LEADERSHIP

& Networks

OCTOBER 2012

*New Ways of
Developing Leadership in
a Highly Connected World*

**LEADERSHIP LEARNING
COMMUNITY**

groupaya

IISC Interaction Institute
for Social Change

NetworkingAction

New Directions
COLLABORATIVE

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CONSULTING

Net Work

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LEADERSHIP & NETWORKS

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About the Authors of This Report

The people who authored and contributed to this report are leadership development and network practitioners who convene, facilitate, and mobilize networks for social benefit. We came together to figure out how to better develop leadership with the mindset, behaviors, and skills needed to optimize the impact of networks on social change. We are committed to strengthening our collective capacity to lead in networks and to use network strategies to produce innovative solutions to our local and global challenges.

The primary authors of this publication are Deborah Meehan and Claire Reinelt from the Leadership Learning Community. The report was developed in partnership with co-authors Beth Tener, New Directions Collaborative; Diana Scearce, David and Lucile Packard Foundation; Eugene Eric Kim, Groupaya; Gibrán Rivera, Interaction Institute for Social Change; June Holley, Network Weaver; Nance Goldstein, PhD, CPC, Principal at Working Wisely Group; Patti Anklam, Net Work; and Natalia Castañeda Chaux, Leadership Learning Community. Steve Waddell, Networking Action, and Grady McGonagill, McGonagill Consulting, also contributed to this report. For more information about the authors and contributors, please refer to the last section of the report.

The Context for This Report

We live in a world of skyrocketing complexity. Despite enormous efforts of more than 1 million nonprofit organizations, we have not made significant progress on our most critical social problems, such as the widening wealth gap, the failure of global food distribution systems, and the rapid deterioration of the environment. This is not surprising when we consider the complexity and interconnectedness of our most important social challenges. No individual or organization can solve these problems independently, yet as John Kania and Mark Kramer point out in their article, "Collective Impact," "nearly 1.4 million nonprofits try to invent independent solutions to major social problems, often working at odds with each other."

We can make a similar critique of our investments in leadership. Hundreds of leadership programs have invested in developing the skills and capacities of nonprofit and community leaders. As a by-product, some of these programs catalyzed relationships across silos, sectors, races, and neighborhoods, but despite the thousands of leadership program graduates clustered in communities around the country, most do not have the capacity to leverage their networks for significant community and social benefit.

At the same time, we have seen extraordinary examples of previously unimaginable social change in recent years, such as the Arab Spring of 2011, when masses of people rose up against corrupt regimes. These examples demonstrate how quickly change can happen when people and organizations are activated around a common purpose. With new social technologies like Facebook and Twitter, ideas, feelings, and actions spread quickly across social networks and unleash coordinated actions at a scale that would have been unimaginable before these tools.

The Purpose of This Report

This report is written for those who run and fund leadership programs that develop and support leadership for social change. It shares many examples of how leaders using network strategies are increasing the impact of social change work. Our goal is to inspire and help hundreds of leadership programs to question their assumptions about leadership and retool their approaches to developing leadership to more fully leverage network approaches. The report provides examples of leadership models, values, skills, and behaviors needed to embrace network strategies, and recommends practical things you can do to develop network capacities and a network mindset.

As leaders in building and supporting social sector and social justice leadership capacities, we have an opportunity and obligation to bring these high-impact change strategies and innovative tools to thousands of individuals and groups who seek social equity, a sustainable economy that is just and fair, and communities that are healthy and thriving.

The Questions This Report Will Tackle

This report will address the following questions:
- Why do network strategies deserve our attention?
- Why do we need a new leadership mindset?
- What are the core principles of leading with a network mindset?
- What leadership development strategies support a network mindset and skills?

Why Do Network Strategies Deserve Our Attention?
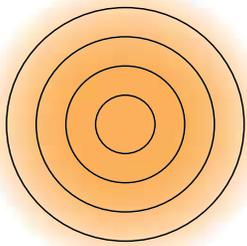
Some leaders ask whether networks are just the current fad or whether they should instead become a core strategy of leadership programs working in the nonprofit sector. Network strategies are critical but are not the solution to every problem. Ron Heifetz, in his book *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, distinguishes between technical challenges and adaptive ones: technical challenges are those we know how to solve; adaptive challenges require changing people, and the systems they have created, because of an environmental change, new technology, or other complex development. Adaptive challenges require a networked approach to leadership so that people can cooperate across traditional boundaries that exist within organizations and across issues, sectors, and social conditions.

The following sections elaborate on how network strategies can help produce population-level results—that is, results that improve the well-being of a specific population, like the number of children who have access to health care coverage. The report will provide examples of individuals, organizations, and initiatives that are increasing their capacity to innovate, extend their reach, and tackle large-scale problems by broadening how they think about leadership and by using network strategies and tools.

