

Network-Centric Advocacy

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Context

American political struggle has always reflected the characteristics of its age, from the early merchants leveraging new economic power to political bosses organizing urban masses of the industrial revolution. Political struggle adapts to new climates, economics and social trends.

Today, we live in a body politic that is increasingly connected to each other and overwhelmed with information. The most active participants in modern movements are more likely to be approaching points of “decision paralysis” caused by an onslaught of too many calls to action from hundreds of important causes.

The resulting choice for millions of Americans is not to engage. Many people avoid focusing on issues that seem distant to their lives. Large segments of the population have reduced the long-term engagement with organizations, issues or causes.

They’re barraged with personalized appeals via email, snail mail, targeted magazines, and newsletters generated by the ubiquitous desktop publishing. They are bombarded with media stories ranging from earth quake disaster relief to Humane Society cute fuzzy puppy or kitten of the week.

In addition to information overload, the public increasingly wants to protect their privacy. They’re actively working to stay off the “radar” of direct mailers, spammers, email campaigns and calling lists (during the summer of 2003 over 50,000,000 households registered on the FCC “Do Not Call List”). This large subset of the public has not walked away from holding opinions on key issues. They have walked away from the current models of civic engagement. These “non-joiners” often self organize into play groups, book clubs, meet-up meetings, running groups and paintball teams but they won’t join churches, unions, bowling leagues, political parties and civic associations. The challenge to grassroots organizers and advocacy communication strategists is to match mobilizing and advocacy efforts with these new behaviors while also exploiting the advantages provided by emerging technologies and communications mediums.

Network-centric advocacy is the adaptation of advocacy and traditional grassroots organizing to the age of connectivity.

Network Theory

Over the last several years theorists and practitioners have been cross-pollinating the lessons learned from network theory and technology development to other disciplines. They’ve updated social network theory, marketing techniques, infrastructure planning, business models, warfare models and group dynamic theory. The discoveries have led to new approaches, including revolutionary leaps in problem solving, software development, computing, law enforcement, communications, marketing and supply chain logistics.



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David Shenk, outlines the laws of information overload, data smog and paralysis from information in *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut* (San Francisco: Harper Edge, 1997)

- Americans sign fewer petitions than they did in the 1970’s.
- They’re less likely to join a consumer boycott than in the past.
- Membership and activity in all sorts of local clubs and civic and religious organizations have been falling at an accelerating pace. In the mid-1970s the average American attended some club meeting every month, but by 1998 that rate of attendance had been cut by nearly 60%.

Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

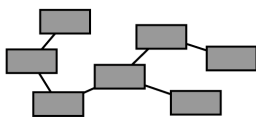
Applied Network Theory:

- Dell
- eBay
- Google Compute
- Linux
- Meetup.com
- Mozilla
- NASA Clickworkers
- Project Gutenberg
- SETI@home
- UPS Logistics

Campaigns Displaying Network Characteristics

- Dean for President
- 911peace.org
- United for Peace and Justice
- California Recall
- National Do-Not-Call List
- Anti- FCC Media Monopoly Rules
- MoveOn
- Million Mom March
- Partnership for the West

John Arquilla, and David Ronfeldt, outline organizational designs Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy. 2000, Rand.. Unfortunately, John and David don't separate design and intent and very offensively lump all networks together focusing on mostly criminal and terrorist activity.



Grassroots Engagement

- No official leadership
- No control
- Rapidly expandable
- Lots of inefficient duplication of work and learning
- Work travels along "chain"

The implications of these advances have been enormous from launching new research into agent-based modeling to provide predictive traffic reporting (like weather reports), to tapping into distributed computing networks for cancer research or NASA research. Many sectors are working to use the flood of available information and the reliable rapid communication connections to create value and accomplish basic work in new ways. The effects can be seen from organizing open source software development, (Mozilla.org) to building entire "just-in-time" businesses empires (Dell Computers).

