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Abstract

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Keywords: *communications, conflict management, inter-organizational networks, network communication, network facilitation, social capital*

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Abstract

This paper empirically demonstrates that networks of organizations working together can be facilitated by individual network members, even when no facilitators are formally designated by the network members. Regression analyses also revealed statistically significant relationships between the frequency that facilitation functions were facilitated in the inter-organizational network studied and both the level of trust that the network members had for their inter-organizational network and the level of work coordination experienced by the members of the network. These two dependent variables were utilized as indicators of social capital, which was therefore found to be enhanced by inter-organizational network facilitation in this study. This research suggests that conflict resolution practitioners and scholars can work with inter-organizational networks by fulfilling network facilitation roles, training network members in facilitation, or researching facilitation in inter-organizational networks. The context for the study is an inter-organizational political advocacy nonprofit network in Minnesota that organized protest activities against the Iraq War in 2009.

Introduction

This paper examines the nature of facilitation in inter-organizational networks, as well as the connection between network facilitation and social capital. The concept of facilitation is borrowed from scholarship on small group facilitation, in which facilitators seek to enhance communications among group members by making logistical arrangements for meetings, providing social support to group members, encouraging participatory discussion and participatory decision-making processes, and providing conflict management. This paper

considers whether a specific inter-organizational network is facilitated, even when there have been no network facilitators formally designated by the network members. Then the paper investigates whether the frequency of network facilitation conducted by any identified network facilitators is statistically related to the level of social capital in the network.

These possibilities are investigated in the context of the network of organizations in Minnesota that worked together to organize protest activities against United States' involvement in the Iraq War in 2009. The study explores how communications were facilitated in this inter-organizational network. Then regression analyses are used to determine if the frequency of facilitation in the network is statistically related to the overall level of network social capital (as indicated by the level of trust network members had for their network and the level of work coordination with each other). These relationships are illustrated by considering the analogous "spokescouncil" process used by peace movements, as well as the general assembly process of the occupy movement in New York City. Finally, theorizing based on the findings from the study are applied to the field of conflict resolution more generally, by considering the possibility that conflict resolution practitioners and scholars could fulfill network facilitation roles in inter-organizational networks, train natural network facilitators in facilitation skills, or study how network facilitation can enhance social capital in an inter-organizational network. The potential for other conflict resolution processes to generate social capital is also speculated upon.

The Facilitation of Inter-Organizational Networks

We are now living in a global "networked society," increasingly interconnected by social networks and digital communication media (Castells 2009). Social networks are groups of social actors who have ongoing relationships in a moderately stable social structure in which they exchange valued resources (for example, information, money, and business contacts) (e.g., Galaskiewicz 1989). Information is the foundational resource that is

exchanged in social networks, because sharing all other resources depends on the ability of network members to communicate information with one another (Kenis and Knoke 2002). Interpersonal networks, such as friendship networks, networks of extended family, and church congregations, meet diverse needs of the network members, who are interdependent, assisting and supporting one another by various means (Wellman 1999; 1982). Inter-organizational networks (such as strategic business partners working together to broaden their markets or networks of social service providers collaborating to serve client populations) are, in addition, purposefully created, directed towards the attainment of collective goals, and to some extent, manageable (Galaskiewicz 1989; Hall and Tolbert 2005; Kickert et al. 1997). Inter-organizational networks are less hierarchical and more decentralized than typical organizational social structures, which tend to have a defined hierarchical structure, with employees, managers, volunteers, and board members often having more formalized roles and responsibilities than individuals in inter-organizational networks (McGuire 2006; Milward and Provan 1998).

Networks are similar to small groups (such as task groups or committees in a workplace or therapeutic groups in social service settings), within which individuals collectively accomplish tasks using pooled resources. Small groups meet the needs of individual members and pursue goals that benefit both the individual members and the group as a whole (Toseland and Rivas 2005). However, unlike small group members who are always individuals, social network members can be any kind of social actor (like an organization, a community, or an entire network); network members may only rarely or never meet as a full group; network activities are often more spontaneous, as dictated by the interests and aptitudes of network members or cliques of members; and network leadership tends to be less formalized and more diffuse (e.g., Nan 2008). Networks, like small groups, can either be naturally occurring, as is the case with a network of family members or friends,

or intentionally crafted to attain collective goals, as is the case with strategic business partnerships or networks of social service providers (Lin 2000).

