup> – suggested I begin putting my vision for CatComm on paper. He also handed me a list of his organization’s funders. Inspired, I immediately prepared a 12-page document, stipulating concrete goals for the organization. These goals were divided in two areas: community and knowledge development, and can be viewed in Figure 29.

What I did not think of naturally was how these goals should be operationalized for effective measurement. Of course, it would be difficult to imagine at that point what could realistically be expected. Not only did I have no experience at that stage in working towards the achievement of the goals and therefore little knowledge on which to base an assessment of what exactly could be done by when, but even if I worked on my own for a significant amount of time, it would be difficult to imagine what a staff would be capable of doing within a certain period. In addition, at that point there was no way I could know of barriers that would appear in the process of carrying out the mission of the organization.

A few weeks later, I utilized pieces of this document towards the elaboration of a larger proposal, with a specific foundation in mind – Avina – that did, as is normally the

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<sup>422</sup> For whom I had worked on a grassroots campaign during high school when I lived near Washington, DC.

case, ask for quantifiable goals. Without any way of knowing what was realistic at such an early stage, I prepared a list of anticipated project results. These can be viewed in Figure 30, side-by-side with Figure 29. One can see from comparing the two sets of goals that it was much more honest to set broad three-year goals as I did naturally (and I would argue looking back now over three years are *all* being achieved), than to develop concrete, quantifiable goals that, it turns out, would have been totally unrealistic! It is almost amusing to view the numerical targets I listed in the Avina proposal. In addition, there were unanticipated results and directions that the work naturally took in responding to the needs of and uses of our resources by community leaders that, had we stuck to specific pre-approved objectives, would not have been incorporated into the organizational design.<sup>423</sup> The most important of these is the objective CatComm now has, which is totally in line with its mission but not among the initial goals or anticipated results, of divulging community initiatives for *their* benefit, attracting attention to strengthen those initiatives that already exist, as opposed to only divulging them for the benefit of peer communities who can learn from them.

In addition, had we focused on achieving quantitative results such as those outlined in the project for Avina, the organization would have compromised the quality of its work, perhaps by incorporating more questionable community projects in Rio to its site because it would not be possible to be as close to these programs. As CONGESCO worried in Chapter 4 (see discussion of the CONGESCO Seal) and as community leaders frustrated with large NGOs treating them like “sardines” have put across, such leaders are tired of large organizations that grow fast at the

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<sup>423</sup> See Chapter 3, section “Innovation Arises from the Content and Often Cannot be Predicted” for more on this common characteristic of virtual networking organizations.

**Figure 29.** CatComm goals as outlined in first organizational document (10/00):

*Goals for Catalytic Communities' 3-Year Pilot*

Community Development Goals

- Helping actors within the *favelas* to learn of development innovation elsewhere in their own city that might form the basis for their own solutions.
- Triggering local people's imaginations to think up solutions 'outside the box' of traditional development strategy, to create their own unique solutions based on exposure to a wide range of possibility that open their minds up to alternative ways of tackling problems.
- Documenting information and innovation that can be useful in contexts worldwide, while taking into account local conditions that affected the outcomes at hand.
- Providing a safe forum in which members of communities in which powerful interests (drug traffickers, police, politicians) impede development can learn how other communities responded to similar contexts and to make contacts that will enable them to tackle their own roadblocks.
- Allowing those living and working in one *favela* to trade ideas without having to spend money on transport or invest substantial time arriving at and scheduling meetings.
- Assisting existing projects in Rio to search out others that might have overlapping interests or shared goals, diversified funding sources, or other useful pieces of knowledge for them to incorporate into their own work.
- Forming a network of civil society actors that interact to improve their own work and that of the development community in general.

Knowledge Development Goals

- Learning of the potential use of the Internet in assisting with economic and social development.
- Developing an understanding of how Internet resources can be targeted to lower-income groups.
- Developing a greater understanding of what sorts of innovations work, and what others don't, by amassing a large body of information within one city context initially, and beyond that later on.
- Understanding the dynamics of how public and private actors work with civil society (third, voluntary, NGO) sector actors to address social inequalities and other problems.
- Learning about barriers and obstacles to widespread use of the Internet in low-income communities.

**Figure 30.** CatComm objectives as defined in first funding proposal submitted (11/00):

*Anticipated Project Results  
(Objectives)*

The anticipated outcome objectives of this work can be best summarized as follows:

- The documentation of 200+ cases of community innovation in Rio each year.
- The documentation of 20+ cases of community innovation outside of Rio (but of interest to Rio) each year.
- The building of an online network of residents and innovators from Rio's *favelas* with a retention rate of 30% participating in online discussions, and a total number of participants of at least 50 by the end of Year 1.
- The building of an online network of Rio innovators with domestic and international innovators with a retention rate of 25% participating in online discussions, and a total number of participants of at least 100 by the end of Year 1.
- Twenty calls into the hotline within its first month of operation; 40 calls in month 2; 60 calls in month 3; and 80+ calls per month thereafter (minimum of 4 calls/day).
- Following up on requests from 20% of individuals who utilized the hotline with evaluation surveys, either orally conducted or written, to evaluate the relevance and usefulness of the database and hotline services.
- At least 5 concrete examples of local people whose new initiatives resulted directly or indirectly from the use of Catalytic Communities' database (online or via the hotline) by the end of Year 1.

expense of qualitative long-term partnerships to empower and strengthen their communities.

During the first weeks of Catalytic Communities' development, while I was in Washington and before heading to Rio, I spent significant time researching foundations. I visited the Foundation Center library in Washington, D.C., spoke with leaders of various organizations I was familiar with, and conducted extensive online research. By October 8, I had compiled an 85-page document with contact and program information for twenty-four foundations whose goals appeared to coincide with the vision I had for Catalytic Communities.

This document would start me off towards fundraising for CatComm.<sup>424</sup> After determining the deadlines of several of the foundations listed in this initial document and recommended to me thereafter, I set to work on writing proposals. In 2001 I spent approximately two full months-worth of time contacting and then preparing and sending proposals or letters to the Kellogg Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Jennifer Altman Foundation, David Rockefeller Fund, CS Fund, Markle Foundation, Mott Foundation, Pew, and the Rockefeller Family Fund. I also sent my "Idea Letter" to

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<sup>424</sup> A strategic decision was made early on not to fundraise for Catalytic Communities in Brazil but, rather, to focus on resources in the United States. In the beginning, this was mainly done for three reasons: (1) CatComm did not acquire legal status in Brazil for some time; (2) I had more experience with American bureaucracy and procedures than with those in Brazil, and (3) CatComm's ultimate objective was to serve communities globally, and there are simply no funds available in Brazil for missions with more than a national reach. Over time, however, I realized other benefits of this approach: (4) As the numbers in this chapter will show, the tradition of philanthropy and giving is much richer in the United States and more funding is available; (5) Fundraising outside of Brazil would ensure that CatComm did not compete for limited centralized local pools of resources with Brazilian organizations, a strategic point since our work focuses so heavily on network-building and partnerships and this would relieve much of the potential competitive pressure; (6) What for a traditional US-based organization are limited funds multiply when converted to the Brazilian currency, allowing fundraising conducted in the US to carry the organization much further; and (7) Fundraising away from Brazil, in the United States, helps to ensure that CatComm continues to focus on its original vision – serving communities globally – and the experience of fundraising in the US during regular intervals brings with it moments for reflection on the quality and direction of CatComm's work.

Ashoka Innovators for the Public's Brazil office. Towards the end of 2001 I wrote letters to 14 CEOs featured in *Latin Trade* magazine's issue on "Mighty Young CEOs"<sup>425</sup> and 36 CEOs, CFOs and other leaders from top technology companies across the United States. No financial support resulted from these efforts, and no foundations requested additional information. I began feeling frustrated when I reflected on how much further my time could have gone were I spending those two months towards website-building or documenting community initiatives.<sup>426</sup>

One foundation, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) based in Virginia, exemplifies my early experience. I learned of this foundation during research at the Foundation Center in Washington. The information uncovered on this visit described their objectives in such a way that they appeared closely in line with those of Catalytic Communities.<sup>427</sup> I was encouraged and prepared a full proposal in response to this. However, when I visited their website another image surfaced. I got the impression they only supported organizations *based in the favelas*. I never sent the proposal, realizing CatComm was not *that* sort of community organization. Some time later, after getting to know the organizations this foundation does support in Brazil (which are rarely community-based), and getting to know the program officer in charge of Brazil, I realized this was not, in fact, a requirement. The main requirement that kept CatComm from

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<sup>425</sup> "Mighty Young CEOs" 2000.

<sup>426</sup> At this point I was still the only full-time volunteer involved in building CatComm and time spent towards fundraising meant the same time was not being spent on building the organization's base.

<sup>427</sup> The mission of the Inter-American Foundation published at the Foundation Center explained that "the IAF provides cash grants to help community and non-profit organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean implement their own creative ideas for development and poverty reduction. IAF favors proposals that are based on direct participation by beneficiaries in the design and management of project activities. As a pioneer in learning about grassroots development, the IAF seeks to support projects that produce real improvements on a local level, but that also have the potential to offer lessons and inspiration to others."

applying when I finally sorted out this foundation's expectations was its lack of not-for-profit status in Brazil. IAF only supports organizations legally established in Latin America. CatComm now has such a status and may well apply in the future. Of significance here is the lack of clarity on IAF's website and the materials available about them at the Foundation Center.

To a novice fundraiser (as I was) foundation fundraising is attractive in part because it appears to be a clear and genuinely fair system. Without knowing better it appears to a novice that foundations list exactly what they are looking for in their published materials, on their websites, at the Foundation Center, and elsewhere. They often state that they prohibit certain types of contact in favor of others that allow for equal treatment (e.g. letter applications as opposed to face-to-face meetings). They state if they are willing to provide operational support or seed money. One can look up their regional foci, their thematic interests, those responsible. One is told what items to include and how many words to use in preparing a project proposal in order to meet their criteria. And so on. Or so it seemed.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> In 1986 the Dreyfus brothers – Hubert and Stuart – published a very important article describing their research on skill acquisition. Following an extensive research period, five stages were uncovered that apply to the learning process associated with all unstructured human activities [“unstructured problem areas...contain a potentially unlimited number of possibly relevant facts and features, and the ways those elements interrelate and determine other events is unclear” (21)]. The first stage in this sequence – the novice – beautifully describes my early experience with foundation fundraising: “The novice learns to recognize various objective facts and features relevant to the skill and acquires rules for determining actions based upon those facts and features. Elements of the situation...are...clearly and objectively defined...The rules are to be applied to these facts regardless of what else is happening(, they are) ‘context-free rules’” (21). In short, I believed what I read on the foundation websites and in their materials were the rules that, once followed, would afford CatComm an equal chance as that of others given the equality of my vision to that of others. Assuming my vision was something special, I would have an even better chance at acquiring support, or so the logic went.