Build social capital

Network leadership strategies connect leaders across boundaries of race, sector, and geography and create an environment that builds and fosters trusted relationships.

> **CASE EXAMPLE: The Barr Fellowship Network**
>
> In Boston, a diverse network of social change leaders is forming unlikely partnerships, bridging across boundaries of race, ethnicity, sector, neighborhood, and more. New ideas, approaches, and solutions to persistent challenges are coming from leaders who break out of the silos and "groupthink" of homogenous networks. Since 2005, the Barr Foundation (www. barrfoundation.org), with the Interaction Institute for Social Change as its primary partner, has focused on cultivating the Barr Fellowship, a network of nonprofit executive directors. The Fellowship experience begins with the "creative disruption" of a three-month sabbatical and group-learning journey to the global south (for example, South Africa and Brazil). These and subsequent retreats are carefully designed and facilitated to foster authentic connections and deep bonds of trust and respect. Over time the result has been a host of breakthrough ideas to address persistent challenges in Boston, such as the creation of the city's first bilingual high school and the inclusion of a state-of-the-art community garden in the heart of a public housing project.

Catalyze community engagement

Network leadership strategies encourage community members or neighborhood residents to self-organize, weave connections, and take action to improve the quality of life for themselves and their community.

A **network** is a set of relationships that are characterized by both strong and weak ties. Strong ties are characterized by high levels of trust, reciprocity, and sense of community, whereas weak ties cross boundaries and are a source of new ideas, information, and resources.

Network mindset is a term used to describe the patterns of thought that enable us to become aware of how what we say and do connects with others and creates ripples through an ecosystem.

Collective leadership is the process of many people working together and aligning their efforts to achieve greater impact on significant social issues.

CASE EXAMPLE: Lawrence CommunityWorks

Lawrence CommunityWorks (www. lawrencecommunityworks.org) uses a network-organizing strategy to create a new "environment of connectivity" in Lawrence, Massachusetts (a largely immigrant community). Their goal is to create the conditions for community residents to more easily connect to information, to opportunity, and to each other. They believe that if thousands of residents are induced to "get back in the game" of working together and taking leadership roles in Lawrence, they can truly revitalize the city. As a result of weaving stronger connections and linking residents to leadership opportunities, the LCW network has attracted millions of dollars in new investments for neighborhood development, family housing projects, a recreation center, and playgrounds.

Change hearts and minds

Network leadership strategies can increase exposure significantly enough to encourage new thinking and behaviors on a large scale.

CASE EXAMPLE: The Story of Stuff

The Story of Stuff (www.storyofstuff.org) is a narrated animated film about how our obsession with stuff is trashing our planet, our communities, and our health. Its engaging presentation, powerful message, and use of social media have made the film go viral, with 10,000 views a day and more than 12 million online views since its release three years ago. The creator of *The Story of Stuff*, Annie Leonard, understood that what she had created could be adapted, expanded, and transformed in many settings, well beyond what she had originally imagined or could manage. She decided to let go of her first ideas about how to make and distribute the film, and instead invited enthusiasts with their own ideas from all over the world to expand her vision. As a result, many people

Image: *The Story of Stuff,* http://www.storyofstuff.org/

beyond the film's creator took up leadership and increased the project's influence by developing it in new directions, including converting it to theater, creating curriculum guides for students, and translating the film into multiple languages.

Mobilize more people to your cause

Network strategies and platforms can engage significantly more people in the democratic process. Social media is transforming how we can mobilize for social change.

CASE EXAMPLE: The 2008 Obama for President Campaign

The 2008 Obama campaign mobilized 13 million supporters and generated more than $750,000 in small donations, demonstrating the power of social networks to activate citizen leadership. Online tools made it possible for people new to leadership to raise money, find each other, organize house parties, and coordinate canvassing and phone banks.

Stimulate creativity and innovation

Network strategies connect a diversity of perspectives and ideas and provide supports for inventing and trying out new solutions. When people with different talents, knowledge, and interests connect with one another in a trusting environment, they create conditions that are conducive to creativity and innovation.

CASE EXAMPLE: Switzer Fellows

The drinking water in some farmworker communities in California's Central Valley is contaminated and not safe to drink. An aqueduct system carries fresh water to agricultural fields, yet the water is not accessible to local communities. At the same time, statewide efforts and local projects are underway to restore salmon population and natural habitat along the San Joaquin River and once again give the community access to the river. The Robert & Patricia Switzer Foundation's Environmental Fellowship Program (www.switzernetwork.org/grant-programs/fellowship-program) addresses issues such as public health, river restoration, and environmental justice, and Switzer Fellows organized a retreat and study trip to learn firsthand about the complex water issues in the Central Valley. They reflected together about

what they learned, developed key observations and strategies for actions benefiting the communities, wrote a cross-silo op-ed piece on Central Valley drinking water, and produced two videos on drinking water and river restoration. A Switzer Fellow now consults for the river restoration organization American Rivers, which has expanded its priorities to include a social justice exploration of flood risk in local communities. Another Fellow is working with the area's Community Water Center to bridge science, policy, and local action on behalf of the drinking water issue, and a Central Valley mailing list enables Fellows to stay in contact about current and emerging issues.

