FOCUSING THE BUSINESS CASE AND MAKING USE OF TEAMWORK – KEY ISSUES IN CONSULTING NETWORKS AND COLLABORATIONS[1]

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ABSTRACT

The paper presented is based on the research programme "Organization Development in Networks and Collaborations" of the iff – Institute for Organization Development and Group Dynamics of the Alpe-Adria University Klagenfurt and on the author´s consulting practice.

Two aspects of managing networks and collaborations and how consulting can add value to success are presented.

One key issue in managing and consulting networks is focusing the business case. The idea basically comprises that collaborations have to invent something new, which is not in the world yet at least not for those who are joining to form a collaborative venture. This is illustrated by analyzing the consulting process of the initial phase of the "Vienna Network for Workplace Health Promotion". In 2006 the most important regional financer of workplace health promotion, the Health Insurance Vienna Region (*Wiener Gebietskrankenkasse,* WGKK), decided to involve the health insurance agencies and regional social partners,to set up this network. The consulting process

A second key success factor lies in building teams in networks working on relevant issues of the collaboration. Establishing teamwork is an investment with quite an impact: people involved have to invent the details of their work on the level of content and processes themselves as there is no formal authority telling them what to do. With this they generate continuously the sense of organizing (K Weick) which is vital to collaborative ventures. The case of a network of companies, research institutes, consultants and service provides in facility and real estate management suggests a model of how to use teamwork to speed up and broaden a process of strategy development.

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INTRODUCTION

Recent discussions among scientists and practicioners argue that consulting of networks and collaborations needs to apply different focuses and models than those of single organizational settings (Sydow & Mannings 2006, Chisholm 2008). This goes in line with our research and practical experiences during the last years.[2]

As collaborations and networks are forming connected organizations or coupled systems per definition, I firmly believe, that it makes sense to describe them as specific types of organizational entities. They are built between individual organizations, each of them existing mostly independent from each other and each of them equipped with established structures, strategies, processes and people. Following Barbary Gray (1989) however, collaborating systems are not set by definition but they emerge in a collective process, driven by the partnering organizations who decided to join forces to achieve something special. In difference to most single organizations collaborative systems are fragile and recurrent subject to change. The inherent logics of collaborative systems express themselves in structures and processes for decision making and management, the way work processes within and across the partnering organizations are set up and in the cultures collaborative systems and networks build while operating. The fact that structures, processes and management systems are rather fragile or even temporary provide a variety of potential entry points for consultants (see table 1).

Table 1: Where consultants typically are appointed

Phase/Subject of the cooperation	Consultancy support (exemplary)
Start/Conceptualising and system building	Due diligence for the cooperation, structuring the network formation, convening the partners, developing basic rules and division of duties, establishing control systems, helping stakeholders defining their role
Defining the goal and visioning the future	Developing strategy and future plans

[2] The paper presented here is based on the research programme "Organization Development in Networks and Collaborations" of the iff – Institute for Organization Development and Group Dynamics of the Alpe-Adria University Klagenfurt. Aim of the programme is to investigate principles of organization development in transorganizational settings by analysing case studies and own field work including consultancies, training and evaluation projects. Members of the research team: Ralph Grossmann, Hubert Lobnig, Klaus Scala and Michael Stadlober (Grossmann, Lobnig, Scala, Stadlober (2007, 2009); Grossmann & Lobnig (2004).