The implications are now starting in political context, such as in the California Recall of 2003, the *Dean for President* campaign, *Draft Wesley Clark* campaign, *Million Mom March*, MoveOn's *Bush in 30 Seconds* project and a variety of small local campaigns. These new style campaigns are just beginning to mold models of plotting advocacy in a connected society.

Models of Civic Engagement

Basic models of individual civic engagement can be simplified into four general models:

Direct engagement: the individual acts alone to influence society and government.

Grassroots engagement: individuals act as a part of a loose coalition.

Organizational engagement: people work through nonprofit and advocacy corporations with governing boards and centralized leadership.

Network-centric engagement: an individual acts as part of a coordinated network.

Encouraging success means supporting each model for engagement and finding the most effective investments to empower the individual. Network-centric advocacy is the least understood and least supported model for organizing the people and resources involved in the pursuit of progressive policy.

Implementation and support of network-centric approach complements current models of engagement. Planning network-centric campaigns requires understanding both the processes of activism and the support elements that enable a network to function efficiently.

Direct Action

With direct action, participants individually engage with the government. Lone actors seek to exert influence based on their own capacity to do so.

Grassroots

In a grassroots model, individuals work together with others to develop a strategy, collect necessary resources and implement action in an informal alliance. Such grassroots advocacy is characterized by a lack of an official top-down organizational structure to govern, manage resources and direct engagement. Pure grassroots advocacy is rare and usually localized. Typical examples include neighborhood zoning fights, school improvement, crime prevention efforts, small restoration or clean up efforts. Volunteers, leaders and supporters emerge to accomplish a specific task, then disband over time. All the resources, experience, knowledge, volunteer lists, leaders, etc. are unofficial and undocumented. Any lessons learned are likely to be lost to the larger movement.

Organizational Advocacy

Organizational advocacy is characterized by the use of a particular organization that serves as a vehicle for engagement between the individual and government or other policy-making entity. An organization's membership and constituency engage via proxy, allowing the organization to advocate on their behalf. Organizations recruit and manage volunteers, leaders and supporters. Organizations develop governance structures to direct efforts and manage resources including staff time, reputation, political clout and funds.

Network-Centric Advocacy

Finally, network-centric advocacy is a hybrid of the individual determination and participation typical of direct and grassroots models with the efficiencies and strengths of the organizational model. The hybrid is only possible because of the increased density of communications connections among potential participants and the ability to scale those connections to meet demand. The network-centric advocacy focuses on supporting individual engagement by connected grid resources (that may reside with individuals or organizations). The network-centric approach relies on dense communication ties to provide the synchronizing effects, prioritization and deployment roles of the organization.

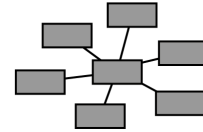
The potential for network-centric advocacy increases with each advancement in connectivity technology (web meetings, phone wi-fi, teleconference, voice mail, cell phones, voice over IP, etc.) and drop in transportation cost (flights, low cost shipping, etc.)

Challenges to Advocacy Coordinated by Organizations

While it is increasingly clear that network theory opens the potential for a new style of advocacy, the existence of this alternative is not cause enough to begin experiments with campaign strategies. There is a need to explore network-centric approach not only because it is possible but also because traditional organizational based advocacy is threatened by the new dynamics of the age of connectivity.

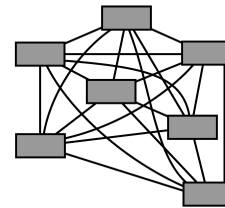
Limits of Relying on Organizational Based Approaches to Advocacy

Some of the largest and most sophisticated organizational based advocacy groups are working for environmental protection. In the last 30 years, the environmental movement has focused on engaging individuals through connecting them with particular organizations. In *Earth Rising*, Phillip Shabecoff documents the successful growth of national environmental groups to engage people in environmental policy. Shabecoff suggests the development of organizations has occurred in successive waves since the founding of Sierra Club, Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation and National Parks and Conservation Association in the early part of the 20th century. These waves have organized and sub-divided into a movement of 25 million people with 14 million engaged as dues contributors through the top 20 environmental groups. [3] However, despite the progress in building stronger organizations, investing millions of dollars in operating revenue, and recruiting a dedicated and talented staff, the progress of the environmental movement has stalled and in some cases reversed. Membership numbers are stagnant and organizations seem increasingly unable to address the major issues threatening environmental health. The environmental movement is consistently losing engagements of conflict against larger opposition



