

Collaborative Networks CHOICE White Paper

by Ruth Rominger, CHOICE Fellow
James L. Ritchie-Dunham, CHOICE Co-hosting Fellow

The CHOICE PICNIC Advanced Reflection Group gathered in Morro Bay, in October-November 2017, for a series of conversations among CHOICE Fellows, in-person and through our online Zoom room.

This group is exploring the general landscape of collaborative networks as platforms for transforming complex systems. (PICNIC stands for “Platforms for Integration through Collaborative Networks and Integrated Conversations.”) In Morro Bay we started to describe the specific landscape of work we see within networks in which two of the Fellows are working.

In this white paper, we set out a frame and describe our efforts and intentions:

1. the initial model building we have done
2. the data set we want to gather to evolve the model
3. the tools for field building we want to develop as we gather data and evolve the model

Model Building

The intention of model building is to develop testable hypotheses about what collaborative networks are (specification), what impact they have (consequences), and how to integrate them (antecedents).

Specification – What Do We Mean by Collaborative Networks?

We began the model building by capturing our insights from decades of experience with collaborative networks. We arranged these insights using the three levels of the Agreements Map (see Figure 1).

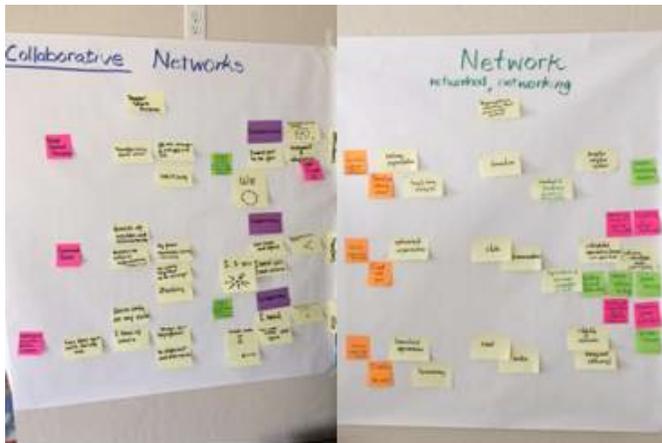


Figure 1: Insights into Collaborative Networks, Arranged by Levels of the Agreements Evidence Map

We then further categorized the insights by six Agreements Geometries [*Tensor Field geometries**]: impact, leverage, lumens engaged, interaction, experience, and choice. Table 1 captures the typology of these insights and specifies three classifications of collaborative networks. These three

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types provide an initial continuum of collaborative network impact resilience (CNness), from low to high, with specific characteristics identified along the continuum. What seems clear from these brief descriptions in Table 1 is that they have common features and yet exhibit very different mindsets and behaviors.

Geometry	Low CNness Resource/Noun	Medium CNness Development/Verb	High CNness Potential/Light
<i>Impact</i>	Outcomes toward a similar goal $Y_{GG}=e^3=0.01$	Common goal $Y_{GG}=e^3=0.1$	Deeper shared purpose $Y_{GG}=e^3=1.0$
<i>Leverage</i>	Design for segregating Be different and distinguish differences Hierarchical (bureaucratic) organization Strategic Clarity to Operationalize Performance Enhancement (SCOPE) Time horizon, 0-2 years	Design for flocking We work together to be stronger Networked organizations Time horizon, 2-5 years	Design for uniting I am stronger as you are stronger as we are stronger Evolving organization, tangibilizing ecologies* Strategic clarity to accelerate large-system evolution (SCALE) Time horizon, 5+ years
<i>Lumens Engaged</i>	Competition Single node (mine/I) Right now I need	Cooperation Node and relationships (mine and yours/I & you) Over time and space I need you/others	Collaboration Whole of nodes & relationships (ours/we) Movement and adaptation I need you to be all you; all us
<i>Interaction</i>	Some members 10^0-10^2 Resource power Stability of resources Management (efficiency) Proven outcomes	Network 10^3-10^5 Network power Building trusted relationships Interrelated organizations & resources (over time and space) Informing interrelated nodes Proven relations building and learning	Networks of networks 10^6-10^8 Tangibilization power Complex adaptive systems Proven evolutionary adaptation
<i>Experience</i>	Ego	Sympathy	Compassion
<i>Choice</i>	Focus only on my node Events I know of others How your work serves me	Focus on my node and relationships State of system Access to others' information (sharing) How does your work serve me? Communications Type and volume of resources connected (in trust)	Focus on whole, nodes, and relationships Transitions Collective intelligence Transforming each other Commitment to transforming dynamics and shared evolution
<i>Systems Thinking</i>	Systemic structures Noise (many independent voices) I need you the same	Systemic decision structures Melody (same page, same note) I need more yous	Systemic agreements structures Harmonic (different notes in specific relationship) I need your difference and relevance
<i>Attempts to Work at Next Level</i>	Resource power distribution Building of resource power by connecting	Grow network big enough to break the existing system	

<i>(that don't)</i>		Crystallizing of network identity	
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Table 1: Insights by Geometric Structure

Looking down the three columns, we observe characteristics in different levels of collaborative networkness (CNness).