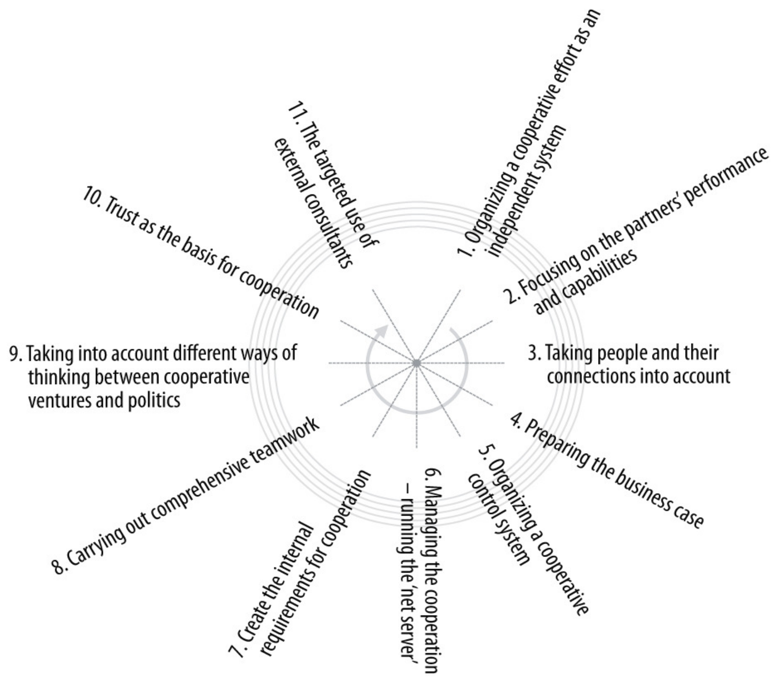
Table 1 - Continue	
Transitions, difficulties and conflicts	Dealing with demands for re-structuring, taking critical inventory, providing conflict management and mediation,
Re-dimensioning/Re-structuring	Providing evaluations, carrying out change management processes
Starting up work teams	Team development and coaching, providing project management

However the given specifics of collaborating systems, subsequently have consequences for consultants working with interorganizational systems and affect the underlying assumptions as well as the methodological repertoire to be applied. Some of the key issues in this respect include the following:

- who is the client? A considerable complexity of the client system, usually structured as multi-stakeholder approach (Sydow 2006). In addition to that the complexity may even increase when payment of fees for the consultant and client-system to work with are very different. Especially for the consulting of developmental initiatives, regional networks, economic clusters e.g. consulting activities are financed by public authorities or programs and not by those who receive help.
- the need to define structures for steering, processes for decision making, formats for transorganizational working processes and the formation of professional roles which help the collaborative effort to develop while at the same time lateral rather than vertical coordinating principles seem to fit at best (Chisholm 2008, Grossmann et al. 2009),
- the need to embed a consulting project within a more loosely structured system as a whole, including issues like defining the scope of the consulting approach, setting time frames and fees (Königswieser 2006) in order to be able to provide consultancy.
- an increasing demand to combine process oriented consultancy and more directive types of counselling (Sydow 2006)

In the following some characteristics for consultancies in the field of interorganizational networks are elaborated in more detail, using the Grossmann-Lobnig model for networks and collaborations (Figure 1). They are focusing on the role consultants can take in their work and they are providing

Figure 1: The Grossmann-Lobnig model for networks and collaborations (Grossmann & Lobnig 2009, 69).



exemplars of interventions in two selected areas: "defining the business case" as one of the most important key issues in the initial phase and "making use of teamwork" as a guiding principle for the process of organizing. Both issues can contribute conceptually as well as in terms of practical application to an appropriate understanding of the specifics consultants are facing when working with interorganizational systems. First I will describe the conceptual framework and it´s relevance to the consulting practice and secondly I will demonstrate the practical implication with practice cases I was involved as consultant.

The research methodology is based on the concept of the "clinical perspective on fieldwork" which was originally developed by Ed Schein (1988) and recently also described for organization development research by Scala & Grossmann (2009). At its core the model comprises that taking the position of intervening and researching at the same time is not an obstacle for the research process. Instead it allows for deeper and more congruent insights about the nature of organizational change when carried out with a reflective attitude and repeatedly applying scientific hypothesis.

PREPARING THE BUSINESS CASE

When talking about the importance of the business case for networks, colleagues repeatedly argue, that many networks are not in the business world and therefore the term might not be fully understand by the recepients. However with the idea of focusing the business case we are not proposing a market model to the world of interorganizational settings. The idea is rather that collaborations have to invent something new, something which is not in the world yet at least not for those who are joining to achieve something together. In that respect the innovative issue, the basic idea, the new model acts as what we call the business case for the collaboration, the reason why this all should be done.

