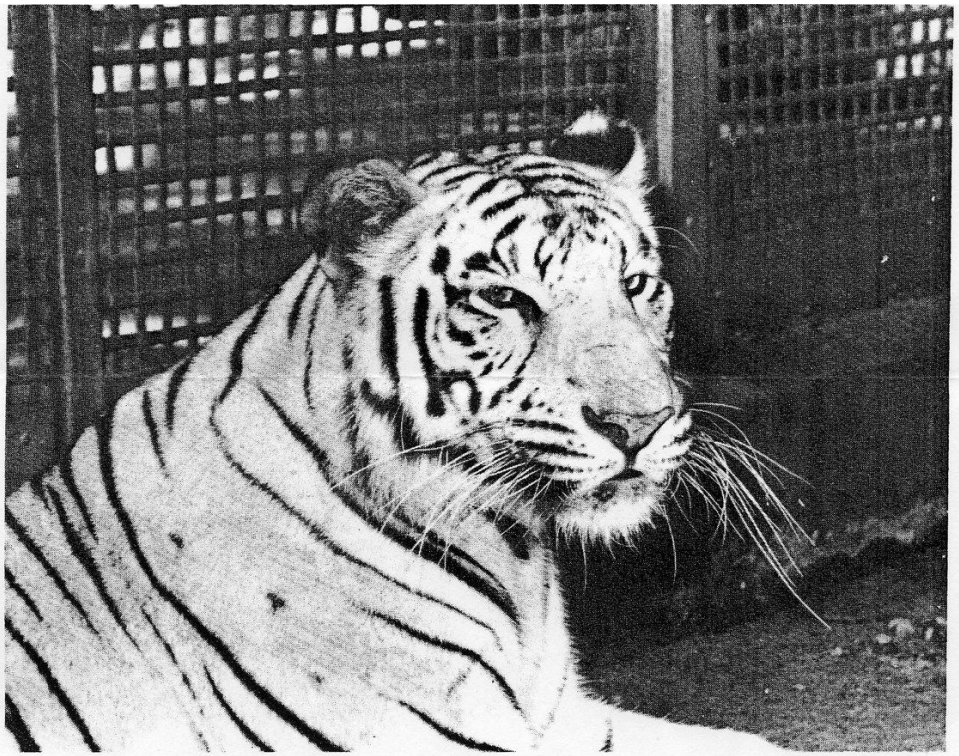
from collaborative action to collective impact

Katherine Skinner, Educopia Institute
FIPNet, October 19, 2015



(Courtesy National Zoological Park, Washington, D.C.)

Better bred than dead

David Challinor on the efforts of zoos to preserve rare species

ZOO DIRECTORS and others concerned with the survival and well-being of zoo animals are increasingly interested in the ability of wild animals to adapt to captivity. The present design of new zoo exhibits reflects in part this concern. Not only are the new barless enclosures more aesthetically pleasing to the visitor, but they are also designed to reduce some of the neurotic behaviour shown by some mammals, particularly primates and cats, when confined to the old fashioned menagerie cage. The moats and glass barriers now used are designed to protect the animal from the visitor and, in the case of glass panels in primate houses, serve the double purpose of keeping the monkeys from catching humans' colds and freeing the visitor from the animals' pungent smell.

Despite such improvements, some zoo-bred animals, when moved from cramped quarters to landscaped habitats, cannot readily adapt. We have had several examples of animals' difficulty in breaking habitual behaviour at the Smithsonian National Zoo. Our white tiger, Mohini, released from her old barred cage to expansive new quarters with trees, grass and even a swimming pool, seldom strayed from her electrically heated concrete pad. She even wore out the grass walking back and forth in front of it, covering exactly the distance she had travelled during her years in her old quarters. Eventually, after a few months, she was able to break this pattern and occupy the entire enclosure. Yet, one of our polar bears, when moved to large new quarters, was unable to swim freely in his new pool, paddling in a tight circle of the same diameter as of his old pool.

