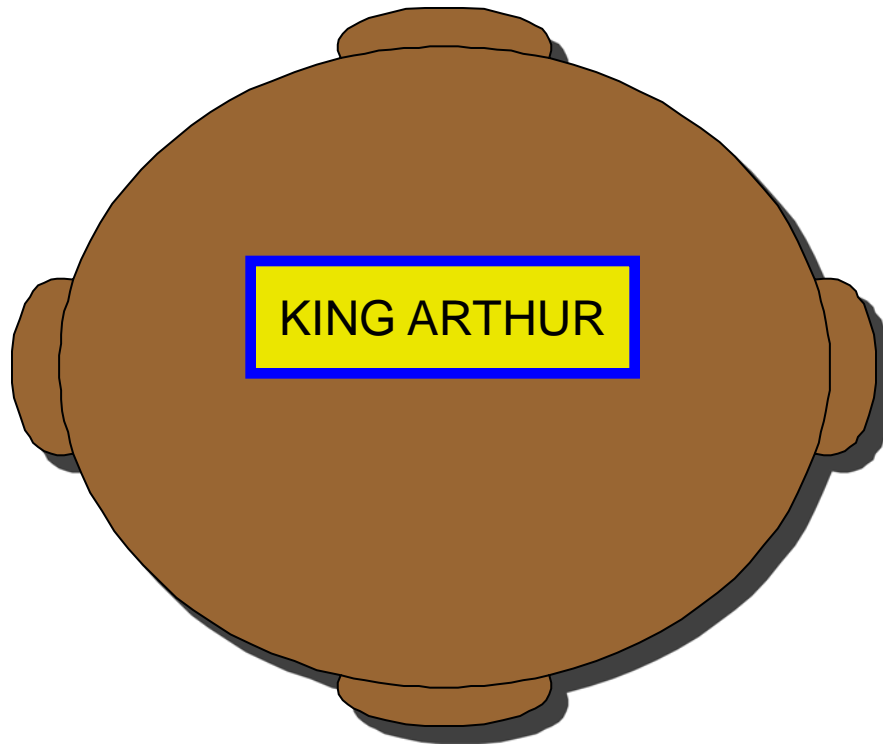# SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT NETWORKS

Inverness Research Associates
October 16, 2011

What is a Network?

