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What are we
learning about...?

Community leadership in networks

Dimensions of community leadership

A development tool designed to facilitate
discussion about organisational relationships
and their focus within networks.

Community Leadership Strategy

Networked Learning Communities

| learning from each other | learning with each other | learning on behalf of each other |

Acknowledgements

Dimensions of community leadership

This development tool is a game designed to explore the dynamics of community leadership in networked organisations. It focuses upon two key dimensions of community leadership in networks orientated around the questions – What is the focus for your network? and What is the organisational form your network takes? In addressing the first question, participants are able to plot the focus of their network activity along a 'school-community focus' continuum. In addressing the second question participants are able to plot the nature of their network relationships and organisational form along a 'loose-formal organisation' continuum. The outcomes of the activity enable participants to locate their network's position within one of four quadrants of activity which characterise four broad types of network.

Successful networked organisations do three things.

1 They develop networks within themselves.

2 They find ways of learning from and with each other.

3 They establish some form of community which sustains the networking and learning.

For most school-based networks, the communities which are their focus are internal ones – the teachers, students and other adults who work in the schools. Some, however, are also concerned with what can be described as 'external' communities – made up of parents, local residents, community agencies and organisations, and local businesses.

Assessing where a network stands in relation to these wider communities is complex. This game is a way of helping with this process. It is something which headteachers, network leaders, advisers, consultants and community stakeholders can all use to help them understand where their network is and, perhaps, where they would like it to go.

This activity is appropriate for all adults involved in the work of schools, networks of schools, other organisations and their wider communities. It is designed to be used with a wide range of participants in several different ways, depending on your desired outcomes.

We believe this tool is most useful to schools and networks of schools and other organisations, in engaging their staff, governors and members of their wider community in discussion about how the organisations within their network collaborate together and what is the focus of their work. Any number of people can be involved. □

Dimensions of community leadership game

Activity guidance

Resources

- one envelope containing a full set of statement cards per group
- one counter per participant (eg 1p coin)
- photocopy of the 'Dimensions game board' for each participant (see page 8)
- photocopy of the 'Overview of the dimensions of community leadership' resource page for each participant (see page 9)

Organise…

- Organise participants to sit in groups of between three and six – ensure that groups are not bigger than this, or the activity will *not* work.
- You may wish to think about who is in each group to ensure balance and positive group dynamics.
- Provide each group with a set of resources.

Facilitate…

The facilitator of this activity should:

- prepare the resources and set up the room in advance
- think about who will be in each group and why – eg do you want each school to do this activity first, before considering the network's position?
- explain the whole process to participants before they start the activity
- keep track of the time and remind participants when they should complete each part of the activity
- move between the groups, checking that they understand the task, and listening to the conversations for interesting points
- plan how to collate the results and feed these back to the whole group – plan how the network can use this information to move forward

Plan…

The following questions may be helpful to you in planning to facilitate this activity (see 'Activity planner' on page 10).

- Who will be in each group and why?
- How will you use the game board to encourage both organisational and network perspectives?
- How will the participants best learn from each other?
- How will you pull things together at the end of the session?
- How will you use this information to help your network to move forward?

How to play the game

1 The game board consists of a grid organised around two dimensions. One dimension (the vertical) is concerned with how schools in a network work together. The other (the horizontal) is concerned with the focus of their joint activities.

2 The aim of the game is to plot where a network lies in terms of these dimensions.

3 You will need a counter to represent the network. Place the counter in the centre of the grid, where the two dimensions intersect.

4 There are seven cards. Each card has two statements on it (see pages 6-7). You have to choose the statement which fits most closely with the network's current position. To make the decision easier, beneath each statement there are two examples of the sorts of things you *might* hear said in a network of that kind, however, these are only for guidance.

5 When you have decided which of the statements offers the best fit, move the counter in the direction indicated above that statement – one point up, one down, one left, or one right.

6 The finishing point of the counter indicates where the network stands in relation to the dimensions.

Getting the most out of the game

1 The game is best played in groups. The debate about how the statements do or do not fit tells you more than where the counter ends up.

2 Anyone involved with a network can play the game. It can be used by headteachers and network leaders thinking about where they currently stand, or consultants and advisers helping the network develop.

3 The questions are not fixed. Different questions can be substituted and/or the grid can be extended to incorporate more questions.

4 It is also possible to use the game to compare differences in emphasis and perception. For instance see the notes opposite.

Interpreting the outcome

Each network is different and works in different circumstances. However, the dimensions help to differentiate between four broad types of network (see 'Overview of the dimensions of communinity leadership' on page 9).

None of these types is better than the others. In any case, many networks will straddle different types. The question is: whether the network's current position is coherent, whether it is appropriate for the circumstances in which it finds itself, and whether it has a sense of the direction in which it wishes to travel.