Organizational Engagement

- Central leadership
- Effective tools sharing within organization
- Efficient and directed
- Controlled expansion
- Support directed to central node
- Communication, resources travel through central hub



Network-Centric Engagement

- Lots of leadership
- Self-organizing teams
- Rapidly expandable
- Efficient
- Communication and resources travel in all directions

3. Phillip Shabecoff., *Earth Rising: American Environmentalism in the 21st Century*. March 2000. p. 224 pages.

interests. The environmental movement is losing ground on enforcement, transportation, energy consumption, sprawl, over fishing, protecting endangered species, protecting remaining old growth forests, securing wetland protection and improving air quality. A powerful opposition that makes money on unsustainable industries has successfully worked to devolve enforcement and expand their tactics to influence opinion. The success of the opposition can be seen in the eroded strength of the laws, the loosening of existing regulations and the complete inability of environmental groups to successfully mount new progressive initiatives.

Backbone of the Network

Organizations are the most refined instruments of the advocacy movement. They provide invaluable support to the efforts to protect the environment and are the backbone of the capacity to move policy and organize progressive work in many sectors. The environmental movement consists of more than 3000 thousand nonprofit organizations employing talented people, developing content, organizing campaigns and watching government, corporations and other nonprofits. These organizations are central hubs of activity. These organizations often continue to be successful as stand alone units for implementing campaigns or acting as independent chess pieces working on defined jobs with specific roles. The challenge is to look for ways to network these organizations with organizations from other sectors, individuals and loosely organized teams in ways that multiply the positive influence they can have on policy.

Corporations (profit and nonprofit organizations) serve as effective mechanisms for managing complex tasks and creating efficiency. Directors, managers, procedures and offices helped foster communication, reduce duplication of work effort, clearly define assignments, provide training and coordinate collaboration. The survival of the organization has become interwoven with the importance of the original work giving rise to organizational dynamics of self-preservation, governance maturity, brand protection and specialization.

In advocacy contexts, organizations are primarily sustained by membership, donations and foundation support. In some cases, income can also be augmented endowments, reserves or service fees to perform government work or other projects. The revenue needs lead groups to become dependent on traditions of membership, group differentiation and issue concentration. Driven by the need for income, organizations strive to assure members and donors of consistency. The more an organization needs a steady income the more transparent and predictable it must be. The resulting trajectory leads larger and more established brands to become easier to invest in but it works against them in advocacy campaigns. The more successful organizations are more predictable and therefore the more easily opposition can monitor and disrupt advocacy campaigns. In most of these head to head conflicts opposition forces can leverage advantages in staffing, resources, lobbyists' access and media pressure to succeed in blocking campaigns. Fighting for progressive policy change under the banner of a handful of large organizations makes efforts easy to target and disrupt.

As organizations have become the primary mechanism for representing individuals, they have professionalized staff and developed considerable expertise. Organizations are the basic structures that collect resources (staff, funding, tools, and expertise) and apply these resources to achieve missions and goals. As organizations grow, they tend to further institutionalize policy and strategic decisions. The organizational structure creates drag and the

groups begin to move more slowly and adapt to change less quickly. The organizational inertia hinders ability to respond to political, economic media and policy shifts.

Four Threats to the Effectiveness of Organizational Advocacy

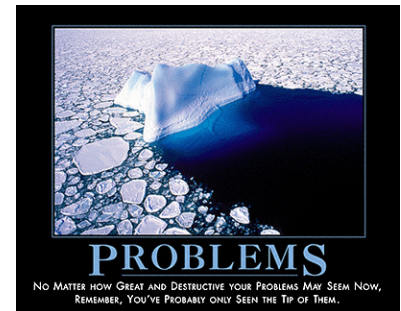
1. *The dynamic nature of issue advocacy creates larger inefficiencies as organizations grow in size.* Much like the business cycle, as organizations grow, their investors or supporters are locked into maintaining overhead through periods of diminished demand for their products. Unable to quickly adapt their model to more closely match expenditures with opportunities, organizations continue to push for policy change during times when legislative, administrative or court support is limited (i.e., 2002-2003).