The following year, in 2002, I sent an application to Echoing Green, the Ford Foundation, the Funding Exchange, and the BrazilFoundation, a nascent foundation based in New York and Rio that attracts funds in the United States to support initiatives in Brazil. By its nature, the BrazilFoundation is very flexible in selecting the projects it funds. I was ecstatic at the end of May 2002 when I received word from the BrazilFoundation that we were one of eight finalists (three would be chosen) out of an initial group of approximately 80 applicants.<sup>429</sup> This was the first truly positive reaction I received after 18 months of attempts. Their representative in Rio emailed me requesting an interview. Since I was in the United States at the time, the face-to-face interview was scheduled for June 13, 2003 following two weeks of email interviews for which I answered a number of questions with great care and in utmost detail.

At the time of the BrazilFoundation interview I felt it had gone very well, and I was told that within a matter of two weeks I would be contacted with the results. I waited patiently, until receiving a response (of sorts) one full month later on July 19<sup>th</sup>. Perhaps the event associated with the experiment of building Catalytic Communities that has left the most marked impression on me, I wrote that night in my dissertation journal:

*Like I didn't have enough to write about in the journal tonight! When I got home from a full day launching the new site,...listening to lectures and meeting old contacts at Firjan, and heading to a final meeting with the co-organizers for last-minute preparation for (next) Tuesday's seminar<sup>430</sup> – I got home to find an email from the BrazilFoundation. Due to the title: Convite – BrazilFoundation (“Invite – BrazilFoundation”) I thought WOW! I opened it and it was a general invite to the presentation of the winning projects next Tuesday night. (A listing of the*

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<sup>429</sup> For comparison, in 2003, BrazilFoundation's second year, they received 895 applications of which they selected 17.

<sup>430</sup> This was a seminar on HIV/Aids that Catalytic Communities was co-organizing with the Community Manager's Council of Rio (CONGESCO), a network of community leaders and CatComm's main organizational partner.

winning projects was not included.) My reaction was to scream – they didn't send a 'no' so this must be a YES!

...I imagined they were wanting to announce the winners that day, that they had only invited the winners, that they were responding to Brazilian likes – certificates and ceremonies. But no, it ain't so. At least that's what it seems like a couple of hours after the original excitement. First mom, after I'd read the invite, said she thought that was nasty, that they sent me that without any explanation. But I told her I thought it was a positive statement, even if it was poorly directed (without any explanation whatsoever of my status). Perhaps it was my deep-down like of great surprises that wanted to believe I would just show up in a room and they would announce they actually decided to give us \$20,000, rather than the \$10,000 we requested, because our project was so promising.

Anyway...I decided the best thing to do was Monday for me to call, explain I had to be at the seminar Tuesday afternoon (speaking to 150 community leaders) and that I hadn't received the results (so as to know if I should go). I wasn't about to leave an event where there might be dozens of people wanting to talk to me (after 5 pm when it ends) rushing to find out (CatComm) didn't get any funding!

When Marcos got home...I told him. Without looking at the invite he had the same reaction I initially had. But then when...he came into the study with me and read the card, he couldn't believe it. He said the way they wrote it – not directing it specifically to me – that it was obviously sent to tons of people – so we weren't selected. They weren't about to organize a presentation and not tell you you would be presenting. Not confirm you could be present if you were a winner, etc.

After trying to point out the other side – that US foundations ALWAYS send you a letter of explanation, so if they did not it must mean we got it – I realized he was right. “Mas que indelicadeza!” (“How indelicate!”) After all...I spent all that time responding to their emails, meeting with them for the interview, only to have them not take out the 5 minutes to tell me my proposal wasn't selected! Beyond that, without having first done this they nonetheless sent me an invite to go and hear and meet with the ones that were selected!!!

At first I was going to write Candace<sup>431</sup> a letter. I began, “Dear Candace, I have just received by email the invitation for the presentation of the projects that have been selected by the BrazilFoundation. However, I still have not received any correspondence discussing the results of the selection process, which you informed me would be completed at the beginning of July,” but then I saw her face in my mind. I realized the woman I saw today at Firjan was Candace!!! She had cut her hair! I couldn't figure out how I knew her (at the time), but

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<sup>431</sup> One of the two representatives of the BrazilFoundation who interviewed me in Rio (I have chosen to substitute a fictitious name here).

*recognized she was important to me. So I looked at her with knowing eyes. She looked at me but walked away...*

*There is something good that came of all this – I made the decision from here on out to...(focus on) individual contributions...(this) marks the turning point in my fundraising approach [jointly with the meeting I had with (Washington-area) neighbors in May when they told me they wanted a way of supporting local scale initiatives and made me realize we don't need to have a (large number of) projects and a proven evaluation of results to get funding. Plus that kind of funding, from good people with rich hearts, is the best kind!].*

*Instead of investing in writing to Ford or whoever I am going to put together a...brochure and offer to give lectures in the US...Instead of running after Ethos and Firjan I am going to host a fundraiser jointly with the Brazilian embassy...I'll dig up the money, the way I know how and the way I find ethical...because I don't deserve this treatment... (Foundations) are the ones with the pockets and they think they can treat people this way – the people who actually know what is going on and what is truly needed. They get to choose the projects for the common good when they aren't the ones who know what those projects would be. Same things with our communities – they could make a difference but the donors don't have the same view. They have their own...ideologically-based view (of what is needed)...*

*All this makes me wonder too about the (Foundation A/Foundation B/Foundation C)...mafia. The invite I got had (Foundation A) on it too, and (Foundation B)...was involved in the selection. How are social entrepreneurs going to be diverse if the selection is centralized in the hands of such a few!!! And then there is the King ONG phenomenon (the leader of another NGO) mentioned... if you're in with (certain individuals) you're in.<sup>432</sup>*

As it appears in my writing, this episode marked me strongly. It changed the focus of my fundraising approach and brought several problems I had perceived in the foundation world to the surface. There were two attractions to foundation fundraising early on. First, foundations could offer big lump sums of money and I felt there was not much I could do without such a start. Second, because Catalytic Communities was, as many like to point out, my “baby,” at this stage it still felt very personal. Asking for money for myself was not regarded as a quality in my upbringing. Since CatComm still felt so personal, asking for money for the organization was akin to this.

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<sup>432</sup> From July 19, 2002 Dissertation Journal entry entitled “Nasty.”

This experience also shed light on *the other side* of foundation fundraising – the side of the grantees, as opposed to the grantors who, even in their literature speak in patronizing ways.<sup>433</sup> My justice-seeking quality reacted sharply to this, realizing it is the community organizations, not the foundations, which are close to the problems – and the solutions – to society’s ills. As such, the means by which foundations exert their “expertise” is not only patronizing, but may be largely ineffective in addressing the issues they seek to address.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> As Joel Orosz makes clear in *The Insider’s Guide to Grantmaking* (2000: 110), “One of the tried-and-true aphorisms of foundation work is that no proposal arrives ready to fund. No matter how good the idea, there will be holes in one or more of the five plans that describe it: the implementation plan, the continuation plan, the evaluation plan, the dissemination plan, and the financial plan (budget). (The program manager’s) task is to decline proposals that will never be ready for prime time and to develop those that are not ready *yet*. As previously mentioned, **the ‘never-will-be’s’ far outnumber the ‘maybe’s,’** usually by a factor of five or more to one. Those few **survivors** will require a lot of your attention and **nurturing** before they are ready to face the internal funding committee or the board of trustees. Most of this work will be routine, but some of it will be delicate, and a surprising amount of it revolves around **managing** applicants’ expectations.”

<sup>434</sup> During a meeting at one foundation, I encountered a brochure that described that particular foundation’s analysis of the specific sorts of initiatives that would be needed to solve the problems with which it was concerned. It is common to find such materials published by foundations that, as Orosz explains, view themselves as the “research and development arm of society.” I reflected on this in my Dissertation Journal on July 30, 2002 in an entry entitled “Closing that Chapter:” “*As (a friend of mine who is an aspiring program officer) pointed out last week – the foundations have to develop themselves to prove their own evolution – so they have to develop their own theories and apply them – otherwise (many of them) won’t get the money that makes them tick. It’s ridiculous that those in control of the money (the wealthy) are those deciding what’s best for the poor communities in need, communities that are hammering at their local problems all of the time!*” I would argue that many foundations are too distant from the problems they are hoping to address and should count on community organizations and locally-rooted NGOs as equal partners to help pinpoint the solutions. This debate is akin to the argument over the (mis)application of technical rationality. The “hierarchical model of professional knowledge,” as described by Schon (1983), institutionally separates “research...from practice...Researchers are supposed to provide the...techniques for diagnosing and solving the problems of practice. Practitioners are supposed to furnish researchers with problems for study and with tests of the utility of research results” (26). This approach is limited, however, not accounting for the tacit “knowing-in-practice” of competent practitioners (viii). As Flyvbjerg (2000) explains, ‘theory’ cannot be developed in the social sciences as it is known in the natural sciences, where “research and...progress are founded upon a relatively cumulative production of knowledge, the key concepts being explanation and prediction based on **context-independent** theories” (26). Therefore, as Schon argues, it is important to focus more on and see the value in “practitioners’...capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and...(their use of) this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice” (1983: viii).

Through almost two years of failed experience with grant writing I learned more about the foundation world.<sup>435</sup> In this process I came to take notice of another glitch with regard to foundation fundraising – a Catch-22 that existed almost inherently for Catalytic Communities. As Joel Orosz describes in *The Insider's Guide to Grantmaking*, "Despite...wide diversity, the great majority of U.S. foundation would probably agree with the following four statements: (1) Foundations should primarily concentrate on philanthropy (root causes) as opposed to charity (meeting immediate needs); (2) Foundations should primarily concentrate on supporting innovation as opposed to supporting ongoing programs; (3) Foundations should primarily concentrate on leveraging funds as opposed to being the sole funder; (4) Foundations should primarily concentrate on helping good ideas get a trial and a start as opposed to funding tested and proved approaches".<sup>436</sup>

According to Orosz, foundations agree with these statements because of the key, though limited, role they play in shaping society. Contrary to popular thought, they are not big social spenders in comparison with other sectors in the US or in any other society: "According to...*Giving USA 1998*, (individual) Americans gave \$143.46 billion to charities in 1997...Individuals gave 85% of all funds.<sup>437</sup> Foundations, often thought to be an infinite source of philanthropic largesse, gave less than 10%, and corporations, another

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<sup>435</sup> Though I still do not believe I have passed Stage 2 that the Dreyfus brothers call Advanced Beginner, the point at which a novice advances due to acquired experience and the realization that success is not dependent only on 'context-free rules.' At this stage, "the learner...consider(s) more context-free facts and...use(s) more sophisticated rules...(and) enlarge(s) his) conception of the world of the skill...Thanks to a perceived similarity with prior examples" (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 22). At this stage, there are new 'situational' elements that the learner recognizes as important.

<sup>436</sup> Orosz 2000: 18.