Notes

✔ Instead of focusing on the network as a whole, you can plot each school separately. This will give a clear of view of where there are similarities and differences.

✔ Different people (staff in the same school, stakeholders in schools and community) can play the game separately, then compare their results. For instance, do people outside schools see the network in the same way as those inside it?

✔ The game can be used to compare where the network is now with where people would like it to be. Simply respond to the statements in terms of 'what is the case now' and 'what ought to be the case in future'.

✔ It may be that the network engages in many different activities. You may wish to plot these separately rather than focusing on the network as a whole. ☐

Dimensions of community leadership
Statement card template　Photocopy these pages and cut out the cards.

Card 1

Move up one if you choose

a) Schools collaborate without compromising their autonomy.

eg *"None of us is bound by the decisions of the group."*

"We collaborate so far as this serves the best interests of the school and its students."

OR

Move down one if you choose

b) Schools work together within some more-or-less formal structure which impacts on their individual autonomy.

eg *"We are all bound by the decisions of the group."*

"Sometimes schools have to make sacrifices to implement joint decisions."

Card 2

Move up one if you choose

a) There is joint action, but little deeper engagement which allows schools and/or their partners to learn from each other.

eg *"Meetings focus on action rather than on processes and practices."*

"Outsiders know little about how each school works."

OR

Move down one if you choose

b) There are opportunities for schools to learn from their partners, whether these be in other schools or other agencies or in communities.

eg *"When they meet, people discuss how and why they do things as well as what action to take."*

"Outsiders learn about schools and share their knowledge with the school."

Card 3

Move up one if you choose

a) Issues are specific in focus. If more than one issue is addressed they are likely to be dealt with sequentially or as a loose bundle of concerns.

eg *"We tend to focus on immediate needs and priorities."*

"We have lots of initiatives to address lots of separate problems."

OR

Move down one if you choose

b) There is a strategic focus. Issues are dealt with as part of a long-term agenda.

eg *"We have agreed a long-term strategic plan."*

"All our actions are co-ordinated with each other. If we stop any one, the whole package begins to unravel."

Card 4

Move left one if you choose

a) School concerns dominate the issues that are addressed. Community issues figure mainly as they impact on schools.

eg *"Community issues are important if they impact on school performance."*

"Schools need to focus on what they do best: teaching and learning."

OR

Move right one if you choose

b) Wider community concerns figure prominently in the issues that are addressed.

eg *"Schools address a range of community needs, even if they impact only indirectly on school performance."*

"Schools contribute wherever they can to community development."

Card 5

Move left one if you choose

a) Decisions are made by schools.

eg *"All decisions are in the hands of heads, their staff and (possibly) other education personnel."*

"If people outside schools are involved in decisions, it is in a consultative capacity only."

OR

Move right one if you choose

b) Decisions are made jointly with community agencies, organisations and members.

eg *"People outside schools are frequently involved in decision-making."*

"We are regularly prepared to support and comply with decisions that are made by non-educational bodies."

Card 6

Move left one if you choose

a) The needs of communities are defined by schools.

eg *"We can decide what is needed in local communities on the basis of our knowledge of our students and their families."*

"Our plan of action has been drawn up by ourselves and fellow educators."

OR

Move right one if you choose

b) Schools engage with definitions of community needs other than their own.

eg *"We have formal means of finding out what community members and non-education agencies want."*

"Our plans are drawn up by groups which include non-educators."

Card 7

Move left one if you choose

a) When schools develop relationships with community members, they do so primarily with those whose concerns relate most closely to their own.

