PART ONE

SCENE ONE: BAR, LOW MUSIC PLAYING, WOMAN, MADELINE CHURCH, IN JEANS AND A RED LEATHER JACKET, IS PERCHED ON A HIGH STOOL AT THE BAR, DRINKING A PINT OF GUINNESS. SHE IS IN HER EARLY FORTIES, SHORT BOBBED HAIR, AND STRIKING JAW. SHE IS ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM SOMEONE OFF CAMERA. A MICROPHONE IS JUST IN SHOT.

MADELINE: The action research project? Oh lord….What was the process like? If you read my book [publication forthcoming] I have tried to describe the way in which this process unfolded. It all started over a glass of wine, inevitably, I was at dinner at a friends and another friend, Claudy Vouhé, then working for the Development Planning Unit at UCL, asked me what I was doing, and I began to tell her that I was working for a small network on Colombia (all the big UK aid agencies and human rights groups) doing political lobbying work, and coordinating positions between the agencies. She has worked much in Africa and Latin America, so we half chatted in Spanish, drank more wine, ate more food. I then started banging on about networks and evaluation and what I thought I was doing my PhD about. I recall being fired up, waving my arms around a lot, as I do. Talking about how there is no methodology for doing evaluation of networks that do political change work, or at least any methodology that makes sense, and how much we needed it if we weren't going to get 'evaluated' by people who didn't know what they were doing, and drinking more wine, and laughing about my opinionated burbling.

SHE SWALLOWS HER GUINNESS

MADELINE - She called me a few days later, and asked me what did I think about putting together a proposal for some small grant money for the evaluation thing. Her department had just told her they needed to get more research grants. She admitted she couldn't really remember what I was on about, but the deadline was really soon and she was sure it was in the right area. I then talked to Mark Bitel, my mate from Partners in Evaluation (we had been trying to find some way of working together for a long time) and we were going to be in Edinburgh together for the UK Evaluation Society conference, so we grabbed an hour over lunch. I wrote the 'what for' kind of bits, Mark wrote the evaluation bits, and we sent it to Claudy and she did some background reading, and wrote the 'how it fits into the field' bits. It all took a week I think.

Of course I wasn't expecting we would get the money, I guess you can tell that by the rather casual way I describe putting the proposal together, I think I wasn't at all convinced that they would be convinced. Although looking at the proposal now, it looks convincing enough.

SHE WHISKS A BLUE FOLDER OFF THE BAR, AND HANDS IT TO THE INTERVIEWER OFF SCREEN

THE PROPOSAL
Building Evaluation into the Praxis of Externally-Funded Networks: A Model for Increased Participation and Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

According to a recent publication by Karl (1999) [1], networks started to emerge in the 1960s when individuals wanted to work on issues or campaigns. Without established structures, they were compelled to form their own linkages in order to co-ordinate action, to lobby, to "network". The last ten years have seen a staggering increase in the number of networks operating in the field of development. As a result of the recognised (or assumed?) value of networks, more are now externally funded by donor organisations. As networks grow and make use of external resources, the need to ensure their accountability and effectiveness becomes more pressing.

The range of issues development networks deal with is vast and covers most of the key themes and concerns on the agenda of decision-makers and planners in international organisations, governments and NGOs in the South and the North. There are thematic networks dealing with housing (eg. The Asian Coalition of Housing Rights), water and sanitation (eg. CiudadAgua in Latin America), environment (eg. Local Agenda 21 Communities Networks) and conflict prevention and resolution (eg. CODEP), to name but a few.

Starkey defines a network as 'any group of individuals or organizations who, on a voluntary basis, exchange information or undertake joint activities and who organize themselves in such a way that their individual autonomy remains intact"[2]. The overarching objective of networks is to share information with a view to exchanging learning, avoiding duplication, pooling resources and facilitating advocacy, or, as Karl puts it, to "influence the complex and global social, economic and political forces that shape people's life and society".

Networks pose particular challenges for evaluation. Objectives and procedures are often not clearly articulated, while limited resources mean that active networks are often too busy to devote time to reflection. Formal authority and power may be held by those with access to greater resources, thus increasing chances of power imbalances. As a result changes may be harder to implement than in a single organisation because decision-making power is often less clearly allocated.

Given the specific characteristics of networks outlined above it is often considered that the effectiveness of networks cannot be meaningfully evaluated. What is certain is that evaluation should ultimately be useful to and practical for the networks themselves, and those supporting them. This research project thus aims to assess the problems common to evaluations in externally funded networks, paying specific attention to issues such as internal conflict resolution, accountability and transparency in the use of power and resources, democratisation and equity in participation. Through participatory methods, it aims to develop a model for evaluation of use to network managers, funders and members. The research is designed as a pilot project with a view to large-scale comparative research at a future date.

POLICY RELEVANCE

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[1] Karl, M: Measuring the Immeasurable: Planning, monitoring and evaluation of networks, Novib (The Hague) and Women's Feature Series (New Delhi), 1999.
[2] Starkey, P: Networking for development, IFRTD, 1997

Contribution to DFID's objectives

Networks in the development context often have as their central objectives the sharing of experiences, and the development of partnerships for change. Such aims match DfID objectives of sharing skills and experience, and of building genuine and effective partnerships. It is important that such partnerships are accountable, transparent and based on values of equality and participation. This research will support DfID objectives by developing appropriate evaluation methodology and practice in what is a rapidly-growing area of investment. The research will 1) enhance current knowledge of the challenges and obstacles to evaluation in networks; and 2) develop a participatory evaluation methodology that is tailored to the needs of networks wishing to evaluate their work.

Practical and theoretical benefits

Practically, the research will provide in-depth information on if and how networks are evaluated and how useful those evaluations are or have been. It will also develop a model of evaluation to be tested in practice with a view to wider replicability. This will be of benefit to those networks and funders or prospective funders of networks by providing a framework for accountability, transparency and control of resources.

The literature on networks, while extensive, is of relatively recent origin and reveals the limited extent of our understanding of the problems networks experience in undertaking evaluations. In this context, the research will enhance existing theoretical knowledge and debate on approaches to, and the problems of, evaluation.

Potential users

The principle potential users of the research will be those managing, participating in and funding networks. Those managing a network will have a practical model that can be employed in the regular praxis of the network; members of networks will be able to use the model to ensure participation and accountability; and external funders will find it useful in making proper use of resources.

In addition, it is envisaged that the research will be of practical and theoretical use to evaluators, trainers and the academic community concerned with evaluation.

Plans to link up with the users

During the research itself, the project will involve at least one network and its members in all stages of developing the evaluation model. A consultation and feedback stage will also ensure that those participating in the research have the opportunity to comment on the findings.

The research findings will be disseminated in a variety of formats including project reports, conference papers, journal and newsletter articles. The research, in addition to using electronic (such as ID21) and paper means of dissemination, will also aim to use networks themselves as a dissemination vehicle.

RESEARCH PLANS

Research aims

- ➢ To enhance the knowledge and understanding of how evaluation in networks is put to use and contributes to better practice;
- ➢ To understand the practical challenges and obstacles experienced by a functioning network attempting to evaluate its own work and use the learning acquired to improve practice;
- ➢ To develop a model for evaluation of networks that is practical and useful to network members, managers and funders.

Research questions

- ➢ What are the different ways in which networks evaluate their work, if any?
- ➢ How useful have evaluation initiatives been to date for those networks that have undertaken them ?
- ➢ What are the particular challenges posed by evaluation in a network project?
- ➢ What kind of evaluation model could be developed to meet such challenges?
- ➢ What methodology is most appropriate to use when researching networks?

Methodology

The research will adopt a participatory action-research approach. Participatory action research aims to integrate research and action and as such is considered appropriate to the goals of the research, which is to increase participation and effectiveness through an iterative practice of action-evaluation-action. It also aims to solve practical problems through the involvement of practioners, placing particular importance on popular knowledge and seeks to contribute to shifts in the balance of power in favour of poor and marginalised groups. It is underpinned by a commitment to democratic values.

The evaluation model will be developed with the full participation of the pilot network in an iterative process. This will promote ownership of the model and increase the likelihood that the network will use any evaluation results generated. Such an approach will draw on participatory monitoring and evaluation methods, and the work of Michael Quinn Patton (Utilization-focused Evaluation). Other practical conflict resolution theories such as mediation would be drawn upon to work through issues of power and decision-making.

Methods

Phase One (Months 1 and 2): will involve a literature review of evaluations done of/with externally funded networks. Will include peer review, published and grey literature. This phase will also review the theoretical material relevant to the research.

Phase Two (Months 3 and 4): the research will then aim to gain an overview of networks' attitudes to evaluation, how useful evaluations have been to networks who have undertaken them and if the evaluations have delivered in terms of improving practice. Different approaches will be used, including structured and open-ended interviews by email and telephone, and attendance at a network meeting (costs have been budgeted for a trip to Brussels where many EU-funded networks are based). In Phase Two a significant number of externally funded networks who have undertaken evaluations will be involved, and in addition, networks who have not yet undertaken evaluations will also be included in the research to understand why they have have not conducted the exercise, what they would seek to gain from an evaluation, and how they would go about it.

Phase Three (Months 5 to 11): will involve producing a short document outlining the results of Phases One and Two and highlighting the challenges and obstacles that networks themselves consider to be most important in making evaluation practical and useful. A model will be proposed that will then be put into practice in partnership with a network that has been identified during Phase Two. This will be an iterative process and the process itself will be documented as an important part of the research. The Network for Conflict, Development and Peace (CODEP) has expressed an interest in being involved.

Phase Four (Months 12 and 13): will involve the production and dissemination of the final outputs.

Research team

Claudy Vouhé – DPU Project Manager

Academic Qualifications
MA: International Marketing, Napier University, Edinburgh
BA: Latin American Studies, Poitiers University, France

Development Experience

3 years as DPU full-time Lecturer, Consultant and Trainer on gender policy and planning and development issues; Editor of DPUNEWS (since 1997)
Recent consultations with the ILO, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Government of Tunisia, the South African Commission on Gender Equality (DfID funded); and NGOs in Namibia and Chile.

5 years in Namibia as Unicef Consultant "Small Businesses for Women" (1993 – 1996) and as adviser to the Ministry of Education, National Literacy Programme, Namibia (1992 – 1993). Work included research, advice and training, with extensive use of PRA and other participatory research and planning methodologies.

Networking, Communication and Advocacy
3 years with private Community development/employment Consultants firm CEI Ltd, (Edinburgh/Brussels) as a Consultant and Communication Co-ordinator for EC Programme on Long-term unemployment (1989 – 1992).

Reports/Publications

"Men and Masculinities in motion" in IDS Bulletin, with Caren Levy and Nadia Taher (forthcoming 2000); "Guía para la planificación local con las mujeres y los hombres", with Marisol Saborido, Chile (1999); Monitoring and Gender in Four Bi-lateral Aid Organisations, Report presented to the Royal Tropical Institute for DGVIII, EU (1998); "Guidelines to assist income-generating projects"; "Business skills for income-generating projects" and "Methodology to assess capacity building of income-generating projects', with A. v Diesen, UNICEF Namibia (1995-1996); 1996 Income-generating Projects for Women:Evaluation of UNICEF project 1993-1996, Namibia

Madeline Church – Research Associate

Academic Qualifications

Phd Student in Participatory evaluation at Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice, University of Bath
MA: Area Studies Latin America – University of London
BA: European Studies Spanish – University of London

Network Co-ordinator
Three years as Co-ordinator for ABColombia Group, a network of seven UK-based agencies working on displacement in Colombia [CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB, Amnesty International, PBI-Colombia Project, SCIAF, SCFUK] – since 1997

Evaluator
Evaluation consultancy to IA, Alternatives to Violence Project, CIIR, and Oficina Internacional de Derechos Humanos – Acción Colombia.

Mediation and Conflict Resolution Experience
Lead Facilitator for Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in UK prisons – since 1995
AVP 2000 Conference Convenor
Mediator for Wycombe Mediation Service - since 1998
International Alert's (IA) Latin America Officer – 1995-1997
IA Training and Resource Development Team - 1997

Reports/Publications
Bitel *et al.*: AVP as an agent of Change: the pilot evaluation of the Alternatives to Violence Project in three British Prisons, unpublished report for AVP Britain: 1998
Church, M: Assessment of AVP at HMP Cookham Wood, Stage 1,2 & 3, 1995 -7
Church, M: Disappearance, denial, resistance: women in the face of 'la violencia'. Unpublished MA Disseration, 1994 ILAS

Mark Bitel – Evaluation Consultant

Academic Qualifications
MA Sociology - State University of New York, 1991
M Professional Studies (Counselling & Ethics) - New York Theological
Seminary, 1992
MSc Research and Evaluation - Institute of Health Service Research, Luton, 1997
BSc (Hons) Psychology - University of Plymouth, 1985

Professional experience
Independent Evaluation Consultant with over 5 years experience in
conducting evaluations across a wide variety of human service programmes and effectiveness of NGOs in the UK and overseas. Recent clients include London Borough of Lewisham Youth Services, Black Voluntary Sector Directors Network, Konfliktradene I Oslo.

Publications include:
Mediation in a south London school" (with D. Rolls), in Mediation in practice, M. Liebmann (ed.) London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000.

Measuring Impact: a guide to monitoring and evaluation. London: Charities Evaluation Services, 1999.
A tale of two cities: the evaluation of Jobroute and Workroute. London: Tomorrow's People, 1998

Developing a strategy for HIV prevention in the African Communities in the UK (with other co-authors), London: Department of Health, 1997.