The most recent anecdote about animal adaptation to new conditions comes from the Rio de Janiero Primate Center, where a colony of captive golden lion tamarins was removed from small enclosures to a very large outdoor one to start training them for ultimate release to the wild. Old males in their new enclosure would climb only along the stable wooden framework and supporting cables. The flexible natural branches were too much for these old males, but not for the younger animals in the troops, who readily adapted to their new surroundings.

Although some animals are adapting well to captivity, unexpected problems continually arise. The magnificent sable antelope is now breeding successfully at the Smithsonian's Conservation Research Center at Front Royal, Virginia. However, their hooves are not worn down as fast in the lush pastures and hardwood thickets of Virginia as they are in the flinty soils of their home ranges. Unless manually trimmed about twice a year, their excessive length can damage the muscles and small bones in their feet. Trimming is done while the antelope in tranquillised by a dart gun. Unfortunately, sable antelope seem to be more vulnerable than other antelope species to darting, with the result that we have lost some animals by using this method. The challenge is now to find other ways to keep their hooves the proper length.

Grass is better than concrete

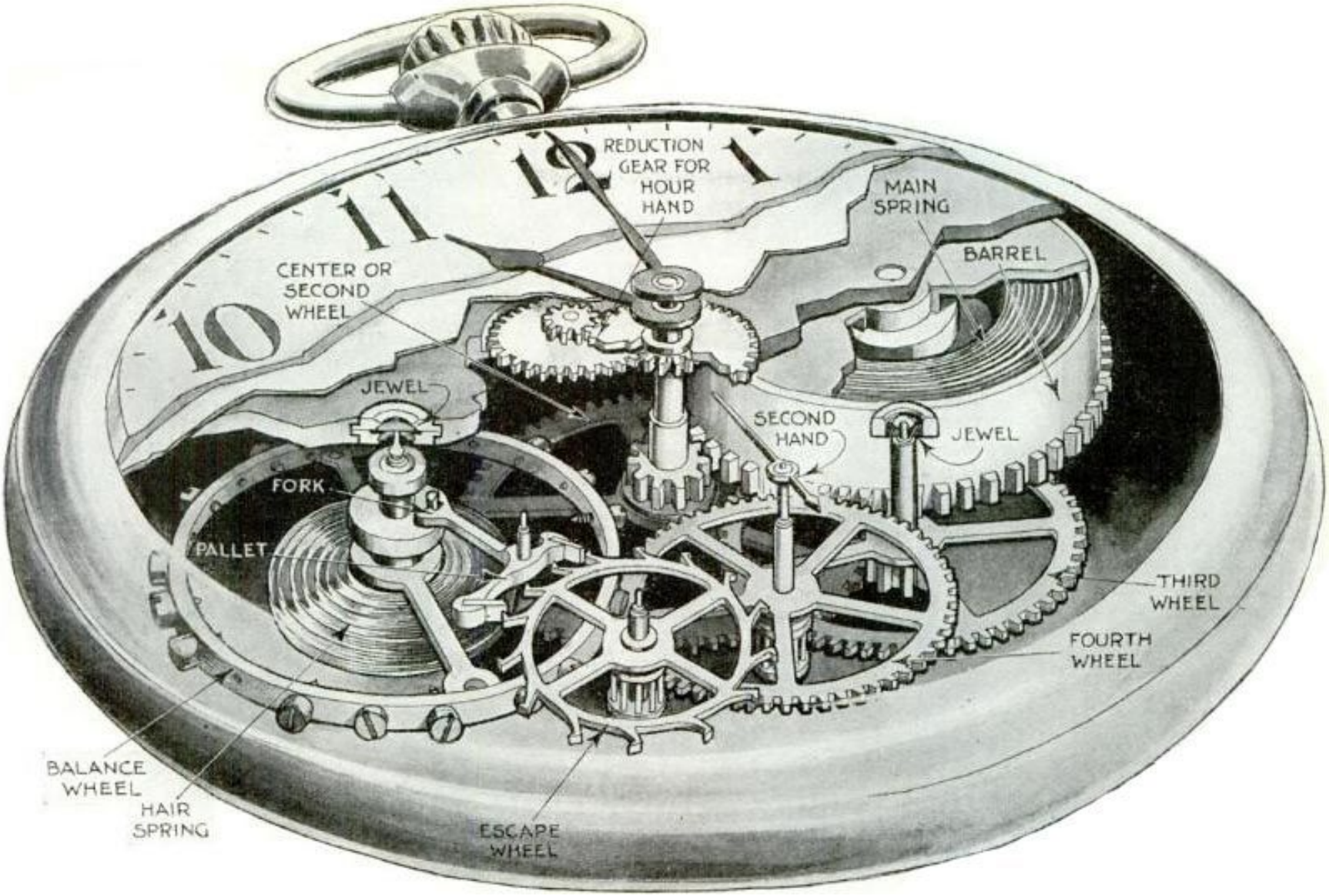
If hoof trimming of sable antelope is still awaiting solution, other problems have been easily solved. For example, newborn scimitar-horned oryx are very susceptible to frost if born in cold weather. The problem was resolved by simply removing the breeding males from our herd for about four months each year to ensure all births would occur when it was warm. ▶