At the very beginning collaborative ventures face the challenge to elaborate that business case which is attractive enough for the partners involved as well as for the stakeholders and thus create the required energy to start. This first foundation phase is crucial as it has to meet the challenge of a double sided reference: it has to be attractive

1. for decision makers of each partnering organization so that they are convinced to invest resources and their attention to the collaborative venture and
2. at the same time it has to be attractive also for the other partners involved.

A convincing business case is a prerequisite for attractive collaborations, but it is not something which can be found "out there" or which can be defined by one group of managers already working together for a longer period of time.

It results from a working process where key decision makers in organizations meet first, define aims or a strategy to partner and look whether the strategies are comparable with those of others. At best an iterative process is set up where the definition of the business case is a result of an intense discussion and learning process of the partners involved. The work on the business case helps to clearify explicit concerns as well as implicit assumptions and the final decision of "our business case" (expressed in a signed document, a presentation, a logo ….) is a first very important step where the new collaborative organization is created.

THE VIENNA NETWORK FOR WORKPLACE HEALTH PROMOTION: CONSULTING INTERVENTIONS TO DEFINE THE BUSINESS CASE

In 2006 the most important regional financer of workplace health promotion, the Health Insurance Vienna Region (*Wiener Gebietskrankenkasse,* WGKK), decided to set up a network involving all the insurance agencies and regional social partners in Vienna. In order to be successful, the WGKK decided that the network would have to assume the form of a collaborative effort instead of a more centralized cooperation solely based on WGKK´s activities.

First attempts to invite the planned partners were very positively appreciated by them but initiatives to also practically start the network were soon ebbing. The addressed partners seemed not to be ready to stand up and buy in into that initiative and so the well accepted good idea did not get into reality.

FIRST HYPOTHESES

This was the starting point where I came. In the summer of 2006 I was asked by Eva Baumer, the responsible internal project manager of the Wiener Gebietskrankenkasse (Vienna Health Insurance Fund) to help them with implementing the network for health promotion at the workplace. In a first meeting with her we developed a set of hypotheses for this situation and we we discovered a couple of different reasons, why the process got stuck:

- insurance companies are rather big and hierarchical organizations: decisions on issues which do not directly relate to their primary task are not easy to be taken and soon become concern of the top management which slows the process.
- the different organizations were unequal in previous attempt to health promotion: as some were very experienced with offering that type of programs and also developed internal professional structures for health promotion, others were quite unexperienced and lacked any internal contact points.
- although each organization has its own responsibility for the different sectors of employees which are defined by law, they are partly also in competition for resources or in a defensiveness as when they set up a program it may also be of benefit for the customers of the other insurance company;
- Personal relations between the partners were very unequal and unbalanced: some had already a trusted relation through previous cooperations while others were not even known to each other.

Based on that I proposed to restart the process and not to build on what was already planned. As the most effective way for the partners to identify with and also support the network would be to involve them actively in the process of defining goals and structures (business case).

As a first step a letter to eleven leaders of the health care insurances and social partners in Vienna was sent by the CEO of WGKK as the initiating organization for the network to invite the partners to participate in its launch. The first step was to have these organizations nominate their delegates to represent each institution in the network so it could grow and prosper. Some of the invited organizations' nominated delegates were skilled decision-makers from upper-management with little involvement in operative details, while others were specialists in health promotion or administrative officers who required a strong reference to their home organizations to make decisions. Additionally they were offered an interview with me as consultant to talk with them about the purpose of the network and their ideas about this all.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS (SEPT-OCTOBER 2006)

After nomination procedures were finished, the consultant walked out and visited decision makers, key persons and the nominated delegates from each participating organization. The visits included advice on how to internally organize their delegation in the network and to prepare for the coming collaborative work. They further included interviews to identify the institutions´ internal aims, targets, potentials and resources upon entering the network. And, thirdly, the delegates' roles were discussed and they were prepared to properly represent their organization. The interviews made it possible for the consultant to:

- understand the players' interests
- optimize their representation in the network
- familiarize the delegates with the network organizing plan
- prepare a diagnose on preconditions and specific challenges the collaborative ventures faces at the start as feedback for the partners and
- to properly develop a workshop design for the kick-off workshop.

But they turned out to be helpful also for the partners as they were allowed to talk about their ideas and concerns with somebody involved but without any particular organizational interest or stake in the process.

