Catalist - Connection Platform To Enable Collective Understanding & Action

The Scope, Scale & Speed Of Required Change

According to the latest IPCC Report, limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society [1]. After surpassing this tipping point, cascading environmental feedback loops are predicted to cause widespread ecosystem and economic collapses. Our current economic paradigm based primarily on competition, infinite growth, and extractive industries is **fundamentally broken**, as it prioritizes *the profit of a few* over *human flourishing as a whole* as the prime metric for its success. Since profits are tied to the successful externalization of costs, the winners have maximized externalities on the environment to the point that our economy no longer aligns with the carrying capacity of our planet. In order to drive the urgent systemic changes in order to prevent ecological and social collapse on a global scale, scientists predict we have 10 years to intelligently redesign our economies, governmental policies, physical and digital infrastructures, educational systems, and cultural paradigms. The scale and speed of change required for collective action and impact will require a large percentage of our population to be able to empathize with different perspectives, understand complex issues, decide on the appropriate individual actions, find and connect with other aligned people, organizations, and communities, and have the technology and tools to collaborate and share resources, opportunities, and knowledge at scale.
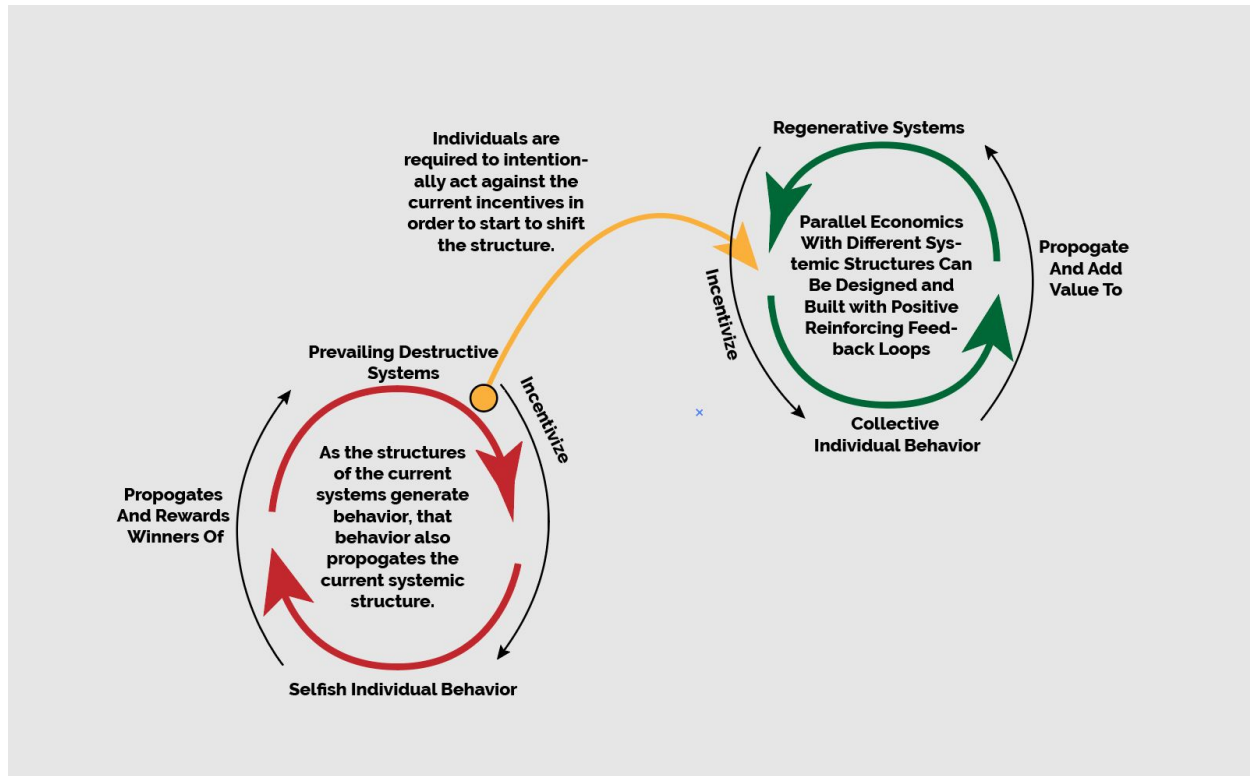
Collaborating Out Of Our Prisoner's Dilemma

If we want to overcome the systemic issues behind today's problems, then we need to change the thinking that led to their creation. The inherent flaw of an economy based on extraction, consumerism, and competition is that it incentivizes each individual to act to maximize their own self-interest, regardless of the inherent negative impacts on other people and on the ecosystem/planet that **every individual** relies on. Society is in a prisoner's dilemma on a global scale, where rational individuals, organizations, and nations don't cooperate to make better decisions, even though it would be in their combined best interests to do so.

