

Bocconi on Management

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GLOBAL ACTION NETWORKS

Creating Our Future Together



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	xii
<i>Foreword</i>	xiv
<i>Preface</i>	xix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxv
1 Organizing for the 21st century	1
Examples	2
Example 1. Changing the logic of finance	2
Example 2. Transforming forestry	2
Example 3. Addressing AIDS	3
Example 4. Giving life to the Rio Declaration	3
Example 5. The changing face of labor	5
Example 6. Taking on corruption	6
Example 7. Creating sustainable fisheries	7
Example 8. Raising the poorest of the poor	7
Example 9. The funding of war	8
Example 10. Changing the definition of success	9
The examples' shared characteristics	9
Characteristic 1. Global and multi-level	10
Characteristic 2. Diversity embracing boundary spanners	12
Characteristic 3. Inter-organizational networks	13
Characteristic 4. Systemic change agents	14
Characteristic 5. Entrepreneurial action learners	14
Characteristic 6. Voluntary leaders	15
Characteristic 7. Global public goods producers	15
A growing phenomenon	16
2 Understanding networks	21
The intent of the network	22
Network advantages	23
Different levels of organizing	24
Who makes the rules?	26
Shared visioning	28

System organizing	29
Learning and research	30
Measuring and certifying	30
Finance	31
Advocating	31
Networks as complex systems	32
Communities of practice	39
3 GAN development strategies	44
The core development challenge	45
The dynamics of differentiation and power	46
Three development dynamics	46
Development stages	49
Stage 1: Exploration	49
Stage 2: Initiation	53
Stage 3: Infrastructure development	57
Stage 4: Realizing the potential	62
Summary	66
4 Seeing the whole	69
Methodologies	71
Semantic clouds	71
Issue crawl mapping	72
Systems archetypes	74
Concept mapping	76
Geo mapping	78
Social network mapping	79
Value network analysis	81
Managing for clarity mapping	83
Explaining complexity	87
5 Mastering change	93
What is “Change”	96
Transformation	98
Reform	103
Incremental	104
Four change strategies	105
Observations	107
Observation 1: The importance of dialogue	107
Observation 2: Continuing change strategy questions	111
Observation 3: Additional observations	113

Processes for change	114
A change process design example	118
More on processes	120
6 Formalizing the connections	123
Design principles	125
Core structural components	128
Membership	128
Member groupings globally	131
Committees	133
Boards and councils	133
GAN-wide meetings	135
Legal structure	136
Emerging models	137
7 Growing the competencies required for success	142
Core competencies	144
Competency 1. Leadership – Realizing coherent entrepreneurial activity at all levels	146
Competency 2. Network development – Aligning effective strategies, patterns, and structures	154
Competency 3. Measuring impact – providing continuous feedback to improve effectiveness and support	159
Competency 4. Conflict and change – Developing complex change skillfully	166
Competency 5. Communications – Creating robust glocal conversations and connections	171
Competency 6. Learning systems: Transforming data to wisdom-in-action network-wide	174
Competency 7. Policy and advocacy – Generating tight connections between action and policy	181
Competency 8. Resource mobilization – Growing commitment to global public goods	184
Power, politics, and the competencies	190
Developing the expertise	192
8 Learning from experience: Lessons for success	196
Lesson 1. Change mindsets from organization to network	196
Share power	196
Be accountable, maintain integrity	197

