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Planning and Managing Effective Networks *Compiled 2015*

Effective collaboratives, communities of practice and grantee networks are a core service offering for Education First. We believe our effectiveness as partners and facilitators derives from our extensive research and experience about what makes a network work. This deck, compiled in 2015 from a series of resources prepared for individual clients across multiple years, summarizes some of our deep thinking about the conditions, opportunities and challenges for successful networks.

Please contact [Jenn Vranek](#) to learn more about Education First's approach to networks and collaboration.

About Us:

Education First is a national, mission-driven strategy and policy organization with unique and deep expertise in education improvement. Our mission is to deliver exceptional ideas, experience-based solutions and results so all students – and particularly low-income students and students of color – are prepared for success in college, career and life. We work closely with policymakers, practitioners, funders and advocates to design and accelerate policies and plans that support strong systems, outstanding educators, engaged students and effective investments.

Planning and Managing Effective Networks:

Lessons for the Field

Compiled October 2015



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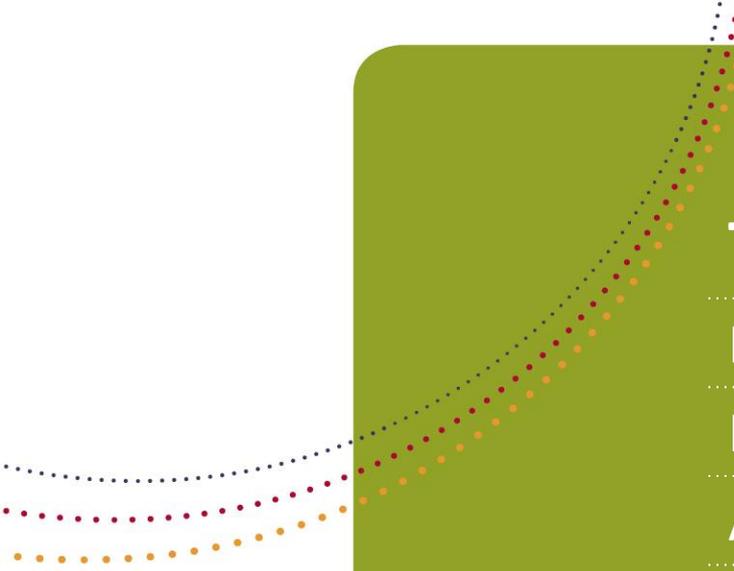


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Networks 101



Networks 101

Not every group is a network...



- **What:** Many different organizations working in concert
- **Who:** Organizations, institutions, governmental agencies, corporations, foundations, etc.
- **Why:** Around a common defined purpose
- **How:** As equal partners



Learning Networks: Considerations and Lessons Learned

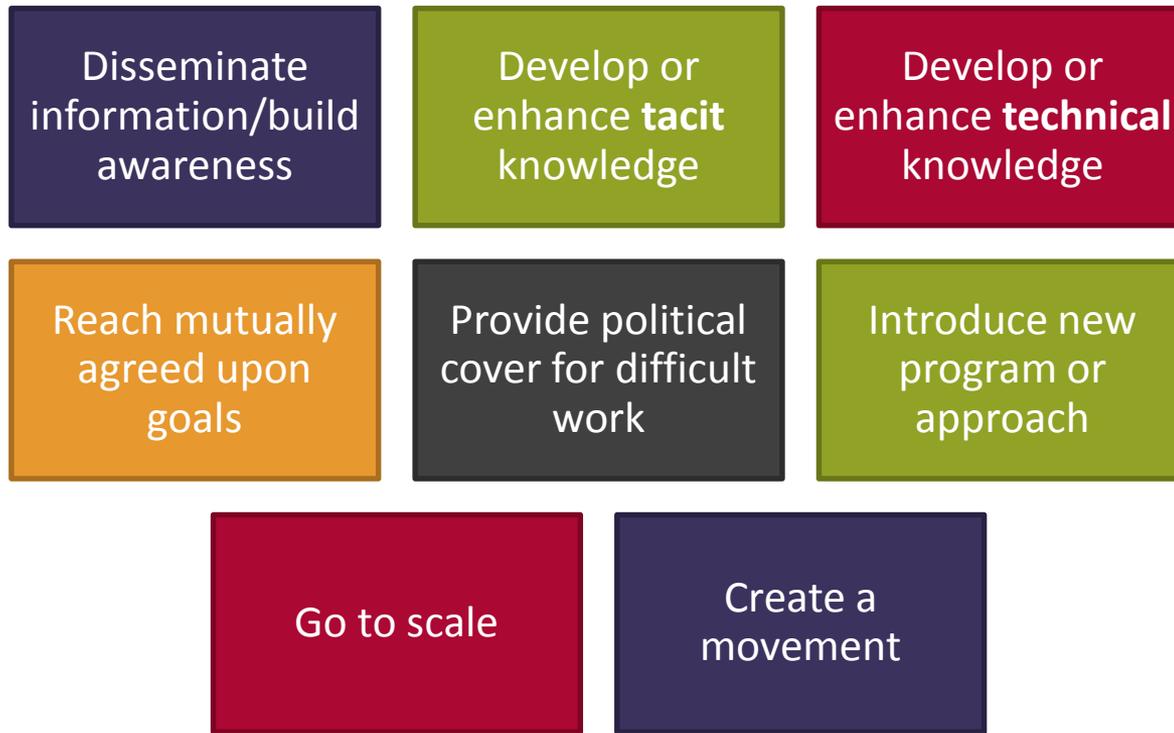
- Networks do not automatically produce cost savings – in some cases networks require considerable investment
- Networks are best created on a basis of trusted partners; easier to begin one where relationships already exist
- Create them only when the synergy of a network is likely to move the work ahead farther and faster than individual organizations working alone
- Networks must have shared goals and shared accountability
- Every partner-participant and resource/TA provider must get ongoing value or they will disengage
- Create clear parameters at the outset