David Challinor is Assistant Secretary for Science at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Skinner 2014

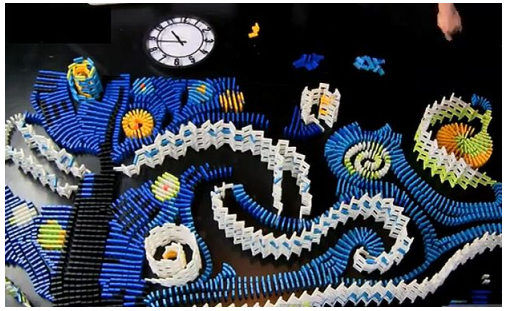

Shift
Key

Source: Boston Public Library. Edmund Birckhead Bensell: Boating scene, "A Critical Moment"


REDUCTION GEAR FOR HOUR HAND
MAIN SPRING
BARREL
CENTER OR SECOND WHEEL
JEWEL
SECOND HAND
JEWEL
FORK
PALLET
THIRD WHEEL
FOURTH WHEEL
BALANCE WHEEL
HAIR SPRING
ESCAPE WHEEL

Just a Few of the Conditions Aligning…

- Technological changes
- New competitors
- Political shifts
- Economic concentration
- Information deluge



Source: FlippyCat https://www.youtube.com/flippycat

Fields and Transitions…

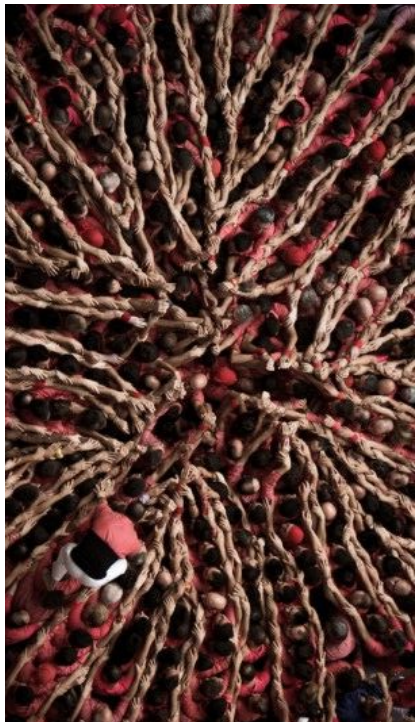
- Fields tend toward stasis
- Innovations happen on the fringes
- Field-wide change depends upon networks