Breaking Negative Reinforcing Feedback Loops

The structures of the existing systems shape our behavior in ways that make it difficult to break out of social, cultural, and ecological feedback loops, as illustrated in Figure 1. The cheaper and more convenient an unsustainable product that people need is, the more people will

be driven to that behavior, which then gives the most profitable market players ability to make their products even more cheap and convenient. Winners Take All. It is difficult for individuals to change behaviors within the current system because it typically requires an individual to sacrifice excess resources or energy to choose an alternative that is more sustainable.

Propagating Nuanced and Holistic Solutions

Despite millions of people protesting for the climate [2] and millions of others willing to make smart sacrifices and changes their lives, they often lack the specific and nuanced understanding of how to translate their values and aspirations for a better future to daily life decisions and actions within their capability that actually help others and the holistic system. Many behaviors that are perceived as "better" often entail solutions that are just band-aids in the context of larger holistic problems, for example, a push for biodegradable or recyclable single-use water bottles that don't address the throw-away culture at the root of our linear economy. Furthermore, where systemic changes are necessary, such as adding composting infrastructure to a city, even seemingly sustainable decisions, like buying compostable products, go in vain inside unsustainable systems.
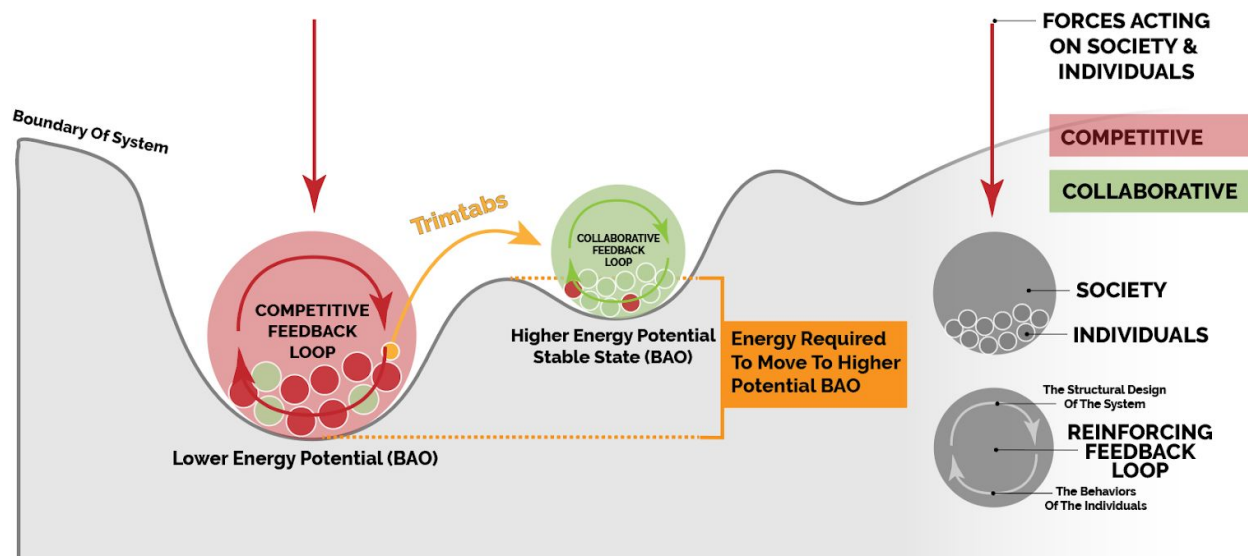
Navigating Complexity Through Education

For intentional action to be effective it requires intentional decision-making, and more importantly, a comprehensive understanding of the problem and context. In order to know how to solve any problem, we first need to identify and define the problem and its root causes. However, in an economic system with a focus on infinite growth, where innovation is required to stay hyper-competitive - the exponential advancement of technology far exceeds societies ability to keep up socially and politically. On an individual level, we now live in a world of intersecting crises that is too complex for the average person to be able to comprehend, and that only continues to accelerate in complexity.