Networks: Form Should Follow Function

The type of network should match the type of function needed.

Network functions can include:





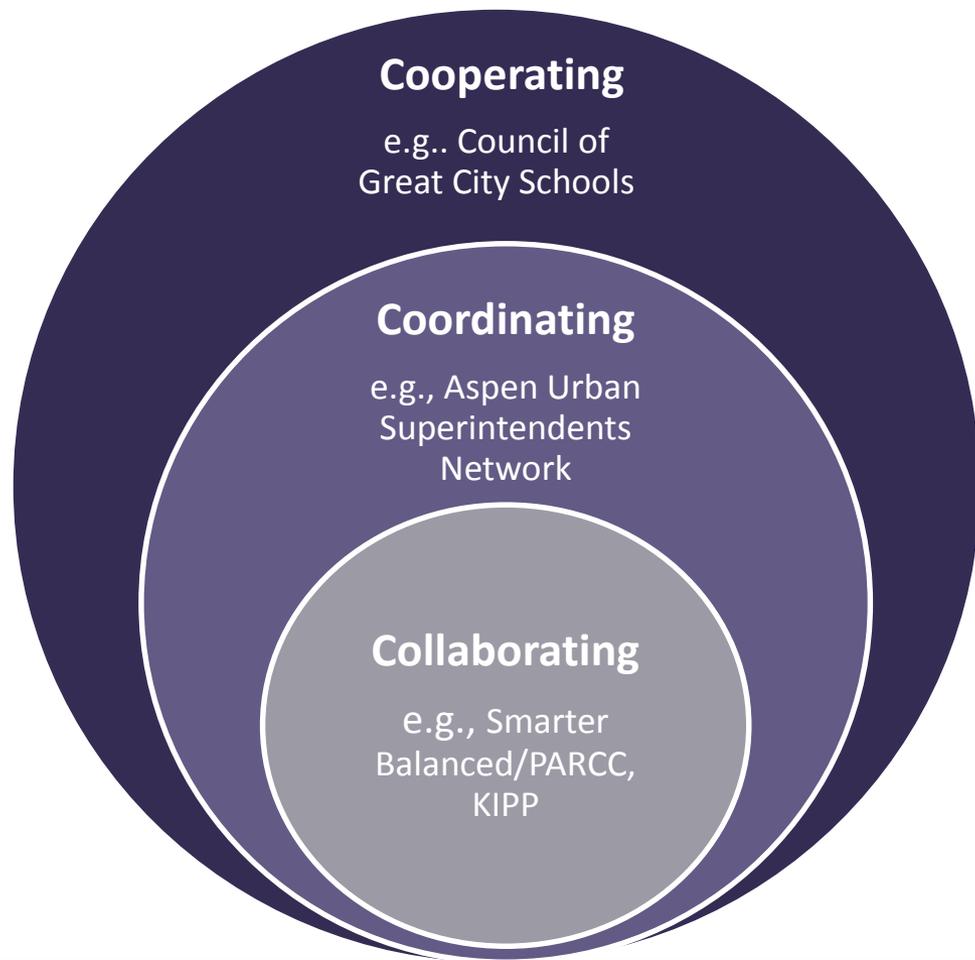
Form should follow function in determining which type of network to organize

Network functions include:

- Disseminate information/build awareness
- Develop or enhance tacit knowledge
- Develop or enhance technical knowledge
- Reach mutually agreed upon goals
- Provide political cover for difficult work
- Introduce new program or approach
- Go to scale
- Create a movement

