Hot Diggity Dog:
Understanding Self-Organizing Systems Through Dog Rescue

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Imagine a well orchestrated organization with no CEO, no performance reviews, and no hiring policies. Imagine an efficient and effective organization that learns, grows, and transforms itself without consultants, strategic plans, or change management. Organizations rooted in the command and control architecture of the industrial era find it difficult to believe that such a creature could possibly exist. This session provides an intimate look into just such a self-organizing system, the complex network of dog rescue operations.

Notes from the Introduction:

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The nature of a self-organizing system, a review:

Local interaction
Simple Interactions
Repeated multiple times

Spontaneous generation
Organized Structures
Emergent Patterns
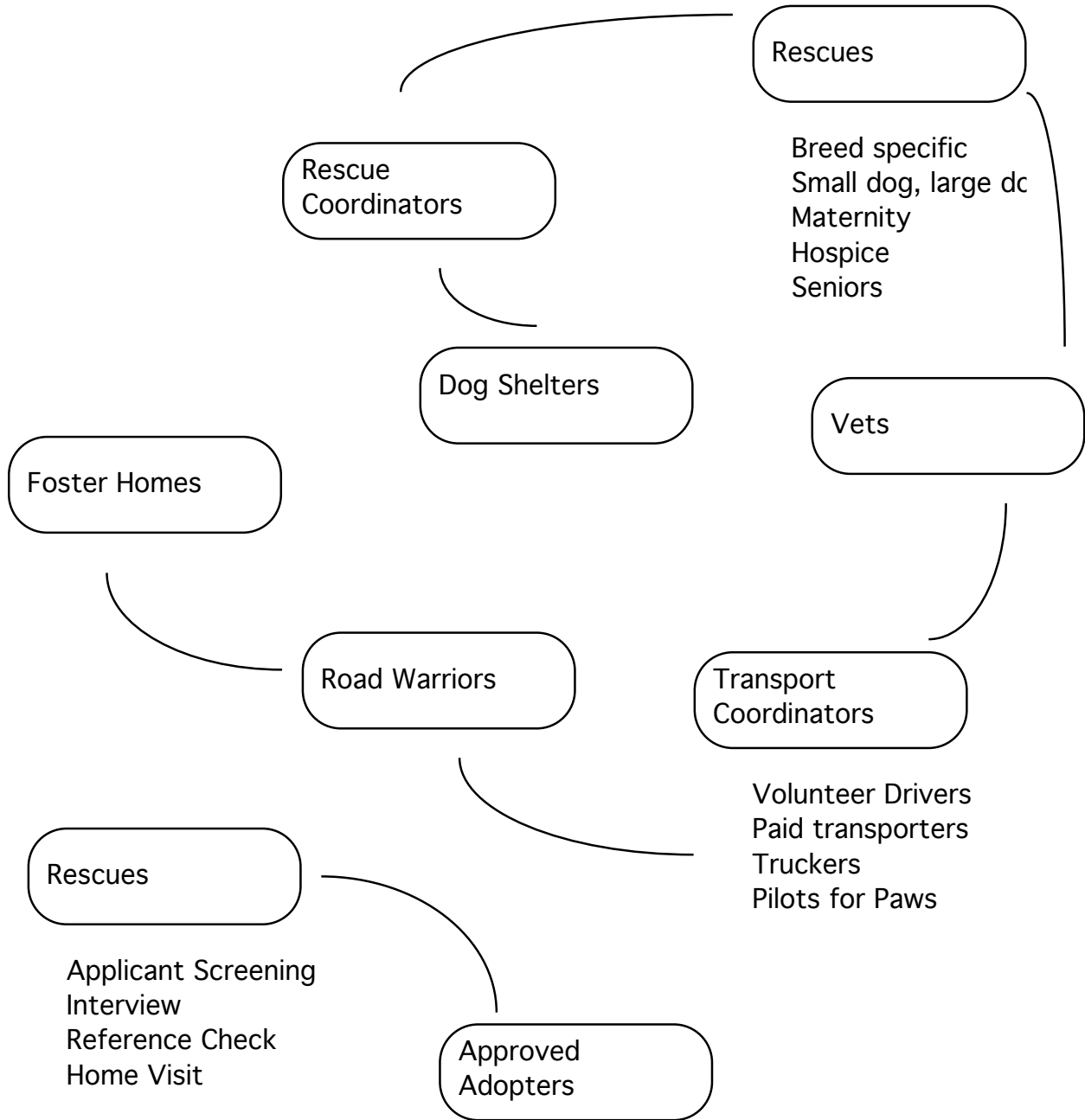
Properties of the whole
versus the individual parts

Complexity, not Confusion
Order without Planning
Without Guidance or Centralized Control

Boundaryless with the Environment
Open system

And. . .

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The Dog Rescue Network

Rescues

Breed specific
Small dog, large do
Maternity
Hospice
Seniors

Rescue Coordinators

Dog Shelters

Vets

Foster Homes

Road Warriors

Transport Coordinators

Volunteer Drivers
Paid transporters
Truckers
Pilots for Paws

Rescues

Applicant Screening
Interview
Reference Check
Home Visit

Approved Adopters

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Stories from Rescue:

How do people become a part of the system?

What is the motivation to work?

How is work allocated?

How is responsibility assigned?

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DISCUSSION:

What questions does this raise for your organization?

What potential do you see in this system?

How is this different from a traditional organization?

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More Stories from Rescue:

How are resources managed?

How are "executive" functions structured?

How is conflict handled?

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DISCUSSION:

What questions does this raise for your organization?

What potential do you see in this system?

How is this different from a traditional organization?

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Still More Stories from Rescue:

How does Learning Occur?

How Does the Organization Transform?

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DISCUSSION:

What questions does this raise for your organization?

What potential do you see in this system?

How is this different from a traditional organization?

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Hopefully you will leave this session with three things: questions, curiosity and possibilities. I believe it is vitally important to raise questions about the nature of our organizations and their evolution or transformation. Here is a place to start:

Have our organizations really broken out of the traditional model?

What does a true paradigm shift look like?

Can a traditional organization even become self-organizing?

Can we really control change?

What is the nature of OD work?

What might OD look like in a self-organizing system?

What is the OD practitioner's role?

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A final thought for OD practitioners:

Our understanding of the physical world has changed dramatically, but our organizations still function with systems that have yet to adapt to this quantum change. On the one hand, organization development practitioners need to lead the way. By professional definition, we should be creating the vision for this new direction, educating leaders, influencing our organizations. We have an obligation to understand the cutting edge theory and translate its implications so that our clients can adapt. On the other hand, if we "get" that systems are self-organizing, that fundamentally changes our role as change agents. This presents an even greater challenge, because we need to redefine our role as it relates to a system that teaches itself, changes itself, grows and transforms in relation to environmentally driven needs. On both counts, we need to be asking questions and seeking the structures that will work in our future.