<sup>437</sup> I am told this may include sizeable contributions to religious institutions.

source thought to be highly significant, less than 6%”.<sup>438</sup> This figure does not include public sector support to the third sector, an even more significant pocket of funding.<sup>439</sup>

The logic is therefore that because of their limited financial means to effect social change (and the enormous demand that is placed on them), foundations need to think strategically with regard to how they spend their finite resources. “Obviously,” Orosz explains as he operationalizes the list of four characteristics of foundations he presented (above), “if foundations tried to meet basic needs, their funds would quickly be swallowed up, and nothing would fundamentally change. Foundations instead should aim at *causes* of problems...(They should also) focus on encouraging innovation rather than on supporting the ongoing programs of nonprofit organizations...(because) the dollars that foundations provide are so few that they would quickly be swallowed up by support of ongoing programs...(Third), foundations do not see themselves as sole funders of projects...and prefer to stimulate other funders to join them in support of good ideas...by issuing challenge grants (etc.)...(as a way to) multiply their impact without increasing their expenditures...(Finally) most foundations see themselves as the research and development arm of society...their mission is to support the experimental and the untried. They find good ideas, back them, nurture them, leverage other dollars for them, and then reduce and eventually cease to support them altogether...Foundations must

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<sup>438</sup> Wagner and Ryan 1999: 396.

<sup>439</sup> These figures incorporate individual, foundation, and corporate contributions, but not public sector or service fee contributions to not-for-profit income. These are of little relevance in CatComm’s case because of the organization’s international, network-developing nature. However, it is important to provide context. Only 12.9% of not-for-profit income in the United States comes from philanthropic giving (individuals, foundations, and corporations). 30.5% comes from public sector contracts and 56.6% from fees and charges that certain not-for-profit types issue (a total of \$320 billion arrives at the US not-for-profit sector from this last, largest source) (Sokolowski and Salamon 1999: 272).

continuously stop supporting ‘old grantees’ so that they will have funds available to meet new opportunities”.<sup>440</sup>

The Catch-22 for Catalytic Communities comes with Orosz’s second foundation criterion, that “foundations should primarily concentrate on supporting innovation as opposed to supporting ongoing programs”.<sup>441</sup> What if innovation *is inherent in* the ongoing program as I explained is typical of Dot Orgs?<sup>442</sup> What if innovation is *at the soul of* the ongoing program? What if an ongoing program is by its nature organic and flexible, innovating as it responds to its users/clients, but not developing new program areas because, simply put, innovation is what it is designed to foster?

One reason CatComm did not acquire foundation funding during this early period is clearly my lack of expertise. More fundamental, however, were two other factors: (1) My lack of credibility in this circuit, being young and not having led any organizations or initiatives in the past; and (2) The fact that Catalytic Communities was still only an idea, and one that is difficult to imagine without seeing in practice (hence, unlikely to be funded at the outset). It became apparent over time that for the most part, foundations support new initiatives *within* existing organizations or new organizations headed by *already* respected social entrepreneurs. Few provide seed money for entirely new organizations headed by individuals as-of-yet unknown in their fields. The Catch-22 is that once such a new organization is in existence and acquires credibility, it will only acquire foundation support if and when entirely new and innovative programs are

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<sup>440</sup> Orosz 2000: 18-20.

<sup>441</sup> Orosz 2000: 18.

<sup>442</sup> See Chapter 3, section entitled “Innovation Arises from the Content and Often Cannot be Predicted.”

initiated. In the case of Catalytic Communities, then, traditional foundation funding neither supported the organization at start-up, nor will it now the organization is developing, because the nature of the organization's programs does not fit into the traditional model for foundation support, of supporting innovative new directions in existing institutions.

William Cameron is one of Catalytic Communities' advisors and a retired Network Consultant for YMCA, who, after running several successful local YMCAs spent the last ten years of his career providing development advice to hundreds of member institutions and teaching not-for-profit management. Cameron summarized the situation of many not-for-profits when, during a November 2003 interview, he told me: "Nonprofits have very unwisely chased funding because it is available...(arriving at) strange marriages of organizations going way out of their path because that's where the money happens to be".<sup>443</sup>

My experience with the BrazilFoundation made it official: I felt disempowered by my reception in the foundation world.<sup>444</sup> But, as I allude to in the above journal entry, I had had a much more empowering and enriching fundraising experience that helped me "see the other side" less than two months before.

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<sup>443</sup> Similarly, Warwick (2000: xiii), asks about corporate partners: "What about comarketing programs with corporate partners? By entering into these agreements, are we selling our credibility too cheaply?" And on a related note, I have received brochures in the mail advertising foundation magazines. One asks: "Grantmakers will decide to nurture your project, or trim it. Do you know what they're thinking? Get inside the grantmaker's head. Subscribe to *Foundation News & Commentary*."

<sup>444</sup> It is important to defend the BrazilFoundation, however, in saying that the incident I described happened in the foundation's first year. I have learned from others involved in their selection process that the foundation has been developing better systems and is attempting to become more careful and professional. That said, the incident did not fail to mark me. The effect it had on my relationship with fundraising remains.

### ***Seeing the Light: Empowerment through Individual Private Contributions***

On June 1<sup>st</sup> 2002, while in Washington, Catalytic Communities hosted a small and intimate gathering of neighbors at my parents' house in Chevy Chase, Maryland. An affluent neighborhood, Chevy Chase had been my home for all my school-age years, and I knew my neighbors well. I was the kid who babysat their children, walked their dogs, fed their cats, picked up their newspapers, and helped at dinner parties. I was also the Camp Fire Girl who sold them candies and the environmental activist who dropped by their front doors to ask what they knew about the county's proposed incinerator. The group of twelve neighbors my family hosted on that evening were those who had already demonstrated interest in some way – providing legal expertise, encouraging words, or even monetary contributions.

The few who had already provided financial support were those who responded to a newsletter I prepared and printed six months earlier, in December 2001. This 2-page newsletter was inspired by that of Colman McCarthy's Center for Teaching Peace. McCarthy is an acclaimed pacifist whose syndicated column ran in the *Washington Post* for many years and who has dedicated his life to teaching peace studies. I took his course during my senior year in high school and remained close friends with him afterwards. On a visit to his house for a 'pep talk' of sorts in early October 2001, I complained about the difficulties I was having in acquiring foundation funding. McCarthy turned to me, in his calm, thoughtful and deliberate way, presented me with a copy of his Center's newsletter and, pointing to and tapping it, said, as I remember it, "All you've got to do is prepare one of these, pop it in the mail, and the checks come in." At first I did not think too much

about his suggestion. After all, I needed *large* sums of money, and how in the world would I, alone, administer dozens or even hundreds of separate donors?

By mid-December, however, on my next visit to Washington, I had decided to give Colman's suggestion a try. I prepared Catalytic Communities' first newsletter, modeled visually after the Center for Teaching Peace's, but with more color and graphics. I went to a professional printing service and had over 500 copies made. Starting local in order to save on mailing costs, a hand-folded copy with hand-written address was dropped in the boxes of the approximately 500 homes in my parents' Chevy Chase neighborhood. "This is an experiment," I thought, as I marched through the freezing streets over several days.

The response rate for this experiment was approximately 1.4%. Only seven of the neighbors contacted in December 2001 replied. Contributions ranged from \$50 to \$200. And, not coincidentally, they were seven of the neighbors I knew best. This experience confirmed my initial view that individual fundraising would not be viable given my limited time availability and comfort level in making requests which, as was mentioned earlier, I still felt as if were for myself. On the other hand, an important lesson was learned here, that would later prove central in CatComm's fundraising strategy: start with those you know.<sup>445</sup>

Six months later, when my family hosted an event for twelve neighbors, it was not meant to serve as a fundraising event. Rather, this intimate gathering was an "update,"

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<sup>445</sup> Later I would also learn through experience that the "acquisition cost," or "net amount spent to recruit a new donor" (Warwick 2000: 220), would start high but go down with time, if an individual fundraising strategy was developed. These two lessons form the basic logic behind CatComm's current fundraising approach (that will be discussed in the remainder of the chapter).

where those who had expressed interest could provide feedback and hear how the organization was progressing. After some refreshments and initial difficulties setting up Catalytic Communities' new projector (our first purchase), I presented CatComm's vision and the importance of developing a dynamic database in order to move forward. Interested, the various neighbors began asking questions. One, in particular, who had already provided important legal support, turned and asked something of the sort, "So what is it you *need* to get this database working? How much?" Taken aback, I told him we would need approximately US\$6000.<sup>446</sup> He then looked around as if gauging the number of people in the room and challenged, "I will make a contribution of \$500." If all those in the room pledged this amount, he seemed to imply, the problem would be resolved and the initial work on the organization's database – the most important initial step to building Catalytic Communities – could be tackled. In June 2002, largely as a result of this meeting, \$2300 was acquired in individual contributions.

During this initial gathering the same neighbor who had previously provided legal support and then stimulated contributions from others also emphasized the importance of my learning to "make the ask," as fundraising professionals like to say. He kept repeating, "You have to ask!" throughout the meeting. This was honestly very difficult for me in the beginning,<sup>447</sup> as I have mentioned, but by May 2002 I was becoming increasingly comfortable with it. In particular, Ted Howard, a member of Catalytic Communities' initial Board of Directors and the Executive Director of the University of

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<sup>446</sup> This figure was based on how I expected a US estimate I had received (of \$10,000 to do this work) would translate when handled by Brazilian programmers at Brazilian rates. In fact, the work ended up costing only ~US\$3000.

<sup>447</sup> "I'm much more comfortable when I feel I'm asking for others!" I wrote on May 29, 2002 in my Dissertation Journal.

Maryland's Democracy Collaborative, had recommended a new resource to me only two weeks before. Howard had told me about a friend of his, Lynne Twist, a professional fundraiser who had developed an exceptional kit consisting of cassettes, a workbook, and video.

By the meeting with neighbors, I had listened to much of Twist's material, but was only beginning to incorporate it. In her three cassettes, Twist provides a taste of a two-day symposium she conducted in the Spring of 2000 with fifty not-for-profit fundraisers. Twist has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for not-for-profit efforts, all from individuals (not foundations or corporations), over a thirty-year career. The cassettes begin by expressing Twist's goals for the symposium<sup>448</sup> and go on to (1) emphasize the importance of a focus on individual fundraising;<sup>449</sup> (2) demystify the nature of our relationships with money;<sup>450</sup> (3) call attention to the condition of scarcity in

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<sup>448</sup> Her goals were to: (1) "Enable, empower, and inspire you to be an effective generative resource for your mission and for your work;" (2) Make the "arena of fundraising...an area of joy, aliveness, and productivity for you;" (3) Help "you leave the symposium with a new lens. A new way of seeing and hearing the constituency that surrounds you all the time, and surrounds your organization, and your personal commitment, so you can be ever more effective in generating long-term financial partners for your work...life-time financial partners;" and (4) Help "you leave this symposium with a fundraising design and strategy which is inspired by and **consistent with the mission** and the very heart of your work. Not some slick, clever way through the morass of that horrible thing of fundraising, but a strategy and design that totally turns you on, that you just can't wait to implement" (Twist 2001: Cassette A1).

