# COVER SHEET

**Network Structures: Working Differently And Changing Expectations**

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# Network Structures: Working Differently And Changing Expectations

## Abstract

There is a growing need for innovative methods of dealing with complex, social problems. New types of collaborative efforts have emerged as a result of the inability of more traditional bureaucratic hierarchical arrangements such as departmental programs to resolve these problems. Network structures are one such arrangement that is at the forefront of this movement. Although collaboration through network structures establishes an innovative response to dealing with social issues, there remains an expectation that outcomes and processes are based on traditional ways of working. It is necessary for practitioners and policy makers alike to begin to understand the realities of what can be expected from network structures in order to maximize the benefits of these unique mechanisms.

## Network Structures: Working Differently And Changing Expectations

## Introduction

There is a growing realisation that one of the biggest challenges for contemporary governments centres on resolving the highly complex and intractable social problems such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, drug abuse and social dislocation that continue to plague many communities despite concerted efforts. These 'messy problems' (Ackoff 1975) or 'wicked issues' (Clarke and Stewart 1997) present a special challenge to government since they defy precise definition, cut across policy and service areas and resist solutions offered by either the single agency or 'silo' approach (Mitchell and Shortell 2000; Pearson 1999; Rhodes 1998; Waddock 1991) or through the complexity of the market model (6 1997; 6 et al. 1999; de Carvahlo 1998). Indeed, as a number of commentators have noted these traditional ways of working have added to the problem by further fragmenting services and people (6, 1997; 6, Leat, Seltzer and Stoker 1999; 2002; Clarke and Stewart, 1997; Funnell 2001).

As Clarke and Stewart (1997, 2) note:

> "Wicked problems cannot be dealt with as management has traditionally dealt
> with public policy problems. They challenge existing patterns of organisation and
> management"

Instead, wicked issues require new ways of working and thinking, beyond the traditional approaches that have been found to be inadequate and inappropriate (Chisholm 1996; Huxham and Vangen 1996; Huxham 2001; Keast 2001). The concepts of networks and network structures

are at the forefront of this move to develop innovative ways to deal with complex problems confronting communities (Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Kickert 1997; Mandell 2001; O'Toole 1997).

New ways of collaborating that bring together the full array of stakeholders and offer more integrated and holistic responses to issues are being experimented with by decision makers. The problem is that although they are utilizing more collaborative arrangements, they are expecting outcomes and processes that are consistent with the more traditional, comfortable forms of working (Keast and Brown, forthcoming 2002; Klijn and Koopenjan 2001).

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the fact that unless policy makers have a full understanding of what it means to work through network structures, they will continue to develop traditional policies and management techniques that mitigate against the very positive attributes of networked arrangements. Practitioners and decision-makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors need to understand what can be expected from these network structures as innovative approaches to governance and can then act accordingly.

Part one of this paper will introduce the concept of network structures. In the second part we describe a current project in Australia that is based on the concept of network structures. In part three we show how the case study represents the formation of a network structure. We then describe some of the traditional expectations of government from this type of project. In the final part, we highlight the actual expectations and outcomes that have resulted from this project and comment on the value of these outcomes.

**Networking, Networks and Network Structures**

A distinction must first be made between network structures and the ideas of "networking" and "networks". "Networking" is the most common term and refers to people making connections with each other by going to meetings and conferences as well as through the use of communication technology such as e-mail and web discussion groups (Alter and Hage 1993; Considine 2001). In a myriad of informal and formal ways, people engage in "networking". This is a critical step in being able to accomplish individual efforts through establishing contacts with key people.

