

Maintaining Innovative Potential Over Time

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Abstract

How can you maintain your community's social innovative potential over the long term to devise new approaches to intractable social-ecological problems, adapt to changing conditions, and scale innovations to catalyze systems change? Leadership practices that foster capacity to generate fundamental social innovation were identified by highly experienced designers and facilitators of learning networks during a dialogue series on how to maintain lively, generative innovation communities held from 2018 to 2020. In their own words, I offer their advice on how to choose an appropriate suite of innovations through co-work that both probes the system for opportunities for change and pursues harder-to-achieve leverage points for change by building on short-term innovation. I also offer their insights into how to engage your community member's innovative potential over time and how to generate useful rapid feedback to stay aligned with your goals using measures that enhance your community's capacity to self-assess. This can both hold the organization accountable and build capacity for self-governance. In my commentary, I suggest how this practical wisdom concretely applies ideas about systems change to the challenges of organizational leadership.

Keywords: systems change, social innovation, social-ecological problems, rapid feedback, leadership

Introduction

How can you nurture and maintain your community's innovative potential for system's change? It can take a very long time to devise new approaches to intractable social-ecological problems, adapt to changing conditions, and scale innovations to catalyze systems change. In addition, since social innovation may encounter active resistance, innovators need to cultivate political will and the support of a community with the appetite to institutionalize and resource an innovation. Accordingly, the capacities required to cultivate social innovation over time are wide ranging, drawing on imagination, openness, creativity, purpose, empathy, presence, courage, initiative, persistence, and collaboration. One initiative oriented to cultivating social innovation (Rockefeller Foundation 2016) proposed this list of core features:

- Deep insights and understanding into the workings and potential of the system;
- Innovative, systemic prototype initiatives that serve as “living examples” of a new reality;
- Strong, trusting relationships among key players in the system; and
- Strengthened individual and collective capacities.

But then the next question is – how do you cultivate these features? This analysis focuses on this question of how maintain a community’s social innovative potential by examining what the designers and facilitators of learning networks – or “netweavers” - do to foster and enhance their organizations capacities to generate social innovation. I group the netweaver’s insights under three headings:

- How to choose the appropriate suite of innovations;
- How to engage your membership to enhance their innovative potential, and;
- How to generate useful and timely rapid feedback from your community to stay aligned with your evolving goals.

I also suggest how the netweavers’ insights complement some of the core ideas and practices of reflective practitioners within the field of social-ecological systems change, including:

- The many kinds of systems change that can occur across different leverage points and scales (Meadows 1997, O’Brien 2018);
- The relationship between creativity and complexity when organizations are at the “edge of chaos” (Warren et al. 1998; Gell-Mann 1994);
- How change dynamics aren’t linear or predictable, and can be understood as part of an adaptive cycle (Holling 1996), and;
- How developmental evaluation can help to create and sustain the conditions for creativity over time (Patton 2010; 2019).

These complementarities underscore how the netweaver’s practical wisdom concretely applies broader thinking with the systems change field to the challenges of organizational leadership.

Methods

The insights presented in this article series here were principally derived from two online dialogues that I convened on Zoom on May 22, 2019, and August 1, 2019. In each of these 90-minute dialogues highly experienced netweavers discussed the challenges of building and maintaining change-making networks.