<sup>449</sup> Twist utilizes statistics to demonstrate the power of individual fundraising, citing that of the US\$34 trillion moving about the world in goods and services in 1998, half was controlled by Americans. Of that, only a tiny fraction – \$174 billion – was given to not-for-profits. Of those funds contributed to not-for-profits, 5% were distributed by corporations (despite their abundant wealth), 7% by foundations, and 88% by individuals. Of those individuals, 89% have annual incomes below US\$150,000. In other words, argues Twist, That's really the target audience for fundraising. That's where the big numbers come from. If you think you have to be connected to Bill Gates, and Larry Ellison...to fund your organization, and that you don't have the contacts, and the connections, or the relationships you need to get the money you need for your thing, I'm telling you that's not true...that's not where the big bucks are being given, frankly" (Twist 2001: Cassette 1A).

<sup>450</sup> Twist talks about "the power of money when it's sourced," the power people give money when they spend it or make a contribution, as being of utmost value. She believes that at some point the initial point of money was forgotten and that now it is misperceived and misunderstood, controlling our lives. She also believes that the flow of money is healthy, and that "we...as fundraisers, need to open our heart to people

which we live and the importance of sufficiency; (4) teach the importance of and how to fundraise in a way that is consistent with the organization's mission; (5) express the need to cultivate donors over the long term and to educate them; and (6) reformat our thinking to think of fundraising as 'expanding the pie.'<sup>451</sup>

In mid-2002 the primary message I took from Lynne Twist as I began listening to the tapes came with lesson two above. Though the others struck a chord at the time, and grew in importance later, at the outset it was this lesson that came into play. Essentially what Twist does is to demystify fundraisers' relationship and view of money by framing the importance of the work that not-for-profits undertake. Fundraisers, she says, have "an exciting and sacred mission." Once they view the scope of their work in this way, and reframe their own love-hate relationship with money, their role is transformed. All of a sudden the fundraiser turns into a minister: "We should have a lens for the people with money and see them as part of our ministry, rather than people we are trying to get something out of".<sup>452</sup>

Twist's words were the first I heard that made it easier for me to "make the ask." Realizing funds would support more than just myself, but the effective functioning of an entire organization based on an innovative and high-potential idea, Twist's and the neighbor's plea to "make the ask" were just what I needed to hear. On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002 I

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who are trapped in (the) vicious cycle of wealth because *we can help them!*...that's part of the ministry of fundraising" (Twist 2001: Cassette 1B). That is, those who are wealthy benefit psychologically from being generous and a fundraiser should not have a negative relationship with money but, rather, find means by which to increase its flow.

<sup>451</sup> Involved in this is an emphasis on not viewing the world of funds available as a limited universe, or pie, of which one is attempting to get a larger slice. Rather, Twist encourages, the job of fundraisers is to constantly increase the size of the pie – the number of individuals and institutions contributing and the size of their contributions. According to this thinking, there is no reason for organizations to sense themselves as competing for funds with one another.

<sup>452</sup> Twist 2001: Cassette 1B.

had the opportunity to have breakfast with Ed Scott, a wealthy businessman who supports diverse international development research initiatives. At a meeting several months earlier my father had given him a copy of CatComm's first newsletter. Shortly after that he asked my father to encourage me to contact him. This is why I was meeting with him at the Watergate Hotel on June 10<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Scott came off the elevator, we greeted, and sat down for breakfast in the hotel restaurant. I remember feeling that I was not speaking well about Catalytic Communities that day: maybe Mr. Scott's businesslike, all-American nature made me feel he would not be a likely supporter of CatComm. His way of being contrasted with the more idealistic ideology represented in the language and interaction I was accustomed to when talking about CatComm. Regardless, I had decided I would get up the courage to tell him just what I was looking for: \$25,000 to cover CatComm's ideal working budget for the rest of the year. After answering Mr. Scott's questions about CatComm's work, he facilitated my "ask" by asking *me*, "So, what is it I can do for you?" The impression he gave was that as a businessman his time was valuable and that now he had heard some of what I had to say, he needed to know where the conversation was going. I remember gathering the courage to tell him: he could provide Catalytic Communities with a \$25,000 contribution that would allow us to develop for six months to a point at which our impact could be more widely perceived and the basic framework would be in place.<sup>453</sup> Having felt I presented poorly, I then braced myself for a clear, concise "no."

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<sup>453</sup> Again, the truth is that early on it is difficult to know just what will be needed and how long it will take to *see* an impact, but in order to attract supporters one has to develop such estimates. At the time I expected that six months of support would allow for (1) the programming of the website in database form; (2) the documentation of 80 new community projects in Rio de Janeiro, and (3) the hiring of a number of

Instead, what came after was incredible. Scott explained to me he had supported small organizations in the past that, upon receiving a sizeable contribution from him, did not pursue sustainability. He was therefore going to try a different approach with CatComm. But first, he made clear what he *really* believed would come from my hopes to build CatComm: “I’ll be honest with you,” he said, “I think you probably have about a 1 in 10 chance of succeeding with this... Worldwide I’d say 1 in 30... But, I like your stick-to-it-ive-ness”.<sup>454</sup> He appreciated exactly what Twist emphasizes good fundraisers make clear – my dedication – and offered an alternative to my request. Having retold the story many times, as I remember it, Scott went on: “So I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I won’t give you the \$25,000, but I *will* give you \$10,000 up front. In addition, I’ll match any contributions you receive until my total contribution is valued at \$50,000”.<sup>455</sup> He stipulated this would be his only contribution, and later he added that this possibility would last for only one year. After that, Catalytic Communities would be on its own.

I wrote in my dissertation journal two days after this experience:

*All I can say is that, for the first time in my life, I used the word “empowered” to refer to myself. I was consciously “empowered” by what Ed Scott did. Even though what I thought I wanted going into the meeting was for him to say “Sure, here’s a check for \$25,663, to cover the rest of your expenses through December!” What he actually did left me feeling dozens of times better than I would have had he said this. Had he said this, I would have left the meeting thinking, “Great, I can focus on the project implementation stuff until December and forget about this damn fundraising... but (uh oh)... this had better be working by then, so that I can run after money for next year!” I think part of the difference in my state of mind (I’ve lost my lack of affinity for fundraising) has*

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interns to organize a year-end event to bring 200 leaders from Rio’s *favelas* together to learn from their peers and inspire future word-of-mouth outreach.

<sup>454</sup> From June 12, 2002 Dissertation Journal entry titled “We got our First Funding!”

<sup>455</sup> In other words, Scott agreed to provide \$10,000 up front in seed funding, plus up to \$40,000 more in the form of a matching grant on top of other sources of funding that CatComm secured. This way, his family foundation’s total contribution would be valued at \$50,000.

*been Lynne Twist's tapes; I now don't dread talking with people about giving us money...*

*Leaving the meeting after what he actually said left me thinking "Fantastic, I'm doing a good job... let me get out there and get this program rolling with what he's given me! Let me get out there and continue talking to potential funders, to guarantee us for next year!" or something like that.*

*As André<sup>456</sup> pointed out, he essentially makes it so that we can meet an annual budget of \$100,000 if we just raise \$50,000. And as Peggy<sup>457</sup> pointed out last night, it's much easier to attract additional funders if we can tell them there's a match out there...Peggy even suggested mentioning this in CatComm's next newsletter in December, to attract our donors to give more. Having learned about this possibility I'm going to ask for this from all future individual contributors. This is actually preferable, I think, to getting grants from them, because it is something I can use when I talk with foundations.<sup>458</sup>*

This experience, as several people highlighted to me, also reflected on one of the significant strengths of the not-for-profit sector in the US (and the profit-making sector, too), as I reflected in the same dissertation journal entry:

*...André was (impressed) when I told him what Scott had proposed the other day...(His) reaction was – "That's what's amazing about this country: the incentives and opportunities for private initiative – whether by nonprofits or by businesses." Yes, between the protections for entrepreneurs through incorporation and the incentives for not-for-profits, the US has a lead on innovation. Goes to show how important smart regulation and policy-making is.<sup>459</sup>*

It is widely remarked in the third sector literature that today's bustling not-for-profit sector in the United States is due in large part to the way such organizations are treated by tax laws and state bureaucracies. Very favorable tax legislation is, indeed, the

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<sup>456</sup> André Williamson, my brother, is a member of Catalytic Communities' Board of Directors and an MBA.

<sup>457</sup> Peggy Kidd was a Catalytic Communities volunteer at the time. Having directed a not-for-profit in San Diego for which she significantly increased fundraising prospects, Peggy provided CatComm with early fundraising advice.

<sup>458</sup> From June 12, 2002 Dissertation Journal entry titled "We got our First Funding!"

<sup>459</sup> From June 12, 2002 Dissertation Journal entry titled "We got our First Funding!"

second major factor contributing to people's motivation to support not-for-profit activity.<sup>460</sup> The first are the cause and the individual that is "making the ask."

The month of June 2002 was the most critical month with regard to Catalytic Communities' fundraising strategy since inception. On the 1<sup>st</sup>, neighbors and supporters of CatComm got together for what might today be called the impetus meeting. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, I met with Ed Scott and CatComm received the financial injection it needed to begin moving. And on June 13<sup>th</sup> in Rio came the interview with the BrazilFoundation that would lead to that foundation's *faux pas* of mid-July. Following Scott's support and the incredibly nurturing form it took, I hoped the BrazilFoundation grant of \$10,000 would come in. With that, CatComm would have already had \$30,000 in the bank, since this support would have been matched and added to Scott's initial \$10,000 grant.

Realizing CatComm would not be acquiring \$10,000 from the BrazilFoundation towards Scott's matching promise, and remembering that his promise would only last for one year, I turned my attention to individual fundraising. It would be better to raise \$10,000 from individuals during a year and have that matched than nothing, the logic went. In late 2002 and early 2003 my fundraising focus was centered entirely on this approach.

Beginning with those I knew, as Twist recommends and as I had already learned through my own experiment works best, I contacted friends and neighbors in late 2002, inviting them to an event hosted by my parents specifically as a fundraiser – the First Annual Fundraiser to Benefit Catalytic Communities. Though I termed it as such, it was

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<sup>460</sup> "Surveys of donor motivations consistently point out that tax benefits are a secondary motivation; the cause and the person asking are more important for donors" (Wagner and Ryan 1999: 387).

still unclear at this point that individual fundraising would become a mainstay. It seemed strange to me – counterintuitive, in fact – that an organization would be sustained by friends and neighbors! It felt almost like a form of nepotism, like an organization fundraising in this way simply could not be sustainable. In reality, as I learned during this process, beginning with those closest to the organization is a tried and true method of sparking growth and, of course, from those closest the organization's base grows beyond to the contacts of those and others, who can then spread the word further (if the organization is performing well).