eg *"We work with parents/carers but not with other community members."*

"We will talk to anyone who can support our core tasks and targets but do not have sufficient capacity to work with other groups."
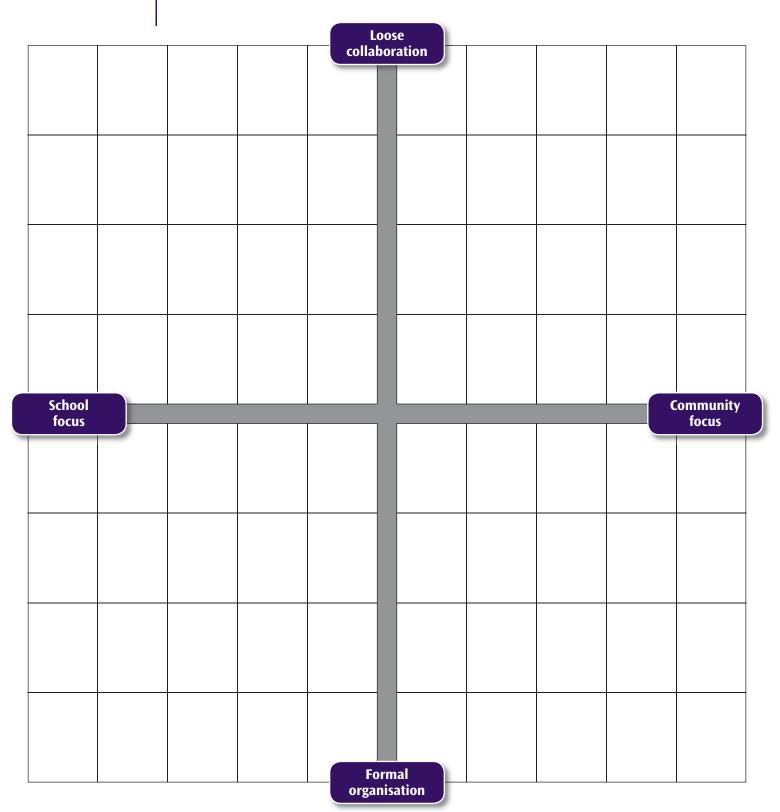
OR

Move right one if you choose

b) Schools develop relationships with a wide range of community members, organisations and stakeholders.

eg *"We work with a wide range of non-educational groups and organisations."*

"We are part of a network of organisations supporting the development of local communities."

Card 8

Add your own example

Dimensions of community leadership
Game board Photocopy this page.

Loose collaboration

School focus

Community focus

Formal organisation

Overview of the dimensions of community leadership

Photocopy this page.

Loose collaboration

School focus

Community focus

Formal organisation

Type A
Loose collaboration-school focus

- Schools collaborate without compromising their autonomy.
- There is joint action but little deeper engagement which allows schools and/or their partners to learn from each other.
- School concerns dominate the issues that are addressed. Community issues figure mainly as they impact on schools.
- Decisions are made by schools.
- Issues are limited in focus. If more than one issue is addressed they are likely to be dealt with sequentially or as a loose bundle of concerns.
- The needs of communities are defined by schools.
- When schools develop relationships with community members, they do so primarily with those whose concerns relate most closely to their own, particularly parents/carers.

Type C
Loose collaboration-community focus

- Schools collaborate without compromising their autonomy.
- There is joint action but little deeper engagement which allows schools and/or their partners to learn from each other.
- Wider community concerns figure prominently in the issues that are addressed.
- Decisions are made jointly with community agencies, organisations and members.
- Issues are limited in focus. If more than one issue is addressed they are likely to be dealt with sequentially or as a loose bundle of concerns.
- Schools engage with definitions of community needs other than their own.
- Schools develop relationships with a wide range of community members, organisations and stakeholders.

Type B
Formal organisation-school focus

- Schools work together within some more-or-less formal structure which impacts on their individual autonomy.
- There are opportunities for schools to learn from their partners, whether these be in other schools or other agencies or in communities.
- School concerns dominate the issues that are addressed. Community issues figure mainly as they impact on schools.
- Decisions are made by schools.
- There is a strategic focus. Issues are dealt with as part of a coherent agenda.
- The needs of communities are defined by schools.
- When schools develop relationships with community members, they do so primarily with those whose concerns relate most closely to their own, particularly parents/carers.

Type D
Formal organisation-community focus

- Schools work together within some more-or-less formal structure which impacts on their individual autonomy.
- There are opportunities for schools to learn from their partners, whether these be in other schools or other agencies or in communities.
- Wider community concerns figure prominently in the issues that are addressed.
- Decisions are made jointly with community agencies, organisations and members.
- There is a strategic focus. Issues are dealt with as part of a coherent agenda.
- Schools engage with definitions of community needs other than their own.
- Schools develop relationships with a wide range of community members, organisations and stakeholders.

Dimensions of community leadership
Activity planner Photocopy this page.

Planning questions	*Pause for thought...?*
	Activity plan

Who will be in each group and why?

How will you use the game board to encourage both organisational and network perspectives?

How will the participants best learn from each other?

How will you pull things together at the end of the session?

How will you use this information to help your network to move forward?

What are we
learning about...?

The 'What are we learning about…?' series is designed to make public the learning that has emerged from NLCs in the last two years.

The first nine titles in the series will focus on:
What are we learning about…?

- LEA involvement in school networks

- Establishing a network of schools

- **Community leadership in networks**

- *'Making mathematics count'* in school networks

- The impact of school networks

- Sustaining a network of schools

- Facilitation within school networks

- Professional development in school networks

- Leadership of school networks

To order a copy of this series, please email **nlc@ncsl.org.uk** quoting the reference **WAWLA/Community leadership**

NCSL
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School Leadership