

# 7 Models of Community

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I enjoy the musings and observations of Mark Hurst, who publishes a regular newsletter on "good experience" and who hosts a really interesting TED-like conference every year. He offered seven models of community, which I found interesting...

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Everyone seems to be building community these days, or at least saying they are. Look at the buzz around Facebook and Twitter. Or consider museums - I've seen multiple recent exhibits of photos by visitors. How about politics? The leader of the free world is a community organizer. Or retail and travel - especially online, full of community features. Journalism - newspapers declining, locally-oriented sites rising. And so on.

How do we bring together different people, ideas, cultures, values, into a cohesive whole?

Off the top of my mind I have seven answers, surely an incomplete list - but here are some ways to conceive of joining disparate parts.

1. Solar System: A whirling ballet of major and minor parts, each with its own well-defined station and role. But everything is dependent on the one supreme central figure holding it all together.

(See also, the atom - though electrons are less easily tracked :)

2. Crack the Whip: A common children's game in which players run or skate in a line, each player holding on to the one in front of them.

The leader makes the decisions of when and where to turn, while everyone behind scrambles to keep up. Notably, the further back one is, the harder it is to keep up, eventually throwing the last in line out of the group entirely.

3. Birds on a wire: I couldn't resist this one - birds twittering on a phone line. They sit together "online" and each have their say, twittering their individual thoughts off into the ether. Sometimes there are interesting patterns as they fly off into a clump, a V, a flock - but mainly it's each bird to itself.

4. Melting pot: An American ideal - welcoming diversity, bringing in many different voices. But we often forget that the melting pot precedes the mold, which shapes everything into a uniform mass with a predetermined shape - much like an ice tray.

5. LEGOs: Different parts fit in different places, and they're interchangeable to some extent. Independence is the pro and con:

each piece retains its shape but has no connection to any part it's not immediately adjoining.

6. Salad: Lots of pieces chopped up and tossed together, intended to create one delicious concoction. Not exactly a melting pot, as pieces retain their identities - but neither are the pieces exactly joined together in any way, except that they're in the same bowl together. (Some people have said that America is more of a tossed salad than a melting pot.)

7. Gel: My favorite. Can be hard to describe exactly what it is and what it does, but that's its strength. Parts are added together without losing their identities, but the whole can take on different forms (think of a jello mold). Can be used to hold a shape (hair gel), \*not\* hold a shape (dissolving toothpaste gel), adapt to pressure (gel pen handles) or protect from pressure (gel shoe inserts). Gel is both formed and formless, both strong and weak, depending on the situation.

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Mark Hurst invites comments here:

<http://goodexperience.com/2009/04/seven-models-of-commu.php#comments>

His newsletter can be subscribed to here:

<http://goodexperience.com/newsletter.php>