"Networks" occur when linkages among a number of organizations and/or individuals become more formalized. This process also involves "networking" but is seen as a more formalized means of maintaining linkages with others with whom there is mutual interest. For instance, Medicare requires a network of medical professionals, insurers and government agencies to co-ordinate their efforts in reaching their individual goals (Mandell 1994). Networks may involve simultaneous action by a number of different actors, but each of these actions represents actions of independently operating organizations. (Chisolm 1989; Hanf et. al. 1978; Hanf and Scharpf 1978; Mandell and Gage 1988; Provan and Milward 1989, 1991)

Network structures occur when working separately, even while maintaining linkages with each other, is not enough. Individuals representing themselves, public, not-for-profit and private organizations realize that working independently is not enough to solve a particular problem or issue area. A network structure forms when these people realize that they (and the organizations

which they may represent) are only one small piece of the total picture. It is recognition that only by coming together to actively work on accomplishing a broad, common mission will goals be accomplished (Agranoff, 1997, 1991a, 1991b, 1992; Agranoff and McGuire 1997; Feyerherm 1995; Gage and Mandell 1990; Gray 1989; Mandell 1994).

Network structures may include, but reach beyond, linkages, co-ordination, or task force action. Unlike networks where people are only loosely linked to each other, in a network structure people must actively work together to accomplish what is recognized as a problem or issue of mutual concern (Agranoff 1992, 1997; Agranoff and McGuire 1997; Feyerherm 1995; Mandell 1988, 1994). Network structures may require separate actions on the part of the individual members, but the participants are transformed into a new whole, taking on broad tasks that reach beyond the simultaneous actions of independently operating organizations. Network structures may include, but go beyond, informal linkages, co-operation, co-ordination, task force action or coalitional activity (Mandell 1999).

A network structure is typified by a broad mission and, joint and strategically interdependent action. There is a strong commitment to overriding goals and members agree to commit significant resources over a long period of time. This does not mean that the commitment that members have to their own, individual organizational or group goals, disappear. Indeed, one of the difficulties in network structures is dealing with the conflicts that emerge between the individual members' goals and the need to commit to joint, overriding goals (Mandell 1994). As a result, there is a high degree of risk involved.

Network structures are distinguished from traditional organizational structures because there is no-one "in charge".  This situation does not mean that there may not be a lead agency, foundation, or other not for profit organisation who sets up the formal rules of the collaboration. Instead it means that typical forms of power and authority do not work in network structures. Although some actors may have more formal power in terms of resources or political clout than others, since each member is an independent entity, to be effective, this power cannot be used unilaterally.  In addition, informal power based on interpersonal relations can be more important than formal power.  This means that new modes of leadership that rely on the role of being a "facilitator" or "broker" will be needed (Davis and Rhodes 2000; Considine 2001; 6 et al. 2002; Mandell 1994). Rather than rely on contractual arrangements, (although there may be some contracts as part of the collaboration) network structures rely on exchanges based on interpersonal relations.  This means that to be effective, participants must be able to trust each other to work to their mutual benefit.  The reality is that in the political arena, this trust may not be easy to build.  There are two other realities in a network structure, however, that can be used to temper these constraints.

First, the formation of a network structure means that at least some of the members recognize that their purposes cannot be achieved independently and thus all action is mutually interdependent. Second, many of the participants may already know each other and formed various pockets of trust prior to the formation of the network structure.  These pockets of trust can be capitalized on through the use of effective management strategies.

In summary, network structures will lead to fully integrated systems in which members see themselves as interdependent, working toward systems change and that although they represent individual organizations, their perspective is a holistic one. They recognize that they need to work together differently because traditional methods including co-operation and co-ordination have not been sufficient. In fact, network structures are established when all other options have failed. In the next section, we present a case study of one such effort in Australia.

**Service Integration Project Case Study**

This section provides an overview of the methodology and the case study. The background to the case is provided as a foundation for the subsequent analysis of the Service Integration Project as a network structure.

## Methodology

The case study methodology included triangulation of data through interviews, focus groups and documentation (Yin 1980). The empirical data was collected over a six month period from October 2001 to March 2002. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five key network participants as well as several senior departmental decision makers (Director Generals and Senior Executive Service members). A focus group was also undertaken to tap the network dynamics and gain additional insights. Documentation included minutes of meetings, government reports and other written materials.

**Background– Goodna Service Integration Project (SIP)**

Goodna is a small community located halfway between Brisbane and Ipswich on the eastern coast of Australia populated by a wide range of disadvantaged groups (Boorman and Woolcock 2002, 62). The Goodna district has been subject to considerable, ongoing intervention by both government and government-funded local services. As such over time, it has also been the recipient of substantial amounts of government funds from various sources. Nonetheless, the problems in this area remained entrenched.

