



Training course Senior Service Worker

Networking in home and community based settings for elderly

Networking in community based settings

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2. Networking in community based settings

Networks are fragile entities (voluntariness, great variety and diversity of actors, heterarchical controlling). This is the strength and the weakness of a network. As amalgamation of autonomous partners networks have to develop a new culture of communication and have to find their own rules. Controlling must keep the different interests in balance.

Organisational forms and governance / controlling of networks

Actors working in networks face complex challenges. Basically no written-down rules are necessary within networks and co-operations, many contacts and relationships are self-evident. "Generally: Especially for long-term cooperation the partners should agree on a cooperation-contract, when services are provided and money is payed."* (BMW Berlin 2001, p. 14, in Block p. 33).

Networks need governance and coordination, i.e. a network-management. Again the special challenges of network-management:

- voluntary participation
- diversity of actors
- heterarchical governance (governance among equals) Or, like Bienzle concludes:

"Networks or nets are exceptional (...) because a lot of (autonomous) actors are linked to each other with special relationships and form a whole system. Thereafter they form a horizontal, heterarchical structure without centres" (Bienzle p. 17)

Net-like co-operations do not exclude hierarchical structures a priori. They exist alongside heterarchical structures, interlink with them and form hybrid forms. (Bienzle p. 17) Networks give themselves forms of organisation dependent on the functions they have to fulfil. Bienzle distinguishes the forms of organisation (of networks) by their content and illustrates it in the following graph:



Dimension	Degree of organisation
Issue specificity	Low / high
Moderation	Continuous / changing
Voluntariness	Low / high
Hierarchy	Hierarchical / cooperative
Time of engagement	Continuous / changing
Size of meetings	Small / large
Division of labour	Low / high
Exclusivity	Free / limited access
Formality	Low / high
Heterogeneity	Homogenous / heterogenous
Range	Local / international

Organization forms of networks (Bienzle p. 17, transl.)

2.1. Network governance

Networks are fragile entities. They are a mesh of persons, where the participants fulfil a double function: As a person A, B or C and as agents for the organisations A, B or C.

“Because networks are a mesh of persons you can ensure their continuance by personal interactions. The usual stabilisers of social entities like rules, regulations, systems of command and obedience or economic incentives, do not only not work in networks but they destroy the precondition of a network: Personal trust, the trust of person A that person B is not just an agent of the organisation B, but adheres to the greater aims of the network.”

(INQA p. 12)

As amalgamation of autonomous partners networks expect a culture of collaboration. For this not only new structures have to be found but also new ways of conduct have to be learnt. (Themenheft 2 SONG p. 13)

As stated by Block, networks are learning systems, where all participants are learning from each other. (Block p. 9) Thus the success of a network depends on its governance. Sydow



describes four tasks or functions of controlling of networks which indicate also stages of networking.

2.1.1. Stage of selection

The following questions are pivotal during the founding stage of a network and stay being important:

- Who should participate and who not?
- How to find partners for networks
- Who has got to talk to whom?
- Who fits in and who doesn't?
- How to handle competitors in the borough / network?
- How is the relation between competition and cooperation valued?

In order to answer these questions it is necessary to be clear about your own targets and to define the requirements on your (preferred) partners. As Block states, private reasons like sympathy, personal closeness, or the cool realisation of your own weaknesses and faults can be pivotal. (Block p. 21)

2.1.2. Stage of allocation

The allocation of tasks and resources and the allocation of responsibility on the partners is the main item of this stage:

- What do we want to do and how do we allocate the tasks?
- Who is responsible for what?
- Who covers the costs?
- How to create a win-win situation?
- What services can be contributed?
- How to achieve transparency?

