



iSPIRT

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Dec 2017



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VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

PREFACE

Dear Volunteers

This Volunteer Handbook explains the inner workings of iSPIRT and articulates the expectations from iSPIRT Volunteers. We hope that this Handbook will make our current volunteers more effective and will help attract more high-quality volunteers to iSPIRT.

The volunteer model that underpins iSPIRT has been around since 2009. It has evolved continually and has grown over the years. So, there is lots to cover. The Volunteer Handbook has been broken into four parts to make it digestible. New Volunteers can just read Part 1. Part 2 is for Existing Volunteers. There is more detail for Core Volunteers in Part 3. And the final section, Part 4, is for Council Members.

There are three core tenets of iSPIRT Credo. These are:

- *5 Beliefs (covered in Part 3)*
- *12 Volunteer Qualities (covered in Part 3)*
- *5 aspects of good Decisions (they are in Part 2)*

There are three distinctive elements of iSPIRT Organization. These are:

- *Rhythms (covered in Part 1)*
- *Rooms (covered in Part 1)*
- *Orbit-shifts (covered in Part 3)*

Some may prefer the alternative path of reading the Credo and Organizational elements first and then going through the other sections.

Think of this Handbook as the Gita (or Bible) that guides volunteer actions. Keep this handy so that you can refer to it often.

BEING A VOLUNTEER

AN INTRODUCTION

It will take us another 10-20 years to become a Product Nation. We take inspiration from the 26th January 1929 declaration for Purna Swaraj. "... India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence." At iSPIRT, we are just scratching the surface of what is possible.

iSPIRT Foundation has come a long way. By relentlessly challenging status quo and working in an unconventional way, we are, slowly but surely, rewriting the script of India as a product nation. We are changing how our product entrepreneurs think and work, creating new business playgrounds (that pull in banks and other large institutions as enablers), influencing how government services operate and shaping the nation's narrative. We have done all this with frugality and discipline. We have been told that we are the most efficient use of philanthropic money in the history of India.

But we have a long way to go. Most Indian product companies are sub-\$30m in revenues while Oracle is \$37B revenue, Microsoft is \$85B, and Google is about \$90B. India's product companies need to grow 1000X in revenues to be visible on the global stage. We have to also watch out for Digital Colonization. Success in Software Products can have a significant impact. After all, "software is eating the world" and software products span industries from BFSI to defense to aerospace to manufacturing to HR to automotive to electronics to biopharma to name a few.. Software products will also bring out a significant improvement in the functioning of small enterprises. In 10 years, the number of small enterprises (small businesses, rural schools, primary healthcare centers, farmers, etc.) impacted will go from 3m to 30m.

It will take us another 10-20 years to become a Product Nation. We take inspiration from the 26th January 1929 declaration for Purna Swaraj. Like then, there is no map to follow. A path has to be made. There are no wrong turnings. Only adjustments to be made. In this journey, often, we won't know what will be around the corner. It could be everything. Or it could be nothing. We will keep putting one foot in front of the other till we get to our destination.

We have much to do. iSPIRT is about 100 active volunteers at any time. This volunteer pool can be deepened substantially in the years to come. [Linux has 14,000 developers](#)¹, of which 5000 are active at any time. They add 5000 lines of code every day. The English Wikipedia, the largest language edition, [currently has 121,322 editors](#)² who have performed an edit in the last 30 days. About half of the active editors spend at least one hour a day editing, and a fifth spend more than three hours a day. The [10,000th contributor](#)³ made 7400 edits. At iSPIRT, we are just scratching the surface of what is possible.

1 <https://www.linux.com/infographic/25-years-linux-kernel-development>

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia_community

3 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_Wikipedians_by_number_of_edits/5001%E2%80%939310000#9001.E2.80.9310000

PART 1: HANDBOOK FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders.

Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

WELCOME TO iSPIRT VOLUNTEERING

We expect the volunteers to become part of iSPIRT not for glory, but for playing a part in addressing a shared challenge. Just like patriotism moves the soldiers, our Product Nation mission animates our volunteers. It generates the energy to brainstorm, ideate, experiment, build and evangelize. Program management converts all these actions into tangible results. In other words, it's only when a "hot cause" meets "cold momentum", magic happens.

We are all strivers.

We seek the good for our nation, our ecosystem, and our think tank through our volunteers. We want every new volunteer to be the one who leads us by drawing us into an ever-enlarging realm of intellectual possibilities and loads of purposeful engagements. May you inspire us to do our best work for the iSPIRT community, for the broader product entrepreneur community and India as a whole. May you help us see that the particular gifts of every volunteer are honored, and each one receives the encouragement necessary for the patient pursuit of his or her excellence.

You believe in the power of good that resides in every person and all of us together. Volunteering for iSPIRT is best experienced as an adventurous journey. It is best embraced with a funny bone and a backbone.

The bond generated out of working on something bigger than oneself is what binds our volunteer network together. Volunteers feel a kinship for one or more of these three reasons.

- Kinship to iSPIRT mission (Product Nation, India First, API-fication of value-chain, etc.)
- Kinship to iSPIRT credo, values, and beliefs
- Kinship to other iSPIRT volunteers for being part of an amazing team

iSPIRT is a family where you learn to care, to give, to create and cope. You will learn to stay cool under fire, to foster affinity, and skillfully navigate diverse opinions amongst volunteers. You will learn teamwork and an all-hands-on-deck work ethic. You'll learn to take decisive action when an extraordinary situation demands. But your true approach will be deliberative. You'll discover the joy of weaving other voices in the service of a cause bigger than all of us. You'll learn to offer warm praise rather than a hot rebuke and inspire harder and better work in others. You will learn to be endlessly curious, develop a capacious intellect and become a visionary with big plans and the capacity to bring them to life. And most of all, you'll learn to pay-forward, to give and be part of something larger than yourself.

WORKING ON SOMETHING BIGGER
THAN ONESELF GENERATES

THE BOND

DEMYSTIFYING iSPIRT

iSPIRT is a place where people are organized, but there is no organization; disputes are resolved, and order prevails, but nobody is in control; where demand breeds its own supply; work is leisure and vice-versa. These Volunteer Handbooks demystify iSPIRT.

The Dance of iSPIRT

In contrast to a mechanical system in which various elements interact linearly to produce outputs, iSPIRT is a complex system. There are simple rules, emergent and self-organized behaviors, and nonlinear interactions over multiple scales such that they produce orbit shifts. All this can be described by these eight statements:

1. **Volunteers** work in **rooms**.
2. Rooms are where **public goods** are built to bring about **orbit-shifts** in the ecosystem.
3. Every volunteer and employee abides by a **code-of-ethics** that determines which rooms one can volunteer in.
4. They also seek to develop the **12 qualities of a great volunteer**.
5. **Beliefs** are more about our actions than ideas. They shape our culture and credo.
6. Donors, Advisers, Volunteers-in-Training, Partners, and Alumni help us, but the **onus of holding up our high standards is on the active Volunteers**.
7. iSPIRT has many **rhythms**. Rhythms are like heartbeats.
8. Our Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) prevents ossification of iSPIRT so that it remains a powerful vehicle of collective ambition.

Types of iSPIRTers

Just like a University has faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees, we have many types of iSPIRTers who make up this great think tank. iSPIRT is a collective that is greater than the sum of its parts. Together we are capable of rewriting the script of the nation.

- Core Volunteers
- Volunteers
- Employees

Based on your iSPIRTer type, you can use an External Title. For instance, some Core Volunteers choose to call themselves Fellows.

As you probably know by now, it is difficult to become an iSPIRT volunteer, but easy to cease being one. The arduous process of becoming a volunteer allows each side to feel each other out. We want you to get into volunteering with your eyes open. As part of this counter-intuitive mantra, we let you hibernate without any hesitation. This enables you to make soft promises that you can keep.

Some Mixed Metaphors

A classic mixed metaphor is: Let's not open that can of worms until we get this one nailed down. iSPIRT has a few mixed metaphors of its own. They can throw new volunteers into a tizzy.

Watch out for three terms that cause most confusion: rooms, pillars, and playgrounds. Rooms are where public goods are built. All rooms are divided into 4 pillars. Now, if you are one of those who feels that having rooms inside pillars is a funky architecture, you aren't alone!

Playgrounds are where product entrepreneurs play and use the public goods built in each of the four pillars to succeed. If all this doesn't make sense yet, don't despair. Reference the glossary and plod along. And soon, you would've "put your finger right on the nail."

CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE AKA ROOM

Volunteers work in 'rooms'. And 'rooms' are where public goods are built to bring about orbit-shifts in the ecosystem. All rooms work for making India a Product Nation. The rooms are divided into one of the four Pillars - Playbooks, Market Catalysts, Policy, and Platforms - based on the type of stakeholders they address.

All rooms follow similar volunteer practices. There is no upward reporting by (or within) any of the rooms. There is only peer reporting about the work/progress/challenges to others in the Core Volunteer Meetup (formerly Fellows Meeting). It is an autonomous system. Some rooms even have their own board to guide their work.

You can volunteer in as many rooms you like. But start in one place and make your mark first. Here is a list of active rooms:

Simple rules, emergent and self-organized behaviors, and nonlinear interactions over multiple scales such that they produce orbit shifts is the

THE DANCE OF iSPIRT

PLAYBOOKS PILLAR

Room	Code of Ethics Level
BTRC (Bootcamps, Tear-downs, Roundtables, Cohorts)	Level 3
iKEN	Level 2
InnoNation	Level 3

MARKET CATALYSTS PILLAR

Room	Code of Ethics Level
PSP Connect	Level 2
CXO Connect	Level 2
LP Connect	Level 1
Fin Inclusion Cohorts	Level 2
Health Inclusion Cohorts	Level 2
Winning Implementations	Level 3
Mainstream Adoption	Level 3

PLATFORMS PILLAR

Room	Code of Ethics Level
India Stack	Level 2
Health Stack	Level 2
Travel Stack	Level 2
MUDRA Platform	Level 2
iStack Dev Community	Level 2

POLICY PILLAR

Room	Code of Ethics Level
Stay-in-India Checklist, List in India, Digital-Goods	Level 4
No SW Patents, Net Neutrality	Level 4
National Policy on SW Products	Level 4
Software as Soft Power	Level 4
Data Empowerment & Protection	Level 4
Financial Inclusion Policy	Level 4
Health Inclusion Policy	Level 4
Buying Prds, Reg-Sandbox, Grand Challenges	Level 4
Fund-of-Funds, Open API/Source Policy	Level 4
State Policy – KA, RJ, DL, WB	Level 4

HORIZONTALS

Room	Code of Ethics Level
Air-game	Level 1
iSPIRT Blog	Level 1
Donors	Level 1
Ops, Tools, Data	Level 1

The latest list of rooms is available in the Core Volunteer Meetup, formerly Fellows Meeting, slide deck. See details of Code-of-Ethics later in the Handbook.

1. Volunteers work in rooms
2. Rooms are where public goods are built to bring about orbit-shifts in the ecosystem.
3. Every volunteer and employee abides by a code-of-ethics that determines which rooms one can volunteer in.
4. They also seek to develop the 12 qualities of a great volunteer.
5. Beliefs are more about our actions than ideas. They shape our culture and credo.
6. Donors, Advisers, Volunteers-in-Training, Partners, and Alumni help us, but the onus of holding up our high standards is on the active Volunteers
7. iSPIRT has many rhythms. Rhythms are like heartbeats
8. Our Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) prevents ossification of iSPIRT so that it remains a powerful vehicle of collective ambition

Why So Many Rooms?

For India to become a Product Nation, we need our product entrepreneurs to succeed. We think of our product entrepreneurs as playing in a business playground.

There are many kinds of business playgrounds. SaaS for global SMBs is one such playground - we called it gSaaS. Another playground targets Bharat (or India-2) SMBs and consumers. There are other business playgrounds too. In each business playground, the player, the product entrepreneur, has to deal with:

- a set of rules and umpires (managed by policymakers)
- a set of play equipment like gloves and pads (technology building blocks in our parlance)
- a set of business partners like TV networks (market catalysts in our parlance).

Winning players either have better playbooks and/or know how to leverage the rules, equipment or partners better. This is where iSPIRT comes in. It helps product entrepreneurs as players with all the four things - playbooks, rules, equipment or partners - that determine their success. It is no surprise that good players deeply leverage what iSPIRT has to offer.

Take gSaaS product entrepreneurs for instance. iSPIRT offers:

- playbooks
- policy support arising from Stay-in-India Checklist initiative
- partners from our PSP Connect program.

Bharat product entrepreneurs get the following:

- playbooks
- policy support arising from Financial Inclusion initiative
- partners from our FTLC and other such programs
- equipment' from India Stack building blocks.

iSPIRT has played a significant role in creating and orchestrating the Bharat playground by influencing the local policy makers and partners, and building the technology building blocks that India needs more effectively.