Source: FlippyCat https://www.youtube.com/flippycat

Not a single extraordinary genius…

Source: Howard Schatz

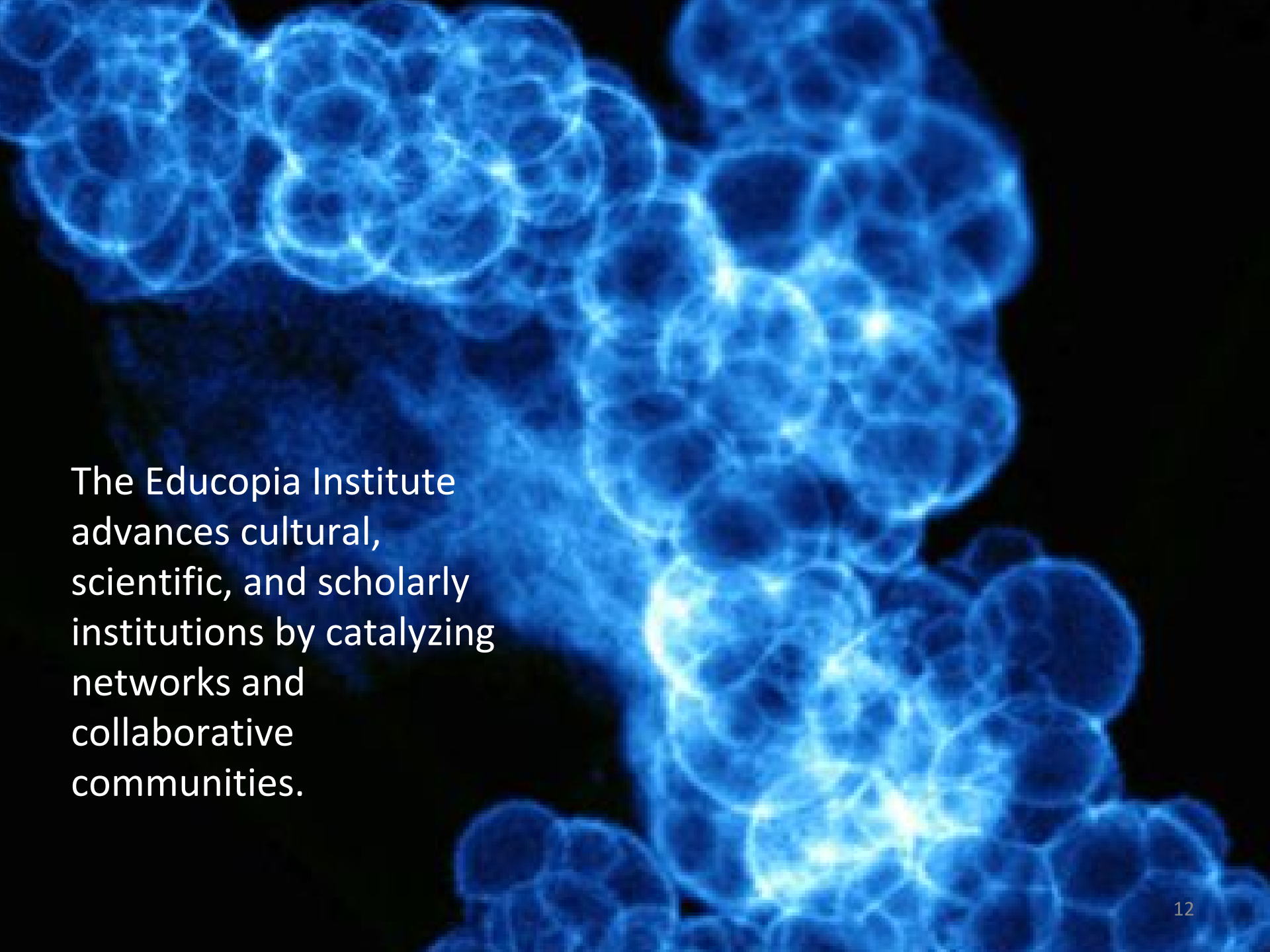
…but a network of players



Source: Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

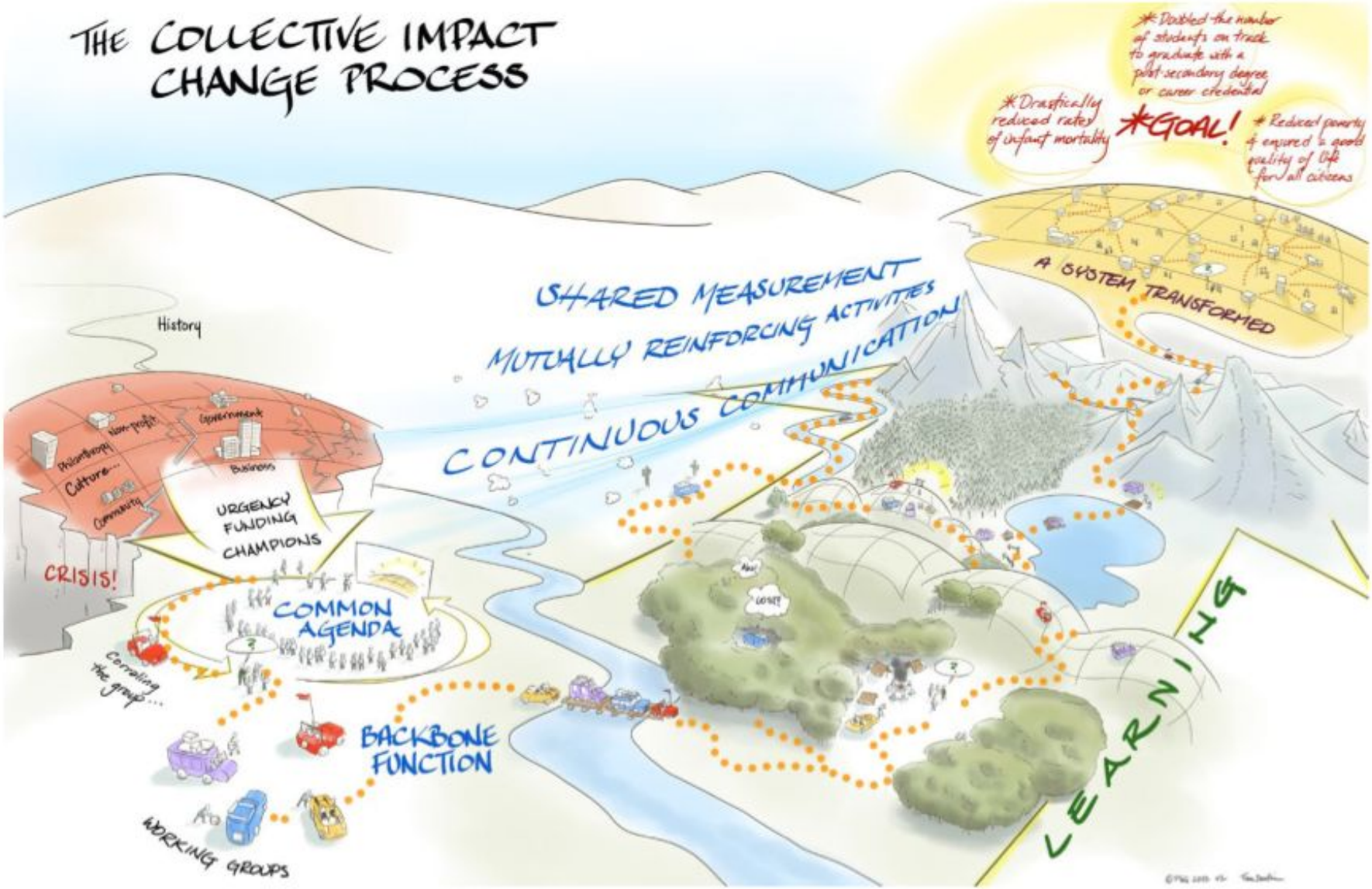
- **If**
  - This is a critical moment (change imminent)
  - Networks, not geniuses, bring about change

- **Then**
  - Alignment is a transformative tactic



The Educopia Institute advances cultural, scientific, and scholarly institutions by catalyzing networks and collaborative communities.