Partner yourself	198
Acknowledge the roles of individuals and hierarchy	198
Create coherence	199
Be role-centric	199
Lesson 2. Be clear about your theories of change	199
Lesson 3. Take an entrepreneurial development and learning approach	200
Lesson 4. Keep work focused	202
Lesson 5. Be comfortable with ambiguity and paradox	203
Lesson 6. Keep the appropriate geographic center of gravity	204
Lesson 7. Create and maintain sufficient diversity	205
Lesson 8. Persevere	207
9 Foreseeing a future	209
Scenario for a plausible future	209
Challenges to the scenario	211
Challenge 1. Increasing competence	211
Challenge 2. Realizing scale	212
Challenge 3. Avoiding bureaucratization	213
Challenge 4. Defining “successful business models”	214
Challenge 5. Engaging government	216
Challenge 6. Becoming glocal	218
Challenge 7. Maintaining the cutting edge	219
Challenge 8. Managing competition	220
Challenge 9. Building accountability, reputation, and legitimacy	223
Trends supporting the scenario	224
Trend 1. Continuing globalization	224
Trend 2. Inability of traditional strategies to address globalization	225
Trend 3. Disruptive impact of new technologies	226
Trend 4. Shifting assumptions about the way the world works	226
Assumption 1. From addressing issues in parts to whole systems thinking	227
Assumption 2. From inter-national structures for addressing global issues to multi-stakeholder ones	228
Assumption 3. From assuming the natural environment to nurturing it	230

Assumption 4. From change that can be addressed by linear approaches to complex systems strategies	230
Assumption 5. From negotiating our way to solutions to envisioning futures	233
Assumption 6. From an enforcement focus to a collective values focus	235
Summary	236
<i>Index</i>	240

CHAPTER 1

Organizing for the 21st century

The old ways of doing things are not up to the global challenges that we are facing. The Copenhagen 2009 and the Kyoto climate change process have clearly demonstrated the limitations of national governments in global problem-solving. And another finance crisis is inevitable, given that nothing significant has changed with the way the global finance system is organized. These failures are but two giant votes in favor of a new strategy that is rapidly emerging in response to global challenges like corruption, poverty, water, sustainability of forests and fisheries, health, security, and almost anything on the “global agenda.” I call this new strategy Global Action Networks (GANs). This is a book about these networks, particularly for people who are working in them and who are interested in developing them.

Networks are perhaps the oldest and most enduring organizational form. Such networks in the form of family ties still dominate most people’s lives. For individuals, organizations, and nations, networks have long been important as alliances, coalitions, collaborations, partnerships, and associations.

However, since the end of the twentieth century, networks are taking on new meaning and importance. Of course there are the networks of terrorists and criminals.¹ However, here we are talking about legitimate networks. In his 2000 seminal book, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Castells looks at the entire society through a network prism.² In an equally influential book 4 years later titled *A New World Order*, Anne-Marie Slaughter documents the growing importance of networks of government officials – police investigators, financial regulators, even judges and legislators – to combat global crime and address common problems on a global scale.³

Business activity is increasingly analyzed as networks between people.⁴ In lock-step with globalization business activity increasingly is no longer characterized as centrally owned production processes, but rather long chains with multiple organizations.⁵ And civil society’s non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are continually forming and reforming networks, to address shifting goals of scale and complexity.^{6,7}

The attraction to networks is tied to their ability to do things that other ways of organizing cannot. GANs are, however, a very particular type of network that gives us unusual capacity to create our global future together. Let's begin by taking a look at some of them.

Examples

Example 1. Changing the logic of finance

The “global finance system” hit the wall in 2008 and neared collapse. Although many are working on parts of the solution from nation-state perspectives, the Principles for Responsible Investment aim for basic change at a global level.

In 2005, a group of the world's largest institutional investors, supported by a 70-person multi-stakeholder group of experts from the investment industry, governmental organizations, civil society, and academia, drafted the Principles for Responsible Investment. Those principles aim to change the logic of global finance, so it integrates social, environmental, and economic concerns.

The PRI was launched in April 2006 to give life and meaning to the principles. Key launch partners were the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the UN Global Compact, and the UN Environmental Program Finance Initiative.