Bring projects to scale

Network strategies encourage self-organizing by giving small groups of people access to tools, models, and resources that they can use and adapt to make a difference in their communities. Projects that empower people to take action in their local communities can more easily evolve to be effective at a larger scale.

CASE EXAMPLE: **KaBOOM!**

The national nonprofit KaBOOM! (kaboom.org) aspires to create a "great place to play within walking distance of every child." To bring their idea to scale, they used a network strategy: they posted an online "do-it-yourself" direction kit making it possible for more communities to access the resources needed to build playgrounds without direct support from KaBOOM! The founder of KaBOOM! understood that if he shared leadership in the production of playgrounds by decentralizing planning and letting people run with a design template, more children would have playgrounds. To realize KaBOOM!'s vision, "the leader" became one of many leaders doing the work and bringing their own unique spin to the projects. This shift in strategy (and control) empowered communities to build 1,600 playgrounds in one year, more than KaBOOM! had built in the previous 14 years of its existence. Monitor Institute's case study of KaBOOM! provides more details.

Transform systems

Network strategies are essential for shifting power dynamics and transforming inefficient and unsustainable systems. Coordinating and aligning efforts across sectors, silos, and geography can produce changes in policy and practice that accelerate reaching a tipping point.

CASE EXAMPLE: **The RE-AMP Energy Network**

In 2005, the RE-AMP energy network (www.reamp.org) had a vision to get funders and grantees aligned to stop coal plants in the Midwest. The movement has since grown into a highly connected network of more than 125 nonprofits and funders across eight states focused on reducing regional global warming 80% by 2050. One of the keys to their success has been investing in distributed leadership and creating the Commons, an online community in which leaders across the network share information and coordinate both online and offline action. Their success is the result of innovative collaborative projects supported by the many new leaders emerging out of the Commons network. Monitor Institute has written a case study of the RE-AMP network and its impact.
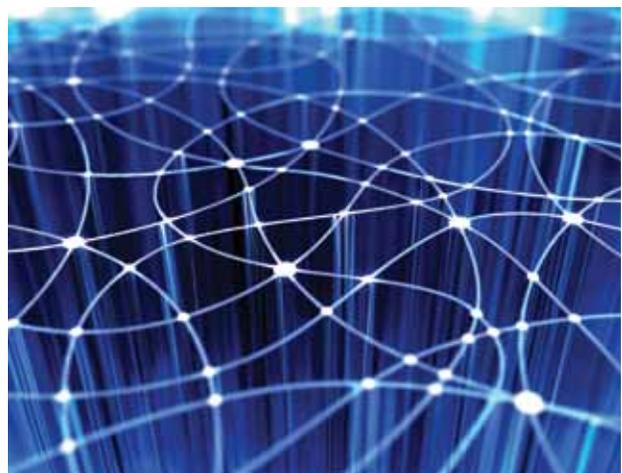
Foster greater equity

Network strategies inspire and support leaders to take action and be accountable to others to achieve a desired result. When leaders take action in high alignment with what others are doing, their collective impact is greater.

Why Do We Need a New Leadership Mindset?

The stories of what is possible with network approaches are full of examples of leadership that is shared and ubiquitous, involving multiple people coming together to accomplish more. Yet for many people the word leader conjures up individual heroic figures who have made their mark on history. Our fondness for heroes often prevents us from seeing and understanding collective leadership, even though we could learn a lot about collective leadership from indigenous cultures. In the dominant culture, we are inclined to see leadership as the behavior of individuals exerting influence over others, often by virtue of their position or charisma.

The following sections look at the limitations of the heroic leadership model and the benefits of leading with a network mindset.
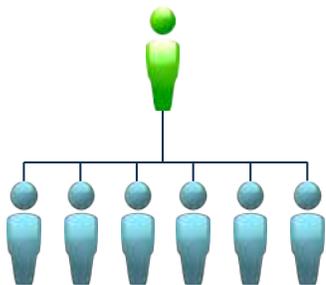
The limits of a heroic leadership mindset in organizations

Mainstream ideas about leadership are closely tied to assumptions about the power of lone individuals and organizations to solve problems. As a result, nonprofit leaders are trained to be organizational leaders who direct, lead, and manage organizations, and who assume a role at the top of the organization chart, invest decision-making in a senior team, and expect others to follow directions. Although traditional organizational leadership models may be effective in solving and managing technical problems, they are a liability when it comes to tackling complex, systemic, and adaptive problems. Our collective failure to implement significant solutions to those kinds of problems has led to growing wealth and health disparities, with few signs that nonprofit organizations know how to turn the situation around.