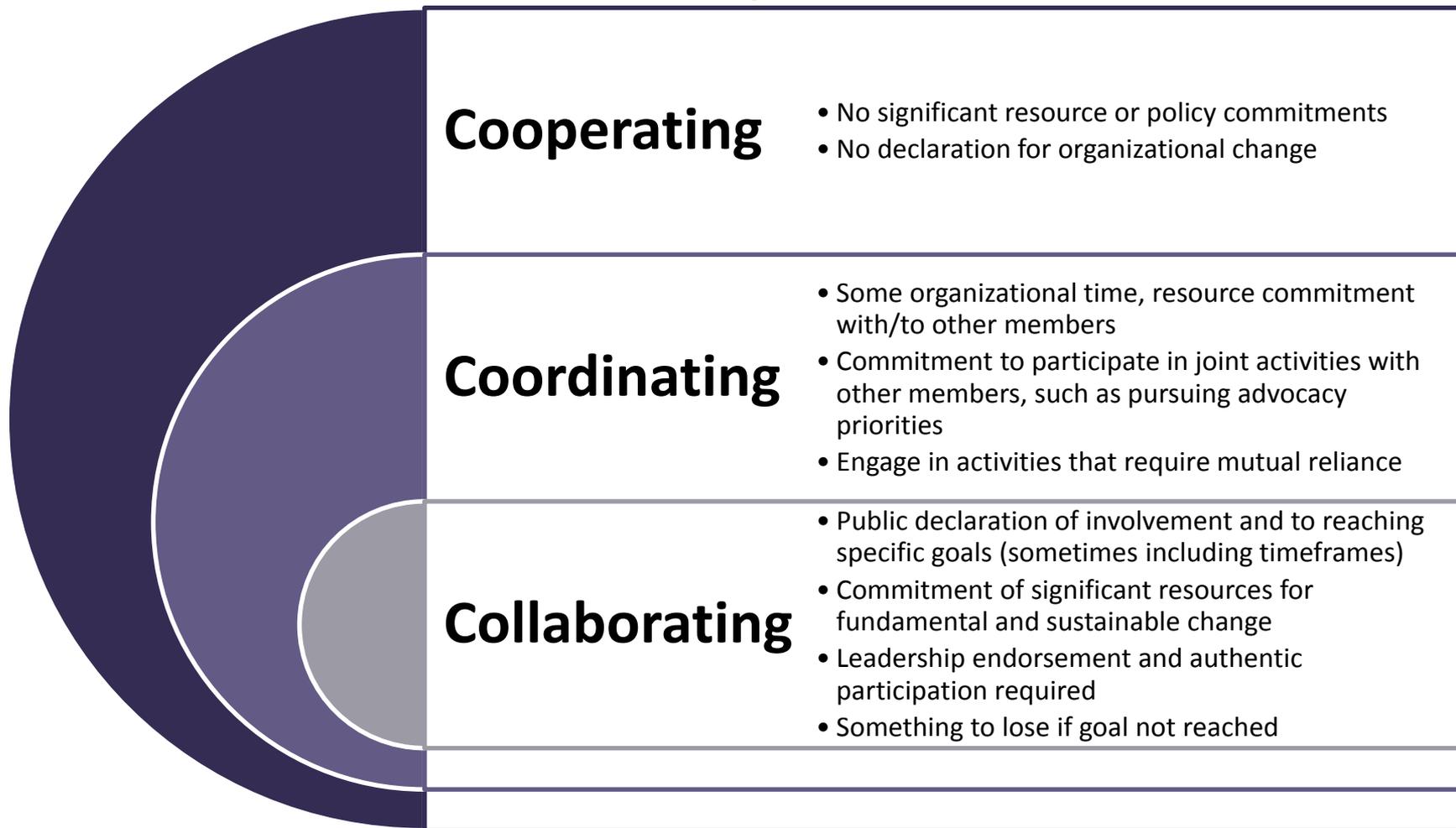


Three categories of networks





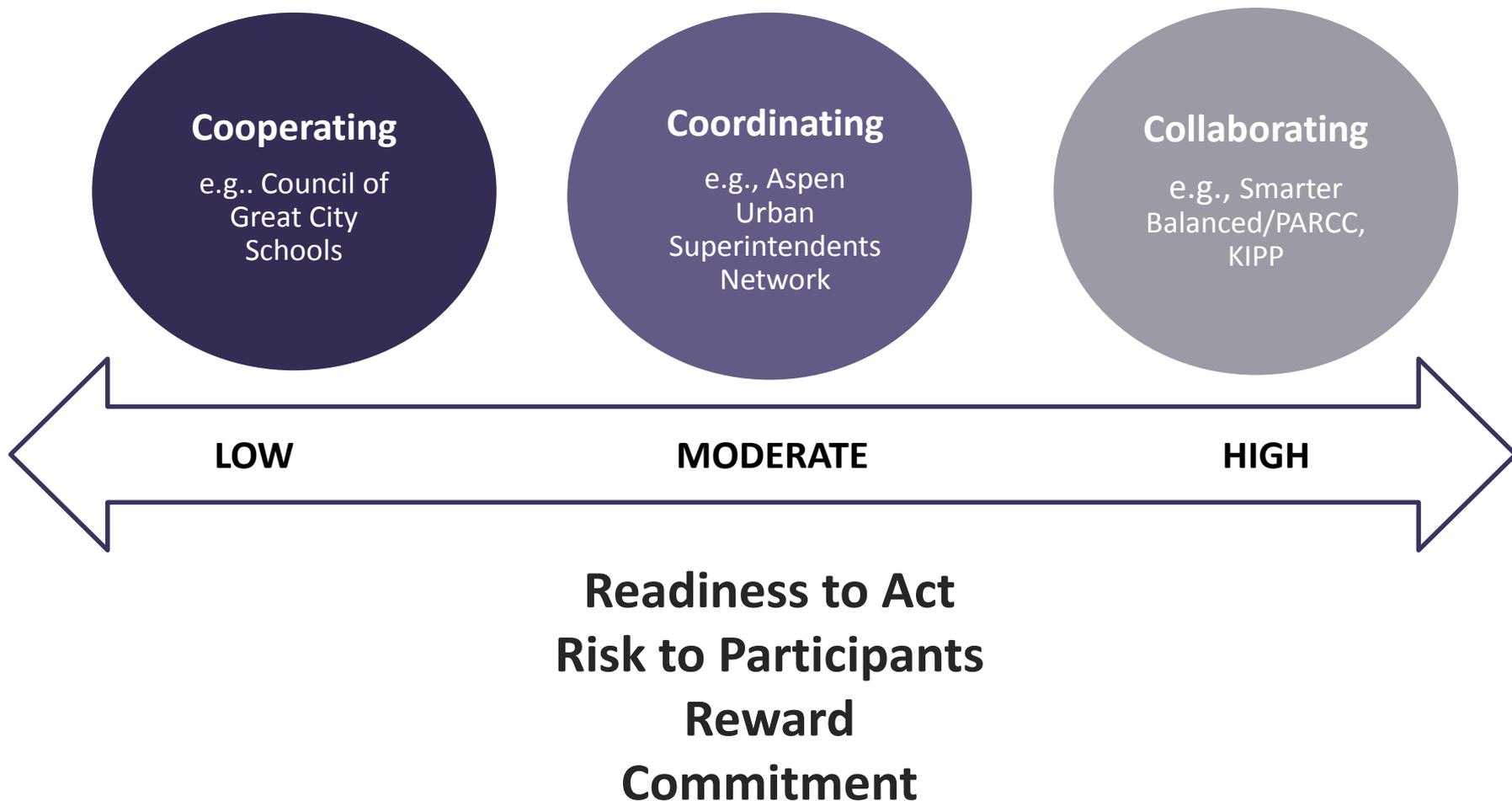
These categories help inform the network's structure, design and intensity of investment



