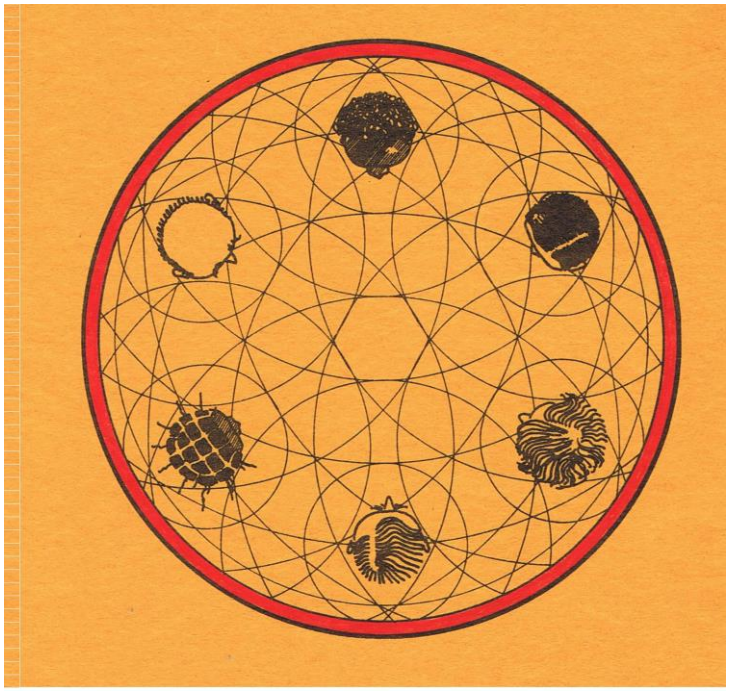
Dynamics of Living Networks



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5th edition, 2018

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1. Tools for networkers

Models and methods

The initiative as a starting point

How can you mobilise a network of people and institutions towards an initiative which you believe in? The "tools for networkers" were developed to answer this question. Networks come in all shapes and sizes, and the very word "network" means different things to different people. Definitions range from meeting places where business cards are exchanged to "old boys networks" of friends who pass jobs on to each other. Meanwhile social networks have an identity for which people say "we".

If you are engaged in an initiative that requires action from certain actors, these people may not necessarily be part of such a social network. The FAN approach focuses on networks for action, those which form around an initiative. People engage with an idea or ambition, and this is where the journey begins. Who would have to move to bring this initiative to fruition? All of these actors are considered part of the network.

FAN stands for "free actors in networks". A free actor is someone who does whatever it takes to make or maintain a network's health, whether they have a mandate to do so or not. The FAN approach assumes that no network can do without at least one free actor. The question is how someone can perform this role in a way appreciated by others.

Instruments to navigate in unknown terrain

The initiative gives energy and direction. This is different to a goal that has been set out beforehand. Initiators will encounter other actors, who also want something and that perhaps must be negotiated. There will be surprises along the way, and assumptions may prove false.

Such a journey requires different tools to those offered by more typical project management approaches. With so many unpredictable elements, a road map is of little value. Checklists of risks or lists of competences can be helpful, but in a complex world you will always miss a few things and such methods may give the false impression that the process is under control.

In unknown territory you need to be able to recognise patterns, and respond to situations that may arise. This is what the Fan Approach was designed for; to recognise where you are and know the options for effective action.

Networks are about people

Change starts with people, not institutions. Most tools for analysing networks and change processes only consider actors as institutions or representatives of institutions, with their particular interests and positions of influence. In the FAN approach, institutions do determine in part the space in which people can move, but the focus is on the people who make use of that space and, if necessary, act to move its boundaries. Energy is created when people meet and connect over ambitions. If there is energy in a network, much is possible.

Models, but not to be followed

The toolbox consists of models that highlight different aspects of a network process. They distinguish actors' involvement, development stages, interaction patterns and positions regarding the initiative and the structure in which change is to be brought about. These distinctions are useful if they help in a choice for effective action.

The tools provide options for action, although they are not cookbook recipes. Reality is always more complex than any model can show, and what is the best action in a particular situation

depends on many factors. Personality is important: what works for one is not without saying good for the other. In a network you often follow your intuition. Above all, this is what you should continue to do. The models do not replace intuition. However, you can feed your intuition by reflecting on experiences of yourself and of others. The tools provide language for that reflection.

Furthermore, the tools include also methods for reflection and reporting. There is a guide to peer consultation, and a method for reflection on a network process together with stakeholders: the timeline method. If an analysis is added to such a timeline it becomes a Learning History, which is also suitable for reporting.

2. Three Modes of Collaboration

Networks are about collaboration

People form networks to do what they cannot achieve alone. In action networks, the focus of the FAN approach, people use different ways to try and get others on board with their initiatives. Three mainstreams of thought can be identified, which imply three different modes of collaboration: transfer, exchange and co-creation.

Transfer: "I know what is good for you"

In transfer mode, an end outcome is set by the one who takes lead. The challenge is to make others contribute to that end. They must be convinced that it is in their interest to do so.

Here, the expert is supposed to know best. For a long time, the mainstream thinking in innovation processes was that new knowledge and techniques were to be developed by researchers and disseminated to end users. Transfer of technology, extension (*vulgarisation* in French), diffusion of innovations, multiplier effects, adoption: this is the vocabulary of transfer mode.

When the message is really good, transfer mode can be effective. Yet there are many cases in which one cannot be so sure. Is adoption really in the interest of those who must be convinced of it? Furthermore it is only effective in the case of accepted hierarchy between the expert or leader and those who are to follow.

Exchange: "Can we make a deal?"

In exchange mode, the initiator has a desired outcome in mind, for which other actors are needed to collaborate. The initiator knows that these actors will probably want something in return. Through negotiation, he tries to get as close as he can to his target. It is a matter of give and take. When actors know more about each other's interests, as well as what each can possibly contribute, the more possibilities for exchange will become visible.

There should be mutual gain in this mode. People strive for "win-win" situations. Everything has a market price. Since neo-liberal free market thinking became mainstream in the organisation of activities for development and innovation, relationships have been redefined as positions within the market. Knowledge is seen as a product. There are suppliers and clients, and the market should be demand driven. Suppliers should be efficient, effective and give value for money. Accountability is also part of the deal. This is the vocabulary of exchange.

When individual interests are paramount, exchange mode is an effective way to deal with issues of conflicting interest, but only so long as the actors involved have more or less equal positions of power from which to negotiate.

Co-creation: "What can we create by pooling resources?"

In co-creation mode, actors share a dream and pool their resources to make it happen. Each one has specific knowledge, skills, experience, means and access to other networks. If they could manage to pool all of these, what possibilities could come within reach? If they can become really creative together, the eventual outcome will be better than anyone could have imagined initially.

Shared ambition is the driving force here. When people discover that others share their dream, the possibility to make it come true becomes more likely. Interestingly, this mode requires a personal commitment. Whereas in the modes of transfer and exchange people can act on behalf of institutions, co-creation begins with something people believe in themselves. The mandate they have been given by their respective institutions is now seen as a space that allows them to pursue what they really want to work on themselves.

It takes effort and skill to enter into this mode. The trust required must be built up carefully. The tools and methods of the FAN approach are designed to do just that.

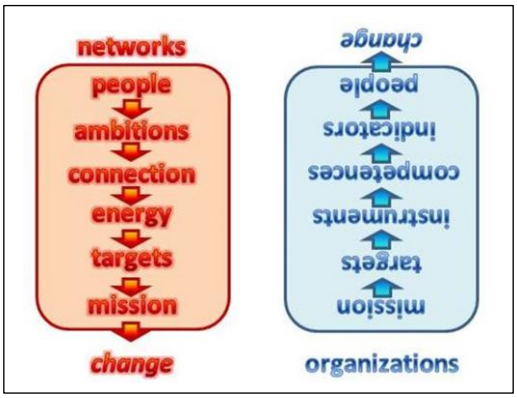
Know what fits your situation best

Each mode has its own merits; one is not necessarily better than the others in all cases. When you take your car to the garage, you hope that they know best how to repair it. When you buy a car, you want a good deal and that doesn't require a shared dream between you and the salesman. But when you want to embark on an interesting journey with friends, it is good to start out with a shared dream.

3. Networks: What's so Different?

More interesting than organisations

The dynamics at play in networks are fascinating. If you want to observe how people shape their environments together, networks are far more interesting than organisations. The relationships people develop to get things done in a network are not restricted by the confines of the organisations they work in.



The cold and the warm column of inducing change

Two processes play out simultaneously when people collaborate to get things done: The first process relates to how people find each other in relation to what they want to do. The second relates to the structure within which they hope to do it. The FAN Approach identifies the elements of these processes within the Cold Column and the Warm Column of achieving change.

The Blue Column shows the conventional way we have been taught to organise activities:

- *Mission:* There is a mission as a point of departure..
- *Targets:* This mission is made operational in SMART formulated targets.
- *Instruments:* We choose appropriate tools.
- *Competences:* We assess the skills needed to carry out the tasks. We select and, if necessary, train people to acquire them.
- *Indicators:* We set performance indicators to allow for monitoring and evaluation.
- *People:* Then we hope that the people involved will do what they are supposed to…

The Cold Column assumes that the people involved share a mission from the outset and that the process of change can be controlled in a calculated manner. This is the dominant approach in organisations.

These assumptions cannot be taken for granted in a network. Here, a shared mission is not the start but the result of a healthy process, in which individual ambitions have grown towards each other. Ambitions, opinions and mutual trust may change over time. Network partners cannot be controlled like factory workers.

People engage in networks for a purpose. Networks allow them to join forces, mobilising and sharing different assets through task division and specialisation. Networks can also provide access to knowledge, resources and decision makers.

In contrast to conventional organisations and projects, hierarchy is not a precondition and usually mandates are not clearly defined. Therefore networks depend heavily on the voluntary contributions of their partners.

Recognising this, the FAN Approach turns the Cold Column upside down and starts with people. This creates the Warm Column, which shows what it takes to get people motivated and engaged in a process of change together:

- *Ambition:* Any movement starts with people who have ambitions.
- *Connection:* When individuals with ambitions connect, they find that others share their dreams and this increases the chance that these dreams might come true.
- *Energy:* This generates energy. Informal networks emerge, seeking ways to join forces.
- *Targets:* At a certain point, this leads to target setting, in order to focus the efforts.
- *Mission:* When trust increases, ambitions convert into a shared mission.

The two columns complement each other. We do not aim to invalidate one in favour of the other. In fact, organisations may use the principles of the Warm Column to motivate staff, whilst networks may use the Cold Column to organise and accomplish activities.

However, the distinction between the Warm and Cold Columns underlines the point that it is risky to approach networks in the same manner as organisations.

Since the elements in the Warm Column are hard to plan for and make it more difficult to hold people accountable for their actions, its principles are generally overlooked in a culture where organisations are supposed to deliver specific products effectively and efficiently. In networks, hierarchy has limited options to force people into obedience.

Most management tools were developed with hierarchical organisations in mind, and follow the cold principles of planning and control. The FAN Approach offers the Warm Column tools, focussing on energy and connection. An initiative is the starting point.

4. Networks are Living Organisms

Networks as a way of understanding the complex reality

Networks of people can be seen as living organisms, with identities, task division specialisation, and life cycles. Like all forms of life they reproduce themselves through interaction patterns that maintain connection between the essential components. Each network is also a node in a larger network, and conversely each node is also a network in itself. From this perspective, networks can be a way of viewing society. Organisations, projects, families and neighbourhood communities: these are all networks with their own specific characteristics.

Living networks can be more or less healthy. Interaction in a healthy network is satisfactory. It makes people willing to invest effort and align with others. This is a self-propelling process.

As trust increases, the network develops a higher level of coherence. This means that the network becomes more powerful and better able to develop effective responses to what may occur in its surroundings. The reverse can also happen. If interaction costs people more than it gives, willingness to commit and connect decreases. This can escalate towards stagnation or chaos, and ultimately the network will fall apart.

Healthy networks require free actors

Connection is key to a network's health. Interaction patterns (both the constructive and defensive kinds) are ever present in every living network. To maintain a network, it is necessary to have people who are able to recognise defensive patterns and have the skills to do whatever it takes to maintain connections. This is the role of what we call the "Free Actor". Networks cannot do without them. This is why the FAN approach is so called.

Free actors position themselves between the change agents, managers and suppliers in the network[1] and build upon relationships that allow for a good division of tasks between these players. They are the catalysts for change. This role may be assigned to someone, , although this is not necessary. It is however important that someone does it. Such people will do whatever it takes because they believe that it is necessary for the network, regardless of whether or not they have a mandate for it. This means that a job description cannot be made for the free actor. Conversely, it does not mean that free actors can do whatever they want. They must first acquire a position in the network which is respected by others. The FAN approach offers tools for free actors to be effective in their role.

Investments in quality pay off, although the result is unpredictable

The FAN Approach is based on two distinct assumptions. First, investing in mutual relationships to keep the network healthy is the best way to get results that are relevant within their context. Second: there is no blueprint for the ideal network. Networks vary and if you want the network to function well you need someone to keep an eye on the relationships within it.

The thinking behind this is that although people engage in networks to achieve results, it is hard to predict where the networks will take them over time. Methods for planning and control are not enough. However, a healthy network with strong relationships is capable of responding to a complex environment. The outcomes that emerge from the network processes might be better than anyone could have foreseen. This is why the FAN Approach focuses on tools for improving connections, rather than on reaching goals.

[1] See "The Triangle of Co-Creation": p27

Everyone has the basic knowledge of what is required in networks

As social beings, humans have developed the necessary skills to keep networks healthy. Through evolution, these skills are much more deeply ingrained than the ability to think rationally and plan. That ability arose only in the last few hundred generations of the human species. We experience these older skills as intuition; knowing instinctively what to do in certain situations. The ability to keep interactions healthy is in our genes, and the mechanisms through which we do so are more complex than we can imagine.

On the other hand, no one goes through life without any disappointments or frustrations. We also learn patterns to protect ourselves, and that's a good thing. The world around us is not always safe. Perhaps some of these defence patterns are no longer functional however. They may limit our repertoire of possible actions in a network. "For he who has only a hammer, everything seems to be a nail" the proverb says. The tools of the FAN approach are not intended to replace our intuition with scientifically proven recipes. The approach offers language to articulate what matters in network processes. It helps to reflect on one's own experience as well as of others. Such reflection sharpens the intuition, making one more effective in new situations that may arise. The FAN approach aims to contribute to the ability of humans to be effective in networks, enabling the network to be responsive to its environment.

Background

The basis of the theory was laid down in the PhD thesis of Eelke Wielinga. As public servant at the Ministry of Agriculture in The Netherlands he witnessed the conversion of the public extension service into a commercial advisory enterprise (DLV) in 1990. After a few years, the mentality of his colleague policy makers had changed dramatically from sharing responsibility with the farmers organisations to developing firm restrictive policies for containing the damage of the intensive production system, for which the farmers were the culprits. In this period neo liberalism found fertile ground among policy makers, who saw knowledge no longer as uncontested truth but as a product for sale. Wielinga observed that the success factors of the former knowledge system that had made the agricultural sector the most productive in the world were being neglected in the new system. He searched for a new way to understand knowledge systems, and explored the idea that they could be seen as living systems that could be healthy or sick. His plea was to revalidate networks in a new way (Wielinga 2001).