Leading with a "go it alone" heroic mindset and relying on tried and true organizational managerial and leadership behaviors impedes the emergence of collective network leadership. Here are some leadership attitudes and actions that stand in the way of adopting a new leadership mindset:

- An unwillingness to share learning or models for fear of losing competitive advantages or losing control of your brand
- A fear of cooperating with critical allies doing similar mission work in a competitive funding environment
- Hierarchical planning processes that limit input and new ideas by failing to engage stakeholders beyond the voices of an inner circle
- Organizational processes that demand excessive amounts of leadership time to manage, thereby diverting resources that could be used to catalyze networks and build movements for health equity, community sustainability, and social justice
- Processes scheduled without allowing time for serendipity or the opportunity to reflect and learn with others who are concerned about the same issue in other sectors, fields, and communities
- Too much focus on immediate and short-term outcomes

- Insufficient attention to the multiple factors and relationships within a political, economic, and social environment that produce complex problems such as disparities in wealth and opportunity

Learning to lead with a network mindset

Adaptive change requires an entirely different mindset, moving from working alone to working in highly connected ways. We need leaders who are willing to share ideas, information, and contacts with one another and who are able to weave networks that are more agile at forming and re-forming themselves in response to changing environments.

Learning to lead with a network mindset is not as simple as acquiring a new skill. Often our deeply held ideas about leadership collide with new ways of leading that are more distributed, relational, and interdependent. Those who lead with a network mindset practice openness and transparency, let go of controlling outcomes, and believe in the leadership potential of everyone.

Many leadership programs are continuing to promote the model of heroic, individually centered leadership that undervalues collective and specific leadership behaviors. To scale social change work in ways that enable having a major impact, we need to usher in a new era of leadership development that cultivates collective leadership, with a focus on transformative results. Our emphasis on individuals has inspired a practice of leadership investments and programming that focus on improving individual performance, but with a new leadership mindset and practice we can set our sights higher. The examples in this report are evidence that an investment in collective leadership can produce a significant and measureable change to improve the condition of people and the planet.

Being intentional about power

We often associate the exercise of power with hierarchies and the structural authority to enforce others to follow our lead—but power is not limited to those on top of an organizational chart. There are always hidden power dynamics in any group, for better or for worse. These dynamics are often related to resources that people do or do not have, whether knowledge, money, or relationships. A network mindset encourages having an explicit and authentic conversation about the real power dynamics within a group and exploring how to take advantage of those dynamics.

What Are the Core Principles of Leading with a Network Mindset?

To support leadership that achieves large-scale change, leadership programs need to cultivate leadership according to the following principles.
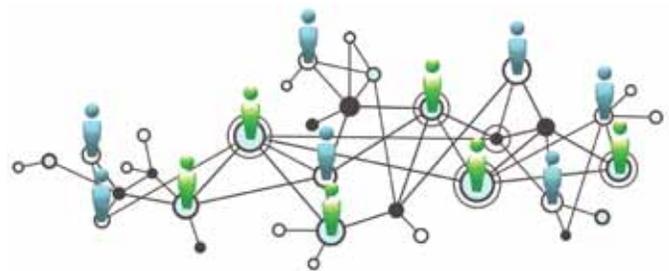
Connecting and weaving

Relationships are the foundation of networks. Leadership programs are uniquely positioned to build strong ties and cultivate authentic relationships among diverse groups of leaders. Through creative disruption and reflective dialogue, for instance, the Barr Fellows develop bonds of care and affection for one another, discover their shared passions and interests, and find creative ways to connect their assets and resources for community benefit.

Network weaving is a leadership strategy to intentionally introduce and link people together to strengthen their bonds and build bridges among groups that are not already connected, thereby expanding the network's reach, influence, and innovation. These connections also help people self-organize and experiment around common interests, forming many collaborative projects and initiatives.

June Holley's *Network Weaver Handbook* includes hundreds of worksheets and ideas for cultivating networks that create breakthrough change. June has

developed a self-assessment tool that enables network weavers to identify their strengths and weaknesses. She has also founded a vibrant Facebook group for network weavers to ask questions, learn together, and provide mutual support.

