



LEADERSHIP LEARNING
COMMUNITY



Synergos

CASE STUDY:

Network Development and Catalyzing Collaborative Action on Poverty and Injustice

“We have a long-term relationship with the Leadership Learning Community. We have attended several of the Learning Circles in New York, and continue to use the website as a valuable resource for information on networks and evaluation of leadership strategies. For this project, we appreciated the flexibility of the team, openness to including multiple perspectives in the report, and commitment to providing insightful recommendations during our meeting with the Synergos network team.”

Surita Sandosham, Senior Director Global Leaders Programs and Networks, The Synergos Institute

“Overall, this (report) helped us to focus on building networks and adopt a different type of engagement strategy that has allowed us to begin to tap into the full potential of our Fellows across networks, areas of work, and regions.”



Senior Fellows

International civil society leaders committed to collaborative efforts that address the underlying causes of poverty and inequity.

(Synergos.org)



Global Philanthropists Circle

Network of leading philanthropic families from across the world committed to using their time, influence and resources to fight global poverty and social injustice. (Synergos.org)



Arab Innovators

Individuals from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine who are implementing successful social projects. (Synergos.org)

The Synergos Institute believes achieving systemic change that reduces poverty and advances social justice requires government, business, civil society, and affected communities working together towards a common purpose.

Synergos invests in bringing together leaders across diverse fields to foster personal transformation, build bridges, network, apply systems thinking, and form inclusive partnerships. In 2009 the Leadership Learning Community partnered with The Synergos Institute to explore how the organization could better support collaborative action across its three networks: Senior Fellows’ Program, the Global Philanthropist Circle (GPC), and the Arab Social Innovators. We conducted a scan of best practices related to network leadership, and presented strategic recommendations around network recruitment and selection, network weaving, network assessment, and network support.

Since the completion of the project, the Synergos team has implemented some of the key recommendations and is seeing tangible results in their internal capacity to organize cross-network collaboration.

Synergos selected the Leadership Learning Community to work on this project because of our expertise in the fields of leadership and network development. Over the past 10 years, we have convened numerous leadership programs to harvest learning about how to develop sustainable networks that support collaborative action. More recently, we have experimented with social network analysis as a network capacity building and evaluation tool, and employed social media to foster connections among members. We applied this knowledge to our analysis of the Synergos networks.

Note: The primary source for all the information presented in this document is Surita Sandosham, Senior Director Global Leaders Programs and Networks, The Synergos Institute.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

During the course of this project we attended the Synergos All-Networks Meeting, reviewed the website and the online network platform, and learned what data was being gathered to both build and assess the capacity of the networks. We had conversations with several Synergos staff who gave us their perspectives on the networks.

The framing questions guiding this exploration included:

- Who should be recruited into the Synergos network(s)?
- How should members be recruited?
- How can Synergos best catalyze and support the capacity of network members to act collaboratively?
- How will Synergos know, and communicate, what difference its networks are making?
- How can Synergos best organize its staffing and resources to support network development?

RECOMMENDATIONS & RESULTS

“There are a lot of organizations that are interested in growing and supporting their networks. We were excited to collaborate with Synergos and identify the conditions that promote collaboration within networks, and how those collaborations can be translated into actions that advance positive social change. We look forward to continue learning how the Synergos network members collaborate across regions and fields, and how we can increase the capacity of the social sector to catalyze and sustain networks across the board.”

(Claire Reinelt, Project Lead, Leadership Learning Community)

SELECTION & RECRUITMENT

One of our main recommendations was the need to clarify the network’s value proposition so that change agents will be attracted to participate, and understand why they will benefit from being part of the Synergos network.

Since our meeting in December 2009, the Synergos team has started to think more strategically about how to recruit Senior Fellows based on location and area of work, and the nominations process has gotten stronger. The

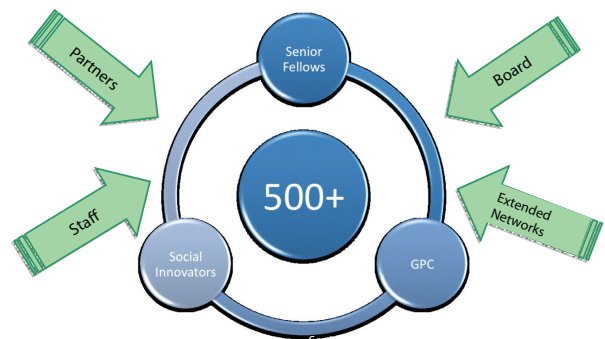
team has also had conversations about the value add that the program can offer for Global Philanthropist Circle members, and plans to incorporate this thinking into future recruitment strategies.

COLLABORATION & NETWORK WEAVING

Synergos was interested to learn more about how to stimulate connection and collaboration within and across the three networks. We encouraged the team to identify and leverage network weavers that can help connect Fellows across programs, projects and locations.