The Goodna Service Integration Project (SIP) evolved during a series of meetings between concerned human service practitioners in the aftermath of a local crisis in which an elderly local man was killed by a group of young people with whom many of the government and local service providers had been working or had some responsibility. This incident brought the escalating social problems in the community under closer scrutiny. One respondent indicated that:

> "People were saying this is terrible – it was the fault of the failure of a whole lot of systems… The whole thing spilt out and over into the community who were expressing real concerns about the failure of the services involved and the safety of the community" (SIP interview, 27 November, 2001).

The event galvanized some key thinkers to come together in a series of informal meetings reflecting on what had happened. At this point, a community meeting was also held at which main public sector agencies and departments, as well as a number of other entities such as the Ipswich City Council and the University of Queensland were present. This energised the Ipswich City Council, Regional Directors/Managers of key State Government departments and the

Community Service & Research Centre at the University of Queensland Ipswich campus to seek state government endorsement and funds to resource a pilot project designed to achieve better outcomes for community members by integrating human services within a specific community. Following this, there was a series of ministerial deputations in which central government support was obtained for the development of a pilot project. One of the respondents indicated that at this point:

> "The response (from government) was 'yes, we know there is a problem but the area already gets a lot of money for community based services'" (Interview, 27 November, 2001).

The concern was that this would be just one more project involved in improving the co-ordination of existing services. The way that SIP was set up, however, was meant to overcome this type of objection.

The SIP Team is composed of the following: representatives of the Commonwealth Government (Area Manager CentreLink, Area Coordinator, Ipswich & Regional Area Consultative Committee); 16 State Government departmental employees (at Area Manager and above level); three local government employees including the Chief Executive Officer as Chair; two Directors of Learning Institutions, and two project staff.

The aim of the Service Integration Project is to develop a sustainable system of human service provision (including design, funding, delivery and evaluation phases) by:

1. aligning the needs and aspirations of the community of Goodna, the strategies of service agencies in the Region and the priority outcomes of Government and consequential resource allocation processes that support that alignment

2. building social capital, responding to community well-being and facilitating the integration of human services and,

3. building relationships, promoting learning processes and giving emphasis to measurement and modelling as 3 critical and inter-connected strategies to create systemic change to facilitate community well-being.

In summary, the key features of the Goodna Service Integration Project, thus far, were outlined as the following (Boorman and Woolcock 2002, 60).

1. A team of committed, action-oriented, and skilled (experienced) government leaders whose practice is informed by shared operating principles, guiding ideas and decision making protocols;

2. Distributed networks of energetic and committed local service providers and residents;

3. Broad local government support – chair is Council CEO.

4. A small team of dedicated project staff

5. A three year focus

6. Sponsors/champions – CEO Housing and Corrective Services

7. Vertical links to Treasury, through a SIP representative and joint project work.

Together these features indicate that SIP is characteristic of a network structure. SIP charted a course away from merely 'business as usual' through networking and networks, to collaboration

through a network structure. It shifted away from simply coordinating services to integration of services, through inculcating the integration of formal and informal learning, relationship building and measurement and modelling processes.

**SIP As Network Structure**

SIP is an excellent example of the formation of a network structure. Firstly, the crisis over the death of the elderly man and a growing awareness that the traditional structures and processes in dealing with these kinds of problems had failed precipitated the need for a new way of dealing with the problem. The literature on network structures highlights that a crisis will often be the trigger to move toward the development of a network structure (Cigler 1999).

This event led to a recognition that each of the concerned agencies could no longer work by themselves. In fact one interviewee commented that the idea was to determine "what we can do as a whole-of-community to respond to the tragedy?"  Rather than moving ahead quickly, however, there was a period of thinking and initial relationship building that identified that there was a need to change the present way of working. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the SIP project was that it was recognised at the beginning that what was needed was systems change.  Participants knew that in order to do this, they would need a mandate that allowed them to go beyond their traditional ways of working as independent entities. For example, as one respondent noted:

"... although we wanted to change the present way of working – we didn't want to commit or expose ourselves to … another interagency project that wasn't recognised by our departments."