2. *Cheap market alternatives can now mimic the output of larger organizations and are supplanting traditional large organizational advantages.* Consulting services and grassroots management companies have leveraged the reductions in the costs of technology to provide instant “off-the-shelf” campaigns cheaply and effectively. In the process of building these “instant” constituencies, they have devalued genuine popular support. The opposition has found affordable counter-measures to targeted mailings, phone banking, letter writing, and event organizing. Affordable technology (intranet PAC sites, corporate advocacy tools) and communication services (ads, polling, name purchase, auto-dialers, Internet and media bookings) help narrow well-financed special-interest groups respond symmetrically with any of the tactics used by broadly-supported organizations.

3. *The contraction of attention cycles in the modern 24-hour news cycle both intensifies and shortens opportunity to push policy.* The 24-hour instant news world works against both large and small organizations. The media cycle is shorter and more intense. Media have developed an unchecked feedback loop where the coverage of a story by one outlet helps a story become newsworthy to other outlets. This loop runs very quickly and is only stopped by story fatigue. The resulting dynamic is a tighter attention cycle and a smaller window for creating policy change fueled by earned media. The public’s attention has developed into a fast paced and rapidly changing appetite for news. Smaller organizations do not have the resources to cope with the attention of a major media story nor do they have the resources to continually generate new content for “new” stories. Larger organizations can cope with the strain of media attention but cannot shift policy and program directives quickly enough to capitalize on the opportunity media attention represents.

4. *The shift in demographics is away from “joiners” to a more casually connected base of support.* The most troubling trend and direct threat to the organizational structure is a basic shift in behavior of the American public away from “joiners”. Demographics and membership data show that the average citizen does not join organizations, political parties or institutions. Increasingly, individuals get involved in an issue on their own terms rather than on the terms forced on them by organizational membership. Membership of major organizations is increasingly old, white and declining in number. The membership of environmental groups is not reflective of broader societal diversity. However, this trend away from membership is not a trend away from popular support for many progressive policy positions.

Despair, Inc. takes a slanted view at motivation. It’s definitely worth a visit. <http://www.despair.com/>



“PROBLEMS: No Matter How Great and Destructive your Problems may seem Now, Remember, You’ve Probably only Seen the Tip of Them”

Steven Johnson details the outbreak of the Jennifer Flowers “story” as a turning point in decentralized and positive feedback loops that dominate today’s media in *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software*. September 2001: Scribner. 288 pages. .

Suh, R. Speech to the Environmental Grantmakers Association -- “Just Change”. October 15, 2000

Introducing Network-Centric Advocacy

An alternative to relying entirely on the current organizational-based advocacy model is to create a hybrid to supplement the strengths of organizations with the flexibility and viral potential of direct action. This hybrid is built on the availability of cheap transportation, free phone systems, new technology tools, secure online collaboration tools and exploiting service industry that was built for small businesses all for network campaigns. These are the characteristics of our age connectivity and they can now be used to “wire” together the movement or coalitions. Network-Centric Advocacy demands a simple set of actions to build and maintain connections among campaign assets (staff, volunteers, expertise, tools and organizations) so that campaign leaders can count on the response of the network in a predictable manner.

Network-centric advocacy focuses resources on enabling a network of individuals and resources to connect on a temporary, as-needed basis to execute advocacy campaigns. The network-centric advocacy approach fosters the creation of self-organizing teams to compete for aid from other network elements (manpower, talent, funding, tools, connections to the public, and experts). Leadership of campaigns is decentralized. Basic services are supported by a variety of generic issue-neutral and flexible service providers.