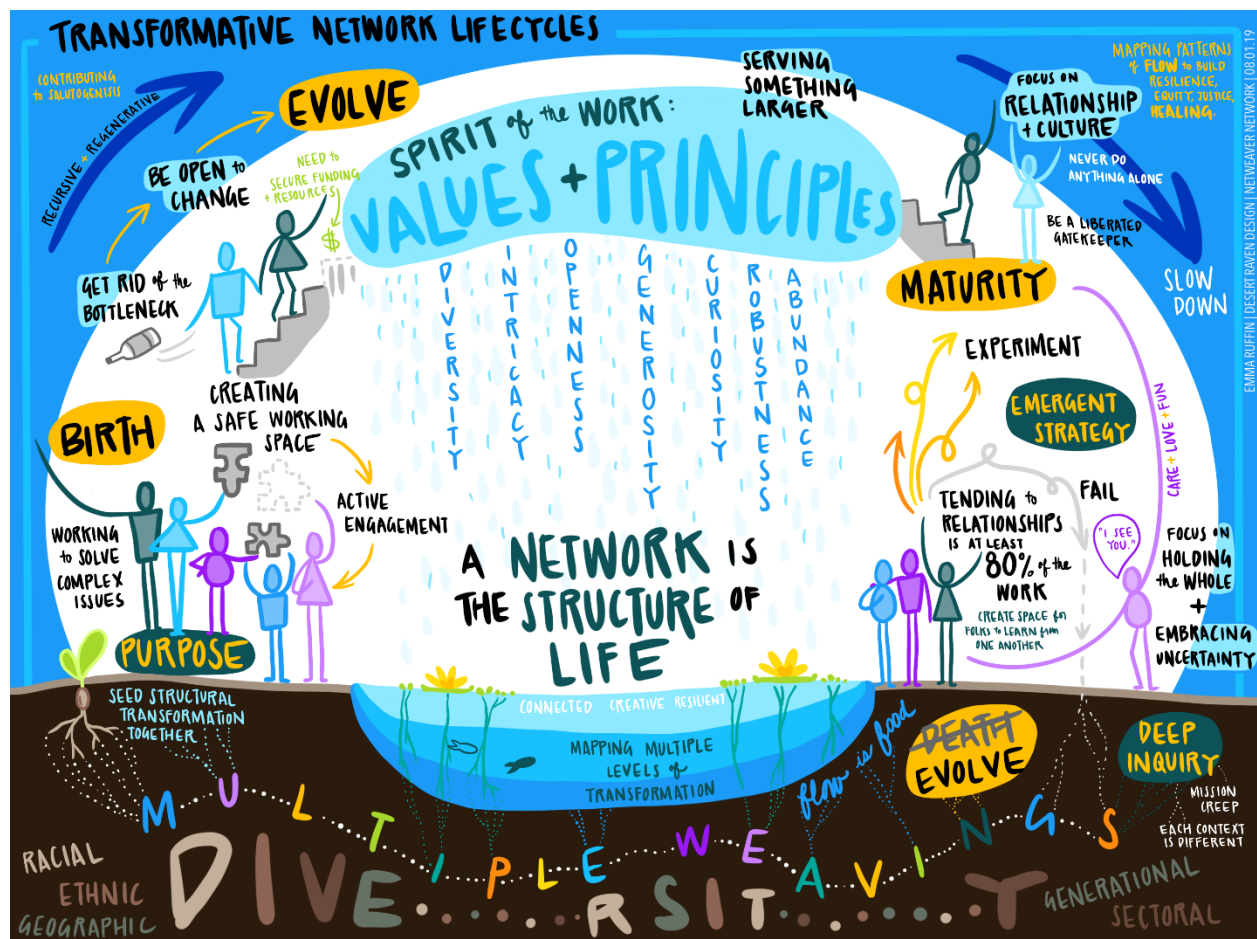
The first of these dialogues focused on how to manage network lifecycles in ways that contribute to capacity building for systems change. Participating netweavers and their organizations were:

- [Sarah Ann Shanahan: Director of Community Management, The RE-AMP Network](#)
- [Stuart Cowan: Founding Convener, Regenerative Communities Network](#)
- [Michelle Medley-Daniel: Director of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network](#)
- [Curtis Ogden: Organizing team of Food Solutions New England](#)

The core questions that I asked the netweavers during this dialogue were:

- What are the essential parts of a healthy new social innovation network?
- What are the essential parts of a mature social innovation network?
- When do we know that a network is ready to end?
- Is a network like an individual organism with a beginning, middle and end, or do you have a different mental model?