"Doacracy" and self-organizing

Engaging large numbers of people in a network depends on the extent to which people feel authorized to take action on their ideas. For instance, the 2008 Obama campaign was able to mobilize millions of volunteers who organized themselves to make phone calls, knock on doors, host parties, and get out the vote. Someone's willingness to step up and do a particular task is a rationale for having that person be the one to do the task. Creating platforms that enable individuals and groups to self-organize is essential for organizing across networks. Strong networks have a shared sense of purpose and create many avenues for engagement and action. Consider, for instance, MomsRising (www. momsrising.org), a national network that brings together millions of people to build a more family-friendly America. MomsRising uses the metaphor of a six-tier layer cake to describe how members can be involved, including sharing stories, using traditional and social media to get their message out, taking action offline and online, and collaborating with partners.

Learning and risk taking

Leadership that embraces risk taking and openness and that commits to continuous learning is better able to adapt in an era of continual change and increasingly complex problems. Rapid-cycle prototyping solutions and the capacity to quickly learn what works and what does not are essential for getting results. MomsRising celebrates mistakes with "joyful funerals" to encourage people to move quickly to let go of things that did not work. Current funding models favor known outcomes and deliverables. This understandable "due diligence" practice discourages bold experimentation and learning from failure—both of which are needed for innovative and transformative change—in favor of short-term successes.

What Leadership Development Strategies Support a Network Mindset and Skills?

As we embrace leadership as a process enacted by multiple people engaged in change, we need to clarify and develop associated strategies and tools. It is important to start with some hard questions about the cost of selecting and developing only a few individuals. Are we inadvertently reinforcing the individualism that has infused our leadership thinking? If leadership emerges through the process of taking action, the skills needed for success reside not in one person (one leader) but rather in the capacity of groups of people (many leaders) coordinating their actions, learning, and collaborating for greater influence and impact. While it may be possible to help individuals learn collective behaviors and practice collaborative skills in a cohort environment, our traditional approaches have not led to the impacts we seek. Innovations in leadership development that focus on supporting the leadership of many who are engaged in joint work merit our attention.

Many interesting development strategies, often not recognized as leadership development programming by conventional criteria, are designed to develop leadership in the context of joint work. Elements for developing collective leadership capacity could be practices incorporated into an organization, network, or community that is organizing work, or they can be (and have been) integrated into leadership development delivery strategies and programs. The following sections describe some key strategies for developing and supporting network leadership development.

Support convening and processes that build relationships across boundaries

Everyday Democracy's Horizons initiative (www. everyday-democracy.org//en/Page.horizons.aspx) used study circles to invite community members to learn about one another in an environment that promoted listening, sharing, and storytelling. This process built trust that enabled people to make new

meaning of shared social and economic conditions that inspired action. Lawrence CommunityWorks (www. lawrencecommunityworks.org) uses neighbor circles to support neighbors getting to know one another based on confirmed experience that as people talk about the issues they care most about, they discover and will take action on commonly held desires for change. The Art of Hosting community (www.artofhosting.org) uses practices such as World Café, Open Space, and dialogue to support large groups of people with different perspectives to connect their ideas and experiences. A critical and perhaps underestimated role for leadership programs is to provide a container for seeding and nurturing new relationships and practices.

Cultivate and practice with a network mindset and network tools

Introducing a network mindset into a leadership curriculum might start by helping people question their deeply held leadership assumptions, especially those that promote heroic leadership or one person as the leader that others follow. Developing a network mindset requires a willingness to practice what may be unfamiliar behaviors, like transparency, self-organizing, or letting go of control. Experimentation can be supported in a group context as people share their experiences and cheer each other on. Many valuable resources are available to help individuals and organizations understand why a network mindset is important and how to incorporate network thinking, including *The Networked Nonprofit* and *Network Weaver Handbook*. Mastering network tools and cultivating a network mindset can occur in the course of joint work or in a leadership training program that encourages developing network strategies and skills.

Some leadership programs have been using social network analysis (SNA) to help participants understand the patterns of relationships among people and groups, enabling them to better build connections, identify common interests, and mobilize to take action. SNA resources and tools give participants a hands-on opportunity to look at network maps together and figure out why some groups are tightly clustered (were they in the same cohort, do they live in the same region, are they all involved in the same area of interest?) and where relationships across clusters could be enlisted to help make introductions that would strengthen the network. *Network Weaver Handbook* explains how to read and interpret network maps—a capacity that enables leaders to develop a shared understanding of the health and influence of the network as a whole and make strategic decisions about where to invest resources for greatest influence and impact.