Small groups can be either facilitated or unmoderated, when group members negotiate their interactions with one another without the aid of individuals specifically designated to guide the quality or form of their interactions (Schwarz 2002; Toseland and Rivas 2005). In an unmoderated committee in a workplace, for example, responsibility for setting-up committee meetings or disseminating meeting agendas and minutes could fall to whoever was able to do it at any given time, in which case “the ball might get dropped” and these tasks might not get accomplished. With no one designated to facilitate the committee during a crisis or conflict, committee members might seek support (both emotional support and actual assistance with their work tasks) from their unique set of friends or they might continue to have unresolved problems that make them less productive, more-stressed committee members. Likewise, when the committee would try to hold strategizing or planning meetings in an unmoderated fashion, some members could dominate interactions, while other members may not actively contribute to discussions, as no one would be designated to ensure that participation was balanced or inclusive. Decisions could also be made unilaterally, with more persuasive or dominant committee members making decisions on behalf of the committee as a whole, or the committee could find it difficult to make decisions at all and flounder. These are all common concerns that emerge in unmoderated small groups like the work committee described above (Schwarz 2002). Designated small group facilitators can ensure that logistical arrangements for meetings are made, provide emotional support or actual assistance to group members experiencing crises or conflicts, and encourage balanced, participatory discussions and decision-making (Schwarz 2002; Toseland and Rivas 2005).

Garb and Nan (2006) have researched inter-organizational peacebuilding networks as negotiated, unmoderated phenomena, considering the direct, negotiated interactions among

the network members, uninfluenced by any designated facilitators. Nan (2008) has built upon this research by theoretically speculating that individual network members may spontaneously take on facilitator or broker roles in inclusive, participatory inter-organizational networks, but she did not specifically study, empirically investigate, or describe these roles in any detail. There has been extensive research conducted regarding the role of brokers in social networks. However, research of the broker role in social networks frequently identifies a broker as a position in the social structure of a network, as determined by their relationships with other network members, which may then be correlated with outcomes (e.g., Burt 2004). However these data cannot conclusively demonstrate if brokers fulfill specific communication functions or permit the description of those functions in detail, leading to a rather nondescript explanation of the broker role. Traditionally, research on the broker role answers the question, “where are the brokers?”, rather than “what do brokers do?” or “how do brokers behave?” Using this sort of traditional social network analysis, any investigation of brokers is limited to structural concerns. Conversely, this study seeks to identify facilitators on the basis of their functional role, which then provides a basis for specifically describing their role, what they do, and how they behave. The data collected in this study are used to consider specific types of facilitation roles adopted by individual network members and therefore provide a more specified description of the broker role than is possible in using traditional social network analysis, which equates brokerage with a position in the social structure.

If individual network members facilitate inter-organizational networks as speculated on by Nan (2008), those network facilitators would be ideally suited to provide networks with guidance and direction without any formal authority, by virtue of their influence over information flow in the network. In his scholarship examining the international networks established by digital communications for example, Castells (2009) found that within

international mass media, political, or military social networks, social actors who exercise control over the “protocols of communication” used by the network members had a form of “communication power” by controlling the network’s flow of information. Likewise, interpersonal and inter-organizational networks must establish such protocols, the norms and rules that regulate the flow of information in a network, giving any network members who control or influence these norms and rules (the network facilitators) “communication power,” providing them the means to offer a network guidance and direction (Cook 2005). This form of power, the control over information flow in communications processes, is particularly important in our present networked society (Castells 2009).

This paper therefore empirically investigates whether inter-organizational network members facilitate a specific network, even though no network facilitators were formally designated to perform this task in their network. The paper considers the hypothesis that natural facilitators can spontaneously emerge from the structure of an inter-organizational network to facilitate network interactions, due to their aptitude for facilitation and/or their inclination to guide the interactions among a network’s members. These natural facilitators would then have “communication power,” giving them the potential to influence the network’s communications and information flow, which they could then use to enhance the performance of the network.

Social Capital and Benefits of Inter-organizational Relationships

If it can be demonstrated that an inter-organizational network can be facilitated even when facilitators are not formally designated for that task, this would beg the question: would this facilitation enhance the performance of the network? One of the most significant effects that social networks can have on their members is to provide them with a repository of social capital that members can access and benefit from (e.g., Lin 2001). In general, social capital connotes that benefits come from being in relationships, but it manifests differently

depending on the perspective of the observer. Individual network members may benefit from increased access to resources through their relationships with others in the network, but the network as a whole benefits as well.

From the vantage point of a network's members, social capital represents the resources and social support that members can access through the reciprocal obligations and expectations that they incur with one another (Coleman 1988; Lin 2001, 2000, 1999). Considering personal relationship networks, for instance, Granovetter (1995; 1982) illustrates that larger, more heterogeneous networks of business acquaintances improve an individual's ability to get a job (as people often discover job leads through their acquaintances). In addition, employers that have larger, more heterogeneous recruiting networks can improve the quality of their recruits for job openings (Erickson 2001). Coleman (1988) demonstrates that higher levels of social capital can also positively impact the performance of children in school, when parents have stronger relationships with them and when children have stronger relationships with other people in their community. Relationships that parents make in their social networks can also make it easier for them to find the right school for their children. Moreover, personal relationship networks can help small business owners find clients, get loans, or gain access to helpful industry information (Renzulli and Aldrich 2005; Zimmer and Aldrich 1987). Networks of personal relationships can also be an invaluable form of personal support, providing individuals with social support (information, companionship, and empathy) and material aid (financial and otherwise) to enhance their physical and mental well-being, which can buffer the effects of life crises (like getting a life-threatening illness, facing a natural disaster, or losing a job) (Hurlbert et al. 2001; Lin et al. 1999; Wellman 1999, 1982; Wellman and Gulia 1999).