Below is the visual record of this dialogue:



Graphic by Emma Ruffin

The second dialogue focused on how netweavers could evaluate if their efforts were making a difference. Participating networks and their organizations were:

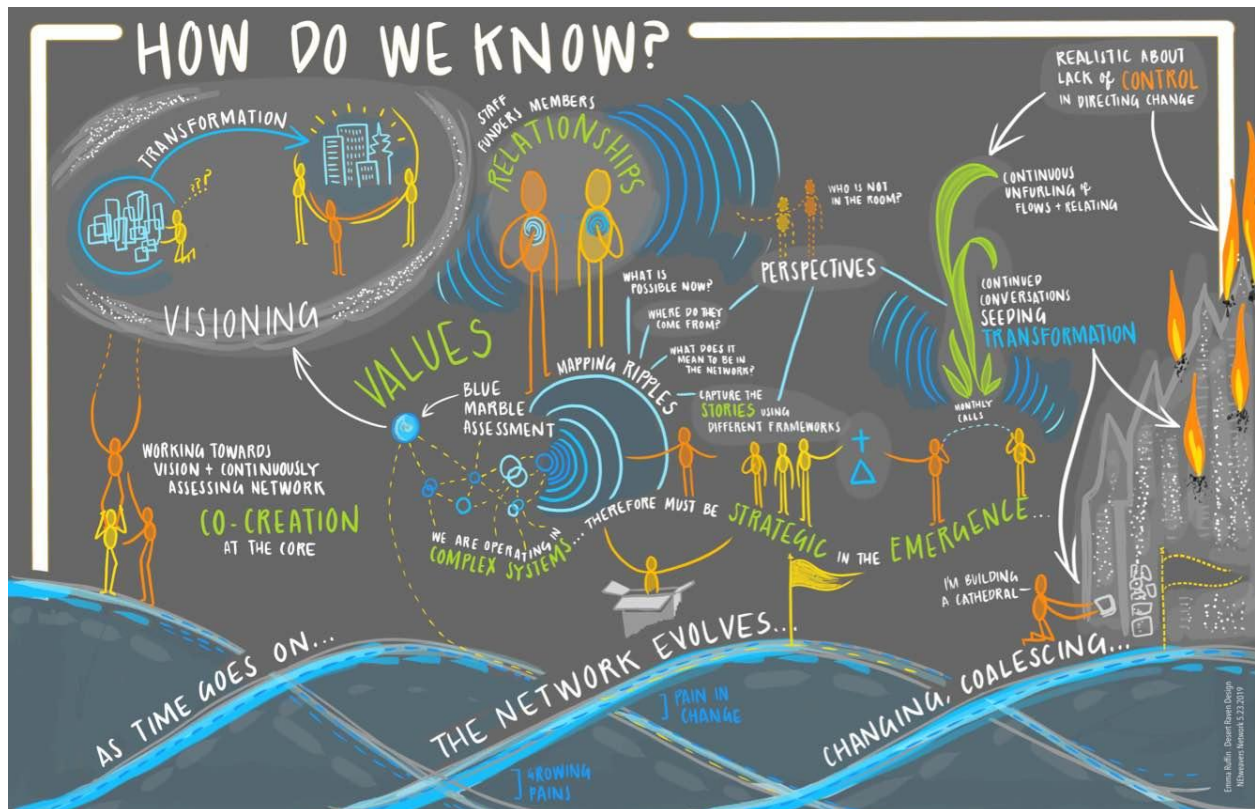
- Gail Francis: Strategic Director, and Sarah Ann Shanahan: Director of Community Management at The RE-AMP Network
- Stuart Cowan: Founding Convener, Regenerative Communities Network

- [Michelle Medley-Daniel: Director of the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network](#)

The core questions that I asked the netweavers during this dialogue were:

- What have you learned as netweavers about how to assess innovative impact?
- How do you currently monitor or assess how your network is moving toward social and ecological change?

Below is the visual record of this dialogue:



Graphic by [Emma Ruffin](#)

In addition, some of the insights presented in this article were derived from the other seven dialogues convened between 2018-2000 to explore how to maintain lively, generative networks, which are described in Goldstein (2021).

Participants in each dialogue were sent follow-up questions to stimulate additional ideas and reflection. The dialogues were recorded and transcribed, and the transcription and responses to follow-up questions were coded and analyzed using [Delve](#) content analysis software. Analysis of individual cases was guided by grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) with an emphasis on

identifying emergent themes and insights (Law, 2004). This article contains the principal ideas from this analysis, along with direct quotations from the participating netweavers, which were edited to enhance their clarity and enable them to stand alone in this format. These edits were limited to changing tense or pronoun and removing elements characteristic of verbal speech (e.g., phrases like “um” and “well”).