Introducing basic social networking tools, such as blogging, wikis, Twitter, and Flickr, along with providing technical support and a safe space for participants to practice and reflect, enables groups of people to learn the value of social technologies that will help them achieve their shared purpose. Using the right social media tools in the right way can mean accomplishing more in less time, and often with fewer resources. The learning curve may be steep for some, but the payoff can be big. Many young people are comfortable with social media tools, while others may be slower to adopt; peer mentoring and encouragement are essential. As an example, the Levi Strauss Foundation, with ZeroDivide as a partner, launched its Pioneers in Justice leadership
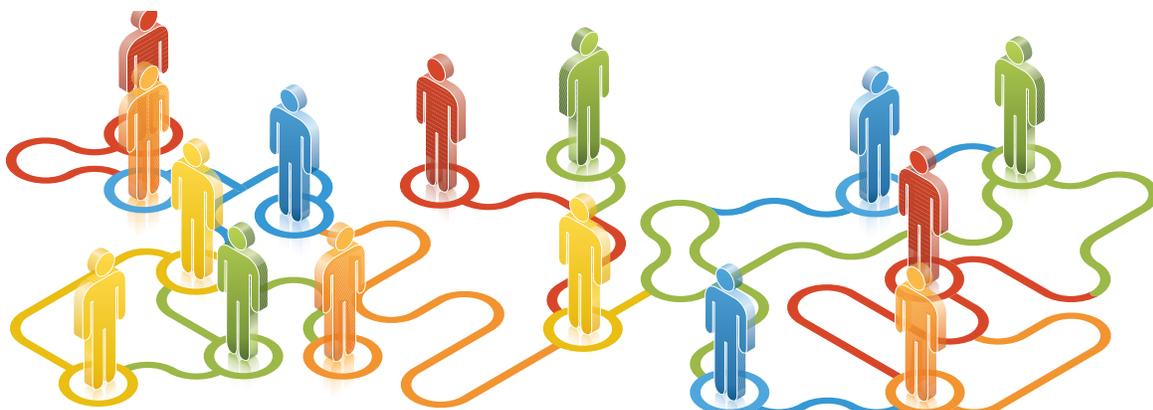
program (www.levistrauss.com/about/foundations/levi-strauss-foundation/pioneers-justice) with the goal of enabling peer learning among participants and equipping them with new social media tools and strategies to work together to create change.

Facilitate action learning

Action learning in groups creates opportunities for effective action around real-world problems. Successful action learning projects encourage a spirit of experimentation, risk taking, and accountability to real-time learning that can produce new solutions. When action learning teams can pool their collective resources to make a difference, they are more likely to learn how to make change happen and to shift expectations about what is needed and what is possible. The Leadership in Action Program brought together leaders who shared a sense of urgency around the significant social problem of school readiness. Its participants were able to align their efforts and

be accountable for taking action, which resulted in dramatic results. A report recently published by the Leadership Learning Community, *How to Use Action Learning to Achieve Your Results*, provides recommendations and tools to help organizations clarify their program's purpose, identify and map the results the program seeks, and decide on action learning approaches that increase the ability and likelihood of participants to deliver the desired results.

Invest in communities of learning and practice

Communities of learning and practice provide a strong base of moral support, peer assistance, practical tools, and collaborative problem solving. People develop more rapidly as leaders and become more creative and curious when they encounter others who are working on similar issues in different contexts. In a complex, interconnected world, communities of learning and practice can support new skill development and

Self-Organization and Collaboration Tools for Networks

A key element to consider when creating a network is how participants will interact and collaborate with each other. Face-to-face opportunities may be limited for most networks, so finding ways to collaborate online is crucial. At the Leadership Learning Community, we have been experimenting with online tools to help our national network of more than 3,000 leadership programs, funders, and consultants connect and collaborate. Here are some of the tools we have found to be helpful:

NING: ONLINE COMMUNITY

- THE CHALLENGE: When planning our annual Creating Space event in 2009, we decided in the spirit of self-organizing to open up its design team to include all community members who were interested in planning the event. We were thrilled by the 20-plus responses we received but were concerned about having the planning done by such a large group of people, many of whom were not very familiar with the event. We stepped up to the challenge and decided to accept all the volunteers to take advantage of their multiple perspectives and ideas. The date of the event was approaching, and we needed to find a way to organize the planning team in the best way possible.

- THE SOLUTION: In addition to using Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com) as we had in the past, we used Ning (www.ning.com) to successfully support the planning and documentation of the event. Ning enables groups to create a fully functional and customizable social network in a couple of minutes and at a low cost. We created a social network and invited the planning team to exchange ideas about the logistics, content areas, and so on. The response from the team was very positive, and some members even took the initiative to create subgroups around specific work areas, such as technology and outreach, to streamline the information flow. Overall, the combination of our wiki and Ning helped us harness the power of collective thinking and ultimately organize and coordinate our national meeting.
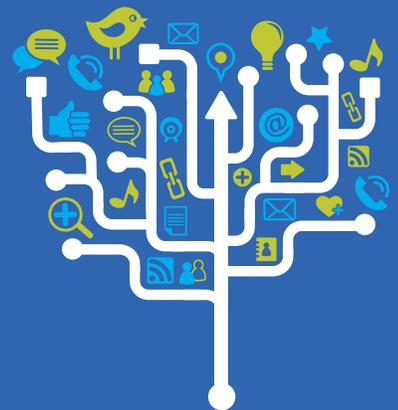
behavior change among a network of practitioners.

