

# Putting Networks in Context: How School Improvement Networks Manage Complex Environments

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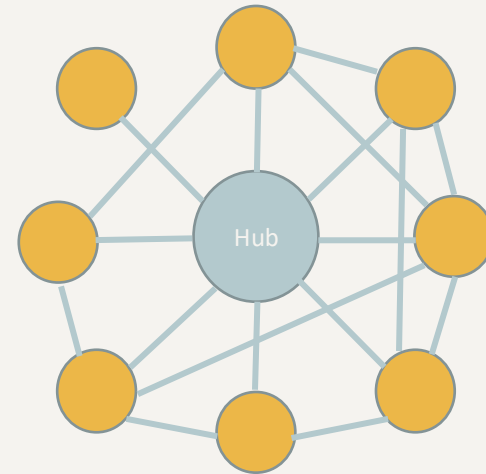
# An untraditional approach to educational improvement situated within traditional education systems

- US education system notoriously pluralistic, turbulent, & incoherent
- Improvement networks ask educators to embrace logics of improvement:
  - Logic of inquiry
  - Logic of community
  - Logic of equity
- Critical that network leaders attend to how these new logics interact with existing logics at play in education systems

(Bryk et al., 1998; Cohen & Spillane, 1990; Hatch, 2009; Labaree, 1997; Marsh et al., 2020; Peurach et al., 2019; Woulfin & Allen, 2022; Yurkofsky et al., 2020)

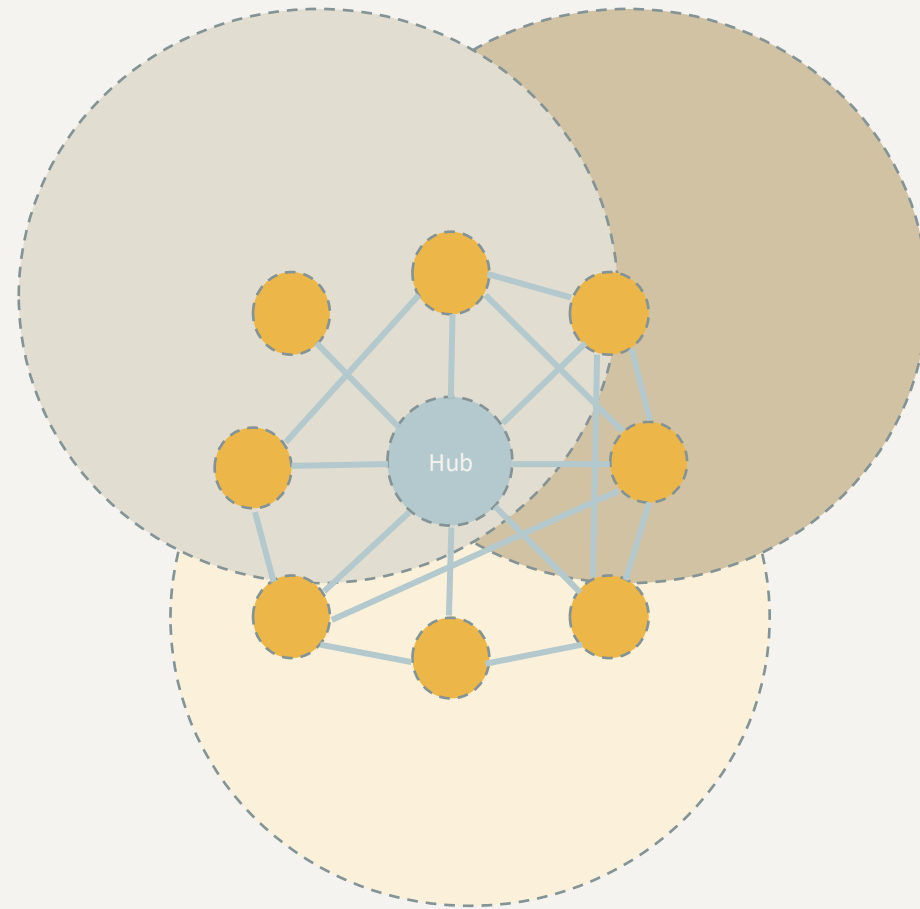


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# The role of design and strategy

1. How does system alignment vary by network design?
2. How does system alignment vary by network strategies?



# Sequential mixed methods research design

1. Networks purposefully selected based on members' perceptions of system alignment on Network Health Survey (2021 & 2022)
2. Longitudinal cross-case studies, using qualitative and quantitative data:
  - Network applications to BMGF
  - Notes generated during monthly check-ins between network leaders and BMGF
  - Network-generated annual progress reports
  - Descriptive data about network design (e.g., size, spread, hub type, etc.)