The theory got hands and feet in a large scale experiment "Networks in Livestock Farming (2004-2007)". The experiment dealt with networks of farmers who came with initiatives for sustainable innovations in their sector. Yearly, some 50 networks were assisted by researchers, and later on also advisors. It soon became clear that these facilitators needed different tools from what they had learned for project management. After 3½ years and over 120 networks, a comprehensive toolbox had been developed (Wielinga, Zaalmink et al. (2007). The toolbox has been, and still is, subject of many updates and improvements ever since, (Wielinga and Vrolijk 2009), (Wielinga and Geerling-Eiff 2009).

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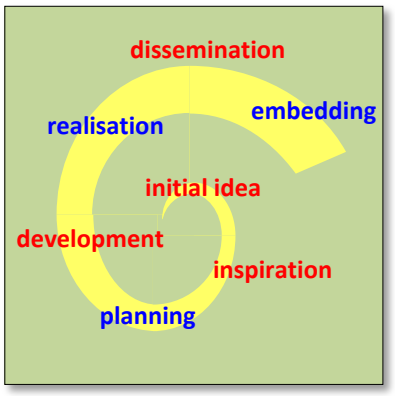
5. The Spiral of Initiatives

focuses on content



The Spiral of Initiatives distinguishes stages in the development of an initiative.

What *is* the initiative? How far has it developed? Who needs to be involved at what stage? And what can be done to take it one step further?

The Spiral applies to processes through which something new is being developed. This is different from sales: stimulating people to buy a product that is ready. New means at least new for the stakeholders involved. The Spiral has been developed for innovation processes, but actually it applies to all processes of change.

Usually such processes do not follow a simple track from A to B. Sometimes it is necessary to take a step backwards. This is why the process is presented as a spiral, rather than a line.

- An initiative begins with an **initial idea**. It may come from an individual or emerge from a group.
- When they start talking about it, it may **inspire** others. An informal network develops. Sooner or later this network wants to move towards action.
- Then the **planning** stage starts. Tasks are divided and the network tries to acquire space to work out their idea.
- With this space they can experiment and **develop** a practice that appears to work.
- This should convince stakeholders to move towards **realising** the initiative.
- When it is successful, the new practice **disseminates** to others, who will apply it.
- When the new practice becomes widely accepted, procedures are adapted to it and it becomes **embedded** in the structure.

Every stage has its own core activities, actors and pitfalls

The Spiral helps to navigate in the rather messy process of getting inspired, getting disappointed, two steps forward and one step back. The path of innovations and, more in general, initiatives is unpredictable because many factors that play a role are still unknown at the start. Therefore, the Spiral is not a planning tool. More important is it to recognise what stage is at stake at a certain moment, and to act according to what is needed in that stage. Every stage has its own core activities to perform. In every stage there are other actors to connect with. There are also typical pitfalls for every stage that should be avoided. What

follows in this chapter is just a selection of pitfalls that are often encountered, and a number of tips to avoid them.

The initial idea stage

Core activity: *look beyond borders*

There are always people with good ideas. If it is easy for such people to find likeminded people and assistance to resources, the threshold in the system for renewal is low. If it is risky to have uncommon ideas, or when there is little space for experimenting, the threshold is high. When people are supposed to do as they are told, the threshold is high as well. Still, there will be hero's with good ideas, but in a system with high thresholds, they are scarce.

Crises are often the starting point for initiatives. Changing conditions make it hard to continue in the old way, and such circumstances force people to leave their comfort zones. Under high pressure solid structures become liquid.

When there is an initiative as a starting point, the initiators can pass on to the second stage: inspiration. When innovation support agents want to stimulate more initiatives to come to the surface, they can do several things to lower the threshold.

Exposure to other systems is a powerful way to generate new ideas. Study tours, cross visits, cross posting of personnel: such activities help people to look beyond their own borders. Often, new ideas come from people who have had experiences elsewhere, or who are relatively new to the community. Just ask around in a network: people usually can tell you who are the ones with new ideas and dare to draw beyond the lines.

New initiatives can come from all corners: from researchers, entrepreneurs, activists, policy makers, etcetera. It does not matter where the idea was born. The important thing is that the initiative is being embraced by those who want to contribute to the adventure.

Actors:

For pioneers, the origin of the idea is not an issue. This is different for policy makers or managers who want change. They can open up doors. But if there is no one walking through, nothing will happen. They have to look for people who want to take initiatives in line with the desired change. Not because the boss wants it, but because they see it as an opportunity to work on what they want themselves.

Pitfalls:

Arrogance (we know what is good for you)

There is energy in a network if people connect on ambitions they share. This requires an explorative attitude. Someone who is only convinced of his own truth does not connect.

The pioneer syndrome

Pioneers are often poorly connected to the system. This makes it easier to generate new ideas. But it is not helpful if pioneers are full of judgements about common practices and about other people who keep these practices going. It is also not helpful if pioneers are so much focussed on their technical solutions that they cannot see what is needed in the social process to bring their idea to reality. Without mobilising others, the chances of success are limited. But when others get involved, the original idea might start to move. Many pioneers find it difficult to adjust. Another pitfall for pioneers is to keep on improving the initial idea and postpone the moment to involve others. For someone who follows this path, it will never be good enough for the next step.

The imported idea

Some initiatives follow exposure to a solution that has worked well somewhere else. The pitfall is that the initiators want to implement the solution precisely as it has been carried out there. But in complex systems such solutions never fit perfectly. It needs to be adapted to the new circumstances.

Moreover, the actors involved in the new situation have to go through their own learning process, just like the actors in the other area have done. In contrast to what the proverb says, people need to invent their own wheel, although it is fine to seek inspiration with those who did so before.

Tips for the initial idea stage

- *What counts is the ambition to change:* Not the solution but the ambition is the driver for change.
- *Make space for change:* Remember that the capacity of a system to change is merely a matter of thresholds. Some actors have more power to change the thresholds than others. It always involves risks to deviate from the usual path. Mitigating risks helps initiators to come to the surface and flourish.
- *More than one Spiral:* Innovation processes are seldom successful in just one cycle. Usually it starts small, some people get inspired, they create room, start experimenting, and then find out that they need more space, or that they have to change track. Then they go back into the inspiration stage. Maybe they acquire more space, etcetera.

When the initiators start to mobilise others, they enter into the next phase: inspiration.

The inspiration stage

Core activity: *mobilise partners for a warm network*

Initiators look for likeminded people, those with similar interests, and risk takers. They meet informally and start dreaming together. When a dream is shared, this increases the chance that it might become true. This generates energy. When the shared ambition gets more powerful, an informal network of change agents emerges.

Ambitions are not the same as targets. They are about dreams. A target is a specific spot where the journey is suppose to end. An ambition is a reason to start the journey. Without that spot at the horizon, people would not have started. But the final destination could be different from what they had thought of before. With all the things they learn underway and the creativity that is being generated, the result might be better than what anyone could have expected.

Genuine ambitions are not selfish. Acquiring money and power are not ambitions but means to an end. If the prime motivation for people to act is money or power, this does not motivate others. It might mobilise some who hope to profit themselves as well in their struggle to survive, but such a motivation is not conducive for the climate of co-creation we are looking for.

Creating a warm network for change does not occur at negotiation tables but at kitchen tables. Informal contacts are crucial to allow each other to express dreams as well as uncertainties. It is easier to make friends with questions than with answers. When people discover that they share ambitions, this releases energy. People generate hope that a joint effort will bring them further.

Actors: Visionaries, Pioneers and Strange Ducks

In this stage it is important to mobilise people who are enthusiastic about the initiative. This warm network should carry it further through later stages. Maybe they became inspired. Maybe they had similar ideas themselves and now see chances for getting them realised. Maybe they were looking for allies in their struggle. There can be many reasons for joining such an action network.

Those who are looking for actors to mobilise should bear in mind that it is not just their idea that inspires others. Others join in because the initial idea touches something they want themselves. The inspiration stage is not about convincing but about making connection.

When mobilising people is part of the job of an agent, it is important that this agent believes in the task himself. Then this job provides the space (s)he needs to do what (s)he wants to do. Energy is being released when people meet on what they really want. If the agent just does what (s)he has been told, this connection will not be established, and the energy, required for the following steps, will not be sufficient.

As far as the initiators can foresee what institutions will be important for the process, it is very useful to actively look for people within those institutions who might be interested to join the warm network of initiators on a personal basis. They can inform the group about ways in which the game should be played, and also create awareness within their institutions about needs and possibilities related to the initiative. They can prepare the soil.

Pitfalls:

Arrogance: 'We Know Best!'

A network with a history of success tends to shut itself off to new ideas when threatened by the future, and attempts to move forward with 'more-of-the-same' category of solutions. It is a pitfall to think that only insiders can contribute to new solutions. This attitude makes the threshold for people with uncommon ideas at the edge of the system quite high.

Pioneer Syndrome

Detachment from the system allows pioneers to develop their new idea. However, it is often difficult to restore a connection. Being judgemental towards the mainstream and those who participate in it will not help, but very often results from the pioneer's frustration at the incomprehension they encounter.

It also doesn't help if their sole focus is on a technical solution, not seeing that a network process will be needed to make their idea a reality. If they cannot mobilise others, the odds of that happening are very low. However, if others start to interfere, other ideas might compete with the solution they had in mind. The temptation is strong to postpone and avoid this confrontation, and continue working on the solution until it's 'untouchable'. Thus, progression to the next phase in the Spiral would be blocked. It is easier to make friends with questions than with answers.

The Imported Idea

Sometimes an initiative arises around a solution that has worked well elsewhere. The potential pitfall here is that the person who brought in this solution wants to see it applied in exactly the same way. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for complex systems. The situation for which this solution originally responded to will never be identical to any other. Moreover, a whole process will have taken place in the original situation, through which the actors involved gradually developed this solution. Just because they have gone through all the phases of the Spiral does not mean that another network can skip them. Contrary to the popular saying, the

wheel really does have to be invented again and again. Experience from elsewhere can only help to speed up the process.

Tips for the Initial Idea Phase

What Counts is the Ambition for Change

It is not the solution itself but the drive to look for one that triggers a movement. The prospect of a possible solution can help break through a frozen situation. Anyone who feels the tension of a system unable to generate an effective response, but without an idea of how things could be different, naturally tends to shut themselves off from uncomfortable warning signs. The possibility of a solution though, makes it easier to take the troubling signals seriously.

Make Space for Change

Space to get on with an ambition can come from two sides. In principle, anyone can initiate a movement that attracts more and more supporters over time, thereby increasing pressure on the establishment to make space for it. On the other hand, a visionary director or manager who sees the need for change can make space for it by authorising initiatives into this direction. They can do this, for example, by putting it on the political agenda or making it a criterion for financing projects.

In practice, it is usually an interaction between action from below and authorisation from above. Here too we can see why innovation is almost never a linear process, but rather a matter of mobilising people, creating experiences, telling stories and thereby acquiring space within the structure for the next step to be taken on a larger scale. Directors and managers need to be aware that authorising a renewal does not mean that obstructive beliefs held by people within the system will immediately disappear.

More Than One Spiral

Initiatives and innovations rarely succeed within one cycle. Usually the process starts small. Someone wants something and teams up with a few others, who use the space they have until they reach a limit, then negotiate more space, where they can do and show more, thus attracting more people, and so on. The Spiral is therefore not intended as a guide for planning but for orientation: *Where are we now and what is at stake here?*

The Initial Idea Phase will evolve into the next, The Inspiration Phase, if there is a clear desire to create movement. An initiator wants to change something. Thus begins the journey of the hero. Heroes have a purpose in mind. Otherwise they would not have departed. Whether their voyage of discovery will actually lead to their intended goal remains to be seen. For innovation processes only one thing is for sure; if the outcome can be fully described and accounted for in advance, then nothing new will emerge. What matters is that the initiative sets something in motion.

Warm or Cold?

The Initial Idea phase is an informal one. The idea might arise under the shower, at the kitchen table, or during a trip. The possibility that action can lead to something new, perhaps to a better future, gives hope, and this generates energy. That is what makes this a warm phase.

The Inspiration Phase

Essence: A Network of Supporters is Mobilised

As soon as initiators talk to others about their ideas, the Inspiration Phase has begun. Initiators search for like-minded thinkers, people with similar interests, those who dare to take risks.

They connect informally and imagine what might be possible together. When people share an ambition or dream with each other, it increases the chance of it becoming a reality. This

generates energy. When people get involved in an initiative and are prepared to invest energy into it, this forms the warm network of initiators.

When we talk about ambitions, we mean aspirations and intentions for a better world. We are aware that the word 'ambition' has other connotations too. An 'ambitious person' is often perceived as one who wants an important position, with more power and status, or to get rich quickly. Such ambitions do not inspire other people though. Inspiring ambitions are not ego-centric or self-serving, but are beneficial for others. In these cases, the acquisition of money or influence are not end goals but means to achieving the overall ambition.

Ambitions and goals are not the same thing. Goals are where journeys end. They represent what needs to be achieved and are linked to interests. Cooperating with others to realise a goal will mean taking water with the wine, because nobody's interests are exactly the same. The goal agreed upon will always be a compromise based on the overlapping parts of everyone's individual goals. This is because everyone has to relinquish something during negotiations, which cost energy. Smart negotiators search for 'secondary values': issues that are important to the other party, but which they did not immediately put on the table as requirements or wishes. The more secondary values become visible, the more exchange opportunities arise which increase the chance of mutual benefit. This is the core of the Mutual Gains Approach of Susskind and Cruikshank.

Ambitions indicate the direction the network wishes to travel in, as it sets out on its voyage of discovery. What generates energy is the sense that everyone can achieve more through working together than they would by trying it alone.

Actors: people who are warming up for the initiative

During the inspiration phase, a network is formed of people who want to be involved in the initiative. They are inspired by the idea. Perhaps it's because it seems to provide a solution to problems they experience themselves. Perhaps they were already running around with similar ideas. Perhaps they have confidence in the first initiators. Perhaps they see them as kindred spirits in resistance against others. There may be many reasons to join an initiative network.

Those who wish to motivate others to get involved in an initiative should not just tell their own story, but one that connects with the hopes and dreams of the others. What is their shared dream? What becomes possible if they join forces, combining their strengths, skills and contacts?

During this phase, the core initiators are looking for supporters to help the initiative. They could be people in a situation similar to that in which the idea first emerged. As the network grows, the chance of achieving something increases. Diversity within it is useful; people with different competencies and potential. People who can connect with the network environment are also important. They can see what is needed for the journey ahead and understand the dynamics of the different parties to be encountered on it.

Not everyone needs to participate with the same level of passion and commitment. What is essential though is a core of supporting initiators. These are the people who will lie awake at night thinking about it, and will continue no matter what, even if others drop out, for whatever reason.

Building an initiative network is done at the kitchen table, not the negotiating table. It is informal and personal. Carriers are not institutions but people with passion for the initiative. They are people who connect and inspire each other, and then look for ways to it make possible together. Each potential partner has different possibilities. A private entrepreneur can invest, be selective in choosing collaborators, and is subject to less restrictive rules than someone working in for the government. Meanwhile, the government official or researcher

may be able to bring parties to the table that would not respond to the invitation of an entrepreneur.