The network-centric structure allows for the application of talent to engage opponents at moments of weakness or when they are “off balance”. The network relies on loose and flexible collections of participants taking advantage of technologies and communications tools to collect and deploy in “campaign time”. The goal is to tip policy debates and create policy effects that are disproportionate to the resources expended.

The Application of Network-Centric Theory

From agriculture reform to water quality protection, the environmental movement works to protect communities, families and species. Often the groups worry about worst case scenarios including spills, fires, outbreaks, floods, cancer clusters, childhood diseases clusters, and a variety of environmental horrors. The groups work tirelessly to warn the public and reduce the likelihood of disaster but are rarely prepared to seriously push for policy change when events conspire to focus attention on their issue. It is at these times of attention that inactive players in government and society can be pushed to join calls for reform. During these crises, politicians want to act and the public listens to proposals that offer future solutions.

The current organizational framework limits ability to scale response in times of great opportunity. Advocacy groups need to match expenditures with opportunities and reorder the allocations of staff, technology, hardware and political clout to meet opportunities associated with intense national attention.

Network teams typically remain small tight groups of changing leadership supported by resources provided by the broader community. Networks are fluid, moving very quickly to exploit opportunities. They self-dissolve if there is stagnation. Membership is diverse and robust. Resources are often borrowed or used only on an as-needed basis. Each individual is bonded to the network through personal contact with other members and through acceptance of the common goals. Network strategy is irregular as is the expenditure and the need for resources. Networks are not centralized.

Networks are very difficult to counter. [2] The benefits of adopting a network-centric model include:

- A shift in the style that would “irregularize” advocacy, making efforts much harder predict, monitor and therefore disrupt.
- Creating “swarming” effects that neutralize consistent disadvantages in funding and staffing resources.
- Campaigns would be locally planned.
- Leadership would evolve at more levels.
- Actions would be more flexible and incredibly fast paced.
- Collaboration across the progressive movement would increase: civil rights, community development, environment, health care, human rights, and labor staff and volunteers would be able to work on joint campaigns.

Implementing Network-Centric Advocacy

While initial theory of network-centric advocacy may be intriguing in concept advocacy strategists want to sketch out places where investing in network-centric approaches will have value. A good scenario can be found in any sector.

The predictable disasters that strike our communities and catapult underlying issues to national attention always seem like a surprise (despite the fact that industries pay high insurance premiums to protect themselves against such events). The movement will always need good ideas and policies that make sense. However, more than that, the movement needs to plan for these “surprises” that can create the new waves of interest that move national policy.

Many Fortune 1000 companies prepare for such disasters with crisis communications plans. They retain public relations firms and keep experts on retainer to deflect the wave of attention and quiet any storm. How can the progressive movement plan for these inevitable but predictable events that highlight the need for new policies? What does the total package look like? What are the limitations that have prevented policy change after events in the past? What types of events can we predict, with some degree of confidence, will occur in the next 3-5 years that will create this opportunity? How will we mobilize to exploit it?

Media is an opportunistic beast. Opponents to government regulations, inspections and enforcement of regulations have made a fine art of “managing” the “PR Disaster”. Many companies large and small have public relations firms on retainers to protect them from the ripple effects of bad media including new and tougher regulation, victim lawsuits and loss of profits. Advocacy groups must prepare for the crisis the same way our opponents do. They run drills that focus on limiting liability, spinning the media and pushing the media on to the next story.

The environmental advocacy movement needs to develop strategies to capitalize on world events to focus media attention toward failures in policy, tough solutions and protections and the new angles that keep a story alive and relevant.

Read crisis communications literature, deconstruct it and build a plan to counter attack. When your river catches fire, when your fish float, when your community is exposed to toxins, when cheating and greed have sacrificed your security the responsible parties are going to be implementing crisis communication plans. At this moment, you can speak to the entire state or the nation. You can push for policy change and you can get peoples attention.