As a result, through this fundraising event and newsletter mailings to friends, by December 31, 2002, Catalytic Communities was able to raise \$16,586 towards Scott's matching challenge. Further interest sparked in CatComm by new friends of the organization made at the World Social Forum in January 2003 led to an additional fundraising event in San Francisco the following May. In May 2003, three events were hosted by supporters – in San Francisco (a large event organized by new friends and previous Rio-based volunteers now in the Bay Area), Santa Cruz (a small get-together organized by friends among their own friends), and Chevy Chase (this time by a supportive neighbor). By late May, as Scott's early June deadline for the acquisition of matching funds approached, CatComm had raised \$19,139 in 2003 which, combined with those funds acquired in late 2002, meant only \$4,275 of Scott's challenge remained unmatched. Scott was contacted, asking for an extension to the end of June in order to afford time for additional checks to arrive. A neighbor joined forces with my mother to send out personalized letters in June describing the deadline that was approaching. These

efforts were effective – by late June additional contributions had arrived, putting CatComm just over Scott’s promise. The full amount was matched. A positive externality not yet seen as an objective, the number of CatComm individual contributors had grown from 12 in June 2002, to 27 in December 2002, to 80 in June 2003.

This meant that, in mid-2003, Catalytic Communities had funds in the bank to last the organization at least one full year. One positive aspect of this was that I could focus on other stresses like improving the organization’s administration (see Chapter 5) and on this doctoral dissertation. For these reasons no public fundraising event was planned for late 2003. Rather, during that period contact was made with previous supporters through the mailing of letters and newsletters, and with potential new supporters through the distribution of a specially prepared online slideshow that functioned as a presentation, much like what I would have presented were I physically attending fundraising events. This constituted a new experiment, one with online fundraising, though not at random. The presentation was sent only to individuals I had had direct contact with in the past (at conferences, in high school and college, etc.). In addition, a “Living Room Tour” is being planned for late May and early June 2004, during which I will present in the homes of friends throughout the northeast of the United States, California, and Seattle.

Catalytic Communities’ developing fundraising strategy<sup>461</sup> therefore can be described as having the following components:

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<sup>461</sup> Now that CatComm’s fundraising strategy has shifted from an uncomfortable home in the foundation world to that in the individual philanthropy department, I feel much more capable of raising funds. My personality, comfort in speaking about and visually presenting the work (as opposed to writing proposals, whose format and style I never felt allowed for the nature of the organization to come clear), and excitement about what the organization is doing, mean that presentation-based fundraising is more effective and natural. In addition, I grew up involved in the activities and as a member of not-for-profits that

1. Focus on individuals with whom contact was initiated face-to-face (at fundraising events, conferences, etc.) and who have a cursory sense of what the organization does or of who the individuals involved are. This may include individuals representing family foundations that, in my limited experience, often operate similarly to private individuals.
2. Regular face-to-face fundraising events where a presentation is made and participants interact with the presenter. I think it is probably important that a 'centralizer of information,' like the Executive Director, is the one presenting. This person holds the appropriate knowledge to answer all questions, can speak comfortably on behalf of the organization. In addition, having such a person presenting shows a level of respect and demonstrates import with regard to those individuals attending. Face-to-face meetings have proven to be crucial moments with regard to reflection about the organization's strategy. New or distant observers often ask important questions and offer unique insights that are later incorporated into the organizational design at such meetings.
3. Presentations that encourage participants to become involved in the "Community of Solidarity" that Catalytic Communities is creating, online and off, between community innovators and those who want to learn from and/or support their initiatives in limitless ways. CatComm's philosophy is that all individuals have value and resources to add to the initiatives described on its website and fundraising presentations focus on those areas, in addition to "making the ask" for financial resources. This is the way CatComm has found that allows its fundraising to further the organization's meeting of its mission, as Twist and others recommend.
4. Regular newsletter distribution that keeps supporters and others interested in the organization updated on goings-on, in addition to more frequent updates online (something which we are only now beginning to incorporate). It is important the newsletter be printed with a frequency that allows for (a) significant news, and (b) maintenance.
5. Transparency with supporters. As CatComm is a small organization with limited time resources among staff, I am transparent with supporters in letting them know that this affects the frequency of our newsletter distribution and fundraising

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conduct fundraising through individuals, and so already had knowledge with regard to this approach. In fact, I would say with regard to the Dreyfus brothers' five steps, that in June 2002 I was already "competent" (the third level of skill acquisition) with regard to individual fundraising – "adopting a hierarchical procedure of decision-making...choosing a plan to organize the situation, and...then examining only the small set of factors that are most important given the chosen plan...A competent performer with a goal in mind sees a situation as a set of facts. The importance of the facts may depend on the presence of other facts...when a situation has a particular constellation of those elements a certain...decision (should be) made" (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1986: 24).

drives. A Gandhian tactic that I have found very helpful, complete transparency dispels or mitigates skepticism. It also reduces people's questioning of the ethics of the organization and affords understanding as to why CatComm operates as it does. Limited contact does not mean the organization is not being effective and functioning well but, rather, that it is targeting its limited time towards meeting community needs. For this reason it is important to schedule defined regular fundraising periods.

6. Regular innovation with regard to fundraising. In December 2001 a newsletter was distributed to 500 homes. This experiment taught me a great deal about how to target supporters. In December 2002 the first fundraising event was held. In May 2003 a series of fundraisers were held emphasizing the completion of the period for receiving support towards the matching grant. Now, in December 2003 the first mass email fundraising campaign has been carried out in addition to the mailing of newsletters to existing supporters (most of whom received a personalized letter and photograph of community artwork which will be awarded to three December supporters – two at random and one to the highest donor).<sup>462</sup>

It is worth recounting one additional story – that in January 2003 I reacted to a plea from CatComm's closest community partners in Rio, the CONGESCO coalition of community leaders, to help them acquire funding to attend the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Social Forum in southern Brazil. This group of leaders had been attempting to secure support for the long

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<sup>462</sup> My hope is, as I test, gain experience with, and build upon these and other components of CatComm's fundraising strategy, that I will reach the Dreyfus brothers' last two stages of skill acquisition, beginning with Proficiency, and culminating with Expertise (as Lynne Twist is clearly an example). These two stages are characterized by a qualitative shift from the first three in the sequence. By the fourth stage, that of Proficiency, "understanding...effortlessly occurs upon seeing similarities with previous experiences." "Usually the proficient performer will be deeply involved in his task...certain features of the situation will stand out as salient and others will recede into the background...No detached choice or deliberation occurs. *It just happens, apparently because the proficient performer has experienced similar situations in the past and memories of them trigger plans similar to those that worked in the past and anticipations of events similar to those that occurred*" (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1984: 28; emphasis added). The fifth stage, that of Expertise, is that during which "skill has become so much a part of him that he need be no more aware of it than he is of his own body...*When things are proceeding normally, experts don't solve problems and don't make decisions; they do what normally works*" (31). That is, "With enough experience in a variety of situations, all seen from the same perspective or with the same goal in mind but requiring different tactical decisions, the mind...seems to group together situations...At this point not only is a situation, when seen as similar to a prior one, understood, but the associated decision, action, or tactic simultaneously comes to mind. An immense library of distinguishable situations is built up on the basis of experience...With expertise comes fluid performance" (32). Something I noticed with regard to the Dreyfus brothers' five stages and which I noted in the margins of their article, is that "there is a pain element (to learning) – being a novice is no fun! Once you're an expert it's all a game." This is no doubt an important factor, too, in facilitating the skill acquisition process beyond a certain point, wherever that may be, where the task at hand begins to feel more like a 'game.'

trip over several weeks from Rio-based organizations that they had worked with in the past, to no avail. A documentary was being produced about their trip, but that film's small budget would only allow for one or two CONGESCO members to participate. In a last-minute attempt, I spent an hour one evening writing a letter, on their behalf, and sent it to six contacts I had made at the previous year's Forum. During that event I had worked as a translator for a group of progressive foundations from the United States. I targeted the email to members of this group. Two replies brought \$2700 in resources that, combined with part of the match CatComm would receive for these funds, allowed for 23 community leaders to attend the Forum, an experience that changed the face of both CONGESCO and Catalytic Communities. The larger of these two replies was from the Panta Rhea Foundation, a small foundation comprised of several individual or family-funded trusts based in California. My understanding today is that this foundation, like Scott's, operates in the flexible style of a family (as opposed to a private, corporate, or community) foundation. Interestingly, neither the Scott nor Panta Rhea Foundation has a face on the Internet. As family foundations, both allow enormous flexibility and no bureaucracy in responding to interests that arise. As is true with individual fundraising, there are no pre-imposed limits on what issues and approaches will be supported.

It is generally not a good idea for a not-for-profit institution to depend purely on one income source. Though I believe this to be less the case when that "source" is comprised of hundreds – in the case of Catalytic Communities – of individuals,<sup>463</sup> it is still important for CatComm to consider avenues of support in addition to developing its

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<sup>463</sup> Authors on the subject tend to focus on the problems with depending on one donor – a government institution, philanthropist, or foundation, for example – rather than one *type* of donor.

current plan, based on what has been learned to date, in building the “Community of Solidarity” discussed.<sup>464</sup> Suggestions by Peter Brinckerhoff as to ways to attain financial empowerment are already being incorporated. Rather than diversifying through corporations, government, or foundations that would limit CatComm’s ability to do “more mission that you want to do, not the mission that...funders limit you to”,<sup>465</sup> other avenues are being considered. Brinckerhoff recommends various techniques organizations can use to reach financial empowerment, among other things listing the five characteristics of financially empowered not-for-profits.<sup>466</sup> These are the five areas that CatComm is beginning to consider as this chapter is being written. In particular: maintaining some of its funds in an accessible interest-bearing account, including a “mission reserves” category within the annual budget, and fundraising with the intention of guaranteeing a surplus from one year to the next. In addition, a board of directors more engaged in fundraising, the development of a close relationship with key family foundations and philanthropists, and developing a tradition of individual philanthropy in

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<sup>464</sup> It is important because, for example, if CatComm’s sources, despite being numerous, are all in the same category, then if something should happen to that category – mass unemployment or changes in the tax legislation, for example – CatComm would be dramatically affected. CatComm therefore needs to diversify its fundraising strategy, but in a way that neither forces it to depend on funders that will inspire a negative form of “mission creep” (see footnote 404), nor require fee-for-service, a form of funds acquisition inconsistent with the organization’s mission (see footnote 253).

<sup>465</sup> Brinckerhoff 1994: 151.

<sup>466</sup> These five characteristics are: (1) That the not-for-profit makes money in at least seven out of ten years; (2) That it expands the universe of income streams (particularly relevant for foundations depending on big government or other sorts of grants); (3) That it gets at least 5% of its annual operating income from an endowment; (4) That the not-for-profit maintains at all times a ‘comfort’ level of at least 90 days-worth of operating reserves in an accessible interest-bearing account; and (5) That the organization maintains a line in the budget for “Mission Reserves,” allowing it to respond to local needs as they occur, rather than having to acquire money after needs arise (Brinckerhoff 1994: 153-4).

Brazil,<sup>467</sup> will also contribute to future efforts at diversifying CatComm's funding base.

A summary comparing my experiences with regard to foundation and individual philanthropy is provided in Figure 31.