When considered from the vantage point of the social network as a whole, the benefits of social capital appear different, as the entire network and the social actors that interact with

it derive certain benefits due to the relationships among the network members. The network is able to enhance and extend the capacity of individual members to accomplish network tasks and meet network goals, beyond what they could achieve on their own (e.g., Green and Haines 2002). In addition, supportive networks tend to develop cooperative norms, a climate of trust, and opportunities for collaboration, enabling easier, more productive interactions, which can benefit the network as a whole and any actors that interact with it (Coleman 1988; Green and Haines 2002; Mattessich and Monsey 1997; Putnam 2000).

Inter-organizational networks also offer their organizational members particular benefits when compared to organizations that “go it alone.” Organizations participating in inter-organizational networks can: expand their resources, diversify and improve their funding streams, learn from other network members, become more innovative, broaden their capacity to address large social or organizational problems, bring in additional voices to evaluate their operations, and increase the public’s awareness of their organization, as well as its goods and services (Arsenault 1998; Crutchfield and Grant 2008; Doz and Hamel 1998; Hansen 2009). However, participating in an inter-organizational network also yields possible costs to the network members, such as: the time and financial requirements required to participate, the potential for clashes with other network members, an overall reduction of competition in the marketplace, organizational drift away from its original mission, and finding compromise solutions to problems rather than optimal solutions (Arsenault 1998; Doz and Hamel 1998; Hansen 2009; Yankey and Willen 2005).

A variety of empirical studies have considered whether various aspects of the facilitation of inter-organizational networks could be found to be statistically related to such indicators of social capital as trust and work coordination. For instance, statistically significant relationships have been discovered, revealing positive correlations between conflict resolution and trust (Gargiulo and Ertug 2006; Hall et al. 1981; Van de Ven and Ring

2006) integrated decision-making and trust (McEvily and Zaheer 2006), integrated problem solving and trust (McEvily and Zaheer 2006), and procedural justice and trust (Cook 2005; Ring 1996; Van de Ven and Ring 2006) in inter-organizational networks. Another study found a statistically significant relationship and a positive correlation between the quality of network discussion and work coordination in an inter-organizational network (Hall et al. 1981).

The Study: An Inter-Organizational Nonprofit Network in Minnesota

The theorizing presented above provides a basis for examining patterns of facilitation in a specific inter-organizational network and considering their impact on the network's social capital. This paper therefore empirically investigates the question of whether a specific inter-organizational network has natural network facilitators, even when no facilitators have been formally identified to facilitate the network. Once this question is considered, the paper then takes up the question of whether any detected facilitation has any statistically significant relationship with the social capital in the network, as measured by effects of any detected network facilitation on the levels of network trust and work coordination. These variables were chosen as indicators of social capital because they are common outcome variables in social network evaluation research, they have previously been demonstrated to be related to various aspects of facilitation in inter-organizational networks, and they seem to represent the essence of social capital in inter-organizational networks (Cook 2005; Gargiulo and Ertug 2006; Hall et al. 1981; McEvily and Zaheer 2006; Ring 1996; Van de Ven and Ring 2006). The inter-organizational network that was used to investigate these research questions was a network of political advocacy nonprofit organizations in Minnesota that organized protest activities against the United States' involvement in the Iraq War in 2009.

Minnesota has a vibrant network of nonprofit organizations that have opposed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as war in general. In a given week, this network of

peace organizations organizes several events (small protests, presentations on current events pertaining to wars, and the like) and there is usually a large protest or two in any given month. Many of the individuals involved in the network (who represent anti-war and peace organizations) have been engaged in peace and anti-war activities since the Vietnam War. The network of nonprofit peace organizations in Minnesota received national attention in the 1970s, protesting against the Honeywell Corporation's production of landmine timers (Rogne and Harper 1990). More recently, they received attention for their role organizing and participating in protests at the Republican National Convention from August 31 to September 4, 2008, where over eight hundred arrests were made (Coleman 2008).

The various events and activities organized by the network of nonprofit peace organizations in Minnesota are attended by different individuals and clusters of individuals, so each event tends to draw its own crowd of individuals who sustain it on an ongoing basis, creating heterogeneous affinity groups of activists that participate in the movement activities that interest them. There are affinity groups of activists who, on a weekly basis, meet to protest arms manufacturers or the United States' participation in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, church groups and veterans groups who meet regularly to discuss peace related concerns and potential peace actions, and groups of individuals who plan periodic presentations or who bring in speakers for activists to hear. There are also large protests, like annual protests against the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, which tend to attract most of the peace activists in Minnesota.

Data were gathered for this study from thirty-six participants (who represented 42 separate organizations, as some individuals represented multiple organizations), using a self-administered eighty-three question survey. The survey questions were designed by reviewing existing inter-organizational network evaluation surveys (e.g., Galaskiewicz 1979; Morrissey et al. 1982), selecting appropriate questions, and modifying them to fit the research context.