In order of a network to work out all partners should profit from the common work. "It is important that the work is documented and defined in order to make clear to the partners, who has contributed what." (Block p. 26)

Contributions are very heterogeneous, like:

- Financial/material contributions (supporting membership)



- Payments in kind (rooms, photocopier, paper)
- Working time (full-time work, voluntary work)
- Special skills (accountancy, help with the authorities)
- Contacts (political contacts, government) (see Block P. 26)

2.1.3. Stage of regulation

Topics are the agreement on rules of cooperation and the development of an own network culture. As new organisations networks must found and develop an own culture of cooperation. This is an important precondition for a committed, confident and transparent cooperation. Networks need to agree on principles and rules, so that commitment on work level is encouraged and self-evaluation is made possible. Still, it is not easy to combine the open network-structure with rules and principles.

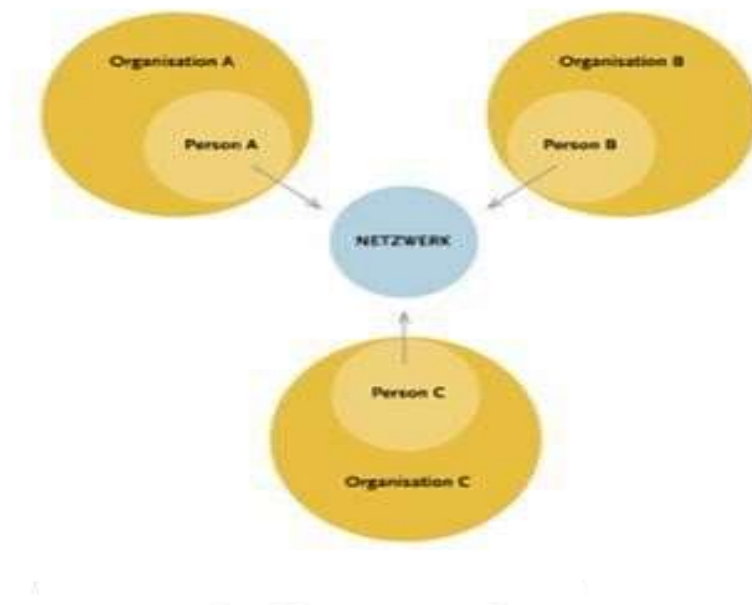
Open structures are needed in order to react flexibly on different challenges, on the other hand a certain degree of formal organisation is mandatory to act target orientated. From this results a charged relationship between the informal accountability among persons and the formal accountability of organisations. Networks and groups are organised according to soft criteria like sympathy and trust. In networks sentiments like trust and sympathy are a more important governing function than formal rules. But still: Networks are not hierarchy-devoid.



2.2. Roles and tasks in networks

Ambivalent roles of participants: The ambivalent roles of the participants cause a certain dynamic in the network. In institutional networks organisations are represented by persons. Being members of the network they pursue the aims of the network, at the same time they represent the interests of their employer. They've got to "integrate the particular interests of the participating institutions into the network and submit them under an overriding aim." (SONG Heft 2 p. 15)

Precondition for this balance to succeed is a clear assignment of the own organisation and a transparent scope of action as well as a network organisation that recognises this ambivalence and acts accordingly.



Ambivalence of network members (Picture from INQA, Gesundheitsnetzwerke p. 11)