### ***Fundraising in Line with Organic Management and Systems Thinking***

The blessing in not having acquired funding in the beginning, and particularly not from foundations, is that in the end Catalytic Communities' organizational philosophy has been developing more fluidly, flexibly, without focusing too narrowly on specific targets. Rather, the organization defines its mission and specific objectives within its range of pursuit, and involves communities we work with who tell *us* what is important. Volunteers and suggestions from individual supporters also help steer the way. As one can see from the listing of numerical targets at the beginning of this essay, they were tailored to meet the expectations and desires of the specific foundation targeted (in that case, Avina, which focuses in Brazil). A proposal written to a US-based foundation would inherently have involved a focus on amplifying the CatComm website for a low-income US audience; an international foundation for an international audience, etc. This means the organization would have been steered not by its natural, organic pattern of development but, rather, that dictated by the very distant foundation world.

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<sup>467</sup> Stimulating and helping develop a culture of individual philanthropy in Brazil is right in line with CatComm's mission as the organization attempts to broaden the Community of Solidarity surrounding community projects in that country.

**Figure 31. Comparison of foundation and private fundraising as experienced by CatComm**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Sub issues</b>	<b>Typical Foundation Fundraising as experienced by CatComm</b>	<b>Fundraising from Private Individuals and Family Foundations as experienced by CatComm</b>
<b>Start-up Concerns</b>			
	Seed money	Typically do not provide seed money, particularly to projects of individuals without established 'names'	Like to support people they see as dynamic initiators (particularly the case for friends)
	Legal standing	NGO must be legally established before any funding is made available	Individuals taken with the NGO's mission may support it before legal standing is acquired
	Operational expenses	Typically do not cover	Derive satisfaction from supporting ongoing initiatives they feel are making a difference
	Term	Normally support programs for 2 years at the most	Normally support programs on a continuous basis, as long as they like the results; in fact, contributions often increase with time
	Sustainability in funding	Encourage organizations to find sustainable funding elsewhere	If cultivated properly, are by their nature a sustainable funding source
	Odds	Odds of acquiring a grant may be 1/1000	Odds of an individual writing a check may be 1/10 or better
	Potential supporters	Limited in number, particularly with regard to a given topic area	Virtually unlimited
	Time requirement	Up to two weeks per proposal	Up to two days to prepare a newsletter; two weeks or more to prepare a fundraising event
	Amounts	Thousands to hundreds-of-thousands of dollars	Tens to thousands of dollars
<b>Procedures</b>			
	Budgets, strategies & objectives	Require that organizations delineate strict budgets, strategies, and objectives <i>before</i> programs are administered and that they <i>stick to them</i>	Follow what the organization has <i>accomplished</i> during a particular period with the budget and strategy that were, in fact, used and the results that were, in fact, reached

**Figure 31. Comparison of foundation and private fundraising as experienced by CatComm, cont.**

Issues	Sub issues	Typical Foundation Fundraising as experienced by CatComm	Fundraising from Private Individuals and Family Foundations as experienced by CatComm
<b>Procedures, cont.</b>			
	Flexibility	Once a project is initiated, there is little flexibility with regard to how it can be carried out	Significant flexibility because support comes as a <i>response</i> ; reflecting during the process, and shifting targets as new possibilities surface
	Deadlines	Pre-established, often once or twice annually but sometimes rolling	Flexible, up to the fundraiser and depends on program needs and organizational calendar
	Paperwork	Require extensive <i>paperwork</i> that can take weeks to prepare and may only be useful for that <i>sole</i> purpose	Respond well to simple, lively updates that can be used in multiple contexts and may take only days to prepare
	Results	Emphasize quantitative program results	Emphasize qualitative program results, though are concerned with quantitative
	Feedback	Theoretically could provide feedback of “professional” caliber, though rarely the case unless funding approved	Feedback from individuals may not be of “professional” caliber, though organization can focus more on obtaining feedback from clients, rather than funders
	Importance of networks	Give the impression in publications and websites of being impartial and often prohibit phone calls or face-to-face meetings, when in reality many support programs they have personal contact with and with whom relationships develop	More likely to give if a friend or contact has recommended the program; however, can easily donate without contact previous to that of the fundraiser
	Validity of publications	Sometimes no longer looking for what is stated on website or publication; information not updated	n/a

**Figure 31. Comparison of foundation and private fundraising as experienced by CatComm, cont.**

<b>Issues</b>	<b>Sub issues</b>	<b>Typical Foundation Fundraising as experienced by CatComm</b>	<b>Fundraising from Private Individuals and Family Foundations as experienced by CatComm</b>
<b>Psychological / Philosophical</b>			
	Personality	More attractive to individuals uncomfortable with approaching individuals or more comfortable with formal approaches	More attractive to conversational, extroverted individuals that inspire excitement over their organization's accomplishments
	Empowerment	As odds (see above) predict, if grant does not come through, may feel (particularly within small organizations) disempowered	As odds (see above) predict, some level of support will come through; if support does not come through, organization is strengthened by a growing network of individuals aware of its work
	Proximity	Organization is at a distance, difficult to grow familiar with supporters	Supporters close to organization, provide feedback and become engaged
	Wasted time	Sense of wasted time can be quite high and yield a sense of despair	Sense of wasted time miniscule since fundraising in this way contributes to the mission itself
	Risk	Uncomfortable taking them; have to answer to strict foundations; dependence on small number of funders means potential subservience	Willing to take them, no one to judge or criticize but clients themselves; easier to diversify to others if disagreement arises among certain contributors

Book after book warns of the hazards of depending on foundation, government, corporate, and other external, centralized, “large sources” funds. In *Building Structures and Skills for Fundraising*, Elizabeth Wilson offers suggestions on how to raise funds locally for foreign organizations that have grown dependent on Western foundation funding that eventually dries up. Her advice? “The goal of local fundraising programs is not just to increase revenue quickly for particular programs. A second, underlying goal is to make friends whose support will, in the long term, sustain the organization. A big effort on one or two fundraising projects may bring in lots of money, but friend-making is what brings success in the long run”.<sup>468</sup> Brinkerhoff, in turn, calls on not-for-profit managers to “Imagine having funds that you can both depend on, and spend without approval from anyone other than your own board of directors. Imagine having a great idea, or noting a terrible problem in your community and being able to attack it head on, this year, this *month* without having to go to your state capital...for a lengthy review and then denial. Sound great?...This is the reality for many not-for-profits...the ones that have worked toward financial empowerment, and away from...traditional dependency (and subservience)”.<sup>469</sup> Brinkerhoff continues, focusing on small not-for-profits: “Small not-for-profits can be just as empowered (financially) as large ones, and often remain more flexible...Many start-ups are positioning themselves for financial empowerment from day one”.<sup>470</sup> In effect, CatComm was doing this, first by not acquiring foundation

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<sup>468</sup> Wilson 2001: 1-2.

<sup>469</sup> Brinkerhoff 1994: 151-152.

<sup>470</sup> Brinkerhoff 1994: 152.

grants, and later by going down the route of developing an individual funding base spurred by Scott's matching grant, without initially having planned for it.

Unlike the not-for-profit non-management style of the 1960s that Drucker described, CatComm is managed. However, it does not follow a prescribed management style following a somewhat set structure, procedure, and evaluation routine. Rather, the style has been developed internally and organically – as issues are encountered. Those involved are not naïve or ignorant of management as a concept or necessity. However, they also have not imposed (in the case of the Board of Directors) or insisted on (in the case of staff) structures for the sake of structures.

This new management style I term “organic management.” The American Heritage Dictionary defines **organic** as “4. a. Having properties associated with living organisms. b. Resembling a living organism in organization or development, interconnected: society as an organic whole. 5. Constituting an integral part of a whole; fundamental”.<sup>471</sup> **Management** is “1. The act, manner, or practice of managing; handling, supervision, or control.”

**Organic management** is therefore “the act, manner, or practice of managing, handling, supervising, and controlling the development of an (institution/organization) in a way that resembles a living organism in organization and development.” Organisms and their ecosystems are complex. In some ways they develop in predictable patterns. On the other hand, they are situated in environments that are not fully understood or anticipated and must respond rapidly and efficiently to change, stresses, and opportunities

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<sup>471</sup> *American Heritage* 1992: 1275.

imposed from the outside and in. Organic management is therefore a form of conscious management of an institution that allows for development in creative and previously unforeseen, unpredictable ways, responding to its environment, rather than following prescribed patterns of operation and structure, or focusing too heavily on pre-conceived objectives.

In organic management there are no rules, one does what makes sense in meeting the ultimate goals of the organization, not what is dictated by the latest business practices or outside expectations.

Similarly, in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Peter Senge describes the importance of applying systems thinking to organizational development. He is convinced that the lack of such thinking, in conjunction with the application of four other disciplines,<sup>472</sup> is responsible for the downfall of many institutions. As is true in any natural system, “you can only understand the system...by contemplating the whole, not any individual part of the pattern”.<sup>473</sup> Senge lists eleven laws of systems thinking<sup>474</sup> as it applies to organizations. All of these are pertinent to the problems outlined above with regard to fundraising:

1. Today’s problems come from yesterday’s “solutions.” This, Senge’s first law of systems thinking, perfectly describes what happens to many organizations whose “solution” to fundraising involves an emphasis on funds from sources that dictate the approach an organization should take. With time, their missions are “perverted,” as one organizational leader warned me. Salvaging the organization at that point becomes difficult.

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<sup>472</sup> Senge’s (1990) other four disciplines include: Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Building Shared Vision, and Team Learning.

<sup>473</sup> Senge 1990: 7.

<sup>474</sup> Senge 1990: 58-67.

2. The harder you push, the harder the system pushes back. Imagine continuously tailoring foundation proposals, to a more “perverted” extent each time, in order to acquire funds? How would that change the face of an organization, or oneself?
3. Behavior grows better before it grows worse.<sup>475</sup> The delay associated with the problems surfacing in laws one and two means that those problems will not be viewed as such until they become harder to solve.
4. The easy way out usually leads back in. This law, applied to fundraising, implies that the learning process is never complete, that creativity must be utilized in order to locate new solutions to acquiring funds, solutions that will not “lead back in” to the problems but, rather, lead to relief. Applied to not-for-profits, this means searching for a path to financial empowerment, to use Brinckerhoff’s term.
5. The cure can be worse than the disease. Gradually, the cure an organization finds for its fundraising maladies – selling credibility through comarketing programs with corporate partners, for example – may lead to worse problems. Particularly with regard to money, it is vital that organizations take systems thinking into account, for the obvious reasons that the organization’s funder is, ultimately, its boss.
6. Faster is slower. The optimal rate of growth in natural systems is far less than the fastest possible rate. The same is true for organizations. Taking it slow and growing organically, as healthy funding streams (in line with the organization’s mission) and client needs are made clear, is the most sustainable path to growth.
7. Cause and effect are not closely related in time and space. An organization that raises funds in a manner seemingly only mildly inconsistent with its objectives and clients’ needs will ultimately find itself way off course and will have a difficult time pinpointing the cause.
8. Small changes can produce big results—but the areas of highest leverage are often the least obvious. Obvious solutions to fundraising are unlikely, as is true with most obvious solutions, to work in the long run. A team of two project leaders in Rio de Janeiro recently dropped when I told them I was not pursuing foundation funding but, rather, wanted to involve as many individuals as possible in supporting CatComm. “Why would you not go after the foundation grant?” they asked me, “you’ll get it in one lump sum.” This appears as the obvious solution to many start-ups. As was not obvious to me (until I discovered Twist and

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<sup>475</sup> Senge (1990: 60) explains that “compensating feedback usually involves a ‘delay,’ a time lag between the short-term benefit and the long-term disbenefit...eventually...the compensating feedback come(s) back to haunt you... A typical solution feels wonderful, when it first cures the symptoms. Now there’s improvement...It may be two, three, or four years before the problem returns, or some new, worse problem arrives.”