Function as Assignment or Space

It is often difficult for civil servants, for example, to make the distinction between their status as an official and themselves as a person. The function describes for what you are hired, with the tasks that go with it. That is what the organization expects from you. But as a person with a heart, you want something yourself. For example, as a public servant, you must stay within the lines of what has been agreed in the democratically legitimized policy. If you feel sympathy for people in the initiative network because you personally share their ambition, it can sometimes be difficult.

There are two ways to approach one's official function. The first is to put aside any personal opinions and feelings, and perform exactly what is asked for from above. After all, this is what job performance evaluations are based on. The other option is to view the function as a space within which one can work on one's own ambitions. Ideally, these should not deviate too far from those of the employer (but if they do, finding a new job is advisable, to prevent burnout). The function and its specific possibilities are a playground. Within this, the individual can search for a connection with the ambition of the initiative network. If the space proves too small, the individual can work on the edges of it. This in itself could also be a new initiative.

You don't need to be your own boss to do what you believe in and follow your passions. This is a liberating thought for many people, as often has been observed through my training and consultation programmes. 'I actually did that, but I thought it was illegal!' was often declared by those with reputations as effective networkers. Others who started experimenting with this approach later reported 'My job has become nicer now!'.

This does require continually justifying the trust placed in you by others. It is not a license to do whatever you feel like. Then you would quickly lose your space to play. If your supervisor gets the impression that you have sided with a party with opposing interests, then you've done something wrong. The insights contained in this book hopefully help you to manage your space effectively.

Pitfalls

Too Early to the Boss

Sooner or later, the initiative network will need more space to move forward. This usually involves acquiring money to fund activities. The permission of superiors might also be needed before taking on new activities or fulfilling tasks in a different way. Then either the initiator or network must talk to those responsible for the existing structure. These people control the power and resources. They can open or close the doors for change. We call them the managers in the system.

It is a mistake to seek cooperation with the managers too early. Their function is to ensure the stability of the system. They must assess risks, and not every new idea is a good one. They must therefore be selective. Of course, the formality of the relationship between initiators and managers matters. Ideas can be tested out in safe and supportive atmosphere. It is great if people can work together through a warm process on desirability, feasibility and strategy. This is not possible within a formal, cold relationship. In that context, a proposal submitted prematurely will only be damaged. Reputations and trust will also be damaged, and a similar proposal cannot be submitted again too soon.

Whether any idea stands a chance with managers depends on various factors. Is it in alignment with the goals for which managers are responsible? Is it sufficiently developed, both technically and in terms of content, to possibly succeed? And are there enough supporting

people with the right knowledge and decisive power behind the idea to make implement possible?

The latter factor often proves to be decisive. That is why it is so important to informally build a warm network of supporters. Without such support, the initiative will fall in the first hurdle, either in confrontation with managers or not even being considered for discussion. The exact same idea may be embraced by the same managers later on, if it turns out to have enough supporters to tip the scales in its favour.

Dreaming Too Long

On the flipside of the coin is another pitfall. If the network carries on dreaming for too long, continually improving the idea, and gathering more supporters, momentum will be lost and energy will leak out. For every newcomer, the original initiators must explain everything all over again, with the newcomers wanting to continue with discussions that the network has already struggled through. This may lead to passion wandering out the door and early carriers of the initiative dropping out.

To continue with dreaming is appealing, because that non-committal state is safer than when things become real and people have to sign up for tasks and investments. However, the right timing is important for taking the next step to the planning phase. Someone has to stand up and say: 'Now we are going to do it!' even though everything is not clear or certain.

The Pioneer Syndrome (continued)

When pioneers get others interested, through such total conviction and self-righteousness that leave no room for discussion, something also goes wrong. The idea is just the starting point, not a finished product. Along the way, it will need to be planned, added to and adapted, if it is to make an impact in the real world. Hence, pioneers need other people alongside them, with relevant aptitudes for these stages. But they too have their own ambitions and ideas. The risk is that pioneers get the feeling that the supporters will take their idea and make something of it that they can't believe in. To avoid this from happening and keep interactions healthy during this phase requires experienced and skilful steering.

The Guru

Some pioneers attract followers with an idea that is so powerful that the followers abandon their own critical thinking for pure adherence to the doctrine. Such a network can become so introspective that it loses its ability to learn. The pioneer is often still searching and learning. However, if they have become a guru, then there is a risk that the first generation of followers will become more dogmatic than even the pioneer had ever wanted.

Create Support

'If a government wants to create support, then you have to be careful!', wrote Cees van Woerkom after realising that people could not be as easily manipulated with sophisticated media techniques as he had previously believed. Sometimes an outcome has been decided by parliament or local council, but the public has yet to understand why it is the best option. It might seem very appealing to hire a communications agency to foster support for it. However, this is a recipe for misery. Especially if the communications strategy involves tokenistic 'consultation events' during which the plan is presented, to be followed by questions and answers. Very often we see the notorious critics seated in the front row, with questions intending to show that this display is also a mockery. Once that tone has been set, it can't be saved.

People want to be taken seriously, and before placing their faith in a new initiative, they need to feel that there is space for them to formulate their thoughts and objections. To be inspired, they need to feel a connection to their own ambitions and to go through their own thought

process (re-inventing the wheel). They cannot just blindly embrace a new plan, because usually it is quite apparent that there are aspects of it that can be improved upon. This requires a different process than a token gesture event where 'people can have their say'.

Financially driven Cooperation

The last pitfall we mention here (although there are certainly more) is that of the financially driven collaboration. This often happens when project funding can be acquired on condition of cooperation between certain parties. When money is the primary motivation, problems can be expected sooner or later. The distribution of benefits and burdens is always sensitive. Fruitful collaboration arises when people grant each other something. That 'grant factor' is fed by ambitions that go beyond surviving and earning money alone.

Tips for the Inspiration Phase

Do not Convince but Look for Connection

There are many people who want change, but few who want to be changed. Movement happens when we touch on something in others that they are already engaged with.

Build a Warm Network First

Broad participative events and token meetings with stakeholder groups do not help. Initiatives flourish in fertile breeding grounds, not in cold spaces with official representatives and critics.

Look for Diversity in the Warm Network

Connect with people for whom the initiative fits and consciously search for diversity, both in the vision and background of participants, so that as the journey continues it will become easier to find entry pointed to the institutions with which cooperation will be needed. Also cherish the people who have a gift for connection and go the extra mile to feed the energy in the warm network. We call them the 'free actors'.

Distinguish Between the Institution and the Person

The basis for a successful initiative is shared ambition. Such ambitions are personal. It is always essentially about people connecting with each other, and never about institutions, with their interests and goals. Institutions are important inasmuch as they set the parameters within which individuals can play. The game, however, should be led by personal ambitions, the things that people warm towards.

Make a Network Analysis

All the above tips come together in creating a good network analysis. Who needs to be activated, sooner or later in the process, to bring the initiative to fruition? Who is already involved? Who is in a position to connect initiators with those who can create movement? *See the next chapter.*

The Timing of the Next Step is Key

Do not ask for more space too soon, but ensure that a warm network with sufficient energy is in place first. If there is energy there, it makes a lot of things possible. Waiting too long however and the carriers in the network will lose interest.

Warm or cold?

During the inspiration phase a warm network with energy is created. Hence, it is a warm phase.

The Planning Phase

Essence: Space is Created to Experiment

Moving into Commitment

When ideas are converted into concrete steps, the planning phase has begun. *What actions are needed and in what order? Who will perform them? What do they need?* These are the type of question addressed in this phase. Agreements are made to coordinate and align the efforts of participants in the network. When it becomes clear what efforts are involved in terms of time and money and who is willing to take risks, people begin to feel it. The non-committal inspiration phase is over. 'Planning to…' turns into solid agreements that participants commit themselves to.

Structuring the process is one side of this phase. The other is about acquiring space. The initiative started with the intention to change something in the current practice. This usually means that something needs to change within the conditions in which this practice takes place. If enough space existed before, the initiative probably would not have been necessary.

Not every change is an improvement though. The initiative needs to justify itself. Even if a practice is working very well elsewhere, it remains to be seen whether or not it will work within the environment proposed by initiators. Often there is still a lot of uncertainty, with functional solutions yet to be developed. What is crucial here is the overall ambition, not a pre-designed outcome. There is a general direction in which to explore, and space is necessary for this.

Space to Learn

To become wiser, a network needs space for trial and error. If a certain path turns out to be a dead-end, it should be possible to change direction. If an unforeseen situation requires additional expertise, it should be possible to look for it. Allowance for this puts demands on the ways that plans can be formulated and progress monitored. Time and attention are needed for joint reflection on the process, as well as flexibility to change course if necessary. Initiatives full of enthusiastic specialists without much sensitivity for process are exactly the types where such time, space and attention are lacking. A free actor with a good eye for it can be invaluable to the network at this stage.

Money and Permission

This is the phase during which initiators approach funders or others higher up in the hierarchy of the system upon which the initiative is dependent. These are the people who can provide the capital or space necessary. As 'managers' of the network environment, they have the power to change the conditions. They constitute the 'enabling environment'.

They usually based their decisions on project plans. Such plans should include descriptions of goals, the tools needed to achieve them, activities, necessary expertise, quality assurance, progress milestones and evaluation criteria. In summary, the 'cold process' needs to be set out in great detail in order to convince them that money and other resources will be well spent.

These managers are not waiting around until someone comes along with an idea. They are already busy with and responsible for their own objectives and targets. Unless they can see that the new initiative can contribute to these, then there is little chance of success with them.

The art of the planning phase is therefore in finding connections with the interests of those who can provide the space and resources needed. There are often more possibilities than people are aware of. It is not easy to navigate through the forest of opportunities for funding at various levels.

Funding programmes have their own criteria on the basis of which they assess project proposals. Writing proposals that meet all these criteria has become a distinctive discipline.

Negotiating Questions Instead of Solutions

What many funding programmes have in common is a requirement for clear and accountable results. That may be reasonable for those who want to make a new machine, for example, but not for an initiative network that wants to embark on a voyage of discovery. Where such a journey ends is not established in advance. If it was, then nothing new would be discovered.

Here we encounter one of the most persistent problems with innovation support programmes; the tools for funding rarely fit with what innovative projects actually need. If the entire path must be mapped out in advance, then there is no space for mistakes and learning.

The key to the planning phase is not in articulating what needs to be done and how, but rather about the approach to finding answers to the questions everyone is concerned with. This conversation is of a totally different nature than those about production contracts. The Spiral of Initiatives illustrates that the planning and realisation phases actually take place separately, with a learning phase taking place in-between them.

Agreements about a product to be delivered are made in the context of a client-contractor relationship. Clients specify what they want, and contractors make it.

Agreements regarding a development process are about effort. All parties involved want this effort to result in answers to their concerns. However, their questions are not necessarily all the same. A conversation about this allows everyone to add their wants to the 'wish list', without the need to reach consensus on each question. This creates a framework for negotiation, which can break through potential stalemate situations.

Trusting in a Voyage of Discovery Requires Something Different than in Production

Funders may hold project proposals to strict criteria for assurance that their money will be well spent. This is not so easy to do when there is a lot of distance between a client and contractor. Then there is a strong temptation to spend the money differently than originally agreed.

However, a report with lists of accountable items to tick off ('tickboxing') is a rather poor way to foster necessary trust, and it encourages the wrong developments. If the carriers of such projects adhere strictly to what was agreed upon, they will not be able to learn and develop anything genuinely new. What is more likely to happen is that they will learn anyway, and then feel compelled to deal 'creatively' with the agreements made, thereby likely feeding into a growing sense of mutual mistrust.

Explorers keep logbooks describing what they encounter, the choices they make and the reasons for them. It should be the same with development processes. The Timeline Method and the Learning History Method are helpful tools for generating stories about the journey of the network (chapters 9 and 10).

Actors: People in Positions to Provide Space

The planning phase sees the first confrontation between initiators seeking change and those responsible for the existing structure. The latter must assess whether or not the proposed initiative contributes to movement in the direction they wish to travel, and if granting the space required for it would involve too many risks.

Those responsible for the current structure may be managers, directors, political representatives or funders. However, we can see the same dynamics within the initiative network itself. There will always be some people who want things to be done differently, and others who will question whether that's such a good idea. This is healthy and necessary.

It makes a big difference whether change is effected all at once, or is preceded by a period with space for experimentation: the Spiral of Initiatives illustrates this.

It is easier to make friends with questions than with answers. Which questions should be answered by the end of the Development Phase for which space is currently being created? All parties involved can submit their wishes for this. They can also make agreements that meet the concerns that parties have about the process and the risks that must be avoided.

The second confrontation comes later, in the realisation phase. Then other players come into view.

Pitfalls

Wanting Everything all at Once

People who are very enthusiastic about an initiative can easily become impatient. However, those who ask for a lot will also be refused a lot. Success with this phase depends on careful assessment of where space may become available. An ambitious, large-scale plan may be better broken up into smaller, more manageable sections, so that a start can be made on it. For bigger projects, pilot programmes are often opted for, with a view to scaling up if the initial results are encouraging. Innovation developments often go through several cycles of inspiration, planning and experimentation like this, before entering into the realisation phase. With each cycle, the activities become more extensive and the results more persuasive.

Starting Too Carefully

At the opposite end of the spectrum, too much caution will result in nothing to show. For this reason, funding bodies usually apply both upper and lower limits. For projects with too small a volume, the overhead costs for each run may be too high to justify.

Trying to Convince

Trying to persuade managers not only of the usefulness and necessity of the initiative, but also all of the ideas it is based upon is another stumbling block. Although it is certainly an advantage if managers are open to it, at this stage it is not actually necessary for them to be as enthusiastic as the initiators. The next phase is intended to bring different views closer together. For now, it is enough if they have faith that the space they are giving will be well used, in positive relation to their own agenda.

Friction often occurs over the terminology to be used. Managers use language that suits their way of thinking. It is their language that will be applied to agreements made about an initiative's activities. However, if the initiative emerged in response to an issue caused by related thinking, then its initiators will understandably struggle in using this language. Meanwhile, the necessity for managers to reformulate their concepts has yet to be demonstrated. Therefore, it is not wise to emphasise issues about terminology at this stage. It is more productive to deal creatively with possible definitions, leaving room for dialogue in the development phase, if needed.

Production contracts

We have already touched upon the persistent problem of production contracts, wherein specifying every step in advance leaves little room for new discoveries, and zero chance for co-creation to occur.

Imposing such regulations sends initiators down unproductive paths. In order to survive, they may discard their own ambitions in order to adhere to the guidelines. As a result, energy drains from a system where there is no space for creativity. Taking a more creative route, initiators may decide to utilise the space for their own ends, but hidden from the view of their

managers. This can easily degenerate into a game of cat and mouse, of control and evasion, feeding mutual suspicion.

The way out of this is to make agreements on how to report on progress, in order to provide managers with ongoing insights into what is being learned and achieved.

High Thresholds

The high demands placed on project proposals by many funding programmes make it virtually impossible for ordinary initiators to seek support from them. Only fund raising specialists stand a chance, if they know exactly what needs to be written down to meet the criteria. Hence 'the usual suspects' always seem to win the prize money. Whether they actually have a network of initiators behind them, with the ambition to make something of the proposal, is another matter; doubtful.

Another barrier is access to funding. It is an impossible task for initiators to find their way in the forest of possibilities. Intermediaries can provide good services here.

