hy**post**hesis

My normal *modus operandi* is to paint word pictures, sometimes embellished by diagrams, tabulations and layout.

The purpose of these stories is to identify tensions and contexts which should be taken into account.

I admit multiple factors and minimal causes.

While it will never be my mission to pursue a thesis opposing the very notion of thesis, my methods assume the validity of that post-thesis.

But for the purposes of academic discourse, I am able to represent the points I am making in this story as a couple of hypothetical propositions:

- *the Internet is the appropriate place for virtual organisations;* or
- *vision/change-driven service delivery is what Internet-originated organisations do naturally.*

This story builds on some and becomes a part of other stories I and others have told and will tell elsewhere.

This presentation has been inspired by the contrast between the efforts required to maintain:

organisations which are predicated on common **visions** of future needs	organisations which are primarily occupied producing familiar **rituals**

The author has been involved in the early stages of several "before their time" organisations which have attempted to apply a range of traditional structural models to achieve their futuristic purposes.
These include: Computer Literacy Foundation, Electric Grapevine, Clever Country Co-operative and Mindware Exchange.
Those organisations have typically experienced a three year cycle of formative enthusiasm, a couple of specific major activities, and exhaustion of interest.

The author has been centrally involved for around 25 years with organisations which provide community based sport--in particular: Strathmore Sports Club's football and cricket divisions and the recently renamed North West Cricket Association.

This presentation is informed by first hand experience of the development and representation of a range of organisations on the Internet, including: Globewide Network Academy, Principia Cybernetica Project, Media MOO, Electronic Frontiers Australia and Diversity University.

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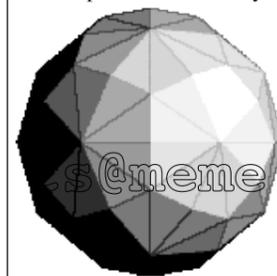
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Purposes and Structures

vision

Organisation driven by a shared vision of how things might be changed for the better.

industrial organisations
environmental movement
political parties

change
political

e.g.

ritual

Organisation driven by a shared wish to maintain some socially-valued ritual activity.

organised religions
sporting clubs and leagues
community support groups

about

continuity
social

In a world where power is nominally in the hands of:

Nation States

Individuals/Nuclear Families

Corporations

there remains another sector which shoulders most of the practical responsibility for social cohesiveness, a sector which is overwhelmingly:

Voluntary
Community

---

service

Practical responsibility rests with the systems for delivery of services.

road service
newsletter or magazine
annual conference

e.g.

leaders espouse

subscribe

power

action

member

Ultimate responsibility rests formally with the membership as a whole.

social rooms
coaching or preaching
weekly activity cycle

members participate

join

Real organisations cannot be absolutely categorised on either of the above axes--vision-ritual or service-member.

Persistent organisations embody a rich mixture of purposes and structures that have evolved over time to present a coherent whole.

All organisations can call upon a common heritage of formal meeting arrangements, committee structures, office bearer responsibilities, etc., etc.

Virtual organisations are usually connected to the external commercial world through the "good offices" of some sponsoring organisation which is not ultimately subject to the will of the online membership and which could thus "pull the plug" at any time.

# of Virtual Organisations

Conversations

Bulletin Boards
E-mail list servers and Usenet News provide the foundation for asynchronous group conversations within tens of thousands of separate subject areas. Such phenomena as threads, flames, lurkers, FAQs, spams and netiquette emerged here.

Chat
Rooms within Multi-User Dungeons became places to hang out for anything from delivery of online courses to net sex. Internet Relay Chat provides comparatively context-free group conversations. Chat spaces can be important to the development of online organisations.

Information Discovery

The great brochure rack
aka the World Wide Web
Any organisation, real or virtual, can promote itself through a Web site (usually known as a home page). Search engines and the interactive potential of Java provide ways of finding information and people that have fuelled the explosive growth of the Net/Web.

Internet

While each of the organisations I met on the Internet had an identifiable very small core of founders, they all had distinct approaches to ongoing control through a period of rapid growth. Some launched themselves with a very public and complex structure definition phase that placed at least nominal control squarely in the hands of their membership. Others were eventually forced to divest more and more control to their membership for logistical reasons, while in some cases the founders managed to retain effective operational control.

The broad coverage of the Internet allows it to do better at providing a home for vision-driven groups than do traditional organisation structures. However, there appears to be some evidence that the essential difference in performance is more between a client-service model involving a core group of providers and the notional alternative of divesting control and responsibility to the membership at large.

At MediaMOO, Lillee (deceased in the matter world) still keeps Sacha company:

```
You see glass of milk, water, Sacha, and Lillee here.
                                    Sacha barks once.
                                  Lillee sniffs the air.
                       command Lillee to drink water
You transmit the command "drink water" to Lillee.
                              Lillee drinks her water.
                             command Sacha to go office
           You transmit the command "go office" to Sacha.
Sacha cuts through a lane towards the local cricket office.
```

Radical Theory

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