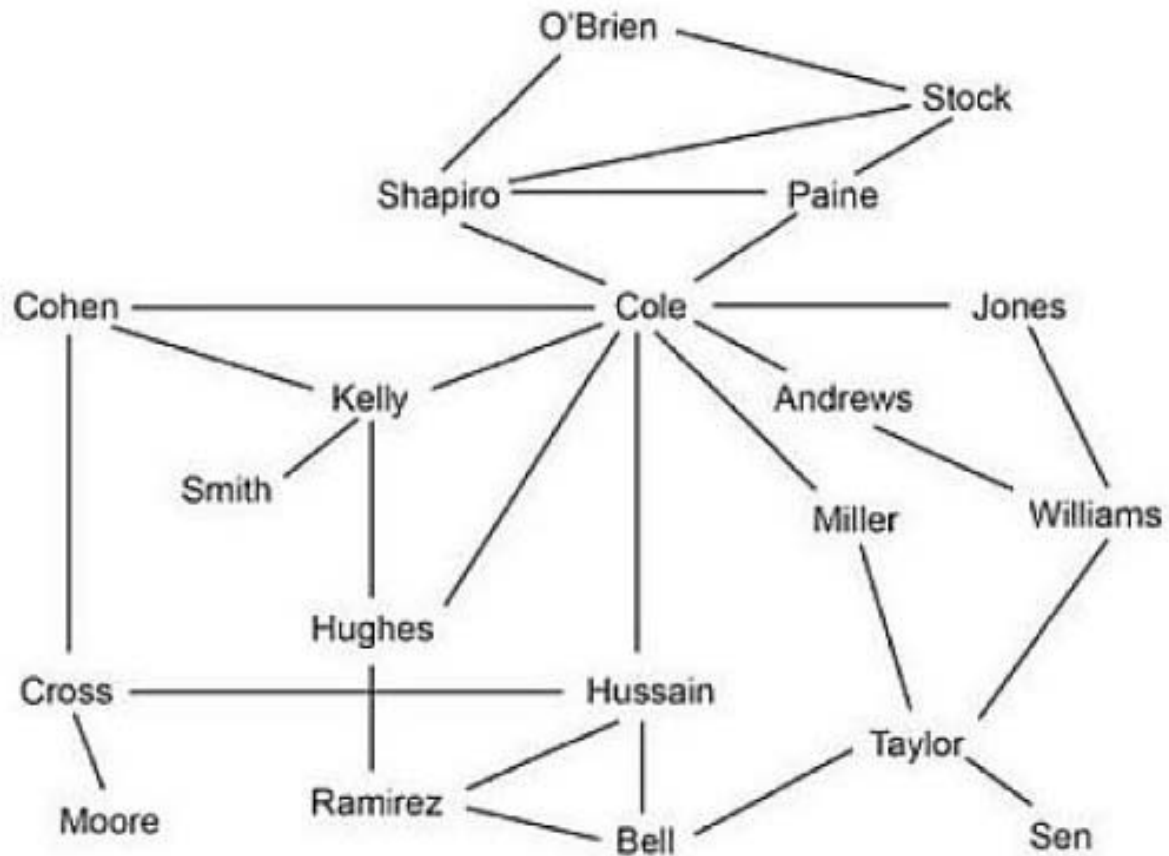# *The Original Network*

One for all and all for one!

KING ARTHUR

Designing the Networked Organization

by
Ken Everett

Network Example

"Networking" vs. "Networked Organization"

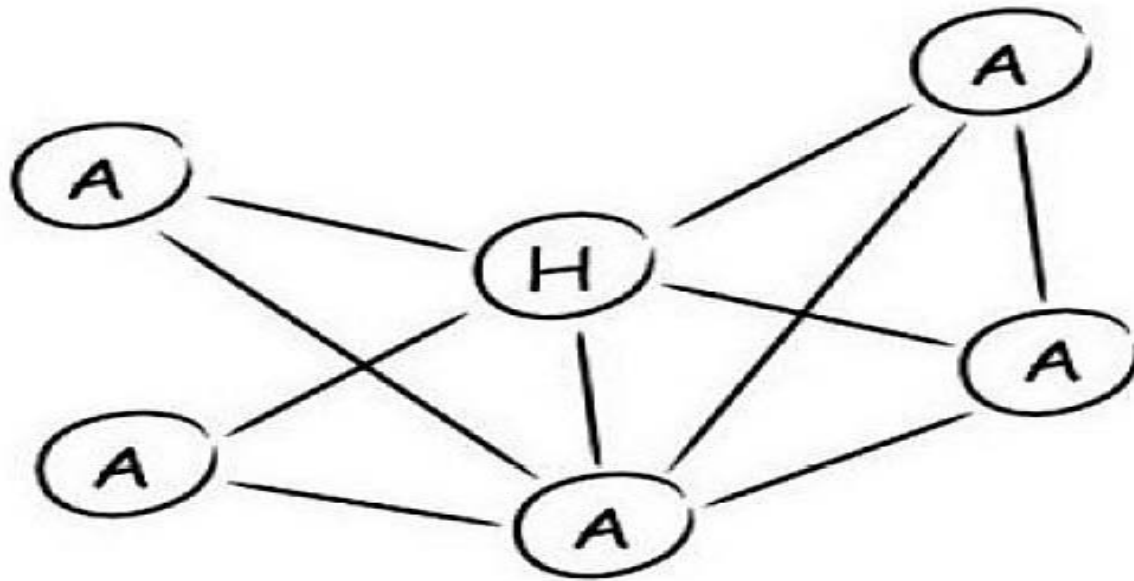- **Networking as an end in itself**

  - Facebook
  - Linked In, Plaxo
  - ASTC?

