



LEADERSHIP LEARNING COMMUNITY

Leadership and Networks

A Preliminary Framework

Background: Social media and networks have been in the spotlight of social change. Our interest has piqued against a backdrop of dramatic events: massive protests in Egypt that led to the resignation of Mubarak or 13 million supporters engaged and almost three quarters of a billion dollars raised in Obama's 2008 presidential election campaign. Some media outlets described the upsurge in Egypt as a leaderless revolution. But was it? We want to dig into the role of leadership in network success stories. Without re-examining tried and true beliefs about what leadership is and how to support it, we may find ourselves on the sidelines of impressive network actions that are tackling seemingly insurmountable problems like carbon emissions, poverty or the hold of a repressive regime.

Why this is important to people doing leadership development: The opportunity to reach, influence and mobilize exponentially more people is important to everyone who is engaged in change work and raises a number of important questions for people who are supporting and developing social justice leadership:

1. Is the ability to utilize network strategies and tools an important leadership competency for everyone?
2. Are traditional leadership models effective in today's connected environment?
3. What can we learn from leadership in networks about new ways of leading and developing leadership?
4. What can people doing leadership development work do to better prepare leadership in a connected and networked world?

Where we are now: Tremendous resources have been invested in the non-profit sector and sadly, this massive amount of effort is not achieving a similar scale of transformation and positive change on "wicked" social problems. We live in an increasingly global economy where complex and interdependent problems cannot be solved by one individual or even one large institution. And yet, mainstream ideas about leadership have changed very little. We remain attached to heroic models of leadership placing extremely high expectations on individuals going it alone.

What we need: We need to move beyond leadership models that focus on building the skills of individuals and challenge ourselves to understand how to cultivate leadership as the process by

which multiple actors align their efforts to take action. We need a new mental model of leadership and new approaches to leadership development if we are to move the needle on any significant social problem by taking advantage of network strategies and more connected ways of working together.

Are networks the answer? Network strategies are no more the answer to every change initiative than organizations can be, and yet organizational change strategies have been prioritized for decades as the best way to make change happen. The problems of duplication and fragmentation persist, even in the face of growing recognition that an organization working alone cannot make the really big changes that are needed. We settle for doing our part on our small piece of the puzzle and for the most part, it's not adding up to a huge collective impact on any major problem. There are many reasons to pay attention to networks and what they mean for leadership:

1. Networks increase influence and reach by amplifying messages through social media, producing innovation by bridging organizations and sectors, coordinating the actions of more people with fewer resources, and aligning the work of individuals and organizations to produce greater collective impact on our goals.
2. People and groups will exercise more effective leadership if they know how and when to use network strategies.
3. Using network strategies effectively requires different leadership values and behaviors that clash with mainstream leadership assumptions
4. Millennials who have grown up in a socially connected world are bringing a strong network centric approach to social cause organizing.

What can we learn about leadership from networks? Networks are often successful because they embody a set of values (sometimes referred to as a network mindset) that shape how people and organizations interact. These examples demonstrate values that are part of the leadership ethos of a network and demonstrate individual and group behaviors that increase leadership impact.

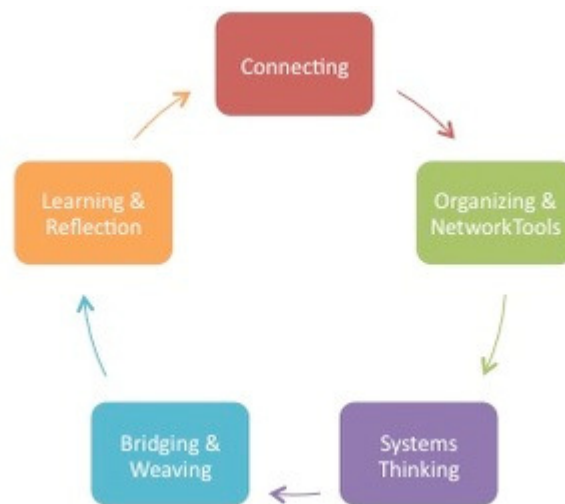
- **Generosity:** The founder of KaBOOM!, Darell Hammond, tells a story about a breakthrough on their mission of getting a playground within the reach of every child when they asked, "why don't we just give away the model? We can't do everything anyway. If we give it away people can replicate it on their own."
- **Letting Go of Control:** The last presidential election campaign developed social technologies that enabled people to organize their friends and communities. This was possible because campaign organizers let go of control and concerns about whether people would do what they said they would do or stay on message.
- **Trust and Reciprocity:** Networks assume good will and build trust so that people from diverse experiences can connect, interact and find common ground. Lawrence Community Works began hosting dinners for people to tell their stories and now 50,000 have connected and are acting on things they care about.
- **Transparency:** When people work in ways that are more transparent, accessible and understandable to people outside their organization, the walls between inside and outside become more porous. LLC involved more people and generated more ideas for a collaborative research project by using a public wiki.