Then the survey was given to experts in social network analysis to review, who provided helpful feedback on it, and finally it was field-tested with two potential research participants before it was used in the study. The Principle Investigator was present to assist the participants when they completed the survey.

The research participants were identified non-randomly by peace activists who were approached and asked to identify representatives of organizations who organized or planned protest events. These identified organizational representatives were then asked to participate in the study. They were chosen to represent a wide variety of nonprofit organizations (like student organizations, women's organizations, socialist organizations, religious organizations, and veteran's organizations). The survey asked them about their perceptions of facilitation-related activities that transpired for the three-month period prior to filling out the survey, which they completed from April 20 to April 30, 2009. As stated above, the reliability and validity of the measures were maximized by borrowing questions from previous inter-organizational network evaluation studies, selecting measures that captured a range of dimensions for each of the variables under investigation, modifying them to suit the context, getting feedback on the survey, and field-testing it. Following the initial analysis of the data, study participants were given a report of the findings and several of the study participants took part in a focus group meeting to discuss their impressions of the study findings, which were incorporated into the final data analysis.

The survey asked the study participants whom they would identify as being responsible for the facilitation of planning and strategizing meetings in their inter-organizational network. The network facilitation variable was divided into five dimensions that accorded with functions performed by facilitators of small groups in models proposed by Schwarz (2002) and Toseland and Rivas (2005). Five of the dimensions of facilitation common to both of these models were: performing logistical arrangements to organize group

meetings (this dimension was sub-divided into the tasks of organizing meetings and disseminating information about them), providing group members with social support (assisting them to cope with stress, completing their work, and motivating them), encouraging participatory discussion (fostering inclusive, non-coercive deliberation, where everyone openly expresses their views and can influence agenda topics), encouraging participatory decision-making (distributing compromises evenly and using inclusive decision-making techniques like voting or consensus-building, rather than employing unilateral decision-making), and providing conflict management (ways to discuss and overcome interpersonal differences that save the face of group members and prevent retaliatory actions). Study participants were asked to identify who was most responsible for each communication function, who was the second most responsible individual, and who was the third most responsible individual.

The study participants completed four Likert-style questions considering different aspects of each communication function (logistical arrangements, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management). This provided a total of twenty questions for the network facilitation variable for each study participant. The questions asked them the frequency that they experienced facilitation for all aspects of each function in their inter-organizational network interactions. Each of the answers was assessed a numerical value by adding the scores of ordinal measures ranging in value from one to five, giving each individual a total score from twenty to one hundred for the network facilitation variable. The network facilitation variable was used as the independent variable in two regression analyses.

As mentioned above, two separate indicators of social capital were considered in this study: the level network members trusted the other network members, as well as the level of work coordination that network members experienced in their network interactions. These

two variables were used as the dependent variables in the regression analyses. Study participants were asked eight Likert-style questions concerning the frequency that they experienced different dimensions of network trust (network members believed that other members put the interests of the network ahead of their own personal interests, made good faith efforts to accomplish network tasks, were honest with one another, and gave one another the benefit of the doubt) and work coordination (network labor and resources were shared fairly, network members attempted to accomplish common goals, credit for network successes and failures was shared fairly, and work duplicity was avoided) in the accomplishment of network activities. Thus, each study participant had a total score of eight to forty for each of the dependent variables. Because every individual experienced a unique set of activities and interactions in the network, their levels of network facilitation, trust, and work coordination were also unique, as dictated by the activities that they participated in. The level of network facilitation that each of them experienced could be compared with the levels of trust and work coordination that they experienced in their unique set of network activities. Hence, the study participants' network facilitation scores were compared with their trust and work coordination scores in regression analyses to assess whether any statistically significant relationships emerged between network facilitation and either trust or work coordination.

Results

Were the communication functions facilitated in this inter-organizational network?

Regarding this first research question, whether or not the six dimensions of network facilitation (organizing, disseminating information, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management) were facilitated, the results partially substantiated Nan's (2008) theoretical assertion, which indicated that individual inter-organizational network members may spontaneously take responsibility for facilitation in an inter-organizational network. In the inter-organizational network examined in this study,

natural facilitators emerged that planned and strategized meetings of network members, facilitating the functions of: organizing, information dissemination, participatory discussion, and participatory decision-making. However, the functions of social support or conflict management were not found to be facilitated.

Two separate methods were used to determine whether or not a function was considered facilitated. In data analysis, each response from a survey respondent was scored as follows: “most responsible” responses received three points, “second most responsible” received two points, and “third most responsible” received a single point. The total score for each individual identified as responsible for a given communication function was compiled from the entire sample, as was the total score for the function as a whole. Figure 1 (see next page) depicts the scores of individuals who were considered the most responsible for the communication functions; meaning that they received the largest number of points for a given function (the top ten scorers for each function are shown). Figure 1 also shows the total number of points that were allotted for each function by the entire sample of study participants and the total number of individuals who were perceived as having some responsibility for each function.