So, as you can see, each Room represents an opportunity to shape the ecosystem and improve the odds of success for the Indian software product entrepreneur. Given all that iSPIRT is doing, is it any surprise that we have so many rooms!

Rhythms of iSPIRT

If one goes back in time, one could figure out how an organization or institution worked by looking at its organizational chart. The organizational chart got replaced by a core process when Process-based Management (PBM) took off. iSPIRT is different. It is much closer to a holacracy¹. The best way to understand iSPIRT is to understand its rhythms.

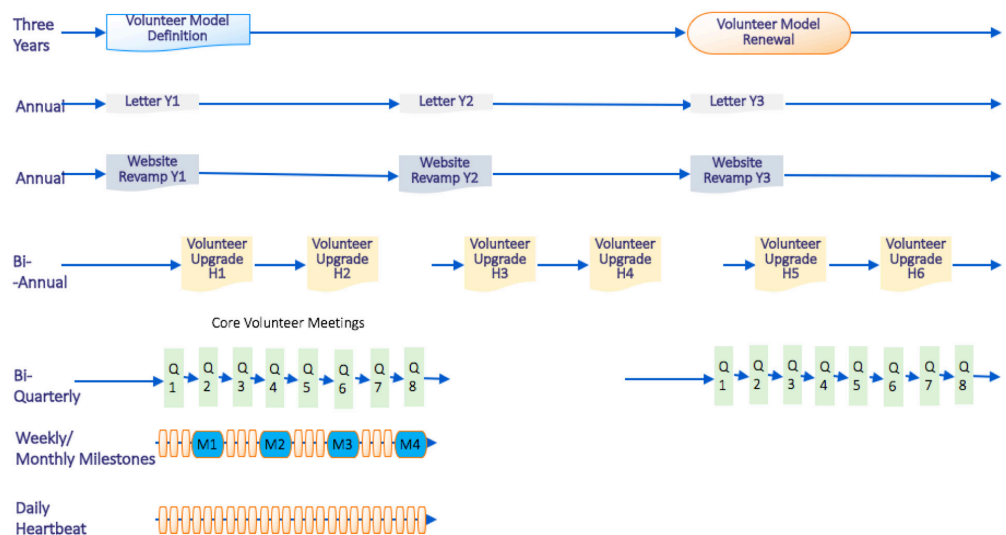
iSPIRT has many rhythms. Rhythms are like heartbeats. As long as these iSPIRT heartbeats are healthy, iSPIRT is doing well.

Some heartbeats occur once in three years. Others are annual. Yet others are twice a year. We have one that is twice a quarter. There are many that are twice a month. There are weekly rhythms too. And, of course, there some daily rhythms as well.

Our rhythms:

- Daily, Bi-weekly, weekly, working room heartbeats.
- Bi-quarterly Core Volunteer Meetup (aka Fellows Meeting)
- Bi-annual Volunteer Upgrades/Downgrades
- Annual Website Revamp
- Annual Letter
- 3-year Volunteer model renewal

¹ <https://www.holacracy.org/how-it-works/>



Right Rhythms of iSPIRT from daily heartbeat to the three year renewals

Dealing with External Stakeholders

iSPIRT deals with many external stakeholders like entrepreneurs, Incumbents, MNCs, Developers, Policymakers, & VCs.

Our Annual Letter is a statement of how we engage with these stakeholders and the rest of the outside world. Our Annual Letters are not about the past. They are not Annual Reports. They are a statement on "what we stand for" the outside world. They will tell you about our positions on various contemporary issues (e.g., digital colonization). They are a must-read guide on how to interact with the outside world as an iSPIRTER. This Volunteer Handbook serves a different purpose. It tells you how to engage internally.

SETTLING IN: iSPIRT WAY OF WORKING

Viewing iSPIRT's way of working through a corporate lens could cause confusion and dissonance in the mind of the volunteer.

iSPIRT is a social commons project. Think of it as university science where scientists collaborate and produce something that's available to all. Replace scientists with volunteers, and you get Linux or Wikipedia. Social commons are cooperatives and credit unions of the new age. Is this a passing fad? No. Now prosumers produce entertainment on YouTube. Or, as in Germany, prosumers produce electricity and form the largest utility company. Given all this, iSPIRT work is:

- About being a **volunteer** rather than being an employee.
- About seeing our work as a part of a **higher purpose**¹, not just problem-solving or meeting goals.
- About **being a missionary** rather than being a mercenary.
- Embracing **self-sufficiency of a startup** instead of structure of a big company.
- Adopting a **results culture** instead of micro management.

A new form of organization, inspired by open-source principles, was necessary to meet the challenges faced by the infant software product industry in India. In the process of running the volunteer model, we have come up with seven lessons. These are counterintuitive to those vested in the corporate way of working.

The **first** lesson is: The best way to get something done is not to have a grand plan². While this seems counter-intuitive, it isn't so. There is a power in self-forming teams. We encourage teams to come together organically. Then go on and solve problems that if we had tried to plan out would never have happened.

The **next** lesson is shocking for wannabe volunteers. It is quite effortful to become a new volunteer. This difficulty creates cognitive dissonance for somebody unfamiliar with the open-source model of peer production³. Since the process of being accepted as a new volunteer is both arduous and time-consuming, it weeds out the house painters and keeps the Michelangelo's and the da Vincis of their day.

The **third** lesson is that it's all about creating great poetry. Because our volunteers are building public goods out of love and belief, they create great things. They truly believe in what they're doing.

And because they believe in it so much, they embrace the **fourth** lesson, which is: give it all away. Give it away. Anybody can take and use our public goods completely for free. Our volunteers are even happy to stay in the background, as sherpas in other people's success. But, the only thing they can't stand are interlopers who step in to usurp credit. So, we stamp down these free-riders fairly gently at first, and if they don't pay heed, aggressively.

The **fifth** lesson is about accountability. In a volunteer model, unlike a corporate setting, seeking accountability cannot be the goal of a meeting. Accountability is a gift that the volunteer gives iSPIRT. Our goal is to connect with the volunteer emotionally. When we feel connected and safe, we embrace the truth. When we embrace the truth, we feel empathy. When we feel empathy, we take responsibility towards others. This chain leads to accountability⁴; not of the soft surface kind but of the hard internal type that keeps us at iSPIRT going.

Sixth, it is important to realize that open-source inspired social production is NOT about harmony. It is about thriving with contention. It comes from the history of "code talks, bullshit walks"⁵.

We have discovered that it is the cause that finds its people. Once we articulate the cause, people gravitate to this cause. So our **seventh** lesson is that demand breeds its own supply. Now, when the cause finds its own people, the question is how can one engage them in a fashion that moves the ball forward. This engagement comes from co-creation. Co-creation comes from collaboration. And, collaboration is cooperating with amplification. For all this, we must engage with each person as an individual. We must enroll the hearts and minds through servant leadership⁶.

³ See <http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.html>

⁴ See Joseph Grenny's talk on How to hold your loved ones accountable <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDSuTAFZFrw>

⁵ iSPIRT believes in Friedrich Engels' dictum: "An ounce of action is worth a ton of theory." Also, see this Jim Zemlin video starting 12mins 27 secs that explains that this is true for many open source software projects <https://youtu.be/7XTHdcmjenI?t=12m27s>

⁶ See this interview of Sharad Sharma where he talks of how cause finds people. <https://youtu.be/t80vDMDh7OM>

¹ University of Michigan Leadership Professor, Dr. Robert Quinn says that finding purpose in your work is the key to a better life. It reduces the risk of stroke and heart attack and results in more friends and happiness. See his Google Talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeG4DikTl3Y>

² Antifragile thinking: <http://www.amazon.in/Antifragile-Things-That-Disorder-Incerto/dp/0812979680>

HOW AM I DOING?

To most new and occasional volunteers, iSPIRT is a cacophony of many views and is disorderly in the way it does things. Visualize yourself as a first-time visitor from USA being asked to drive in Bangalore traffic. You'll feel anxiety. And, when you see a minor accident, and there is no 911 to call, you'll even feel panic. Not knowing what to do can be disorienting.

This is a friction that we've seen and come to accept as a new volunteer finds their footing. It is natural to feel confused and sometimes even isolated, or that you are not being heard. It may seem as if you're the only one who does not know what is going on. Since this is different from the saccharine inclusivity of most other organisations, some volunteers have been less than happy.

At these times of disorientation, commiserate with a Core Volunteer. If that doesn't help, let out your frustration by writing to Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) at ***@iSPIRT.in.

Don't let your angst become an email tirade to the entire iSPIRT Family. Or, even worse, don't let it become a rant on social media. Both are a sure way of losing whatever goodwill you might have accumulated within the iSPIRT Family.

iSPIRT, by its very nature, has many self-correcting mechanisms. You'll discover them once you settle in. Just be patient. It takes months, sometimes even a year, before everything starts to make sense. Give yourself time to feel at home.

Meanwhile, here is a quick test to see if you are settling in:

- Are you putting PURPOSE over Profits
- Are you embracing NEUTRALITY over Favoritism
- Are you practicing TRANSPARENCY over Secrecy
- Are you enrolling in TRIBES over Hierarchies
- Are you EMPOWERING over Controlling
- Are you following the SPIRIT-OF-LAW over Letter-of-Law

Sometimes new volunteers ask us why we don't have a list of simple dos and don'ts in iSPIRT. The answer has two parts. First, rules do not by themselves lead somewhere, regardless of whether people follow them or not. Instead, it is practices that get us somewhere. So our focus is on constructing better practices and rhythms than on constructing 'better' rules. Second, we believe that self-regulation works well for us as it adapts to the diversity of iSPIRT's rooms, orbit-shifts, and volunteers more effectively.

Are you going through your ten steps of onboarding? A Core Volunteer should be guiding you through an onboarding process. If that is not happening, let VFC know. These ten steps will help understand the parts of iSPIRT that you don't deal with on a regular basis. You will also learn the code-of-ethics and sign the level that applies to you. Finally, you will get to test your readiness to be a productive volunteer by taking the iSPIRT Knowledge Quiz.

6 LESSONS OF ORGANIZATION

1. Don't have a grand plan. Realize the power of self-forming teams that come together organically.
2. Being accepted as a new volunteer is both arduous and time consuming. It weeds out the not serious ones.
3. It's all about creating great poetry, because our volunteers are creating public goods out of love and belief.
4. Give it all away - anybody can take and owe our public goods completely for free, stay in background as Sherpas.
5. Accountability is a gift the volunteer gives iSPIRT. We connect with the volunteer emotionally.
6. It is important to realize that open-source inspired social production is about thriving with contention.

BECOMING AN INSIDER - COMPLETING YOUR VOLUNTEER ONBOARDING

Once you finish all the onboarding items that your host volunteer has given you and have sent your volunteer introduction to ***@iSPIRT.in, you become part of the iSPIRT Volunteer Family. Congratulations!

To get to this stage, you have survived the long volunteer-in-training period, and have finished one of the most arduous and time-consuming selection and induction process in your working life. By our estimate, only one of thousand becomes a successful volunteer! Not everybody is wired to be a good volunteer. This rarity is not at all surprising when you see what it takes to a successful volunteer:

- You have to be able to influence others without control, deal with delayed gratification, and handle contentions and rejections.
- You have to see the world in shades of grey, not in black and white and be non-judgemental towards others.
- In addition to being a good thinker and a dependable doer, you must also be a passionate change agent (Affirmative Disruptor) without being a pure idealist (and, instead, be a Pragmatic Idealist).
- You must live the iSPIRT Beliefs, take decisions using the iSPIRT Values and abide by our demanding Code-of-Ethics at all times.
- And, most important of all, you must be a selfless and practical builder of public goods.

Anyone can be a good worker, but it takes someone special to be an iSPIRT Volunteer. So, once again, a warm welcome to the select club of iSPIRT Volunteers.

PART 2: HANDBOOK FOR EXISTING VOLUNTEERS

*Walk on, through the wind,
Walk on, through the rain,
Though your dreams be tossed and blown.
Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart,
And you'll never walk alone,
You'll never walk alone*

*Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart,
And you'll never walk alone,
You'll never walk alone*

Liverpool Football Club Anthem¹

Volunteers endow iSPIRT with their talents, their labor, their differences, passions, and knowledge. And in doing so, they create the collective energy needed to address our mission.

BECOME A BETTER VOLUNTEER

There is a strong 'doing' ethic amongst our volunteers. The quickest and the surest way to accumulating influence is to be a selfless doer. A 27 year old volunteer may have more influence than a 50 year old as a result.

Exerting influence without positional power is a skill that needs to be learnt. The best way to learn this is by watching other volunteers in action. The opportunities for this kind of peer learning abound.

Those volunteers who understand the outside-in perspective of iSPIRT and are able to use to cross-leverage the work of several rooms are valued highly. They become 'glue' volunteers that create the web that holds iSPIRT together. Try being a glue volunteer.

DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF iSPIRT

Often it takes 6-9 months of active volunteering to understand iSPIRT from an outside-in perspective. The WHY-WHAT-HOW framework in the box is the starting point for that journey.

It takes time to develop a deep appreciation of this framework. Part of the reason for this is that iSPIRT is not just complex, it is also evolving continuously.

We don't know of any formal structure or model that is an analog for our kind of mission. So we mix-and-match ideas, moving parts, and practices from various places. Not surprisingly, there is always some disorder and chaos inside iSPIRT. We see ourselves as being in perpetual beta.

Your investment in deepening your understanding of iSPIRT will have big payoffs. You will be able to foster cross-pollination, lubricate the flows of ideas and be active glue volunteer.

WHY, WHAT, HOW OF iSPIRT

WHY - Make India a Product Nation

WHAT - Playbooks (e.g., PNgrowth), Market Catalysts (e.g., PSP Connect), Platforms (e.g., India Stack) and Policy (e.g., Stay-in-India checklist)

HOW - Build public goods without public money using a volunteer model

WHO Benefits - Primarily product entrepreneurs; however, Incumbents, MNCs, Developers, Policymakers, VCs, etc. also benefit as a byproduct of our work.

WHO is iSPIRT - Volunteers - part-time and full-time - are at the core of iSPIRT

¹ Listen to this rendering: <https://youtu.be/b586XjryPW0>

OF SUPERPOWERS AND KRYPTONITE

Our mission animates us, and our credo guides us. Our volunteer engine is our superpower. It enables iSPIRT to be a market maker, an ecosystem builder, and a mindset shaper.

Some elements weaken our volunteer superpower. We have to stay away from this kryptonite. Here is what we must avoid:

- Free Riding: Unethical misuse of Public Goods that we build
- Tragedy of Commons: "Somebody else will do it" thinking
- Tribal Friction: Sibling rivalry, personality conflicts, and different ideologies that prevent us from scaling excellence

If you see kryptonite around you, speak up and let a Core Volunteer know. If that doesn't work, write to Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) at ***@iSPIRT.in.

NAVIGATING TRIBAL FRICTION

Happily, our diversity has grown in the last few years. But as a byproduct, tribal friction has crept in. We face three types of tribal friction: sibling rivalry, clashing personalities, and different team dharmas.

Tribal friction arises from parochialism and ignorance. Learning our history and about the work in different pillars is the antidote to this. Often volunteers in Playbook pillar do not know about what is happening in the Policy pillar and vice-versa. Developing a broader understanding of iSPIRT is important. Probably the best way to learn is to attend the bi-quarterly Core Volunteer Meetup.

TAKING DECISIONS

iSPIRT is a think tank with an outrageous ambition. We take clear decisions and bold actions. Our decisions are subjective but transparent. There are five practices that we encourage to help take the best decisions.

First Principles

All our big decisions are evaluated on first-principles ("Veda Deliberation"; more in Handbook for Core Volunteers). They must also make sense in practical terms. Until there is alignment at both these levels, it creates a fractured foundation that will crack wide when put to the test, and we don't move forward.

Diverse Perspectives

Diverse perspectives coexist inside iSPIRT because there are many paths to becoming a Product Nation. In some cases, we do pick a particular position as an iSPIRT position. In this situation, the Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) guides the process to ensure that (a) there is adequate consultation, and (b) a decision is reached. We don't let anybody exercise a veto or a "pocket veto" (stall the decision by asking for endless time to decide).

Architects like Pramod Varma have crafted an interoperable and open architecture that is intended to be a framework for large-scale citizen-centric problems. This approach is built on purposeful and intentional Veda Deliberation. The first-principles thinking led to architectures like UPI where every stakeholder spanning Government, Banks and private payment providers have innovated on the same basic platform, but at scale, and created a framework which does not discriminate against any service provider whether public sector or private sector.

An interoperable and open architecture is essential to building Public Goods by being inclusive to all those who want to participate, and does not seek to be exclusive. Further, it encodes the rules of the playground where innovators can come and build solutions for financial inclusion, health inclusion, logistics and other areas. Policymakers and regulators become umpires of these new playgrounds. TRAI, RBI or CCA have played similar roles in the past. In some cases, new regulators like Digital Locker Authority of India have to be created by the Government. This demonstrates that the practical implications of open-API type first-principles thinking that fosters co-creation among all stakeholders under its umbrella, are immense.

Examples of diversity of opinion inside iSPIRT:

- Patents vs. no-patents
- Bootstrapping vs. VC funded
- India Stack: good or bad
- IKEN (effectuation) vs. PNGrowth (go big or go bust)
- SaaS vs. on-premise

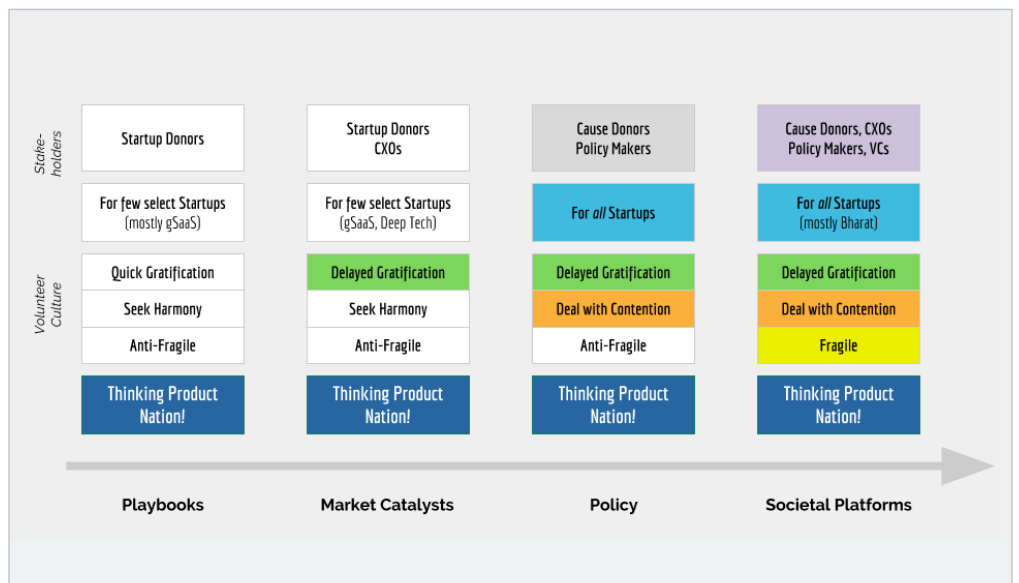
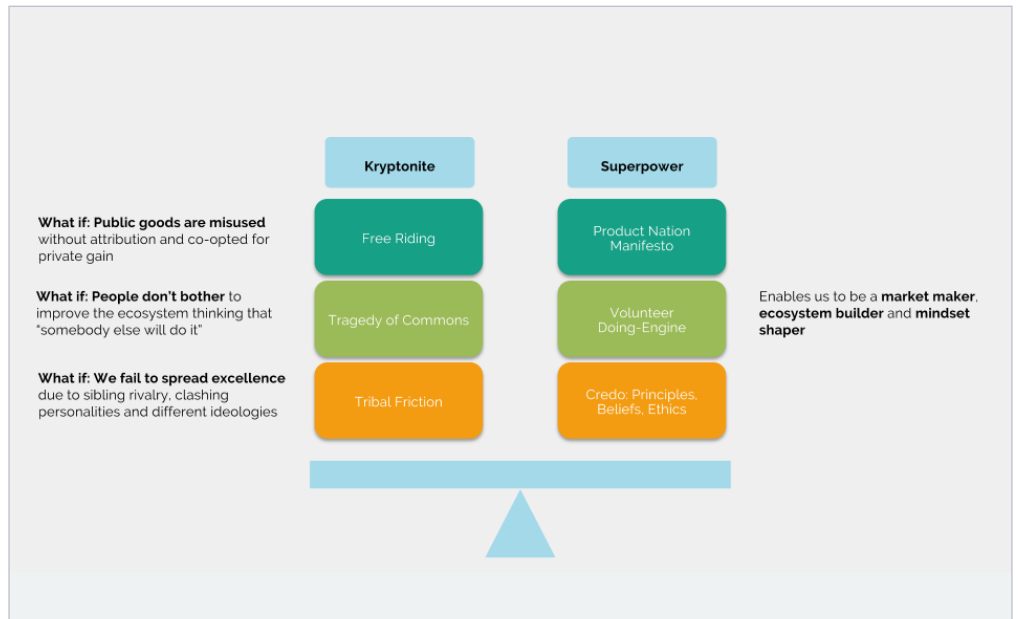
Our Annual Letters capture the official iSPIRT position on these issues. They are not about the past (and are not Annual Reports). They are a statement on "what we stand for" for the outside world. Use them to represent iSPIRT correctly on these contentious issues.

BATTLE OF VALUES

The values essential to iSPIRT are fixed and encoded in its internal logic. These values shape our decisions, often, in ways that are not obvious. They tilt the balance when we are considering multiple options. Our own personal values also guide how we approach decisions. Sometimes there is a gap between our personal values and iSPIRT values, and this can create an internal conflict, a dissonance. Resolving this battle of values is essential to good decisions. When wrestling with nuanced decisions, a self-awareness about this battle of values is helpful. Here are the contentious value pairs that we have seen over the years.

Conflict, over False Harmony

The energy that comes from a diverse, innovative, results oriented, passionate group of volunteer will generate heat. This heat will fuel our high performance and will also produce some heated moments. During these moments, high performance leaders will mine for conflict instead of burying it.



Top
Social production through volunteer model - building public goods without public money

Bottom
iSPIRT volunteer tribes and their diversity - we are all thinking Product Nation

When taking decisions, while choosing false harmony is a lot easier, it only results in underperformance of our volunteer teams. Conflict, not false harmony is our real friend. We don't see conflict as a problem to be avoided, instead a crucial-conversation to be had.

Autonomy, over Scale

iSPIRT volunteering relies on intrinsic motivations, optimal challenges, and informational feedback. Our volunteer is high in the autonomy orientation and tends to display self-initiation by seeking activities that are interesting and challenging, and taking greater responsibility for his or her own behavior. Every decision should stimulate this autonomy orientation. The demands of scale often blind us to taking the right decision. Any decision that hurts this autonomy orientation will lead to degraded results.

Purity of Intent, over One Person's Agenda

The purity of intention is the most fundamental ingredient of success in any volunteer model. Purity of intent is not about nobility but about being faithful to the cause. Don't let any decision compromise larger cause to any one person's agenda.

Independent India, over Digital Colonization

Colonising a country no longer requires its physical invasion with military strength. It can simply be done by controlling activities through technology and data. Every decision that we take should be cognizant of the dangers of digital colonization.

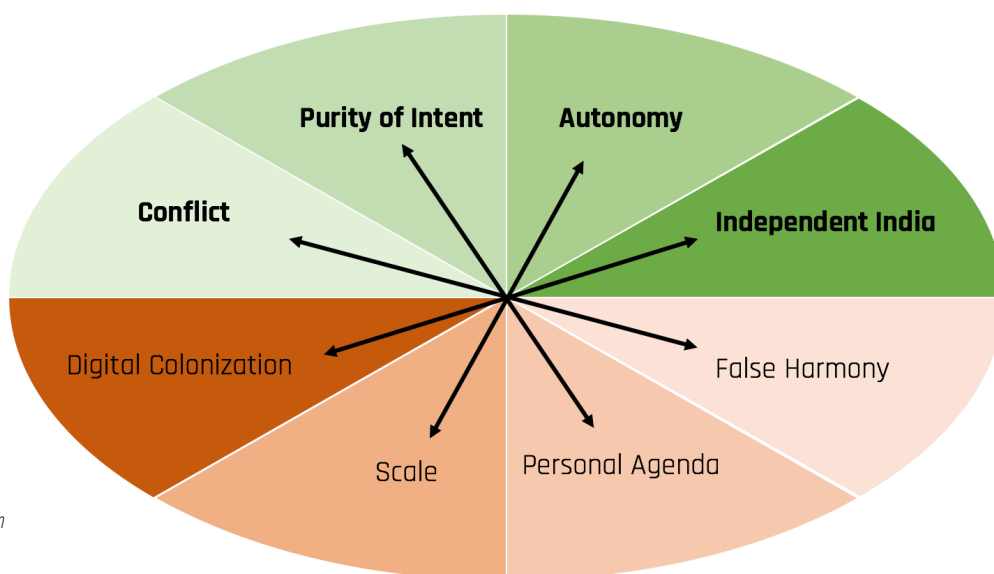
iKEN is based on principles of Effectuation. It promotes the idea of building a large business through organic means. It is opposed to the go-big-or-go-home philosophy of many VC funded startups. These philosophical differences resulted in a last minute agenda change at PNCamp at Pune in Oct 2016 that, in a sense, relegated the iKEN workshop to a less attended part of this day. This change triggered a conflict between the core volunteers of iKEN and PNCamp. The emotions ran high, and some iKEN volunteers wondered if they even belonged in iSPIRT. Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) had to step in. Eventually, the belief that iSPIRT is a big tent prevailed. Today iKEN itself is going strong independently, something which was not even remotely imagined in 2016.

CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS

Crucial-conversations¹ have high stakes, opposing opinions, and strong emotions. We seek crucial-conversations with our stakeholders to arrive at good decisions.

Many of our volunteers are active entrepreneurs, VCs, or even policymakers. Keeping their volunteering work separate from their day job is no easy thing. The first set to crucial-conversations led to a consensus that we must have a code-of-ethics, and it must be material and executable. Now, the challenge was to agree on the exact language. So, another set of crucial-conversations followed. One of these was between Shekhar Kirani and Manju Nanjaiah. They went back & forth on every word. In the end, the discussion was between "at no point in time, I shall use my iSPIRT Volunteer status to further my private or business interests" versus "at any point in time I will never make my personal or business interest ahead of iSPIRT interest." The latter version was selected as it captured the intentions better.

1 Mastering The Art of Crucial Conversations by Joseph Grenny: <https://youtu.be/uc3ARpccRwQ>



*Right
The contentious value pairs that we have seen
over the years*

Transparency

Discussions, meeting notes and intermediate decisions are available to iSPIRTers on an ongoing basis. Transparency is essential to building trust amongst volunteers.

Since Aug 2016, Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) notes are available to all iSPIRTers at <https://bit.ly/iSPIRTFC>. This level of transparency is unparalleled in any think tank.

HANDLING CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Our policy on volunteer ethics & donor influence is unambiguous. Each volunteer must abide by the code-of-ethics. E.g. those doing curation must disclose their interests during the shortlisting exercise. And those doing Playbook Roundtables mustn't take any advisory equity in startups they help through iSPIRT. And our volunteers in policy rooms can't invest in startups that benefit from the specific policy advocacy efforts that they champion.

We embrace Polycentric Governance¹. This requires us to keep our donor engine separate from our volunteer engine. We have four types of donors: Founder Circle donors, Product Circle donors, Financial Inclusion donors and Fellowship donors. All our donors are listed on the website² which is updated quarterly. Our view on donations is clear as stated in the Aug 2014 blogpost³ and was reiterated in our 2017 Annual Letter⁴,

We manage Advisers, Volunteers-in-Training, Partners and Alumni the same way we deal with Donors. We regard them all as our goodwill ambassadors. Since we don't require them to follow the iSPIRT code-of-ethics and absolve them of any mistakes much the same way book authors do with their editors, the onus of holding up our high standards is on the Volunteers. We set a very high bar. If you have any specific concerns, please write to us at ***@iSPIRT.in.

2017 Annual Letter talks about conflict of interest

"We also pay particular attention to the possibility of mission capture by donors. To maintain donor diversity⁵, we invite only those companies to be donors that have visibly demonstrated their zeal in championing the mission of iSPIRT. We ensure that we have a broad base of donors and no one company is a dominant donor and exclude categories of donors - VCs, MNCs and Service Companies - where future mission conflict can happen. To stay independent of Government, we don't take any money from the Government."

¹ Governance of a complex and modern community like iSPIRT requires multi-level, multi-purpose, multisectoral, and multi-functional units of governance. Polycentric governance implies that these multiple independent units mutually order their relationships with one another under a general system of rules.

² <http://www.ispirt.in/who-we-are/Our-Donors>

³ <http://pn.ispirt.in/ispirt-welcomes-product-circle-donors/>

⁴ <http://bit.ly/AnnualLetter2017>

⁵ We want the donors to represent the cross-section of the software product industry so we invite big/small firms, those that have a global/domestic focus and are from different cities.

STARTING A NEW ROOM

Most new rooms get incubated inside an existing room and grow big to become independent. This incubation happens to Pillars (collection of rooms) as well. For instance, our Platforms Pillar was part of our Policy Pillar in the early years before becoming independent.

When we uncover a new constraint that holds back our mission, the usual response is to spin up new effort in an existing room to deal with this. If this new effort finds its own volunteers (that is demand breeds its own supply) and is strategic to our mission, we look at the option of creating a new room. Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) drives this conversation and make the final decision.

BECOMING A CORE VOLUNTEER

Every February, Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) adds or replaces Core Volunteers. The easiest way to become a new Core Volunteer is to step up and Anchor an existing room or an orbit-shift. One can also start a new room or a new orbit-shift in an existing room. Not all Core Volunteers are Anchors. Glue volunteers who exhibit DWIT Working and Integral Thinking traits (see details about these traits in the Handbook for Core Volunteers) also become Core Volunteers. Alternatively, those volunteers who combine thought-leadership and scholarship, often referred to as Veda Deliberation, with DWIT Working also become Core Volunteers.

As you know, it is effortful to become an iSPIRT volunteer but easy to stop being one. The reverse is true for Core Volunteers. It is relatively easy to get noticed for your good volunteering and become a Core Volunteer. However, staying a Core Volunteer is tough as one has to maintain a consistently high level of volunteer contributions.

PART 3: HANDBOOK FOR CORE VOLUNTEERS

*If no one answers your call,
Then walk alone,
(be not afraid) walk alone my friend.*

*If no one talks to you,
O my unlucky friend,
if no one speaks to you,
If everyone looks the other way and everyone is afraid,
Then bare your soul and let out what is in your mind,
(be not afraid) Speak alone my friend.*

*When dark clouds cover the sky,
When darkness engulfs the truth,
When the world cowers and bows before fear,
You be the flame,
The flame that burns you and banishes darkness from the world,
(be not afraid) Burn alone my friend.*

Rabindranath Tagore¹

To be a Core Volunteer you should be able to point to the dangers of local maxima and keep everyone focused on the bigger picture. You should also be leading by example on how to think and act in a complex, changing and chaotic world.

DEVELOPING THE QUALITIES OF A GREAT VOLUNTEER

iSPIRT volunteers are capable and collegial, smart and insightful, caring and kind. They see the world in shades of grey, not in black and white. They influence others without control. They deal with delayed gratification. They handle contentions and rejections. They build public goods selflessly. They are good thinkers, dependable doers and passionate change agents.

Over the years we have discovered qualities of good and great volunteers that are particular to the iSPIRT volunteer model (and are different from, let's say, what Linux and Wikipedia volunteer networks will value). They fall into three categories: cultivated skills, critical traits and modulating strengths.

1 Ekla Cholo Ray: <https://youtu.be/qHWzN0E8wj0>

CULTIVATED SKILLS

These six skills have to be there to be a functional volunteer. No one volunteer excels in all of these. Having volunteers that complement each other in a volunteer team (say one is stronger in product thinking and the other in platform thinking) pays rich dividends.

Strategic Agility

Our best volunteers stay focussed on the problem but change course often. For most of our work, we don't have a template to follow. So, we do lots of experimentation ("fire bullets before firing the cannon ball"). There are many moments of failure. Not one of our successes is a straight-line. These ups and downs are captured in a journeyline.²

Dealing with Rejection

Delayed gratification, failure, and rejection are an inevitable part of our work at iSPIRT. Our best volunteers deal with this by using the principle of "affordable loss"³.

Personal Intelligence

Many of us are borderline 'Sheldons' but have learned to work well in groups with diverse personalities⁴. In fact, we are good collaborators⁵.

Paying-Forward

All our volunteers pay-forward. They give more than they take. They are the antithesis of mercenaries.

2 PNCamp journeylines is an example: <http://pn.ispirt.in/inside-story-on-the-making-of-pncamp/>

3 Affordable loss is one of the principles of Effectuation. http://www.effectuation.org/?page_id=4055&principle=affordable-loss

4 Most of Silicon Valley has low personal intelligence too as argued by Peter Thiel: <https://youtu.be/hkHvDOPN1w>

5 Here is a delightful TED interview of our hero, Linus Torvalds. He has used collaboration-at-scale to build things that make our world better: https://www.ted.com/talks/linus_torvalds_the_mind_behind_linux

Product Thinking

Our best volunteers apply product thinking to our work of building public goods. They have empathy for the problem holders. They view the underlying problem from different perspectives before finding a good solution.

Platform Thinking

iSPIRT is a big believer in platforms as a way of getting ecosystem scale. We don't see ourselves as community builders but as builders of public goods for communities. So, we expressedly prioritize platforms over the community as an instrument of change.

CRITICAL TRAITS

Volunteers practicing Integral Thinking have the highest engagement¹. In addition to Integral Thinking, they also exhibit three other traits that are essential to be a great volunteer.

Integral Thinking

Many of our volunteers foster cross-pollination of ideas and practices. They point to the dangers of local maxima and keep focusing everybody on the bigger picture. They are 'glue' volunteers and work in different rooms. They create the web that holds iSPIRT together.

DWIT Working

There will always be volunteers for front-stage roles (e.g., serving food in a langar of a Gurudwara). But the volunteer model works only if there are committed volunteers for the less public backstage roles (e.g., cleaning dishes in a communal free kitchen).

Our volunteers step up to take on these less visible, sometimes even invisible, backstage roles for the sake of the larger cause. These committed volunteers often Do-What-It-Takes (DWIT) volunteering.

Without this, our volunteer model will not work on a sustainable basis. We tie volunteer heroism to specific situations and recognize the unsung hero's - those on the frontline - rather than the generals and brigadiers. What bravery is to the army, DWIT (do-what-it-takes) volunteering is to iSPIRT. This type of power volunteering is why we honor volunteers like Rohith Veerajappa² or Vivek Raghavan³ as volunteer heroes.

"Veda" Deliberation

This term doesn't have any religious connotation for us. It is about first-principles thinking. This type of thinking is necessary for iSPIRT because we often operate in areas where there is no template. Also, the real world is a complex thing.

We all know that many things that look simple are, in fact, astonishingly complicated in a dense knowledge environment. Unless some of our volunteers are deep first-principles thinkers who can soak and stew in the problem without feeling the rush to find a resolution, we won't find the right answers.

Anchoring

Some volunteers are good at preventing dissipation of energy into many areas. They focus relentlessly on rallying volunteer energy to make their part of iSPIRT successful. Their role is absolutely critical to our success.

1 See Appendix for Analysis of our Core Volunteers

2 <http://pn.ispirt.in/volunteer-hero-rohith-veerajappa-credostories/>
 3 <http://pn.ispirt.in/volunteer-hero-vivek-raghavan/>

Cultivated Skills	Critical Traits	Modulating Strengths
Strategic Agility		
Dealing with Rejection	Integral Thinking	
Personal Intelligence	DWIT Working	Affirmative Disruptor
Paying Forward	Veda Deliberation	Pragmatic Idealist
Product Thinking	Anchoring	
Platform Thinking		

Above
 Over the years we have discovered qualities of good and great volunteers that fall into three categories shown above

We forgot to acknowledge Manju Gowda at 2014 Intech50 despite him doing DWIT (do-what-it-takes) volunteering. This oversight was a result of hubris and was eventually corrected.⁴

“They say that the biggest enemy of success is fear of failure. No, that’s not true. The greatest enemy of success is hubris. This happens when one forgets the core driver behind the success. In our case, this core reason for success is our volunteer model. And, at this moment of success, I want to take a few minutes to talk about the volunteer heroism that went into InTech50.

Nobody illustrates this volunteer heroism better than Manju Gowda (i7 Networks). In spite of his startup being a critical phase in its buildout he made magic happen. He looked up 350, yes 350 product startups, and wrote to them about InTech50 explaining why they should file an application. He also anonymously wrote all the InTech50 blogposts! He reached out to the Indian CIOs as well. And he is the one who came up with the idea of using tables instead of booths (which worked well and saved Rs 5L). He ran the 50 pitches like clockwork using his grace and humor. This ate into his own presentation preparation but he never complained. If you ever need an example of a selfless, passionate and heroic volunteer, please think of him.”

MODULATING STRENGTHS

Pure Idealism is corrosive, and we avoid it strenuously. We embrace Affirmative Disruption to effect non-linear change.

Affirmative Disruptor

iSPIRTers are about creating a positive orbit-shift, not chaos. The mechanics of any significant change is effortful. Effecting change takes preparation and work. We make others see why status-quo must be changed. We try doing this without resorting to abstract theory. We may be heretical to past theories, but we have empathy for its current practitioners. The work required to convince others involves fully understanding their current position and only then rejecting it ⁵.

We get them to envision another solution by having them view the underlying problem from a different perspective. We focus attention on a new end-state and show that things will be better for them after that orbit-shift happens.

Pragmatic Idealist

Our best volunteers tend to be pragmatic idealists. We shun pure idealists. We believe that all successful revolutionaries (Gandhi, Lincoln, Mandela, etc.) were also pragmatic idealists.