A typical comment from the interviews was that:

"we've been giving that extra bit for the past fifteen to twenty years, and the system has got to recognise that the current system does not work and that this integrated work has to take place otherwise this will happen again."

Interviews revealed that the meetings held to establish SIP highlighted some shared concerns regarding the need for:

- More integrated responses and strategies across departments and agencies;
- An enhanced focus upon community capacity building;
- A more rigorous approach to place-based planning, funding and delivering of government services; and
- Improved certainty of continuity of operations for non-government providers.

All of these concerns reflect the unique focus of network structures on what has been termed whole-of community, place based management and making communities equal partners (for example, through capacity building and engagement).

The composition of SIP also reflected the need for diverse membership and for a framework to be

set in which participants are able to work flexibly and without hierarchical controls. In this way, the positional leaders of key government services in the Region were enlisted to join the Project Team and a decision made that the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson roles should rest with non-State Government agencies. Similarly, the Project staff were employed outside of government in the Ipswich City Council and the University of Queensland, Ipswich Campus (Boorman and Woolcock 2002).

In addition, as was indicated in the preceding discussion, there was a recognition that more money to do the same types of programs was not going to work.  This need to move beyond 'business as usual' and concentrate on the development of relationships between often-fragmented service providers was recognised early in the SIP process (Interview, 27 November, 2001).  Indeed, it was stressed that if SIP was to be genuinely different, participants would need to make an earnest attempt to build relationships and learn from each other as well as prior efforts (Boorman and Woolcock 2002). To this end, a Graduate Certificate in Social Sciences (Inter-professional Leadership) was developed in which most SIP participants spent sixteen full days over two semesters learning new theories, unlearning old behaviours, developing shared language and skill sets and progressing the design and delivery of SIP (Boorman and Woolcock 2002, 73). The relationships developed through this Graduate Certificate Program were frequently attributed to as facilitating and underpinning the operation of the project.  As one member said "it is very process driven".

Finally, the participants, in developing their mission statement, recognised that they had to go beyond just coordinating existing services. As a result the mission of SIP became: "Working better together for sustainable community well-being in Goodna".

The mission statement reflected the commitment of the members of SIP to work toward systems change. In achieving their aim, SIP utilised three key strategies. SIP attempted to link the community's needs to government priorities, involved the community through building broader community capacity and supported relationships within and across the community and government. In adopting these aims, there was a recognition of the need to 'do things differently' while still maintaining legitimacy with government and the community.

**The Need For Changing Government Expectations**

Based on the empirical evidence and findings of the case, SIP appears to be meeting the goal of collaboration through a network structure. The difficulty is that although integration and collaboration are preferred strategies to enable better service delivery, the implications of what this means in terms of the changes that will be needed to carry out this type of collaborative effort may not be well understood. Instead, interorganizational arrangements based on co-operation and co-ordination have been the primary mode because they involve low risk and a level of comfort that was accepted. These processes usually involve mainly a sharing of information, autonomy of individual departments and the ability to deliver services as usual.

Basically, they have struggled to come to terms with the fact that, if indeed, they really do want collaboration and integration that it cannot be achieved by doing "business as usual". Or, even

worse, they may have recognized this, but they want to be able to control the process through traditional control mechanisms.

In effect, there is a desire to continue to tightly control what occurs in the network structure. True collaboration and integration delineates, the key role for policy makers is to lay the foundation for the members to be able to operate with the authority they will need, and then to step back and "get out of the way". This does not mean that policy makers should not be involved in the assessment of the network structure, but it does mean that they have to pull back and allow the members to have the kind of flexibility they will need to come up with innovative systems change and to feel comfortable taking the risks they will have to take.