See the appendix slides for examples of each of these networks



Categories of networks run along a continuum based on four key factors influencing by participants





Strong networks come together around a common goal, share social and operational norms and are involved at different levels in the network

Participants make firm commitments to participate

Network conveners ensure participants understand key network commitments. Network-wide meetings are planned well in advance, and participants put dates on their district calendar and view convening attendance as a high priority.

Clear definitions of success are provided upfront

Participants enter the RFP process **with a clear understanding of how their success will be measured (goals, metrics, etc.)**. Districts only submit applications if they are on board with the metrics.

Participants have capacity and right mindset

Participants understand they are at differing levels of progress from each other, but **are willing to both learn and share learnings with others**. Participants are willing and able to make systems change.

Participants engage in teams, including leadership

Districts have steering teams that oversee the work and a dedicated project manager. Teams attend each convening, with participants at multiple levels of leadership. The highest levels of district leadership are not at every meeting, but understand and are informed of the effort.



Schools districts in K12 networks tell us that strong networks engage participants in multiple ways, with multiple people, and are action-oriented

Strong networks are more than convenings

The best networks **include full-network, multi-day convenings; special-topic seminars** (e.g., one-day meetings) and **webinars; coaching and 1:1 technical assistance**; policy briefs and curated tools/resources made by participants and national organizations.

Strong networks are responsive

Participants drive network topics and activities; feedback loops are used frequently; intermediaries and TA providers able to change course as needed. While dates and high-level topics are carefully selected far in advance to enable district planning, flexibility is key to address needs.

Strong networks are about doing, not just listening or learning

Participants, intermediaries and TA providers are held accountable for generating real outcomes, not only attending events. A large focus is placed execution and change management, so that participants can implement their learnings in their contexts.

Strong networks provide quality opportunities for relationship building

The network is **intentionally structured so that participants can build trusting, collegial relationships** between each other, and with the technical assistance providers. Participants feel ownership over network activities and success.



Strong networks properly prepare and convene participants in person at key times, around an engaging agenda

Networks use convenings thoughtfully

Though convenings are only one aspect of networks activities, they often engender the most love (and frustration!) among participants. **Strong networks convene “just in time” and do not over-convene.**

Networks provide a combination of activities at convenings

A blend of activities, such as panels to introduce new topics, case studies of models to discuss, role-alike groups and mini presentations across districts to share practices, **and team time** to synthesize learnings and next steps can engage and challenge participants.

