



I will be convening a group of seriously smart entrepreneurial friends to discuss and prototype new collaborative models for building organisations and networks. **We will be organising a retreat in April / May 2016.**



Read this document and send me your feedback (anton@exponentials.co.uk). *Let me know if you want to get involved as a catalyst or a member, and feel free to share this document with your friends too.*



The IO Collective : Action Plan

by Anton Chernikov, Founder at The Exponentials



A new collaborative, pro-social economy is emerging. This is being driven by both cultural and technological forces. We are all beginning to wake up to the fact that business, society and environment are interconnected and that many of the systems and institutions that we have today have become too big and are no longer fit for purpose. We are also beginning to see the transformational potential of exponential technologies that enable us to spread ideas, prototype solutions and inspire action like never before.

A great metaphor for describing this paradigm shift is the metamorphosis of when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly. Biologists have studied this phenomenon and identified that this transformation is driven by a network of emergent self-organising imaginal cells. Initially, each of the imaginal cells operates as a single-cell organism – entirely independent of one another. The immune system of the caterpillar even identifies them as threats and attacks them. Regardless, the imaginal cells continue; they multiply, and they connect with one another, forming clusters. They start to resonate with the same frequency and communicate in the same language, passing information backwards and forwards until there is a tipping point – when they stop acting as individual, separate cells and instead, become a multiple-celled organism: a butterfly.

When we begin to study nature more closely, we are able to observe some kind of deeper evolutionary intelligence. In the case of the butterfly there seems to be some kind of hidden wisdom or hidden code that guides the imaginal cells towards metamorphosis. What is also remarkable is that this intelligence is able to bring forth a new being of great beauty and wondrous possibilities that has little identifiable resemblance to its past state.

Let's now apply this analogy to the modern world; and the growing economic, social and environmental challenges that we face. Can we become catalysts for the metamorphosis of our economies and our societies? Is it possible to understand and activate our innate 'human' collaborative intelligence?

This is the ultimate purpose of the IO Collective; to explore **the fundamental building blocks of collaborative intelligence** by undertaking a real world social experiment to research, curate and test out a variety of group processes, organisational structures, communication tools and event formats.

The questions we will be working with are as follows;

- How can we create networks, spaces, neighbourhoods and organisations that are truly collaborative, self-organising and resilient to the status quo?
- How can we amplify and catalyse the imaginal cells of our economy (e.g. the freelancers, activists, artists and entrepreneurs) and enable them to form larger organisms and structures, without losing their imaginal nature?
- **How can we unleash humanity's innate collaborative intelligence at an exponential scale?**

When undertaking a project such as this it is crucial to work within the context of what already exists. Recently, we have seen the emergence of a few thought leaders who embrace the principles of self-organisation and conscious leadership. Frederic Laloux's 'Teal Organization', Brian Robertson's Holocracy, Rick Falkvinge's Swarmwise, John Mackey's Conscious Capitalism, Giles Hutchins's The Nature of Business, Dave Grey's Connected Companies and Tony Hsieh's Delivering Happiness at Zappos begin to point the way towards new non-hierarchical self-organising forms of governance.