One common funding requirement is that proposers must make a financial contribution to the project. Anyone who puts money on the table demonstrates that they are serious. Investment is a part of business. However, this is a barrier, especially when initiators have already invested time, and sometimes money too, to form a network during the inspiration phase, and may have also engaged a consultant or intermediary to seek out funding opportunities and write proposals. If they also have to encourage participants to part with their own money, while the outcome of the experiment is uncertain, then it makes the threshold high.

Tips for the Planning Phase

Take Time and Create Space to Experiment

A good idea is rarely a ready-made solution. Besides, those who must be activated by the initiative also need to go through a development process themselves. Take the time needed to develop and learn from it.

Connect the Initiative with the Goals of Managers who can Create Space for Experimentation

People who are responsible for the structure 'as it is' have an assignment to carry out and they have to keep risks within limits. If their cooperation is required, the plan must be adjusted so that it fits within that framework.

Put Questions in the Core

Formulate the questions that the network wants answered by the end of the development phase for which it is now seeking space. Invite the other parties who must be involved to do the same. Create a plan with scope for all these questions to be addressed.

Make Arrangements to Document the Voyage of Discovery

A process of development is different to that of making a product, which would involve a client-contractor contract, covering specifications, price and delivery time. Accountability within a development process must therefore be provided for differently. Managers providing space need assurance that it is being properly used, and that adjustments can be made if there are signs that things are not going well. Make agreements about documenting the process. Allow sufficient time for reflection during the development phase, to look at both technical progress and cooperative developments.

Make the Entry Requirements for Participation Easy

If the enabling environment is serious in enabling bottom up innovations or initiatives, it's a good idea to make the threshold for initiators as low as possible. The people with ideas and

passion are usually not at the same time savvy planners and project writers. Do not expect that they have already mobilized everyone who used to be in the past or later for the development of the initiative. Make sure that initiators can approach intermediaries who know the way in the system.

Warm or Cold?

During the planning phase, sky high dreams are brought down to ground, subjected to harsh reality and all its limitations. If money or permission is required, the warm network of initiators must find a way to the cold formal structures of institutions, with their interests and regulations. This phase usually uses more energy than it produces; it is a cold phase. By the end of this phase, the initiative has become a project.

The Development Phase

Essence: Developing a New Practice That Works

In the development phase, research and testing is carried out. People with relevant knowledge and experience are contacted. By the end of this phase, a practice has been tried and tested and it appears to work. Sufficient evidence has been gathered to demonstrate this.

Every idea is based on assumptions. It is important to discuss these beliefs explicitly. Disagreement within an initiative network about the overall approach to be followed can always be traced back to different assumptions about reality. The development process can then be arranged in such a way that it becomes clear which assumption is closest to the truth.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into detail on all the various research methods. All are highly dependent on the most fitting field for respective initiatives. If no researchers have been involved in the initiative before this point, it would wise to involve them now.

This is often a period of trial and error, testing out different paths and deciding on the most promising direction for the current moment. It is very important to allocate space for 'smart mistakes' during this time: errors become valuable when something important is learned from them. It should also be possible to adjust plans during this phase.

Let go, be curious. enjoy surprises... It's easier said than done, but it is essential. The tension in the system in response to which the initiative emerged did not come about for no reason. Underlying the current practices are latent beliefs about what works and what needs to be done. These assumptions are often buried deep under the surface. Who can say for sure that these initiators have correctly understood the root cause of the tension and come up with the right solution? They may have to may have to abandon more certainties, and dig deeper than they did beforehand, when they were getting others on board to cooperate.

The best way to understand the workings of a complex system is to try and change it. The task now for those signed up for this discovery journey is to permit themselves and others to not know the best solution.

Actors: People with Useful Knowledge and Experience

Experts

Expertise is essential during the development phase, and not necessarily just from those inside the initiative, but also those who can bring in specialist knowledge. The wheel actually *does* need to be re-invented every time, and other 'wheel-makers' can provide inspiration. Which experts have the necessary understanding of the theme of this initiative? Who can be involved in the project as an advisor?

The internet is an inexhaustible source of information. Consultants hired for specialist advice often observe that their clients seem to know more than they do. The days of the expert telling

the layman how things are and what to do are essentially over. The role of the expert has changed. Their specialist knowledge is now necessary to inform and think collaboratively with people in the context of an initiative; helping them to filter out the nonsense and find what is of value in the ocean of information, as well as enabling helpful access to their network of others with expertise and experience. Connections are just as important as knowledge.

Experiential Experts

Experiential expertise is another source of knowledge to tap into during this phase. It is highly inspiring to exchange stories and ideas with people who have struggled with similar issues and found their own solutions through trial and error.

The initiative can identify suitable people and invite them to share their experience. This often happens in the form of workshops. Whether the encounter ultimately becomes more than just an illustrated talk, followed by questions and answers, depends on the quality of the facilitator. The impact is greater when participants are engaged in active thinking and genuine exchange.

A more powerful form of exchange is the study tour. This also requires effective guidance to make it more than a mere alibi for tourism. What questions do participants want answered by the end of the trip? How will they make observations and how will they share them afterwards? How will they jointly make conclusions? A cross-visit takes it further, when teams of people engaged in similar work visit each other in context. These two forms of exchange are so much more powerful than conferences and workshops because the participants themselves spend a lot of informal time together in a different context than they are used to. It is precisely at these times that they make each other think differentially.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders should not be overlooked during this phase. These are the people who need to be activated during the realisation phase, if the innovation is ever to be put into practice. Not everyone is necessarily looking eagerly forward to change. There are some who have an interest in keeping the situation as it is. Resistance from them can be anticipated when the new practice is introduced. Whilst it might seem to work in the tests while working under the radar, it may fail as soon as it's exposed to the full light.

Successfully involving people from those interest groups or institutions during this phase will help the progression of the project. These people can reveal the inner workings of the network, through which attention and involvement can be cultivated, and with which the proposed solution must comply, if it's to stand a chance. If invested parties start to feel responsible for finding solutions, then a lot has been won.

Pitfalls

Failure is not an Option

Those who are not allowed to fail do not take any risks. This minimises their learning opportunities. A system that doesn't allow failure is fatal to development. Such pressure can come from two sides. The environment might demand too much performance, without regard for what it takes to innovate. Those who want to encourage a discovery journey should not evaluate such a project as if it were a production line. Meanwhile, people may also put too much pressure on themselves, through believing that their reputation and position depend on the success of this project. They make the perceived price of failure very high for themselves.

Development is about trying things out and taking risks. When an experiment turns out differently than expected, this is when something can be learned. Could it be a question of the right skills, yet to be mastered? Or could it be down to incorrect suppositions?

If you really want to present something new, then you cannot avoid entering murky territory. Theories are not always correct. Expectations may be different than previously understood. Meetings may run differently than intended. Experiments may not deliver what was hoped for. Breakthroughs usually come after a crisis, following those moments of really not knowing. This is when something different to what was done before has to be tried.

What is most important at this stage is not achievement, but the ability to learn from mistakes.

Excluding What Can't be Proven

If hard evidence needs to be presented to validate the innovation, then the temptation is there to only include measurable factors in experiments. The results will say something about the conditions of the test, but whether they are still relevant to the innovation under development is doubtful.

Overvaluing Hard Data

Anyone who has worked with numbers knows that data can be presented in myriad ways to tell whatever they want it to. How are the factors selected? How are things measured? How reliable are these measurements? It is therefore remarkable that managers generally place such value on numbers, even though they may not know the story behind them.

Fighting About Direction

When people are very passionate about an initiative, then it can be hard for them to accept that others may have different ideas about the right way to approach it. Disagreements often occur within the groups behind initiatives. This is part of the risky territory of entering the unknown. The danger here is that a difference of opinion may get distorted into a judgement about the people involved, such as:

'If they can't see it, then they must be stupid!'

'If they disagree, then they're not loyal.'

It is especially important to investigate different opinions during this phase. This is the starting point for co-creation. In the next chapter on Vital Space, we will go into more detail on what is necessary for a healthy process to maintain and strengthen mutual trust. Challenging each other and finding out what happens when someone disagrees is part of it.

We are the Only Experts

With some networks, the sense of identification is so strong that members do not believe that anyone from outside of it could possibly contribute any idea of value regarding its particular struggles. Only the insiders really understand the situation. If there are potential conflicts of interest at play, then those who haven't 'proven' themselves in the circle may be subject to suspicion.

The problem here is that it restricts the options for solution seeking. With too little scope to really tackle the problem, the proposals may simply be 'more of the same'.

Ignoring Diverse Interests

Research and experimentation within one's own environment is safe. For experimentation, such a relatively safe environment is also necessary. Accordingly, the temptation can be strong to look for what confirms their own thinking, and leave actors with opposing views and interests out of the picture. This is rarely done consciously, but of course that does not reduce the potential conflict. During the following phase of realisation, it may turn out that the project falls short in terms of justifications for other actors. This is why it is so important to involve people from the other networks during the development phase.

The Perfect is the Enemy of the Good

It could always be better. With extra effort, and even more time, the prototype could be even stronger, or there could be more evidence gathered to show that the new practice really works. Following this pilot phase, another pilot phase is deemed necessary. Competent researchers will always find more research questions, in order to keep working. There are always reasons to avoid confrontation with the outside world, but that is how an initiative can get stuck in being nothing but good intentions. 'The perfect is the enemy of the good', as the saying goes. How much is good enough? It is advisable to make agreements about this early on, ideally during the planning phase.

No Time or Attention for Reflection on the Process

The development phase is not always easy, but it is often exciting, content-wise. Professionals can indulge in information gathering and trying new things. However, a network of content-driven people can often lose sight of the overall process. Small irritations can then easily develop into energy draining conflicts. It requires a different kind of expertise to keep interpersonal interactions healthy. Reflection on the process is important, and dedicated time for this must be built into the programme.

Sleeping Peacefully

'We are the experts and we will solve it. You can sleep peacefully.'

Anyone entering a development phase with such an attitude does so at great risk. Even if a relatively safe environment has been created, without pressure for things to go well immediately, the enabling community would like to be confident that things are going well. If it appears that problems are not expected, yet signs of danger are evidently seeping out, it is fatal to trust.

'The bad news has to travel faster than the good news', wrote Paul van Vlissingen on his company's management style. It is much better to take the enabling community into the story of the discovery journey, to talk about hope and fear, and about the unexpected obstacles and how they have been overcome. Then the enablers are pleased with the successes that are nevertheless achieved anyway.

Tips for the Development Phase

Do not Demand a Product but an Answer to Questions

The development phase is a period of endeavour during which answers are sought. If all goes well, the work will yield something new; a practice or a product. If this does not work within the constraints of the project, then the effort may still have been worthwhile. With what has been learned here a new spiral of initiatives can be completed.

Embrace error

It is when things do not go as expected that is exactly where the most can be learned. Which assumptions were incorrect? How could it be different?

Accept that Murky Territory is Unavoidable

It is absolutely normal for there to be moments of tension and confusion. If everything runs too smoothly, then nothing will be learned and nothing new will emerge.

Combine Data with Stories

Hard numbers alone do not say enough about the results of a development process. The story about the discovery journey itself is at least as important. On the other hand, a story without the numbers is weaker than one substantiated by verifiable data.

Try Out Different Search Paths

When different assumptions are possible, it makes sense to develop a search path for each assumption. This way every participant in the discovery journey is taken seriously.

Draw on Diverse Sources of Expertise and Experience

People from outside the familiar circle often provide the most unexpected insights. Different contexts give rise to different solutions to issues that may be otherwise similar.

In a different context, similar problems come to different solutions. These solutions have been developed in a specific and cultural historical context, and are therefore not always easily transferable. But the exchange stimulates thinking and creativity.

Seek assistance from people outside the familiar circle

If it is to be expected that the new practice will provoke resistance among actors with vested interests, look for warm contacts in those networks that can already think along in the development process.

Agree when enough is enough

Determine in advance which answers must be sufficiently answered at the end of the development phase. What is sufficient to be able to continue to the realization phase? Whoever waits too long for this runs the risk that the criterion will become increasingly higher. When such an agreement has been made, it may still be necessary to adjust the criteria by means of advancing insight, but then it is a conscious choice, which also includes the potentially negative consequences of delay within the consideration.

Take time for reflection on the process

Put moments for reflection on the process in the agenda. Good guidance contributes a lot to this type of meeting. The tools discussed in this book offer language to indicate what matters most in these types of development processes.

Communicate about the discovery journey, and not just about the result

Let the environment experience what happens in the development phase. Also communicate about setbacks. "Look, we are doing our best" arouses more confidence as a basic attitude than "We will solve it for you", especially if you cannot be completely certain of the latter.

Organize hot or cold?

Space to experiment, to have the opportunity to look around outside of one's own circle, to become creative together, to discover something new: all this generates energy. Even if the murky territory is inevitable, if that yields something new then it is very satisfying. The development phase is a warm phase.

The realization phase

Essence: the renewal is put into practice

The realization phase started when the result of the development phase is applied under conditions in which the renewal can prove itself as a practice that can continue independently. The protection for the experimental set-up is now being removed. Financing for the development phase stops, the temporary exception position is at the end of its term, the pilot project is over.

Usually another revenue model is included here. The lusts and burdens of the new practice must be distributed among the actors involved in such a way that they want to keep it up and keep it for a longer time. The condition is that they all benefit from it.

If the initiative network wanted to cause movement in an existing system, then it comes down to whether the actors in that system are actually going to move. What that exactly means depends on the nature of the initiative.

A new product can be placed on the market to compete with similar products. Maybe the providers are not happy with this introduction, but it challenges them to come up with something better.

If the renewal touches the way of working for an entire chain of actors, then a period of negotiations will start. There will always be people who have an interest in the situation as it is. Attention is needed here for interests and perceptions before people want to cooperate. That is why it is so important to gather information about this in the development phase, and to gather evidence that can make a difference in the realization phase.

Some innovations only yield something when a large proportion of the actors involved take part. These kinds of trajectories are more difficult than those in which something new can be introduced in phases.

When the initiative aims to change the rules of the game, the realization phase means that decision-making will take place. It now has to become clear whether the work in the development phase has been sufficient to allow decision-makers to agree with the change.

Actors: people with interests that touch the new practice

In this phase, people play a role that gives form to the existing situation, and whose interests are touched by innovation. These are not always the same 'managers' who have made room for the development phase in the planning phase. Who they are depends also on the nature of the initiative.

Of course, the initiators hope that their proposals will be received with open arms by the people for whom the innovation should be a solution. This target group is not always at a negotiating table: think of consumers, agricultural entrepreneurs, care workers, teachers in education or disadvantaged people in developing countries. They also did not give the assignment for the experiments in the previous phase. Yet it is possible that they were the people for whom the initiators had made their efforts. You could call this target group the 'moral contractor'.

Those who do sit at the table are their representatives: consumer organizations, farmers' organizations, umbrella organizations in healthcare, education unions or NGOs in development work. When they do their job well, then ensure they are an environment where innovations can thrive. A high degree of organization is of great importance to distribute the lusts and burdens of change well. Recognition of the interests of other parties and of mutual dependency is the basis for a well-functioning system, in which initiatives that have proven themselves in the development phase can get their place in a responsible way.

The downside is that representative bodies are often not very flexible, because the constituents must be satisfied. A consultation of representatives of interest parties quickly becomes an meeting of gatekeepers, where there is little room for innovative ideas and creative thinking. Whoever has to deal with these kinds of decision-making bodies during the realization phase must already have done the informal preparatory work before the meeting starts.