Educating Nurses: a review of post-registration HIV education and training in London, London: The HIV Project, 1996.

Professional memberships
UK Evaluation Society (currently Honorary Secretary)
Mediation UK (currently Executive Committee member)

MADELINE TAKES BACK THE FOLDER WITH A NOD

MADELINE - I was of course working at the time for the ABColombia Group, coordinating the joint policy and advocacy work on Colombia, lobbying politicians, writing submissions to UN commissions, building relationships across Europe, the US, and of course travelling to Colombia to see the horrors for myself.

FADE IN A SATELLITE MAP OF COLOMBIA, WHICH THEN ZOOMS DOWN TO APARTADO, NORTH WEST COLOMBIA

SCENE TWO: MADELINE IS SITTING IN A SMALL OFFICE IN COLOMBIA, SWEATING, CEILING FAN WHIRRING OVERHEAD. SHE IS WITH A SMALL GROUP OF RURAL WORKERS AND A NUN, CHATTING, LAUGHING.

ON THE WALL IS A POSTER ANNOUNCING A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR A LOCAL MASSACRE IN WHICH 40 PEOPLE WERE CHOPPED INTO BITS BY ARMY-BACKED PARAMILITARIES. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TROPICAL, TENSE, DANGEROUS.

SHE GETS UP WITH HER COFFEE AND GOES TO A COMPUTER ON A DESK IN THE CORNER. SHE TYPES, WAITS, AND TYPES AGAIN. SHE BEGINS TO READ HER EMAIL, OCCASIONALLY LAUGHING AND ENGAGING IN SPANISH WITH THE CONVERSATION BEHIND HER.

SHE STOPS LAUGHING SUDDENLY AND PUTS HER HEAD IN HER HANDS. SHE REACHES FOR HER COFFEE AND PACKET OF CIGARETTES, LIGHTS ONE, GOES TO THE DOOR TO BLOW THE SMOKE OUT OF THE ROOM. SHE RE-READS THE EMAIL. THERE IS A LONG PAUSE AS TEARS WELL IN HER EYES. THEN SHE CLICKS ON ANOTHER. THIS TIME SHE LAUGHS IN DISBELIEF

MADELINE VO - I remember that day very clearly. Sister Maria had come to meet me, with a group of survivors from the massacre. They had told me a very grim tale, and despite being used to hearing such terrible and brutalising stories, I had sat and listened to the whispered accounts, with my usual combination of impotence, sadness, and compassion. We finished the meeting, passed round coffee and as we relaxed and started to tell each other more uplifting stories, I asked to use the internet connection. There were two emails. One telling me George had been killed in a car crash on his way back from the USA (he'd come home a day earlier than Diane and fallen asleep at the wheel of the rented car). I was suddenly moved to tears. The other said that we had

been awarded the grant money for the networks and evaluation project, and we had to start in August.

Context here is really important, not just anecdotally interesting. At the time the grant was awarded, as I said, I was working part-time for the ABColombia Group, a small network of UK and Irish aid agencies working in Colombia. I visited two or three times a year, often undertaking a gruelling schedule of travelling and listening to stories. I then had to translate that into easily understandable political analysis for a broad readership (for an example see Appendix V, Colombia Forum, Issue 22), policy level argumentation, submissions to Commissions, feed it into round-table meetings with Ministers, and not lose the heart of the people in the process.

My personal commitment was always to try and find a way to encourage civil servants and politicians in Westminster and Brussels to see justice and human rights as the fount of real security, and to illuminate the stupidity of spending aid money on increasing a police force that was corrupt, unable to collect evidence, faced with a justice system carrying a 95% + impunity rate. I wanted them to redefine their ideas of corruption, to move on from their obsession with bribery in business and see how the normal practice of democracy in Colombia - vote-buying and assassination of political opponents - is the real corrupting force in the body-politic. I wanted them to stop taking the easy route, the military route, the more-guns and bombs route, the pay-people-to-inform route. I wanted them to see how corrupting of the social fabric that was and how dangerous in the long-term. I needed to be able to **shift from one shape to another** depending on my environment, and to combine the passions of an activist with the hard-headed clarity of a lobbyist, while holding on to my own capacity to be moved, both emotionally by peoples' stories and rationally, by more convincing arguments or ideas.

Secretly I wanted to talk about the power of love.

TABLEAU: PASSION, REASON, LOVE

THE ACTIVIST
Do you have any idea how angry, depressed, dispossessed and impotent I feel? And I don't even live there. Justice, a way out of poverty and illness, access to resources, all these are reasonable requests, why is it so hard for you to listen, pay attention, give it the commitment it requires, and not slavishly follow in the footsteps of the USA bullying its way around the world, spraying poor peasants in its war on drugs that is so badly misconceived, and ignoring its snorting and smoking backyard?

THE LOBBYIST
What we think is that a comprehensive and coherent policy on human rights, development and justice could have lasting results if it is just coupled with an attention to measurable steps and progress reports.

THE HUMAN
I believe in the transformative power of love
We have lost the will to live once we lose the power of love

CUT BACK TO THE BAR, AND THE INTERVIEW

MADELINE IS NOW ROLLING A CIGARETTE, AND LIGHTS IT AS SHE TALKS

MADELINE - I had to speak the language of the rural poor, the language of the aid agencies, and the language of politicians all at once. I also had to work with a wide spread of networked institutions and individuals across Europe and the USA to build common positions to increase our influence. I had to be Spanish-speaking, abierta, accessible, con conocimiento de la realidad rural, understanding of rural reality, committed to doing something, con cojones. I had to sound authoritative, be persistent, creative, and understanding of the complexities of political action or inaction. I had to retain my passion for justice and love in the face of ugly realities and weakness and political bullshit.

I was also in my second year at CARPP, and still searching for a research agenda. This project would give structure to my research and money to do it. I had thought I would give up my ABColombia job if the money came through.

Once it did, I agonised for weeks about what to do. I think now I can see that there was no way I could have given up my job. I had to be in networks, of relationships, meaning, doing something good, trying to change things, in order to be able to do this Action Research project. I somehow couldn't imagine the project working if I wasn't, still, working, still being touched to act.

Invitation to participate

MAKING EVALUATION REAL AND USEFUL FOR NETWORKS
An Action Research Project Funded By Department For International Development (DfID)

This project seeks to understand the way externally-funded networks evaluate their work, the challenges and obstacles that we face, what stops us undertaking evaluative exercises, and how/if we put the results of those exercises to use. We are looking to move the methodological debate forward and fill in some of the gaps that exist when it comes to the difficult job of evaluating our work.

I am not only part of the research team, but also a network co-ordinator, and it is my own experience in that work that led me to propose this project. We want it to have real practical benefits for network co-ordinators, members and funders. As part of the work, we would like to establish an Action Research Group to run the length of the project, made up of those who are paid to co-ordinate networks. The idea is to ensure that we are actually responding to the issues practitioners come up against when faced with the challenge of evaluation.

If you are a network co-ordinator and interested in attending a preparatory meeting of the Action Research Group, make sure you answer the last question and we will send you further details. The first meeting of the Group will take place on the afternoon of 19th September 2000 in London.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Madeline Church

MADELINE IS DRAINING HER PINT OF GUINNESS, MUCH MORE ANIMATED NOW

MADELINE - I most definitely had the reins. It was 'my' project, and although it's hard to admit, it stayed mine, really, Mark and Claudy and I worked on the proposal together, and Mark and I on the facilitation together, but I really drove it, and did all the writing up. But when faced with questions about methodology, and 'Was it cooperative enquiry? (Heron & Reason, 2001) What sort of action research? Did you do cycles of action and reflection?' my answer is usually to draw pictures with my hands.

SHE PUTS HER GLASS ON THE BAR BEHIND HER AND STARTS TO MOVE HER HANDS. TOM WAITS CHURNS ON GRUFFLY IN THE BACKGROUND.

MADELINE - It had a life of its own. I 'spose that sounds a bit contradictory, but I think that because I was 'in charge' I let it have a life of its own. Reminds me of what Patricia Shaw talks about when she describes herself at work as 'being in charge but not in control.' (2002, p. 117).

That invitation brought in loads of responses, most saying they simple didn't have the time to spare, but would desperately like to know what we found when we found it. We started as a group of people sitting in a room asking each other what evaluation meant in the context of an international network working on 'important' issues, what others have since called 'social change networks' (Nuñez & Wilson-Grau, Appendix III), and how we might gather data to make some claim to knowing anything about what we were talking about. I pushed and pulled it along. I did the reading coz I had the time. Everyone else was working flat out. No-one but me wrote anything, again because I had the time (I was being paid for it) and the fire. I took what we all said and formed it into something that would spark more conversation. Like Shaw (2002) I tend to think of most of my work as happening through conversation. I took our conversations to be evidence that we were finding something out. It often had no form other than a meeting with a group, not always the same people, who had a particular interest in some aspect of our work. We ranged over seeking to understand the nature of our working together in networks, the many qualities and meanings attached to leadership, the ways in which our attachment to separating out and categorising, and to structure and planning, sat stiffly with our striving to be networked.

The 'thing' bubbled and grew, grew long tentacles and wound itself round our struggling minds. We sought different routes through it, and differed in our language, our practice and the shapes we wanted to put on it. My job, I felt and sensed, was to take the whole of the conversation, and make it possible for people to see and hear themselves in it, as well as allowing questions to emerge for the next round of conversation. In paper terms, that meant that I summarised and reflected on the sessions, and used different fonts for quoting different people as they entered the 'communicative space'. The group said they liked the way they could hear themselves together and separately, held within something that in a way did make sense although we couldn't necessarily see it at the time. I tended to be able to see more of it simply because I had the job of holding it.

If I think in terms of 'action', what we did more than anything was talk. And that talking was revealing. What we revealed then became subject to more questions and scrutiny. And it was really the first time any one of us had had the opportunity to sit with our work and talk about it, analytically and in conversation with others who did not need copious explanation.

Mainly we were network co-ordinators, a job which is peculiarly isolated from the institutional frameworks of identity that most participants in networks are attached to. We were and are 'network-centric' thinkers, fighting to subvert 'ego-centric' institutional norms (Miller & Stuart, 2004), driving the collaborative, horizontal power agenda through what Miller and Stuart describe as the Old Power of institutional concern for its own profile and results. Lots of isolation hit the euphoria of an instant connection. Quite a lot of energy was released.

In the end, the visible product of this work is a rather dry report. It was drafted by me and reworked through a process of the others reading, commenting, and clarifying what we meant. Through that process we came to what I think of as a level of simplicity that does not erase the complexity of what we were trying to analyse, and put on paper. This is very important.

SHE HOLDS A COPY OF 'CHURCH *ET AL.* (2003) PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE', UP TO THE CAMERA.

MADELINE - I'm afraid you are now going to need to read this, before the rest of the interview will make any sense.

> No. 121
> # PARTICIPATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND DYNAMIC CHANGE:
> ## New Thinking On Evaluating The Work Of International Networks
> ## Madeline Church *et al*
> 2003

MADELINE - Go to Appendix I, grab a seat, a drink, take your time, read, and we'll carry on tomorrow, OK?

SCENE THREE: MADELINE AND THE INTERVIEWER ARE SEATED AT A TABLE OVERLOOKING THE THAMES ON THE CAFÉ BALCONY OF THE TATE MODERN. BOTH HAVE CAPPUCCINOS. MADELINE IS STIRRING HERS.

MADELINE - The thing is, what you see on the page in Working Paper 121 doesn't tell you much about the complexity of our work together or how I influenced the direction and outcomes. I guess I am trying to fill in that gap here, because what matters to me here and now is process. I am heartily encouraged by Humberto Maturana's (A day with Humberto Maturana) attention to the importance of process, because it is here that living happens. And I for one am interested in living, not results.

CAMERA NOW IN CLOSE UP ON MADELINE'S FACE. DISSOLVE INTO

MADELINE WEARING GLASSES IN FRONT OF A COMPUTER SCREEN. SHE IS CONCENTRATING HARD AND WRITING FURIOUSLY

MADELINE VO - Over the period of nine months our Action Research Group has met 8 times. Each time I have made sure we have a decent room, and plenty of biscuits. I have also co-facilitated the meetings with my colleague, Mark, to enable me both to participate and lead. I have then revisited the meetings, created a different form from them, and provided all participants with this 'record'.

In looking back over the Action Research Group notes I notice that I have taken pains to make clear what it is that I am doing in the process. This is partly an issue of ownership, partly of transparency, partly of operating in concordance with what I consider to be a fundamental of the network form – the individual voice recognised and empowered within the collective. I have also put in the effort to ensure that each person who is participating is given their own words back so that their voice is heard as far as possible as they construct it. So I am knitting together the I of my own authentic voice as I interpret the dialogue we shared, I am grouping together the we of consensus where I hear it in the tapes, and I am offering up the personal voice as full of expression and individuality and creativity.

So in the notes for the first meeting, I believe I set something of the tone. Here my voice is clear, and the 'we' of the group is given initial form. The individual voices are as yet subsumed.