Finally, SIP is still confronted by the reality that government often expects that they will be able to see traditional results, and to see them quickly. For instance, launching the SIP, the Minister for Public Works and Housing, in a press release expressed great hope in the pilot program strengthening the Goodna community. He stated:

> "The pilot aims to reduce crime, increase school retention rates, encourage stable housing, reduce drug and alcohol abuse and reduce unemployment" (Communicate: Ipswich Community Service and Research Centre Review, 20001, 37)
>
> .

The difficulty is that the types of results that occur through network structures do not primarily have to do with generating programs or numbers (although that would be part of the secondary results), but rather they have to do more with changing relationships and perceptions which are

much more intangible.  This involves a process by which relationships are revised, adjusted and strengthened through continual interactions. Government needs to appreciate the importance of this process.  In addition, they need to understand that accomplishing this is going to take a much longer time than simply the time to allocated delivery services (6 et al. 2002).

Instead, government policy makers need to revise their expectations based on an understanding of the realities of operating through network structures.  The case of SIP provides an ideal framework in which to view these realities.

**Understanding the Realities of What Can Be Expected from Network Structures**

Although there is now much literature on the use of network structures to deal with complex problems, there are still difficulties with understanding what this means in reality.  For one thing, there is a difference in what we can expect to occur as a result of operating through network structures.  Although network structures may lead to more innovative problem solving, these are actually one of the secondary outcomes of operating through network arrangements.  The primary outcomes have more to do with the processes that will occur as a result of operating through network structures.

In order to understand the realities of what can be expected through network structures, the focus needs to be on the three main characteristics of network structures.   These are:

- A common mission

- Members are interdependent

- A unique structural arrangement

Table One depicts how each of these three characteristics requires new behaviours and thinking that will result in changes in expected outcomes.

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Take in Table One About Here

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**A common mission**

In a network structure, members come together because they realize that working individually has not worked. Although participants each have their own individual perspective, these perspectives are reformulated into a new, overarching goal or set of goals. Members begin to see themselves as just one small piece of a larger whole. As one respondent put it:

> "The different professional backgrounds we have mitigated against us working cooperatively initially, but through the process of the Graduate Certificate and the meeting processes, we have been able to gain a more 'holistic' picture of each other and our departments and their needs and limitations. This has really helped to break down the barriers of the silos – at least in relation to this project and hopefully with others" (SIP Focus Group, 11 October 2001).

As a result, what occurs is a new set of values and attitudes that reshapes the views of the individual members. New synergies are realized and new points of convergence emerge. In essence what happens is a new way of thinking. This is exemplified by several of the interviewees in SIP:

"I think, if anything, it was a feeling that if we can't do it in terms of change, that is, changing the way people think and act and how governments can interact after all these years of people sitting at the table, then there is a sense of hopelessness, that there has not been enough effort to make things change" (Interview, 7 February, 2002).

"So it was an attempt, an active attempt, to change the classic mechanism of regional group sitting slightly outside of Brisbane thinking quite revolutionary thinking about what had happened here and how we could change the way things work so that it did not happen again" (Interview, 7 February, 2002).

**Members are interdependent**

In a network structure, members are <u>not</u> just interconnected, they are interdependent. This means that each member begins to see themselves as one piece of a larger picture. When participants first come together however, they do not necessarily see themselves as one whole. Instead, as one observer of SIP indicated:

"At the very beginning it must have been a struggle. All these departments were trying to work together and the dynamics were really awful – they were just amazing – there was no trust and no relationships. … There was no testing of assumptions – just an acceptance that the problem was caused by others' (Interview 19 December, 2001).

Where these perceptions are actually having a detrimental affect on collaboration and integration, there clearly need to be steps taken to bring about change. This relies on a process by which participants, in effect, try to "step into each other's shoes". Building relationships therefore is primary, not the completion of tasks (i.e. delivery of services). As one of the participants of SIP put it:

> "For me the relationship building has been the main thing. Talking about practical outcomes we have created a process that allows for and continues to encourage that process. We are talking about the residual capacity of this network, that is, what remains after this intervention (SIP) has been completed. People can go back to this network and the relationships to build or work on other projects and can use those resources as a way of mobilisation' (SIP Focus Group, 11 October, 2001).

