Achieving Impact With Networks

Presented by Marty Kooistra

Executive Director
Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County
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My Backstory:

How did I get so deeply engaged in this work, and

How has Professor Jane Wei-Skillern’s research impacted me?
Table Discussion:

Share **3 of the most difficult challenges** you’ve faced in developing and maintaining collaborations or networks.
Is Today About Networking?

Yes; the kind that’s done **in pursuit of mission impact** through **engaging, mobilizing, and supporting trusted, values-aligned peers.**
Is This the Same as Collective Impact?
No. Complementary principles, **key differences in focus**.

CI: structures and systems. **Networks**: values and culture.

CI: funder-driven impacts. **Networks**: organic, bottom-up approaches and mutually beneficial solutions.
Why Networks?

Because three observations from the field point directly to their unique effectiveness.
Field Observation #1: Growth is Hard.

For nonprofits and NGOs, achieving the scale and sustainability needed to meet their mission is extraordinarily challenging.
Field Observation #2: Size Doesn’t Guarantee Impact.

Even large global NGOs are *dwarfed by the scale of the problems they seek to address* and struggle to ensure their impact is greater than the sum of their individual parts.
Field Observation #3:
How We Define Success Matters.

Our tendency to assess organizational performance denies the more important assessment of mission impact.
Networks Work When…

the goal is to **mobilize** various organizations and resources that **together** can deliver more impact

not when

the goal is to become a **leading organization** first, engaging in **collaboration at the margins**.
What Can Any Collaboration Learn from High-Impact Networks?

A different leadership mindset and different metrics.

The network is seen as the primary vehicle for change, not the organization.
What I Learned About Networks from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
Unprecedented Damage

More than 500,000 families with destroyed or severely damaged homes
Extremely Concentrated Habitat for Humanity Building Effort

- Great urgency
- Specific geographic region
- Limited existing infrastructure
- Non-scalable traditional service delivery model
The Need for Rapid & Sustainable Scalability Demanded a New Approach

Constraints on Sustained Scale

New Approaches Multiply Scale

- Pre-disaster effort
- Heroic relief effort
- Exhaustion in our existing organization
- Hurricanes

- New approaches
- Accelerated traditional building
Large Group Discussion:

Other examples of successful networks?
Network Entrepreneurship =
A Mindset Shift

Rooted in four counterintuitive principles:

1. **Mission**, Not Organization.
4. **Trust**, Not Control.
Principle #1: Mission, Not Organization.

Leaders adopt strategies and tactics to achieve a mission, not necessarily to stimulate organizational growth.
Principle #2: Node, Not Hub.

Network partners see their organizations as part of a larger web of activity targeting a cause, not as a hub of action.
Static Role as Hub
Dynamic Role as Node
Principle #3: Humility, Not Brand.

Organizations work alongside their peers as equals and willingly take a back seat when their partners are in a better position to lead.
Principle #4:
Trust, Not Control.

Trust and shared values are far more important (and robust) than formal control mechanisms such as contracts or accountability systems.
My Road to Embracing a Network Leadership Style
Arc of career experiences;
Accepting hard realities;
Recognizing my limited influence.
Networks: Forces Seen and Unseen

The unique power of a network comes from massive but largely invisible forces...
like these.
What’s Below the Surface?
A Strong Network Arises from a “Risky Mindset”

Don’t underestimate the power...
...of risk.
Network Leaders “Get on the Balcony”

What does that mean?
“Most people instinctively follow a dominant trend in an organization or community, without critical evaluation of its merits. The herd instinct is strong. And a stampede not only tramples those who don’t keep pace, it also makes it hard to see another direction—until the dust settles.”

--Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*
What Does a “Network Mindset” Look Like?

Some observable traits:
Trait #1: Eyes on the Prize

Visionary, but resists being sidetracked.
Trait #2: Sees the Big Picture

Integrative thinker, listener, and communicator.
Trait #3: Inclusive

Uses the art of honestly reflecting the various perspectives to draw people into deeper exploration.
Trait #4: Entrepreneurial
Finds space to use network leadership, sometimes under the radar.
Trait #5: Submission to Mission

The work is never about making their own role more important.
Trait #6: Willing to Be Vulnerable

Makes it safe for partners to go below the surface to discover mutual values, beliefs, and assumptions.
Trait #7: Believes in “Little L” Leadership

You don’t have to be in charge to lead.
Neither does anyone else.
Trait #8: Continuously Invests in Relationships

Listens vs. talks.

Inquires vs. asserts.

Believes relationships have inherent value beyond the immediate endgame.
Trait #9: Rewards Getting it Right, Not Being Right

Acknowledges that vulnerability, humility, release of control, and trust = sacrifice and risk.
What About Boards?

The 10 basic responsibilities of nonprofit boards are not inconsistent with a network mindset.
#9: Determine, monitor, and strengthen the organization’s programs and services.

The board’s responsibility is to determine which programs are consistent with the organization’s mission and to monitor their effectiveness.

How is this affected by a shift to a network mindset?
#10: Support the chief executive and assess his or her performance.

The board should ensure that the chief executive has the moral and professional support he or she needs to further the goals of the organization.

How is this affected by a shift to a network mindset?
A Case Study
In Network Leadership:
How it broke through decades of deadlock and acrimony.
1. The Challenge
2. The Approach
3. The Principles in Action
Four Counterintuitive Principles of Network Leadership:

1. **Mission**, Not Organization.
4. **Trust**, Not Control.
“If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten.”

--Attributed to Mark Twain (among numerous others)
Stay Connected!

Visit the brand new, one-stop resource for network leadership: www.newnetworkleader.org

marty@housingconsortium.org