Pitfalls

We do not need you

Some changes can be implemented without many problems, for example in a small company where the entrepreneur has all the factors in his own hands. But even then, the other family

members must agree if it is a family business. Probably they were already involved in the development phase.

In more complex situations more people need to move for innovation. If the initiators are very convinced of their initiative, then that easily provokes resistance. It is a pitfall to ignore that resistance. The basic attitude 'we do not need you' excludes people with other interests, and they will sooner or later form a counterforce. This leads to power struggles with potentially destructive consequences.

We know what's good for you

The opposite attitude is: "we know what is good for you". The initiators try to convince others of their proposals, while at the same time losing sight of the fact that those others may have good reasons not to accept those proposals. This situation can be recognized by the initiator who with every objection from others continues to put forward even more reasons why his idea is best. When people are asked to cooperate, they want to feel heard: they want recognition for their interests and doubts, and see what they get back in exchange for their cooperation.

The naive expert

If a new insight or a new practice is introduced, it usually does not happen in a smooth system: there are always conflicts of interest, there are always tensions, and there is almost always a struggle. For some actors the new proposal comes in handy, others see it as a deterioration of their position. Whoever has no eye for this falls into the trap of the naive expert who can easily be stretched in front of the cart of one of the warring parties.

This often happens to scientists when they are hired by one party to come and tell "How It Really Is" and what " is the Best Solution Objectively ". While the researchers are convinced of their objective scientific knowledge on the basis of thorough research, their story becomes a weapon in a power struggle.

If the boss likes it, then it is OK

Anyone who assumes that things will turn out well if a formal decision has been made in favour of the change can come home from a cold funfair. If the director thinks it is a good idea, that does not mean that all employees agree. The same applies to representatives and their supporters. These managers in the system can decide to change the conditions in favour of the renewal. Whether people will also do something different: that depends on more factors.

Skip informal contact

For most innovations, formal steps are not enough. The experimental conditions under which the new practice or the prototype has been successfully tested are never completely equal to those under which the innovation must be realized. Informal contact is needed to know which resistances one can expect. Intermediaries ('links' in terms of network analysis) can be of great importance here: people who, because of their status and independence, easily come into contact with the various actors involved.

Tips for the realization phase

Look for cooperation with mutual benefit

As long as the renewal can be carried out without bothering anyone, there is little to worry about. But usually it is not that simple. Whoever enters occupied terrain has basically three options: enforce, compete or seek cooperation.

A dominant position is needed for the first option. Whoever walks this path must realize that what is excluded will develop into counterforce. The second option follows the principles of

the market. If the new practice or the new product is really better, that will have to be proven. But a perfect market is rare, and in addition to quality, there are usually more factors involved which determine who wins.

The royal road is the search for cooperation, in which the new practice is given a function in the system. The quality of this cooperation depends on the extent to which stakeholders together succeed in dividing the lusts and burdens of the change in a way that is satisfactory for everyone.

Grant others their own development phase

Even if the innovation is a well-tested and brilliant solution for a certain target group, they themselves still need their own learning process to discover this. They go through their own development phase, and often this takes time. It helps if people who know this target group have already participated in the development phase of the initiative: they can make an estimate of what the introduction will evoke, and help develop a strategy.

Resistance does not have to be related to the quality of the idea

When a renewal is not immediately received with open arms, it does not necessarily mean that the idea is not right. There can be anything going on in the system that makes it closed for a change. Much can be learned about the functioning of a system from its response to an attempt to change. Be alert to tension in the system and prevent the renewal being hijacked by one of the warring parties.

How do we make this possible together?

Do not try to convince. Be aware that if you want something from others, they probably want something in return. It is even more effective when it is possible to start a conversation with the people who are needed for the realization about the ambition from which the initiative group went on a journey. Do the discussion partners share that ambition? Is there a common dream, for which may the renewal may offer a perspective? If so, how can the partners make this possible together?

This conversation is similar to that in the inspiration phase. The difference is that, as a result of the development phase, there is now a beckoning perspective. This makes it easier for discussion partners to acknowledge problems that they would otherwise prefer to look away from. In the inspirational phase, the initiators build a network of people with guts who want to actively take the adventure. In the realization phase, it concerns the gatekeepers who can open or close the door to realization.

Warm or cold?

In the realization phase, the initiators want to set a system in motion. That usually does not work that easily. Letting go of what is familiar is difficult. Usually there is negotiation and often there is tension and struggle. That costs energy. The realization phase is a cold phase.

The dissemination phase

Essence: the new practice finds imitation

If the renewal has been put into practice and attracts the attention of others, then the dissemination phase has started. A successful change spreads itself. When a renewal in this way finds wide acceptance, we can speak of an innovation.

Who wants to actively promote the dissemination of an innovation, focuses on communication channels through which the news can spread. For whom is the innovation intended? Which channels do they use mainly? The rise of the internet and social media has drastically changed the landscape in the last decades. I do not have to add much to the extensive literature on this.

Not every initiative network has an interest in the fast takeover of the innovation in which it has invested by others. If it is a product that requires money, then the promoters are not happy with 'free riders' who can get away with the profit without all the effort. That is why there is patent legislation, and promoters and investors already make agreements about the protection of the results during the planning phase. When public money is spent, it is usually the agreement that research results from the development phase will be made available to everyone. Sometimes a delay is agreed upon so that the initiators can earn back their investment before the market takes off with it.

The dissemination of innovations is a separate discipline, ever since the first adoption research from the 1960s, when Evereth Rogers developed his adoption curve that is still quoted as a standard model. He investigated how innovations spread among farmers, and found a nice Gaussian (Normal) distribution between entrepreneurs who were very quickly involved and others who could not come along. He classified them into innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. The usual assumption was that the innovation was good for everyone, and that it was up to the entrepreneur's character how quickly he (usually 'he') understood this and wanted to take the risk in order to change. An innovation sooner or later seeps through to the entire community ('trickle down').

Development workers who tried to spread the new successful agricultural methods in the Third World quickly realized that this assumption is not always right. The conditions of a Dutch test station or a modern Dutch farmer are different from those of small farmers under tropical conditions with little access to good basic material, veterinary care, credit and market, to name just a few examples. The effect was often that a limited number of large entrepreneurs made use of the innovations and thus strengthened their position of power. Access to the market and modernization for large groups of others was therefore blocked. That those small farmers did not follow the innovations was a very sensible choice under their circumstances.

For a long time, public sector financiers have made a strict distinction between knowledge development and knowledge transfer. Knowledge development would be the privilege of scientific researchers, while knowledge transfer was the domain for information officers, advisers and education staff. As if knowledge is something that would bubble up from the source of science and subsequently reach the fertile soil of the users via the river of knowledge disseminators.

Anyone who looks at change processes through the lenses of the spiral of innovation sees a different picture. The knowledge that people need to act effectively in their situation is the result of an interaction process with various actors. Knowledge workers such as scientific researchers can play a specific role in this: they have access to what is known in their field, and they can introduce methodologies to ensure that experiments, in particular in the development phase, are carried out in a way that produces reliable results. They are important as supporters of innovation processes. That is something different from what the classic image suggests: the scientist who knows and who can determine where it should go.

Actors: people who find the new practice interesting for their own situation

An innovation spreads as innovation when it is copied in a broader circle. People become curious and try to find out whether the new practice also works well for them. If this works out well, there will be others who derive the hope from such a positive story that it will also be beneficial for them.

Stories are of great importance for the dissemination phase. A result of scientific research does not say much to people in practice, and the status of scientists has also devalued considerably in recent years. When others are successful in a comparable situation, it arouses curiosity.

Those who have an interest in spreading innovations does well to focus on the storytellers of those stories, and the channels through which those stories can end up by the target group.

No two situations are exactly the same. If people find an innovation interesting, there will almost always be an adjustment to their own circumstances. This may mean that the innovation will be fitted in by the target group in a new initiation spiral in which all phases will be completed again.

Pitfalls

I know what's good for you

The biggest pitfall in the dissemination phase is the assumption that the quality of innovation is beyond any suspicion. It worked well under the circumstances of the development phase, and in the realization phase important barriers have been removed to put the innovation into practice. Perhaps conditions have changed, such as adjusted rules or influenced prices, so that people will make a different decision.

It remains to be seen whether the intended target group is inspired by it. For who is it a solution for? And for whom not? What are the unintended side-effects?

Knowledge development and transfer of knowledge as separate elements

Anyone who separates knowledge development and knowledge transfer loses sight of the process that is needed to grow initiatives and to promote innovations. Innovations are not products that are produced on order and are then delivered neatly on the doormat of the target group by others.

Tips for the dissemination phase

Tell stories

Innovations mainly spread through stories. Look for those stories, and make sure they are recorded. The story of the hero who leaves with the best of intentions and overcomes all kinds of difficulties is more powerful than a 'nice weather story' in which everything seems to go smoothly. Use people who can interpret stories and the channels in which those stories reach the target audience. Be alert to which channels are trusted by that target group.

Give/grant the target group its own initiation spiral

For complex issues, there are few 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. Even though the innovation is great, people who have to work with it go through their own process and eventually find their own solutions. This takes time. Good guidance can mean a great deal if the innovation serves as inspiration, and not as the solution that it ultimately has to become.

Be curious about variations

If other people come up with different solutions, that does not mean that they are doing wrong. Assume they had good reasons for it, and be curious about it. Perhaps they missed insights, and this is a moment to discuss this. It may also be that they add new insights to the initiative group, so that the innovation can be further improved. After all, no innovation is the ultimate answer to all questions.

Warm or cold?

It is satisfying to see that the result of efforts benefits people for whom the renewal was intended. This generates energy. The dissemination phase is therefore a warm phase.

The embedding phase

Essence: the renewal becomes common practice to which structures are adapted

The movement initiated by the initiative reaches the embedding phase when the structure adapts to it. This may include procedures, job descriptions, regulations, assessment criteria for financing, financing options, and so on. The new is normal.

Structure is always a bit behind what happens in a system, and that cannot be otherwise. Of importance is the ability of structures to move along. If that fails, tensions will rise and harmful conflicts will become inevitable.

Actors: people with responsibility for the structure

In this phase, it's the turn for people who can change beacons and make adjustments to the structure. For example, the 'managers' in a system appear three times in the Spiral of Initiatives, but they are not necessarily the same managers. In the planning phase, it is managers who provide experimental room. In the realization phase, managers are able to remove obstacles to the introduction. In the embedding phase, managers are adapting structures to the new reality.

This new structure will also walk behind on some points with reality, which does not stand still. And in that tension, initiatives for new initiation spirals emerge again.

Pitfalls

Have we been doing it wrong?

There is a tension curve between stability and change, with a pitfall on each side. On the side of stability we find the people who in principle oppose any change. This mainly occurs in systems with a successful past. The structure is seen as the success formula that cannot be released. Fixed routines and traditions work like a sort of flywheel in difficult times: they offer something to hold on to. But they exclude what does not fit in, and therefore they block the channels which should receive signals of danger. The urgency of change is thereby missed, and with it the interest in the movement that may have been going on for a long time.

Change as the only constant

On the other hand, there is the pitfall of the constant change: one reorganization is not yet complete or the next is announced. The government is a notoriously unreliable partner because under democratic pressure the rules are adjusted so often that entrepreneurs can no longer predict whether they can still earn back their investments.

Such continuous uncertainty encourages short-term thinking. A run on 'quick wins', opportunism and other survival strategies become dominant. A vital system needs safety. A too rigid structure is not safe, but neither is a structure that continuously changes.

Tips for the embedding phase

Respect what is there

The situation has not grown as it is for nothing. Rules, even though they seem so ridiculous now, have been introduced once because they were found important at the time. Respectful attention to those decisions from the past may bring to light what has changed between then and now, so that the structure must be adjusted. It can also bring up arguments that may have been overlooked and lead to a reconsideration of proposed decisions.

Find balance between stability and change

Where the balance can be found will be different for every movement. But respect that people need, in some degree, to know what they are up to in the longer term.

Accept that there is something to criticise on every decision

Here too, the perfect is the enemy of the good. What counts is that the structure is offering space for new initiatives that will ultimately require adjustments to the structure.

Warm or cold?

Organising and structuring is usually a process of negotiating and compromising. This costs energy. The embedding phase is a cold phase.

Steering on energy

Tools for navigation

The lists with pitfalls and tips can easily be made much longer. Please continue to do that from personal experience. What I want to show with these examples is that it makes sense to distinguish between the seven phases as described here. Each phase has its own task and dynamics. Different actors come into the picture at each stage. It is useful to reflect on the process from time to time, and to ask in which phase the initiative is located. Do we do what is needed at this stage? What needs to be done before we can go to a next phase? Or is it time to take a step back and take a new run? Do we have contact with the right actors? Are we alert enough to the specific pitfalls that often occur at this stage?

The spiral is particularly suitable as a tool for navigation: where are we now and which way should we go? The instrument is also suitable for progress reporting. It provides a framework to explain which efforts have been made and which choices have been made, and then to report on the effect and the way in which surprising reactions have been responded to.

Who wants to plan creative change processes must take into account that the process can run differently than anticipated. A good plan offers enough space to react in the situation itself to what presents itself, and a procedure to consult with the 'managers' who make space for the activities when it is necessary to change the course.

Generating and Deploying energy

The Spiral of Initiatives illustrates the role of energy in processes of change. If successfully completed, some phases will generate energy, which will be needed to sustain momentum in subsequent (cold) phases. When, for example, an essential core group of enthusiastic individuals has been formed during the Inspiration Phase, they will not be easily discouraged by knock-back statements they may encounter during the Planning Phase, such as:

'That is impossible because…'

'There is no money for that!'

'That's not how we do things here.'

'You mean we're doing it wrong?!'

'We're doing that already.'

They will draw on the previously accumulated energy to search creatively for the space needed for the Development Phase. However, if this energy is depleted too early, then it won't make much sense for them to continue with the initial strategy they devised, nor hold each other to corresponding agreements. Irritations often arise, which can easily develop into damaging conflicts. It is better to move back to the Inspiration Phase, examining what is left of the original ambitions through which they found each other. Does the fire still burn? Where did things go wrong during this attempt? Is it possible to devise a different, more feasible strategy? Perhaps by using a different entry point or slightly lowering the level of ambition?

Energy is a useful concept to work with when tweaking innovation processes. If it's there in a network, then so much is possible, because the people involved will look for opportunities creatively. If it doesn't work on the left side, then they will try it on the right. *If not, then still!*

Origin of the tool

In its original form this model was called the Spiral of Innovations. It was developed by Eelke Wielinga and Wim Zaalmink within the framework of the experiment "Networks in Livestock Farming (2004-2007)". In the experiment, farmers were asked to propose initiatives for sustainable innovations in their sector, and to present themselves as a network. These networks received assistance for one year by a researcher of advisor in the role of facilitator, and a limited budget for hiring expertise when needed. It could not be expected that within one year an idea would fully develop into a widely spread innovation. The monitoring team needed an instrument to visualise what progress had been made within the project period.

The tool was helpful to reveal the story of an innovation process. It also appeared to be useful for facilitators to reflect on what was needed for the process at any point in time.