- **Networking as a means to an end**

  - YouthAlive
  - NiseNet
  - COSEE

Network Organizations

"Network organizations exist to do work… not just to allow people to "network" with each other…."

-Mary Ann Smith, National Writing Project

Networked Organization –– Hub and Affiliates

Basic building blocks

Figure 2.2. The hub-affiliate relationship.

Figure 2.3. The manager-employee relationship.

Key Attributes of Network Bonds

AUTONOMY / INDEPENDENCE

CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY

SHARED MISSION, VISION, VALUES, CULTURE....

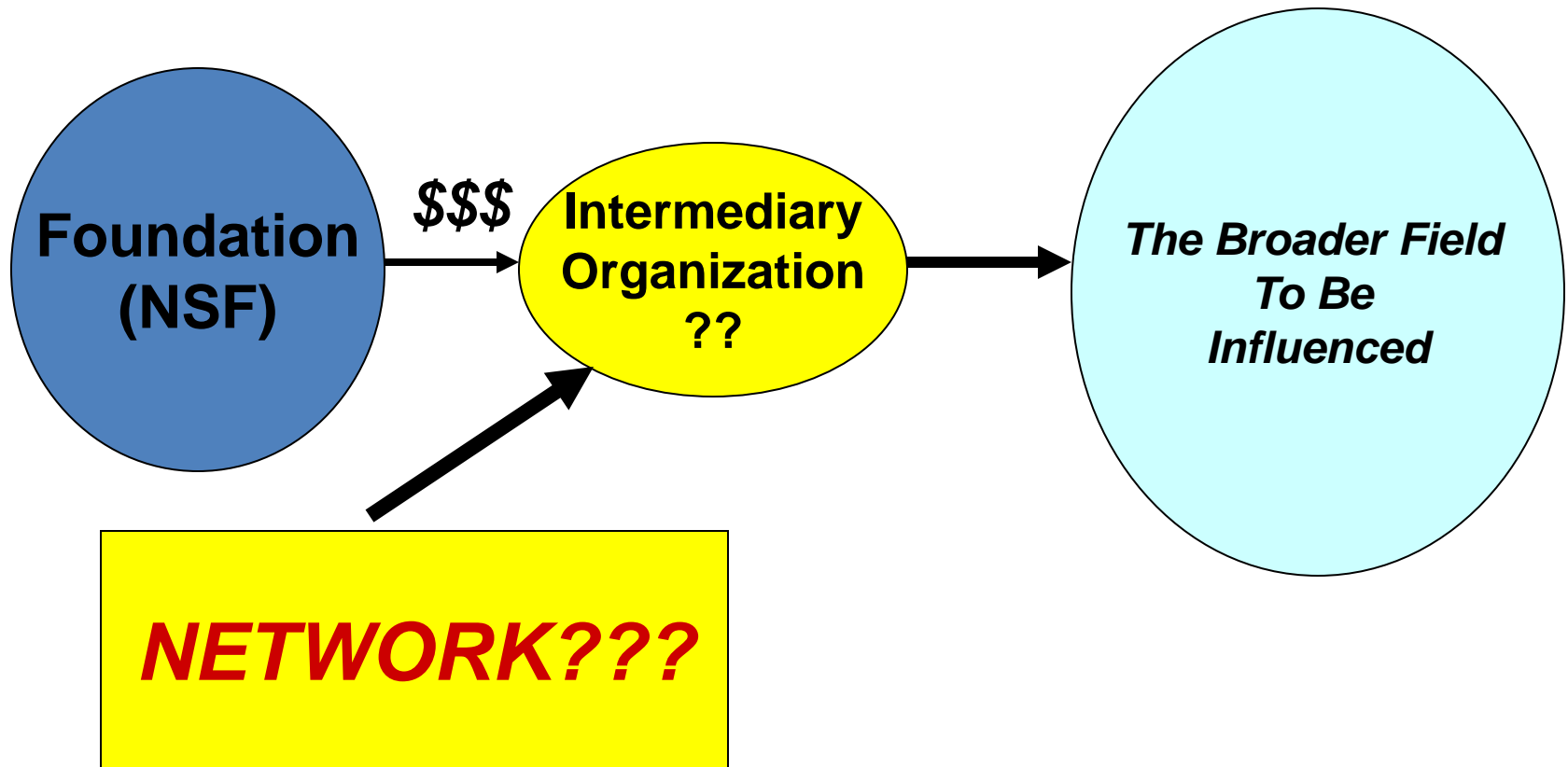# The Paradox: Networks promote both autonomy and community