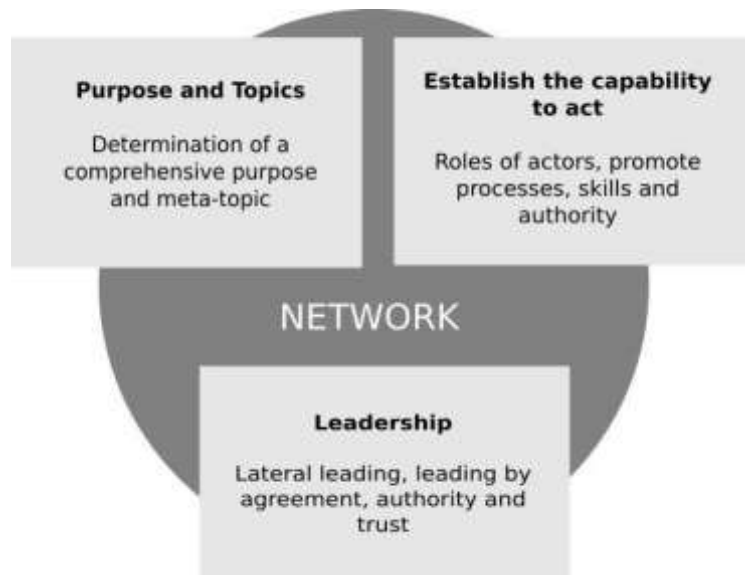
Reflection task: Please describe shortly the ambivalent role of network members and show at least on potential role conflict.



2.2.1. Tasks of the network-management / coordination during the stage of selection

In a network very different partners are linked to each other and they strive to reach targets they agreed on together. In order to achieve this, a clear assignment of tasks and transparency by communication is needed so that differing interests can be integrated and loss of information can be avoided. (Block p. 27 f)

Which tasks and roles are assigned in a network depends on the content and targets of the common endeavour. Engagement and task assignment can change. Therefore, the structure should be flexible.



Network management (Picture (transl.) from INQA: Gesundheitsnetzwerke p. 13)

Tasks in networks include (Block, p. 27f):

- maintain contacts to partners
- attune aims and contents of networks
- shape communication – organise and coordinate meetings - organise the flow of information – mailings, circulars, etc.
- document agreements, work results and progress
- structure and initiate public relations
- facilitate network meetings



- find out and process conflicts
- evaluate results - ensure quality of work - etc.

These tasks can be assigned in different ways. For example: Some networks engaged in town quarter development receive public money. These funds are often used to employ a professional network manager. This person holds a neutral position in the network. In other networks a person, that holds the trust of all partners, is designated as a network manager. It is also possible to allocate the tasks to different persons. “When allocating roles and tasks high transparency is mandatory. All partners must know who is responsible for what and which tasks are included. Solo actions are taboo!”* (<https://www.in-form.de>) However coordination and management may be allocated, the success of the network depends on it: Network-coordination is a central task.

“Only networks with specific aims, a network identity, trust, formal structures, cooperation agreements, rules, clearly allocated tasks and resources, sufficient ways of information and communication, regular cost-benefit analysis, the continuous balance between “I” and “we”, the recurring win-win situation for all concerned parties and a professional network management leads to a long-term cooperation success.” (Friedmann p. 22 f)

2.2.2 Tasks in the stage of evaluation

Evaluation covers the entire network, rules of cooperation, work results, customer satisfaction, content of the actors, the effort and the benefit of the common work. Regular evaluation of the cooperation via feedback mechanisms is a requirement for successful networking. (Bienzle p. 18/19)

In order to analyse the data the use of an analyse grid is helpful. The results can be sorted according to three main aspects:

1. Purpose of the network, dimensions:

- Target: What is to be achieved?
- Sustainability: What is to remain?

2. Structure of the network, dimensions:

- Actors: Are the important partners involved?



- Governance: Has the network an adequate management?
3. Processes in the network, dimensions:
- Interactions: How is the cooperation, what quality?
 - Impact: What are the results

(Sustainum Institut für zukunftsfähiges Wirtschaften Berlin <http://netzwerk-kompetenz.de>)

More can be found at: Qualitätssicherung in der Netzwerkarbeit

<http://netzwerkkompetenz.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Qualitätssicherung-in-der-Netzwerkarbeit.pdf>

Reflection task: Think about success factors and sticking points in networks. Compose a short satirical essay (max.one page).