FIRST WORKSHOP (OCTOBER 2006)

Approximately 20 delegates from all eleven organizations took part in the first workshop in October, 2006 acting as the core group for the network. Their task was to develop the basic strategic guidelines for building the network. Table 2 (on the following page) presents the agenda of the first workshop.

Table 2: The first workshop of the Viennese network for workplace health promotion (detailed design)

Time	Contents
9:00	Welcome and opening III. Presentation of interests and concerns The coordinator divided the delegates into groups of four and asked them to describe their primary interests concerning the network and to formulate questions and comments for the workshop
10:00	II. Introductions of the participating organizations Each organization was asked to prepare a flip chart with the following contents: - Name of the organization - the importance of participating in the Viennese network - which abilities, resources, and contributions should be offered to the network? - who will represent the network (and a short introduction including profession, function, experience)
11:00	Break
11:20	III. Consultant's presentation: "Results of the interviews and their evaluation based on the criteria for successful networks" Three groups formed according to the "maximum mix principle". Their task was to diagnose the context for starting the network based on the following questions: - what is surprising about what was reported by the organizations? - what strengths and resources have become available to the network? - what obstacles can be expected? Results were documented on flip charts by each group and then presented and discussed.
12:30	Lunch

Table 2 cont.	
13:30	IV. Consultant's input: the critical points of starting cooperative ventures and networks. The following questions were discussed in two mixed groups: - what is the name of the network? - what exactly was meant by "workplace health promotion"? - what would be the network's main goals? - in two years, how could we measure the network's success?
14:45	Break
15:00	Presentation of the flip charts and discussion
15:30	V. Consultant's input: what are the criteria by which the partners could effectively work together in the network? - the management level (monitoring group, core group, etc.) - the coordination level (network server) - Commitment to the network's development (task forces) - Professional expertise (expert groups) - Observers
16:00	VI. Outlook for the next phase "Homework" on further requirements and agenda for the second workshop included two task forces that would include: - the definition of visions and goals - Ideas for network structure and work methods - closing discussion of results and examples of the network
16:45	End of the workshop

REPORTING BACK AND ANCHORING IN THE HOME ORGANIZATIONS

At the end of the workshop the delegates were asked to report back and to bring the ideas developed in the workshop to their home organizations. But while discussing effective tactics for this, some delegates were not sure about their proper institutional setting where they should report back as their organizations lacked some obvious entry points for that issue. It became clear, that each organizations had to proceed this task differently but also, that this feed-back loop is an essential element for initiating the energy needed to start the network.

At the end of the first workshop two task forces were set up (teams!) to more deeply elaborate the discussions which started. One groups edited a paper on visions and goals and a second group a concept for the organizational design of the network. Both were issued to be discussed at the second workshop but a draft would be circulated before the end of the year so that first reflections and feedbacks of the home-organizations could be brought into the second workshop. At this stage, the project coordinator was involved in both task forces and helped them to draw up a "position paper" which outlined both the network's topic and the organizational design.

FINALIZING THE BUSINESS CASE AT THE SECOND WORKSHOP

The partner organizations provided feedback on the concepts in the second workshop and collaboratively completed the "position paper". As main elements of the organizational design a steering group ("cooperative conference") and a more operative management committee ("operative panel") were set up and their members were nominated and elected. Finally workshop two (see table 3) ended with a draft outline of the action plan for 2007 drafted by the management committee and decided upon by the steering group "online" (at the end of the workshop).

Table 3: Agenda for the 2nd workshop of the Viennese network for workplace health promotion (detailed design)

Time	Contents
9:00	Welcome I. Organizational reports (recorded on a flip chart) - participating organizations receive the first workshop's results - discussion of what transpired between the first and second sessions - the criteria/results necessary for a satisfaction - if appropriate, the introduction of new delegates
10:00	II. Completion of the position paper The delegates were divided into four groups made up of two to three organizations. The groups read and evaluated the position paper. People color-coded their responses as:

Table 3 - Continue	
	- Red: not admissible, changes were necessary. - Orange: attention to potential problems and need for discussion - Green: explicit agreement Following the exercises, the facilitator asked the groups to post their evaluations on an enlarged copy of the position paper that hung on the wall. This visual aid clearly illustrated the need for improvement. The consultant reviewed each of the chapters with the delegates and immediately made changes on the computer.
13:00	Lunch
14:00	III. Filling key positions and nominating delegates for the committees Based on the suggestions made in the position paper, the entire group of delegates selected members for the "cooperative conference" as the partners' strategic panel. The following procedure was adopted: 1. each organization could nominate a total of two members 2. the members could provide a short explanation for their motivations 3. the entire group of delegates selected the candidates The delegates wrote in and voted on their nominations. Since the results were similar to the ones made by the preparatory group, there were few surprises. The next phase of committee selection was for "cooperative conference" members to select the "operative panel" -- the group responsible for running the network. They adopted more selective procedures for this committee: the five organizations were selected that had dealt with the topic most thoroughly. In order to guarantee a continuing working process no deputies were nominated as personal commitment and continuity was seen essential.
	Break
15:30	IV. Determining internal projects and responsible teams At this point, The partners defined the next steps according to a simple task-organization mode based on 1) tasks to be completed, 2) who should be responsible for the work, and 3) the timeframe for the work to be completed. They defined the most important topics which were carried out uniformly, including:

Table 3 - Continue	
	- drawing up procedural rules for the cooperative conference and the operative panel - developing a public relations strategy and campaign - developing a logo and design used to implement as part of the PR campaign - adopting and formalizing the position paper - drawing up a work schedule through May/June of 2008
16:15	V. Concluding round of discussions Questions answered during the closing round of discussions included: What have we learned from the process to date? What is important to us for further development?

This project utilized processes that seriously considered the individual partners' perspectives on the involvement in a collaborative venture. All parties involved recognized that the initial phase of interviews and feedback to the home organizations was invaluable because they focused on both, the well of the network and at the same time on each organization´s specific interests. Following this principle, the initial phase helped the participating organizations to balance their own interests and the requirements for a successful network development as the transorganizational system. In further development, the network performed a high level of joint activities. These included setting up the core groups in the initial phase which robustly fostered the network´s capability to successfully proceed.

Focusing the consultants practice, the example shows, that networks can gain both stability and progress when a clear step is provided and the consultant is able to form a helping coalition with the client. The double sided reference to a) the collaborating system and b) the partnering organization requires careful attention throughout the process. However even when this sometimes mean to slow down the process as the participating delegates already seem to be ahead with their knowledge and attitude, the consultant should insist on extensive feedback loops between home organization and collaborative systems as these are the knots which cling different partners together.

MAKING USE OF TEAMWORK

Teamwork can pull together loosely coupled systems since it provides the individual with intense interaction as well as meaning and relation to the overall undertaking. But there is a considerable difference between formal working structures in collaborations and real team work. Establishing teamwork is an investment with quite an impact. However in collaborative ventures, people involved have to invent the details of their work (content and process) themselves and there is no formal authority that tells them what to do. They rather continually have to (re-)define their goals, their roles, the processes and thus generate continuously the sense of organizing (Weick 2001) which is so vital to collaborative ventures. The patterns that result from these reflective processes create the 'spirit of collaboration', a culture highly required for innovative action. Productive work relationships in teams can achieve success in collaborations more readily and more sustainable than individual members or formal work structures could do and – as small systems within the system – they create both an individual and social commitment.

When tasks in networks and collaborations become highly interdependent between the partnering organizations a case for true teamwork is set. Teams then are "cultural islands" as Edgar Schein recently pointed out (Schein 2009) in which individuals can work together without to be disturbed too much from differences in roles, hierarchy and culture. The higher the interdepence of the tasks, the stronger the need for true teamwork and the application of proper working techniques.

For the consulting process the team approach means to organize as many important functions and tasks in a way, that they create interdepencies which are the container for cross-functional and cross-organizational teams: management and control, working teams for specific tasks, trans-organizational process-teams and planning teams for events.

FACILITY MANAGEMENT AUSTRIA: APPLYING TEAM-WORK TO LEVERAGE THE NETWORK

A network of companies, research institutes, consultants and service provides in facility management and real estate (Facility Management Austria, FMA) asked me to help them to redefine their strategy after an expert´s strategy report did not achieve enough commitment within the network to change something at all.