One revolutionary aspect of the PRI is that asset owners such as pension fund trustees are in the drivers' seat and on the PRI board, rather than fund managers and the investment industry. Another distinguishing quality is that individual parts of an organization – such as social responsibility funds existing within an investment firm – cannot become a signatory. Rather, the whole investment firm must commit to the Principles. By 2010, signatories comprised more than 720 institutions, representing in excess of US\$ 20 trillion in assets.

Example 2. Transforming forestry

A group of timber users, traders, and representatives of environmental and human-rights organizations met in California in 1990 to discuss how they could combine their interests in improving forest conservation and reducing deforestation. The core ideas of certifying forests that are sustainably harvested through a multi-stakeholder strategy with business,

environmentalists, and social activists became the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in 1992.

By 2010 the FSC's achievements include:

- FSC-certified products surpassing 50 percent of all timber and panel products produced in and imported to the UK in 2008.
- 120 million hectares of forests certified around the world, representing an area equal to Germany, France, the UK, and Ireland.
- Organizing approximately 16,000 businesses in the forestry-to-retail forest product production chain in almost 100 countries that have a product, process, or service conforming with FSC standards.

Example 3. Addressing AIDS

By the turn of the millennium, AIDS was truly a worldwide epidemic. Over 20 million deaths were attributed to the virus, and an estimated 36 million more were infected. In 2000, there were 4 million new infections in sub-Saharan Africa alone, with approximately 20 percent of those aged 15–49 in seven countries.

And yet, 90 percent of those infected could not access new, effective treatments. Cost was a huge factor, but also the delivery systems were simply not in place. In June 2001, a Special Session on AIDS of the UN General Assembly called for the creation of a global fund to address the scourge. A month later in Genoa, the G8 countries agreed to create such a fund. In January 2002, a Secretariat for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria was established, and 3 months later the first grants were given to 36 countries.

By the end of 2008, \$14.8 billion in grants had been dispersed, with \$3.1 billion in 2008. A quarter of the recipients were in lower-middle income countries; most of the rest in low-income countries. The Fund claimed 3.5 million people who otherwise would have died of AIDS, TB, or malaria over the past 5 years were alive as a result of the interventions.

Example 4. Giving life to the Rio Declaration

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit seemed a watershed event at the time. It was the largest international meeting ever held on the environment. Over 10,000 NGO representatives joined many heads of state and made their global presence felt more strongly than at any other international

meeting. One commitment governments signed was the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development that listed 27 principles.

However, the Declaration produced little change. At the turn of the millennium, Frances Seymour and Elena Petkova at the World Resources Institute (WRI) in Washington, DC, began talking about doing something about it. They circulated a paper about what they might do. “It was also an effort to link research more directly to action,” commented Elena, “build a constituency and a user base before the research product was ready and thus get a research product that reflects user demand and needs.”

Through discussions, Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration surfaced as particularly important. Principle 10 reads:

Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

In November 2001, about 50 people from NGOs and international government agencies met to discuss action. Rather than a traditional advocacy route to demand government adherence, a more collaborative approach would be developed to engage governments more as colleagues in developing “assessments” of their progress on implementing Principle 10. Zehra Aydin-Zidos of the United Nation’s Commission on Sustainable Development commented: “There is lots of resistance to bringing in other actors because (implementation of the Rio Declaration) is seen as a government domain.”

Today, through the Aarhus Convention, European countries are advancing the issue of “access rights” (the right to obtain government information, the right to participate in government decision-making, and the right to seek justice are a bundle of valuable rights). However, many countries do not have such strong government commitments. The Access Initiative (TAI) partners work in 50 countries to advance the fundamentals of Principle 10 by:

- conducting research using evidence-based research assessments to advocate for legal, institutional, and practice reforms;

- raising public awareness; and
- engaging their governments and other democratic institutions in a constructive dialogue to create change within their countries.

Guidelines on Principle 10 were adopted in the February of 2010 at the United Nations Global Ministerial meeting in Bali (Environment Forum). The guidelines set out the minimum legal standards for implementation of Principle 10 and mandated UNEP to assist countries in implementing programs and policies around access to information, public participation, and access to justice.