A bank is a bundle of services like lending, savings, payments, and identity. Our Open-API and India Stack push has unbundled these elements and has ushered in the 'WhatsApp Moment of Banking' in India. For us, this has offered an opportunity to accelerate financial inclusion.

So, when some public sector banks requested us to help them navigate the coming nonlinear change, we took up the challenge. Srinath Sinha started working on our intervention. His empathy for the bankers and his ability to deeply understand their current predicament gave us the goodwill to provoke the bankers into doing what they regarded as 'awkward' experiments. These experiments set in motion an affirmative disruption. And this has helped these banks to get many of their internal orbit-shifts right and has advanced financial inclusion in a significant way.

Pure idealists embrace a 'theory'. They have a lot of anxiety if a perfect fit with a 'theory' or 'model' isn't visible to them. Putting any theory (say, Effectuation or Lean) or model on a pedestal is a kiss of death for a *panga* entrepreneur or an iSPIRT volunteer. After all, a theory emerges from past action. All the effectuation principles have emerged from other entrepreneur's actions. Present action will shape what effectuation will become in 10 years. Even religions evolve (Protestant movement), and when they don't, they create havoc.

Black or white thinking results in 'theory' constraining action. This constriction of the solution space erodes the chance of success for a *panga* entrepreneur, a political revolutionary, an experimental physicist, or an iSPIRT volunteer. They all need to break free from past experience. Only then can they forge a new path to be a success. Pure idealism, surreptitiously, puts past experience, embodied as a 'theory,' on a pedestal. We are heretical about past theories.

We have been wrestling with the problem of logistics bottlenecks in India. Two different volunteers started looking at this. One of them was an excellent first-principles thinker. His Veda Deliberation quickly led him to a 'theory' that could underpin a solution. This theory looked great on paper but had no appeal to the other volunteer who was addressing the problem from the lens of experimentation. When the Veda thinker couldn't reconcile the beauty and coherence of his theory with the messiness of the real world, he became paralyzed. He was unwilling to partner with the experimenting volunteer. Had the Veda Deliberation been modulated by pragmatism a better outcome would have resulted.

⁴ <http://pn.ispirt.in/intech50-the-secret-sauce/>

⁵ Purva Paksha is a traditional Indian practice of building a deep familiarity with the opponent's point of view before criticizing it. Charlie Munger follows it too: "I never allow myself to have an opinion on anything that I don't know the other side's argument better than they do."

Deep Engagement

Many of our volunteers also seek actualization and autonomy. They produce world-class artifacts – they are code poets of sorts. Deep engagement happens when iSPIRT provides an avenue for this self-actualization. This self-actualization takes different forms: a volunteer may want to be in global Midas 100 list of VCs, another may want to be as famous as Vijay Shekhar before turning 35, yet another may want to create Indian products like South Korean products, or might want to be like 'Dewang Mehta' of the industry. Volunteering for a cause at iSPIRT can facilitate all these journeys. Look out for occasional guided self-actualization conversations for volunteers. We do these because we believe that unless volunteers see internal growth, iSPIRT will stagnate.

LIVING THE BELIEFS

There is a can-do spirit and pride, intellectual adventurousness and inclusivity that shines brightly throughout iSPIRT.

iSPIRT is audacious about rewriting the script of the nation. We seek to blend the best of our past, with the full technological capabilities that our present now allows, with an eye towards the scalability and adaptability that the future demands. Our core beliefs are:

- We are at an inflection point as a country, and it's time to act.
- Technology is a leverage point for changing systems. Challengers are the agents of change.
- "Entrepreneurs help entrepreneurs" symbolizes our belief in self-help for all market participants.
- We are Enablers, not Cheerleaders.
- And work as a "Think tank, not a lobby group."

Beliefs in Action

Beliefs are more about our actions than ideas. There are real stories from our iSPIRT's journey that show how our beliefs express themselves in action internally.

WE ARE AT AN INFLECTION POINT AS A COUNTRY, AND IT'S TIME TO ACT

We don't see ourselves in some kind of self healing system where problems will get easier to solve as they age. Problems must be addressed to be eliminated. The sooner they are addressed the more simply they are solved. The time to act is now. Any delay in nurturing or fostering the product industry could impair growth and curb the opportunity that this industry presents to the country. The positive impact is on employment, capital, investment, infrastructure and ultimately, revenue and growth for the country as a whole.

30-year Architects

We see ourselves as 30-year architects of change and will collaborate with everyone who works towards a long-term 10-year horizon - policymakers, platform builders, investors, and others - to lift the performance of our product entrepreneurs.

We believe that a mass-market payment system is a public good that will bring hundreds of millions in India-2 and India-3 into the formal economy. Doing so will drive a credit supercycle (good for banks and NBFCs), create job and wage growth (good for our citizens) and open up a market for products (good for our product entrepreneurs). To fulfill this ambitious 20-30 year vision, we helped build the UPI architecture, worked with regulators, policymakers, bankers, investors and supported early adopters. This ability to work with all stakeholders in the ecosystems is essential to bring out country-level change.

India First > Public Goods > Volunteer Model.

We build many public goods because we don't know what will work. We respect a new cause and don't dismiss it outright. But, all new iSPIRT initiatives don't pass muster. The new initiative has to be implementable in a volunteer model. Furthermore, the initiative must build a public good (a playbook, a market catalyst, policy or a platform). And, this public good must place India first. Initiatives that pass muster must now be able to summon up volunteer energy to proceed.

Some volunteers had a strong view in mid-2016 that our ecosystem needed an India Stack Fund. This Fund was discussed at the 25th Fellows Meeting (now called Core Volunteer Meetup) and was then taken up for the Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC). After much discussion, the conclusion was that an India Stack Fund shouldn't be an iSPIRT initiative. It will thrive better as a commercial venture than as a public good.

In April 2013, AS Rao proposed an initiative for iSPIRT to improve the Engineering Education curriculum so that more "product-ready" engineers will emerge. In Sep 2014, Arvind Tiwary proposed an initiative for iSPIRT to do ecosystem orchestration for IOT. In July 2015, an IT Security Working Group was created after much discussion. However, all three well-intentioned initiatives, despite initial interest, did not find volunteer energy and never matured into the pilot stage from an idea stage.

Seek Ecosystem Scale.

Everything we do must have the potential to move the ecosystem in the future.

We shutdown Software Adoption Initiative (SAI) in late-2015 as it could not achieve ecosystem scale in a volunteer model.

“ BELIEFS

**“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.”**

Mahatma Gandhi

Deliver Scale Excellence.

We use the metaphor of gourmet cooking to create our public goods. Gourmet cooking requires getting all elements right in the cooking process - getting 4 out of 5 right doesn't work! Doing this kind of gourmet cooking repeatedly in a volunteer model requires coherence across action, culture, being and doing. We actively seek this coherence in our quest for scale.

When PlaybookRTs were launched in mid-2013, they had a Net Promoter Scores (NPS) in the 80s. The scaling of this initiative resulted in a fall of NPS by mid-2014. We then took the hard decision to stop the scaling process and went back to doing each PlaybookRT well and let scale emerge from that process.

TECHNOLOGY AS A LEVERAGE POINT FOR CHANGING SYSTEMS

We believe that there are places within a complex system (an economy, a city, an ecosystem) where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything. We use Donella Meadows' framework to think about leverage points where interventions can make a difference. We see software products as the "magic bullets" that can alter an entire system and bring about positive social change by leapfrogging to the next generation.

Non-Linear Change.

We expect our open-access technology public goods (like India Stack) to unleash bottom-up innovation. They allow small teams to create impactful systems that address India's hard problems. When this type of combinatorial innovation happens at scale, it shakes up status-quo and triggers non-linear change.

Terrestrial TV broadcasting in India started in 1965. It spread to 7 cities by 1975 and 30 cities by 1985. It was a slow growth. But, things exploded when PANSAT became available. In only a few years, village-based entrepreneurs had rigged up cable-tv networks everywhere, & TV footprint exploded. India Stack is the PANSAT for flow-based lending explosion that we are witnessing right now.

ENTREPRENEURS HELP ENTREPRENEURS

Just like a chain of mountain climbers, our product entrepreneur community is at different stages of evolution. There is an entire generation which has already established itself in terms of product, processes, people, and market. We encourage this generation to "pay forward" and nurture the newcomers. Learning from those who have been "through the grind" ensures that insights are better and mistakes are fewer. This also means the potential of catapulting the next generation to the path of growth and prosperity much quicker due to better tacit industry knowledge.

Pay-forward > Practitioners > Founders

Sometimes founders are not the only repositories of tacit knowledge. In such situations, iSPIRT ropes in non-founder practitioners if they share our belief in the pay-forward model.

Thiyagarajan noticed that cutting-edge practitioners of Design Thinking were not founders. Instead, it was Deepa Bacchu. Despite not being a product startup founder, she enthusiastically embraced iSPIRT's pay-it-forward model and agreed to do PlaybookRTs on a pro-bono basis knowing that sharing her tacit knowledge will help her refine her craft.

ENABLERS, NOT CHEERLEADERS

We are not in the stadium but are in the field. We have a keen sense of the institutional voids and ecosystem gaps that are holding back the growth of the Software Product Industry in India. We adopt a "roll up your sleeves" attitude to fix these voids and gaps. Towards this end, we work for a cause not for applause. We are an oasis of high trust that allows many collaborators to come together to build the 'public goods.' Our public goods are available to all software product companies on an open-access basis.

Realistic and Hard-nosed Change Agents.

We seek to be realistic and hard-nosed change agents in a society of dreamy armchair commenters (e.g., wishing why we don't win more Olympics medals). We see ourselves working in the trenches, not sitting on the balcony. We are movie makers, not movie critics. We are groundsmen making the cricket pitch, not cricket commentators. We are policy designers, not tradebody lobbyists. We are selfless builders of the ecosystem. To do this well we combine thought-leadership and scholarship with a bias for action.

iSPIRT's Health Inclusion effort has been going on since Oct 2015. In its first phase, it developed a deep understanding of the Healthcare landscape by "firing many bullets before knowing where to fire the cannon ball." By the time, this initiative rolls out in the ecosystem, likely in late 2018, our volunteers in this initiative would have become realistic and hard-nosed change agents.

Oasis of High Trust.

We are trusted because of our way of being, not because of our polished exteriors or our expertly crafted communications. We seal this trust with our code-of-ethics.

As a founder and CEO of his startup, Taron Mohan regularly meets CXOs of Banks to sell his mobile-SIM-overlay based financial inclusion solutions. He is also an iSPIRTer. During one email conversation which included the CEO of a big Public Sector Bank along with other iSPIRTers talking about India-Stack, he took a misstep, unwittingly. In the flow of the conversation, he pitched his SIM-based solution and quickly enough realized that this was a mistake. He instinctively knew that he should not have used the iSPIRT session in this way and that it violated the volunteer code-of-ethics. Not only did he clarify things with the CEO, but he took one step further and wrote up a blogpost¹ on his infraction, imploring all iSPIRTers to live by the code-of-ethics. While he could have stopped at clarifying his mistake, he chose to admit it publicly and set an example for everybody.

¹ Taron's blogpost: <http://pn.ispirt.in/story-of-an-ispirt-volunteer/>

THINK TANK, NOT A LOBBY GROUP

We build public goods without public money. Our public goods are free of commercial interests. We believe that a think tank like ours is more credible and impactful than a traditional tradebody.

Dynamic Internal Hierarchy.

iSPIRT has an internal structure that operates with a dynamic hierarchy. Authority shifts based on who has the most knowledge and experience in a specific context. Most of the time authority doesn't correlate with age or time spent in the organization.

A new practitioner entering may have superior expertise on a subject to others, and so may get to the "top of the hierarchy" for a particular area.

The hall at Leela Hotel was full. Nandan Nilekani had just finished his scintillating presentation on Data Democracy. It had built up the excitement for the unveiling of the operational details of Data Empowerment and Protection Architecture (DEPA), the 4th layer of India Stack. When Siddharth Shetty stepped up on stage, he noticed the nervous laughter of the room on being introduced as a 21-year-old. But he didn't care. He knew his stuff. He forged ahead and got the job done with great elan, much to the surprise of some conventional thinkers in the room. Siddharth was the Arjuna for whom the only thing that mattered, was the task at hand which he delivered with a single-minded focus.

Normative Framework.

We believe that a normative framework is better than prescribing a set of do's and don'ts. A careful design of the normative framework yields three things for us. One, it gives us a scalable system where the volunteer gifts hard internal accountability to iSPIRT. Two, it provides robust self-regulation of behavior without needing an external (and often ineffective) enforcement system. Three, it produces practices and rhythms that accommodate the diversity of iSPIRT's rooms, orbit-shifts, and volunteers. Maintaining a normative framework is harder than some dos and don'ts but the payoff for this extra effort is immense.