2.3. Challenges in network communication and facilitation

There is hardly a realm that needs more communication than network governance. This is due to the fact that networks need a spirit of community in order to function. Only the common volition of the network actors enables the network to function. Important principles for network communication are:

- all actors are equal
- transparent information policy
- do not let 'in-groups' develop
- foresee conflicts
- convert destructivity into positive criticism
- facilitate personal contacts and informal encounters
- arrange a bit more time for breaks
 - evening events
 - common outings
- encourage mutual trust, awareness for the common responsibility
- pass on information swiftly, do not edit
- equal use of network amenities
- encourage learning, create a wealth of common know-how
- evaluate and publicise
- clear rules
- decisions should be made transparent

When these principles are observed, the network can be a source of innovation and enhance its performance. In order to promote mutuality and common added value Teller and Longmus give the following bits of advice:

- enquire regularly about the expectation of the actors
- maintain personal contact to the actors
- make it a subject of discussion if actors miss their assignments
- speak up when actors are in trouble (if they agree)
- initiate opportunities for sharing of knowledge (Teller p. 114-115)



Networks are voluntary associations. Because of interest, sympathy and personal commitment actors are part of the network. So the atmosphere, the trust, the mutual appreciation, acceptance of mutual contributions, respecting diversity and the understanding of the values of the other partners play a larger role than in companies.

According to Block (as cited above) key points for a successful networks are:

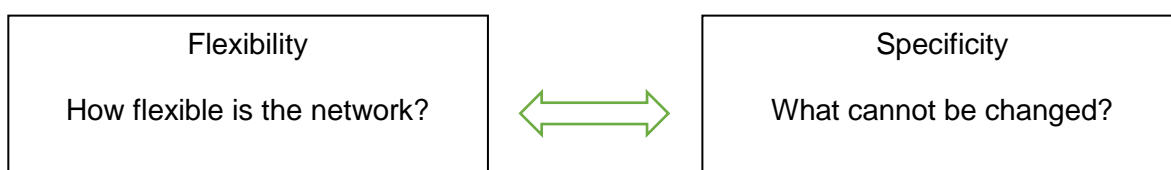
Appreciation: because without mutual appreciation and respect the work will not succeed.