Building relations is what forms the basis for the development of trust that is critical in a network structure. The outcome of the establishment of these relationships is that perceptions of each other begin to change. Members begin to recognize and appreciate each other as "resources". In effect, the pool of expertise is expanded based on these new ways of relating to each other. This was expressed by a number of participants in SIP:

> "I think that this is different to the traditional model that departments use. From my perspective we have not been using each other's knowledge and skills to the full capacity and we have been treating out clients and each other as only parts – not whole people. In

working in this project I feel that I am a whole person working toward helping whole

people" (SIP Focus Group, 11 October, 2001).

"Well I think that we have probably only scratched at the surface of what can be achieved

in terms of utilising the capacity of the talents that are situated around this table. But I

also think that in scratching the surface we have done a lot more than using another

method" (SIP Focus Group, 11 October 2001).

Although the process of building relationships is very rewarding, it is also a very time consuming

process. This is very frustrating to those in government who perceived this emphasis on process

as being too focussed on relationships at the expense of outcomes. Indeed, it was described as

"*just having cups of tea*" (Interview, 21 February, 2002) which was seen as in danger of leading

only to participation in "talk fests" (Interview, 7 February, 2002). However, a Senior

Departmental representative identified the importance of needing to take time to develop

relationships as follows:

"And some people complain from time to time about the time concern but … there was

probably time lost anyway coming up with less effective solutions" (Interview, 14

February, 2002).

Therefore, building relationships is a critical element of working through network structures. As

seen by one participant of SIP:

"Relationship building and maintenance have been very important to the operation of the project. The Graduate Certificate was a great aspect of this and a critical element in establishing the relations we all now have. It enhanced and broadened our knowledge of each other and the work of our agencies" (SIP Focus group, 11 October 2001).

**A unique structural arrangement**

A network structure is composed of representatives of many diverse entities. It may include representatives of government, businesses, the voluntary sector and community members. Each member, however, is perceived as an equal partner in the endeavour. Actions are based, not on top down authority, but rather on horizontal partnerships. Hierarchical control will not lead to results. Rather the ability to build coalitions, mobilizing support and make mutual adjustments are what will be needed. One participant put it very clearly:

"This project will have failed, if, at the end of the day, we have not created an environment in these state agencies and between others whereby the process continues to encourage these people to act collaboratively" (SIP Focus Group, 11 October 2001).

Although the emphasis is not focussed on the tasks of delivery of services, the members of a network structure are actively engaged in doing something that moves beyond the provision of services. What happens is the creation of processes in which the infrastructure and environment are created which will allow for the innovations needed to deal with complex problems. In SIP this can be seen in the way that they have been able to build new capacities for both the government and community. Several participants clearly indicated this as follows:

"…comes down to the difference between being reactive and proactive. Staying in reactive mode defeats the purpose, you have got to be more proactive. That is why it is crucial to be part of a network: so that you are not always on the back foot when trying to respond to the issues. You are working with others who know bits of the information and together you pool your knowledge and resources to respond – determine issues, set solutions and respond".

"I think that one big difference is just looking at Education is we have got a police officer, health nurse and other services but they were not coordinated. They were still working in their silos instead of working cooperatively, or together. Where we are different now is that all those different agencies are working together. We have not been going long enough to have big outcomes, but this alone is an achievement and we are heading in the right direction".

It is here that the role of a facilitator or broker is critical. The way SIP operated, for instance, reflected this orientation. SIP members referred to this role as a "driver" and more than one person (for example, both the chair and the Project Officer) often assumed this role. As one participant indicated:

"However, it is apparent that along side the processor relationship aspect is a strong 'task' element that moves it beyond 'just cups of tea and a bit of a talk'. This is evidenced by the

formal minutes, tight agendas and way that the meetings are chaired and the driver

function of the project officer" (SIP Focus Group, 11 October 2001).