Organizational campaigns program the work of the movement. They count the votes of politicians and monitor opportunities within the existing

Crisis Public Relations Strategy

1. Focus on the history of the company, company leadership and their lobbyist that demonstrates the arrogance. In the middle of a crisis the “we know best” will bite them on the reputation. It will undermine their ability to control the spin and strengthen efforts to push for third party review of the crisis.

2. Force the CEO to be the spokesperson not the PR people. CEO's are not as good in front of the camera and in the public eye. If the CEO is not around hammer the “train without a conductor” message. Ask about past lobby efforts, personal pay, people that they fired over environmental management failures.

3. Ask for all the information that you ever wanted. Ask lots of questions. Nothing makes a story stick like a “no comment” or a slow release of information. “No comment” sound bites are as good as “I'm guilty” to a lot of the public.

4. Draw the story out. Do not let opponents sweep the story to yesterday's news. Continue to look for new angles and new messengers.

5. Demand recognition of fault and public disclosure of all damage findings and settlements. (The legal teams hate this) It is a great opportunity to put the pressure on the offending party to come clean and help the victims win fair compensation down the road. It creates tension between the legal and PR teams.

6. Start a “never forget” campaign that can serve the victims and push for meaningful legislation to prevent the trouble in the future.

7. Find and highlight opposition failures on three levels. Look at the long-term mismanagement, the systematic incompetence and the moral failure to manage danger.

8. Focus on the lack of compassion at every opportunity. How are communities devastated by the smells, sounds, and health impacts? Demonstrate the need for government to protect the public.

9. Have a crisis attack drill. Who talks? What are the bills that can move in the wake of disasters? Can the team respond to intense news cycle?

10. Make crisis response work a priority. The most significant change can occur during times of chaos.. Plan entire campaigns that last six days.

climate to plan a methodical grassroots campaign. Organizations monitor the current situation and predict a slow growth of resources used to wage the campaign. The groups look at the past and plot a communications and legislative plan that is usually predictable and stoppable by opponents. The groups report steady progress and keep staff and funding expenditure rates paced with the time of grants.

On the other hand, network-centric advocacy campaigns are variable, opportunistic and forward-looking. The hallmarks of the campaigns are “just-in-time” delivery of resources and appropriately applied talent to create asymmetric responses to policy failures and corporate crises. These network-centric campaigns monitor a different set of variables (insurance rates, media traffic on very local issues, reports of cancer clusters, drought conditions, flood conditions, unemployment rates) that might indicate growing imbalance. The networks prepare to deliver massive organizing capacity within 24 hours. They plan to counter-punch the crisis communications efforts of big business. They steer the debate and coverage of events to highlight the underlying policy failures and the political forces that perpetuated them. Networks understand and accept trends that energy and public interest lay dormant until the right opportunity presents itself. Moveon.org is a prime example of a network-enabled, self-organizing movement. The participants have used the MoveOn infrastructure to move from impeachment, to politics, to anti-war.

While rapid attack and crisis response scenarios are obvious first steps for applying network-centric advocacy there are many ways to begin to implement network-centric approaches to everything from security in a community to delivering food to the homeless. Planning network-centric operations starts with a fresh look at the work traditionally performed by the core team of an organization. The aim is reorganize the tasks in a way that makes each component a very small and manageable part that can be broken off to be completed with results synchronized into the campaign at exactly the right moments. The work can still be done by the same people in the organization but now there is the opportunity for someone else to join in to help. The second step to laying out a network-centric campaign is to focus on building a dense connection of ties (social then professional) among the core group of people working on the campaign (volunteers and staff) to foster cohesion, trust and collaboration skills among the 10% of the 90/10 rule of a campaign. (90% of the work done by 10% of the people)..

Supporting Networked-Centric Advocacy

Network-centric advocacy requires a healthy support structure to function. However, it is not an all or nothing proposition. As each layer of support is built, initiatives should see incremental improvements in their capability and success. Healthy networks require support and development in five categories: [9]

1. *Network-centric Advocacy requires a strong social network among the progressive community.* Elements of such a social network include strong and trusted interpersonal ties and extensive peer to peer knowledge of each participant’s level of commitment, experience and skills. Campaign networks need to be able to call on friends and personal connections that will drop other commitments to join a clearly defined campaign.