The Solutions: Connected, Collaborative, Systemically-Informed, and Regenerative

The alternative to a system that encourages competition, unsustainable decisions, and surface-level sacrifices is one that encourages collaboration, sustainability, and holistic solutions that are nuanced and informed. The necessary social and economic paradigm shift is to align our businesses and lifestyles in a way that is ***connected and regenerative***, such that the system makes it easier for every individual to do the right thing. Through design, such a system could incentivize cooperative and sustainable action that was truly win-win. There is no longer time for avoiding or prolonging the recognition that each of our well-beings is inextricably linked to the well-being of the planet and society as a whole. Therefore, we must create systems that lower the barrier of entry to understand the complexity of the world, make better and more holistically positive decisions, and collaborate on collective issues.

Moving From Extractive To Regenerative "Basins Of Attraction" (BAO) Systemic Change Through Aligning Individual Actions With Collective Goals

A basin of attraction is a space in which a system will be attracted to approach over a long period of time. This diagram shows two *Basins Of Attraction* (BAOs), one in red which society is currently being pushed into by the cultural, economic and social pressures/forces, and another in green which is a possible stable state that we haven't yet reached. Without changing the fundamental system, the topology that pushes people by default to make certain choices, it is going to take energy from each individual and organization to move into a more stable, higher potential BAO. According to a recent report by the Global Commission on Adaptation, it says that global efforts at adaptation are "gravely insufficient" [3]. With an absence of systems-change coming from governments, non-political solutions are required immediately to start creating momentum. This is why we need Trimtabs.
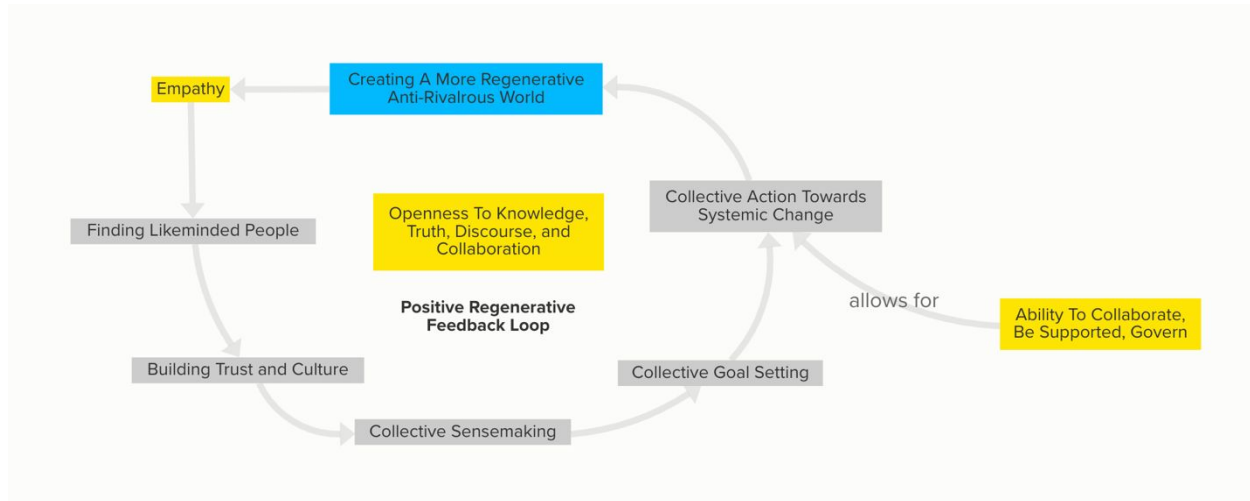
Trimtabs As a Driver For Systemic Change

Although systemic change is necessary, we cannot wait for a complete system redesign to start to act. Instead, we must align our actions in the short-term to give momentum and energy to more sustainable and long-term systems. We must be the change we want to see in the world; we must be like **trim tabs**. Trim tabs are a small mechanism that help stabilize an enormous ship or aircraft. The human equivalent are those people that create small shifts in awareness or behavior that might leverage and add up to have a much larger effect. In order to move from a destructive

and competitive "Basin of Attraction" to a "Regenerative and Cooperative Basin Of Attraction", requires energy from individuals willing to act in the interest of the collective. As difficult it is to act against the habits, forces/incentives and trends of the status quo, if enough people do so at the same time, systems can be shifted through **intentional short-term actions** that will **maximize individual and collective self-interest in the long term**. For example, while it may be difficult at first, when we fight anger and hate in a relationship with love, we change the environment in a way that can diffuse broken habits and heal the relationship instead of feeding into the existing negative feedback loop. While it may be difficult to find something used vs. buying in 1-click on Amazon, each action has the potential to shift power into more conscious systems. Although some decisions are not possible in the current system, Trim-Tabs are conscious actors that make the best decisions possible while also vocalizing and pushing for the ideal. The world now needs millions of Trimtabs, individuals willing to make better and more conscious decisions in the information we consume, opportunities we pursue, and actions we take to shift us onto a different trajectory.