- **Accountability:** Accountability is created through relationship (not rules) when people care about each other. Nonprofit executive directors in Boston neighborhoods historically looked out for their own interests until they formed strong, trusting relationships with each other through a fellowship program to incubate a network.

What is different about network leadership? Network leadership clashes with strongly held ideas about leadership in the nonprofit sector and society at large. The chart below illustrates some of these differences:

Traditional Leader Model	Collective network leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader exerts influence over followers • Leadership in organizations is top down & hierarchical • Achievements attributed to strength of individual leader and failures are attributed to his/her shortcomings as a leader • Leaders can be developed but not everyone has leadership potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals and groups connect & align efforts to support a common purpose. • Leadership is a dynamic process with people assuming many roles • Achievements are produced through collective leadership effort and failures & experimentation is embraced for advancing learning and adaptation. • Everyone has the ability to exercise leadership

What are network leadership competencies? There are at least five key competencies needed to effectively lead within a network, utilize network strategies and tackle complex problems.



Connecting: Relationships are the foundation of leadership as a collective process and strongly valued in networks.

Organizing: In networks, leadership is more distributed and often self-authorizing as people and groups take on different roles, and align their actions to move the system in a desired direction. Network members understand that small and large contributions aggregate to produce a larger collective impact.

Systems Thinking: Efforts to take on societal problems like climate change, poverty, or class and racial disparities, require a deep understanding of how systems work and perpetuate themselves. It is not possible to work for social justice without paying attention to how opportunity structures create and maintain racial and class inequities.

Bridging and Weaving: The process of building diverse relationships is essential to social change endeavors. Revealing gaps in the nonprofit ecosystem is a first step towards bridging across silos and other divides that interfere with joint action and alignment of effort needed to tackle complex problems.

Action Learning/Reflection: Learning in networks occurs through constant experimentation and failure. Creating space for collective reflection and assessment enables networks to learn and leverage their successes. In the process of learning with others individuals learn also about themselves as agents of change.

What does this mean for leadership development? To support leadership that works effectively in networks and in more connected ways we need new leadership development delivery strategies. We can learn from how leadership is being developed in networks:

Multiple entry points: A number of organizations using network strategies have created multiple entry points that draw people into the work and provide many opportunities for people to take on new roles and acquire new skills in the course of the work.

Learning by doing: In a collective culture where people are actively supported to take risks and have the opportunity to learn together, a couple of things are happening. Everyone can be part of the leadership of doing and by learning together everyone is being developed.

Convening and Process: When people set time set aside to get to know each other and are supported with processes that help them understand how their work connects in a larger ecosystem, opportunities for collective action and accountability expand.

Relationship building and weaving: As people in LCW got to know neighbors they had not met, share their stories and talk about their community, collective grievances and aspirations emerged connecting people in their desire and willingness to take action.

Implications for Leadership Development

There are several implications, ideas and questions for people doing leadership work:

1. Learn and practice network strategies: Read up, experiment with new technology, try bringing a network lens to your program design and ideas about recruitment.
2. Question your assumptions about leadership and the role of individuals: What model of leadership are you promoting in your leadership development work?
3. Question your ideas about leadership development: Can you embed leadership development into change work to support the process rather than focusing on individuals?
4. Bring network thinking to your program graduates: Help them understand themselves as a network so they can weave, bridge and strengthen learning and collaboration.
5. Competencies: In your leadership development work, are you cultivating competencies that help participants to increase connection, understand systems, promote action learning, effective bridging and collective action.