What is being done is not "business as usual". Rather members are engaged in systems change. Boorman and Woolcock (2002, 60) suggest that 'service integration' in the title of the project indicated that the emphasis would be on systems change rather than just better delivery of existing services. This non-traditional way of thinking was obvious to many of the participants of SIP:

> "This is very different to the traditional models that we have all worked in. I can really notice a difference in working this way. We have all experienced going in to the community to 'do an intervention' but they have not worked because we were going in as single departmental workers, all doing our own thing. And it was hard to sustain that, your commitment. Now we are all much more committed to projects and feel that it has a greater chance of being successful. What we have or are working towards are integrated people in integrated systems "(SIP Focus Group, 11 October 2001).

In summary, although SIP can be regarded as a well run network structure based on the three characteristics of network structures, it remains at risk of being judged based on traditional measures. Though SIP is clearly changing the way governments and government-funded agencies do business in the Goodna community, there are very few definitive outcome measures commonly utilised by government agencies that can conclusively demonstrate these changes. If this deficiency persists, the true benefits of its operation as a network structure (i.e., systems

changes, relationship building, innovative operating procedures and community inclusion) could be seen as less significant than it deserves. This would give weight to the arguments of those who are currently sceptical about network structures. Governments therefore need to be willing to take some risks to give those involved in these endeavours the time and space to work as was intended. If then there are no additional inroads made to "wicked problems", the endeavour can legitimately be abandoned.

## Conclusion

Working through network structures provides a way of dealing with "wicked problems" by bringing about systems change. In the process, innovation and change in traditional methods of operation, come to the fore. This approach leads, however, to the need for a high degree of risk taking. The reality is that the way governments conduct business does not lend itself to changing traditional methods easily because of the risks involved. Nonetheless, if these innovative structures are put into place because everything else has failed, decision makers may not have the luxury of not taking these risks. This situation can either be very threatening or very rewarding to the existing power structure. The difference depends on decision-makers knowing at the beginning of the program what to expect.

Clearly network structures are unique responses to very complex, messy, "wicked problems" that do not lend themselves to "business as usual". It is not anticipated that governments will change the way they do business wholesale. Nonetheless, based on an increased knowledge base about the benefits of network structures and what to expect in terms of the outcomes, decision makers may be willing to make some changes at the margins. Longer timeframes for evaluation, a new

emphasis on integration rather than simply delivery of services, changed perceptions about each other's contribution to the whole and recognition of the value of relationship building are a promising start to this process. From this, it might be expected that the use of network structures for addressing "wicked problems" will indeed be seen as a useful method of intervention.

**Table 1: Characteristics and Outcomes of Network Structures**

| Characteristics of Network Structures | Requires | Expected Outcomes |
|---|---|---|
| **Common Mission** | - Seeing the whole picture<br>- New Values - around the issue, not the service<br>- New Attitudes | - Each member sees themselves as one piece of a total issue<br>- Synergies Develop:<br>  - Doing more with less<br>  - Developing more meaningful programs<br>  - Increasing power by being able to convince the "power brokers" in government - because of the increased "strength" of the network members <u>as a whole</u><br>  - Seeing points of convergence, rather than of contention<br>(Not fighting over scarce resources, but seeing how each wants the same thing)<br>- Not wasting time and money |

| Members are | – Changing perceptions: | - Building relationships is primary; Tasks are secondary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Interdependent** | It is not what you expect from others (agencies), but rather how you understand them that makes a difference<br><br>- Stepping into others' shoes | - Building Trust<br>(Trust in each other and trust in government)<br><br>- Very time consuming to develop relationships<br><br>- Breaking down communication barriers<br><br>- Building new "resources" to use (gaining new "eyes and ears" on the scene)<br><br>- Expanding "expertise" - meshing different types of expertise<br><br>- Listening to both professional and community "experts"<br><br>- Recognizing the expertise of others<br><br>- Resolving conflicts (or potential conflicts) |

| Unique Structural Arrangement: Composed of representatives of many diverse organizations and groups: may include representatives of: - government - businesses - voluntary sector - community | - Actively doing something - Systems Change - Members need to represent their own organizations and the network structure - New way of thinking | - Risk taking - Flexible, innovative ideas merge - Visible/Invisible Conflicts |
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