> *'In what follows I have attempted to capture the questioning spirit of the discussion, and highlight what appeared to me to be the key issues we were coming up against. This is not an exhaustive report of all that was said, obviously, and I take full responsibility for any missing elements, errrors or misunderstandings. Please offer feedback, it will enrich and deepen our work, I'm sure.' (Action Research Group notes)*

This introduction makes clear what I think I am doing: capturing the spirit, gathering the consensus, exposing the agency by claiming responsibility. I also put my authority in a place of iterative dialogue as I call for feedback which I believe to be enriching. In the second meeting I take the core of the discussion – participation – and offer us the individual voice and the group as symbiotic parts:

'This meeting was planned to take us deeper into what we mean by participation, what it looks like in our individual networks, and what the differences and points of convergence are between our assumptions about participation. It again took the form of a conversation in which we all participated, and in which all our voices were recorded. In writing up these notes, I seek to give each voice its own timbre and colour by using words actually spoken, while at the same time grouping our ideas to gain more understanding of the landscape we are charting' (Action Research Group notes)

Again there is the I and the we, the I searching for form that will do justice to the other Is and the we that we are becoming. The other Is have become part of the puzzle. This is an important reflection, and it was this commitment to holding the 'I' and the 'we' in tension together that I believe allowed the 'network image' to emerge. (Church *et al.*, 2003, Figure 3). The vision of a network of individuals knotted together in a web of open edged community by their shared values and diverse ideas, this image emerged from our joint practice, our connection and our creative individuality.

Similarly I give pride of place to the questions we raise rather than conclusions. This influences the process aspect of the work, the understanding I have that we are inquiring rather than deciding, and sets an open tone, a reflective and curious tone.

The notes are full of questions, some set out in question boxes, others embedded in the text. I know when I write up the notes that I seek to frame the questions as open questions: How questions, why questions although that may not have been how they were posed by the group. This is a deliberate act, designed to deepen and open rather than force conclusive answers. This is part of my individual way of being and knowing in the world, of not knowing and finding emerging questions to ask.

SCENE FOUR: A ROOM OF TEN PEOPLE, ALL WITH NOTEBOOKS, AND SEATED AROUND A RECTANGULAR MEETING TABLE. THE REMAINS OF A WORKING LUNCH ARE EVIDENT, AND A PACKET OF BISCUITS IS BEING TORN OPEN BY A LATECOMER. MADELINE AND A MAN OF SIMILAR AGE, MARK BITEL, WITH A GOATEE BEARD, ARE CLEARLY IN CHARGE

MADELINE VO - In the way we designed the first meeting, I wanted to avoid using the project proposal as submitted to and accepted by DfID as the working framework (see Proposal, pp. 62-66). I did not want to work through a proposal that frankly had been put together without consultation and really on the run. I was acutely aware that commitment from these busy and creative people would only come if they felt it was theirs, they could input and gain at the same time. We distributed the proposal but engaged the meeting to talk through what we understand by evaluation and what we understand by action research. This appreciation of participation, the input-gain circle, was and remains crucial to my growing understanding of what we are doing when we seek to work in networks. It also became a running theme of all our meetings and our work.

At a deeper level, my belief in the affirmative, the appreciative, the active positive approach (Ludema *et al.,* 2001; Anderson *et al.*, 2001; Alternatives to Violence Project, 1986) to working out what's going on (rather than the problem identification and solving approach) that has also given a certain lightness and creative impulse to our on-going research.

'In the introductions I asked that we all gave some indication of what it is about the work that we relish, enjoy, what drives us, what we like most about it. Overall there was a sense of satisfaction at the business of communicating, of facilitating communication, of building community across distances. Some of us felt freed by not being in a formal organisational structure.' (Action Research Group notes)

I can see the lightness in the agenda we proposed in that first meeting and we worked to:

Tentative Agenda

1. *Introductions – what inspires us to do our work?*
2. *What is the project, and how can we all benefit from it?*
3. *What do we understand 'evaluation' to mean? What is 'action research?*
4. *What are the questions we want to ask about evaluation in a network context?*
5. *What can we contribute?*
6. *What help do we need?*

If, for instance, I imagine the agenda written differently for a minute, and use some of the words that are often used when people in my profession meet and talk to one another in workshops, the agenda might have looked like this:

1. *Introductions – what challenges do we face in our work?*
2. *What is the project, and what do we need from it?*
3. *What do we find difficult about evaluation?*
4. *What will the project do for me?*
5. *How will it help me?*

I instantly feel the weight of problems, difficulty, effort, demand. I feel like sagging in my chair, and all the stuff that my work throws up, that I come to these kind of workshops to get away from, is immediately present and all-surrounding, like a suffocating blanket. The simple use of other words, generative words, sparks up the potential that I see, and makes me lean forward in my chair to catch the breath.

I can also see how this setting of tone in part led to the development of the first 'output' of the Group – the Contributions Assessment approach (Church *et al.*, 2003, p. 27). Actually, it is more than tone, it is more profound. It is staying true to a value-base, to a belief in inspiration and creativity and shared inquiry as crucial elements in any way of working that intends to change things for the better in this world.

I am also doing in this research work what I believe I do in my work as a coordinator for the ABColombia Group. I am both facilitating a process of consensus-building, recognising the strengths of individual members and what they can contribute, at the same time as offering leadership. By leadership I mean moving things forward, pushing at the boundaries, challenging us to innovate, motivating us all.

'This time I have attempted to draw greater conclusions and make proposals for how we might use tools and take things forward. This is partly as I take responsibility for keeping the process rolling and the wheel oiled, and partly simply to generate further thinking, discussion and experimentation with what is possible.' (Action Research Group notes)

I can see that I become more confident in this role in the Action Research Group as the relationships consolidate and the group starts to feel a sense of cohesion. I am more detailed in my explanations of what I have done with the material, more transparent, and also more authoritative. I believe this confidence and authority comes as a result of the way I am facilitating the work, working to interconnect the three different subjectivities: the I of Madeline, the Is of the participants, and the we of those connected Is. As I say above, taking my own authority and leading, calling up the strengths and quirks and interests of each individual, building a community out of us all, and pushing us forward again.

> *'What I have done with the notes this time is to give a quick summary of what we talked about. Then I have drawn out some quotes and indicated where people think they have advanced on Monitoring and Evaluation in their work. I have noted the discussions around networks and power, and how we might look at this in more depth. I have also highlighted the tensions around facilitating and leading, and propose that it can also be construed as a tension between process and action, or mediation and advocacy. I have pulled together all the thinking so far into 'Guidance for a Contribution Assessment' (see Guidance). Lastly I list some of the research questions that arose from this meeting, which we cannot necessarily address but are useful to keep in mind.' (Action Research Group notes)*

By the fifth meeting, I feel bold enough to start 'conceptualising', offering us ways that might enable us to begin to talk out there to an audience of 'third persons'.

> *'I have moved considerably beyond in the hope of drawing our thoughts together into a framework that might be useful for us and others who are practically involved in networks. This is not a 'conclusion' or the 'right approach', but one that I hope does justice to the key concerns we have expressed, and the tensions that exist in our work. To go back to basics a bit, this is an action research project, and as such its brief is to gather in understanding and experience from practitioners, and make that available in a more 'conceptualised' form to others. That is, build the theory on the practice, and not vice versa. The idea as always is to keep things moving.' (Action Research Group notes)*

I am acutely conscious that this conceptualising may not work for others. I feel tentative but excited about the prospect. I also feel a little threatened by the way in which other consultants and academics who have something to say on the matter are insisting on typologies of networks and the fit of type to purpose. I know I feel strongly about not doing typologies, but it may not be shared by the group. I know that I believe that the starting point of a network – the shared values and purpose and the diversity of participants - should be the aspects that define the way we work together and relate (structure). But I also know that people are keen on 'models'. As are research funders. It somehow anchors them in a solid world. The search for an image in some senses starts here, in resistance to the idea of models.

This is also the point where I begin to wrestle with an underlying anxiety that someone, either during the process of doing the action research, or here and now hearing this account of it, is about to shout, HOLD ON A MINUTE. WHERE'S THE METHODOLOGY, WHERE'S THE MODEL, WHERE'S THE UNDERLYING THEORY, WHERE'S THE LOG-FRAME, WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE, WHERE'S THE RIGOUR? If I think back hard, rigorously, then I remember that from this moment on the project generated a kind of fearful how-do-I-write-this-up kind of attention from me, and we moved out of the cosy circle of conversation and into the 'third-person' place, where we had to account for what we'd been doing, in writing, and present it in a form accessible and useful for others.

That meant the hard-slog of turning fun, and inquiry and practice and art, into the dry flat smooth planed-down professionalism of a 'report on evaluation of international networks'. If the feedback is anything to go by, it has been used widely, in myriad ways, by a real variety of people across the globe struggling like us to make sense of network organising.

SCENE FIVE: BAR

MADELINE FIDDLES PENSIVELY WITH HER EMPTY PINT GLASS. SHE LOOKS QUIZZICALLY AT THE CAMERA. SEEMS TO WONDER WHETHER TO SPEAK

MADELINE - There are two core moments in the process that are worth a bit more time, a bit more attention, as they say a lot about how being in conversation with others is both a source of inspiration and generates creativity. The first moment is a more detailed account of how the Contributions Assessment idea came in a flash of inspiration.

SCENE SIX: A BUSY OXFORD STREET. BICYCLES, NOISE OF TRAFFIC, BLACK CLOUDY SUNNY WEATHER, A RAINBOW MIGHT APPEAR. WE SEE MADELINE RUN-WALKING TOWARD CAMERA. AS SHE GETS CLOSER WE SEE HER FACE LIT UP WITH AN EXPLOSION OF IDEAS, SHE IS ALMOST SKIPPING, AND SWINGING HER RUCKSACK LIKE A KID COMING HOME FROM SCHOOL.

MADELINE VO - The thought - it happened as I was walking back from a meeting about the project with two people I thought were proper professionals in the field. I didn't count myself as a 'proper' professional. Like many actors, I carry a huge conviction that I will be 'found out' as a fraud, and that has not changed as I have zig-zagged my way from one profession to another. It was very early days and I was struggling. In the conversation with Candy and Tina, while I was trying to 'explain' the project, and in some way 'account for myself' to a pair who seemed to me to be very experienced and likely to know more than me, I had said the word 'contribution' and the word 'need' and begun to play with them. In the development world, and these were two women from the development world, 'meeting needs' is a project norm. Funding is dedicated to meeting needs. Funding comes as a result of an assessment of the level and variety of need. Needs assessments are commonplace justifiers. As I was talking, a haze began to clear. It was like a sherbert exploding on my tongue. Fizzy, and tickly up the nose, and warm as it spread.

As I was walking back through the streets of Oxford, a fitting place to have a moment of conceptual inspiration, suddenly the idea of thinking about what people can contribute, what they can add to the mix, put in, took the notion of 'needs' and 'demands' and flipped it on its head. What makes a network sustainable and alive is what people put in, I thought. What they get out is altered by this. Contributing brings good things. If we just shift our minds round 180 degrees and think of ourselves as potent, full of dynamism and energy and good ideas, instead of needy and empty and waiting, we can see what this network thing is all about. It's not about meeting needs, it's about sharing the wealth we have, and creating more through that sharing.

The thrill – it all fitted together. The importance I attach to focusing on the positive, the affirmative, and the life-enhancing rather than the energy-draining seemed encapsulated

in this idea. I don't claim to be able to live it; it is just that I fully believe that it has a capacity to affect us at a very profound level. I am an intensely critical person, and highly resistant to joining any happy, clappy, positive-thinking club, but my experience tells me that engaging people in discussing best possibilities rather than fixing problems takes us to a different, more creative place. In my work as an AVP facilitator, the emphasis we placed on looking for our best selves consistently surprised me in its power to affect those who have lived with violence all their lives.

The fear was that my colleagues would think it a babyish and simplistic idea. I had set myself up to 'run' this project and I knew at least one person wanted to get beyond the 'same-old-same-old' and think differently and creatively about networks. I felt I had to deliver something, and in a context in which people are very problem-focused. I took the idea to my colleague Mark. I was excited but he didn't seem at the time to leap with me. I felt flat. Then he rang me back, and it was as if the idea had percolated through him as it had through me. He was suddenly really excited by the idea. So simple. We introduced it at the end of our next Action Research Group meeting

SCENE SEVEN: MARK, MADELINE, PRIYANTHI, SALLY, CANDY, KATHLEEN AND MANISHA ARE SEATED AROUND A RECTANGULAR MEETING TABLE. A TAPE RECORDER IS RUNNING, AND MADELINE IS LOOKING NERVOUS. MARK IS SMILING ENCOURAGINGLY.

MADELINE - As a result of the last meeting, I went away and started thinking again about networks, and the specificities of networks, and what networks are, and why they are different, and I was really struck by two things: one is that people talked about the *needs* of their participants. There was lots of talk about how we get people to participate, what are the *needs?*, are we meeting the *needs?,* what net benefit will people get out of it?, people will only participate if they see added value, some people are participating a lot, others not participating at all, a lot of stuff about 'Is the network meeting the needs of its members?'

And I went away and thought, this is a very project approach. What is it that makes a network sustainable and gives a network its energy? It will only be sustainable not because of what you or I or Kathleen do, but because people have a driving interest. Where does a network come from? People meet at a workshop, at a conference, somewhere, and they say 'Oooh, I didn't know about you, I do something rather similar', or 'we could do something together' and before you know what has happened it's possible that you have a network on your hands. It comes from – 'you're doing this, and I'm doing that, and the two of us could do something bigger together.'

What we should be doing as a starting point, is not a needs assessment but a <u>contributions assessment</u>. What is it that you do that you would like to bring into a wider environment?, what is it that you have that you would like to share? What is that drives you?, what is it that is at the centre of your work?, where is the energy for you? What can you offer to someone else? My theory is, and it needs to be tested, that if you start from a place of 'what have you got that everyone else can share?' rather than 'what haven't you got that needs filling?' then you will have a rich mass of different dishes on the table, which all actually relate to something we have in common, and people can look around and say, I didn't know I needed that but actually I could use some of that, in order to give me the energy that I need to keep going. I think that if we start from a 'what can I

contribute?' approach rather than 'what can I get out of it?' approach, then the needs they think they have will actually end up being substantially different.