Wilson) in the beginning, the least obvious solution – talk with those you know – is actually a very effective route to financial empowerment for small organizations.

9. You can have your cake and eat it too—but not all at once. One can reach financial sustainability *at the level* of their ideal budget annually, but not all at once. *First* the emphasis should be on growing the budget within a fundraising model that expands in a healthy, consistent way and that allows flexibility to work in a concentrated way within one’s mission. *Then*, the focus should be on attaining the ideal amount. Rushing to attain a sizeable organizational income in a way that will be difficult to sustain is not a healthy approach.
10. Dividing an elephant in half does not produce two small elephants. Handling fundraising as an aspect of organizational development in isolation from other aspects – as is often done when an independent contractor is hired – may create problems. This does not mean a fundraiser has to know all of the details of the organization in order to do this task. It does, however, mean that he or she needs to step back to understand the system as a whole – the system they are fundraising *for*. It is only in this way that fundraising can be made both consistent with and furthering of the organization’s mission.
11. There is no blame. When funds are not acquired, organizations tend to blame the outside circumstances, particularly funding sources themselves, that they view as having denied them access to resources. The truth is there is no “outside.” Organizations and the context in which they operate are part of the same system and all those involved in this system are responsible for its behavior. This can be very empowering as an organization realizes that through creative thinking “outside the box” fundraising can be handled in innovative new ways that strengthen philanthropy as a whole.

## *Conclusion*

I called this chapter “The Fundraising Conundrum” because for some time it was a mystery to me just how Catalytic Communities would obtain funding. Clearly I knew funding exists for not-for-profit initiatives, and that it comes from many sources. I had worked in various types of organizations – member-supported, fee-based,<sup>476</sup> and foundation-sponsored.

Catalytic Communities is a new type of organization, however, one whose natural fundraising strategy does not present itself easily. In his book, *The Five Strategies for Fundraising Success*, Warwick<sup>477</sup> tells us that:

A nonprofit organization’s (fundraising) strategy depends on its age, reputation, and accomplishments; the breadth and depth of its financial sources; the quality and spirit of its staff; and most of all, its mission. (It) is also likely to involve such corporate considerations as market share and competitive positioning.

Early on, however, it was unclear how these various factors would play out for Catalytic Communities. And there did not exist other organizations like it on which to predict what the most effective strategy would look like. In fact, in reading Warwick’s analysis, it is extremely difficult to place Catalytic Communities within the seemingly all-inclusive framework he creates. In this framework, Warwick describes five fundraising strategies, of which all organizations, at least in theory, fit primarily into one.<sup>478</sup>

CatComm’s fundraising strategy is therefore still being developed, and will continue to do so (one hopes) for many years to come, in line with those factors that

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<sup>476</sup> To understand why Catalytic Communities never seriously considered utilizing a fee-based structure refer back to footnote 253.

<sup>477</sup> 2000: 5.

<sup>478</sup> Warwick’s five strategies are: Growth Strategy, Involvement Strategy, Visibility Strategy, Efficiency Strategy, and Stability Strategy.

Warwick cites. The organization's age, reputation, accomplishments, financial resources, and so on will change and with those factors so will this strategy. The current approach – in line with both Twist's emphasis on fundraising in a way that is consistent with the organization's mission, and Warwick's "central message...(that) fundraising can do far more than provide the money to achieve (the) organization's mission. The ways in which (funds are) raise(d)...can themselves directly help...fulfill (the) mission"<sup>479</sup> – is to develop a Community of Solidarity that can be involved in multiple ways, beyond providing financial contributions. What CatComm is about, in fact, is forming networks of solidarity around community innovations, valuing and supporting them. One of the many ways this can be done is to provide a financial contribution to maintain its work. This is the fundraising strategy we are currently betting on and that fits snugly within our mission and within the bounds of systematic thinking as Senge recommends. Only time will tell whether, as we predict, this strategy will yield a large and growing base of support that will, with the right follow-up and attention, sustain Catalytic Communities.

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<sup>479</sup> Warwick 2000: xi.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion – Introducing Protagonist Action Research**

‘Action research’ was developed by social psychologist Kurt Lewin and, “put simply,...is the way in which groups of people can organize the conditions under which they can learn from their own experience and make this experience accessible to others”.<sup>480</sup>

Derived from Lewin’s approach, Participatory Action Research (PAR) fuses ‘participation’ with ‘action research’ so that authentic participation<sup>481</sup> occurs in the research that affects people’s lives. In both action research and PAR the researcher is a protagonist within the subject of study. PAR exists where subjects become co-researchers and researchers enter into the world of the people being studied,<sup>482</sup> with the intention of using their research to alter the initial situation of the group under study.<sup>483</sup>

PAR differentiates itself from “other kinds of research that typically involve researchers...doing research *on* people, making the people the objects of the research. Research on people can be either empirical-analytic or interpretive, and...because neither of these approaches...has an explicit politics, both...express an interest which is not emancipatory”.<sup>484</sup> McTaggart continues by saying that “the knowledge produced from such research can be used in coercive kinds of ways...can create the *illusion* of

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<sup>480</sup> McTaggart 1997: 27.

<sup>481</sup> Tandon (1988: 13) identifies three determinants of authentic participation in research: “(1) people’s role in setting the agenda of the inquiry; (2) people’s participation in the data collection and analysis; and (3) people’s control over the use of outcomes and the whole process.”

<sup>482</sup> Chesler 1991.

<sup>483</sup> Greenwood and Morten 1998: 3 7.

<sup>484</sup> McTaggart 1997: 29.

participation”.<sup>485</sup> PAR, on the other hand, “seeks the development of theoretically informed practice for all parties involved”.<sup>486</sup>

The case of this dissertation can be described as a form of action research though it does not conform to the principles of PAR, since here the researcher is studying herself and her own invention. Many of its characteristics do resemble those of PAR, but the nature of this approach involving the main protagonist of the object of study as the sole researcher infuses the final product with a different set of qualities. For this reason I am denominating this a new approach which I am calling Protagonist Action Research (PrAR).<sup>487</sup>

PrAR differs from other types of “involved” methodologies in that it is controlled, to a large part if not totally, by the chief protagonist of the object under study. I was both entrepreneur and participant observer of my own invention without either the involvement of other researchers or the participatory involvement of subjects beyond myself. I also initially intended this research to be purely descriptive and to enhance theory-building.<sup>488</sup> In the end conducting a dissertation on my own project did do as PAR is intended to do and benefit the organization being studied. This was not, however, the original motivation as is often the case with PAR.

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<sup>485</sup> McTaggart 1997: 29.

<sup>486</sup> McTaggart 1997: 30. According to Maguire (1987), researchers using PAR “explicitly commit to working with members of communities that have traditionally been exploited and oppressed in a united effort to bring about fundamental social change.”

<sup>487</sup> One professor suggested another potential term, something along the lines of “Participant Observer and Agent of Change.”

<sup>488</sup> Theory-building that occurs during this dissertation may be used to inspire future evaluations, but this particular study did not aim to perform any evaluation as is often the case in PAR.

This approach can be viewed as a mixture of experiment and action research where the researcher utilizes tools of case analysis, storytelling, and auto-ethnography (narrative of the self) in order to describe the evolution of his/her experiment. These tools will be described in sequence.

### ***The Revelatory Case***

In this, a *revelatory* context, cases are fundamental. A revelatory case is one that “reflect(s) some real-life situation that social scientists had not been able to study in the past. This revelatory case is in itself likely to be regarded as a discovery”.<sup>489</sup> It is due to the potential of Catalytic Communities as a revelatory case that it proved interesting to form the basis for a doctoral dissertation.

Robert Yin’s list of five applications of case study research includes two that are applicable to this dissertation. One “application is to *describe* an intervention and the real-life context in which it occurred.” Even more relevant in this case, “The case study strategy may (also) be used to *explore* those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes”.<sup>490</sup> Both of these applications characterize the use of case study throughout this dissertation. Due to its nature as a revelatory case, it was essentially impossible to predict, at the onset of research, what outcomes could be imagined and measured by Catalytic Communities’ third year. Rather, the dissertation focused on *exploring* and *describing* the process of creation, and themes that emerged, in building the organization.

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<sup>489</sup> Yin 1994: 147.

<sup>490</sup> Yin 1994: 15.

Bent Flyvbjerg makes an impressive argument in favor of case study research in his *Making Social Science Matter*. Convinced that it is case research alone that produces “the type of context-dependent knowledge which makes it possible to move from the lower to the higher levels in the learning process”,<sup>491</sup> Flyvbjerg argues that case studies are “important for the development of a nuanced view of reality”.<sup>492</sup>

It is from the description of revelatory cases like that presented here that context-dependent knowledge can be created and on which future studies involving more detailed hypothesis-testing, if that is a goal, become viable. Such cases are essential to call attention to the interesting subtleties, ‘nuances,’ that can inspire future topics of study.

### ***Storytelling***

Planning theorists from John Forester<sup>493</sup> to Seymour Mandelbaum,<sup>494</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg<sup>495</sup> to Carlo Rotella<sup>496</sup> have made important uses of and arguments in favor of storytelling in planning. Forester’s elaboration of “deliberative practitioner,” a term he coins by making comparison to the late Donald Schön’s “reflective practitioner”,<sup>497</sup> is a logical successor to his earlier work in which he highlights the fundamental nature of power to planning by telling the stories of practicing planners.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> (Flyvbjerg 2001: 71). Here he is referring to the learning process as described by the Dreyfus brothers. See footnotes in Chapter 6 to get a sense for the Dreyfus model.

<sup>492</sup> Flyvbjerg 2001: 73.

<sup>493</sup> 1989, 1999.

<sup>494</sup> 1996, 2000, 2003.

<sup>495</sup> 1998.

<sup>496</sup> 2003.

<sup>497</sup> Schon 1983.

<sup>498</sup> Forester 1989.

“Just as the ‘reflective practitioners’ learn from experience, ‘deliberative practitioners’ work and learn with others”,<sup>499</sup> Forester tells us. “Reflecting alone, a practitioner learns; deliberating with others, practitioners learn together and craft strategies to act collaboratively”.<sup>500</sup> In *The Deliberative Practitioner*, he “chose (the) cases (he did) precisely because they...reflect real possibilities of what planning might yet be”.<sup>501</sup> Forester did not choose cases at random or even attempt to choose “typical” cases. In order to describe the “deliberative practitioner,” he chose specific cases that best highlight this new concept. Similarly, this doctoral dissertation tells stories surrounding the case of a particular organization that represents a new concept in order to flesh out its special characteristics.