Low CNness. Groups that demonstrate low CNness are formed with people who are working towards a similar goal, like feeding the poor or educating kids, usually at the local level. While they each impact a very small part of the overall system, they know the individuals they impact. Focused on the here and now, a relatively short time horizon, this “network” is designed so that each effort works on its own, segregated from other efforts. They focus on their own efforts and how to compete with others for the scarce required resources by distinguishing and promoting their differences in services and impacts. These groups tend towards hierarchical or informal structures, that seek strategic clarity to enhance their performance efficiency. This “network” of many independent voices, reaching a few to hundreds, creates a lot of noise, a confusing cacophony of different perspectives and different, competing efforts. Their power is the cumulative amount of resource they can each and collectively mobilize towards their similar goal—e.g., \$1,000,000 raised for food for the poor in our city.

Medium CNness. Groups that show medium CNness bring together people working toward a common short-term goal, like a market campaign. They are able to impact a sizeable percentage of the people in the system, connecting with those who are aligned with their common goal. They organize for local action and for aggregation and coordination of groups working at the local level. Designed to move together (flocking), they work on a 2-5-year time horizon. While the members of the network work mostly with their own local communities or constituencies, they also spend considerable resource to be aware of and move with other members of the larger network, who they need for having greater local and larger-scale impact. These networked organizations can reach thousands to hundreds of thousands of members, who spend enough time communicating with each other to build mutual trust and shared experience of their cumulative impact. Their power comes from the simultaneous strength of the core network characteristics—their identity, common communication, trust, and coordinated movement—and the strength of the periphery, how many members they have.

High CNness. High CNness groups build upon an explicit deeper shared purpose, where they aspire and strive towards whole-systems impact, reaching everyone everywhere in the system everyday. They organize for local and system-wide change, over short, medium, and long time horizons extending decades, in ways that invite and value all of the unique contributions necessary from all of the different stakeholders to accomplish the deeper shared purpose. Knowing that there is much to learn along the way, they design for evolution, for developing hypotheses that they test, adapting the pathways they use to specific outcomes as they learn from their continuous experimentation. They seek strategic clarity about how to accelerate the evolution of their large-scale, systems-change efforts, designing their organizational systems to adapt over time, at different scales of complexity. They develop and commit to processes for continuously pushing themselves to be their best, at each of their unique expressions, as this is what is needed to succeed at each stage of the evolution. It is all about bringing one’s best game and supporting each other in doing so, to be resilient along the long winding, uncertain path to achieving the deeper shared purpose.

What are the next steps for investigation and reflection?

Consequences – What Is Their Impact?

In Table 1, we described our initial characterization of initial impact resilience in the three forms. Our next steps will be to use these characteristics to study our own efforts in collaborative networks and systems thinking to measure their impact and resilience. We can then plan to look at a broader set of efforts, with wider variety of examples to expand upon the description of geometries in their different forms. to a broader set of efforts, addressing a wider variety of examples of different forms, which will be described below.

Antecedents – How Do You Build Them?

We will also continue to capture and describe the elements, some of which have been captured in Table 1, processes, and developmental stages of collaborative networks, distinguishing them on the proposed continuum.

Data Set

To test and evolve our model building, we propose the following field-based research project. We plan to test a *model for due diligence on collaborative network and systems thinking efforts*, to see what the different forms are actually designed to do, along the continuum described in Table 1. It might be interesting to identify field tests across the 3 levels of collaborative networks and the 3 types of systems thinking.

Field Building

To build the field, we could focus initially on frames and case studies.

Frames

- What are collaborative networks and systems thinking
- Why are they valuable/ the case for CN
- How do we build and evolve them

Case Studies

- CHOICE Fellow anchor projects
- Data set (see above)
- Possible media forms – videos, blogs, articles, white papers, books, discussion groups, courses/onboarding materials