CANDY - 'I don't know I need it until it's offered' is part of the thinking behind that, is that right?

MADELINE - One, I may not know I need it until I know it's there, or know it exists, and that I could possibly share some of it with you, but also two, if I start from a place of 'what is my need?', I end up saying, 'you must fill my need, this is what the network must give me,' rather than 'this is what I can offer and you could benefit by what I need to give you for this to work.' It seems to me that we are struggling a lot with participation and how to get people to participate, and if that is the question, then looking at what people can give is often a really good way to get people involved. So if you were starting from the planning stage, for instance, Sally, your document gives a really good overview of what people do, so that if you were to go back to them and ask them what they could bring, and contribute, then you might get an understanding of what people's *real* capacity is, how much you, Sally, as the secretariat, need to do that can't be done by other people, what is the extra that you, Sally, need to put in.

PRIYANTHI - yes that's brilliant…that's really good.

MADELINE – and I just thought, Oh, we're going about this from a completely…maybe if we switch it round the other way..

SALLY - I can't quite see…I can't quite see the great realisation..

MARK - I think that so often people just do the needs assessment and then they evaluate on 'have your needs been fulfilled' whereas in this people both give and take, if a network is working effectively it is not all give and it is not all take, it's give and take..and so therefore you need some kind of assessment of not just what do you need from us but what can you contribute..

MADELINE: Ye….

MARK - sorry just one more thing, and not only does that put more stuff in the pot that can be used by the network, but then when it comes time to reflect and evaluate on how successful the network has been, in shifting these resources round the network, you can ask them if they have been able to contribute, have the facilitation structures of the network enabled you to contribute what you had to give?, rather than did it just fill you up. If contributing is an indicator of participation and empowerment,

MADELINE - Yes

MARK - then actually looking at what people had to offer, and then going back and asking them if they were able to give that, seems to me to be completely uncharted.

SALLY – oh that's much clearer, but that's where I started off, because the network didn't exist, there were only 17 organisations on the committee, and one of things that I used was that I didn't think they were targeting the resources in their organisation to enable them to contribute to the network effectively.

MADELINE – right.

SALLY - For example, Amnesty International was on the management committee, and I thought that given that they have a massive global reach in masses of countries with loads of volunteers working on human rights, I thought them being on the management committee was a waste of their resources, so I discussed it with them and they've decided now that it would be much better if they were on the regional networks group and able to put in their resources regionally.

MADELINE – well you're one step ahead..

SALLY – no I'm not.

ALL - you are!

SALLY – but we haven't actually got a network going yet.

EVERYONE LAUGHS

KATHLEEN – to a certain extent we have done that, mainly with our executive committee, we haven't done it so much with the broader network..

MADELINE - exactly.

KATHLEEN – but people are contributing, for instance through me starting things, like the newsletter, I don't go out and solicit stuff, they send it to me without me asking which is a help, but we did a sort of needs assessment on the committee and one of the questions was, 'What do you think you can do to contribute' , and people say why they joined and what skills they would like to contribute, but it's easy to *list* them

MADELINE - yeah

KATHLEEN - and I guess that the next thing is monitoring, because we will set up little working group things and then just before the meeting something comes up and people cancel, because for some reason, we haven't quite got there, we haven't quite got that contribution in a proactive contributory way, instead of them saying that their *need* is that they want to put in. Like in a sense there's a difference, some people will say that they have a contribution to make but that may be to get their voice heard or to learn, instead of them saying that they, almost selflessly if you like, I want to make a contribution to be able to get it going and I'm willing to put the time in, not everybody is like that, there are people who are willing to put it the time, and I don't know if I'm going round in circles but I think we need to look at the difference between real contribution and people only saying I want to contribute in a needy sort of way.

SALLY - I think that maybe I've done it with one or two organisations, but I haven't done it in any way systematically and I haven't done it in any way which is measurable.

MARK - And that systematically and measurably gives you a baseline to reflect on at later date to find out how you facilitated it.

PRIYANTHI - That's quite brilliant actually, because in the secretariat team we were always getting quite concerned about these needs, and we said it is more than just meeting individual needs of members. So in our report I asked people to say about their work in the past year and we do a summary of stuff, using the specific aims and ask them how they have contributed to the specific aims and the good thing about that is because we have such diverse members, it puts them all on an equal footing. So our donors are telling us how they can promote networks at a national and regional level, and our national networks are saying exactly the same thing, and although the donors might be giving us money, that's just an additional contribution, they are on the same level in a substantive way. And it also gives us the same basis for the Secretariat. We can say what our contribution is, to highlight gaps, for instance about gender and transport. So I think it's a really useful way of putting the cards on the table in a fairly equal way.

MADELINE - And my sense would be and I may be wrong, that if you start from that place, it is much easier for you to see as a network where the added value would be, so that you're not replicating things because you can see they are happening somewhere else, or you can pass on someone who needs some thing to someone who has it, but the very process of looking at what it is possible for everyone to contribute will change the direction of the work, in a way that going the other way will change it in a different way.

SALLY - It's gaps, if you find that you haven't got anyone with advocacy skills, you can start looking for an organisation to join the network who has that.

MADELINE - So the idea of presenting it at this stage, to find out if it is worth exploring, we could try and develop some kind of simple, sophisticated tool that would enable us to do such an assessment of the network that we are currently involved in..

CANDY - Could you get it done by yesterday?

THEY ALL LAUGH

CANDY - I'm going out to the Middle East at the end of the month.

MARK - But pragmatically, ask that question, and get that information recorded, because if what a network does is shift knowledge and information and stuff round a system, then knowing what there was in the first place is useful in order to enable you to make an assessment about whether you have enabled that to happen.

CANDY - In the Lebanon we will be doing what we call a mapping, to try and get some of this information, and I also like the way of switching it around to contribution, I like the way that it's starting from the positive energy. I'm just curious if there are bits of tools somewhere to start adapting. But just picking up on something Madeline was saying, I heard something saying, forget the lack at the moment, because the lack will

come out of what we have got, and I am curious about that, as a question, will it actually or not..?

MADELINE - That's why we need a tool that allows a questioning process to happen, because it's not just a question of saying what can you contribute….I think the more broken down and more questioning of that contribution you can be, the more useful it is as information.

MARK - and I think the needs will emerge,

MADELINE - I do too..

MARK - they will either emerge through clear gaps, or through looking at the strategy of what we are trying to do and what we have to do it with, I don't just mean financial resources, the inputs or contributions of the people, or even if you are doing a contributions assessment people will still say 'yes but, this is what I need'.

MADELINE - Yes they will.

MARK - They will still voice it without being asked, you will hear, and if it is an important enough need it will come through loud and clear.

CANDY - But are you actually suggesting that you steer clear of what people need, that you let that arise, as opposed to asking people 'what is your contribution?' and 'what is your need?'.

MARK - As a deliberate strategy, yes,

MADELINE - As a deliberate approach, yes,

PRIYANTHI - I think that is really interesting, that's really good, because what you are saying is that you are in this network because you have something to contribute.

MADELINE - how the network can be helped, and that's what I think is different, I think networks are different, and the fundamental difference is that the network only works and only exists because of what members put into it, and if you don't know what members can put in, what are we doing?

PRIYANTHI - we should have found this out about a month ago.

THEY ALL LAUGH LOUDLY

SALLY - I had somebody say the other day 'the thing that our organisation can do for the network is write out in simple language a lot of the complicated international procedures to share with people', and I thought, 'that would be nice…'

MADELINE – and then you don't have to do it.

SALLY - well exactly.

MARK - you just have to get it out and round the network, so that once it has been done it has a distribution.

MADELINE - and the point is that it is not that people are not doing that, people are contributing, but it is the starting point, it is somehow the hook point, and it's absolutely to do with my own philosophy I suppose, if I am driven by what I lack, I give away my power and I give away my energy, I give away my sense of self. If I am driven by what I can contribute, I engage because I think that what I can contribute is valuable.

KATHLEEN - I think this is quite timely, because one of the objectives that we identified as what we wanted to do was to set up a system of assessing learning needs of people in the network.

THEY ALL LAUGH AGAIN

KATHLEEN: and I was hoping that participating in this would give me some ideas of what to do and how to do that, so this is great. I think it is wonderful to turn it around to contributions; it's much more proactive and much more positive.

CANDY - I have a little caveat, if I thought of going round and asking a group of individuals 'what can you contribute?', there would be some real cultural conditioning going on there, and the women might well be the first people to say 'well I can't contribute anything', or someone in another culture, so we have to be careful that we don't exclude people, that we only take the most confident.

MADELINE - But I think if we take what we would normally do in any needs assessment, it would have to have the gender awareness there, the cultural context there, so it doesn't exist outside the norms, it's rooted in the same kind of awareness, so you think through the tool so that you can draw out the power dynamics or the resource dynamics, but that somewhere along the line what your are talking about is valuing, a whole range of things, and that one is not more valuable as a contribution than others.

CANDY - No but that you support people through that process.

MARK - Maybe through the use of a wide range of examples, would help to stimulate thinking about what the different types of contributions, examples of what other people have said they could contribute, at different levels, they can be theoretical to start off with, so that you suggest a range that are all equally valid.

CANDY - And that people don't think that this is something extra, or different to their normal work.

MADELINE - Exactly, for me this is about being realistic as well, people say 'I'll participate in that, I'll do that' and actually they participate in one meeting in the whole year, or responded twice to what they said they would respond to, and you realise this is obviously not a realistic assessment of what you can contribute, and we need to go back and say 'ok you said this is what you could

contribute and this is what has actually happened, is there any way we can make those two things more alike'.

PRIYANTHI: Well I think that the contribution engenders commitment.

MADELINE: Exactly, it's about engendering commitment.

THE GROUP CONTINUE TALKING IN THE BACKGROUND

MADELINE VO - listening back to the tape, my voice is very loud and excitable and I laugh inappropriately and strangely. I can hear on the tape the way I am desperate for my idea to be approved by others, that I am fearful it will be seen as simplistic and idiotic and that I will be exposed as a fraud. I am conscious that Priyanthi is in this group to get new ideas about the subject and I have been worried that I have to produce them. Yet I am also very engaged by the simplicity of the idea and how it slots right into my value base, and my beliefs about how we build a better world.

SCENE EIGHT: DISSOLVE BACK INTO BAR SCENE.

MADELINE - After this meeting I write it up. I use the tape, then an annotated version of the conversation, then I distil it into the notes of the meeting. It is beginning to settle nicely, it feels right.

As a group we develop some guidance for others about it – this happens in our next meeting, and mysteriously the tape for this section doesn't work. I have to make it up from my notes which were paltry. Maybe I don't want to share the credit. I give all in the group the credit but reserve some for myself by putting my name on the front as having drafted it.

MADELINE WAVES ANOTHER DOCUMENT AT THE CAMERA. WE SEE

CONTRIBUTIONS ASSESSMENT – A TOOL FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN A NETWORK

Guidance for gathering in the range of contributions that network members might make to a network

DRAFTED BY MADELINE CHURCH

A network depends for its life and vitality on the **input** of members. Networks tend to grow out of conferences, seminars, conversations, joint projects, where people connect through common agendas and purpose and think that they can offer one another and the wider world something **better together than separately**. A secretariat helps to **facilitate** the exchange and connection between those who participate, and to **draw on and circulate** the resources of members for the greater good, and towards the achievement of the overall shared aim.

One of the key issues for network projects and for those who coordinate networks is **participation**. How members participate, why some participate more than others, how to encourage greater participation, how to 'measure' participation.

A contributions assessment seeks to add another layer to needs assessment approaches. Most of us working in development and human rights are used to the needs assessment approach, of establishing a base line of project end-user needs before the project starts. You can then evaluate the work against that baseline, seeing if needs have actually been met by the project.

A Contributions Assessment aims to find out what people might **contribute**. It can then serve as a baseline for assessing **if the network enabled its members to contribute over time**, and how that contribution gave **added value** to the network.

The underlying philosophy

A **network** thrives on the drive, commitment and passion of its members. It is the combination of **diversity** (many autonomous institutions and individuals) **and a common purpose**, which gives a network power and energy. It is thus vital for a network to know what resources its members have and would be prepared to contribute and share. The aim of a contributions assessment is to hook into where the energy lies for the members, and involve people through their passion and drive to make a difference.

♦ A contributions assessment maps what members believe they can contribute to a network project. We are not talking simply about financial commitment in terms of a grant, but human resources, activities, skills, and energy. Value is placed on the interest and willingness to contribute, not the size or extent of what members can contribute
♦ A contributions assessment pays attention to power differences, and obstacles to commitment
♦ A contributions assessment enables the network as a whole to see what resources it can draw on and where it might need to seek extra members or resources
♦ A contributions assessment enables members to be realistic about what they can commit to – they are asked to think carefully about what such a contribution means for them in terms of time and energy and resources.
♦ A contributions assessment gives you baseline information against which you can evaluate. It enables you to ask –has the network provided its members with the opportunities they wanted to contribute? Has it enabled them to share in what is already in the pot? Has it enabled them to participate in making a difference?
♦ Evaluation can be done on how successful the network secretariat or coordinator has been in shifting the resources around the network, and how far the facilitation structures of the network have enabled that exchange to occur.

How you might do a Contributions Assessment
♦ Keep it focused on **contributions** – we all find it a lot easier to articulate what we might need rather than what we can add. The needs will get articulated in other ways.