For instance, for the function of organizing, *study participant 3* received the most points from all of the study participants combined with 62 total points, followed by *study participant 20* with 29 points, *study participant 14* with 17 points, and so on. There were 198 points allotted for the function as a whole, and thirty-seven individuals were identified as having some responsibility for the function by at least one study participant. Of the grand total of 198 points allotted for the communication function by the study participants, the three individuals who were identified as having the most responsibility for the organizing function (the three individuals with the highest scores: *study participants 3, 20, and 14*) received 54.5% of all of the total points allotted to the function ($62+29+17 = 108/198 = 54.5\%$).

Figure 1. Summary of the distribution of the points allotted to the top ten scorers for all of the facilitation functions, as well as each function as a whole.

Function> Rank (top ten only)	Organizing	Information Dissemination	Social Support	Participatory Discussion	Participatory Decision- making	Conflict Management
1	3 (62)	3 (57)	3 (34)	3 (51)	3 (43)	14, 20 (9)
2	20 (29)	20 (20)	1 (15)	20 (20)	20 (20)	
3	14 (17)	41 (11)	9 (12)	14 (19)	14 (13)	3 (6)
4	1 (8)	1, 7 (10)	7, 20 (11)	5 (13)	5,9 (10)	5 (5)
5	9, 10 (7)			1, 19 (11)		7, 41, 44 (4)
6		8 (8)	8 (10)		19 (9)	
7	6, 33 (4)	9 (7)	14 (8)	9 (10)	8 (8)	
8		10, 14, 17 (6)	24 (7)	10, 30, 41 (6)	7 (5)	4,6,30,32,34, 39,55,88 (3)
9	7, 8, 16, 34 (3)		56 (6)		16, 41 (4)	
10			42 (5)			
Total points for each function/ number of different individuals identified	198/37	200/35	214/50	209/37	173/29	90/35
% of points among the three highest scorers	54.5%	44%	28.5%	43.1%	44%	26.7%

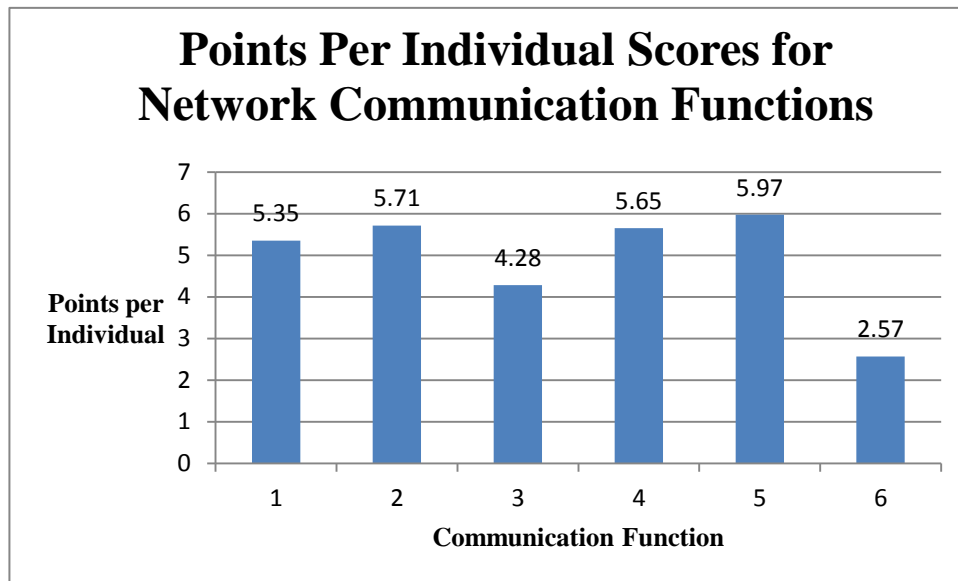
* Scores in the table are presented as follows: an individual *study participant's designated number in italics* followed by their (score in parentheses). **Totals for the sample** for each of the facilitation functions are **in bold**.

Among the four functions deemed to be facilitated (organizing, information dissemination, participatory discussion, and participatory decision-making), the three individuals with the highest scores for those functions received more than 40% of the total points allotted for the function, indicating that responsibility for the function was concentrated. Only social support, where the top three scorers received only 28.5% of the total points for the function, and conflict management, where the top three scorers received only 26.7% of the total points for the function, had less than 40% of the total points concentrated among the top three scorers (in fact, both were less than 30%). Overall, *study*

participants 3, 14, and 20 were among the top ten scorers for all six of the facilitation functions, *study participants 7 and 9* were among the top ten scorers for five functions, *study participants 1, 8, and 41* were among the top ten scorers for four functions, and *study participants 5 and 10* were among the top ten scorers for three functions. Therefore, ten individuals were among the top ten scorers for at least three functions, among the ninety-nine total individuals who were identified overall.