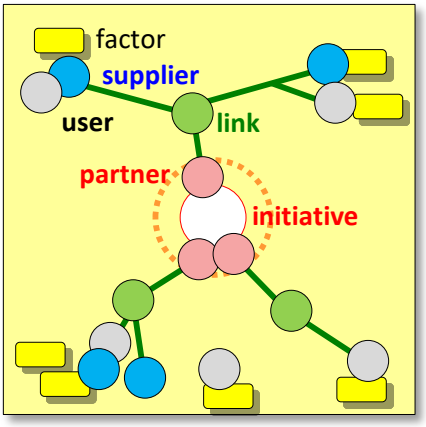
Although the Spiral was developed for guiding innovation processes, in projects and training courses that followed after the experiment, the tool appeared useful for any process of change, starting with an initiative. Such initiatives do not necessarily focus on innovations. This is why the Spiral is called the Spiral of Initiatives. When innovation is central in a project of program, like the AgriSpin program or in Operational Groups within the framework of EIP/EU, the name Spiral of Innovations is more appropriate. The contents remains the same.

First published in:

Wielinga, H.E., Zaalmink, B.W., Bergevoet, R.H.M., Geerling-Eiff, F.A., Holster, H., Hoogerwerf, L., Vrolijk, M. (2007): *Networks with Free Actors: encouraging sustainable innovations in animal husbandry by using the FAN approach (Free Actors in Networks).* Wageningen University and Research.

6. The Network Analysis

focuses on involvement



The Network Analysis puts an initiative in the middle

This model takes the perspective of people who join forces to realise an initiative. For realising an initiative a variety of actors is involved. The way in which they are involved will differ. The Network Analysis draws a map that allows for prioritising relationships to work on.

Actors are involved in different ways

Crucial factors in the success of an initiative are represented by those who adopt different positions of involvement:

- Users will benefit from the initiative.
- Suppliers are required to contribute.
- Partners feel ownership towards the initiative
- Links connect partners to suppliers and users.

Some questions which need to be answered are:

- What is the initiative?
- What is needed?
- Who should be involved?
- Who can make connections?
- Which connections should be improved?

The Network Analysis visualises positions of involvement. Actors can be involved in different ways, and some essential links might be missing. This analysis helps to identify priorities for strengthening links.

Making a Network Analysis

The model can be used for brainstorming about what relationships should be strengthened. Then follow the following steps:

1. **The Initiative** is placed in the centre, since this is the reason for the existence of the network. An initiative reflects an ambition. In the theory of living networks, genuine ambitions are serving the collective good. Money and power are not ambitions but

means to an end. "Fundraising" as an initiative is not good enough. In an analysis session a flipchart or a paper table cloth can be used.

2. **Factors that Matter** are placed in a wide circle around the initiative. These are institutions or things that are needed to make things happen. Participants brainstorm all factors they can think of. The ones that really matter will appear later on. It is practical to write on cards, and stick them on the paper.
3. **Actors** who can connect these factors to the initiatives are given a face. Who should move, to realise this initiative? Think of people who represent this factor. Add them to it. The more specific you can be about people (as opposed to organisations), the clearer it becomes who to get involved in the initiative. Actors can have different positions of involvement, depending on the context. You might need someone as a supplier, user, link or partner. Discuss for each actor in what position you need their involvement.
4. **Users** are people who will benefit if the initiative happens. Indicate these actors in the outer circle in black.
5. **Suppliers** are sources (people or institutions) of things required for the initiative. Indicate those actors in the outer circle in blue. Sometimes users can be suppliers as well.
6. **Links** are people who connect the partners with suppliers and users. This is a crucial step in the analysis. Partners cannot connect with all actors in the outside ring (the users) directly. Their effectiveness depends on their relationships with those who can make the connection. Write links on green cards, and indicate what connection they maintain. The quality of the analysis increases when links indicate names of people.

A completed Network Analysis shows:

- The Initiative
- Users served by the initiative
- Suppliers required to deliver something
- Links connecting partners to users and supplies
- Partners who carry the initiative

Expectations are different, and it takes different actions to get all these actors involved. The analysis reveals which connections are weakly developed or missing, and leads to a plan of action.

The boundaries of the network are not fixed

The initiative may require involvement from actors who do not feel a part of it. This notion of a network differs from the common understand of social networks, with members who recognise each other as such.

The Network Analysis brings people into the picture

The FAN Network Analysis is different to other, more common, methods for actor analysis or power field analysis. It is different in that it takes the initiative as the point of departure, rather than institutional interests or positions of power. Such methods focus on the formal arena where people represent institutions and negotiate about conflicting interests. The network analysis goes beyond the official positions and brings individuals into the picture. Ties can be formal or informal.

Negotiations over conflicting interests are energy consuming, as parties have to compromise their targets to reach agreement (see the Realisation Stage in the Spiral of Initiatives). Informal

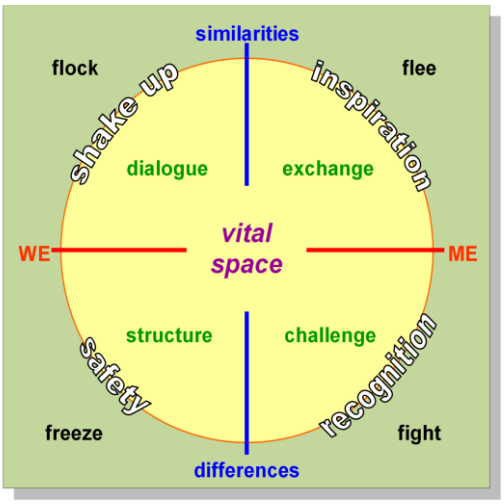
networking, inspired by ambitions, generates energy because it feeds hope that dreams can come true (compare the Inspiration Stage in the Spiral of Initiatives). Disproportionate focus on power relations and formal interests ignores the importance of the informal process that can really make things move.

Origins:
The Network Analysis was developed by Anne Marie Poorthuis (Eigentijdse Verbindingen). Her colleague Lieke Hoogervorst introduced it to the experiment "Networks in Livestock Production" (2004-2007) where it appeared to perfectly complement the other tools in use, with their focus on the initiative, energy and connection.

First publications:
Poorthuis, A.M., Bijl, C. van der (2006): *"Van netwerkanalyse naar organisatieroutine" [from network analysis to organisational routine]*. In: Poorthuis, A.M. (red) (2006): *De kracht van netwerkbenadering. (The Power of Network Approaches)*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
Wielinga, H.E., Zaalmink, B.W. et al (2008): *Networks with Free Actors.* Wageningen University and Research.

7. The Circle of Coherence

focuses on interaction



The Circle of Coherence visualises patterns of interaction.

It identifies constructive patterns and defensive patterns, and offers options for intervention to build coherence in the network.

Vital Space is what people experience when interaction is constructive.

If there is vital space, it is rewarding to be involved in the network. People feel welcome to put in effort and align with others. There is room for curiosity and creativity, and for new things to emerge.

When people feel they can rely on others to do their share, they can concentrate on their own contribution, making use of their specific qualities. This allows for task division and specialisation, and creates added value for the network. Coherence in the network will grow, making the network a system that is more than the sum of its parts.

Constructive patterns feed vital space.

Vital space emerges from healthy interaction. Just like trust, it cannot be manufactured, bought or imposed. Deliberate attempts to gain control over it are self-defeating. This is true for most important things in life; luck, creativity, happiness, passion, love etc. The more you chase it, the faster it runs away.

This does not leave us helpless though. Vital space grows by itself if it is nourished. It grows if there is *connection*. Vital space is not equal to trust. Trust can be unhealthy if people rely too easily on others, without being critical and aware of risks.

Four Constructive Patterns

There are four basic patterns of interaction that strengthen connection. These patterns provide the basic ingredients for vital space.

- The Pattern of Exchange
- The Pattern of Challenge
- The Pattern of Structure

- The Pattern of Dialogue

The Pattern of Exchange:

Individuals seek a balance between give and take. They look for sufficient similarities between their own ambitions and those that are shared, and which could make the network move. The benefits for them must outweigh the effort, risk and cost of involvement. In this interaction pattern, people try to get positive signals on these issues.

The Pattern of Challenge:

Individuals try to acquire a position in which their contribution is valued and their benefits are secured. They challenge rivals who do the same.

Differences are important in developing task division and specialisation. Unsolved questions make curious and provide opportunities for learning. Indeed steady disagreement and conflict is healthy, so long as the network is learning how to deal with it constructively. This feeds trust that the network can cope with unexpected challenges.

The Pattern of Structure:

The network works on formal and informal agreements, rules, and planning, which organises the traffic between people. This allows for concerted action. It feeds trust that individuals can concentrate on their own contribution whilst others will do their share. In this pattern the shared ambition is operationalised into concrete targets and actions in which people have specific mandates.

The Pattern of Dialogue:

The network allows for mutual learning, creativity and growth. This requires an open attitude and willingness to give up set views and practices. In dialogue, people want to learn with and from each other. Dialogue feeds trust that people are being taken seriously. Their input in the network is valued in the process of co-creation, which may lead to new and unforeseen outcomes. In this pattern people show genuine curiosity and feel fulfilment in collectively building something new.

The steering mechanisms in networks are in-built.

Constructive patterns alternate more or less automatically. When one of the ingredients is neglected, there will always be someone bringing attention to it somehow. This normally happens implicitly, wrapped in arguments about the contents.

Through evolution, people have learned to live together as social beings for millions of years. We may assume that the ability to keep networks healthy is much older and deeper ingrained than the rational mind which allows people to communicate in abstract concepts and language. If we are well connected, we know what to do even before we can articulate it. This is what we experience as intuition.

This logic becomes clearer when we consider that any interaction between people has at least two dimensions. Every communication reveals something about contents and mutual relations.

The Axis of Contents:

People communicate between similarities and differences along the Axis of Contents. "Contents" refers to what people understand and what they want. We can learn between what we recognise and what we do not understand. The steering mechanism works through limiting or widening our perception.

If there is too much confusion, we respond by limiting our perception to what we can handle. If everything seems to be known, we get bored and widen our perception in search of new differences, which always can be found.

If interaction partners are too different we lose interest. If they seem too similar, there might not be much added value in interaction. Between similarities and differences we are curious, and this is energising.

The Axis of Relations:

People communicate between "Me" and "We" along the Axis of Relations, between personal interests and the collective value of the network. A network has added value when people attune their efforts to what the network requires. This means that people must sacrifice personal freedom, anticipating compensation by the benefits of involvement in the network.

The steering mechanism works through the emotions of anger and fear. When the network becomes demanding and imposes too much on personal freedom and creativity, we respond with anger, demanding more space.

When we disregard the requirements of the network, we feel that the protection offered by it is diminished, making our efforts less meaningful. This translates into feelings of fear, making us more inclined to attune again.

The borderlines between Me and We are fuzzy and change along with the level of trust in a network. They need to be pushed all the time. Children learn to do so while playing. Children like to play and they are curious. Healthy adults do too.

Defensive patterns exist too.

Networks are not energising all the time. Interaction can drain energy. Just as constructive patterns reinforce themselves, so defensive patterns lead to a self-propelling process; as willingness to put in effort and align decreases, the added value of the network shrinks, making people less willing again.

Defensive patterns disconnect. If not corrected, the network ends up in either stagnation or chaos. Each constructive pattern has a defensive counterpart:

- The Pattern of Fleeing
- The Pattern of Fighting
- The Pattern of Freezing
- The Pattern of Flocking

The Pattern of Fleeing:

When individuals conclude that the balance between give and take is not in their favour, they will withdraw their contribution and are less inclined to align with others. They disconnect. This decreases the gain for others, also lowering their threshold to step out.

They may have very valid reasons for leaving, but from the point of view of an initiator who needs their contribution, this is a pattern of fleeing.

The Pattern of Fighting:

As long as individuals are challenging each other, their competences grow. Even if they lose a game, they learn how to respond better next time. When challenge deteriorates into fight however, the connection is broken. The other is no longer an esteemed opponent but an enemy, whose influence must be eliminated.

This pattern escalates as each party takes a strike from the adversary as a legitimate reason to strike back even harder. This leads to a path of mutual destruction.

The Pattern of Freezing:

Structure can evolve into a situation of control, where nobody dares to move anymore. Some maintain the *status quo,* while others are suffer by it. The underdog is not satisfied with the limited space it gets, but does not see how to change it. A lot of complaint with little action signifies that they resign in their fate. The dominant party usually profits more from this situation, but also complains; about the lack of trust and the efforts it takes to maintain control.

Due to this lack of connection a spiral of fear, control and resistance develops where people are afraid to make any move. This is a manifestation of resignation.

The Pattern of Flocking:

The pattern of dialogue can degenerate into a defensive variety too. This occurs when people start taking any criticism as a threat to their harmony. This is a common phenomenon in idealist movements, religious sects, and also in groups that feel threatened by the outside world.

Groupthink develops in a sneaky way, without being noticed by those involved. They conform to what they think others are expecting from them, because being accepted within the group is more important than maintaining dissent.

Also defensive patterns have an ecological function.

Networks provide temporary structures that channel the concerted actions of people. As such they form the living tissue for movement. When the structure cannot respond sufficiently to its environment, it must adapt, or give way to make space for others; just as living organisms die when the lose the ability to maintain essential connections. Then it decomposes and becomes feed for other forms of life. Just like the steering mechanisms to keep a network healthy, the mechanisms for destruction are deeply ingrained in human nature.

Defensive patterns have two functions. Escalating patterns become a threat to the structure when essential elements are not well connected. This inhibits the network's ability to maintain energy and respond to challenges in its domain. Defensive patterns will either destroy the structure, or provoke a change within the network, allowing constructive patterns to re-connect broken links.

Each defensive pattern calls for a different cure

Such change requires leadership from those who want the network to survive. In each defensive pattern a different mechanism is at work. If we assume that people who get caught in an escalating defensive pattern still have a desire to be part of the network if it were healthy, their needs for re-entering the vital space will be different in each pattern:

- *Fleeing people need inspiration.* New insights or perspectives may change the perceived balance between costs and benefits.
- *Fighting people need recognition.* People are fighting for their position and will not give in to acknowledge the competing position of others. Only after being appreciated themselves, will they turn their attention to the opinions and interests of others.
- *Freezing people need safety.* Deviating from a strangulating structure is dangerous. Risks have to be reduced before people dare to change their behaviour.
- *Flocking people need a shake-up.* Creative and critical voices are not being heard

anymore, and people do not look beyond their own clique. A good shake-up reconnects people with their own individual self and releases creativity.

These different needs call for different leadership interventions in each pattern to restore vital space.

Interventions can be "warm" or "cold"

Warm interventions work through the mind. They invite people to rethink the situation and reconsider their behaviour:

- *The Inspirator provides inspiration,* offering new insights and opening people's eyes to possibilities.
- *The Negotiator gives recognition* to each fighting party, and helps to find ways to make their intended contributions compatible.
- *The Investigator provides safety* by negotiating room for experimentation.
- *The Joker takes care of a shake-up* by wrapping the inconvenient truth in a humorous way, possibly expressing what no one else dares to.

Cold interventions make use of power. They force people to change their position. Such interventions may limit their options or change the balance between costs and benefits.

- *The Regulator imposes limits and rules*, making it unattractive to flee.
- *The Strategist intervenes in the fight,* making it impossible for any actor to "win" at the cost of others.
- *The Fighter undermines the position of the dominant actor,* forcing them to enter into negotiation with the underdog.
- *The Prophet uses his authority* to shake up people by telling the inconvenient truth.

