

1. What is about networks that are different from other forms of organisation and what are the implications for assessing their performance?

- Networks versus crowds:
 - There is a greater degree of *stability* in the relationships between the participants
 - There is likely to be more *connectedness* between the actors involved
- Therefore: It will be easier to make contact with all the participants

- Networks versus formal organisations
 - Participation is more optional in a network than in a formal organisation
 - “The structure of a network is not hierarchical” N&W-G
- Therefore: common objectives may or may not be present. They can't be *assumed*. But they might be *found*.
- The N&W-G paper starts with a series of what look like assumptions about the objectives of international social change networks.
 - Making a large number of assumptions like this may prevent the evaluator from seeing what is there in practice
 - Treating them as *hypotheses* and going out to test them (“Do they exist in practice, and what difference does it make if they are not there?”) is another matter.
 - That way you could discover something new, and then help with the further development of networks by knowing what design features of networks have what consequences

2. How do you define the desired performance characteristics of a network?

- My preference is to take what is called a theory-led view of evaluation:
 - There will be two sets of theories about the network that could guide investigations into performance
 - That of the people inquiring into the network's performance
 - N&W-G paper is this type of theory, and it may be making assumptions about ...>
 - That of the network participants, if they are not those making the inquiry

- My theory is a theory about network participants' theories (a meta-theory):
 - If a network consists of voluntary self-organising membership then a coherent view of what constitutes good performance may in fact be an *outcome* of their interactions, an achievement in itself.
 - (This is also my view of many large aid organisations. A lot of work has to go into ensuring coherence, and activities which are locally defined as “successful” may not be seen as so valuable if they are

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heading in the wrong direction, as judged by a large scale strategy statement)

- There are at least three levels of potential agreement / disagreements between participants
 - Over appropriate objectives
 - Over ways of getting there, the activities or process necessary to get to the objective
 - Over evidence of actual achievement in relationship to specific objectives.
- These can be seen as the participants “theory of change”
 - Most formal organisations, let alone networks, have multiple theories of change co-existing at the same time, some of which can co-exist and others that are inherently in conflict. Making them visible is one way of managing them.

3. How can the N&W-G list of indicators be used?

- As a menu of potentially relevant performance attributes which network participants can respond to
 - Which do they think are most-to-least important (as objectives)?
 - Which are more “means” and which are more “ends”?
 - Which do they think are most-to-least present in the existing network (or present versus absent)
 - Which of these attributes best defines the difference between this and other networks they are or have been participating in
- Which can be compared to the evaluators own (or another key stakeholder's) theory of the network, expressed in answers to the same questions
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 - Which are more “means” and which are more “ends”?
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 - Which of these attributes best defines the difference between this and other networks they are or have been participating in
- N&W-G's categories of indicators provide a means of developing and testing a two-level theory of network performance
 - Firstly at the level of the 3 x 4 category combinations
 - Then at the level of individual indicators

4. Wider theories on networks

- Social network analysis focuses on the relationships between participants, rather than the traits or attributes of participants analysed as individual entities, regardless of relationships
 - But either may be useful *predictors* of the perceived performance of the network.
 - Performance can be judged by number of attributes present from the N7G-W list, as discussed above
 - E.g. What sort of connections between participants are most associated with what sort of perceived network performance? (as seen by same)

- E.g. what types of network participants are likely to be associated with what sort of perceived network performance ? (as seen by same)
- The N&W indicators are about the performance of the whole of the network.
 - In the field of social network analysis a distinction is widely made between whole network perspectives and ego perspectives. The later being the relationship a given participant has with others, and their connections, but not beyond.
 - Individual ego perspectives on relationships may be useful predictors of perceived performance of the whole network
 - E.g. how many and what kinds of relationships do they have with other participants?
- Networks are always part of wider networks
 - Burt's paper on the network structure of social capital (use Google) made a distinction between close interconnections between a group of people and each member's own unique relationships with others in networks beyond that group. It is the combination of both that he defined as "social capital"
 - That is one way of looking at network participants that I have experimented with once
 - What are the interconnections between each participant. Theory is that the more the better (as evidence by participants rating of the networks performance)
 - What unique connections does each member have? Theory is that participant with most valuable external connection's will have more interconnectedness within the network)