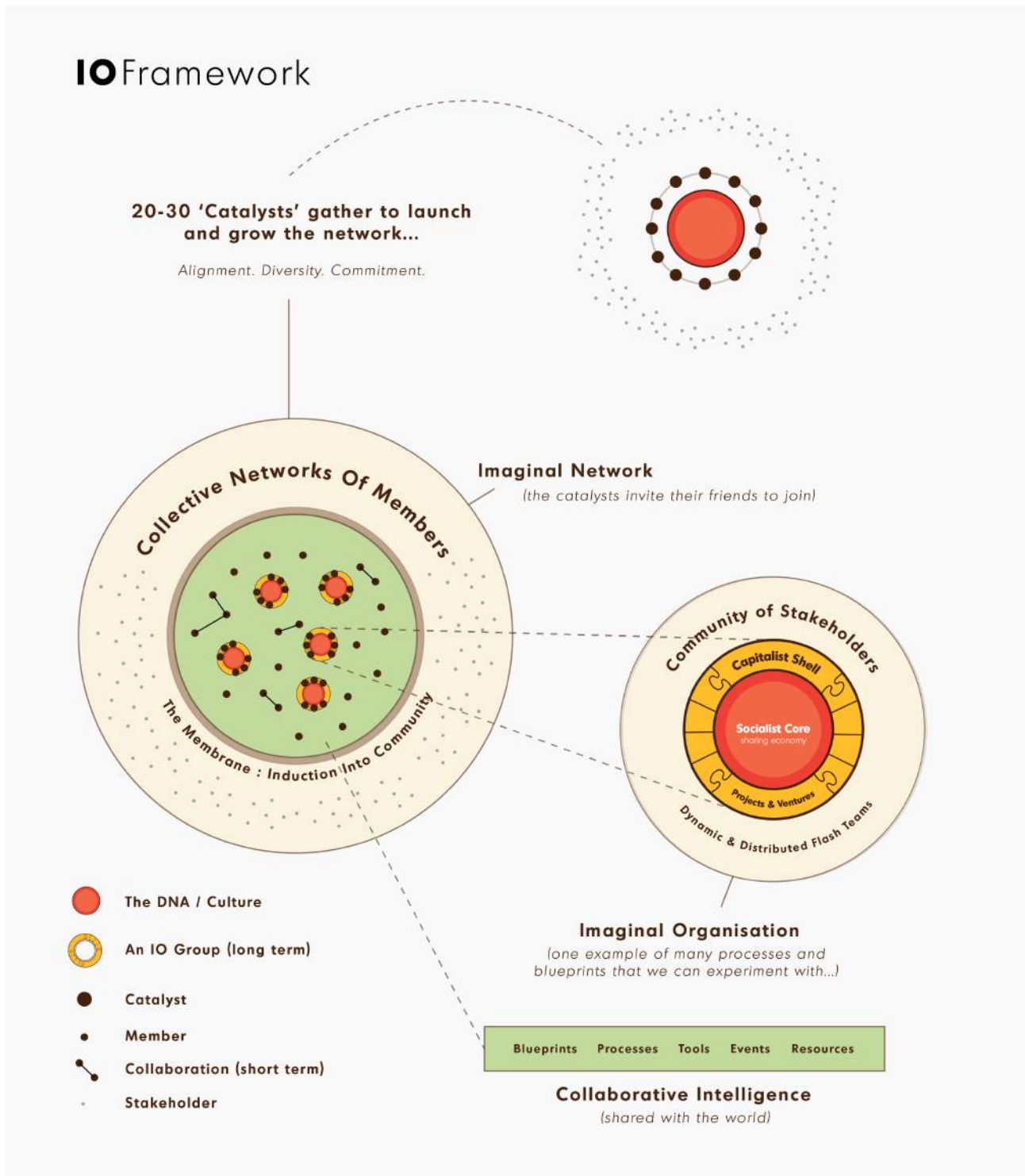
There are also many examples of emergent collaborative networks and organisations. For example, [Enspiral](#) describes itself as a virtual and physical network of companies and professionals working together to create a thriving society. Their network is made of three layers; a foundation, service companies and startup ventures. The members of the spiral network share resources and jobs. They also form ventures together. The network contributes time, money and skills to the foundation and everyone decides on how to invest those assets through a democratic voting system. This [video explains their model](#).

Another inspiration is Sandbox, recently rebranded as [Thousand Network](#). The Thousand Network is a global community that works across sectors, borders and cultures and aims to help its members strive for their best potential. Their vision is to build a global community of exceptional, passionate pioneers who inspire and empower each other to create a better world. There is a genuine culture of friendship and openness in the Thousand Network that binds the community together. There is a Facebook group for collaboration and a series of HUBs, events and retreats across the world.

It is also worth reflecting on [Baller Dinners](#) and also [Live Your Legend](#). Baller dinners is a simple concept for growing a network of likeminded people. You host a dinner and invite two friends you know. Then they invite two or three more friends who don't know each other. Everyone enjoys a dinner and with the approval of existing members are welcomed into the community and are encouraged to run their own dinner. There is a super active Facebook group that underpins the dinners, which is a valuable resource to everyone involved. When it comes to Live Your Legend, they managed to scale their volunteer led meetups across 206 Cities in 57 Countries (and counting!). They modelled an event blueprint and then just let it grow organically. These are just some of the many case studies that exist today. **Our goal is to learn from, integrate and contribute to this growing movement.**

Please email anton@exponentials.co.uk if you want to get involved as a catalyst or a member.