Empathy For People and Planet

The first step in the design thinking process is empathy, because successfully designing something new requires us to put aside our preconceived biases, opinions, learning, and worldview in order to understand another person's experience deeply and meaningfully. Designing for the planet requires the same heightened awareness. Therefore, all change in some way starts with having empathy for others, our communities, or ourselves (Figure 2.). Empathy allows us to recognize the root cause of problems and gives us a desire to go against the current of the current systems to help others. As trimtabs, we must be willing to embrace ambiguity in finding and opening up to others, working to meet people where they are and build trust, community, and culture to start to collectively make sense of the world. Beneath creativity and true collective action is a requirement for an openness to new truths, discussions, and collaborations - and an acceptance that our previous beliefs, processes, and perspectives may be

entirely wrong.

Connection To Cooperate And Not Duplicate

The complexity of the world also carries over into an enormous quantity of projects, initiatives, organizations, and individuals passionate to rise to the challenge of creating solutions to these problems. People create really useful projects, lists of information and resources, and initiatives. However, many of these projects are done in small teams without compensation and thus fail due to a lack of resources, manpower, or visibility, and often discover similar and competing initiatives too late. Many others who would like the start projects just don't have the time, physical energy, and financial ability to pursue impact due to the difficulty of survival in our current economic system. In the same way our planet has finite resources, we as humans have a finite amount of attention that we can give every day. For this reason, another project is not always the answer - as we are overloaded with information already. This means that distributed efforts are often duplicative, disconnected, and difficult to find. The difficulty and time required to find others that align with your values and who have a desire to collaborate makes just building another "X" the default option. Additionally, social platforms don't offer a very good environment to share these projects in a way that isn't spam-like, and that aligns with the dynamic nature of projects - especially for those seeking constant help. Most well-intentioned people, organizations, and movements are not connected in a significant way to work together towards these urgent common goals, and therefore waste an immense amount of time and resources duplicating their efforts [3].

The Failure Of Big Tech

Current social media platforms have failed in designing socio-technical systems able to orient us in the complex world we live in to help us better understand the challenges we face in a nuanced and collective way. Instead of striving to encourage critical thinking and empathy, and facilitating genuine connections, collaborations, and matching to relevant opportunities, they are focused on a constant stream of tweets, statuses, & short-form news. As COVID-19 physically isolates us, social media platforms are a major source of opportunities to explore, share, and find new people, communities, and information. The ironic twist to social media is that the more "social" media we consume as a society, the less socially connected we feel than ever before [4]. Genuine and deep human connections come from people talking about real issues and sharing real problems in a civil and productive way, which is something that often only happens in certain silos on platforms like Facebook. If algorithms are designed to maximize screen time and profit, they will do so even if that means maximizing the reach of fake-news and hateful content, while letting the highest bidders buy attention based on advertisements ability to most effectively influence one's decisions. Even in professionally-driven platforms like LinkedIn, information is not organized in a way that's useful to orient people to "the working world". News feeds and profiles are not designed to be helpful to understand someone on a profound level and match them with the content and opportunities that truly resonate with them. Algorithms that you cannot see or control are fundamentally flawed because they can only show you information based on what you've done on that platform in the past, but never take into consideration your future goals, aspirations, and values.

When using the internet, current search engines, and social media platforms, we're atomized by their design - treated as isolated nodes and largely prevented from truly understanding the landscape at a scale that matches the scale of action needed to create real change. Yet, when we look at the world through a system lens, we see that everyone and everything is interconnected. Search engines have barely changed because they locked-in their business models decades ago. The companies behind these platforms have designed them to maximize ad-based revenue, which has resulted in designs that maximize screen time and data collection, instead of fast connections to the most relevant information. What this has created is a normalization of "scrolling" and a culture of consumption of the highlights of those we "follow" instead of creating the space and free time for genuine social connections or collective action

around real, fact-based issues. There is a huge opportunity to go beyond scrolling through hundreds of pages on google, or the endless flurry of superficial notifications of likes, work anniversaries, and external validation, but big tech has failed to invest the time and resources to harness its power and data to mobilize and connect global citizens to tackle the problems necessary to preserving the planet.