The legitimacy of interventions becomes an issue when deploying power in networks. Since hierarchy is lacking, the mandate for using such power is not at all obvious. Who is *allowed* to? And to what purpose?

Connection is key

Connection makes the difference between healthy networks, where constructive patterns dominate, and unhealthy networks threatened by defensive patterns. Warm and cold interventions aim to restore connection.

Warm interventions work through communication. Cold interventions make use of power. Here, imposing the conditions or even fighting may be necessary. But the risk of further escalation is high. What makes the difference between being part of the problem or part of a solution?

It's about intentions. There is a tremendous difference between using power to win or to reconnect. Using power to win does not contribute to connection, and therefore fuels defensive patterns. Using power to reconnect creates space for constructive patterns, through which people can build meaningful relationships. Anyone who feels responsible for the network can do this, with or without a mandate, although such interventions are more effective when initiated by a respected person.

Using the Circle of Coherence requires practice

The Circle of Coherence is a powerful but complicated model. Real life has more than eight

colours, and it takes time to recognise the basic patterns in a wide variety of situations. Not everyone is necessarily acting in the same pattern, although escalating patterns tend to drag people in. The intervener should focus on the pattern that is most disturbing at a given point, and the people who are furthering it. Practice and joint reflection are helpful in learning how to recognise the principles of the model in everyday life.

The main point is that different patterns require different interventions. What is effective in one situation might be counterproductive in another.

For example, the inspirator will only complicate matters in the pattern of fighting, where there are too many visions already. And don't use the humour of the joker either, because it makes a joke out of the fighting parties struggle for recognition. Neither the inspirator nor the negotiator will be effective against the pattern of flocking, since the conformists do not perceive there to be a problem. And so on.

The constructive patterns of exchange, challenge, structure and dialogue are similar to the stages of *forming, storming, norming* and *performing* as commonly depicted in theories of group dynamics. However, these stages suggest a linear process from primitive beginnings to success.

The Circle of Coherence does not imply this linearity. Patterns alternate. New networks often start in the pattern of exchange, after which those of challenge and structure will follow. A new network of managers or representatives is more likely to start in the pattern of challenge, because they will try take a strong starting position for the negotiations they expect. The pattern of dialogue requires a certain level of trust, for which the other three patterns must already made some headway. But a good shake up can bring the network back into the pattern of challenge, whilst a far reaching proposal may make people reconsider their level of involvement, which takes place in the pattern of exchange.

The Circle of Coherence acknowledges the role of defensive patterns and the importance of connection for feeding vital space. It illustrates how investments in relationships empower the network to work on a shared ambition. This shared ambition gives focus to the efforts network members.

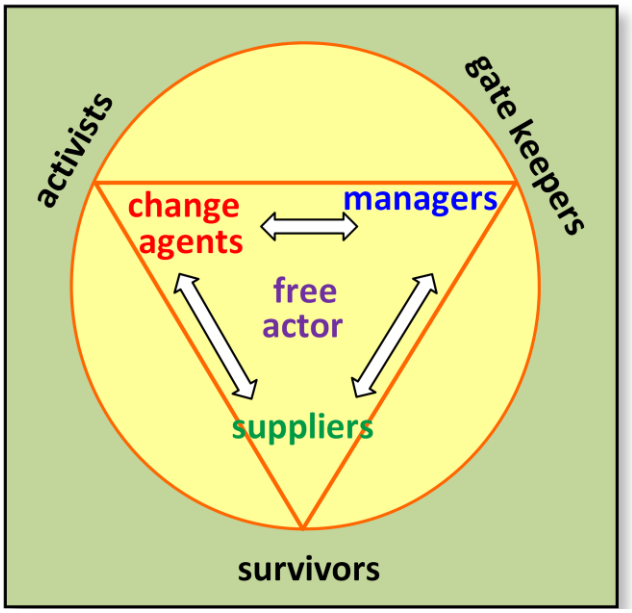
What emerges from the vital space that is thus created cannot be foreseen. The good news is that it might be better than anyone could have imagined beforehand.

Origins:

The Circle of Coherence was developed by Eelke Wielinga and the first version was published in his PhD thesis "Networks as Living Tissue" in 2001. The metaphor of living networks proved to be a useful alternative for other metaphors in use (eg. the world as a machine, a jungle, a market place or a village where people share a common faith). The Circle of Coherence visualises how interaction patterns are governed by biological mechanisms. The model builds on earlier work on situational leadership by Hersey and Blanchard (1977) and insights in group dynamics.

8. The Triangle of Co-Creation

Focusing on Positions



The Triangle of Co-Creation visualises different positions in the process of generating something new.

Co-creation builds on the contribution of all. When shared interaction leads to results beyond what anyone involved had in mind beforehand, then genuine co-creation has taken place.

This goes beyond what is often seen in interactions between stakeholders, which typically includes:

- Struggle over solutions; with that of the most powerful actor winning.
- Negotiation about interests; actors try to balance give and take to find a solution that serves shared interests. When more attention is given to what actors really need, more options will appear.

We can compare the interaction process to dividing a pie. Struggling over solutions makes the pie smaller, as struggle inevitably leads to damage, leaving less to share. Meanwhile, negotiation about interests might make the pie bigger, since there are always more interests than what was initially put on the table. Co-creation goes even further than this: it means that actors bake a new pie altogether, utilising the qualities of everyone involved.

Actors must learn how to relate to each other in ways that elicit cooperation and creation within their network. The Triangle of Co-Creation illustrates constructive and defensive positions in relation to the structure.

The Triangle of Co-Creation visualises positions people can acquire. Some positions contribute to changes in the existing structure, whilst others do not. Interaction within a network can lead to co-creation of desirable outcomes if actors acknowledge that complementary positions are necessary.

Healthy network processes require actors in complementary positions:

- *Change Agents* as driving forces
- *Managers* taking responsibility for the structure
- *Suppliers* contributing knowledge, labour or whatever is needed

Actors might also adopt positions that do not contribute:

- *Activists* driving change at the cost of the structure
- *Gatekeepers* merely maintaining positions of power
- *Survivors* putting their own interests and survival first

Any network requires at least one free actor:

- *Free actors* do whatever is needed for healthy interaction in a network, whether they have the mandate to do so or not.

The Triangle of Co-Creation visualises positions in relation to an existing structure

The Triangle clarifies the influence of formal structures on what change agents actually do. Change agents are not just doing what they are told; they don't limit themselves to their formal job description. Does their formal mandate matter? Is there optimal task division to enhance innovations in networks? Or is it simply a matter of personal qualities, meaning it would be better to invest in people only? Perhaps it is a combination?

We need to be more precise in distinguishing between functions and actual behaviour. The terminology in use is fuzzy, meaning different things to different people. We redefine functions, positions and roles as follows:

- A *function* is a formalised task in a system, with duties and mandates. This indicates what formal means someone has to influence others, and what others expect them to deliver. Functions relate to power.
- A *role* refers to the behaviour someone exhibits in a system, whether consciously or not. It tells something about his their willingness to act, or lack thereof. Roles relate to ambitions.
- A *position* indicates the actual influence someone has within a system (team, organisation etc.), and the kind of influence someone requires to achieve what they want (as they see, it at least). This relates to interests. The division of positions emerges from interaction and is usually shifting over time.

Someone may have the *function* of a gatekeeper. Meanwhile, they might try to take on the *role* of a change agent, trying to mobilise people to go along with new plans. However, they might not get the *position* of change agent, which depends on the behaviour of the other actors involved. If they lose the game, they might end up in the position of a survivor, just trying to save their reputation.

The terms used in the Triangle of Co-creation are applicable to functions, positions and roles:

- *Change agents* start an initiative for change or they become partners. They see opportunities or want to solve problems. They share an ambition and this generates energy. Change agents usually find each other in informal networks. To convert their dreams into action, they must connect with others in the system.
- *Managers* feel responsible for the structure. They contribute to change by organising

what is necessary, mobilising resources and keeping risk taking within acceptable limits.
- *Suppliers* deliver the building bricks that are needed for change. Experts might offer technical know-how or process skills to add quality to the initiative, for example.

A successful process of co-creation requires all three of the above positions to be fulfilled. However, in each corner of the triangle is the possibility that actors may also act in a disconnected manner:

- *Activists* equally strive for change, but they do not connect with the system. They try to force change from the outside. A network of activists shares an ambition, which gives them energy, but they use it for struggle.
- *Gatekeepers* feel responsible for the structure just like managers, but they resist change. They do not connect with the change movement and defend their own position of power.
- *Survivors* are primarily concerned with their own interests, rather than the good of the group. They are not connected in the sense of feeling responsible for either maintaining the system or changing it for the better.

If the threshold is low for actors to engage in processes of co-creation, the probability of innovations is high. Co-creation requires a high level of trust. Something really new can emerge if people are ready to leave behind old views and patterns, to explore new ideas and practices. Accepting the risk of failure is also a part of the process.

Actors have to overcome their suspicion first

In practice a lot of stakeholders' energy seems to be spent on acquiring positions. Only if there is sufficient acceptance at that level, does co-creation become a possibility. Sadly, many programmes and projects, though intended for stimulating collaboration, never surpass the struggle for positions.

We assume that the competition for acquiring positions is inevitable. Changing structures or procedures won't change this. It is an essential part of any process, necessary to build trust (see also the *Circle of Coherence*). Partners have to test each other, to find out what they can expect if and when things get more complicated. What is needed here is the ability to recognise when this challenge is helpful, and when it is turning into a defensive struggle.

Looking at the Triangle of Co-Creation, actors in any connected position can carry the suspicion of being their disconnected counterparts in disguise. In the testing stage others seek evidence to confirm this suspicion. If an actor succeeds in convincing them that their suspicion is not justified, trust will grow. On the other hand, if actors are denied their genuine ambition, their role may shift into the disconnected version.

- *Change agents could be activists in disguise*, undermining the structure, positions of power and safety of others. To foster trust, they must show understanding and compassion. On the other hand, others may turn their suspicion into a self-fulfilling prophecy by ignoring the genuine ambitions of sincere change agents.
- *Managers bear the suspicion of being gatekeepers*, primarily concerned with maintaining control. If they don't show any ambition or flexibility, they will confirm what others fear and provoke reactionary strategic behaviour. This in turn reinforces their conviction that strict control is necessary. Such escalating patterns block the way to co-creative, interaction and innovation.
- *Suppliers bear the suspicion of being survivors,* only in it for the money and inclined to

deliver minimal output for maximal reward.

Functions are linked to expectations and means of power. Someone with the *function* of manager is likely to perform the *role* of a manager as well, having more means than others to adapt the corresponding *position*. This indicates that functions are linked to suspicion. For example, experts who are hired to assist in a project have the formal function of supplier of knowledge, but the suspicion is that they only contribute for the money; doing the bare minimum, for maximum profit.

These issues are rarely, if ever, a part of the formal agenda. When power games are being played out under the guise of discussing content, it is energy draining. When actors succeed in creating mutual acceptance concerning positions, this releases energy to really learn from each other and co-create.

The Free Actor lubricates healthy interaction.

It is necessary that there is at least one person who is already in a position beyond suspicion. Moreover, this person should have the insight to recognise unhealthy patterns and the skills to intervene, to remove blockages to connection. This is the position and role of the *Free Actor*. They have a central position in the figure of the Triangle of Co-Creation. Observing well-functioning networks, dependent on the voluntary contributions of members, the free actor can almost always be recognised as such.

In rigid and target driven structures there is limited space for free actors. Following this analysis, this is why it is likely that the threshold to do what is necessary to create innovation is high.

Origins:

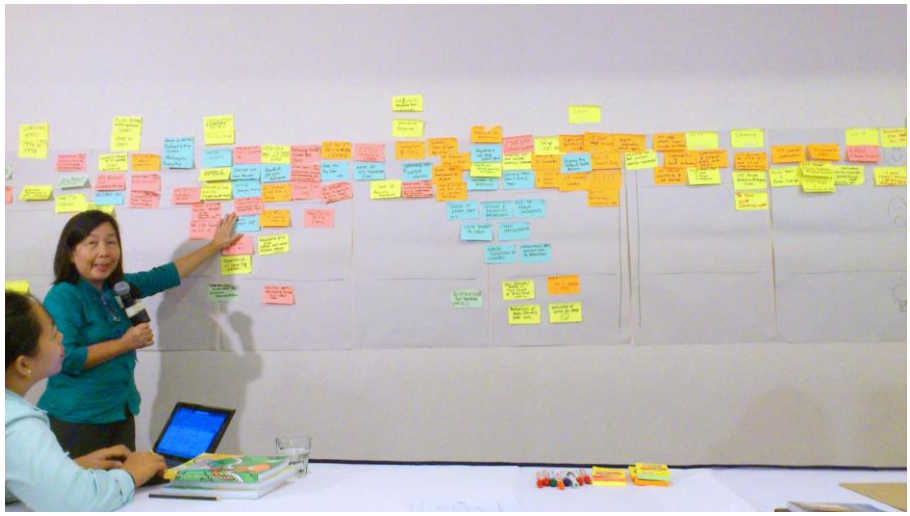
The tool builds on the Triangle of Change, which was developed by Eelke Wielinga in his PhD thesis "Networks as Living Tissue" (2001). This triangle only distinguished change agents, gatekeepers and survivors. In a research project of Wageningen University and Research, the model was used to investigate structural barriers and incentives in the Dutch Green Knowledge System for innovators. When these innovators were asked about it, they easily recognised the distinct roles in the model. But when the managers and governors were asked, most did not like to see themselves as gatekeepers, let alone survivors. The research team, with Marijke Dijkshoorn, Jifke Sol, Eelke Wielinga and others, then added new roles, making distinctions between those who do and do not contribute to responsible change. The position of the Free Actor became better understood. The difference between function, role and position also appeared important.

First published in:

Wielinga, H.E., Dijkshoorn, M., Sol, J. (2010): *In Search of Structural Innovations in the Dutch Green knowledge system*. In: Darnhofer (ed) 2010: *Proceedings of the 9th European IFSA conference,* Vienna, Austria.

9. The Timeline Method

Guideline for Facilitators



A method for joint reflection on a network process

The Timeline is a method for participative monitoring and evaluation. It uncovers the history of the network, as seen through the eyes of those involved. It's relatively straightforward and not too time consuming to create a Timeline. This guideline leads you to all the steps to take to make such a Timeline with participants.

It's different to the other tools of the FAN Approach, which are designed to recognise patterns and determine action. The Timeline contains steps and leads to a result.

A Timeline session is made with the people engaged in the network. They take some time to reflect on their own process (by this do you mean the process/story of the network?) and discuss patterns, which are usually implicit. When there are both veterans and newcomers it helps everyone to arrive on the same page.

There is no need to seek consensus about a shared analysis here. This can be reached in the Learning History, which the Timeline provides a basis for.

Timeline preparation

The Timeline is visualised on a series of flipcharts attached to each other. The number of flipcharts depends on the number of participants. (10 participants need four, 20 participants six, 30 participants eight).

The papers are hung vertically (portrait style), attached to each other. You may use wallpaper, wrapping paper or paper tablecloths as well if these are easier to acquire. It's best to hang them on a long empty wall. If this is not available, use tables, or even lay them out on the floor. What matters is that everyone can see what has been written on the Timeline. Prepare by dividing the paper vertically, into three sections running from left to right, by drawing two lines.