So what exactly are we going to do?



We are going to start by bringing together a group of catalysts (founding members) who resonate with the vision and purpose of this IO document. If sentences like 'understanding the fundamental building blocks of collaborative intelligence' fill you with energy and inspiration then you might just be the person we are looking for.

Within this founding group (approx. 20-30 people) there needs to be alignment, diversity and a commitment from each catalyst member to take a leading role in growing and documenting the IO Collective journey.

To recruit this initial group of catalysts we will share this document (The IO Collective Action Plan) with likeminded friends who are based in both London and Berlin. The founder of this project, Anton Chernikov will Skype or meet with each potential catalyst to discuss the Action Plan document and the values / vision that underpin it. Steffen Stabber will take a leading role in curating the Berlin catalysts.

We shall aim to organise a retreat somewhere in nature, where everyone can meet in person sometime in April or May 2016. It is important that all the catalysts get a chance to meet in person and really connect on a one-to-one basis. A strong level of friendship and trust needs to be built as a foundation before launching the network. All tensions within the group need to be acknowledged and discussed before launching the network. There needs to be alignment and consistency around the language we use and the communications we send out. During the retreat we will not only need to define the culture, purpose and values (DNA) of the Collective, but also to design the rituals, structures and processes that will maintain this culture as the Collective grows and evolves.

After this retreat, we will launch the network with a website, a Facebook group, Google docs and a calendar of events. From this point forward the role of the catalysts will be to promote the network and take an active role in facilitating events and initiating / inducting new members. We will also set up a shared 'catalysts' Google Doc as well as scheduling monthly hangouts to discuss our group processes, reflect on recent events and brainstorm ideas for how we can improve. These hangouts will be 2 hours long. Anton will chair these sessions and will take the lead on capturing all feedback and converting it into presentations, documents and toolkits that can be then openly shared and iterated.

The long term goal is to publish a book titled 'Collaborative Intelligence' or something equally catchy, which documents the journey of the IO Collective and showcases all the blueprints that we have developed and experiments that we have prototyped. A pdf e-book will be available for free with a suggested donation, and then there will also be a hardback version for sale. A percentage of the book sale revenues will be reinvested into continuing to grow and develop the collective.

Ideally the network we build together would be as diverse as possible. This means a diversity of skills and experience, and not just a diversity of gender, age and ethnicity. However, what is more important is the commitment of the members to the purpose and culture of the group. There needs to be an alignment of values and working styles. Otherwise you will have a lot of tension and friction in the group and nothing will get done.

Before joining every new member needs to have a clear understanding of the culture and the commitments that are involved in being a member of the network.

Commitments could include;

- Having a **one to one coffee / drink / Skype call** with a member of the network that you don't know each week. This could later extend to a monthly meetup group. Instead of traditional networking and speaker events, these events should be fun, creative and informal so everyone can relax and just be themselves.
- **Inviting friends to sign up** via the website and attend a dinner. If we choose to grow internationally this could be a hangout instead.
- Attending the **live monthly hangout** between founding members to discuss the health of the network. We will be using Google+ live hangouts. Any member can tune in and share comments. However, only a small group will be participating in the call. The reason for this is because it's very difficult to manage a call with dozens and potentially hundreds of people trying to speak. Also, the hangout will be recorded and shared with everyone in the network.
- **Attending quarterly retreats, which could include one large annual festival.** Every member will need to purchase a ticket to cover the costs of running the retreat and festival. It's also important that some financial contribution is made to the organisers, who are likely to spend several weeks full time making sure the event runs smoothly. Once again all financial

transactions should be transparent. We may come up with creative ways of funding these events through sponsorship or perhaps through a membership fee that could be a % of your annual income or just a fixed price.

The specifics of how community events are funded need to be initially decided on by the founding members. Eventually, these kind of decisions can be distributed to the network as a whole. However, a key point to reinforce is that simply defaulting to democratic 'consensus' voting and decision making is not the best approach. In the early days you need to be able to make decisions fast and establish a clear vision and structure for the network. You need to have a common language and a consistent message, however you do not need to wait for consensus on every single decision.