The Network Weavers community of practice, for example, grew out of an investment by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and six other funders to create an online infrastructure and to support network technology stewards to guide the development of network weaving leadership among their grantees. This diverse peer-learning community met virtually for six months to share their experiments and expertise. Frequent surveys of participants led to identifying topics for peer assists. In a peer assist session, one person is the focal point, sharing a challenge he or she is facing; the other participants ask questions to help everyone better understand the challenge, and offer resources, connections, and advice. The focal person and then the other participants conclude by sharing what they learned from the session and how it will affect what they do going forward.
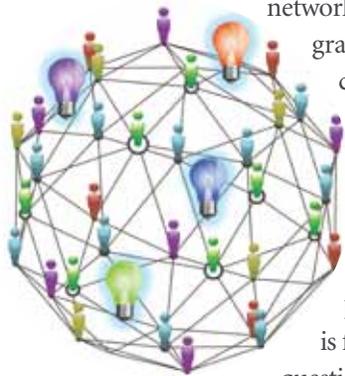
Communities of learning and practice are especially helpful to groups that are adopting new behaviors and growing the knowledge of a field. In the Facebook group of network weavers, peers share resources and learn about network weaving practices and tools, including the self-assessment tool developed by June Holley.

Other network communities of practice include the Leadership Learning Community (leadershiplearning.org), Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (www.geofunders.org), and the Network of Network Funders (networksguide.wikispaces.com). A variety of leadership programs encourage their participants to connect to form communities of learning and practice. If these connections are cultivated during a leadership program, participants are more likely to value and sustain relationships that will continue to enhance their learning and practice beyond the life of their formal leadership program experience.

WIKIS ON WETPAINT: COLLABORATIVE WEBSITE

- **THE CHALLENGE:** When we launched our Leadership for a New Era initiative in 2009, we were tasked with developing an online platform where participants could engage in creating content (adding, editing, and deleting pages) and hold meaningful conversations around the topic areas. We tried using the tools we already had, Wikispaces and Ning, but felt that to create a clear identity for the project we needed to offer a central place where information and ideas could easily be exchanged and discussed—more than just a wiki. Spending the time and money necessary to develop a new website from scratch was not an option.

- **THE SOLUTION:** The Wikis on Wetpaint service (www.wetpaintcentral.com) saved us. It enables groups to create a website that combines wiki and forum functionalities, add a news section with relevant RSS feeds, upload videos and images, and more. Other than a small fee to remove ads from the site, there is no charge. Users can implement a Google Analytics code to track the website's performance, and also customize the site's URL by buying a custom domain.

MEETUP: EVENT ORGANIZING

- **THE CHALLENGE:** We organize a variety of Learning Circles and labs across the nation, and planning and recruiting people for these events can be time-consuming. In late 2000, with our Bay Area Learning Circle coming up in a few weeks, we decided to look for online alternatives that could save us time.

- **THE SOLUTION:** Meetup (www.meetup.com) is an online tool that enables individuals and organizations to find and create groups based on a shared interest. Some of the benefits of this tool are that it is easy to customize (you can add your logo, select the colors of your page, and edit the text), it lets you track members and streamline the event registration flow, and it helps you promote your event. By using Meetup, which has more than 11 million members, we doubled our participant base and minimized staff time on planning, tracking responses, and soliciting feedback. The tool is well worth its small monthly fee, especially for groups that want to increase the reach of network events.

Introduce resources, skills, and tools for leading in complex systems

Many leadership programs, especially in the environmental field, have acknowledged the importance of understanding the larger system that conspires to maintain the status quo. In the case of the RE-AMP energy network, when the Garfield Foundation decided to invest in helping a small group of organizations and funders create a systems map of their climate control work, they were able to identify and align their efforts around four change levers to get dramatic results.

The process of mapping, aligning, and coordinating networks is producing results that can offer insights about leadership development. The Sustainability Institute (www.sustainabilityinstitutesc.org) and LEAD International (www.lead.org), both leadership programs in the environmental field, have developed tools, games, and curriculum to help participants learn to lead with an understanding of how things work and how to disrupt or intervene in systems to change them. Systems thinking curriculum can be incorporated into current leadership programs or offered as training components as part of organizational and network capacity-building efforts.