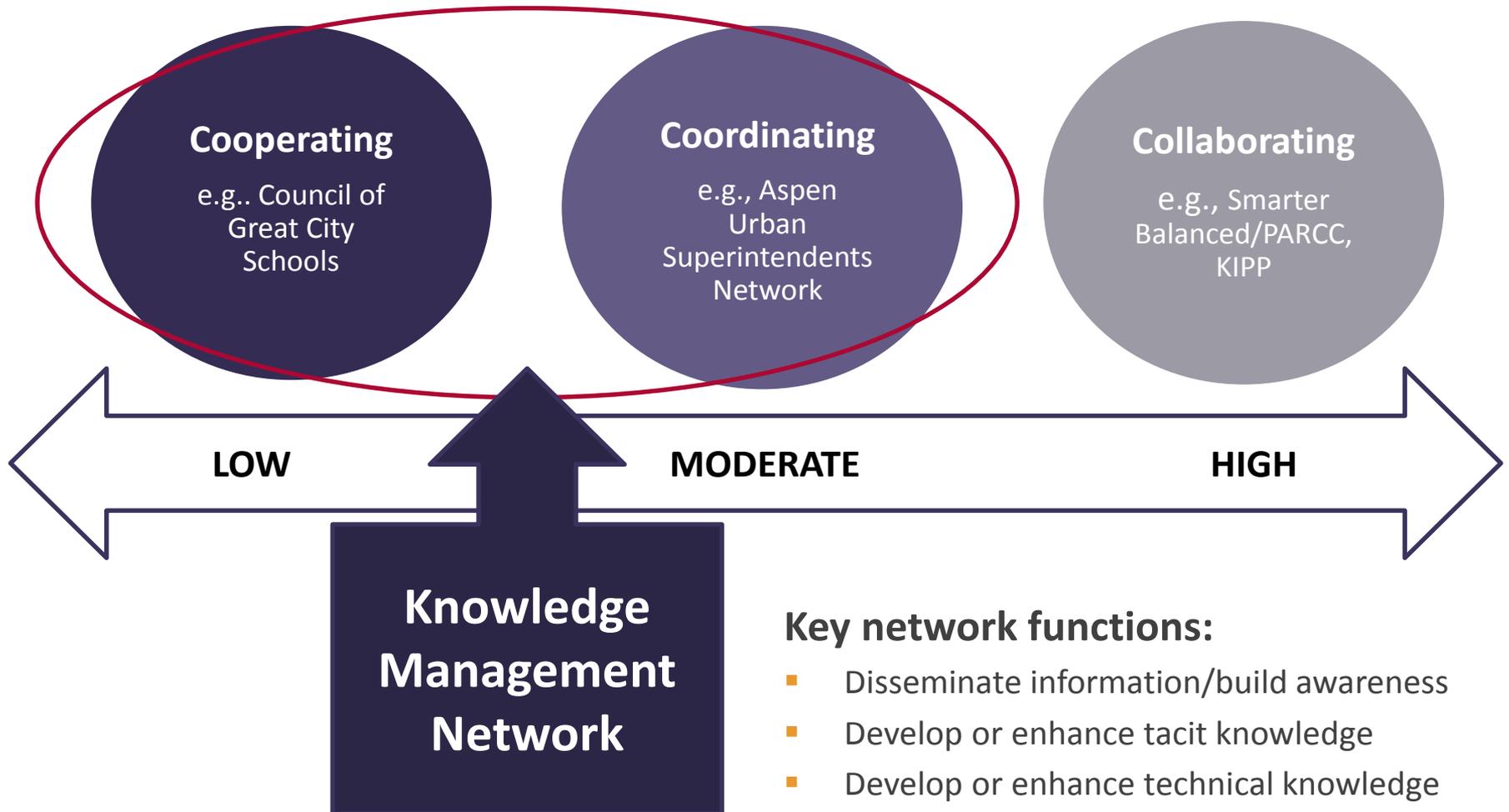
Networks provide participants relevant pre-work

Strong pre-readings enable leaders to tee-up the topic in their district before the convening, so their teams can implement when they return. Participants use pre-work to go to the convening with a “game plan” for learning tied to their district needs.

Knowledge Networks 101



Based on the key functions, a knowledge management network falls somewhere in between a cooperating and coordinating network





Knowledge Networks 101

Defining “knowledge networks”...



Collections of individuals and teams who come together across organizational, spatial and disciplinary boundaries to invent and share a body knowledge

Before creating a knowledge network, there are key things to know...

- Network members come together around a common goal and share social and operational norms
- Unless goals are clearly stated and agreed upon, networks can easily lose energy and underperform
- Networks have lost steam due to poor participation, goal ambiguity, mixed allegiances and/or technology mismatches
- Network leaders can influence members’ behaviors though network design and facilitation



There are four distinct types of network goals, and these goals influence a network's design

1. Coordination

- The network coordinates and leverages members' existing knowledge activities through its structures, incentives and norms

2. Learning/ Innovation

- The network commissions, accumulates and distributes knowledge for its members' consumption, or as a general public good
- The network also looks inward and learns systematically about itself and its processes

3. Translation/ Local Adaptation

- Teams join the network to identify and adapt knowledge to their specific local challenges
- By joining the network as a unit, they can safely vet and translate new or controversial ideas before returning to their home context

4. Support of Individual Members

- Individuals join the network to develop, accumulate and adapt knowledge to support their own and their colleagues' work

See the next slide for examples of each of these goals



These are four real-world examples of the distinctions between the four overarching network goals

1. Coordination

- In a ConocoPhillips' network, an Australian operation identified a new technique for underwater tank inspections that a partner-operated facility in the North Sea adopted as well, resulting in a coordinated inspection approach that could be optimized across geographies

2. Learning/ Innovation

- Harvard's Project Zero brings together chief learning officers across a wide variety of global organizations and convenes the network several times annually; and network members routinely explore changes in the landscape for corporate learning, experiment with new practices and return to their organizations to pilot new ideas gained from their participation in the network