Another important process to get right is the etiquette of communication across the network. e.g. what is ok to ask for and what is not ok. This is why it is so important that in the early days we recruit members who are mindful and self-aware. No one wants to be spammed with email. Also, there will be times when we are busy and less available and times when we have more spare capacity. We want to encourage everyone to be honest about how much time they can commit and what they can realistically contribute to the collective.

This is where the commercial and professional aspect of the network becomes important. If we want busy members to invest their time within the network we need to make sure they can see and feel the tangible value they receive in return. One of the things we all need to be reflecting on is how do we facilitate a genuine sharing economy within our network? How do we effectively share our ideas, skills, assets, resources and contacts?

A **private Facebook group** and **member mailing list** can be used for promoting new projects, crowdsourcing feedback and making introductions. This works great for light touch informal collaborations. In fact we can even gamify these collaborations by encouraging everyone to say thank you publicly for the value that they received from fellow members. Think of it as a virtual gratitude ritual. Human beings are wired with reciprocity. If we sense an imbalance where we have been taking more than giving, we will make a considered effort to find ways to contribute, without anyone needing to point fingers. It is small rituals and nudges like this that can make a significant impact on the culture and effectiveness of the network.

Also, when it comes to offering voluntary support, it is so important that there is a focus on outcomes rather than inputs. Just saying I want to help is not helpful. Be proactive. Take the time to really understand someone's project or venture and offer specific and focussed support. It may also be useful to have a community manager that captures the 'Thank You's' on an impact wall hosted through the network website. The same can be done for useful resources and tools that are shared cross the network.

Another ritual that could be established within the network is **to create a Google doc (accessible by members only) with a bio of every member that outlines all the things that are working on right now, including links to their LinkedIn, twitter, Facebook profiles.** We don't just want a copy of a LinkedIn bio. Instead we want to design questions that encourage members to share their long term personal and professional goals. Perhaps we offer a word limit and encourage members to think creatively about how they communicate their values, purpose, passions, skills and experiences to the group.

Over time, as the network grows we could consider how we can use technology (e.g. dating app) to match members based on their collaboration potential. We could look at personality traits, skills, working styles, needs, availability, industry experience, location, etc... and use algorithms to identify potential teams. This is just one example of the many possibilities that could emerge from the collective as we explore new ways to scale collective action.

One of the key goals of the catalyst retreat will be to curate and organise an archive of tools, blueprints and processes. We will look to brainstorm and map out all the different ways that members could collaborate and generate shared value. How can we all help each other find good work and reach self-sufficiency / abundance? How can we establish an accelerated learning culture? How we support each other in developing our innate collaborative intelligence?

One example of a blueprint we could design and prototype is the IO group, which adopts a Socialist Core Capitalist Shell (SCCS) model. This is the framework that we use to govern The Exponentials.



This model can be represented by three circles. **There is a Socialist Core and a Capitalist Shell (SCCS)**. The Socialist Core is driven by sharing economy principles, and the Capitalist Shell is made up of ventures & projects that are owned by core members of the IO. Then there is a wider circle labelled the 'Community of Stakeholders'. This wider network acts as a talent resource that strengthens the Capitalist shell. Dynamic and distributed flash teams can be instantly assembled and disbanded based on specific needs or opportunities. The surrounding blank space is representative of the market or economy.

The ultimate purpose of an IO is to enable individual small business owners, entrepreneurs and freelancers to co-exist within a larger organisation without giving up ownership or control of their own businesses and endeavours.

An IO (Imaginal Organisation) Group is a non-legal organisation that is bound by shared values and common purpose. The organisation is help together by a culture of trust, transparency and friendship rather than through contracts and term sheets. Legally the organisation doesn't exist. It doesn't have a bank account. It doesn't hold any assets. IO's are managed and maintained voluntarily by the guardian founder members. In many ways an IO could be described as a mastermind group or a leadership circle. All members join the tribe and give value and support to fellow members, knowing they will receive similar value in return. Everyone shares in the collective intelligence and benefits from the diversity of the group.

An IO group operates with the same level of commitment and engagement that you get inside a traditional business or organisation. There is a commitment to meet regularly (at least on a weekly basis) and to be actively involved in each other's projects and ventures. The skills of the group should be complimentary and there should be genuine accountability within the group. Members of the IO should be proactively finding ways to support each other. We share in each others successes and failures. We coach each other and make sure we are all growing exponentially. One culture hack could be to introduce monthly masterclass sessions where one of the members dives deep into their ventures and skills so that everyone can learn something new and spark new ideas for creating shared value. Within this group there is also an assumed creative commons

principle, unless one of the members specifically requests that certain IP be kept private. This places the responsibility of the sharer to define how open they want to be with their content.