Campaigns must build a social strategy. Organizations need to support social functions and retreats strengthen communications and build trust. On a broader scale regional coordinators could arrange introductions and organize network interaction. Resumes, biographical and expertise

Five Critical Steps to Support Network-Centric Advocacy

- Foster Strong Social Ties
- Support a Common Story
- Create Universal Technology and Communication Tools
- Create Mechanisms for Legal, HR and Financial Needs
- Unify Self Enforced Campaign Rules

backgrounds could be shared extensively within campaign teams and more general overviews could be available to the broader network. Members should provide trainings for each other. Stronger support for Environmental Leadership Program, Midwest training academies, Environmental Leadership Institute, LCV campaign trainings, State Environmental Leadership Program, the River Network, Land Trust Alliance, Resource Media and SPIN Project training weekends as well as progressive social meetings, awards dinners and skill trainings on fundraising, and campaign work would be appropriate. However, the agendas should be more clearly tied to the idea that networking is a primary payoff. Time and sessions should be dedicated to the value of building the social networks with other potential participants that would be willing to help the movement.

2. *Network-centric advocacy requires supporting the common story that focuses the workers and volunteers engaged in campaigns.* The story perpetuates attraction to the network and bolsters commitment of workers and volunteers. A clear and compelling story must bind our efforts. Message work needs to be done to both target professional activists and to inspire staff. Unifying the common story adds strength to the social ties, reinforces participation and helps individual participants to create additional message volume. The need for a common story suggests further work with groups like Biodiversity Project, River Network and Seaweb on the issues or with the Environmental Support Center and Environmental Leadership Program for cross-sector support. The voice of the network is broadcast in common places like Grist, Moving Ideas Network, American Prospect, Green Media Toolshed, OneNorthwest and thru NPR.

3. In addition to supporting social ties and a common story, funding is needed to *develop new, fully transferable and scalable technology resources including hardware, field and office equipment, software and talent.* This includes support of:

- Communications lines to enable cheap long-distance collaboration;
- Plans for temporarily transferring use of hardware and software across network;
- Processes to insure that resources that are used quickly and efficiently and that lessons learned using the resources are communicated back to the network for the next deployment.
- Shared project management consultants who can aid local, self-organized campaigns with a portfolio of expertise including technology, communications, donation management, virtual volunteer networks, distributed phone bank volunteers, email, publishing and web strategies.
- Transfer of work space, tools, phones, etc; and
- Access to message and communication expertise.

Several groups work toward these goals including Green Media Toolshed, Groundspring, Move-On.org, NPower, ONE/Northwest, Compasspoint, Evolve Foundation, Action Studio and others. Transferable technology services and a hardware lend-lease programs make it possible to imagine an influx of tools and services that would allow new and local campaigns or new distributed national campaigns to scale capacity to manage public interest in one day or less. As the network becomes more efficient, network-centric actions could initiate roll-out in hours.

4. Adaptation of network-centric activities requires changes in organizational structures. *We need to create mechanisms within the movement or within existing organizations that help support network-centric advocacy.* These mechanisms would manage the legal and human resources. They would manage resources to keep staff employed but allow them to

Strategy Questions:

- What strategy is the network using to build social ties among key participants?
- What is the common story of the network? What are the common threads that all network participants embrace?
- Who are the core team of this campaign? Who are the affiliated and allied partners? What do the “local walk-ins” look like? How does the strategy spread capacity and power to each network actor?
- How is the common story communicated and reinforced?
- What are the key technologies, hardware and financial resources needed to “win”? How long are they really needed for? How can the resources be decentralized so everyone can have access to them?
- How can resources be managed so that they are always being used efficiently?
- What work needs to be done? How can the work be “packitized”?
- Can you absorb and efficiently use very small contributions of money, time and energy effectively? Can the campaign absorb huge rapid investments of manpower, cash, and talent?
- What does information and decision superiority look like if everything works? How are those bits of knowledge and data being collected and distributed?
- What is the learning mechanism that feeds back lessons learned to other participants?

engage in campaigns that are outside the management of the organization. For example, a regional nonprofit support center hires all the staff in a defined area, or a “national environmental guard” is set up with key staff opting into commitments of several days a month and two weeks a year or similar “transferable” staffing arrangements. The current groups that work in this space include community foundations, Resource Media, OneNorthwest, AFL-CIO and the Tides Foundation.