A 27-year old iSPIRTer, Nikhil Kumar, is sitting in front of the CEO of one of the largest banks in the country. He is watching a senior executive obfuscate and provide wrong data to the CEO to hide a problem. Many thoughts are rushing through this young iSPIRTer's mind: Should he stay mum or speak up? Should he let this pass or step in to make things better? He has no do's or don'ts from iSPIRT to fall back on. All he remembers is the quotation: When the elephants dance, the chickens must be careful. But, then, something stirs in him. He knows his dharma as an iSPIRTer is to be pragmatic revolutionary. Isn't he at this meeting to bring about an orbit-shift at this bank? His anxiety subsides. He knows that he has to foster a crucial conversation. He has to embrace healthy conflict, over false harmony. So, he leans in and gently calls attention to himself. Then he humbly calls out the bullshit. There is stunned silence. Slowly, the energy returns to the room. A tiger-team is formed to address the problem. He pitches in to lead the daily actions. Two weeks later, the problem is gone. And, quiet respect for the selfless can-do spirit of iSPIRT has taken its place.

DRIVING ORBIT-SHIFTS

We see India going from a Services nation to a Product Nation. We think of this as an orbit-shift. To accomplish this main orbit-shift, we devolve it into smaller orbit-shifts at the pillar level, and then at the 'room' level. In effect, iSPIRT is a collection of orbit-shifts.

Each orbit-shift is a challenge that a team of volunteers undertakes. Our volunteers become part of iSPIRT not for glory alone, but for being part of addressing a shared challenge. The bond generated out of working on something bigger than oneself is what binds us together.

iSPIRT's orbit-shifts affect product entrepreneurs, policymakers, bankers, VCs, etc. Our orbit-shifts are discussed on our Core Volunteer Meetups (formerly Fellows Meetings) and are referenced in our Annual Letters. A recent snapshot of our active orbit-shifts is in the box. All our orbit-shifts have a common structure.

(The latest orbit-shifts are available in the Core Volunteer Meetup, formerly Fellows Meeting, slide deck)

View From Inside

An orbit-shift is an episodic change that is often nonlinear. It has an air-game and the ground-game. The air-game is the narrative that explains why the status-quo must be changed and focuses

ORBIT SHIFTS

1. Services Innings to Product Innings Orbit-Shift (Overall)
2. Product Entrepreneur Orbit-Shift (Playbooks)
 - » gSaaS Panga Entrepreneur
 - » Bharat Panga Entrepreneur
3. M&A Orbit-Shift (Market Catalysts)
4. Financial Inclusion Orbit-Shift (Market Catalysts)
 - » Payments
 - » Savings
 - » Asset Lending to Flow-based Lending
5. Health Inclusion Orbit-Shift (Market Catalysts)
6. Banking Orbit-Shift (Market Catalysts)
 - » Transaction Engine
 - » Data Engine
 - » Bill Pay
7. Innovate Successfully for Bharat (Market Catalysts)
 - » SIs Innovate Successfully for Bharat
 - » VCs Innovate Successfully for Bharat
 - » Startups Innovate Successfully for Bharat
8. India as gSaaS Hub Orbit-Shift (Market Catalysts)
9. Type-3 Policy Orbit-Shift (Policy)
10. Software as Soft Power of India Orbit-Shift (Policy)
11. API-fication of Value-Chain Orbit-Shift (Platforms)
 - » Public Platforms (Platforms)
12. Tradebody Orbit-Shift to Think-tank (Overall)

attention on a new end-state and shows that things will be better after orbit-shift happens. The ground-game is where our real iSPIRT action takes place. We excel in the ground-game and are getting better with our air-game now. There are several things that need to come together for an orbit-shift to succeed:

- We have to be heretical, and not respectful to past theory.
- We have to be able to soak and stew in the problem without rushing to find an answer.
- We have to have the ability for Veda deliberation and experimentation.
- We have to bring elements from our four pillars together to make the change on the ground happen.

The proposed orbit-shift targets a set of players. Some of them are early adopters of change. We focus on these early-adopters to eke out 'winning implementations' from them. Early adopters can be a product entrepreneur who have embraced our Desk Marketing and Selling playbook to grow rapidly. Or a payment startup that has leveraged India Stack to win in the market. It could even be a regulator embracing change. In the bigger orbit-shifts, it will be all of these things.

View From Outside

Each orbit-shift looks the same from the outside:

- There is a "crisis," and there is a need to change. You will thrive or perish on the back of whether you adopt "this change."
- You need to revamp internals.
- You must revamp using "these principles."
- Some "building blocks" like Policy and/or Technology are in place.
- If you are an early-adopter, iSPIRT is here to help. If you are a product entrepreneur, we help with Bootcamps, Teardowns, playbook Roundtables and peer Cohorts (BTRC). For others, we provide Startup connects, Learning sessions, Orbit-shift workshops, Pilots and Early solution reviews (SLOPE).
- Challengers are moving forward. Time to act is now.

ONBOARDING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers-in-Training are converted into Volunteers by Volunteer Fellows Council and put up in the Core Volunteer Meetup (formerly Fellows Meeting) for a quick discussion and possible veto on ethical grounds. We take new volunteer onboarding seriously. After all, our mission and values are non-intuitive. And our way of working takes time and effort to grok and adopt. While existing volunteers exemplify all this, it is hard to explain in words.

As new volunteers come on board, we need to bring them up to speed quickly. In our model, expecting handholding from a few is unscalable, and leaves the volunteer without support at the critical time of onboarding. In light of this, we have devised this ten steps onboarding.

Ten Onboarding Steps

1. *Read 3 Annual Letters (2014,2016,2017) and watch the 2015 Home Tour videos. (HT Intro, HT Policy Pillar, HT Playbook Pillar, HT Market Catalyst Pillar)*
2. *Review the last two Core Volunteer Meetups (formerly Fellows Meetings) slidedecks.*
3. *Review 'Thinking Product Nation' slidedeck.*
4. *Read Volunteer Handbook.*
5. *Answer iSPIRT Knowledge Quiz. Review results with your Core Volunteer.*
6. *Help with tasks for next Core Volunteer Meetup (formerly Fellows Meeting).*
7. *Must attend the next Core Volunteer Meetup (formerly Fellows Meeting).*
8. *Pick a room meeting - preferably outside your pillar - to attend before the next Core Volunteer Meetup (formerly Fellows Meeting).*
9. *Volunteer writes a funky introduction for the ***@iSPIRT.in within the first 60 days.*
10. *Volunteer writes a review of Volunteer experience for the Volunteer Stories blog.*

APPLYING CODE-OF-ETHICS STANDARDS

There are four code-of-ethics levels. Think of these as four levels of security clearance. A volunteer's code-of-ethics level determines which "room" s/he can volunteer in.

The levels are:

Level 1 - As an iSPIRT Volunteer, I am committed to making India a Product Nation. At no point in time, will I use my volunteer status with iSPIRT to put my personal or business interest, ahead of iSPIRT interests. I hope to set a high ethical standard and be an example to others.

Level 2 - To maintain the integrity of the iSPIRT curation process, I shall disclose to others any interest in participating companies.

Level 3 - At no point in time, I expect any payback in any form, including advisory or sweat equity, from any startups benefiting from my pay-forward contributions through iSPIRT.

Level 4 - India's interest comes before my private interests. I will not become an angel investor in any startups that might benefit from my specific policy advocacy efforts.

Level 1 is mandatory for all Volunteers. The kind of volunteering you do determines the level of code-of-ethics that you need to sign up for. For instance, PSP Connect requires Level 2 since you'll be curating startups there. Conducting PlaybookRTs requires Level 3. And our policy work requires Level 4.

Donors, Advisers, Volunteers-in-Training, Partners, and Alumni are not required to follow the code-of-ethics. While they are part of the extended iSPIRT Family, they don't represent iSPIRT.

HOW TO BE ON VOLUNTEER FELLOWS COUNCIL

The VFC Nominations Committee develops a slate of candidates for each pillar. The volunteers on the slate then pick a representative amongst themselves. This is the kind of email they receive about the process:

“We need all of you to discuss among yourself and select one of you as the representative for the VFC for this year. We do not have any specific process on how you should pick one among yourselves. From our perspective, all of you are great choices!”

We propose a call on Saturday 10am to answer any questions that you may have. We hope to have one of you join the VFC soon for a tenure of one year.”

So peer selection dictates who will be on the VFC.

PART 4: HANDBOOK FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS

*Even if there are mighty trees all around you,
Let them be shady, let them be huge,
But, even for the shade of a single leaf,
Beg not, beg never, ask never!
The path of fire you shall tread! The path of fire! Yes, That Path of Fire!*

*You shall never tire,
You shall never slow down,
You shall never turn back,
This oath you will take today!
This oath you will fulfill in your life!
Take this oath!
And walk the Path of Fire, every single day!
The oath of fire! Yes, That Path of Fire!*

*What greater spectacle,
Than to see such a man walk,
Who in tears, sweat and blood,
Is soaked, covered and coated;
And still walks on in the Path of fire!
Walks the path of fire! Yes, That Path of Fire!*

Harivansh Rai Bachchan¹

iSPIRT Foundation is different from a corporate entity. Shareholders own every company and appoint a Board of Directors which keeps the management (seen as an agent of the shareholders) in alignment with shareholder interest. Unlike a company, iSPIRT is "owned" by its Volunteers who run it through Councils.

iSPIRT COUNCILS

In any non-profit institution, two things are inevitable: unexpected surprises and fundraising! We have to be masterful at dealing with both. Our Councils focus on this. They also cultivate finer skills like preserving values and have an eye for detail. They have intimate knowledge about our rock-solid foundation and be willing to fight to preserve the features that work well and creatively change those that do not. They have the ability to resist the mighty influences that sway us from our true course. They prevent ossification of practices that limit our ability to confront emerging problems that keep us from reaching our mission. They are able to bring together best teams of diverse experts and must

possess the vision and gumption to dare to improve upon the old, with the new. They have an appetite for clear action, building community, and sparking innovation. They make bold decisions to project us to an even stronger future. Finally, they love the energy of being the vehicle of collective ambition.

A simple but effective governance model guides our decision making:

- All volunteers **abide by relevant code-of-ethics** and financial approvals. VFC makes periodic changes to code-of-ethics and financial approval matrix as needed.
- All key decisions – so far identified as: Add/Retire Rooms, Orbit-Shifts, and Volunteers, Volunteer up/down-grades, Add/Retire Donor categories, Credo compliance actions and Legal actions - are **not any individual's decision**. An appropriate Council takes these decisions. A fundamental decision that changes the character of iSPIRT requires ratification from another Council too.
- Council **members are selected**, rotated and retired using a prescribed method that keeps the power with the Doers as this is the iSPIRT ethos.

VOLUNTEER FELLOWS COUNCIL (VFC)

The Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) manages our orbit-shifts, pillars and rooms, and the volunteer network. VFC takes a holistic look at this entire system. VFC prevents ossification of iSPIRT so that it remains a powerful vehicle of collective ambition. It tries to take an institution that is good and raise it to the next level.

VFC needs a deft touch to manage two recurring issues. First is the relentless pressure to convert our open-source inspired, bottoms-up volunteer model into a traditional corporate model. Even the people who profess belief and support for our Bazaar model lapse into pushing for features of the Cathedral model once in a while. VFC often steps in to deal with this pressure.

Second, in our volunteer network there is a constant tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces. There are always some volunteers seeking even more autonomy. And, there are others who are distressed by the variations across rooms and seek to establish more consistency. Managing these competing forces is the responsibility of VFC.

¹ Agneepath: <https://youtu.be/J7rZejyrpQ>

VFC Composition

7-member Volunteer-Fellows Council (VFC):

- Mission Evangelist – Founder
- Ombudsman and Volunteer Conscience Keeper – Founder
- Credo Architect
- 4 Fellows (from Playbooks, Market Catalysts, Policy and Societal Platforms Pillars)
- Tenure: 1 year except for Founders tagged members
- Selected by Nomination Committee of Volunteer-Fellows Council

VFC Key Decisions

- Add/Retire Rooms, Orbit-Shifts, and Volunteers
- Volunteer up/down-grades
- Credo compliance actions

VFC Rhythms

- 3-year volunteer model renewals
- Bi-annual volunteer upgrades/downgrades
- Bi-quarterly Core Volunteer Meetups (formerly Fellows Meetings)
- Annual Letter
- Annual website revamp
- Facilitating Bi-monthly, Weekly and Daily Heartbeats

VFC PRACTICES

Some key practices are essential to VFC functioning well.