How to choose the appropriate suite of innovations

Develop a large portfolio of innovations that enable you to pursue a range of innovative possibilities

While each netweaver had a clear idea of the core challenge their community was intended to address, they were neither confident in their understanding of how to change a complex social-ecological system nor in a position to implement changes unilaterally. Accordingly, they were all in favor of a very eclectic and open-minded approach to identifying and pursuing possible innovations:

- “Since you can't know what the new states of being will be like you constantly need to try new things and do very deep experimentation, exploring different types of possibilities. “
- “It's not getting fixated on only one way or one solution here but the ability to zoom out more broadly and see a bigger picture.”

Not only can a broad search window serve to identify many possible strategies, but it can also help to weigh the benefits against the costs associated with different strategies, from time and resource requirements to the risks of destabilizing the existing system. The netweavers emphasized the need to take the time to think through secondary and tertiary impacts of innovation on the system as a whole:

- “If you think of your system like a house, it's not like you have to get rid of the load bearing wall. It's recognizing that maybe there was a better way. Understanding what is a load bearing wall makes you more efficient because if you try to move that you're going to spend a lot of energy, a lot of time, a lot of resources. So, it might be better to think about how you accept that as a constant in the equation. Where is it that you have give, and why are things structured the way they are now? This leads to more impactful strategies because we appreciate the complexity of the system that we're trying to change.”

Co-work can help to identify what aspects of the system are critical and vulnerable. Compartmentalizing interventions by conducting them as team experiments at small-scale conducted enables you to identify what can and can't be removed or replaced without risking bringing the whole structure down.

Co-work can build the foundations for deeper change

As you organize different co-working experiments that build skills and encourage new collaborative work habits, you create the possibility for adoption of new group norms, shared language, and co-management capacity:

- “Co-work can build habits and shifts patterns of behavior that enable people to move forward on things together rather than on their own.”
- “This is work that we do in service of building a common language.”
- “You can develop a culture of appreciation, oriented not toward status-building or competition but toward co-learning and fun. We create a culture in the network that we're all in this together, that no one of us is smarter than all of us.”

I observed the power of co-work in my study of the U.S Fire Learning Network (Goldstein and Butler 2009). In addition to generating tangible strategies to cope with wildfire risk, co-work conducted in different fire landscapes across the country enabled fire practitioners to increase their ability to restore their own landscapes while gaining a network-wide sense of common purpose and action orientation and repertoire of knowledge and skills. Over time, as they worked in parallel and shared their stories, the fire practitioner's connections deepened despite rarely seeing the other members of their far-flung network. While their work was specific to local context it was mutually comprehensible, enabling them to develop mutual coherence and a shared mission.

Subtly, over time, fire practitioners developed a shared understanding of why they were unable to restore their landscapes a generation after the fire profession had reached consensus that a new approach to managing wildfire was required (Pyne 2004). Seeing the need for a new fire management paradigm and the obstacles to its adoption, they could translate this dissonance into probing efforts in their communities to challenge hidden organizational rules and habits that had become taken-for-granted and had come to define the contours of their profession. These small-scale experiments contributed to emergence of a shared network-wide strategy for transforming a deeply ingrained institutional culture built around fire suppression, enhancing the network's potential to promote change without need for tight central coordination.

One thing that was remarkable to me in studying the Fire Learning Network was how the practical aims of fire practitioners – to improve their ability to manage wildfire risk in forests and grasslands – flowed seamlessly into their political strategy, which flowed in turn into transformation of their personal and collective professional identity. This integration echoes Karen O'Brien's (2018) description of the three spheres of transformation, the practical, political, and personal. O'Brien argues that engaging individuals and groups within all three spheres of transformation enhances their agency and empowerment by developing their future consciousness and sense of what is “imaginable, desirable, viable, and achievable.”

