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EFFECTIVE NETWORKS



→ Key Features of Effective Networks

→ Key Functions of Effective Networks

Why Network's Fail

Networks fail because of one or more of the following:

- fails to reach common understanding across members of purpose and direction
- institutionalisation
- over-management cementing relationships and structures that need to be dynamic and evolving
- over expectation of network member's willingness or ability to collaborate which damages creativity of the parts
- predicating network some members over others
- constraining network member's independence
- not recognising when leadership needs to change/rotate

Purpose, Role, Function & Forms

All networks need to be clear about purpose, and from that choose their role, function and form.



Network Elements	Description
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PURPOSE	These are the objectives and aims of the network, which provides the rationale that justifies its existence, and against which its value, progress and development can be assessed.
ROLE	<p>This is how the network promotes value among its members in pursuit of the purpose. Two archetypal roles are suggested – support and agency – on a continuum.</p> <p>In support networks, members act independently as agents of change but join the network to receive support that will make them more effective in their work. In agency networks, members coordinate their efforts with other members and act together as a single agent of change.</p> <p>These two extremes suggest very different ways of working within the network including the way in which members interact with each other and with the supporting entity. In practice, most networks strike some kind of balance between the two – but few are aware of or are explicit about the trade-offs or their organisational implications. This is valuable data when thinking about developing network functions.</p> <p>A fuller typology is available in Malby and Mervyn (2012) and simplified in The Health Foundation report on effective networks (2014 p9).</p>
FUNCTIONS	<p>Describes what the network actually does – often characterised across five non-exclusive areas of:</p> <p>Knowledge Management – the networks’ ability to filter, acquire, exchange and disseminate intelligence and “know-how”</p> <p>Amplification & Advocacy – the way in which networks place issues on the “wider” agenda, amplify the voices of their members or constituents, influence key stakeholders and enhance members’ legitimacy and status</p> <p>Community Building – enables networks to build shared visions among diverse stakeholders, play a role in building cohesive, mutually supportive communities characterised by strong ties, set and diffuse norms and standards and encourage participation by increasing trust among members</p> <p>Convening – bringing together heterogeneous groups and providing a bridge between groups who wouldn’t normally meet. Find common ground for action and generating coherence across organisational boundaries. Identifying connections and developing relationships and ties.</p> <p>Resource Mobilisation – providing an efficient channel to share resources, aggregate funding and build capability and capacity</p>
FORM	This describes the structural and organisational characteristics of networks including geographical and thematic scope, membership, governance, the external environment, strategic and adaptive capacity and the resources required such as capacity and skill, communications and

Leading In Networks

Network leadership is facilitative, distributed, democratic and inclusive, whilst making the most of difference for creative ends. Networks need to be managed but in collaborative, non-hierarchical ways.

Don't underestimate the amount of work involved in leading in a network and be aware that the skills needed to lead in a network are different to those required for traditional command and control hierarchical organisations. Network leadership is predominantly about brokerage, spanning boundaries, working with knowledge, and maintaining a constant dialogue with members of the network, facilitating peer relationships. Network leadership involves good negotiation skills and being comfortable with conflict and difference. Modelling transparency, commitment and mutual respect is at the heart of leadership in networks.

Network leadership requires different and sometimes challenging repertoires of behaviour, which might at times, feel counter cultural and are likely to be demanding in terms of time. This is likely to be especially difficult for those who at the same time as being active within the network are also still working within the context of hierarchical organisational arrangements at a local level.



Starting up a new Network

Networks are not a panacea for every problem, so you should first ask yourself if a network approach to organising is the best one for the issue you want to tackle. Go where the energy is and connect to people who share the concerns you have. Consensus is not a pre-condition for action and you certainly don't all need to agree everything ahead of time. You need just enough agreement to get on with the next thing and then the next thing and so on.

Create the minimal design for your network, perhaps around a few core principles. Expect it to evolve in response to emergent needs and new knowledge and ideas, as well as to review of the

network's impact. The network will change over time and you should ensure that the "rules" evolve as part of the on-going conversation with and between members. Since a network is a relational, social entity it is important that opportunities are maximised for members to get to know each other (preferably sometimes face-to-face) and build trust among each other, which is an essential ingredient of a well-functioning network.

Unlike hierarchies, power is fluid in a network. Conversations about how power is being used, how authority is being generated and how accountability is being handled are key to healthy network relations.

Beware of the following traps:

- Ignoring power differentials
- Specifying aims and objectives for other people
- Privileging plans over actions
- Privileging some network members over others
- Knowing in advance everything that can be said and done
- Settling for 'soggy' consensus which fails to generate commitment
- Requiring too much of network members

Some tips for running networks:

- Connect with what exists. Networks already exist out there. We are all part of multiple networks so they're already out there to be utilised
- Set simple rules. Recognise you need to design so you can evolve and change over time
- Keep animated – focus on action and energy. Recognise that networks have times when they're active, with a lot going on, and other times when they dissipate. The ebb and flow of energy is perfectly normal in a network. The issue is to know why you are at a certain point, which is often to do with context
- Learn from difference and conflict. It's a normal part of bringing different communities and types of knowledge together that some of the energy you want will come from differences of view
- Keep a focus on impact

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KEY FUNCTIONS OF NETWORKS

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Functional Activity

Knowledge management
Generating, filtering, exchanging, disseminating intelligence and know-how

Amplification and Advocacy

Amplifying voices of the community on wider issues, influencing key stakeholders and enhancing members' legitimacy and status

Community Building

Building shared vision, trust, mutual support, learning; helping to set and diffuse norms and standards

Convening

Bringing together and bridging between groups which wouldn't normally meet; finding common ground for action, generating coherence, connecting, building relationships and ties

Resource mobilisation

Providing an efficient channel to share resources, aggregate funding, build capability and capacity

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KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE NETWORKS

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→ Key Functions of Effective Networks

Shared purpose and identity:

Members of effective networks display strong network awareness. They feel ownership and they know why the network exists. They have a shared purpose. Members also share a common language and collective narrative.

Address big issues/have a compelling purpose:

Effective work-based networks that sustain themselves normally address big / compelling issues that are a high priority for key 'sponsors' or stakeholders / members. They are focused on issues that keep network leaders awake at night and therefore – are likely to receive support.

Meet member needs:

While effective networks generally address big issues, they also have to be of day-to-day benefit to members in the network. Ultimately, they either have to help members to do their job or help them to create a change they are passionate about.

Adapted leadership:

Leadership of networks is different to other forms of leadership. Power does not come from organisational hierarchy. Effective networks benefit from leaders who have well-developed skills and the time to perform their role.

Strong relationships and ties:

Effective networks are characterised by strong personal relationships, high levels of trust and awareness between members. Leaders can play a key role in developing trust and a culture of sharing, using face-to-face to maintain relationships and ties.

Generate helpful outputs:

As well as 'connecting people', effective networks tend to generate outputs that are helpful to other network members. Outputs are often developed or co-created based on experience 'on the ground'.



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