Retool your leadership program to "walk the talk"

Leadership programs can be incubators for emerging networks and help strengthen networks among participants, but some retooling of traditional leadership programs will be required. To nurture network behaviors, leadership programs need to practice network principles themselves, in the many ways just described: give up some control in favor of encouraging the self-organization and initiative of participants as co-designers of the development experience; build in time for participants to get to know one another in more authentic ways as whole people; draw more on the resources of the participants as a community of learning and practice and less on external experts; promote models of leadership that are collective; encourage participants to self-organize around joint projects; applaud risk taking and celebrate mistakes; and help participants understand themselves as a network and learn the power of network weaving.

Conclusion

The Arab Spring captured the imagination of people passionate about the power of democratic participation to transform authoritarian political systems. The ability of young people to use social media to connect with one another around a shared passion for change shook the foundations of the status quo. Movements like these have raised the question of what might be possible if tens of thousands of participants in leadership programs connected their resources and networks to tackle growing social inequities.

Through a partnership between the leadership development and network development fields, this report has addressed why people doing leadership work should pay attention to networks. The report is meant to be a conversation starter, to generate good questions, and to increase excitement about the potential of network strategies to bring about collective impact.

The Leadership for a New Era wiki at http://www. leadershipforanewera.org links to models, tools, and case studies discussed in this report. We invite you to join us there in exploring the potential of network strategies and tools to transform leadership. This work is just beginning and will flourish only if leadership practitioners who are experimenting with network approaches connect their learning. We encourage you to visit the wiki to harvest additional resources, write about your experiences for the benefit of others, and find other funders and leadership program staff who are interested in learning together. All comments are welcome. Through our collaboration, we can shift the ways in which leadership is understood and developed and can achieve the impact necessary for social change.

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About the Leadership and Networks Publication

As part of the Leadership for a New Era (LNE) initiative, the Leadership Learning Community has partnered with thought leaders in the network development and leadership development fields to develop the cutting-edge report *Leadership and Networks: New Ways of Developing Leadership in a Highly Connected World*. This publication is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

This report is written for those who run and fund leadership programs that develop and support leadership for social change. It shares many examples of how leaders using network strategies are increasing the impact of social change work, such as the Barr Fellowship Network and MomsRising.org. Our goal is to inspire and help hundreds of leadership programs to question their assumptions about the traditional leadership models and retool their approaches in ways that will enable them to better prepare those in leadership with the mindset and skills they will need to more fully leverage network strategies. Specifically, the report addresses the following questions:

- Why do network strategies deserve our attention?
- Why do we need a new leadership mindset?
- What are the core principles of leading with a network mindset?
- What leadership development strategies support a network mindset and skills?

For more information, please visit the Leadership for a New Era website (www.leadershipforanewera.org), which includes a list of additional resources and tools about leadership and networks.

About the Leadership for a New Era Initiative

Leadership for a New Era (LNE) is a collaborative research initiative launched in 2009 by the Leadership Learning Community. Through this initiative, we seek to promote leadership approaches that are more inclusive, networked, and collective. We believe that the dominant leadership model, which places a strong emphasis on the individual, limits the ability of leadership programs to bring about positive change in our society, so we have joined forces with a diverse group of funders, researchers, practitioners, and consultants in the leadership development field

to shift the current thinking. Our research focuses on four areas: Leadership and Race, Leadership and Networks, Collective Leadership, and Leadership across Difference. For more information, please visit www.leadershipforanewera.org.

Other publications created as part of the Leadership for a New Era initiative are as follows:

- A New Leadership Mindset (2009) http://leadershiplearning.org/new-leadership-mindset-download
- Leadership and Race: How to Develop and Support Leadership that Contributes to Racial Justice (2010) http://leadershiplearning.org/new-publication-how-develop-and-support-leadership-contributes-racial-justice
- Leadership and Collective Impact: A Guide for Strengthening the Impact of Your Leadership Development Work (2012) This publication was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. http://leadershiplearning.org/draft-download-how-series-webform

The publications listed above were funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, The California Endowment, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the Kansas Leadership Center, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

About the Leadership Learning Community

We are a national nonprofit organization transforming the way leadership development work is conceived, conducted, and evaluated, primarily within the nonprofit sector. We focus on leveraging leadership as a means of creating a more just and equitable society. We combine our expertise in identifying, evaluating, and applying cutting-edge ideas and practices in the leadership development field with access to our national network of hundreds of experienced funders, consultants, and leadership development programs, to drive the innovation and collaboration needed to make leadership development more effective. We also offer consulting services such as scans, evaluations, and network development to help programs and foundations optimize their leadership investment strategy. For more information, please visit www.leadershiplearning.org

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Get Involved!

Join the Leadership for a New Era Website

This publication is part of the Leadership for a New Era Series, which promotes leadership approaches that are more inclusive, networked, and collective. We invite you to visit www.leadershipforanewera.org to connect with peers across the nation, share your ideas, access resources and ultimately, and join us in promoting a more effective leadership model. www.leadershipforanewera.org

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