3. Translation/ Local Adaptation

- The Institute for Healthcare Improvement's IMPACT communities are comprised of teams made of nurses, administrator, physicians, project managers and pharmacists seeking to reduce medical errors and inefficiencies; and by joining other teams and "taking off the white coats," individuals exchange ideas and learning across hospital teams, unfettered by hierarchy

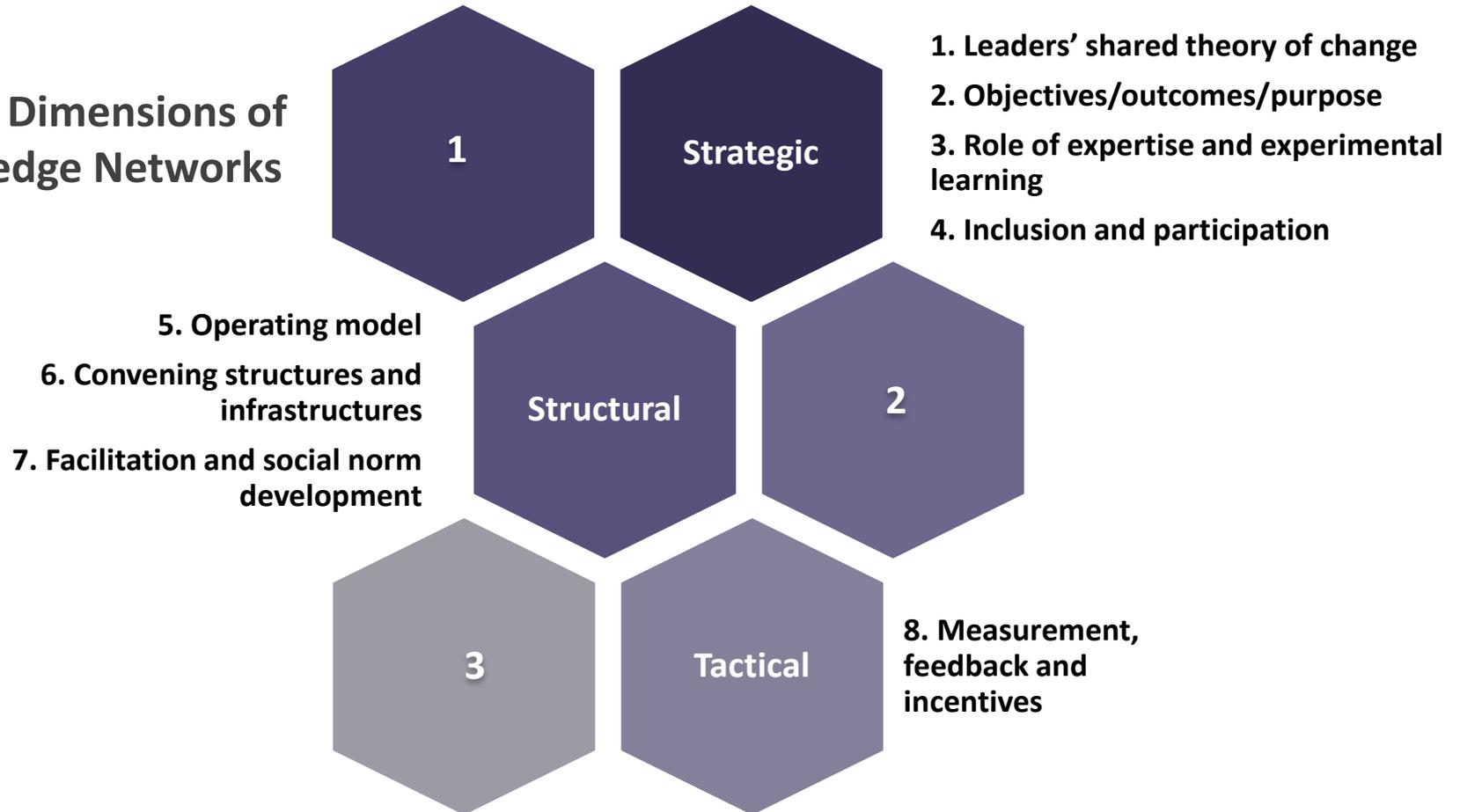
4. Support of Individual Members

- Freedom for an individual to ask questions without manager scrutiny and peer criticism is a central goal of Women's World Banking's network model; for examples, two microfinance leaders from Jordan and from Uganda have peer-coached each other with daily check-ins on the topic of time management



To design effective knowledge networks, network leaders should consider these eight design dimensions

Design Dimensions of Knowledge Networks





1
Strategic

The following questions for the strategic domain can help leaders thoughtfully design and manage knowledge networks