The second method that was used to determine whether or not a function was facilitated was by using a derived value calculated for each function, called the “points per individual scores.” Figure 2 (see next page) indicates the points per individual scores for each function. The points per individual scores were calculated by dividing the total number of points that were allotted to a given function by the total number of individuals that were identified as having some responsibility for the function by at least one study participant. The points per individual scores therefore illustrate the concentration of scores for the function as a whole. For example, there were 198 total points allotted to the organizing function and thirty-seven individuals were identified as having some level of responsibility for the function, so the points per individual scores for the function is 5.35 (198/37). For the functions determined to be facilitated (organizing, information dissemination, participatory discussion, and participatory decision-making), all had points per individual scores over 5 points, while social support had a score of 4.28 and conflict management had a score of 2.57.

Figure 2. Points per individual scores for the communication functions.



Key

Function 1 = Organizing

Function 2 = Information Dissemination

Function 3 = Social Support

Function 4 = Participatory Discussion

Function 5 = Participatory Decision-making

Function 6 = Conflict Management

Was network facilitation statistically related to network trust or work coordination?

There were two separate hypotheses tested by regression analyses in this study. They were used to determine whether the frequency of facilitation activities had any impact on the inter-organizational network's social capital. Thus, network facilitation was the independent variable for both of the regression analyses. The levels of network trust and work coordination were used as the indicators of social capital in the network and, consequently, were the dependent variables in the analyses. It was anticipated that network members who experienced higher frequencies of network facilitation would also experience higher levels of network trust and work coordination and, conversely, that network members who

experienced lower frequencies of network facilitation would experience lower levels of network trust and work coordination. The models tested were as follows:

$$trust = network\ facilitation + error$$

$$coordination = network\ facilitation + error$$

The first hypothesis, that network members who experienced higher levels of network facilitation would also experience higher levels of network trust and that, conversely, those who experienced lower levels of network facilitation would also experience lower levels of network trust, was confirmed. The network facilitation variable was found to have a statistically significant relationship with the trust variable [$\alpha=.05$ and $p=.027 (<.05)$], suggesting that the statistical model was valid. The effect size was found to be moderately weak. The correlation was found to be .33, meaning that the network facilitation variable explained 33% of the variation in the trust variable. The statistical model is summarized below.

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	178.647	5	35.729	2.984	.027 ^a
	Residual	359.223	30	11.974		
	Total	537.870	35			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Dec_Composite, Sup_Composite, CR_Composite, Facil_Composite, Log_Composite

b. Dependent Variable: Trust_Composite

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.576 ^a	.332	.221	3.4604

a. Predictors: (Constant), Dec_Composite, Sup_Composite, CR_Composite, Facil_Composite, Log_Composite

The second hypothesis, that network members who experienced higher levels of network facilitation would experience higher levels of work coordination in the network and,

conversely, that network members who experienced lower levels of network facilitation would experience lower levels of work coordination, was confirmed. The network facilitation variable was found to have a statistically significant relationship with the work coordination variable [$\alpha=.05$ and $p=.000 (<.05)$], suggesting that the statistical model was valid. The effect size was found to be moderately strong. The correlation was found to be .61, meaning that the network facilitation variable explained 61% of the variation in the work coordination variable. The statistical model is summarized below.

ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	355.528	5	71.106	9.534	.000 ^a
	Residual	223.752	30	7.458		
	Total	579.280	35			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Dec_Composite, Sup_Composite, CR_Composite, Facil_Composite, Log_Composite

b. Dependent Variable: Coord_Composite

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.783 ^a	.614	.549	2.7310

a. Predictors: (Constant), Dec_Composite, Sup_Composite, CR_Composite, Facil_Composite, Log_Composite

Discussion

The results of this study provide some important insights for scholars and practitioners working in and with inter-organizational networks, as well as for the field of conflict resolution more generally. For scholars and practitioners working in and with inter-organizational networks, this study empirically demonstrates that inter-organizational networks can be spontaneously facilitated by individual network members, even when they are not formally designated to fulfill that role. This provides some evidence for Nan’s (2008) theoretical assertion that natural facilitators emerge in certain inter-organizational networks,

as four of the six facilitation functions tested were found to be facilitated. It also complements the work of Garb and Nan (2006), who investigated inter-organizational networks as negotiated, unmoderated phenomena, as two facilitation functions were not found to be facilitated.

Four of the six communication functions were determined to be facilitated by network members: organizing, information dissemination, encouraging participatory discussion, and encouraging participatory decision-making. Further analysis of the social support and conflict management dimensions also provides a rationale for why they were not determined to be facilitated in this study. In an inter-organizational network such as the one investigated here, social support may be given by one's closest friends and work colleagues, rather than a specific facilitator. Evidence from this study confirms this explanation. The social support function received the highest number of points allotted for any function (214) and the highest number of individuals identified as having some level of responsibility for the function (50) (see Figure 1). This means that the study participants had no difficulty identifying individuals who were responsible for providing them with social support, but that these individuals were distributed widely across the network, as one would expect if network members consulted their friends and colleagues for social support, rather than a specific facilitator.