Hundreds of research papers... point to the same conclusion. Human beings have an innate drive to be autonomous, self-determined, and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives. (My emphasis)
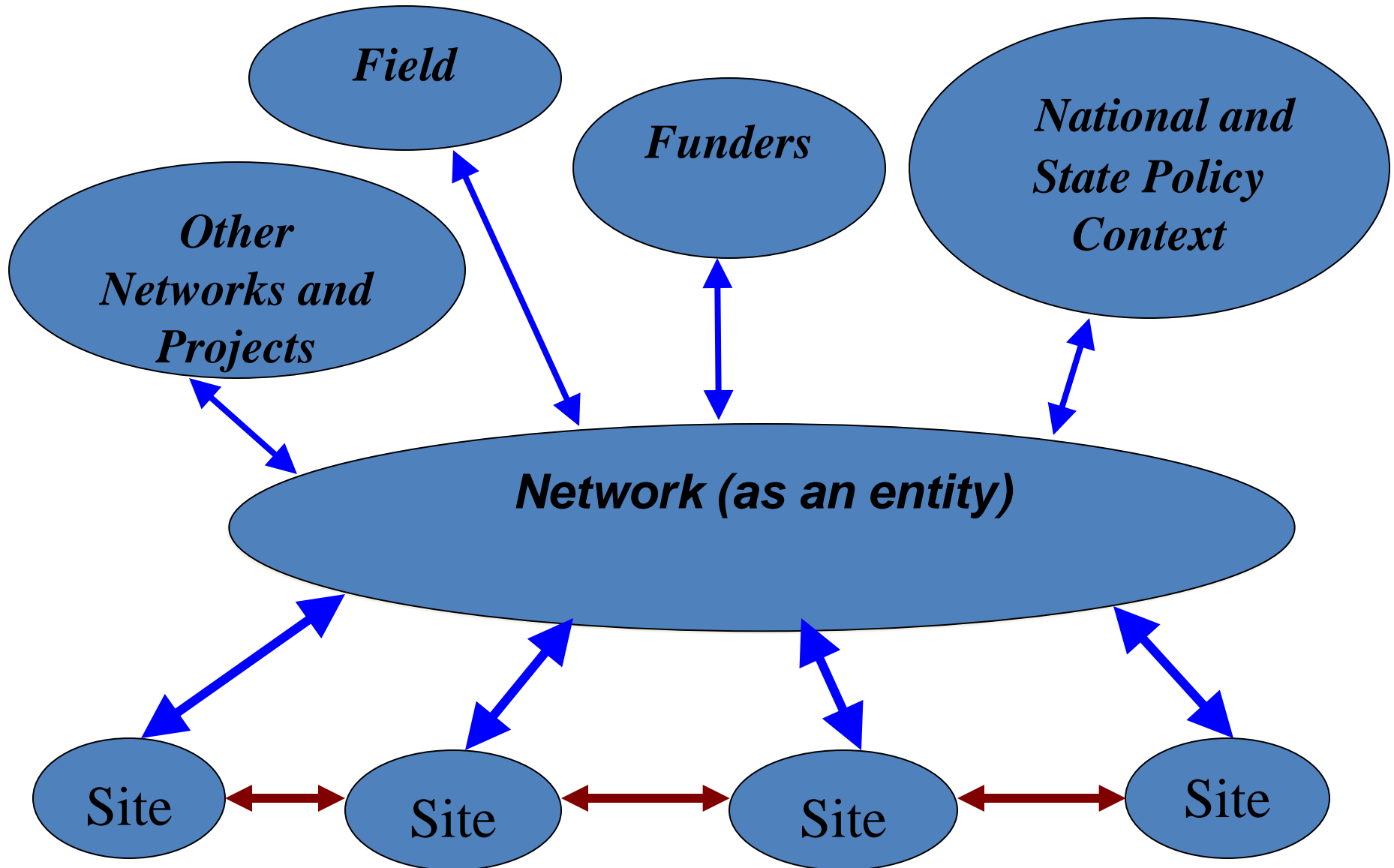
—Daniel Pink, *Drive*