The network performs quite well, is influential in its field on national and also international level, and is already quite developed in its organizational structure. Basically the structure includes a director, a managing coordinator, a steering group and a number of committees and branches and institutional as well as individual members which substantially covers the existing professional field. But as typical for most professional associations, the performance and attractiveness of FMA is highly dependent on the voluntary commitment of their members who are truly dedicated to the organization's goals. A process of rethinking the strategy therefore need contributions from all different levels of the network I reasoned very early.

As often the case, I came in rather late as previous attempts to advance failed. The time given to define the strategy was already short: I was asked for help in April 2006 and the new strategy should be kicked-off at the general assembly in June were also the board members and the president where to be newly elected. A fast paced approach was needed.

I suggested to start a strategy-process where the content will be developed mainly by cross-functional teams integrating the different parts of the network. Together they should work on different aspects of the strategy parallel in a structured way. I defined a series of three meetings to set up the process, conduct an interim evaluation and feedback and a final meeting for refining and finalizing the strategic concept. In addition the teams were given assignments for the time between the meetings and they were asked to work face-to-face or virtually together. As the strategy teams were seen as essential, the composition of each team was crucial. I suggested it should be chaired by one person with a formal role in the network, but each team was advised to also include "newcomers" and people from the outer circles of the network.

THE PLANNING WORKSHOP (MAY 2006)

After the steering group basically agreed on my proposal, a planning workshop was held with the steering group´s spokesperson, the director of the coordination unit and me as consultant. The purpose of this first workshop was to agree upon the basic process principles, to define the scope of the project, to plan milestones, and to specify next steps. The strategy itself was clearly dedicated to be worked out in the planned process.

Especially the discussion about the basic principles for the strategy process led to a trusted and solid relationship between the parties involved, necessary for applying an effective and straight forward (fast paced) consulting process. The busy schedule had the aim of presenting the strategy at the coming members convention by developing a conceptual draft by that date, eight weeks later. The working principles which were agreed on in that planning workshop were the following:

1. The process should be built on the existing roles and structures of FMA, even if they are not performing so well in parts (as was expressed in some interviews at the

beginning) as the association's value is determined by its development as well as its final results. Who takes the initiative? What do the managing board and other committees contribute? How are the members involved? How are the different interests being resolved?

2. As much participation as possible: FMAs success depends on a vital exchange between and commitment of people in many different roles and relationships. If an association is interested in encouraging lively exchange, it should systematically strengthen its rules and procedures in way, that they foster participation. This was seen specifically important as the project focuses on shaping future goals. Teams could create an essential format for that participation.
3. Stringent coordination: this type of process requires a manager who coordinates, and supports the process, continuously informs the managing board, fulfils general management duties and help the teams to proceed in an organized and inter-coordinated way.

THE KICK-OFF WORKSHOP (MAY 2006)

At the kick-off workshop one week later, board members and persons with more coordinative functions of the network as chairs of working groups and committees were invited. At that meeting the project was started, working groups were initiated, the working formats were discussed and the milestones were set in a larger group. On the content level, six topics were chosen by individual ratings and subsequent discussion. Participants worked extensively in narrowing the scope, and in setting priorities as there were wide reaching ideas for strategic relevant issues. Finally they included:

1. define content and goals of FMA
2. develop memberstructure (number and variety) and membership rules
3. identify services (for members)
4. map association's internal structures, processes and rules
5. develop public relations/lobbying strategies
6. develop alliances and partnerships

At the kick-off meeting the instrument of the task force was introduced to stimulate targeted work and guarantee maximum participation. To foster wide participation as well as straight-forward work, I conceptualized a special model for the task forces which sets cross-sectional teams at the centre of the activities, and defines internal roles to secure connectedness to the overall network (see table 4 on the following page).

Table 4: FMA´s task force model
A mentor chairs each task force to guide the group and keep them on track. Board members could only take on the role of a mentor for one group.
At minimum one other person from the managing board joins the task force
The managing board's spokesperson and the chair invite at least one other person from FMA which is not in an official function to join the task force
All functional branches and initiatives have to be actively involved (meta-perspective).
A minimum of four people work together
The COO helped to coordinate and document the task force's work.