An IO group adopts a very similar culture and workflow to Holocracy / Teal organisations. However, the big difference is that there is no central organisation or complicated co-operative ownership structure. No capital or equity needs to be exchanged. No contracts need to be signed. Members just assemble and experiment with different ways to work together. If it works then an IO group is formed, and if not, the members continue to exchange value through the network in a less formal and structured way. Members should be able to move in and out of IO Groups freely based on the commitments and contributions that they wish to make. Life happens and sometimes you need to step away from past commitments. The key is for everyone to be as transparent and open about their intentions as possible.

The purpose of the IO cell (group) is to enable members to commit to deeper levels of collaboration. Not everyone would feel comfortable sharing their most valuable ideas, contacts and expertise with hundreds or thousands of people in a network. However, in a smaller group where there is greater levels of trust, commitment and transparency, deeper forms of partnership can emerge.

An IO group can range from a mastermind group that is focussed on coaching, personal growth and leadership development... to a collaborative team of businesses and entrepreneurs who work together on a variety of ventures and projects. The key is to establish a give first culture where members are continuously thinking about how you can be of value to them. There is a common understanding that 'we are all invested in each other's success'.

We have seen over many generations the destructive impact that the prioritisation of profits over value creation has on people's lives and the wider world. The IO places value creation at the heart of it's operations, and thus achieves a much more human and dynamic way of working.

With respect to the capitalist core it is important to mention that co-ownership and revenue sharing across all the ventures and projects is not necessary (although there are many benefits to adopting legally binding co-ownership governance models). In most cases the capitalist core will contain businesses that are owned independently by members. Eventually joint ventures or joint projects will emerge, but this should not be forced. An essential ingredient that makes the joint venture side of things work within IO's is transparency and a commitment towards fairness and creative commons within the group. All information about deals, payments and new joint venture partnerships are shared openly with all members of the IO group. If there is ever a conflict of interest or a situation where someone feels they are being exploited, this is identified and discussed as soon as possible.

An IO seeks to create a unique kind of self-organising, high trust, collaborative working culture that all of us would love to work in. It seeks to bring out the best in everyone. We invest in each other. We grow together. And best of all within the IO there is no hierarchy or controlling behaviour. Everyone is their own boss. We all have a portfolio of exciting ventures and projects we are working on at any one time. And of course we are all responsible for generating our own income.

Some of the ventures and projects in the capitalist shell will be cash cows (profitable revenue generators) or at least potential cash cows, while others may be impact focussed without the need to generate any short term income. There may be times when some founding members of an IO will have cashflow challenges. For this reason it is crucial that there is a balance between short term revenue generation and long term visionary projects so that all members of the tribe, as well as the people working for member-owned organisations are taken care of. For an IO to thrive there needs to be a culture of abundance and not scarcity at the core. This is why it is so important to be highly selective and curate the right founding members. If you get the wrong people into the socialist core they will drain out the abundance then the capitalist shell will implode and your IO will no longer exist.

When it comes to joint projects that require a flash freelance team to be built, there is a simple and effective structure that works well. A percentage of the project fee goes to the partner(s) who closed the deal (20%). Then everyone who will deliver the project quotes a day rate or a fixed price for their part of the work. The project is delivered and any surplus profit is shared fairly across partners. This team then disbands and can reassemble at any time, in a similar way to the movie industry.

This brings me to one of most crucial elements of the IO, the culture. Just like any organisation, an IO needs to attract members that have complimentary skillsets and alignment in both values and purpose. If there is an obvious tension and personality clash between members it is a good signal that potentially this is not a good fit. Also, if the ventures and markets that the founding members are working in are too divergent it will be hard to identify enough overlap and synergy early on to establish a strong, interlocking capitalist shell.

Culture exists not only in the big picture vision, but in the day to day details. A key part of establishing an honest culture is defining your priorities, not just your values. The model we follow at The Exponentials is as follows. Our core priority is the wellbeing of our inner circle or founding tribe. If there is a problem here, this takes priority over everything else. Then we move out and look at the health of the ventures and projects we work on. Then we look at the customers we serve and finally the market we wish to transform. We are constantly reflect on the relational side of our business and not just the bottom line. It is so important that these core are regularly repeated and discussed, and that we don't default to more transactional ways of working.