The netweaver's advice closely parallels the focus that many systems theorists have on activating social agency. Given systems complexity, it isn't feasible to guide systems change through linear or predictive planning and management. Instead many systems thinkers favor fostering ongoing reflexivity and social learning to respond to unforeseen contingencies, emergent outcomes, cross-scale interaction, non-linear effects and feedback loops, and contested values and goals (Cundill et al. 2012, Ison 2018; Van Kerkhoff 2014). In her foundational paper on systems leverage points, Donella Meadows (1997) orients us toward activating social agency when she suggests that the least influential systems changes are associated with changing physical parameters and the most influential and hard-to-achieve systems changes are our mental models, norms, values, and beliefs. These are in turn mediated by the laws, procedures, and customs that govern the distribution and flow of power, authority, and resources (Moore et al. 2014).

How to engage your membership to enhance their innovative potential

When the initial rush of enthusiasm passes you need to create opportunities for interaction

Group interaction may decline after the initial excitement wears off. The high point of your community's esprit de corps may be right at the beginning of your efforts, even though you may be operating in crisis and have few resources or organizational infrastructure:

- “In the beginning there's a sense that we're in it together, we are the underdogs, we have a new idea, we've got to convince people of this, we don't have any resources, let's roll up our sleeves. It's like when you're in college and you're staying up all night to write a paper. And you're really happy when there's a couple other friends doing the same thing. You start to cheer each other on. And, you know, it becomes kind of fun to be staying up all night to write your paper.”

As this collective spirit yields to initial success, it can become harder to continue to succeed:

- “In the early years, there's a sense that we're out there on the front, this is new, it's going to be hard, we don't have the money. Once it becomes larger and more mature that particular aspect of the culture is lost.”
- “You've got the people who are the first attracted to it. As more and more come to the side, the whole thing eventually can kind of collapse.”

Growing your community means that the new people won't have the opportunity to get to know one another and interact in the same way as your early adopters:

- “Networks do change when there's more people to interact with.”
- “How to maintain the relationships as you grow is a very interesting challenge. When smaller, you're all interacting together. As it gets bigger, that doesn't happen as easily. The very things that have produced the energy and the relationships are more challenging to maintain.”

Your need to try to replace the relationship-building energy that occurred spontaneously during the early days because this energy is needed to maintain your innovative potential:

- “The early leadership attracted committed members who valued that kind of interaction - it happened organically. But you can't always count on that, right? You need to say, “We value creating relationships with each other – first it emerged organically and now we need to intentionally cultivate it”.”

At the same time, you need to attract new members - and what excites your new recruits may seem boring and passé to your early adopters:

- “We're hearing from people who've been involved for a long time that there's nothing new. And then we're hearing from people who come for the first or second time that “This meeting is rocking my world, I finally found my people, God, I can't believe I've been missing you all this time.” So there's a real difference in expectation and needs based on longevity.”
- “We struggle with how to have that deeper and more sophisticated experience while still being welcoming and growing the community and providing professionals who are exploring a new space for what they need.”

It is not easy keeping the early adopters engaged while attracting new members who want to experience what the early adopters had. Systems thinking doesn't provide clear guidance for choosing between the two: do you focus on increasing your numbers, which may create the possibility for a tipping point for change in your system? Or do you focus on going deeper, to achieve the transformation of identity/paradigm described earlier? The next section suggests that the way to manage this tension to let go of organizational coherence over time, rather than attempting to resolve the tension or fixating on one preferred strategy.

Begin with cohesion and alignment, and become less cohesive as you progress

Networks begin with a fixed mindset, striving for certainty and cohesion around a set mission, membership, and goals, which is necessary to initially establish confidence and align the group:

- “It starts with the convener who brings some initial coherence to disparate parts and gives it a powerful channeling purpose.”
- “At first, tending to relationships is at least 80% of the work.”

The turning point comes when your members closely identify with your organization and each other:

- “When members are thinking big and saying things like “we should” instead of “the network should”, it suggests that a collective culture can hold the whole.”

Once trust and collective intention are established, a mature network can become dynamic and mutable:

- “Over time during its life cycle, a network requires pathways toward greater diversity, greater intricacy and greater robustness in terms of what’s moving through it. A network that is mature and more transformative will be distinguished by that incredible attention to variety of all kinds.”
- “In the mature network you see a lot of change over time. There's analysis, there's action, there's collaboration, and all of these things are always evolving and changing over time.”