Combination of inductive and deductive coding

Analytic matrix to identify patterns within and across cases

Findings:  
The relationship between system alignment and  
network design



# Alignment is unrelated to network intermediary

Network	Hub Type
Network A	NGO
Network B	University
Network C	NGO
Network D	University
Network E	NGO
Network F	Alliance
Network G	NGO
Network H	District
Network I	University
Network J	NGO
Network K	District



# Alignment is unrelated to network aim

Network	Hub Type	Aim
Network A	NGO	Instructional
Network B	University	Instructional
Network C	NGO	Early warning
Network D	University	Instructional
Network E	NGO	Early warning
Network F	Alliance	PSM
Network G	NGO	Instructional
Network H	District	Instructional
Network I	University	Instructional
Network J	NGO	Instructional
Network K	District	Instructional



# Alignment is unrelated to network spread

Network	Hub Type	Aim	Spread
Network A	NGO	Instructional	Single
Network B	University	Instructional	Single
Network C	NGO	Early warning	Single
Network D	University	Instructional	Single
Network E	NGO	Early warning	Multiple
Network F	Alliance	PSM	Multiple
Network G	NGO	Instructional	Single
Network H	District	Instructional	Single
Network I	University	Instructional	Multiple
Network J	NGO	Instructional	Single
Network K	District	Instructional	Single



# Alignment is unrelated to network size

Network	Hub Type	Aim	Spread	Size
Network A	NGO	Instructional	Single	70
Network B	University	Instructional	Single	83
Network C	NGO	Early warning	Single	363
Network D	University	Instructional	Single	148
Network E	NGO	Early warning	Multiple	69
Network F	Alliance	PSM	Multiple	97
Network G	NGO	Instructional	Single	83
Network H	District	Instructional	Single	78
Network I	University	Instructional	Multiple	134
Network J	NGO	Instructional	Single	142
Network K	District	Instructional	Single	81



# Alignment is unrelated to network's local experience

Network	Hub Type	Aim	Spread	Size	Prior rel.
Network A	NGO	Instructional	Single	70	No
Network B	University	Instructional	Single	83	No
Network C	NGO	Early warning	Single	363	Yes
Network D	University	Instructional	Single	148	Yes
Network E	NGO	Early warning	Multiple	69	No
Network F	Alliance	PSM	Multiple	97	Yes
Network G	NGO	Instructional	Single	83	No
Network H	District	Instructional	Single	78	Yes
Network I	University	Instructional	Multiple	134	Yes
Network J	NGO	Instructional	Single	142	Yes
Network K	District	Instructional	Single	81	Yes



# Alignment is unrelated to network launch

Network	Hub Type	Aim	Spread	Size	Prior rel.	Launch
Network A	NGO	Instructional	Single	70	No	2021
Network B	University	Instructional	Single	83	No	2021
Network C	NGO	Early warning	Single	363	Yes	2018
Network D	University	Instructional	Single	148	Yes	2018
Network E	NGO	Early warning	Multiple	69	No	2018
Network F	Alliance	PSM	Multiple	97	Yes	2019
Network G	NGO	Instructional	Single	83	No	2020
Network H	District	Instructional	Single	78	Yes	2019
Network I	University	Instructional	Multiple	134	Yes	2021
Network J	NGO	Instructional	Single	142	Yes	2021
Network K	District	Instructional	Single	81	Yes	2019

Findings:  
The relationship between system alignment and  
network strategies



# School & member selection

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opt-in</li><li>• Rigorous selection process</li><li>• Focus on depth</li></ul>	



# School & member selection

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*“Building a good network began with the selection process. Schools were suggested by [district leaders], interviewed by [network leaders], and selected based on having the necessary structures in place for networking as well as a commitment to the network as a whole.”*



# School & member selection

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opt-in</li><li>• Rigorous selection process</li><li>• Focus on depth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Externally assigned</li><li>• Capacity assessment process</li><li>• Focus on spread/scale</li></ul>



# Developing strategic connections

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Engage key stakeholders across multiple offices &amp; levels</li></ul>	



# Developing strategic connections

<b>Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment</b>	<b>Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engage key stakeholders across multiple offices &amp; levels</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work siloed in district offices and/or with school-level practitioners</li></ul>



# Role of school and district leaders

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regularly included in convenings and decision-making processes</li><li>• Included before launch</li><li>• School leaders as institutional gatekeepers</li></ul>	



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*“There is no culture of improvement at my school outside of the [network] community. Leadership does not attend [network] meetings and are not familiar with improvement science. There is a culture of ‘accountability,’ but this results in finger-pointing, band-aid solutions, and a ‘put the fires out’ mentality...Imagine if we focused on learning about what works when it comes to attendance initiatives for an entire year. If we did it right, we would develop a precise and reliable tool, but that would take too long in a culture of accountability.”*



# Balance of decision rights

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Network aims and change ideas co-constructed with school and district personnel</li></ul>	



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*“Network participants used the data we gathered from 2020-2021 and identified...the problem we wanted to collectively tackle. With this new problem area, the network generated possible root causes of this problem. The [hub] staff also contributed some root causes based on what research has identified.”*



# Balance of decision rights

Common approaches in networks with stronger alignment	Common approaches in networks with weaker alignment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Network aims and change ideas co-constructed with school and district personnel</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Network aims and/or change ideas determined with minimal input from network members</li></ul>



# Discussion and implications

- More developed networks leverage intentional processes to continuously balance school, network, and district system aims
- The work of system alignment is never ending
- Alignment is a two-way street: Some schools and district systems may be more aligned with (or open to) the logics of networked improvement than others

# Thank you!

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