- ◆ Decide who your contributors are – general membership, donors, steering committees, national network coordinators, secretariat, …
- ◆ Be clear about what your network is aiming for – its helpful to have a simple statement or diagram that presents what the network is for, to enable people to see how and where they can contribute (see Weaver's Triangle for Networks as an example)
- ◆ Provide specific examples of contributions – participation in a committee, designing newsletter, organising a conference, doing policy analysis, etc. This will help members to define where their expertise might fit in.
- ◆ Ask members to think carefully about what they would like to contribute and how they might deliver it.
- ◆ Find out what the secretariat or coordinating function can do to enable people to contribute more effectively.

MADELINE - I send it to a person in Africa who has emailed me for guidance on a workshop they are holding to discuss whether or not to set up a network. Mark uses it in an evaluation he is working on with a partnership of organisations. We try it out with the networks involved. It goes into the report. The report starts to circulate and get responses. And interestingly, as you will see later on, I begin to question the whole notion of 'neediness' in many different settings, hoping to begin wider discussions on how to tap into the potential energy and brilliance we all bring into connection with one another, and what we can offer up.

CAMERA PULLS OUT AGAIN

A COUPLE HAVE NOW ENTERED THE BAR, AND SIT APART, IN DISCREET CONVERSATION. MADELINE RELUCTANTLY DRAGS HER EYES FROM THEM, COMES BACK TO CAMERA

MADELINE - The other moment was one of those slow-burns, a creeping response to words that won't go away, like a song stuck replaying in your head, a melody that catches itself round and round. Again, a couple of others were involved, again people I had never met before who wanted to 'know' something about me and my work, to whom I was trying to 'account' for myself. Obviously telling stories about my self sets something off….

SCENE NINE: A WORKSHOP ROOM WITH TWENTY PEOPLE ALL ARRANGED IN PAIRS AT TABLES, SITTING ON THE FLOOR, ON CHAIRS, TALKING AND LISTENING AND SOMETIMES LAUGHING. MADELINE IS TALKING WITH HER HANDS. THESE ARE NOT THE SAME PEOPLE AS IN THE ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

MADELINE VO: On a wet day in March, I attended a workshop. First we had to do a 'getting-to-know-you' thing with the person next to us, and feed back to the group. As usual I felt slightly sick at the prospect, determined to protect myself, asking myself yet again why I put myself through this kind of group thing. I have no memory of this conversation. In the feed-back session, I listened to two people, Sara and Ty, who spoke softly and beautifully about their 'getting to know you' conversation. I listened rapt to Ty's description of Sara's searching questions which had opened up their communication.

They smiled and acknowledged each other with vulnerability and tenderness. It was a bit like watching an early moment in a love affair. I wanted very much to be part of their bubble. In the following exercises I went looking for Sara and for Ty. I ended up working with him.

The keys words in my brain that day were inspiration, creativity, networks. I had read lots about the latter, and am in search of the former, always, as a way of getting us all high on what we are up to. We talked about all this, and about the flexible, robust, muscular use of language we are after to bring our stuff to life. He said these words in the course of our varied conversation:

threads, knots and nets   threads knots and nets   threads knots and nets

He kept asking me about my work, and I wanted to explain, but didn't know how.

SCENE TEN: CUT BACK TO THE BAR
MADELINE IS REALLY MOTORING, WALKING UP AND DOWN, ANIMATED, ALIVE

MADELINE - A week later I am sitting in the UN library in Geneva, cramming in some work on my research before having to become the 'lobby-networker' that I am paid to be. I can hear the words

threads, knots and nets   threads knots and nets   threads knots and nets

floating around, like music, and I start to draw them. I know what I am looking for. I am looking for an image and a concept that will help us in the Action Research Group to differentiate the work of the network from the work of the secretariat or coordinating function; to distinguish the work of the network from the work of its members; to see and understand the network structure as something unique, radically different from the norm of organisational structure. I am looking for a way to help us to talk about governance structures and decision-making so that we can see a way out of the tendencies toward more rule-making and greater reach for control. I want to see The Difference and be able to explain it, conceptually.

I mess about with little triangles – representing members or participants – connected to other members via threads.

SHE HITS THE KEYBOARD OF A LAPTOP ON THE BAR AND A SCREEN LIGHTS UP BEHIND HER, A POWER-POINT DIAGRAM COMES INTO VIEW
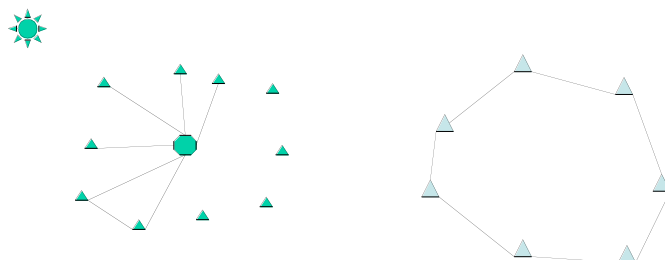
MADELINE - This isn't new, I've been doing this for ages, on paper, on the computer, in my mind at night before sleep. I put the co-ordination secretariat in the middle and make lines in and out, bilaterally and multilaterally.

SHE SCROLLS TO THE NEXT SLIDE

MADELINE - I have the little triangle participants connected to the co-ordination secretariat, I put in dotted lines to break it up, Starkey (1997) does this, others do this, this is not new. But it doesn't feel right.
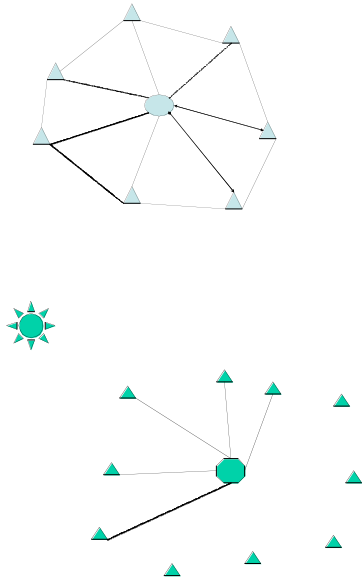

SHE FLIPS IT OFF AGAIN

MADELINE - I return to my fundamentals. The network is based on the relational. This is the process that gives the network its strength. The common purpose is what makes it a network, not simply networking. We are in pursuit of something joined, something together, and something explicit which we have signed up to. And then we are doing, we are undertaking, and engaging in an effort to realise that goal. It is the joint activity that gives us edge and power. This is what's missing from the picture: the activity we do together.

The inspirational moment hits me – SO OBVIOUS and so simple.

SHE RUNS THE POWER-POINT PRESENTATION
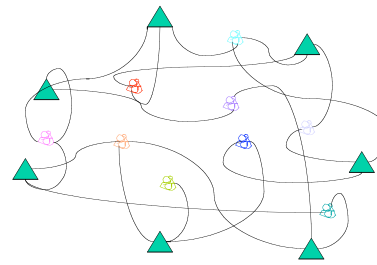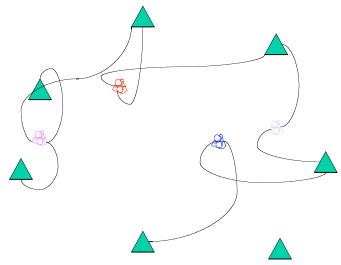
MADELINE - The threads join us together through the knots of our joint activity. It is the relational, engaged in the creational, that creates the structure. The threads tie together in knots and create the strength to hold us. The co-ordinator, or secretariat is the artisan. Keeps the net in good order, knows which knots are best for what, notices the breaks and fraying and seeks to rejoin them.

It was a moment of great clarity and inspiration. And I'd got there through reading, talking, thinking, talking, reading, thinking, and waiting for the images and words. I waited for them and they came.

SHE SMILES AT THE INTERVIEWER, ENERGETIC, RADIANT

God, is it true that both these events are sparked by people asking me questions about my work and my life? And me actually finding a way to answer them, instead of avoiding them?

SHE GOES AND SITS AT THE TABLE WHERE THE COUPLE ARE STILL TALKING QUIETLY

MADELINE - How amazing…..

THE CAMERA PULLS OUT, THE SCREEN DISSOLVES INTO TEXT

'It is difficult to know with precision how things became as they have, to be able to say with some assurance that first it was this and it then led to that and the other, and now here we are. The moments slip through my fingers. Even as I recount them to myself, I can hear echoes of what I am suppressing, of something I've forgotten to remember, which then makes the telling so difficult when I don't wish it to be. But it is possible to say something, and I have an urge to give this account, to give an accounting of the minor dramas I have witnessed and played a part in, and whose endings and beginnings stretch away from me. I don't think it's a noble urge. What I mean is, I don't know a great truth which I ache to impart, nor have I lived an exemplary experience which will illuminate our conditions and our times. Though I have lived, I have lived…….I have time on my hands, I am in the hands of time, so I might as well account for myself. Sooner or later we have to attend to that.' (Gurnah, 2000, p.2)

END OF PART ONE

PART TWO

SCENE ONE: MADELINE IS LOLLING ON A GREEN SOFA IN AN UNTIDY LIVING ROOM, HALF-READING A RATHER TATTY BOOK. SHE HAS A REMOTE CONTROL, AND THE VIDEO OF PART ONE IS PAUSED ON THE GURNAH TEXT. SHE TURNS TO SPEAK INTO A VIDEO CAMERA, MAKING A VIDEO DIARY

That 'how amazing' really was what I said to myself as I wrote that last scene. I have spent five years going to supervision sessions with Jack Whitehead, Jonathan Gibbs and Eleanor Lohr, and I can hear a repeated refrain that plays in the background of every conversation. What is it that you do, Madeline?

My sister has said and my father and brother have said and my friend Sheila and Phyllida have said, 'someone asked me what you do for a living, and I realised I couldn't really say.'

I have noticed that when anyone asks me what my research is about I say, 'I'll tell you when I know.'

Avoiding answering questions for fear of being known. Answering questions with questions to divert attention. I hadn't realised how much my thirst for conversation with others releases creative potential in me when I stop blocking and start responding to inquiries about who I am and what I do. Are you getting to know me any better? I certainly am.

SHE WAVES THE BOOK AT THE CAMERA – WEB OF LIFE BY FRITJOF CAPRA

I came upon Capra (1996) at the end, at the end of the action research project. After I had struggled with conceptualising networks, and wound my way in and out of articulating how structure, relationship, action, and trust interact in building the dynamic tension of the network form. Capra's name kept appearing in bibliographies, lists, conversations, like a beckoning angel, as I read and wrote and thought and spoke and listened my way through the year of actual hands-on research, struggling to make sense. Web of Life was always out of the library, or missing from the shelf if in. It was out of stock in the bookshops.

So this last year, when it feels and appears as if I have done almost nothing, except slob about on this sofa, I have been immersed in Capra. First to say is that I am not a science graduate, never got beyond Human Biology A level, and cannot begin to talk knowledgably about mathematics of any kind, whether classical or the mathematics of complexity. Not going to try. But I am hoping to shed more light on my ideas by engaging with his (and through him many others). As a small contribution to talking across the artificial divides of 'disciplines' I am sure he would approve. He points out that one of the effects of the fragmentation in our Cartesian world is generalised mathematical ignorance and wider appreciation of the beauty of mathematics one of its casualties.

SHE OPENS THE BOOK AT A PAGE WITH THE CORNER TURNED DOWN AND BEGINS TO READ

'Today the new mathematics of complexity is making more and more people realise that mathematics is much more than dry formulas; that the understanding of pattern is crucial to understanding the living world around us, and that all questions of pattern, order and complexity are essentially mathematical.' (Capra, 1996, p. 150)

All that by way of justifying my sitting down with him. The pictures of Mandelbrot sets are beautiful.

Capra, like many of us, is asking the huge questions: How did complex structures emerge? What is the relationship between mind and brain? What is consciousness? He is trying to understand the 'integrative actions of living systems.' (p. *ix*)

Again like most of us, he is asking such questions in the midst of a significant shift in world-view that appears to be taking place across disciplines, from a mechanistic to a ecological world view, 'a unified view of mind, matter and life.' (p. *x*) The shift is not just about concepts, its about the words we use, the way we connect one thing to another, the communication forms we use, the images we have in our heads, the way we learn. For instance, he acknowledges in the preface that the linear structure of a written text is a real challenge when it comes to communicating the interconnected nature of ideas.

AGAIN SHE READS OUT LOUD

'In my struggle to communicate a complex network of concepts and ideas within the linear constraints of written language, I felt that it would help to interconnect the text by a network of footnotes.' (p.xi)

As a strategy it doesn't really work, but it's better than nothing. He himself is caught in the paradox of having to communicate a radically different interconnected networked non-linear world-view to others through a linear structure, possibly, but not necessarily imposed by publishing demands. It is interesting that when he talks about the way Romantics like Blake were leaders in rejecting Cartesianism, they were people who are remembered for their art, paintings, and poetry, their sheer visual and poetic artistry.

He writes about enormous world challenges - crises of poverty, environmental degradation, and rampant consumerism - and encapsulates it all into one 'crisis of perception.' 'It derives from the fact that most of us, and especially our large social institutions subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world.' (p. 4)

My sense is that there are many of us who do not subscribe to that world-view, certainly those I work with, but we are somehow chained to the concepts and structures by the very simple things like project proposals, evaluation methodology, and, of course, resources. What appeared in the sixties and seventies to be a flowering of other ways of seeking change in the world has been somehow high-jacked by the techno-rational top-down measure-or-be-bankrupted 'target'- obsessed world leadership we have today.