Design dimension	Questions to be answered by knowledge network leaders
1. Leaders' shared theory of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What should be the leaders' working assumptions about the change dynamic? How will people learn and adapt knowledge into action? • What is the leadership model? Will leadership be provided by a group (for example, a core team) or an individual? • How do leaders model desired network behaviors (for example, sharing knowledge and contacts, using the platform, being expert and learner)
2. Objectives/ outcomes/ purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are the network's purpose, outcomes and objectives defined? • Are they negotiated among convening members? Start-up vs. ongoing? • How do the community purpose, norms, values and outcomes get documented, along with the operating model? Is there a charter?
3. Role of expertise and experimentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should the organization enable members to be both expert and learner? • What balance should be struck between collective learning, idea integration, expert teaching and bringing in external research or expertise? • What balance is most conducive to reflection? To action? To empowering people to speak?
4. Inclusion, participation (and promotion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the profile of a member? Are there different profiles for different levels of participation (for example, leader or coordinator)? • Do we look for intentionality, comfort with ambiguity and level of commitment? • Do we want to seek out both individual experts and those with strong networks? Self-starters and team players?



2
Structural

The following questions for the structural domain can help leaders thoughtfully design and manage knowledge networks

Design dimension	Questions to be answered by knowledge network leaders
5. Operating model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the governing model? For example, when are working groups or project teams introduced to create formal policies or solutions? • How does this get published and discussed in a charter or other document? • How and where are decisions made? • What the roles and responsibilities of leaders and other officers? • What is the role of the public or outside regulators?
6. Convening structures and infrastructures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What channels or vehicles (such as meetings, “tweetups” or other social media and collaboration platforms) will the network use to convene members, synchronously? • When is real-time rather than asynchronous conversation or dialogue essential? • What low-tech structures are required for convening members in areas with low-bandwidth internet access or limited technology access?
7. Facilitation and social norm development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of facilitation approaches will be required, both from the network managers and from members? • What tone should be set in the various convening vehicles? How does this tone get established and maintained? • What norms, like reciprocity, listening or idea translation for others, need to be established and protected?



3
Tactical

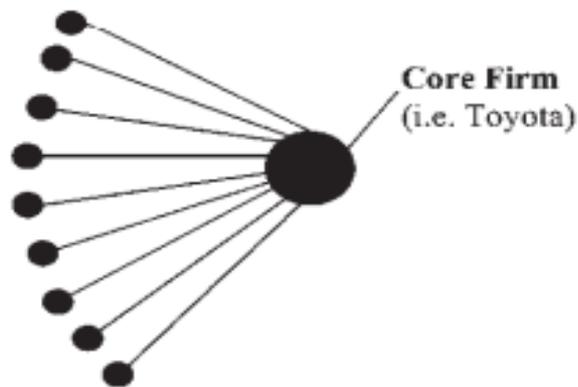
The following questions for the tactical domain can help leaders thoughtfully design and manage knowledge networks

Design dimension	Questions to be answered by knowledge network leaders
8. Measurement, feedback and incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the outcomes, input and satisfaction metrics to examine?• What is the data collection approach?• What reflection and closed-loop learning processes should be explicit?• How do we reward both the community as a whole and individuals as contributors, balancing the need to honor both expertise and learners?



Over time, knowledge-sharing networks should evolve in structure, the type of knowledge and member motivation to participate

Initiation Phase



Network structure

- One large network with core firm as hub
- Bilateral relationships with core firm
- Weak ties among most members
- Numerous structural holes

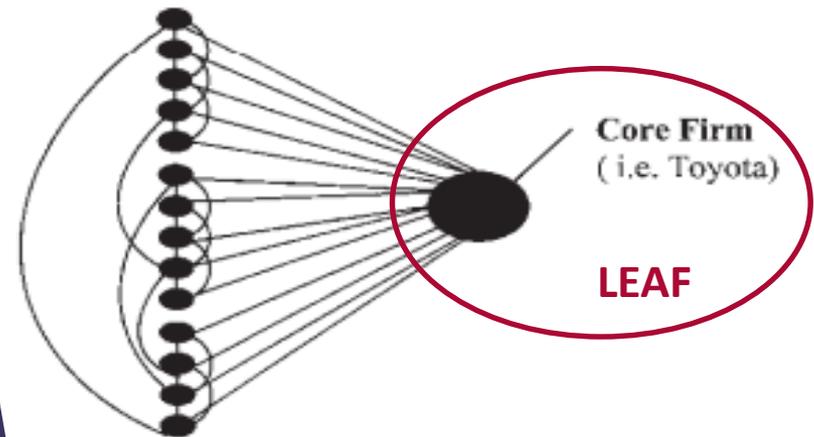
Type of network

- Explicit (codified, documented) knowledge

Member motivation

- Demonstrate commitment to core firm

Mature Phase



- Large network plus multiple “nested networks”
- Multi-lateral relationships
- Strong embedded ties in nested networks and with core firm
- Few structural holes

- Both explicit and tacit (intuitive knowledge and know-how, best passed on through mentoring, practice) knowledge

- Learn faster than competitors (benefits of participation far outweigh isolation); reciprocity