The process of appointing the task force members was quite challenging for both the group and the consultant as some participants of the kick-off meeting wanted to duck away and delegate the task to some very active "usual suspects". However I strongly instated on the principle they previously agreed upon. If they saw a need to change the rules, I would let them discuss it, but I felt to be rather rigorous with keeping the procedures. Finally the task forces were staffed quite well and each participants of the kick-off was involved in one way or other.

On the content side, the tasks included the following topics.

1. goal elaboration and clarification
2. diagnosis of the status quo
3. developing a need to change the current situation
4. developing first solutions and suggesting appropriate work methods

Task force meetings were held after the workshop in dispersed settings (wherever they were able to meet) as the mentors invited the task forces to meet several times to conduct work. The consultant was not directly involved in the task force meetings but provided a checklist with tasks and points to reflect the working phase (which was presented at the kick-off meeting). The coordinator helped the groups with sending templates for documentation of actions and results and with "softly looking after them in a caring mode".

REVIEW MEETING (JUNE 2006)

The extended managing board hosted a review meeting where the task force mentors presented the results and all together evaluated the task force results. The main part of the agenda was to test the results of the six task forces and examine them in terms of what they could contribute to the future of FMA. The discussions were widely constructive: most of the suggested proposals included commitment by the board as well as the other participants, while others were sent to a deeper analysis phase or for further clarification. As the task forces' results brought a rough image of the future, I asked them how this could be achieved and asked them to elaborate a process model for implementing the strategic proposals. The task force members (say: representatives of them) then met in small groups to exchange their implementation plans and to mutually give feedback one another. With those comments equipped the task forces were sent to finalize their conceptual papers to present them at the general assembly two weeks later.

At the end of the meeting, I helped the board to plan the milestones for preparing the general assembly and to decide upon the central issues to be communicated as the strategy of FMA (as decided strategy of the board) or to be left as invitations for further clarification and feedback at the convention and later work.

WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THIS PROJECT?

The FMA consulting process design proved to be quite suitable to this type of network and allowed for a fast paced approach to strategy development:

- in a short period of time, many stakeholders were involved in discussing problems and developing solutions.
- a trusting relationship between the consultant, the managing board and specifically the spokesman of the board and the coordinator helped to proceed quickly and with big steps.
- hands-on work tools made it possible not only to come up with a strategy proposal in time but also with a committed piece of work were most relevant key persons were actively involved in contributing to the association's future (for the use of instruments in strategy work see also Lobnig 2009).
- the coordinator cared personally about the outcomes, called the members regularly asking them about progress and difficulties. This kind of action-oriented coordination management allowed the network members to get tangible results. Continuous calls between the consultant and the coordinator (2-3 times a week) helped to align the real progress with the interventions at the consultants part.

CONCLUSIONS

When a consultant contracts with networks and collaborations he/she faces a different reality to interorganizational projects – at least in some instances. In many cases she/he finds a vacuum in existing structures, processes, strategies and power systems. This makes the system receptive to consultant´s interventions in many ways. However the presented case studies suggest some principles which seem to specifically fit well to that:

- trust emerges from good relations between the primary client and the consultant. A real interest and basic knowledge on the content side helps.
- respecting the double reference of the home organization and the collaboration/network is a guiding principle for designing processes and
- consultants interventions. They are of particular importance in the initial phase.
- interventions should be rather "simple" but not "simplistic"; networks want to have a strategy, structures, rules, projects eg, but usually in-depth designs will overcharge their capacity of processing in terms of time, resources and content. Modest approaches will help to create more solid and sustainable results.
- instruments for community building, team work techniques and formats, tools for practically implementing participative structures and cultural islands (Schein 2009) help to bridge the gap between claims and reality.

Consultants can be influential specifically to networks lacking stable organizational designs or suffering some imbalances of power. Consistent with that, consultants working with networks will have an increased responsibility to contribute to the good (or the great) of the whole collaborating system. I see them rather to be positioned on the side of the solution and action and not on the side of reflective communication.

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