

## Where this model came from

### The 'big idea' of Sustainability

...is much more than reducing negative project impacts. It's also about making life better, and the earth a real home for the future. It's about figuring out how to give up our war with nature, economic man's centuries long habit of treating nature as a conquest largely good only for bending to our will. Sustainability is an emerging idea, not fully formed.

### The 'big idea' of LEED

I did a little study of how [Sustainability grew in the NY Times](#) that showed a series of intense one to four month long 'conversations' of frequent articles separated by quiet periods. Then it turned into a long sweeping exponential growth curve. I haven't had access to the data, but I think that same growth curve also would describe the success of the USGBC's LEED program, a huge explosion with an uncharted future.

What's unusual is not just the growing popularity and global impact of the LEED, but that it's based on a set of particularly rigorous measures. Making people carefully measure things is usually a formula for failure. LEED, though, uses its relatively short list **diverse** measures to represent a holistic redirection of how we design for living on earth, and that, I think, is why it's had such a huge effect. It's that it turned a very complicated and technically complex set of hard measures into a single simple **Idea!**

LEED has a few shortcomings, of course. One is that any project's individual sustainable design can make good use of the set of LEED measures and programs, but LEED can't measure what is particular to any individual design. That's where every project needs to make its own model of sustainability and that's one of the things that the **4D** model provides.

### The 'big idea' of the 4D model

... is to organize planning & design around the natural designs of living things... It's not proscriptive, but like nature, works by exposing opportunities. There's a new synthesis being recognized among the dozen or so different kinds of '**complexity science**', having to do with the new understanding of natural complex networks, how they are organized and develop. The 'four dimensions' in the 4D model correspond to the physical structures of natural system networks, their:



- an internal network of links
- external neighborhoods of links
- long distance links
- working as a whole

### System Networks individually acting as wholes, & participating in larger wholes

It's the combination of near and far links that produces high degrees of connection in nature, as expressed by the '5 degrees of separation' concept. One should not confuse links or their networks with what is goes on through those links, but finding the location and kinds of links is very helpful for finding and building on what can happen.

The first sketch of the 4D concept was [A quick sketch](#) to explain how these dimensions could be applied as a learning process...