Analysis of Successful Networks



Analysis of Successful Networks

Network	Description	Formation and Structure	District Activities
Cooperating	<p>Council of Great City Schools (CGCS)</p> <p>68 large city school districts promoting the cause of urban schools and advocating for inner-city students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially created as a networking and study group in 1956, the Council today has grown into a national education policy and research organization School districts eligible for membership based on urban characteristics. Has an Executive Committee, along with three subcommittees to provide support in financial and organizational areas The Board of Directors is composed of the Superintendent and one Board of Education member from each member district Has five special task forces to address major issues facing big-city school district In addition to these governing bodies, a network of deans of the Great City Colleges of Education and staff liaisons from various school district departments encourage information exchange with counterparts in other cities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a network for school districts sharing common problems to exchange information, and to collectively address new challenges as they emerge in order to deliver the best possible education for urban youth Has fall annual meetings as well as legislative/policy meetings Hosts meetings for various positions in school districts (e.g., Bilingual, Immigrant and Refugee Education Directors Meeting)
		<p>Math in Common <i>(managed by California Education Partners)</i></p> <p>Ten districts supporting K-8 educators to implement the Common Core</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Districts selected via closed RFP process Districts funded to send teams of 5-10 to participate in the network, including a project lead and a high level cabinet member at the district California Education Partners facilitates convenings and cross-district interactions Third party evaluator (WestEd) assesses the initiative Funder has monthly calls with each district and with facilitator and evaluator, and attends most in-person and virtual events

Cooperating

Coordinating



Analysis of Successful Networks

Network	Description	Formation and Structure	District Activities
<div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); background-color: #4a5568; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold;">Coordinating</div> <p style="text-align: center;">Urban District Leadership Network</p>	<p>13 large urban districts advancing implementation of the Common Core State Standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Includes four coordinated networks: (1) the Urban Superintendents/CEO Network (2) Chief Academic Officers Network (3) Urban Literacy Leadership Network and (4) Urban Mathematics Leadership Network ▪ Math and literacy networks cut across a few levels of staff, including content leads, area supervisors, principals ▪ Aspen Institute for Education and Society facilitates meetings ▪ Aspen gathers district needs from CEO meetings to inform convening topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Each of the four networks (Superintendents/ CEOs, CAO, Mathematics Leadership and Literacy Leadership) convene twice per year ▪ Convenings include pre-readings, discussing problems of practice, consultancies ▪ CAO, math and literacy networks help direct one of the two convenings; convening includes independent and collaborative activities ▪ Some informal interactions in between sessions
<div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); background-color: #4a5568; color: white; padding: 5px; font-weight: bold;">Coordinating</div> <p style="text-align: center;">CA K-8 NGSS Early Implementation Initiative</p>	<p>Eight districts advancing implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Districts selected via a closed RFP process ▪ WestED’s K-12 Alliance facilitates district convenings and leads evaluation of overall initiative and the network ▪ Districts bring core leadership teams of 10-12, including a project director, principals and teachers ▪ Districts project directors collaborate with WestED K-12 Alliance regional directors to plan convenings based on district need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Districts participate in 2-3 convenings annually ▪ WestED’s K-12 Alliance provides 5-7 technical assistance coaching meetings with district teams ▪ Districts participate in two lesson study activities per district; each lesson study consists of one day of planning and one day of implementation



Analysis of Successful Networks

Network	Description	Formation and Structure	District Activities
<p>SCALE Up <i>(managed by California Education Partners)</i></p>	<p>Six districts pooling practice and resources; first 2 years focus on early childhood (TK-2) literacy and ELL achievement gap</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Six rural California superintendents formed a collaborative, partnering with a TA provider (California Education Partners) ▪ Districts’ Design Team and teachers develop and implement TK-2 CCSS-aligned assessment ▪ Districts’ Data Director helps districts create Data System to track formative and summative results with eye toward ELL achievement gap ▪ Design Team helps teachers form SCALE Up PLCs and use Data System assessment data to drive instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Biweekly Design Team meetings with CA Ed Partners for coaching and strategizing ▪ A Comprehensive Summit Team meets three times per year to review and plan next steps ▪ Bimonthly trainings for Design Teams led by the Data Director geared toward effectively interpreting and using Data System data ▪ Design Teams lead monthly on-site PLCs with districts to share strategies learned at the Data Director-led trainings ▪ Summit Team meets yearly at Stanford University to share ELL outcomes with Stanford ELL Leadership Network ▪ Executive Board performs reviews every six months, approving data-sharing plans and recommending new work
<p>California Office to Reform Education (CORE)</p>	<p>Ten districts advancing Common Core, improving educator effectiveness and building systems alignment via shared data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Came together to jointly submit an NCLB waiver, which they did not receive, but then later did get ▪ Members are a “coalition of the willing” and mostly large districts (jointly serve >\$1M students) ▪ Membership teams from each district include the superintendent, CAO, and district department heads ▪ Articulated common mission, goals and strategies ▪ Superintendents form the Board of Directors; Staff runs the day-to-day operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quarterly Board meetings of district superintendents to review budget and program implementation ▪ Biannual School Quality Improvement System Oversight Panel meetings to discuss districts’ peer-reviewed self evaluations ▪ Cross district convenings targeting teaching strategies (e.g. formative assessment) and content (e.g. Core Arts Standards), as needed ▪ Pair high and low performing schools to initiate peer learning

Coordinating

Collaborating

Thank You

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