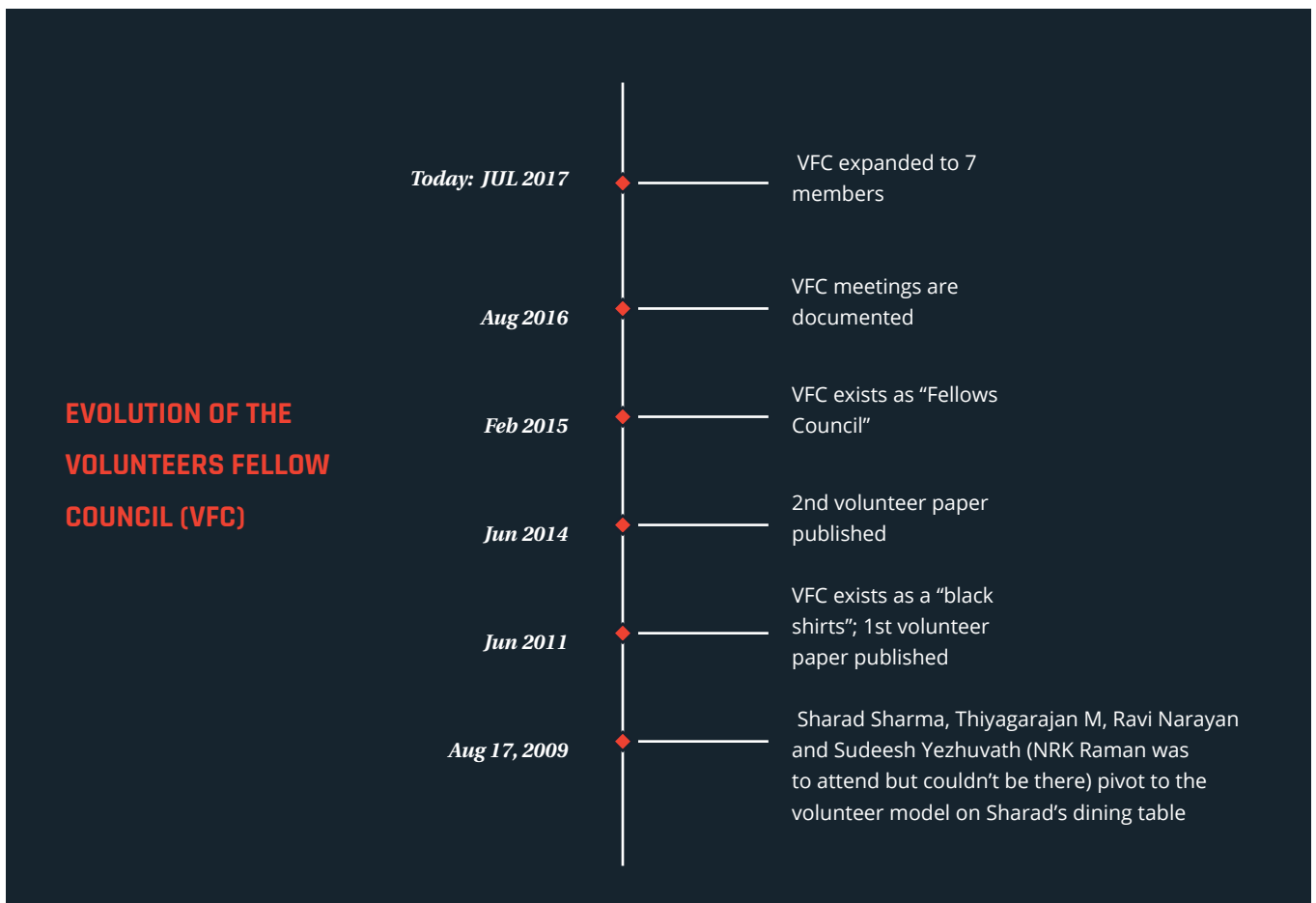
Personality Diversity

VFC members have different personalities. Personality matters because different personalities filter the world differently. The world presents itself as a set of facts that are different for different personalities. The differences may not just be a matter of opinion; they may arise from a fundamental temperamental orientation.

It is useful to talk to somebody different because they actually see a different world. Listening to them can give an insight into that world, which means that one's own universe can expand. VFC uses personality diversity to take better decisions. For instance, one VFC member may be Low in Orderliness on Big-Five Personality Aspect Scale, while another may be Medium and yet another High. This difference may create dissension when looking at any issue. At that time, one has to ask what should be SPIRIT's disposition towards Orderliness.

Veto

We don't ask for consensus in VFC. However, we have a provision of veto. Any member can veto if they feel strongly about a decision. In practice, this veto is rarely exercised.



VFC Bug List

VFC maintains a bug and improvement list for the iSPIRT volunteer model and uses it to drive incremental improvements throughout the year. For instance, 29th Fellows Meeting (now called Core Volunteers Meetup) on 24th Aug 2017 introduced discussion notes based meeting model based on a bug list item. Another example is the fixing of the volunteer onboarding on 9th Aug 2017, again, in response to the bug list. If you have any suggestions for improvement in the volunteer model, please send email to ***@iSPIRT.in.

Other Councils

Donor Council exists informally right now. Its purpose is to drive donations in a way that prevents any possibility of mission capture. It also handles public and press relations. An informal Regulatory Council is also active. It navigates the archaic regulatory and compliance system in India to operate an ambitious non-partisan, non-governmental, technology-oriented volunteer-based think-and-do tank. In addition, it plans the enforcement of the copyleft nature of our public goods in India.

The separation of Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC) from these other Councils is much like the church-state separation or the publisher-editorial separation. This form of polycentric governance keeps the risk of mission capture by donors at bay and improves our system of checks and balances.

ISPIRT IS IN PERPETUAL BETA

We have a heritage of building our volunteer model both deliberately and lovingly. We also have many strands of DNA inside iSPIRT¹.

Culture Evolution

- NPC was a lean-back model with instant volunteer gratification
- Playbooks pillar is a lean-forward model with instant volunteer gratification
- Market Catalysts pillar don't have instant gratification
- Policy pillar has 2-3 year gratification and requires us to deal with contention
- Societal Platforms (India Stack) pillar has longer gratification window and even more contention
- Volunteer-Fellows Council (VFC) has even longer gratification window (though, thankfully, has no contention)

Impact Evolution

- Market Catalysts pillar touches hundreds of companies
- Playbooks pillar helps 12-50 startups at a time, maybe 1000 in total
- Policy pillar touches the whole industry

- Societal Platform (India Stack) touches the whole country
- Help gSaaS product entrepreneurs play better in existing playgrounds
- Create new playgrounds for Bharat entrepreneurs by building societal platforms and working with Policymakers and Big Incumbents

Cross-Pollination Evolution

- Full-time volunteer-in-residence model starts in Societal Platforms pillar in 2009/10
- Extended to Market Catalysts pillar in 2013 and Playbooks pillar in 2016
- Platform thinking comes to gSaaS through SaaS Air-Game in 2017

Great institutions are not born in a day but are built with care and consummate skill over time. Our history is a reminder that iSPIRT is founded on the faith in the possibility of what ignited minds can do to bring out positive change in the community that they live in. This faith powers our commitment to building public goods that will shape our product entrepreneurs, markets, polity, and citizens. We hope to have a strong hand in modernizing India and make it a thriving hub of innovation in the world.

RENEWAL

The landscape of human knowledge and the challenge-profile we have to deal with is rapidly changing. Therefore, so, too, must our maps and tools for navigating them. We need to open our intellect to address the true shape of our mission's needs. We need to tap into the full generative power of all our volunteers for this. We have shown boldness in launching innovative cross-pillar initiatives around, among others, financial inclusion and health inclusion. Few, if any, other technology think tanks do this better. But we must do more and better yet. Are we bold enough now to invent productive ways to organize ourselves around pressing problems? Are we broad-minded enough to collaborate on the full range of possible interventions? Are we disciplined enough to drive resources to support this work? And, are we flexible enough to counter our expectation of what counts as valuable public goods. Our country cries out for a think tank where the drive to act is not hemmed by narrow considerations, where volunteers work side by side with policymakers, where entrepreneurs find inspiration from platform builders, where big company CEOs team up with startups. iSPIRT does all this and will do it even better in its quest for positive social ends.

Our mission demands that we prepare for a diverse and often chaotic world, whose challenges, crises and controversies do not stop at our doors.

¹ For instance, back in 2013, ignited minds from Ignita became part of iSPIRT. See: Raja the Raja! We miss you! <http://pn.ispirt.in/raja-the-raja-we-miss-you/>

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

EPILOGUE

2017

It's not just our accomplishments or reputation that sets us apart but also our grand, collective and outrageous ambition to make India a Product Nation! iSPIRT is a shining example of what dreams and daring can bring forth. It is now known as one of the youngest and best technology think tanks of India. iSPIRT is nimble, keenly aware of how much can be accomplished in so such little time. iSPIRT is energetic, fostering innovation and continually inventing the new. iSPIRT is ambitious, committed to bringing positive change in our society. There is a shared determination within iSPIRT to make a difference, to do things important: in a word, to be great.

Let's keep faith in ourselves, our fellow volunteers and entrepreneurs. The years ahead at iSPIRT would bring about a deeper flourishing. We will blaze a trail to brighter days ahead, a time when India would be a thriving Product Nation!

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Handbook has been co-created by several of our active volunteers, volunteers-in-training and alumni. We thank them for helping codify our tacit knowledge in several areas.

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Council Members: Nikhil Kumar, Pramod Varma, Prasanna Krishnamoorthy, Sanjay Nagra Khan, Sharad Sharma.

Volunteer Fellows Council, 25th Dec 2017

APPENDIX FURTHER READING

Peer Production: Prof. Yochai Benkler - Coase's Penguin, or Linux and the Nature of the Firm <http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.html>

Effectual Leadership: Prof. Saras Sarasvathy - Effectuation <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effectuation>

Polycentric Governance: Prof. Elinor Ostrom – 2009 Nobel Prize Lecture http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economic-sciences/laureates/2009/ostrom-lecture.html

Knowledge economy – “ideas, people and things” as the relevant factors of production in place of the traditional factors of land, labor and capital: Paul Romer - Knowledge and the Wealth of Nations <http://www.amazon.com/Knowledge-Wealth-Nations-Economic-Discovery/dp/0393329887>

Volunteer Collaboration: What the Tech Industry Has Learned from Linus Torvalds – TEDx video by Jim Zemlin <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XTHdcmjenI>

A critical examination of different theoretical perspectives in entrepreneurship research. Effectuation, Causation, and Bricolage: A Behavioral Comparison of Emerging Theories in Entrepreneurship Research by Greg Fisher http://www.effectuation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Fisher-2012-Entrepreneurship_Theory_and_Practice-copy.pdf

The idea of a "hacker ethic" is divided into elements – openness, community, meritocracy, activism, collaboration, meaning, autonomy, serendipity, decentralization, experimentations, speed and trust. Systems and Science at Crossroads by G. Chroust, G. Metcalf. [http://ifsr.ocg.at/world/files/\\$12e\\$Magdalena-2012-proc.pdf](http://ifsr.ocg.at/world/files/$12e$Magdalena-2012-proc.pdf)

APPENDIX

FAQs

Tell me more about Volunteers-in-Residence?

Most of our volunteers are part-time. Some go full-time as volunteers-in-residence, and they typically do so for 18-24 months. We pay them a modest Living Wage that is capped at their previous salary or Rs 36L whichever is lower. For seasoned people, this Living Wage is often 20-30% of their market salary. Our volunteers are mission based. They are seeking to make an impact on the ecosystem and, by stepping outside their comfort zone, grow as a person. In fact, some of the volunteers-in-residence are so mission-driven that don't even accept the entire Living Wage that they are entitled to and donate the extra back to iSPIRT.

Who is part of iSPIRT Alumni?

Volunteers-Fellows-Council (VFC) reviews volunteers in the second half of the year and marks the inactive ones as Alumni. The inactive volunteers remain a part of the larger iSPIRT Family and can choose to become active at any time.

APPENDIX

GLOSSARY

Alumni. Inactive volunteers become part of Alumni. They remain a part of the larger iSPIRT Family and can choose to become active at any time.

Beliefs. We have five core Beliefs that guide our actions. For us, our Beliefs are more about actions than ideas.

Code-of-Ethics. There are four code-of-ethics levels. Think of these as four levels of security clearance. A volunteer's code-of-ethics level determines which "room" s/he can volunteer in.

Core Volunteers. They anchor one of the rooms or orbit-shifts.

DWIT Working. There will always be volunteers for sexy roles (e.g., serving food in a langar of a Gurudwara). But the volunteer model works only if there are committed volunteers for the unsexy roles (e.g., cleaning dishes in a communal free kitchen). Our volunteers step up to take on these unsexy roles for the sake of the larger cause. These committed volunteers often Do-What-It-Takes (DWIT) volunteering.

iSPIRTER. iSPIRT Volunteers and Employees are called iSPIRTers. Donors, Advisers, Volunteers-in-Training, Partners, and Alumni are part of the extended iSPIRT Family, but they don't represent iSPIRT.