The conflict management function, however, received the lowest number of points allotted for any particular function, with 90 (see Figure 1). This means that study participants had a difficult time identifying anybody responsible for the function. In a focus group meeting that was held with study participants, where they discussed their reactions to the study findings, the focus group participants suggested that this research helped them to notice that no one was doing conflict management in their network to any great extent. They indicated that they felt that this was because there were generally low levels of conflict in the network at that time and, culturally, people in Minnesota do not tend to discuss their

differences openly. They did state that several months earlier, in preparation for the Republican National Convention, they worked with many unfamiliar people from other parts of the United States, causing a good deal of conflict at that time.

This analysis leads to an interesting, though tentative, conclusion. There are at least three modes of facilitation that are possible in an inter-organizational network where no facilitators are formally identified, which can guide and shape the interactions among the network members. A facilitation function could be negotiated, as was the case with social support in this study, when responsibility for the function was broadly distributed across the network and many network members performed the function in an unmoderated fashion directly for one another. Alternatively, a facilitation function could be facilitated, as was the case with organizing, information dissemination, encouraging participatory discussion, and encouraging participatory decision-making, with responsibility for the function concentrated among fewer network members. In this case, individual network members, by virtue of their aptitudes or interests, take responsibility for facilitating a facilitation function. Or a facilitation function may not be performed by network members to a great extent at all, as was the case with conflict management here. The degree to which any given facilitation function is negotiated, facilitated, or not performed likely varies from network to network.

The results of the regression analyses considered in this paper are also intriguing. Network facilitation was statistically related to and positively correlated with both of the indicators of social capital examined here, network trust and work coordination. However, the effect size of the impact of network facilitation on the work coordination variable (correlation = .61) was almost twice as large as its impact on the trust variable (correlation = .33). This means that, in this study, and potentially in other inter-organizational networks, the manner in which a network is facilitated might have a greater impact on the ability of network members to coordinate their work activities with one another than to generate trust

among the network members. Trust as examined here was not heavily influenced by network facilitation and was more greatly affected by other influences. In this study, network facilitation had a particularly strong impact on work coordination, suggesting that network facilitation could be a critical means to improve the coordination of work activities among the members of an inter-organizational network.

The findings discussed in this paper also give rise to some interesting speculation. For instance, it seems that certain facilitators of the network examined in this study, such as *study participant 3*, who had high ranking scores for all of the facilitation functions, might have facilitated network-wide interactions for all of the facilitation functions, while *study participant 9*, who had lower but still high scores for five of the six functions, might have been responsible for facilitating an affinity group within the network; and *study participant 19*, who had two high scores, specifically for the facilitation functions of encouraging participatory discussion and decision-making, might have been a facilitation specialist, only facilitating the functions that best suited that participant's aptitudes and interests (see Figure 1). Hence, inter-organizational network facilitators could potentially be facilitators of the entire network or facilitators of affinity groups. Facilitators could also facilitate a wide range of communication functions generally or specialize in facilitating specific functions.

To illustrate how these facilitation patterns look in practice, we can use the facilitation of peace movements and the current Occupy New York City movement as analogous cases. While peace movement and occupy activists do not necessarily represent specific organizations, as would be the case in an inter-organizational network, their communication patterns clearly depict the patterns of facilitation discussed above. Peace movements frequently use a "spokescouncil" model for group decision-making (War Resisters' International, 2009). In a spokescouncil, an affinity group of 5-15 people holds discussions around issues of importance, such as whether or not to take a specific protest action, which is

often facilitated by someone (War Resisters' International, 2009). This facilitator is like the affinity group facilitator in an inter-organizational network speculated on above. This facilitator might also be the group's spokesperson, who brings the affinity group's decision to a council meeting of all of the spokespeople. If the facilitator and spokesperson roles were filled by different people, this would be like the facilitation specialists noted above, who specialize in facilitation roles that interest them. If the same person filled both roles, this would be like a facilitation generalist.

In the New York City occupy movement, all of the activists are able to be present in one physical location at one time, which is not always possible for a local social movement like the Minnesota peace movement or for other kinds of inter-organizational networks. However, the General Assembly facilitation model used by the New York City occupy movement illustrates how network-wide facilitators operate. In this model, a facilitator can get the views of all members of the network all at once by putting forth an idea and asking the participants of the General Assembly (all of the activists) to indicate whether they agree, are neutral, disagree, block the motion, or they need to interrupt or ask for more information, by using hand signals (occupywallst.org n.d.). In this way, a network-wide facilitator can facilitate a dialogue involving all of the network members, producing movement-wide discourse. While the facilitators of the Minnesota peace movement were, for the most part, not able to address all of the network members simultaneously, those who were able to be involved in a wide variety of affinity groups were able to facilitate network-wide discourse, much like the spokespeople for a spokescouncil would, acting as a conduit between the affinity groups and the wider inter-organizational network. Therefore, there are two levels at which network facilitators have the potential to enhance the social capital of an inter-organizational network, at the level of the affinity group or the network as a whole, as is the case with the General Assembly.