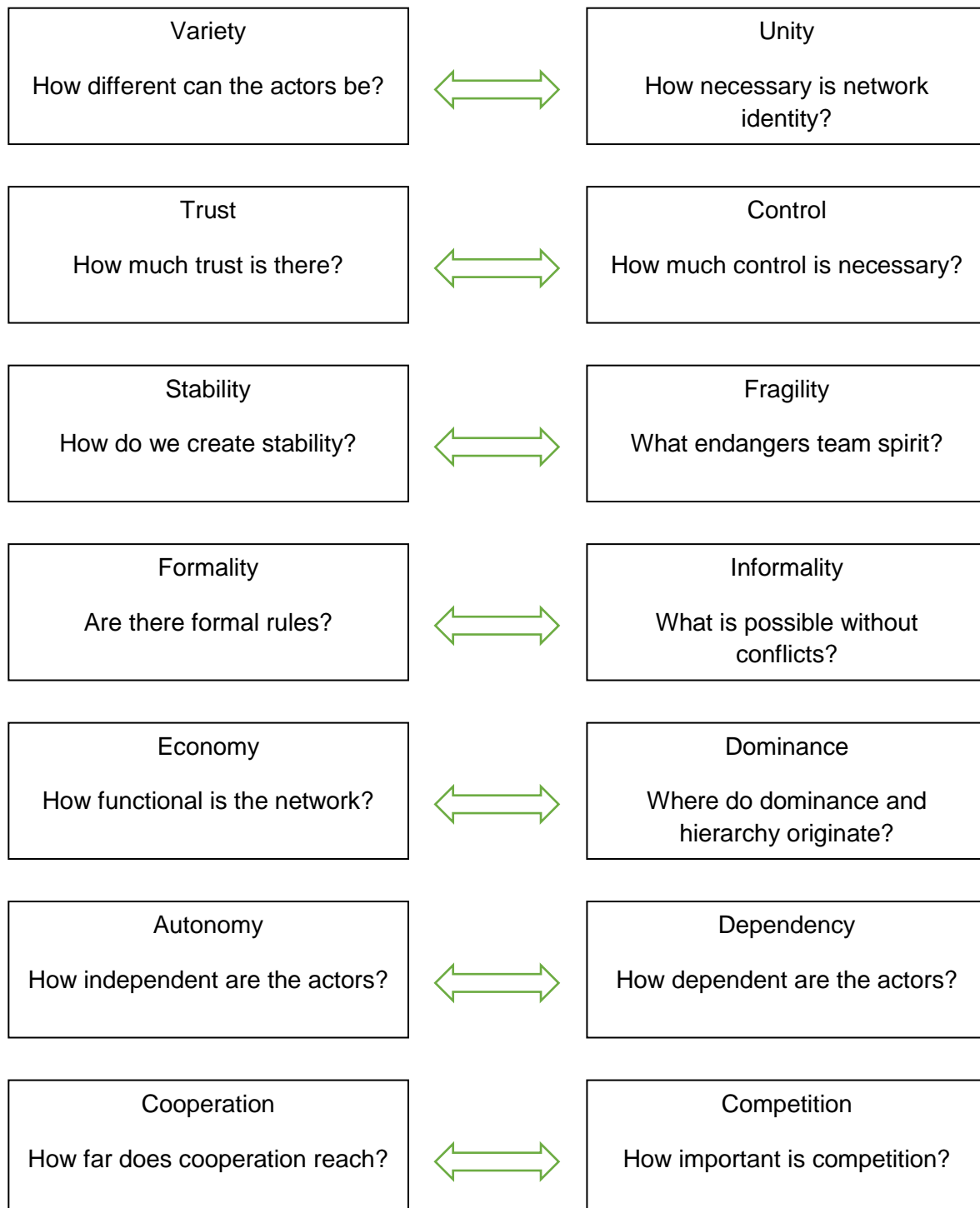
Communication: because open exchange about aims, differences, interests and expected results is a precondition for definition of the common task.

Relationship: because in voluntary common work emotions are important. “Why should I commit myself in a group when I do not feel comfortable?” A positive culture of dissent is necessary for a succeeding network.

Living environments: are contributed by all actors. They are diverse and enrich the group, open up new perspectives and ways. The experience of different cultures makes it possible to create something new. Or, like Block states: “Exceeding your own boundaries starts with the recognition of the other. (Block p. 9)

But the voluntary nature and the diversity of the actors makes networks vulnerable. Network facilitation tries to find new ways to support and stabilise the fragile structure. The facilitator has to have tact and must be very experienced, because she has a relationship building function and therefore is very important for the network climate. The facilitator faces the challenge to create a balance between areas of conflict that exist in all networks. Sydow identifies eight areas of tension that have to be taken care of. Success or failure of networking depends on their balance:







According to Sydow these areas of tension cannot vanish, they are structurally embedded, they are called structural dilemmas. But they can inspire and promote the common networking. The task of network facilitation is dilemma shaping. (Bienzle, Gelabert p. 19)
Baitsch and Müller recommend the following guidelines for dilemma shaping:

- Keep the balance between responsibility and accountability. That means distributing tasks and responsibilities and keeping the network accountable.
- Common successes and experiences create identity and trust.
- Create order and allow disorder, a great challenge to facilitation because a lot of coordination and a sense for the right moment is needed.
- Work on conflicts, delimit them but also bring smouldering conflicts to the surface so that they can be dealt with. Conflicts are the fuel of progress.
- Create transparency about mutual expectations and targets. Maintain and cultivate outside contacts.

(Baitsch/Müller 2001 in Bienzle, Jütte 2009 p. 21)

Reflection task: *Imagine that you are a moderator/facilitator. Describe the properties a good facilitator should have.*

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