What Capra urges us to do is 'to question every single aspect of the old paradigm' (p. 7) - mechanical universe, human body as machine, competition as driving force of society, unlimited material progress, and subjugation of women by men - something that 'requires not only an expansion of our perceptions and ways of thinking, but also of our values.' (p.

9) Just reading his book I can feel Skolimowski's 'spiral of understanding' starting to disintegrate (1994, p. 223), so it's certainly challenging.

Most of all what Capra does is argue that the new paradigm is one in which the network has dominance. The network is the key metaphor, the structure, the organisational form, the concept that unifies substance, form and process. The beckoning angel has had it all along. I am not sure if I would have recognised it all if I had not got there myself another way, but this is a very reassuring book. Maybe too cosy? Or still too categorised? I'm not sure

This is a world where complexity, Mandelbrot sets, and sub-atomic particles make up the account he is offering of how life works, in which the masters of evolution are bacteria, and where evolutionary success is not a triumph of the fittest, but a co-created process of complementarities, cooperation, and coordination. Creativity is the key to greater degrees of complexity and interconnection, as self-producing bounded networks of feedback loops transform themselves through interaction with their environments. Heady stuff.

Capra reiterates that there has always been a tension between mechanism and holism, a 'dichotomy between substance (matter, structure, quantity) and form (pattern, order, quality)' (1996, p. 18)

This is a tension that is obvious in our social change networks, especially with the way in which people seek an 'easy' structural answer to what are often relationship issues. Capra gives priority to 'configuration and relationship as the important aspects of organisation' (p. 27), taking his lead from Aristotle, Goethe, the Romantics, and Kant. He sits much more comfortably with the idea of 'entelechy' - the idea that form is immanent in matter, and the separation of matter and form only possible in the abstract, than with Galileo's commitment to the measurable and quantifiable, or Descartes' reductionism. Goethe and the Romantics perception that form is a pattern of relationships within an organised whole is another way of expressing what I have tried to unpick when it comes to our networked way of working.

Capra doesn't do much in this book to 'apply' this thinking to social systems (the next book *The Hidden Connections* takes this further) but he certainly claims that

> *'the ideal structure for [influencing others] is not the hierarchy but the network, which is also the central metaphor of ecology. The paradigm shift thus includes a shift in social organisation from hierarchies to networks.' (1996, p. 10)*

SHE GETS UP NOW, STARTS TO WANDER ABOUT THE ROOM

Truth is, I have ended up with what seems like a long series of questions about the 'application' of his ideas to the social systems I am working with, as well as a clear sense that I think we are talking the same language, and that my ideas fit neatly with his.

He begins from a system point-of-view, which ultimately means understanding something by contextualising it and looking at it placed within a more extensive inter-connected picture.

'To understand things systemically literally means to put them into a context, to establish the nature of their relationships.' (p. 27)

'Systems thinking is contextual, which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of a larger whole.' (p. 30)

SHE LOOKS AT THE ROOM, THE MIRROR, THE BITS OF HER LIFE, THE ART ON THE WALLS

His thesis is that not only is it <u>not</u> possible to view the whole through its component parts, but that looking at parts in isolation actually destroys the unique nature of the whole, which gains its uniqueness through the relationships and connections between the parts. Thus pattern makes structure.

'According to the systems view, the essential properties of an organism, or living system, are properties of the whole, which none of the parts share. They arise from the interactions and relationships between the parts. These properties are destroyed when the system is dissected, either physically or theoretically into isolated elements.' (p. 29)

This, I think, was part of my struggle to create a picture for us to work with in the networks research. The pictures we had as givens failed to show us anything about pattern (nature of relationship), they seemed only to reflect parts and the connections between them. We were working with bits of structure which we knew to be connected, but the meaning of that connection was missing. What I did, with my new network image was to put in the context, that social change networks are formed in order to *do something*, *to act.* And the doing something was the essential motivator for relationship.

So, given that my research questions are about how we find more appropriate evaluation approaches, especially when faced with questions about the 'effectiveness of social change networks', how does this 'systems/context' work help? Which context are we talking about?

Much of the mainly unspoken theory of organising in social change networks is that it allows for connection points into many more systems, systems that nestle within one another, than a single entity or organisation can possibly manage. The assumption is that if you can enter through as many connection points and levels as possible, shifts can be made that will inevitably disrupt and change the tissue of the beast.

This means that we are dealing with a seriously complex context. In all the networks I have talked to that are advocating for social change, everyone spends significant amounts of time analysing context. Indeed one of the really important aspects of this kind of working is the quality of analysis of context.

Capra, admittedly talking about quantum physics and sub-atomic particles (interconnections), concludes that

'The world thus appears as a complicated tissue of events, in which connections of different kinds alternate or overlap or combine and thereby determine the texture of the whole.' (Heisenberg, cited in Capra, 1996, p. 30)

This of course poses practical questions, both for doing and evaluating the doing. Where do you stop in your analysis of context? How do you work out what to do, where to act, when your analysis is necessarily complex and interconnected? How on earth do you do justice to such complexity when talking about evaluating? Capra echoes this cry,

SHE GOES UP CLOSE TO CAMERA, HER FACE FILLS THE SCREEN. SHE SAYS SLOWLY

'If everything is connected to everything else, how can we ever hope to understand anything? Since all natural phenomena are ultimately interconnected, in order to explain any one of them we need to understand all the others, which is obviously impossible.' (p. 40)

SHE SITS DOWN AGAIN WITH A FLOP

What is the whole system? What are we seeking to change? Can we even know or decide? Part of the problem in the action-oriented world of development, human rights and peace work is that we are used to understanding *action* in the frameworks of 'stepped approaches', linear cause and effect thinking, chains of objectives, roads to peace, construction metaphors such as peace-building, etc. When you try to attach this to system thinking and network realities, it's like trying to run a train on a swirling river system.

Capra himself challenges the norms of using architectural metaphors such as building blocks, foundations, fundamentals, for knowledge, and suggests the use of the network instead. This is an epistemology in which everything affects and is affected by everything else, so ideas of predictability, and cause-effect, especially the specious kind used in evaluation, stem from a flawed perception of how life works. If as Capra maintains,

'living systems at all levels are networks, we must visualise the web of life as living systems (networks) interacting in network fashion with other systems (networks)...The web of life consists of networks within networks.' (p. 35)

then we are banging our heads against a wall trying to match our 'logistical frameworks of intervention' and evaluation, with our social change network ways of organising.

Given that we can never know it all, nor be certain about the effect of acting in such a complex context, we might do well to think in terms of 'approximate knowledge' (pp. 40-41), which challenges Cartesian notions of certainty, suggesting we only ever deal with limited and approximate descriptions of reality. So what is enough approximate knowledge for us to be able to enhance the way we work and make good enough choices about how to work and on what?

Let's go back to structure and form.

SHE LIES BACK ON THE SOFA

The cyberneticists were the first to distinguish between the pattern of organisation and the physical structure of an organism. Of particular importance was the concept of negative and positive feedback. Both negative feedback (through which a system self-regulates by rebalancing itself) and positive feedback (through which a system runs into disorder and out of control by having no balancing mechanism) are important in the understanding of self-organising systems, ones that interact with and are changed by their environment.

> *'To understand the phenomenon of self-organisation, we first need to understand the importance of pattern.' (Capra, 1996, p. 80)*

The study of structure and that of form use completely different approaches.

> *'In the study of structure we measure and weigh things. Patterns, however, cannot be measured or weighed; they must be mapped. To understand a pattern, we must map a configuration of relationships. In other words, structure involves quantities, pattern involves qualities.' (p. 81)*

If what we are working with in networks is not substance but pattern, then we must abandon measuring and weighing and start mapping. This means we must learn how to map, how to understand and represent connection. This is even truer if we look at the work of influencing, which is about power to convince and change.

> *'The first and most obvious property of any network is its nonlinearity - it goes in all directions. Thus the relationships in a network pattern are nonlinear relationships. In particular, an influence, or message, may travel along a cyclical path, which may become a feedback loop.' (p. 82)*

We have to examine our context as if it were feedback loops, with an understanding of how to effect change in such loops and systems, knowing all the while that we cannot predict what the restructured form of the system will be, we cannot pretend to know. If, for instance, we identify a potential positive feedback moment, that is one in which if we continue to do more of the same the system will eventually break down, ... is this what happened with the Velvet Revolution?

SHE INDICATES A PHOTO OF VACLAV HAVEL ON THE WALL

All the self-regulating loops had ossified or in fact broken down, but nothing had really tested them to the limit? The self-regulating spies no longer had loyalty, they were no longer getting their payback, they could see that readjustment of the system would serve them better?

What about negative feedback loops, the way we 'learn' and rebalance and stabilise?

> *'a community that maintains an active network of communication will learn from its mistakes, because the consequences of a mistake will spread through the network and*

return to the source along feedback loops. Thus the community can correct its mistakes, regulate itself and organize itself.' (p. 82)

The system may also go to the edge of extremity for a time, but settle into a new better-informed order, once it understands the nature of the environment shock. For instance, if I think about what we (an extensive network of NGOs) did with Plan Colombia,

SHE PULLS A RELIEF MAP OF COLOMBIA FROM BEHIND A LAMP IN THE CORNER, TRACING THE CONTOURS AS SHE SPEAKS

we shocked the Colombian political regime (a network of power relations) into recognition that in Europe the non-governmental sector is not only vibrant but can have impact on governmental policy. It had to learn that in order to gain political support from old Europe, it needed to control the activity of not just Colombian non-governmental actors but international NGOs acting on their own territory. The international NGO network formed part of the context which the Colombian political system had failed to map. Three years on it has learned to discredit international NGOs, and prevent them from sabotaging its international relations.

What can we therefore say, in evaluative terms, about the work of this international NGO network? That it failed? This is what the prevailing wisdom is about this network, that it failed to persuade the inter-governmental alliances that Colombia should not benefit from their support while it continues to be a regime built on the abuse of fundamental rights. My own view would be that we used the best approximate knowledge of the context available, and grabbed the political opportunities with all its available resources, and forced a redefinition of the Colombian regime's international strategy. The big unknown, of course, was the sudden appearance of the global war on 'terror'. Contextually, this is like an earthquake.

SHE SITS ON THE FLOOR, CROSS LEGGED, READS AGAIN

Nature is "relentlessly non-linear".

> *'Non-linear phenomena dominate much more of the inanimate world than we had thought, and they are an essential aspect of the network patterns of living systems.' (p.122)*

SHE LOOKS UP AT CAMERA

It is really scary that we are still so wedded to linear forms of explanation, accounting, and representation, when it seems so un-natural. We are also chained, it seems to me, to an unworkable model of predictive cause and effect, which so often fails us.

> *'In linear systems, small changes produce small effects, and large effects are due either to large changes or to a sum of many small changes. In non-linear systems, by contrast, small changes may have dramatic effects because they may be amplified repeatedly by self-reinforcing feedback. Such non-linear feedback processes are the basis of the instabilities and the sudden emergence of new forms of order that are so characteristic of self-organisation.' (p. 123)*

Again, this challenges the entire way we think about projects and programmes in development, partly because we still think in terms of small input = small impact, and scaling up from pilot projects to macro interventions. We talk about steps and make linear plans which hood-wink us into believing that when we do x, y will result. We think we know what the effect of our interventions will be, and are asked to plot them in advance in Log Frame definitions. Yet if you look at any projects reporting on a Log Framework, there is a large column which sets out 'unintended outcomes' and 'unforeseen obstacles and threats'. Often these are more extensively completed than the ones we are supposed to be filling in. This should tell us a lot about our underlying frameworks, and their inadequacies..

> 'Chaotic systems are characterized by extreme sensitivity to initial conditions. Minute changes in the system's initial state will lead over time to large-scale consequences.' (p. 132)

Capra contends that solutions vary, depending on very small changes in initial conditions making prediction over the long-range impossible. The new forms and shifts happen when the structure is far from equilibrium (far from dead), and a new order emerges out of amplifying feedback processes. This is where creativity kicks in, and it is entirely unpredictable.

Again, what does this do to our understanding of 'interventions', our predicting what the 'impact' will be of the work we do? Do we have any understanding of whether we are working in chaotic systems? If we think about chaos theory, it may be possible that small inputs lead to large significant transformation, I imagine as long as the feedback loops are there. What we can't know is what they will transform into.

Back to structure, form and process again. Capra distinguishes between pattern (form, order, quality), structure (substance, matter, quantity) and process ('the activity involved in the continual embodiment of the system's pattern of organisation' (pp. 153-7), process being the link between pattern and structure. The pattern is embodied in the structure and the process is the continual embodiment.

Thus pattern, structure and process are the three criteria for living systems, 'three different but inseparable perspectives on the phenomenon of life' (p. 156).

He understands pattern through Maturana & Varela's notion of autopoiesis, (self-making, pattern of organisation), structure through Prigogine's dissipative structure, and process through Bateson, then Maturana & Varela's, ideas of cognition, or mind.

This is quite challenging.

SHE LAUGHS

How does this relate to my network?

Let's take the idea of the dissipative structure and the autopoietic network.

Autopoietic networks are organisationally closed, that is they are autonomous, but they interact with their environment through exchange of energy and resources. But the interaction does not determine the organisation, they are self-organising. Their limits or boundaries are held by whether or not something participates in the process of the networks' living. They are not static, they are in relations of production.