A healthy mature network is constantly adapting and experimenting, with more room for risk taking and a greater tolerance for uncertainty:

- “That's the heart of it, that sense of evolution, trying things constantly, being able to do very deep experiments and be held in that inquiry. Just unceasing exploration of possibility.”
- “Mature networks prioritize experimentation and failure, trying different things and being willing to forge into the unknown.”

One netweaver suggested that this is like the contrast psychologist Carol Dweck (2006) made between a “fixed mindset” in which character, intelligence, and creative ability are established and unchanging and a “growth mindset” which is more experimental and sees failure as a springboard for growth. A fixed mindset isn’t necessarily worse - each mindset carries its own strengths and potential. If your community starts out in a growth mindset there may not be enough cohesion to build a common identity - taking too much risk early on before trust is built and a collective intention established could end up destabilizing the community. However, if your community stays in a fixed mindset it can stagnate. A growth mindset embraces emergence without becoming irresolute or unfocused:

- “If the community doesn't have the potential within it to lead to diversity and intricacy of ties, to move beyond bottlenecking and to get to a place of much more generous sharing, then it doesn't achieve the abundance and it doesn't evolve.”
- “You embrace uncertainty, while at the same time being able to take decisive action.”

The idea that it is better to be clearly defined and consistent at first and then become more eclectic and adventurous later contrasts with the popular idea that young “start-up” firms should have no fear of moving fast and breaking things, while more established firms develop a firm sense of mission and identity, are more conservative, and play by well-established rules. On the contrary, if your objective is to maximize your creative potential AND maintain organizational cohesion at-a-distance, you need to structure your initial efforts to get buy-in and build community, and then become less structured with time, to generate the diversity of change possibilities feasible across multiple leverage points and scales.

This advice resonates with the systems idea that organizations are most creative when they are operating far from equilibrium, at the edge of chaos and stability. The term “edge of chaos” was coined by scientists at the Santa Fe Institute (Warren et al. 1998) to identify the conditions where order and disorder are in a delicate but optimal balance to promote innovation for change. A degree of disorder, instability, and discomfort may provoke self-organizing processes, potentially leading to an emergent order (Stacey 1995: 478). As Wheatley (2006: 170) wrote, “Change always involves a dark night when everything falls apart. Yet if this period of dissolution is used to create new meaning, then chaos ends and new order emerges.” While some guidelines are available on how to balance on the edge of chaos – such as to maintain maximum interconnectivity and diversity to promote generative learning (Gell-Mann 1994) – bringing this into practice is more reliant on well-grounded experience than the application of established principles – as Taylor and Cranton (2013 p. 41), concluded, “Little is known about what brings learners to the ‘edge’ of the learning, or if they need to be already at that edge before learning will occur.”

Think of your community as something that creates thriving in the larger system, not an end in itself

Do not focus exclusively on the well-being of your organization – see it as a part of the larger system and change or end it when it no longer serves to generate innovation. Your community should contribute to the renewal of the larger organizational ecosystem in which it is embedded:

- “The common question all the time is: how is our connection and flow contributing to the resilience of whatever system we are concerned with?”
- “Activity through networks needs to be regenerative, it needs to contribute to the self-nourishing self-remaking capacity of systems.”

Correspondingly, your community should consciously be grounded and integrated in the functional communities that already populate the organizational ecosystem:

- “It’s not about reinventing the wheel, it’s about trying to identify those wheels that are already spinning and that are really spinning fast and efficiently and connect the dots between those networks.”
- “It’s not about creating something entirely new – often it’s about building up and supporting already existing and functioning communities.”

A community is no longer useful when it prioritizes its own needs over its ecosystem function - it can do more harm rather than good by focusing on nourishing itself:

- “Outgrowing usefulness and then having mission creep take over can be a mini version of “oligarchic dysfunction”, where an organization tends to become more self-serving over time and less serving of its environment. When organizations have a perception of

scarcity, when they are competing and trying to take over, that's dysfunctional for the whole.”