Network Organizations

- *McDonalds?*
- *An army platoon?*
- *The Association of Science-Technology Centers?*
- *The Internet?*
- *NISE Net?*
- *COSEE?*
- *Inverness Research?*

Network Organizations

Field

Funders

National and State Policy Context

Other Networks and Projects

Network (as an entity)

Site — Site — Site — Site

Functions – *Site to Site*

Examples:

- *Sites assist one another by sharing ideas*
- *Sites engage in common experiences to strengthen relationships between them*
- *Sites collaborate on projects*
- *Sites pool and share resources*
- *Sites examine areas of overlap*
- *Sites help other sites, mentor new sites*

Functions – *Site to Network*, and Network to Site

Examples:

- **Sites contribute special expertise to the network**

- **Sites contribute knowledge of context to the network and to other sites**

- **Sites agree to participate in special external initiatives that allow the network to serve outside itself**

Functions – Site to Network, and
Network to Site

Examples:

- **Network creates leadership opportunities**
- **Network offers advanced professional development**
- **Network convenes site leaders to develop shared programs to meet site and national priorities**
- **Network conducts and collects research beneficial to all sites**
- **Network gathers and disseminates publications, resource books, websites, listservs, etc.**
- **Network communicates and interprets key policies, events, changes to sites**

Functions – *Network to External World*

Examples

- *Networks can cultivate relationships with research communities, professional associations, legislators, etc.*
- *Network serves as unitary entity that is able to represent the sites collectively to the broader field, funders, etc.*
- *Network can work to make the mission of the network visible and important on a national, state level.*
- *Network can collaborate with other national organizations, agencies to co-sponsor conferences, strategize on responding to state initiatives, etc.*
- *Networks can apply for federal and/or private funding*
- *Networks can contribute research to the field*
- *Networks can connect to other networks, projects and initiatives*

INVERNESS RESEARCH

The Defining Features of Effective Networks

A network works well when members of the network:

- have a shared sense of purpose
- have a collective and shared identity
- do work together
- have deep knowledge and trust of each other
- develop leadership in a collective and distributed fashion
- assume shared responsibility for the mission of the network

Sample Criteria for Evaluating the Health of a Network

- **Clarity of mission and shared vision**
- **Independence and community**
- **Mutual respect and trust**
- **Network strategic leadership**
- **Win-win, symbiotic relationships**
- **Value-added contributions**
- **Communication**
- **Accessibility, equity**
- **Supportive of diversity of members, modes of engagement, levels of participation**
- **Cumulative, self-sustaining**

Strengths of Network Organizations

- *Flexibility and responsiveness*
- *Optimizing uses of resources*
- *Resilience and sustainability*
- *Innovation*
- *Promoting leadership*
- *Cumulative capacity building*

The Paradox of Network Organization Leadership

Strong Stewardship

- Of mission
- Of quality
- Of values and norms
- Of collaboration
- Of independence and of community

End