The vital aspect of the dissipative structure theory, on the other hand, is one that combines order and change, stillness and motion. A dissipative structure is both open to the flow of energy and resources, but is organisationally closed. 'thus a living system is both open and closed – it is structurally open but organizationally closed.' (p. 164)

> *'Prigogine's theory interlinks the main characteristics of living forms in a coherent conceptual and mathematical framework that implies a radical reconceptualisation of many fundamental ideas associated with structure – a shift of perception from stability to instability, from order to disorder, from equilibrium to non-equilibrium, from being to becoming. At the centre of Prigogine's vision lies the co-existence of structure and change, of 'stillness and motion,' (p. 175)*

I am continually defending the seeming 'crisis' that exists in the networks I work in, the sense of 'we must evaluate and somehow put it right' because the tension between order and disorder is continual, there is no stability, only dynamic balance and we are nowhere near to understanding how to work with and maintain that balance. People are forever on the edge of pushing for a 'solution', which I now understand cannot solve anything, for there is nothing to solve. This is the shift in perception we need to move toward. Equilibrium means stasis:

> *'a living organism is characterised by continual flow and change in its metabolism, involving thousands of chemical reactions. Chemical and thermal equilibrium exists when all these processes come to a halt. In other words, an organism in equilibrium is a dead organism. Living organisms continually maintain themselves in a state far from equilibrium, which is the state of life. Although very different from equilibrium, this state is nevertheless stable over long periods of time..' (pp. 175-6)*

Dynamism means life, that is none-the-less stable in its tension. In real terms this means that we have to be brave in embracing what feels like disorder. It also means that we have to find creative ways to use, rather than resolve, the conflicting views and contrasting ideas that exist within the network, for this is what gives it vitality and breadth.

> *'In every community there will invariably be contradictions and conflicts, which cannot be resolved in favour of one or the other side. For example, the community will need stability and change, order and freedom, tradition and innovation. Rather than by rigid decisions, these unavoidable conflicts are much better resolved by establishing a dynamic balance. ... the contradictions within a community are signs of its diversity and vitality, and thus contribute to the system's viability.' (pp. 294-5, emphasis in original)*

So, if the relationships in our social change networks are configured to allow us to act together in the world outside, then our structure must embody both our relationships and our action. This, if I think about it, is what I came to with my diagrammatic representation of a net of relationships tied together through joint action. If process, in Capra's terms

mind, or the process of cognition, links pattern and structure, then our process must allow us to continually renew those relationships and reflect on our joint action and imagine new action to be taken as a result of action taken before. And such process generates trust, the embodiment of our relationships and our action.

Phew.

SHE LIES ON THE FLOOR, WITH HER KNEES BENT

This feels similar, although I begin to get to a point when the simple exercise of working to put these ideas into language that necessarily uses an analytic approach (breaking things down into structure, pattern and process) begins to generate a fog of confusion. I feel the separating boundaries start to dissolve like damp tissues and I can no longer use words alone, only images and poetics, to draw my way into an explanation of what I mean.

In some senses, I could ask the question, so what? Where does this get me? As I said at the start, Capra's work is stimulating and makes me ask many questions about what, if any, relevance it has to the front-line business of striving to get things done together. The world of NGO networks is riddled with complexities, egos, time-constraints, and ultimately, limited political influence to change anything at all. I guess in one sense it provides a rather cosy world-view into which we can 'fit'. It makes me, for one, feel at home, rather than visiting in the home and sitting on the uncomfortable sofa of those more positivist-influenced thinkers.

Mostly, I think, it encourages me to think beyond. It is really very challenging for me to even get close to understanding some of the stuff Capra writes about. But it also validates my desire to delve deeper into what it means for the way we organise our world. There is something here, something… that has to do with a way of organising that creates love. If we can be together in purpose, but freely individual; if we can act together, and by acting together mutually reinforce trusting relations; if we can resist the urge to control, and be prepared to stand firm on our principles; if we can allow another the space to arise, to be, and meet that other in their best view of themselves; if we can find this balance…….

SHE LIES THERE, THINKING, IMAGINING, WONDERING

END OF PART TWO

PART THREE

SCENE ONE: MADELINE IS SITTING AT THE COMPUTER, THE ARCHERS PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND. IT IS 2004, TWO YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT FINISHED. SHE IS STRIVING TO REENTER THE MIND-SET REQUIRED TO FINISH HER DOCTORATE. SHE IS WRITING AN EMAIL TO JACK WHITEHEAD, AND ELEANOR LOHR, ENTITLED 'HELP'

> From: Madeline Church
> To: Jack Whitehead; Eleanor Lohr
> Date: 17 August 2004
> Subject: Help!
>
> Hi both
>
> Just having a complete panic, realised that I have to get my skates on and work on this monster, don't know what I am doing anymore. **I have forgotten what the point was...can anyone tell me why I am doing this?**
>
> I know I need to get it finished, can't bear to have it hanging over me anymore. I just don't know how. I keep looking at all those olympians swimming and finding the energy and discipline and effort to get up at some ungodly hour of the morning and plunge in and thrash up and down, and care about making a milisecond of a difference in their times, and here I am, giving myself a headache in front of a computer screen, unable to switch my mind into any kind of productive gear at all. Jack would probably tell me to relax! I feel so relaxed that sleeping is very attractive. In fact I feel I lie down coming on right now.
>
> And the clock ticks, and soon it will be September. When does my time run out on my fees?
>
> In despairing admiration of those who can get to the end of anything.....
>
> Love
>
> Mad

SHE CLICKS ON SEND, SATISFIED WITH HER DESPAIR. THE ARCHERS THEME TUNE PLAYS HER OUT.

SCENE TWO: LATER SAME DAY. MADELINE IS TYPING FURIOUSLY. THE ONLY SOUND IS THE TINY TIPPITY-TAP OF THE KEYS, INTERRUPTED BY THE OCCASIONAL PLINK-PLUNK OF NEW EMAIL COMING IN TO HER INBOX AS SHE WORKS. SHE COMPLETES THE PARAGRAPH, SAVES HER WORK, AND ALLOWS HERSELF TO OPEN HER EMAIL. TWO NEW ONES HAVE ARRIVED.

EMAIL ONE

From: David Jackson
To: Madeline Church
Date: 17 August 2004
Subject: Use of your work

Madeline,

I have no idea whether this e-mail will find you – I am just following up a google search for your whereabouts.

I lead a national programme of school-to-school networks called Networked learning Communities. We currently have 130 NLCs, involving over 1,500 schools, and the work is beginning to influence national education policy to the extent that there is soon to be a Primary Strategy Learning Networks policy available to all primary schools – with funding to incentivise the early work. We have the role of preparing and designing materials to support the planning and implementation processes. In doing so, we are working with a number of international researchers and network activists to produce artefacts, tools, simulations and background theory pieces.

One of the things that we are doing is to produce accessible, practitioner-friendly versions of key theory pieces that might help to inform people's thinking. So far, everyone has agreed to us using their work in this way (Michael Fullan, Ann Lieberman, Priscilla Wohlstetter, Ben Levin, etc.) but you have proved very elusive to track down. (I believe that one of our team, **Gail MacDonald** may have connected with you some time ago, but then lost touch again.)

Anyway, the bottom line is two questions:

1. May we use a reduced version of the report, as attached
2. Are you working in the UK, and if so, might you be interested to do any work with us?

If this finds you, look forward to hearing from you.

David.

David Jackson
Strategic Director NLG
National College for School Leadership
Cranfield University Technology Park
Derwent House
University Way
Cranfield, Bedford
MK43 OAZ
web address: www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc

EMAIL TWO

From: Jack Whitehead
To: Madeline Church
Date: 17 August 2004
Subject: Refreshed from Bali to Despairing Admiration for Finishers!

On Tue, 17 Aug 2004, Madeline Church wrote:
> Just having a complete panic, realised that I have to get my skates on
> and work on this monster, don't know what I am doing anymore. I have
> forgotten what the point was...can anyone tell me why I am doing this?

You've always demonstrated an enquiring approach to life and so you
continue with 'can anyone tell me why I am doing this?' Given the male
history of telling women why they are doing what they are doing as well as
what they should be doing, I've been trained by Joan (and painful negative
reinforcers) not to do this!! I thought you were doing it because it's
related to knowing yourself through and reflecting on your loving
influence in the world as you have been making your contributions in
different social/international contexts. These contributions have included
your persistent enquiries into how improvements could be brought about.
This has included the development of a process for evaluating networks.
Enough to be going on with?

> In despairing admiration of those who can get to the end of anything.....

I haven't supervised a non-finisher yet - this could be a first - I could
do my second thesis on the experience - would much prefer to see your
thesis making a profound contribution to others' learning through its
communication on the web!

Love Jack.

MADELINE VO - While this might seem a bit over-dramatic, this is exactly what
happened. I had done what I so often do, and Jack perceptively picked up on. I had
thrown out a question. Can anyone tell me why I am doing this?

The act of throwing out a call for help released energy in me to start work again from the
front end of my thesis, thinking, crafting, rewriting. Jack was right at least about the
persistent nature of my inquiries. Eleanor said to me the other day that what she sees
me doing is constantly asking and re-asking the questions, and writing responses, until I
get to some simplicity about what I want to say. Anyway, I was working hard when David
and Jack's emails arrived, back in training, feeling like the task could be enjoyable.

The question is not a flippant one. It matters terribly to me to have some sense of the
worth of what I am doing. **The 'why' of doing it is unbreakably connected to my
values**. I have to believe I am contributing to the business of what Reason & Bradbury
call 'human flourishing' (2001b, p. 1), with what Jack Whitehead calls 'loving influence'
(personal emails), and what I call a kind of inspiration created through a mix of love and
compassion, and passionate and righteous anger. **I want what I do with others to
make a difference**.

The question somehow drew a response from the wider world, and allowed me to see
how the work we had done had extended its influence in unpredictable ways. It appeared
to have networked its way around the world.

I began to shuffle back through my email folder called 'Response from Others'

SHE OPENS A FOLDER IN OUTLOOK, IN WHICH THERE ARE OVER 20 MESSAGES

SHE CLICKS ON ONE FROM GAIL MCDONALD WHICH IS A YEAR OLD.

From: Gail McDonald
To: Madeline Church
Date: 20 June 2003
Subject: Networks paper

Dear Madeline

I work for the Networked Learning Group at the National College for School Leadership in the UK. As a group we have recently been reading your paper on "Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change: New thinking on evaluating the work of international networks"
What you have found about the working and structures of networks is particularly interesting. Are you still involved in this area of work? It would be good to hear from you if you are.
Best wishes
Gail

MADELINE VO - Oh, I had forgotten about that email. I thought that trail had disappeared in the mist, but it has wound its way round again. I replied to David:

From: Madeline Church
To: David Jackson
Date: 19 August 2004
Subject: RE: use of your work

Dear David

Sorry to be so elusive, and glad that google picked up my whereabouts. When you change email addresses, and are not attached to an institution, it is very hard to be sure people know.

I wondered what had happened to Gail. Very good to hear from you. I will look at what you've done, and let you know. When is your time deadline?

I would be really interested in doing more work in the UK, and less overseas, and while I am I think someone with network expertise, I don't have any experience of the UK schools scene. But then you probably know that.

Lastly, I am about to submit my doctoral thesis, being supervised by Jack Whitehead in the Education Dept at University of Bath, and the work you refer to is a substantial part of that. I would very much like to use your email (as I have done several others) as part of my validation of the 'usefulness' of the research we did, as it was done with the intention of being used and modified and expanded upon. Would that be OK?

Looking forward to staying in better contact,

All the best

Madeline

MADELINE VO - I have to admit to being really chuffed. I took a look at the edited version of Working Paper 121 they wanted to publish, and began to wonder. I was struck by just how the work has penetrated into areas that I am not involved in, and know nothing about really. The names mentioned in this email are unknown to me, largely because I am not involved in schools or education. I did a google search of my own, and I find that Michael Fullan, Ann Lieberman, Priscilla Wohlstetter, and Ben Levin are thinkers and writers in the education field. It seems to be yet more data or evidence that indicates that my work has a kind of connecting quality, made possible by the incredible power of the internet and e-networking. Here I am again, stretching across worlds, linking into areas and 'social formations' and having an influence. Who would have thought that this work might end up as part of a set of materials being used as part of a Primary Strategy Learning Networks policy available to all primary schools? It makes me feel rather odd, unable to appreciate that others consider me to be someone who has produced a 'key theory piece'. I think Jack would say this counts as evidence of influence.

ANOTHER EMAIL PLINKS INTO THE IN-BOX. IT IS A REPLY FROM DAVID JACKSON

From David Jackson
To: Madeline Church
Date: 19 August 2004
Subject: RE: use of your work

Ah!

Good to hear from you. Thanks for replying.

Our date for an answer is whenever you can get back to us. As you will see from the Power Point slides, we have been citing your work with our networks for some time now, but we have not produced an artefact as yet. It has informed our thinking and has been used within other research that we have commissioned – I have attached an NFER commissioned piece which used it extensively. So, yes, please do quote me in your PhD submission. (I am envious. My EdD is in a state of terminal suspension, I fear. Life got in the way.)

For reasons that I have set out below, the creation of dynamic artefacts is a priority this year for our work. I have also attached a brief outline of the programme and its principles.

I will provide some basic background. The NLC programme has three core goals: the development of good networks; learning about 'networked learning'; and influencing the wider system. To begin with goal one was the priority, as without good networks there was nothing to learn, but the emphasis has shifted – more rapidly than we had anticipated – such that we need to re-orientate our work this year so that we can form representations of what we are learning through a programme of events and some smart artefacts and publications. The NLCs need increasingly to move towards being facilitated through the learning from these programme materials and from network-to-network support (rather than by direct facilitation from our team) and these same programme offerings, publications and artefacts can then also be made available to support the emerging DfES national policy agenda – which is promoting and funding networks.