- The upper row is for Positive moments (which can be indicated by a smiley).
- The middle row is for Negative moments (sad smiley).
- The bottom row is for Flash moments (flashing light bulb).

Divide the Timeline horizontally into periods of time that make sense for understanding the history of this network, from the start (or before if relevant) until present. If you know a lot about the network you can do this before the session. You can also do it with the participants at the start of the session, by asking for important milestones.

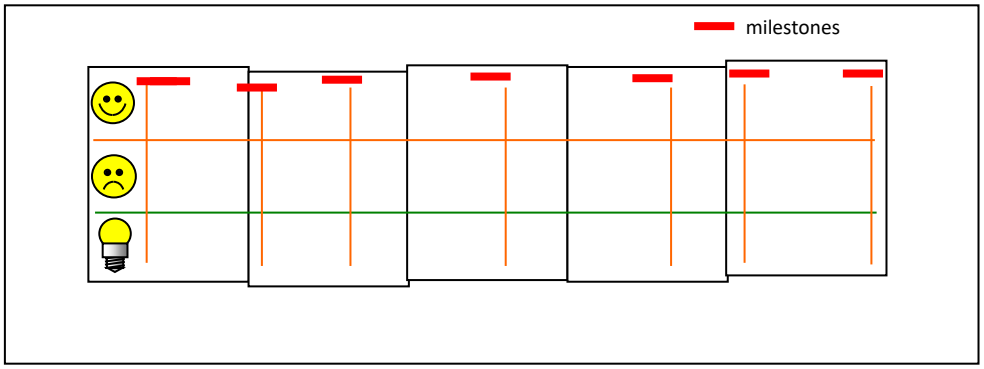


Figure 1: example of a Timeline setup

For each participant you need a marker and about ten Post-it stickers (ideally 12.5x7.5 cm). Post-its are handy, because they are self-adhesive, but you can also improvise with pieces of paper and tape. What counts is that what's written on the stickers is easy to read from a distance.

It helps if you can take pictures of the flipcharts after the feedback session. Audio recordings of the reading and the feedback session are also helpful when writing the report. If you make recordings of any kind, tell participants that they are for internal use only, and that personal statements will be made anonymous in the report. And of course keep your promise.

Instructions for participants

- Explain why the Timeline is made.
- Explain the expected result of this session (the "… and then" story).
- Tell what the next steps in the research will be.
- Invite participants to recall all the moments they consider most significant in the history of the network, from the start of the network (or their involvement) until the present day.
- Moments are to be categorised in three ways:
  - Positive: adding energy,
  - Negative: taking energy away,
  - Flash: when new insights broke through or new opportunities opened up.
- Points of attention while writing the stickers:
  - one card per moment,
  - write a statement, rather than just one word,
  - use a marker and write clearly so it can be read from a distance.
- When participants are ready, they go to the Timeline and stick the Post-its at the appropriate time and place (eg. positive, negative or flash).
- Afterthoughts are allowed. If someone gets another idea while reading contributions from others, they make another card and stick it on the Timeline.

This usually takes 20-25 minutes.

writing statements: Suppose that a capacity building event in Accra is seen as a moment with positive impact. Don't just write down "Accra", but what you found so good about what happened there:

> *"We began to understand each other."*
> *"The atmosphere was playful."*
> *A statement is always a sentence. Post-its are small, imposing brevity (rather like the 160 characters allowed on Twitter). Reduce things to their essence. Milestone events, such as important meetings or signing a contract etc. can be written on the Timeline directly, as points of orientation for participants.*

Reading the Results

After the last participant has stuck his/her statements on the Timeline, the facilitator reviews the result with the group. It usually works best when they all leave their chairs and tables and stand around the Timeline so that everyone can read the cards.

The idea is to arrive at a common understanding of what has been written down. The reading has three components:

- General impression
- Reading the cards
- Points for further discussion.

General Impression

Ask participants what they see at first glance. In some periods you will see more positive cards, in others more negative ones. Do they recognise this? And where do you find most of the flash moments? A Timeline can be read as a kind of barometer of the energy level in the network. Often you will find the flash moments after difficult periods.

Reading the Cards

Read the cards from the beginning to the present, and make sure you understand their meaning. When there are many participants and many cards there will may be clusters of similar statements. They don't all have to be read one by one. If cards have been placed in the wrong row, ask permission to move them to where they belong.

A card cannot be removed because someone else contests its validity. Participants might have different opinions on what moments were relevant or how they contributed to the development of the network. Discussions on what is right or true are not permitted. Every opinion counts. If someone sees things differently, they can write another statement. Different opinions should be appreciated.

Points for Further Discussion

At the end of the reading, ask what thoughts it generates about the continuation of network. List them on a flipchart, so that you can discuss them in order of priority after the Timeline session, or wherever it fits in the agenda.

Interviews For Supplementary Information

The Timeline gives a general impression that can easily be shared, but there are always more stories behind it that don't appear. Sometimes this is because they just don't fit into short statements on a Post-it. Other issues require a bit more trust before people can speak about them. A skilful facilitator will feel which statements on the Timeline require further investigation to better understand the process this network has gone through.

Information generated through interviews can fill in the gaps in the story. It is not necessary to interview everyone. Just select those who might provide important additional insights. Stakeholders who may not have attended the Timeline session can also be helpful.

There is no specific format for the interviews. Participants are invited to explain on their statements on the Timeline in further detail. Other stakeholders are asked about their involvement in the network, the importance of the network for them, and relevant moments in the past. The format of the Timeline can also be used as a basis for the interview.

The starting point is energy:

- What are driving forces for the participants?
- What has contributed to the energy they feel for the network? Made them more enthusiastic and willing to put in effort?
- What has drained energy away?
- Why were flash moments really a breakthrough? Breaking through what and leading to where?

It is important to separate observations from interpretations and conclusions. The Timeline focuses on perceptions to fill the narrative story: things that happened, that are seen as important.

Preparing a Draft Narrative Story for the Feedback Session

After the Timeline session and additional interviews, the facilitator and the key person in the network sit down together to make a draft narrative story. This story will be told during the feedback session with participants. The result of that session provides the material for the Timeline report, which serves as a basis for analysis.

If you approach the Timeline as a movie script, you now have to divide it into scenes that describe the most important events for the network. Usually you can recognise such scenes by concentrations of cards on the Timeline. Four to six scenes is common.

A scene has:

- a beginning; a situation
- a major development that might have been caused by outside forces or things that happened within the network
- interventions by network members that made a difference
- an ending; a situation which is different from the start

Give each scene a newspaper heading as a title:

- Good titles make statements, e.g. "Sense Of Urgency Leads To Network" or "From Drawback To New Strength" etc.
- Bad titles don't communicate much, e.g. "Introduction," "The Accra Workshop," "Conclusions" etc.

Prepare a narrative story reflecting the essential elements of each scene.

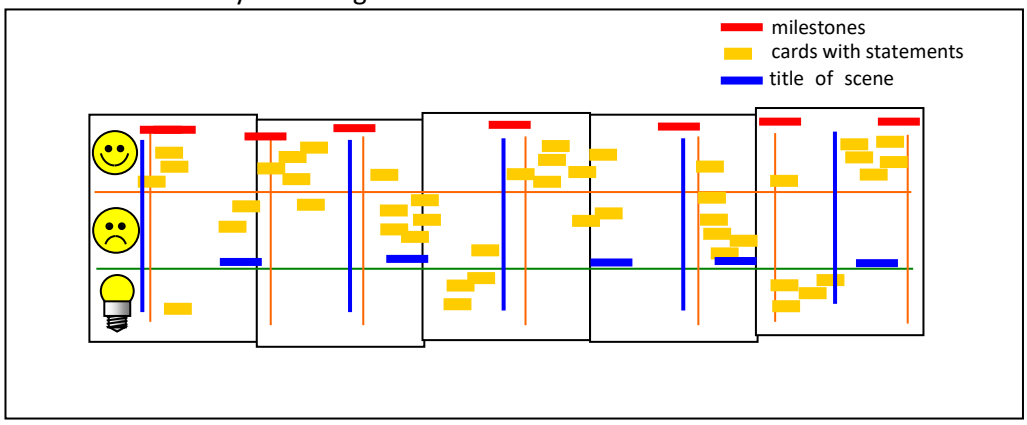


Figure 2: example of a Timeline, prepared for the narrative story

The Feedback Session

If the group meeting is of a few days duration, the feedback session should be planned to happen towards the end of it. This gives the facilitator time to conduct interviews in the free time between formal discussions, and to draw the narrative story.

The feedback session is held to make sure that the narrative story really reflects what participants find most important. Again, all participants should recognise their own stories. This is not the same as consensus between participants on what was most relevant. If there are different opinions, they should all be reflected.

Experience shows that the feedback session generates additional insights at a deeper level. After time together in the meeting, the level of trust is usually higher, and people willing to tell more. The summary also reminds participants of extra facts that matter, even though they may not have thought of them in the first session.

Ideally this feedback session is held with all participants. If this is not possible, a selection of participants can do the job as well.

The report is basis for analysis

A Timeline report is the written version of the narrative story discussed and supplemented in the feedback session. More is not better. Four to eight pages (excluding annexes) should be enough to capture what matters most. The same scheme can be followed, describing the scenes and giving them newspaper titles.

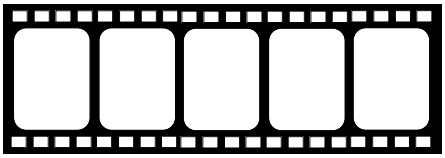
To complete the story, give a short introduction to the network in the beginning, and list the main topics for further discussion as proposed by the participants in the end.

In principle, the draft report is sent to the participants for comments. Since the report is a compilation of what those in the network consider important, additions are welcome. They will serve as a basis for analysis.

> ***Origins***
>
> *The Learning History methodology has been developed by Kleiner and Roth (1997). Its roots can be traced in the movement of "Appreciative Inquiry" (Cooperrider et al. 2000), and the Critical Incident Method (Flanagan 1954).*
>
> *The version as described here, dividing a Timeline and the Learning History, is the result of several researches in which the author was / is involved, notably: "Networks in Animal Husbandry" by Wageningen University and Research, facilitating over 120 networks of farmers to work on their initiatives for sustainable production, and "The Healthy Networks Learning Programme", commissioned by PSO, investigating ways to improve the effectiveness of North-South networks of NGO's.*

10. The Learning History

Diary of a discovery journey



The Learning History makes sense of a Timeline story

The Learning History captures the lessons learned during a network process over a certain period of time. While the Timeline reflects the perceptions of participants, the Learning History adds analysis and conclusions, in terms of lessons learned and eventual future action. Perceptions are non-negotiable: these are the ways participants have experienced things. Opinions may differ however on the way these perceptions should be understood, depending on the theory-in-use of the one analysing the story that results from the Timeline. The value of the Learning History added to the Timeline is twofold: it makes analysis explicit and provides a relatively concise and easily readable account.

The Learning History separates the narrative story and the analysis. Formatted in the manner described by its developers, Kleiner and Roth, the story should be told on the right column, as much as possible illustrated by quotations. Observations and analysis from the analyst are written next to it in the left column on the page. Analyses can also be put into text boxes.

It's easy to agree on what should appear on the Timeline; different perceptions of the same event can appear in one story. Agreement on the analysis can be much more difficult, especially when things are not running smoothly in the network. In fact the Learning History need not necessarily be created through joint discussion; it usually works better when made by a facilitator who then opens it up for feedback.

A good analysis will lead to consequent action. Sometimes, consensus cannot be reached on necessary intervention; network partners may not agree on the analysis behind it. For this reason, it may be more beneficial to find someone outside the network to conduct the analysis (such as active networker or professional analyst). Assistance from peers or a coach can also help.

The narrative story has scenes and newspaper headlines

The narrative that results from the Timeline is a written account of what happened. It should be written in such a way that participants can agree: "Yes, it happened like this, and this reflects the most important things."

If a Timeline is made before a project is finished, a facilitator could add their own observations on the remaining project time and verify them with contactable participants.

As the entire story may be viewed as a film, in the analysis it is important to identify separate "scenes"; when something significant happened. These scenes will take the form of paragraphs with newspaper style headlines. For example: "Introduction", "Goals" and "Activities" could become "Seven Change Agents Join Forces", "From Misunderstandings Towards Clarifying Insights" and "Surprise Encounters!"

Each scene is analysed

A scene has a start and an end situation, and in between something relevant has happened. How can it be understood that it went as it did? The interpretation should be clearly separated from the narrative text, for example in a textbox. When quotes are available, these can be powerful as illustrations in the narrative text.

Try to understand what accounted for the change, by using one of the models from the FAN approach. If you prefer other tools, this is perfectly OK, of course, as long as you make them explicit.

The journey of the hero

Every network process has its ups and downs, as well as unexpected twists and turns. Rather than a clearly planned assignment, it quite resembles the journey of a hero. The hero sets out, well equipped, with beautiful ambition and good faith. At least he thinks so, but he soon encounters unexpected difficulties and finds his equipment insufficient to deal with them. His friends may abandon him when he has to face a dragon, but perhaps he gets help from an unexpected corner and ends up somewhere else than where he aimed for. This somewhere else may even be much better than what he could have imagined (and 'he' could also be a 'she', of course).

The Learning History tells such a story and what may be learned from it. What were the preliminary assumptions? Can surprises be explained by false assumptions? What interventions were effective or ineffective? Can this be explained with theory? What are the lessons for the future?

A short and readable story

Since the analysis is based on the Timeline narrative, which ideally numbers around 4-8 pages, the Learning History should not be much longer. Rather than aiming to be comprehensive, the emphasis will be on moments that seem to matter most; the dynamics behind them, lessons learned and the implications for effective future action.

Compared to conventional reports, with fixed formats for assessing how well targets have been reached, the Learning History, created in this manner, is a much more interesting read, not only for those involved, but also those who have funded or contracted activities.

Origins

The "Learning History" method has been developed by Kleiner en Roth (1977) and has its roots in he "Appreciative Inquiry" approach (Cooperrider e.a. 2000) and the Critical Incident Method (Flanagan 1954).

The version as described here is the result of various researches in which Eelke Wielinga was involved. In the experiment "Networks in Animal Husbandry"(2004-2007) with networks of livestock farmers, the method appeared to be very useful, and appreciated by both the facilitators and farmers involved, as at the Ministry of Agriculture which commissioned the experiment. It was further modified in the "Healthy Networks Learning Programme". This PSO programme looked for ways to improve North-South collaboration in five internationally operating NGO's. (Faber en Wielinga 2011).

First publication

Zaalmink, B.W., Smit, C.T., Wielinga, H.E., Geerling-Eiff, F.A., Hoogerwerf, L. (2007): Netwerkgereedschap voor vrije actoren. Methoden en technieken voor het succesvol begeleiden van netwerken. [Network tools for Free Actors: methods and techniques for successfully facilitating networks]. *Wageningen Universiteit en Research.*

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Kleiner, A, Roth, G (1997): Learning History. How to make your experience your company's best teacher*. Harvard Business Review, Sept. 1997.*

Faber, K., Wielinga, H.E., (2011): Looking at collaboration in North-South networks. Experiences from an action research. *Final report "Healthy Networks Learning Programme", 2010 – 2011. PSO, Den Haag.*