from act
to impact



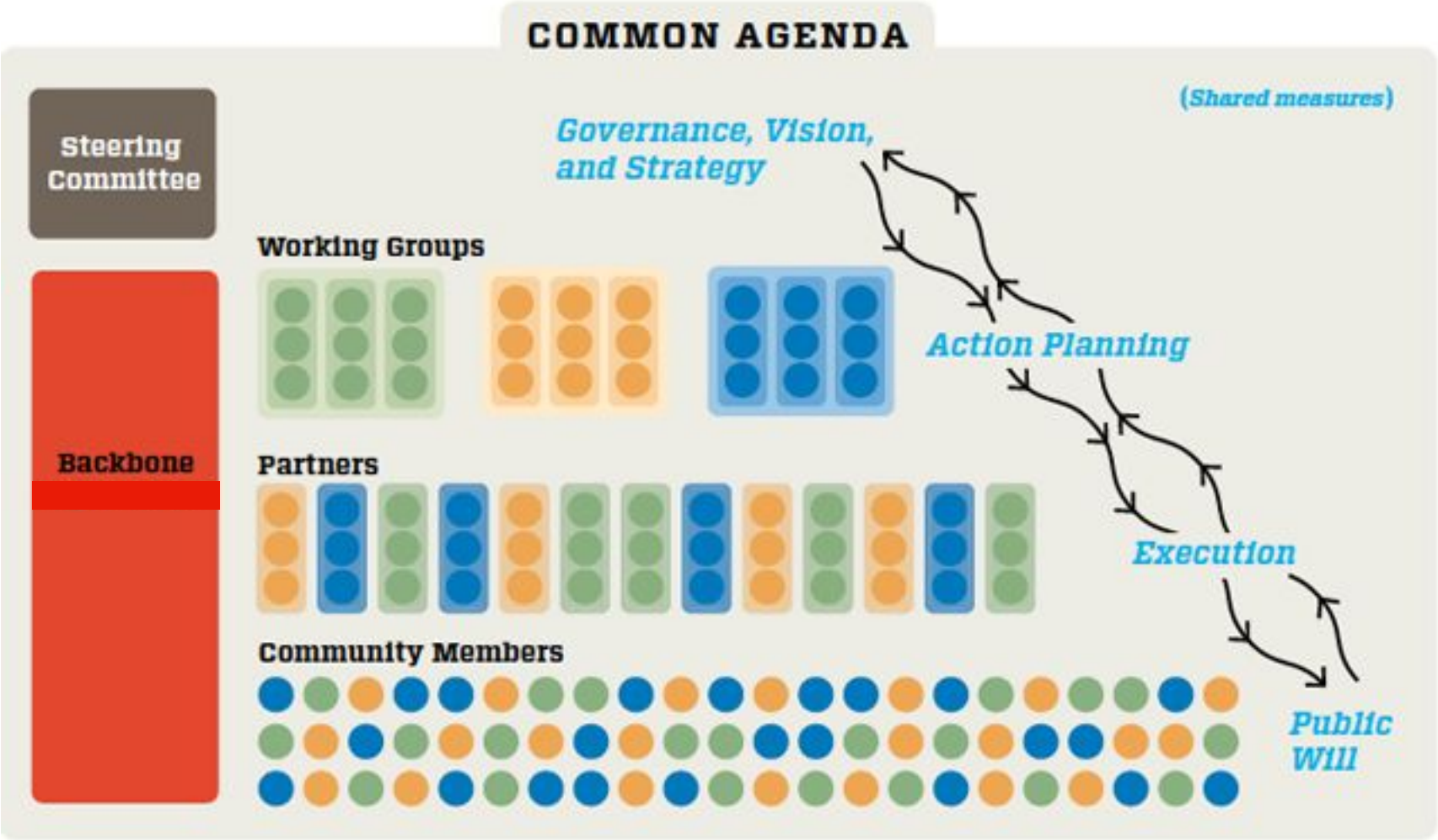
Source: H. Preskill, M. Parkhurst, J. Splansky Justler, “Learning and Evaluation in the Collective Impact Context” (FSG, 2014)


Common Agenda
Shared Measurement
Mutually Reinforcing Activities
Continuous Communications
Backbone Support

1. New solutions are discovered that bridge the needs of multiple organizations or are only feasible when organizations work together;
2. All participating organizations adopt the new solution at the same time … enabling a more aligned, immediate, and coordinated response.

-John Kania and Mark Kramer , 2013

Cascading Levels of Collaboration



Crucial elements

- Landscape scan
- Stakeholder survey
- Backbone facilitation/support
- Establishment of shared goals *and* measurements towards those goals

Photo: Jim Merithew/Wired.com

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