To avoid having the survival of your community become your primary goal, think of your community as a changing and evolving ecosystem rather than as living creature whose purpose is to perpetuate itself:

- “When I think of my network the first image that came to my mind is a piece of land that changes over time. Maybe there were trees on it that became farmland, maybe it got restored into the prairie, and along with all these things there's a lot of other things happening at a micro level.”
- “I have an ecosystem image of a network. I was thinking of a beautiful freshwater pond and the seasons and critters appearing and disappearing. That ecosystem, there's a fundamental vibrancy there, even though through the seasons and times when the need a little bit of pruning, and then this vibrancy might reappear. I don't think of it as a single organism - it's more like a very complex weaving of multiple ecosystems.”

Through these ecological metaphors, the netweavers described their networks not as distinct entities but as part of a broader organizational ecosystem. They saw their role as remaining sensitive to larger system processes and patterns, which shift over time like the seasons. They cautioned against letting their network's internal imperatives and priorities come foremost and were willing to let their own organizational strength and capacity fade, with the confidence that it might return, perhaps in another form. This ecological worldview resonates strongly with the idea of the adaptive cycle in systems thinking, the idea that systems go through periods of emergence and growth and stability, which then lead to breakdown, reorganization, and renewal (Holling 1986). Like the seasons, all these stages call for a characteristic strategy to accentuate the potential for change in the system, and efforts to stop the cycle are rejected as system “traps” (Carpenter and Brock 2008) that reduce resilience and only delay and heighten the potential for loss.

This integrative and processual view requires a high degree of sensitivity to system conditions and when opportunities may unexpectedly emerge - as Francis Westley (2020) recently wrote, “It is the transition between these phases, when a system is moving from one state to another that offers the greatest leverage. This is when timing becomes vital to innovation. There are times when even systems that are deeply resistant to change can be reconfigured.” Accordingly, the netweavers are very attuned to maintaining their awareness of their network's capacity to bring about change, which is the subject of the next section.

How to generate useful and timely rapid feedback from your community to stay aligned with your evolving goals

Build capacity to self-assess “flow”

The netweavers provided useful advice on how to generate useful and timely feedback to evaluate your community’s innovative potential. They emphasized that tracking internal measures of your community’s health is often more practicable and useful than attempting to measure progress toward your intended outcomes, especially if your objectives are complex and multi-causal:

- “We’ve tried to track things like how much greenhouse gas emissions were coming from here, what types of fossil fuel, and so on. It was really unsatisfying. Now we try to tell a story about the network itself by tracking our connections, our capacity building and our ability to co-create strategy.”

However, assessing community health is not like taking a single measurement – its relational and cumulative, and more like assessing momentum or rate of change. The netweavers suggested thinking about it as a “flow”, an immersive feeling of being focused and engaged (Csikszentmihalyi 1975):

- “It’s not about connection, it’s about flow. At the end of the day, that’s what actually shifts things. When power shifts, that’s flow, or when resources shift in terms of how they move from where to where. It’s not just the form, it’s the underlying energetic dynamic that shifts. It comes down to what feeds the people as a whole.”

This kind of flow is collective - the sum of what individuals are feeling and an emergent property of collective interaction:

- “Flow is a powerful way of reclaiming energy, so that we’re not just wasting our resources. Flow is a way to capture participant energy and diffuse it back so that people don’t get burnt out and walk away, taking that energy someplace else.”

Understanding collective flow is about pattern recognition and identifying healthy patterns of interaction is a sensemaking process. Accordingly, the people who can best evaluate flow are embedded in the organization – to extend the metaphor, you need to be in the current to sense the flow. An example of this is how Jane Jacobs’ (1961) experience as a journalist and community activist led her to recognize how healthy communities were dependent on urban form.

Allow community evaluation measures to emerge from community interaction

Community flow can’t be engineered, although the conditions for self-organizing can be shaped and magnified to increase their potential (Mintzberg 1987). To shape and magnify this potential

you need to identify ways to measure the state of where flow is occurring that are simple and easy to observe during the everyday activities of your community:

- “We’ve done baseline measures of the range of practices people were using at the beginning. Then we can see whether they are adopting new practices and expanding their frame of reference based on engagement with their peers.”