During our research, we also learned of several regionally based efforts to find common purpose, align efforts, and join together around an action agenda. We recommended that the team continue to reach beyond traditional boundaries and find alliances with others who are also working on issues with similar solutions, such as Ashoka.

The Synergos Network



Following our work with Synergos, they have stepped up efforts to organize regional gatherings that connect participants across networks. For instance, the team has organized meetings in the Middle East and Mexico that included Senior Fellows, GPC members, Arab Innovators, and even others who are not part of Synergos’ formal networks. By focusing on global topics, such as

“With the GPC group, we have been promoting conversations that are more inclusive of other people who are not part of the network. As a result, the group is coming up with exciting innovations that cut across different levels. That shows that there has been a shift in how we are thinking about a more integrated strategy, a cross-network strategy, which is generating unprecedented innovations.”

entrepreneurship and education, the team is increasing collaboration across network members in a given region. The team is planning to replicate this strategy in other locations, including Brazil.

More and more, Fellows from different networks are finding practical ways of working together and adding value to each other’s work. An example of an innovative collaborative project is the adoption of the Social Evaluator tool. This tool was developed with support from one of the GPC members in the Netherlands to help people set up a simple evaluation mechanism that guides users through the process of determining stakeholders and indicators. The Fellow was interested in testing the use and relevancy of the tool, so Synergos organized training sessions for him and other Senior Fellows and GPC members. As a result, other members have started using the tool – and some even offered to translate the tool into Spanish. In this particular case, the Synergos network acted as a learning community to help test, validate, and promote a tool to improve the work of Fellows across the globe.

NETWORK ASSESSMENT

Another area of interest for Synergos was understanding the best way to evaluate and communicate the collaborative achievements of network members and highlight how their relationships and experiences in the Synergos network contributed to what they were able to achieve.

Based on the recommendations, the Synergos team is planning to change the programming of the next global

meeting for Senior Fellows. The goal is to encourage participants to share stories about how they have collaborated with each other at the beginning of each session in order to inspire other members to collaborate in future projects.

NETWORK SUPPORT

The organization has struggled to find resources to support the network, so we recommended that the team think more expansively about how to leverage existing partnerships, and how to support network members and Synergos staff members to take up network weaving roles.

Also, in order to leverage the talent, expertise, and relationships that exist in the networks, we recommended that the team gather and make that information visible to others in the network and target resources to areas where there is high interest and momentum. For instance, the application process, intake questionnaires and periodic surveys can assist Synergos staff and network members to learn more about the resources in the network, where there is network activity, and what types of supports are most beneficial.

The Synergos team has begun focusing more attention on network weaving. The team has organized meetings to convene staff members working on different programs to brainstorm ideas and solutions together. They also organized a workshop on bridging leadership to help

program managers get more familiar with this competency.

“The staff is getting much more adept and intentional about network weaving, especially when we design the different gatherings that we do together.”

CONCLUSION

“The report helped to validate the importance of networks for our programming and gave us insights for how to promote collaboration across our networks. Having Claire facilitate a discussion with the team was really helpful because it enabled us to unpack a lot of the questions and ideas we had about a network strategy. Overall, this (report) helped us to focus on building networks and adopt a different type of engagement strategy that has allowed us to begin to tap into the full potential of our Fellows across networks, areas of work, and regions.”

We worked closely with the Synergos staff to understand how the latest advancements in network theory and practice can help Synergos optimize its networks. By improving the selection and nomination process, taking a more inclusive approach to meetings with the Fellows, sharing and highlighting stories of collaboration between Fellows, and building the capacity of both the staff and the Fellows to weave participants across networks, Synergos is creating the conditions for greater network action to address poverty in multiple areas around the world.

We are exploring the possibility of convening another meeting in the future to uncover some of the collaboration stories that have been happening across the networks. These stories will help inform other groups and organizations focused on network leadership in the nonprofit sector.



LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

We are a national nonprofit organization transforming the way leadership development work is conceived, conducted and evaluated, primarily within the nonprofit sector. We focus on leveraging leadership as a means to create a more just and equitable society. We combine our expertise in identifying, evaluating and applying cutting-edge ideas and promising practices in the leadership development field, with access to our engaged national network of hundreds of experienced funders, consultants and leadership development programs, to drive the innovation and collaboration needed to make leadership more effective. We provide members with unparalleled access to resources and networking opportunities. We also offer the following consulting services to help programs and foundations optimize their leadership investment strategy: scans, evaluations and network development.

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ABOUT THE SYNERGOS INSTITUTE

We address global poverty and social injustice by working collaboratively to change the systems that keep people in poverty. Bringing together government, business, civil society and poor and marginalized communities, we help every part of society work together to create sustainable systems change.

Over the course of more than 20 years, Synergos has supported innovative global partnerships in more than 30 countries and regions, including Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, India, Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico border, the Middle East, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. For more information, please visit www.synergos.org.