Glue Volunteers. Volunteers who are active in several rooms and cross-pollinate ideas and practices. They create the web that holds iSPIRT together.

Integral Thinking. Many of our volunteers foster cross-pollination of ideas and practices. They keep the focus on the bigger picture and point to the dangers of optimising for the local maxima in our work.

Orbit-Shifts. A Zero to One transformation for that ecosystem.

Pillars. Rooms are organized in four pillars - Playbooks, Market Catalysts, Policy, and Platforms - based on the type of stakeholders they address.

Playground. We see product entrepreneurs operating in business playgrounds where they deal with a set of rules and umpires (managed by policymakers), use public technology building blocks (similar to play equipment like gloves and pads) and leverage business partners (akin to TV sports networks). Winning players have better playbooks and/or leverage the rules, equipment or partners more effectively. iSPIRT helps product entrepreneurs as players with all the four things - playbooks, rules, equipment or partners - that determine their success.

Polycentric Governance. Governance of a complex and modern community like iSPIRT requires multi-level, multi-purpose, multisectoral, and multi-functional units of governance. Polycentric governance implies that these multiple independent units mutually order their relationships with one another under a general system of rules. In practice, the biggest effect of this for iSPIRT is that we keep our donor engine separate from our volunteer engine.

Power Volunteering. When you do Do-What-It-Takes (DWIT) volunteering.

Public Goods. There are four types of Public Goods that iSPIRT builds - Playbooks, Market Catalysts, Policy, Societal Platforms.

Rooms. Volunteers work in 'rooms.' This is where public goods are built to bring about orbit-shifts in the ecosystem. Most rooms belong to one of the four Pillars - Playbooks, Market Catalysts, Policy, and Platforms. All rooms work for making India a Product Nation.

Rhythms. The best way to understand iSPIRT is to understand its many rhythms. Rhythms are like heartbeats. Some occur once in three years. Others are annual. Yet others are twice a year. We have one that is twice a quarter. There are many that are twice a month. There are weekly rhythms too. And, of course, there some daily rhythms as well.

Values. We have four Values that shape our decisions, often, in ways that are not obvious. We encourage our volunteers to keep them in mind when wrestling with nuanced decisions.

Veda Deliberation. This doesn't have any religious connotation. It is about first-principles thinking. This is necessary for iSPIRT because we often operate in areas where there is no template. In fact, our own volunteer model is one of a kind. Unless some of our volunteers are deep first-principle thinkers, complexity will overwhelm us, and we won't be able to do all the things that we are doing.

Volunteer-in-Residence. Most of our volunteers are part-time. Some go full-time as volunteers-in-residence, and they typically do so for 18-24 months.

Volunteer Fellows Council (VFC). VFC is comprised of seven members whose goal is to ensure we remain a powerful vehicle of collective ambition.

Volunteer Qualities. Great volunteers exhibit 12 volunteer qualities that fall into three buckets: cultivated skills, critical traits and modulating strengths.

APPENDIX

ANALYSIS OF CORE VOLUNTEERS

3rd Oct 2017

Introduction

We have 41 Core Volunteers excluding Sharad. For all of them, we think in terms of two thinking traits (Veda Deliberation and Integral Thinking) and two doing traits (DWIT Working and Anchoring). All these four traits are important to our success.

DWIT Working

There will always be volunteers for sexy roles (e.g., serving food in a langar of a Gurudwara). But the volunteer model works only if there are committed volunteers for the unsexy roles (e.g., cleaning dishes in a communal free kitchen). Our volunteers step up to take on these unsexy roles for the sake of the larger cause. These committed volunteers often Do-What-It-Takes (DWIT) volunteering. Without this, our volunteer model will not work on a sustainable basis. No wonder we celebrate DWIT volunteering. Both our volunteer decorations – Rohit Veerajappa and Vivek Raghavan - are for DWIT volunteering. We often refer to it as Power Volunteering as well.

"Veda" Deliberation

This doesn't have any religious connotation. It is about first-principles thinking. This is necessary for iSPIRT because we often operate in areas where there is no template. In fact, our own volunteer model is one of a kind. Unless some of our volunteers are deep first-principle thinkers, complexity will overwhelm us, and we won't be able to do all the things that we are doing.

Anchoring

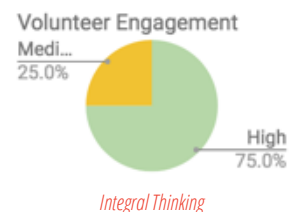
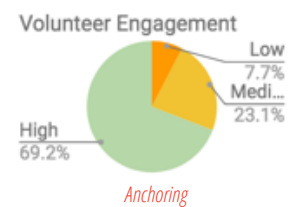
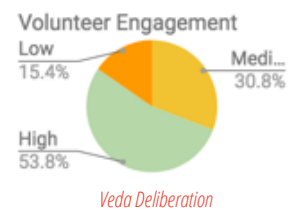
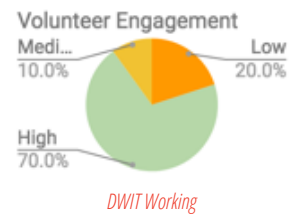
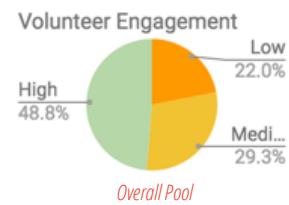
Many volunteers prevent dissipation of energy into many areas. They focus relentlessly on making their part of iSPIRT successful. Their role is absolutely critical to our success.

Integral Thinking

Many of our volunteers foster cross-pollination of ideas and practices. They point to the dangers of local maxima and keep focusing everybody on the bigger picture. They work in different rooms (aka initiatives) and create the web that holds iSPIRT together.

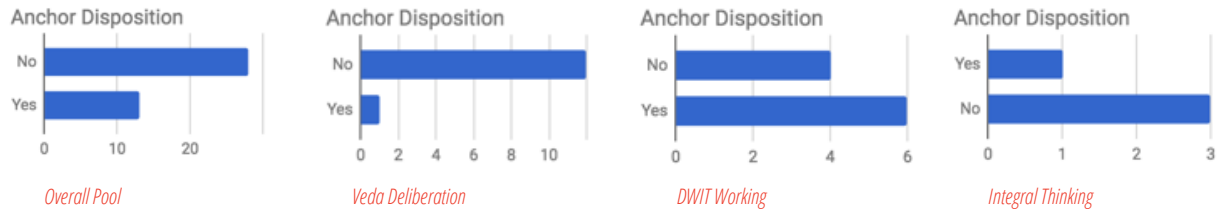
Core Volunteer Engagement

The engagement is higher if a Core Volunteer exhibits a strong desirable trait. Amongst them, volunteers having the Integral Thinking have the highest engagement and those with Veda Deliberation have the lowest.



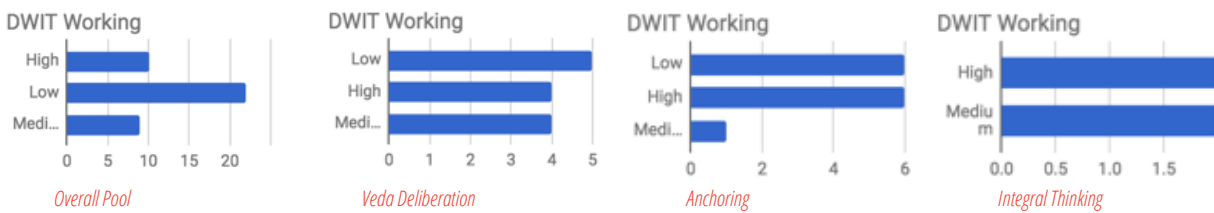
Anchoring

30% of Core Volunteers have an Anchoring trait. Unsurprisingly, this goes up to 60% amongst volunteers with a DWIT Working trait. Those with Integral Thinking (25%) and Veda Deliberation (15%) don't correlate with an Anchoring trait.



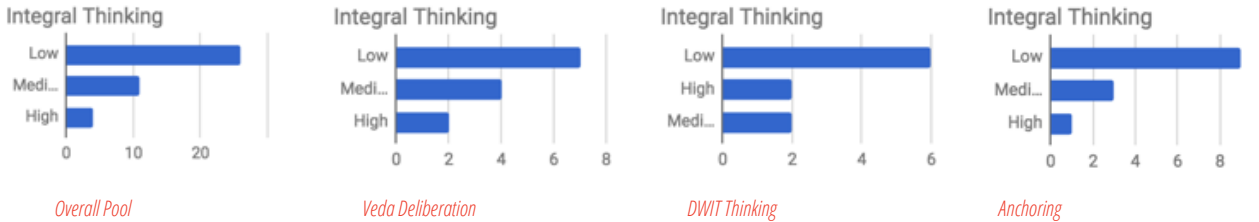
DWIT Working

DWIT Working is a secondary trait amongst volunteers who display another trait. While 31% of Core Volunteers do DWIT Working, it rises amongst those with Veda Deliberation trait (38%) Anchoring trait (465) and Integral Thinking trait (50%).



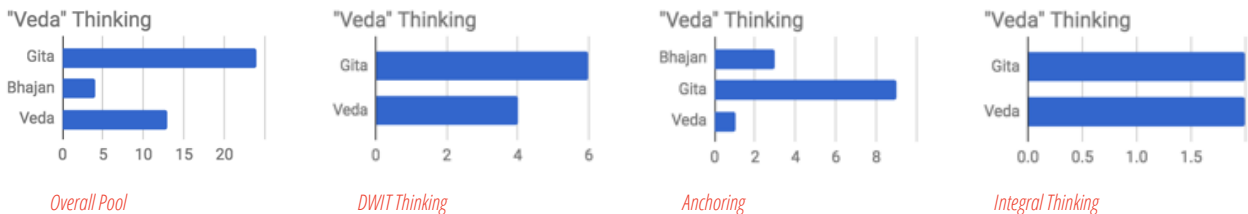
Integral Thinking

Worryingly, Integral Thinking is missing amongst all volunteer types indicating that this has to be specially nurtured. Those with an Anchoring trait have the least Integral Thinking.



Veda Deliberation

We have a healthy mix of Veda and Gita Thinkers. Only 10% are Bhajan Thinkers. Within our volunteers exhibiting the DWIT or Integral Thinking traits, there are no Bhajan Thinkers! Also, those with an Anchoring trait don't have a strong Veda Deliberation trait.



CONCLUSION

Integral Thinking is missing amongst all volunteer types and needs to be cultivated across the board. Volunteers with the Integral Thinking have the highest engagement today. Happily, DWIT Working is a secondary trait amongst volunteers who display another trait. On the other hand, those with Anchor trait have the poor Integral Thinking and Veda Deliberation. Instead of encouraging those with an Anchor trait to embrace DWIT Working, we encourage those with the DWIT Working trait to acquire an Anchoring trait. This is a better path to having well-rounded volunteers. Finally, volunteer effectiveness can be improved by teaming-up with others using self-awareness of these traits.

iSPIRT

SELF ASSESSMENT AGAINST PROSOCIAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

19th July 2017

1. *Strong group identity and understanding of purpose. [In iSPIRT context this means that there are clearly defined boundaries so that volunteers know they are part of iSPIRT and what iSPIRT is about. We can improve here. Thinking Product Nation (TPN) and iSPIRT Knowledge Quiz were two initiatives that are partially deployed. We should think of what to do here in a holistic manner.]*
2. *Fair distribution of costs and benefits. Proportional equivalence of costs and benefits means that members had to earn their benefits and couldn't just appropriate them. [Appropriate for sharing a common-pool. Not directly applicable to iSPIRT.]*
3. *Fair and inclusive decision-making. Collective choice arrangements mean that group members have to agree upon decisions so nobody could be bossed around. [Appropriate for sharing a common-pool. Not directly applicable to iSPIRT as-is. Within iSPIRT, this translates to Core Volunteers having autonomy for their own initiative without a need for upward reporting. iSPIRT does this well today.]*
4. *Monitoring agreed-upon behaviors. Disruptive self-serving behaviors should be detected quickly. [We do a pretty good job of this in iSPIRT today. Code-of-Ethics deployment will strengthen this]*
5. *Graduated sanctions for misbehaviors. Disruptive self-serving behaviors should be punished quickly. [We do a pretty good job of this in iSPIRT today. Whistleblower policy, Ombudsman, etc. can strengthen this]*
6. *Fast and fair conflict resolution. This ensures that the group would not be torn apart by internal conflicts of interest. [Tribal Friction is something that we need to address better in iSPIRT.]*
7. *Authority to self-govern. Local autonomy so that the "room" has the elbow room to manage its own affairs. [We do pretty good on this inside iSPIRT.]*
8. *Appropriate relations with other groups. [We do a pretty good job of this with policymakers, VCs, CXOs and other ecosystem players as iSPIRT.]*

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