It is also important that every member of the IO is committed toward developing their own personal consciousness, mindfulness and self-awareness. We are all masters of self-deception and it is important, especially when addressing conflict within an organisation, to be aware of the illusions that our emotions can create. Without this inner work, the strong relational ties that hold an IO together will fade away. In many ways this inner work helps to form the cultural DNA of the IO culture. It helps us to see the world in abundance not scarcity. It helps us to look at value holistically, not just in terms of the bottom line. However, perhaps above all this deeper wisdom makes it possible for us to manage conflict in much more constructive ways. If the time comes when a member is no longer serving the best interests of the tribe, then we all work together creatively to find the best possible outcome. All opinions are shared and emotions are released. When you have nothing to own, nothing to control, nothing to fight over, the nature of the conversation changes. The ego has nothing to fight for. The IO is an intangible. It cannot be possessed by anyone. That's what makes it so powerful as an organising model. There is so much social capital in the Socialist Core that it creates the conditions for transparency, fairness and openness in the Capitalist Shell.

Ultimately, an IO's existence depends completely on the quality of relationships that exist within the socialist core. At the end of the day it is just a framework that enables genuine, lasting active collaboration between individual entrepreneurs and small business owners who want to follow their own path and yet crave the advantages of having a larger team and network behind them. An IO seeks to establish trust through rituals of communication and collaboration, without creating any hierarchy or dependencies within the tribe. The core values of friendship, transparency and shared purpose encourage the members of IO to invest in each other and grow together from both a personal and business perspective.

When inviting someone new into the core tribe, there needs to unanimous consensus between all existing tribe members. If it's not a hell yes from everyone, then it's a no. Period. Even if it's a hell yes, it is recommended to have a trial period of partnership in one of the ventures, so that genuine trust can be established. If it's a no, this does not mean rejection. This is where the 'Community of Stakeholders' circle comes in. You can still collaborate on specific ventures together within the Capitalist Shell. Perhaps you can also set up another independent IO together. As long as you can

maintain your commitment and contributions to both IOs, there is no reason you should not be able to participate in both. The IO framework is designed to be fully flexible and dynamic.

Another element to consider is self-sufficiency. Since there are no salaries being paid and no legal structures within an IO group, it might be wise to ensure that every member of the group can generate a stable income and has genuine autonomy and flexibility over their time (e.g. it might be difficult to form an IO group with some members who are in full time jobs and other members who are freelance, and others who are frantically growing their startups). Once again there needs to be an alignment of complimentary skills, working style and values.

Here are seven core values that we have created for The Exponentials IO Group. *Zesty is another great example of clearly communicated values that we can draw inspiration from. We can use these as inspiration as we launch the IO Collective.*

Radical Openness.

Trust is broken when information is concealed from the group. All information should be transparency and accessible, especially when it comes to any financial and strategic matters.

Conscious Communication.

We must all be aware of how our emotions and our ego distort reality and influence our actions. We must strive to be mindful and demonstrate humility. We must not shy away from difficult and deep conversations. It is through these deep conversations that lasting friendships are built.

Friendship First.

What binds us together is not capital and contracts, but trust and friendship. We must always prioritise the relationship over any transaction or project.

Holistic Living.

We blur the boundaries between work and life and share in each other's adventures. We make a commitment to ensure the health and wellbeing of every member of the group is an important factor of how we all grow together.

Personal Growth.

Our culture requires high levels of empathy and consciousness within the group. We must all continue to develop our emotional and collaborative intelligence so that we can better serve each other and ourselves.

Abundance Mindset.

One of the biggest obstacles to genuine collaboration is scarcity driven competition. We protect our value and knowledge so that we can win a bigger piece of the pie. It is crucial that there is a give first abundance driven culture within the group. We all share in each other's successes and failures. We invest in developing the collaborative intelligence of the group.

Accelerated Learning.

It is so important that we all constantly aim to do things better than we've done them before. We all take the time to be aware and understand each other's ventures and projects. Then we proactively seek out ways to add value. We share processes. We share case studies and working files. We help each other to save time and money, and in doing so we create a culture of abundance.