In his doctoral dissertation-turned-book *Por Que Uns e Não Outros?* (Why Some and Not Others?), sociologist Jailson de Souza e Silva tells the stories of eleven adults aged 30-42 who managed to make their way through elementary, high school and college despite having been born in the largest *favela* complex in Rio, Maré. Silva, who founded and continues to run a large community NGO, CEASM,<sup>502</sup> effectively performed doctoral research in such a way that both informed and helped justify his organization’s actions. Silva chose his case studies without “considering it a methodological principle to interview only unknown students. The recommendations provided by several residents...permitted me access to a significant number of graduates. So among the interviewees there were those with various levels of contact (with me): One was very

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<sup>499</sup> Forester 1999: 2.

<sup>500</sup> Forester 1999: 4.

<sup>501</sup> Forester 1999: 11.

<sup>502</sup> CEASM is the Center for Study and Actions in Solidarity of Maré and works to stimulate youth to attend college by providing college preparation and other educational opportunities.

close, others close, a few unknown...Either way, the identity that existed between their trajectories and my own, the pride of having taken that path, and the pleasure of speaking about their experiences in school permitted us to establish an open and frank relationship".<sup>503</sup> As is the case with Silva's research and its relationship to CEASM, though unplanned in the case of Catalytic Communities, aspects of this doctoral dissertation have both informed the development of the organization and justified it. Some chapters, particularly that on staff management (5), were fundamental in informing what was going right (and wrong) with the organization at the time. Others, like that on social networks (2), have contributed to a firm justification for the network-building work of Catalytic Communities.

Also similar to Silva's experience, *being a member* of the group about which research is conducted (both in having attended college and in being a member of the community, in his case) actually increased the quality of the research, because only someone in that particular context could inspire the frank and open dialogue necessary. I would add that the person would also have a better idea of which questions to ask and what details, once touched upon in interviews, to flesh out in further detail. In the case of this doctoral dissertation, my position as 'peak coordinator' provided me with a similar vantage point from which to observe and flesh out important details.

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<sup>503</sup> Silva 2003: 25.

### *Auto-Ethnography*

According to Deborah Reed-Danahay, “two major developments in cultural studies: debates about representation (by whom and about whom), and the increasing trend toward self-reflexivity in all realms of writing”,<sup>504</sup> are what led her to edit *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social*. She speaks of the “act of self-narrative and the tension between creativity and restraint associated with that act”.<sup>505</sup> She also points out that anthropologists “are in the midst of a renewed interest in personal narrative...(reflecting) the changing nature of fieldwork in a post-colonial and postmodern world”.<sup>506</sup> Clearly the phenomena Reed-Danahay speaks of are relevant to the research conducted in this dissertation, as well. There is a case to be made in today’s research world, in favor of self-narrative, assuming the researcher’s capability of balancing creativity and restraint.

As defined by Reed-Danahay, however, the research methods utilized in this dissertation are only partially “autoethnographic.” “Autoethnography,” she explains, “stands at the intersection of three genres of writing...(1) ‘native anthropology,’ in which people who were formerly the subjects...become the authors...(2) ‘ethnic autobiography,’ personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and (3) ‘autobiographical ethnography,’ in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing”.<sup>507</sup> My doctoral research does not fall into any of

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<sup>504</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 1.

<sup>505</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 1.

<sup>506</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 1.

<sup>507</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 2.

these categories. It does, however, share characteristics with the autoethnographic research described by Reed-Danahay.

“One of the main characteristics of an autoethnographic perspective is that the autoethnographer is a boundary-crosser...(with) a role (that) can be characterized as that of a dual identity...The notion of autoethnography foregrounds the multiple nature of selfhood and opens up new ways of writing about social life”.<sup>508</sup> As a function of this, however, “this figure is not completely ‘at home’”.<sup>509</sup> This clearly applies to the experience I had in preparing this research. In fact, the dual role of researcher and researched is not simply intellectually, but also psychologically very demanding.

Reed-Danahay summarizes the research literature relating to auto-ethnography. Her short literature review makes clear the very enormous diversity in *actual* application of the term among authors. Maanen defined auto-ethnography as that “where the culture of one’s own group is textualized”.<sup>510</sup> For Denzin, “the important characteristic of autoethnography...is that the writer does not adopt the ‘objective outsider’ convention”.<sup>511</sup> Deck’s interpretation, interesting in particular to our case, is that “the author of an autoethnography...is the...native expert, whose authentic firsthand knowledge of the culture (in our case: organization) is sufficient to lend authority to the text”.<sup>512</sup> Based on a few citations such as these, one can make important connections between the auto-ethnographic approach and that which comprises this dissertation.

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<sup>508</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 3.

<sup>509</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 4.

<sup>510</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 5 summarizing Maanen (1995).

<sup>511</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 7 summarizing Denzin (1989).

<sup>512</sup> Reed-Danahay 1997: 7 summarizing Deck (1990).

All of the types of research described here benefit from being conducted “live.” In fact, research conducted at the time when certain events unfold has several qualities. Roger Chartier<sup>513</sup> speaks of the main advantage of research that occurs in present time being its proximity to references and information, and a greater potential for veracity,<sup>514</sup> in addition to the increased potential for the researcher’s identification with the context in which events unfold. These elements fade when research is conducted retroactively.

### *Closing Thoughts*

Over three years of reading, I have found no examples of research with the peculiar attributes of that conducted for this dissertation. In fact, I found few leads on how to conduct my own research even from the other forms of qualitative research described or mentioned above: auto-ethnography, case research, storytelling, PAR, and participant observation. For this reason I chose to venture into new territory and utilize a new term. My hope is that the form of research conducted here will inspire further investigation into the special uses of research by protagonists themselves who, due to their special circumstances, can describe events in detailed and promising ways.

For a complete summary of the elements and considerations of the form of PrAR utilized in researching for this dissertation, see Figure 32.

There was a risk in undertaking such a dissertation. Going into it I did not know how the organization would develop, or even *if* it would develop. I did not know what

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<sup>513</sup> Chartier 1996.

<sup>514</sup> Greater veracity is also associated with self-narrative, according to Reed-Danahay (1997: 3), who explains, with regard to autoethnography, “the voice of the insider is assumed to be more true than that of the outsider.”

**Figure 32. Summary of PrAR Characteristics**

PrAR Characteristics	Focus on one revelatory case over an extensive time period
	Research carried out by ‘peak coordinator’ him/herself
	General themes uncovered and analyzed broadly, as opposed to detailing
	Contemporary, introspective; <sup>515</sup> not historical, backtracking
	Researcher views project as an experiment <sup>516</sup>
	Extensive storytelling mixed with analysis
PrAR Drawback	Regardless of attempts, a natural bias will influence one’s perception <sup>517</sup>
Drawback (at least partial)	There should be no attempt at evaluation; only description and exploration
Remedies	Maintain view of project as a series of experiments
	Utilize journal entries that can function as ‘interviews with the self’ throughout the case period
	Focus on general themes that present themselves rather than one specific topic so as to avoid anything that might approximate an evaluation
Positive Research Aspects	Allows subtleties to be known, uncovered (because primary sources of data are at hand)
	Interesting and innovative topics announce themselves
	Thorough case documentation allows the development of a ‘nuanced’ view of reality
	Systems view
Positive Aspects for Orgs	A unique opportunity for looking one’s creation in the eye
	Improved quality of reflection regarding organization’s evolution: philosophy and accomplishments; <i>requires</i> that one write regularly
	Improved effectiveness of the organization as lessons are incorporated
	Seeing the organization as an ‘experiment’ allows one to take the ebbs and flows as they arise; increases the chance of ‘sticking to it’ (not getting sidetracked or giving up) during difficult times
	Negative events become “OK” because they provide stimulus for theorizing/discussion in dissertation, do not “go to waste”
	Publication of the research becomes an important information source relating to the organization
	Organization’s development is systematically recorded
Negative Aspects	Psychologically draining for the researcher/protagonist <sup>518</sup>

<sup>515</sup> This is made possible because the research was known of before the period of the “case” began and so appropriate documentation could take place through journals, recordings of live meetings, etc.

<sup>516</sup> This provides some distance so that the researcher can reflect on the project.

<sup>517</sup> Though inherent to PrAR as developed here, some researchers may deem a drawback the fact that knowledge acquired during the research process was fed back into the organization and in that way affected its trajectory.

<sup>518</sup> In my November 6, 2003 Journal Entry entitled “Get this over with,” I explain that “The dissertation forces me to be calculating...How will it be when I stop thinking about this...thing and can just enjoy the relationships with people? When I no longer have to obsess about how things are going but can just get to them? What I mean is – the dissertation is in itself a form of evaluation, constant evaluation. To be honest

themes would surface. It was necessary to work with the ebbs and flows. For this reason I am certain that each and every reader will come up with particular criticisms and concerns. But with a lack of previous research in this style, what I aimed to do was build on the values associated with cases, storytelling, auto-ethnography, PAR and participant observation and offer a new methodology for inquiry that can now be expanded and improved by others interested in protagonist research.

Reflecting back it becomes clear that because the research conducted here focused on the *description of a developmental process*, the richness of that process was of utmost importance. One way of further enriching this process would have been to involve other CatComm participants. Staff members, community leaders, and the board of directors and advisory board could have dialogued in special sessions designed to discuss each of the six themes outlined in this dissertation. Discussions with other Dot Orgs could have been fostered. These techniques would have improved the evaluative quality of the process and thus enriched the final account of what was happening, not relying so much on the protagonist alone. This would also have prevented placing the sole burden for analysis and reflection on the protagonist researcher. Future efforts that build on this case or utilize PrAR should incorporate such techniques.

Catalytic Communities may well not have come to exist today if it had not been for the influence of the dissertation on the organization, both in informing it and in keeping it alive during early times when difficulties in establishing the organization

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with it I have to be honest with myself and write – in this journal, for example – the good and bad that happens, what I feel. So, for example, I can't just *enjoy* that staff is getting along, and work harder to make that happen, but I have to analyze it – whether we really do, or don't? Whether it's just me being upbeat and hopeful, or whether it's true?"

seemed insurmountable. At the same time, it is my hope that writing about the experience will trigger research in new areas. Such a mutually reinforcing, efficiency-enhancing “win-win” situation is possible. As PAR advocates believe, this should, in fact, be the goal of research.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Unfortunately, as is the case with PAR, funding for this type of research will be hard to come by. Chataway (2001: 241) discusses this in relation to PAR: "Academic granting agencies...do not tend to understand or support PAR...(They) tend to decide whether to approve PAR proposals by the same criteria they use for standard research. Namely, they...prioritize content over process. A focus on content undermines and withdraws support from a process-oriented approach like PAR, especially in the early stages...In some cases, the research will not be fully designed until more than a year of intense collaboration has taken place."

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