Catalist - Connection Platform Designed to Catalyze Collective Action (Short)

What are the requirements for collective action? And if we knew this, how would we catalyze collective action towards wicked problems? There is a huge potential for technology to organize and help movements and individuals recognize their power, however, the current tools available each only have a piece of the puzzle, and are not integrated in a way that aligns their interests. True innovation comes at the intersections between seemingly unrelated things, and Catalist aims to combine a few vital technologies in order to build collective knowledge and power.

The proposed solution is to create a global online connection platform that serves as an information management tool for groups and individuals to collect, organize, display, and exchange information to make better individual and collective decisions.

Catalist doesn't work like a traditional social media platform, because it allows individuals full control over data streams (feeds) and data gardens (collections) to choose the what, how, and when they want to be connected to information. Catalist aims to make it easier to do the right thing by lowering the time and effort to understand the world, find relevant resources, information, and opportunities, and collaborate and coordinate with other groups and individuals aligned with creating positive impacts relevant to them. Catalist's mission is to connect people with relevant opportunities that are time-sensitive and customized to the individual, but also socially conscious and relevant towards the collective goals of society.

Just a few of the many use cases of Catalist could be to: help users make informed decisions on sustainable products to buy, survey the landscape of systems design tools, merge a project idea with someone else, find nonprofits or startups to join, or take collective action in times of disaster. For example, instead of a student performing a google search looking for non-profit grants resulting in 6 million results, they could use a filterable spreadsheet that condenses down to 50 relevant opportunities to a user with a click of a few filter buttons. Instead of a cafe going to hundreds of trade-shows, researching online, and traveling to other cafes for sustainability ideas, it could join a "Sustainable Restaurant Community" and find rooms filled with different spreadsheets such as "Eco-Friendly Cleaners" or "Sustainable Distribution

Organizations". A city hit by a storm can duplicate a community from a similar natural disaster that occurred elsewhere in previous months, giving anyone who joins access to templates of previously successful/impactful rooms such as "Resource Sharing", "Successful Solutions/Patterns", "Event and Community Meetings", or "Danger Area Lists". Besides organizing social information and resources, this same template and design can be applied to let any group create local micro-economies or add to global databases to create things like "Green Marketplaces or Exchanges". These would have data on millions of products including water usage, carbon footprint, and ethics (to name a few) that can match users with certain product needs with options for the most sustainable alternatives/choices.

For all the above scenarios, there is a common need for an easy way to connect people who are seeking something with others who are offering something. Intentional design is required to ensure that these data-sets would be constantly updated and maintained by the users and stewarded by online communities. A reimagining of notifications for a healthier information ecology results in a natural end goal: **minimize** the time spent on the platform, **maximizing findability and action.**

Catalist has the opportunity to replace and greatly expand upon outcomes of the many of the useful group and connection features of platforms like Facebook Groups and Google Search, but applied towards social impact and designed not to recreate the unintended consequences that similar platforms have had on society surrounding data privacy, mental health, and social isolation.

As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned, "If I have to select one sentence to describe the state of the world, I would say we are in a world in which global challenges are more integrated, and the responses are more and more fragmented. And, if these are not reversed, it is a recipe for disaster"[5]. The proposed platform has the ability to facilitate global multi-industry, multi-sector, and multi-stakeholder collaboration around sharing information in order to catalyze positive action which benefits all stakeholders. Fostering collaboration within existing organizations is just as important as unlocking the synergies between organizations. Through beautiful and intuitive system maps of solutions, tools, and groups, Catalist has the potential to catalyze people into action by helping them lower the barrier to find the people and knowledge to better understand the world in its complexity. Our mission is to speed the

transition to a parallel regenerative economy that makes the world better for more people, more of the time.

Catalist has the potential to facilitate collaboration and collective action towards global challenges. Our vision is to catalyze action by enabling individuals and communities to build collective knowledge and power together. In a world where we are all fundamentally connected, the only way we truly change the world, is to change it together.

References

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