We are simultaneously launching a series of publications entitled "*What Are We Learning About…..?* The first three titles will be "What are we learning about LEA support for school networks?", "What are we learning about establishing networks?" and "What are

we learning about the impact of networks?" Each issue will be a portmanteaux publication containing: think piece items from theory/research; case materials and vignettes; tools and artefacts; and data sets. The intended audience is system advocates and change agents, within or beyond our networks, the idea being to equip them to be able to work with others.

We have a team of facilitators, researchers and writers (full and part-time) who live all over the country. The whole team (30+ fieldworkers and 20+ core staff) have a two day team residential each month during which we process our learning, prioritise activity, strive for alignment and enjoy working together.

So, if the void in your life is huge after completing your PhD we should arrange to meet up to see whether we might be a congenial work environment. We have plenty that needs to be done. Let me know.

David.

David Jackson

MADELINE CLICKS EXCITEDLY ON THE ATTACHMENT

MADELINE VO - Oh, wow, he isn't joking when he says the NFER-commissioned piece really does use Working Paper 121 extensively, it's all over it. And it really captures some of the most important questions we were asking. I particularly like their appreciation of the network image, the threads, knots and nets, and their suggestion that what we did managed to capture the 'living feel' of a network. (Kerr *et al.,* 2003, p. 14)

SUDDENLY SHE OPENS ANOTHER FOLDER IN HER INBOX, AND OPENS A DIFFERENT MESSAGE

MADELINE - Actually, I got this message the other day too, from Terri Willard at IISD in Canada. I'm working with her on an evaluation for Priyanthi Fernando, one of the Action Research Group lot. By way of an aside she writes:

We have 12 interns from across Canada in town for their orientation/training before we send them out to work with the UN and various NGOs overseas for the next 6 months. This group is excellent - natural networkers - so it was a very fun day :-)

They liked the threads and knots analogies a lot.

- Terri

MADELINE VO - So, interns in Canada are also getting tied into the net, and they'll be out infiltrating the UN and NGOs in the next six months. What fun. All that conceptualising we had done may have been worth the struggle, brought clarity to others rather than greater confusion. This might actually mean something…

SHOT OF THE COMPUTER SCREEN DISSOLVES INTO

SCENE TWO: MADELINE IS ON HER HANDS AND KNEES ON THE FLOOR OF HER STUDY AT HOME. THERE ARE BOOKS, PHOTOS, CLIPFRAMES, CDS, POETRY ON THE WALLS. SHE IS SORTING THROUGH A PILE OF PRINTED EMAILS.

SHE LOOKS UP

MADELINE - Actually, his wasn't the first email of that kind I have received.

SHE SHUFFLES THROUGH A PILE, SEARCHING FOR A SET OF EMAILS STAPLED TOGETHER

MADELINE - About 18 months ago, I got this message out of the blue too. These guys have begun to use the ideas in doing evaluation with international networks.

SHE READS OUT LOUD

From: Ricardo Wilson-Grau
To: Madeline Church
Date: 15 April 2003
Subject: Thank you

Dear Madeline Church,

I am writing to express Martha Nuñez's and my appreciation for your report Participation, Relationships and Dynamic Change. Recently, we evaluated an international network and your document was extremely helpful to us in conceptualising the evaluation. So much so that we felt that the least we could do was extract the conceptual framework from our evaluation report and make it available to other practitioners. It is attached for your use and most critical comments. I am also sending a copy to Monitoring and Evaluation News, which was also a helpful source, especially to help us identify how little literature there is on evaluating international networks. If you have suggestions of others who may find our notes useful, please pass the attached document on, or give me their name and address and I will do so.

Best wishes and many thanks,

Ricardo Wilson-Grau

From: Madeline Church
To: Ricardo Wilson-Grau
Date: 28 April 2003
Subject: RE: Thank-you

Dear Ricardo and Martha

Thank you so much for your message, it really does seem worth the effort when the material is taken up and improved by others. I will take time to look at your framework more carefully, and would like to know more about how you worked on the evaluation. I have one to do in the summer and the more ideas about process the better. I would also really like the version in Spanish, if at all possible. As someone who has worked in Spanish for years, I have many colleagues in Colombia who I am sure would find it very useful.

 Thanks again, and let's keep in touch,

Madeline

From: Ricardo Wilson-Grau

To: Madeline Church
Date: 28 April 2003
Subject: RE: Thank you

Dear Madeline,

You are most welcome. Attached is the Spanish version, which I should have sent the first time around.

Look forward to your most critical comments, in English or Spanish.

Many thanks again to you and your colleagues. It was path-breaking work.

Ricardo

SHE SITS BACK ON HER HEELS.

MADELINE - There was something utterly wonderful about receiving these messages too. For the same reason really. It was all worth it. Someone had actually USED it. This was after all the intention, that people should find it useful. More evidence that it had worked. It was also a marvellous add-on that they had done the framework in English and Spanish given my only other fluent tongue is Spanish. It was potentially useful for my colleagues in Colombia. Lastly, it was perfectly timed. I had just been asked to do an evaluation of a network in Sri Lanka, by someone who had heard about Working Paper 121 through the Institute of Development Research in Canada - more evidence, I guess, that the work is travelling, being read and used - and I could try out their framework. You can see it, by the way, and what we did with it, in Appendix III.

There are actually lots more emails, from Australia, Canada, Colombia, and the UK, from people interested and wanted to share ideas and know more. I am not a whole-hearted lover of the internet, but it does power things around, that's for sure.

Re-reading them all, I am struck by how influence works, in a world powered by new technology but still connected by personal networks.

SHE PULLS OUT AN EMAIL

MADELINE - Irene Guijt is a fellow doctoral student at Learning By Design in the Netherlands, who contacted me one day. I discovered she was a colleague of Rosie McGee's, someone I knew through my work on Colombia. Rosie was working at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, and had passed on the report to Irene. Irene then passed on my name to Waranoot, from the Development Fund in Norway

SHE PULLS OUT ANOTHER

MADELINE - and she contracted me to do the evaluation of the network in Sri Lanka. In that evaluation I used and adapted the framework Ricardo and Martha had constructed out of our research,

SHE WHIPS OUT THE FRAMEWORK AND WAVES IT

MADELINE - who had by chance written the framework in English and Spanish. I then passed on the Spanish-version of the framework to my friend Juan Manuel Bustillo, an old hand at coordination in Colombia.

SHE FISHES IN ANOTHER PILE

MADELINE - Then there's the Carpp community, Eleanor Lohr sent it to a client, Monica Vidal, with whom the Governance Project at Bath was working. Monica is doing a dissertation on evaluation of her network work in Camden, London.

SHE WAVES A SHEAF OF PAPERS

MADELINE - She contacted me, and we talked and I went to meet her work colleagues who all coordinate network-type structures, you can see more on that in Episode Two. Then her colleague sent me some materials which I then sent on to a woman who had contacted me way back at the beginning. And so it goes, round and round.

SHE GETS UP OFF THE FLOOR, HOLDING A LAST PAPER IN HER HAND. SHE LAUGHS.

MADELINE - Lastly, there's this message from Liz Capewell, another doctoral student, who I have met at several Carpp workshops

SHE READS ALOUD AGAIN, SMILING

> From: Liz Capewell
> To: Madeline Church
> Date: 12 December 2003
> Subject: Your paper
>
> Madeline,
> I've just been re-reading your paper on networking and wanted to let you know that I think it is superb. I've been an ardent networker in my time, but it has all been rather naturalistic (or do I mean haphazard!). I feel yours is a really important contribution and I'll use it in the future to bring a little more rigour to my attempts.
> Good luck and have a good Christmas
>
> Liz Capewell

MADELINE - I have to laugh, it doesn't feel at all rigorous to me. It all feels organic, and interconnected, and networked and shifting, and I see this image of the combination of new networking and old, impersonal technology firing personal contacts, and the impossibility of knowing where things will end up. But it appears to have influence.

SHE LOOKS AT THE QUOTATION IN LARGE FONT PRINTED OUT AND STUCK ON THE WALL OF HER STUDY

> *'The Atom is the past. The symbol of science for the next century is the dynamical Net. …Whereas the Atom represents clean simplicity, the Net channels the **messy power of complexity**..**The only organization capable of nonprejudiced growth or unguided learning is a network.** All other topologies limit what can happen. A network swarm is all edges and therefore open ended any way you come at it. Indeed the network is the least structured organization that can be said to have any structure at all. ..In fact a plurality of*

truly divergent components can only remain coherent in a network. No other arrangement – chain, pyramid, tree, circle, hub – can contain true diversity working as a whole.' (Kevin Kelly, cited in footnote, Castells, 1996 p. 61. Emphasis added)

MADELINE - To go back to the Kelly quote, the way the research paper and the ideas it contains have moved around and returned feels just like the messy power of complexity and unguided growth. This is not structured, but organic growth. It has 'a living feel'. The work appears to go where it is desired and wanted, linked by threads of connection that loop and knot and weave, and continuously return.

END OF EPISODE ONE

Questions and responses

Working onwards from the questions I posed at the beginning, it might serve now to see what the above might tell you about my questions. What information, responses, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and shapes are created by the writing? What threads have been spun, and more importantly, are you the reader still with me? Is the net of understanding too loose, or too full of holes for you still to be aloft with me?

Let me remind you of the questions.

Who am I? Who is this Madeline, are you any closer to the living, breathing person, do you sense the anger, the curiosity, the determination, the movement between worlds, the crafting of communities and the ability to connect?

What am I doing? Do you have a better understanding of what I do in the world, the work I do, the places I go to? I am hoping that you have a sense of the way I stretch across professional spheres, and have been able to follow my journeys in and out of Colombia, the Foreign Office, action research group meetings, workshops, and seen me 'at work' asking questions, creating networks, shape-changing, writing, thinking and talking.

Why am I doing these things? Can you grasp what the values are that hold me together, push me on, and seep through those porous boundaries into the work that I do? I want you to see how bullying has burrows under my skin, and how that plays out in the real world for me, how I'll take on those who control through bullying, and how love and art inspire me and speak to me, and allow me to continue to work transform my experiences?

What am I doing them for? Do you have a clear idea of what I want out of doing all this doing? How I cannot <u>but</u> invest my energy in contributing to the creation of a more humane and just world, through doing my bit to strengthen networks of connection and joint action? I have a sense that if we can find ways to allow the creative potential of individuals to flourish in loose community, then we might find we can create communities that flourish in sustainable ways, rather than at the expense of others.

How am I doing them? This is the hardest thing to show you, as Schon (1991) demonstrated so comprehensively in The Reflective Practitioner. We are largely at a loss when it comes to really exposing the innards of method. I have sought to give you insight through my own fumbling reflections, to see if I can't spot the important ways I work, at least the ones that seem to have inner consistency. I know that I cannot do anything very useful or interesting without the spark of connection with others, whether that is subtly, through embodied proximity, or explicitly, by doing things together. I know I work largely through questions, searching for responses rather than answers, and I reflect mainly via writing. It is this writing of lived experience that provides me with depth and meaning.

The last question that I am carrying with me as I write this is, **what am I learning?** In a sense this may be the only real question, as it is this that has forced me to sit down and

write these words. Making sense of what I know, explaining what I know, writing myself into knowledge, is one way of responding to this learning question.

At this stage it seems to me that all the work I have done in bringing mine and others' experience of network-working into a foreground of attention has its roots in my own personal trajectory of creating networks of support and creative interaction as the main community in my life. This understanding of 'Who am I and who am I with?' has come very slowly, almost ridiculously slowly considering how simple it is. My profound dislike of the sloppy conformity that communities are prone to, and which can lead to a demonisation of strange others, combines with my yearning to for an uncompromised place to belong, and I think I feel comfortable in networks because they allow profoundly different and individual worldviews to co-exist and co-create.

And in writing this account of my influence in the process of research, I have begun to understand that my reluctance to disclose myself, show myself, account for myself, which is a product of early life experience repeated and repeated, has in some way distorted my capacities and my potential for connection. This is me learning, and learning through writing as much as anything else. I have seen myself through these pages, and have noticed how hard I have had to work to maintain connection when the urge to hide is so powerful. The writing is revelatory; it somehow draws the blood to the surface, gets the pulse racing, and allows me greater vision and insight.

The work has been driven by a passion for social justice, fairness, and a desire to see love and art feature in our efforts to make the world more a beautiful and sustaining place to be. Despite my occasional doubts about the possibility that what I do will make a difference, I am determined to play a part in making the world a better, fairer, more beautiful and loving place for us all to live in. There is congruence for me, to use a term used by Maturana & Varela (1998), in doing this work in networks.

In a sense my ability to stay connected has been possible partly through an embodied engagement with others over which I have had limited control, and partly through simple bloody-minded doggedness, through knowing that without connection we are only partially alive.

My hope is that Episode One has given you the requisite evidence to show you that I try to integrate my values into my work at all times, and that I hold myself to account against these values intensively. It is intended to reveal how I work with my anger at injustice through doing work that is creative, generative, releasing of potential. I will stand alongside but resist joining, using my well-developed resistance to rigid community to find looser and more liberating ways of organising. This includes taking control of the criteria against which we want to judge ourselves and others to judge us. I think that this work is beginning to have an influence outside of my normal areas of practice, and the way the ideas seem to be spreading, through the use of new technology, indicates to me that the time is ripe for these kinds of questions to be asked.

In Episode Two, I want to dig deeper into the practice I have developed for myself as an evaluator and facilitator, as I think this will enable you a different entry point into how these standards I have created for myself find expression when I work. They are another way of working the threads of the knot.