Some evaluation metrics that netweavers found useful were:

1. How much and what kind of commitment is taking place within your community:
 - “We’re seeing different levels of engagement. This is the second year in a row now that we have competitive elections for our steering committee.”
2. How community members interact with influential people outside of your community:
 - “We’re trying to pay attention to the way that conversation is changing our member’s access and opportunity to get to people who have decision making power. We can see over time changes in our ability to influence that system.”
3. How inclusive is your community:
 - “We use informal metrics to assess the well-being of the network, such as change in demographics. For example, the slate of candidates that we have running for our board does not have a single white man running for our board for this cycle. And I think that’s an interesting dynamic. And it shows the change, again, how the network is making a difference, how we’re making an impact in the ways that we want to see happen.”
4. Member’s emotional connection to the community:
 - “One of the things that we started paying attention to is how people are feeling about the network. And I know, that seems kind of weird to ask, but it’s actually really important to know whether people coming into the space are feeling welcome and included.”
5. How people are framing critical topics:
 - “We assess change in members’ conversation topics over time – for example, five years ago conversations focused on utility company profitability, whereas today the conversations focus on democratizing energy.”

It is important to keep in mind that the highest purpose of assessment is to enhance your community’s capacity to self-reflect, self-assess, and hold one another accountable. You need to develop your members’ interest in and ability to participate in assessment by identifying what it

is that they care about as well as how to track it. Since your members probably have limited interest in digging into community evaluation metrics or survey results, a user-friendly approach is to regularly perform “micro-assessments” to continuously assess the health of your community and make necessary tweaks in real-time. For example, one netweaver described how they end every meeting with an interactive group discussion of what worked and what needed to change – what they call a “+/Delta”. They noted that this gives everyone useful information and signals a desire to be open to ongoing feedback. Another netweaver hosted a monthly call where members reflected on the health of their network and aligned on a “shared story”:

- “If there's a powerful story that seems compelling to everybody and demonstrates that we're all in this shared story, then that can be enough to align the needs of all parties and create true participatory assessment while allowing for both pre-defined and emergent metrics.”

This ad-hoc and process-oriented approach to evaluation and assessment contrasts with traditional formative-and-summative evaluation, with its focus on external evaluators who identify objective metrics to demonstrate that initial goals were achieved. What it resembles in many respects is developmental evaluation, which was designed specifically for systems change initiatives that could not identify their objectives because there wasn't centralized control, and the system dynamics were too complex and changing to predict what innovation would be most effective. According to its developer Michael Patton (2010), in developmental evaluation, “Patterns of change emerge from rapid, real time interactions that generate learning, evolution, and development – if one is paying attention and knows how to observe and capture the important and emergent patterns.” Developmental evaluators support rapid strategic adjustments and quick course corrections that are critical to success under conditions of complexity.

The evaluation techniques that the netweaver's described are an even greater move toward informality, where the metrics emerge in context through situated experience in real time. With no developmental evaluator who provides real-time feedback to program staff, there is a greater reliance on the members of the network themselves to participate in the evaluation and analysis. Practically, this eclectic and ad-hoc approach to evaluation assessment can be integrated into your organization at low cost and it can be done in ways that enhance your everyday operations. The high level of community consultation and participation required for this reflexive approach can also contribute to building your community's capacity for self-governance.

Conclusion

A leader of a social innovation community can enhance social innovation capacity by initiating co-work that enables their community to pursue a range of innovative possibilities, while remaining sensitive to the potential of some innovations to disrupt desirable aspects of the status quo. This co-work can enable the community to both probe the system for opportunities for change and pursue deeper, harder-to-achieve leverage points for change by building on easier-to-achieve, shorter-term innovations. Maintaining the creativity and dynamism of your community

is often difficult to do after an initial flush of enthusiasm of commitment, so the community leader should keep longstanding members engaged by actively promoting ongoing connection, while remaining an exciting place for newcomers.

Through time, the leader should remain focused on how the community promotes innovation and change within a wider system, rather than on the survival of the community itself. Opportunities for change depend on systemic forces beyond your control, such as the location of the system within the adaptive cycle. While it's desirable to know whether you've achieved your ultimate objective of creating systems change, this is both hard to assess and ultimately not a useful measure of your present capacity – it's better to generate useful and timely rapid feedback from within your community that provides a sense of whether you are sustaining what one netweaver called an “underlying energetic dynamic“. Measures that enhance your community's capacity to self-assess can both hold the organization accountable to one another and build your capacity for self-governance.

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