5. *Finally, the movement must develop some common rules that propose an acceptable guide for the use of network resources.* Once a self-led local campaign team has developed a plan that demonstrates the potential for success, the network can begin to support the plan, shifting resources into place to achieve the goals. Guidance can be refined over time based on results of successive campaigns. However, even initial guidance will help network participants understand the likelihood of progress on an issue and help define the needs from the network and probability of success. Essentially, this guidance sets the “marketplace” for ideas like the stock exchange: once a set of basic criteria are satisfied, the campaign can be “traded” on the network exchange to compete for help. The outcome of the competition is based on the potential for the idea and the social ties and skill set of the originating team.

Conclusion

There is a clear need to explore the benefits of focusing on mobilizing networks rather than strictly relying on building organizations. Network-centric campaigns will complement the effectiveness of nonprofit advocacy organizations and advocates.

Literature on social networks provides a road map to target support for the benefit of a network-centric approach. Our own organizations and funders can focus creative energy on thinking “outside the organization;” all of us can begin to think about the implications of network-based advocacy.

The questions that remain include finding ways to re-configure organizations to employ network participants, defining a first round of rules that initiate the use of the network and incrementally building and supporting a framework to enable fluid deployment of hardware, software, financial and human resources.

In the interim, the movement should vastly expand internal communications efforts as well as the connections between staff across organizational boundaries. The movement can begin incrementally building transferable technologies and pulling together “hot shot” teams. The organizers can field test campaigns based on achieving policy change from burst of interest.

We should find new financial mechanisms that can cultivate instant crisis donors and develop network-based planning that can be adapted by local, self-lead campaign teams. Most importantly, investors need to build and collect technology that can be “ramped up” quickly and redeployed as needed.

“Just in time” delivery has revolutionized management of industry and retail. It has produced new efficiencies across retailers and reduced the losses that were created as inventory was allocated based on actual demand not projected sales. This revolution created the need for new communications and new technology throughout the supply chain of moving product to market.

Network-centric advocacy offers the environmental and progressive movements the same promise. The adaptation of a networked approach will enable our staffs and volunteers to shift into campaigns where they make the most difference. The network will provide the best resources to promising initiatives that evolve out of the creativity from the field. Ideas will compete for help in a new marketplace that moves faster and learns quicker. The movement leadership will be more diverse and the campaigns will be increasingly difficult to counter and predict. Ultimately, the movement will see improvements in policy and stronger protections for the environment.

References

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About Martin Kearns

Martin Kearns has been Co-Founder and Executive Director of Green Media Toolshed (GMT). GMT is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping the environmental movement communicate more effectively by offering a professional suite of communication tools, trainings and services. GMT offers the technology groups need along with the training and support to develop strategies that leverage those tools for the benefit member organizations and coalitions.

Previously, Kearns founded the Georgia River Network, a state based conservation group solely dedicated to the conservation of Georgia's rivers. Kearns also served as Executive Director of the Georgia River Network. He worked for three years for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Kearns has been political fundraiser for candidates for the US House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Kearns holds a Bachelor degree in Political Science from LeMoyne College and a Masters degree in Environmental Studies from Yale. Kearns spent two years in Kingston, Jamaica as a Jesuit International Volunteer teaching computers at St. George's College and working with inner city youth.

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Media Advisories
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Message Rules of Thumb
Activists Use of Video Cameras
Organizing Press Events
Working with Radio
Message Research
Organizing Media Kits
Building Online Press Rooms

Arrange a Tour

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