Conflict resolution practitioners and scholars could potentially fulfill these roles in a specific inter-organizational network, train the network members in facilitation skills to improve their ability to fulfill these roles, or research facilitation within a network to assist network members to analyze and enhance their social capital. For instance, in the inter-organizational network considered here, the research indicates that a few natural facilitators could be trained in the skills of organizing meetings, information dissemination, encouraging participatory discussion, and encouraging participatory decision-making, which were facilitated. The whole network could benefit from training in social support skills, which was provided by a wide range of network members rather than a few specific individuals, and perhaps conflict management, which was not performed to a great extent, depending on how network members would like to manage their conflicts in the future.

In general, conflict resolution practitioners may frequently support parties in conflict to develop their social capital. Specific facilitators, mediators, conflict coaches and trainers, negotiators, and arbitrators, who emphasize relationship building, strengthening, maintenance, or healing in their practice, may be harnessing “communication power” to produce social capital among the parties that they serve. The resultant social capital can be leveraged by the parties, in the present or in the future, to solve their problems with one another, accomplish other goals together, or broaden and strengthen the social resources embedded in their social networks more generally. Social capital has a particular importance for conflict resolution practitioners, who frequently seek to help people overcome their relational difficulties and build their relationships.

This study had some important limitations. The study’s sample was discovered non-randomly, potentially reducing the validity and generalizability of the findings. As well, the data came from a one-shot, self-report survey, a study design that does not have strong internal validity. In addition, the study only considers the social capital stemming from

relationships within the inter-organizational network (the internal network), while relationships outside of the network (the external network) are at least as important when considering the generation of social capital (Burt 2004; Hansen 2009). Castells (2009), for example, refers to the individuals with relationships that connect the network to external resources as “switchers,” who provide an important type of social capital for social networks. The research findings presented here are also based upon a single case study, so the results are tentative. The study and/or the relationships explored here must be replicated in other settings, in other inter-organizational networks, or in inter-personal networks, if the applicability of the findings that were considered here are to become more definitive. As well, due to space constraints, the analysis presented here is placed within the context of social network scholarship, neglecting social movement scholarship. Still, the study has opened the door for further inquiry and has unveiled some tantalizing prospects for the field of conflict resolution.

Conclusion

This study provided empirical evidence that inter-organizational networks can be spontaneously facilitated by natural facilitators. Even when individuals are not formally designated as network facilitators, natural network facilitators can emerge to perform facilitation functions due to their aptitudes and interests. In the inter-organizational network of non-profit organizations in Minnesota that organized and conducted protest activities against the United States’ involvement in the Iraq War in 2009 discussed here, four of the six communication functions considered (organizing, disseminating information, encouraging participatory discussion, and encouraging participatory decision-making) were found to be facilitated, while social support was found to be negotiated and conflict management was not performed to any great extent. The case study demonstrates that facilitators in an inter-organizational network could be network-wide facilitators or facilitators of affinity groups. In

addition, facilitators can specialize in facilitating certain communication functions or they may facilitate a wide range of functions. These patterns were illustrated by the analogous cases of the “spokescouncil” facilitation model used by peace movements and the General Assembly model, adopted by New York City’s occupy movement.

However, network facilitation differs from small group facilitation, where the group facilitator or facilitators tend to facilitate the whole group and the entire range of communication functions simultaneously, in locations where the entire group meets regularly. Therefore, network facilitation should be considered a less concentrated form of facilitation than small group facilitation. Conflict resolution practitioners and scholars could potentially fulfill network facilitation roles in inter-organizational networks, train network members in network facilitation skills, or research facilitation in a specific inter-organizational network to assist the network members.

Not only did this case study determine that the inter-organizational network investigated was, to a degree, facilitated, it also demonstrated that the network facilitation that was conducted increased the network’s social capital, as indicated by the levels of trust and work coordination. In regression analyses, the relationships between network facilitation (including the dimensions of logistical arrangements, social support, participatory discussion, participatory decision-making, and conflict management) with both network trust and work coordination were statistically significant, though the effect size was nearly twice as big for the work coordination variable. The greater the frequency of network facilitation experienced by the network members, the greater the levels of network trust and work coordination that they tended to experience.

This relationship was theorized here to be the result of facilitators harnessing the “communication power” inherent in the facilitation processes to produce social capital among the network members. “Communication power” is a key form of power in inter-

organizational networks because information exchange provides the foundation for all other forms of resource exchange in a social network (Castells 2009; Kenis and Knoke 2002). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the potential impact that other conflict resolution processes (such as small group facilitation, mediation, conflict coaching and training, negotiation, and arbitration) could have on the generation of social capital among conflicting parties, particularly when practitioners emphasize relationship building, strengthening, maintenance, or healing. However, this case study should be replicated in other inter-organizational networks and in settings examining other conflict resolution processes to ensure that the findings discussed here are more broadly applicable to other inter-organizational networks and conflict resolution processes.

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