At the national level, most countries now have put in place the basic elements of a legal framework to support access rights. However, there are still wide gaps between law and practice, promises and implementation that TAI is working to address. Profound transformations are still necessary to achieve implementation of access rights in a framework of transparency where governments and civil society share a commitment to environmental democracy.

Example 5. The changing face of labor

Universities across the US know Russell through its brands of athletic clothing, including Russell Athletic, JERZEES, Spalding, and Bike. For about 10,000 Hondurans the US company is their employer.

In 1999, American universities, NGOs, and companies like Russell supplying the universities joined together to form the Fair Labor Association (FLA). The universities and their students wanted to ensure that the billions of dollars of goods they sell in campus stores and to university teams meet fair labor standards.

So when Russell announced its decision to end a Honduran contract at a unionized workplace, its commitment to freedom of association as part of its FLA membership was brought into question. Russell said its decision was simply based on financials: shutting down that plant would save \$2 million more than shutting down any other one.

The FLA launched investigations. Students at the universities organized, and 100 universities ended their Russell contracts. NGOs lobbied at the annual meetings of Fruit of the Loom and Berkshire Hathaway who owned Russell. On June 25, 2009, the FLA board, finding grounds for concern about Russell's respect for freedom of association, announced a 90-day special review. On June 29, 2009, the FLA issued a remediation plan setting out specific steps that Russell would have to take in order to come into compliance with FLA standards.

A 45-day extension was approved for the review and on November 14 an agreement was announced. All of the 2000 workers at the first unionized plant would be rehired with compensation and “collective pacts,” (which were seen as anti-freedom of association) covering 8000 other Honduran workers would be phased out to allow for unionization in all facilities.

“In discussions, our corporate members were harder on Russell than our staff,” comments FLA President and CEO Aurret van Heerden. “They added to the agreement a stipulation that Russell reach out to engage with its stakeholders. Russell saw the stakeholders as the enemy, and said that constructive conversations wouldn’t be possible. The corporate members said ‘That’s your mistake. There’s no other way out of this.’”

Example 6. Taking on corruption

In the spring of 1990, representatives of the World Bank stationed in Africa met in Swaziland to discuss an urgent request articulated by African leaders in their famous Long-Term Perspective Study: “Support better governance.” Peter Eigen, the World Bank’s Director of the Regional Mission for Eastern Africa, talked about corruption as a powerful enemy of good governance. At that time, it was widely regarded as a “cultural” issue not to be discussed, although it sapped hundreds of millions of development dollars.

Participants responded enthusiastically and decided that the World Bank should develop an anticorruption agenda. But it never happened out of fear that it would take the World Bank into forbidden political territory.

Yet some participants remained determined to take action. Eigen left the Bank, and in 1993 founded Transparency International (TI). Today, rather than talking about corruption as a cultural issue and avoiding its political implications, governments are taking action and corporations are being heavily punished. For example:

- On July 2, 2009, the World Bank announced that Siemens was required to pay \$100 million to support the global fight against corruption, as part of its settlement with the World Bank Group following bribery by a Siemens’ subsidiary in Russia. On December 12, Siemens agreed to pay record fines of \$1.6 billion to settle charges of worldwide bribery.
- Anti-corruption conventions have been adopted by the OECD, the UN, and many international development agencies.

- TI is battling corruption through a network of 102 country chapters.
- TI's Corruption Perception Index is widely regarded as important by almost all governments.

Example 7. Creating sustainable fisheries

“To reverse the fisheries crisis,” wrote Mike Sutton, at the founding of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) in 1996, “we must develop long-term solutions that are environmentally necessary and then, through economic incentives, make them politically feasible. Fortunately, an approach is available that has succeeded in other areas: working in partnership to design and implement market-driven incentives for sustainable fishing.”⁸ Sutton's comments accompanied a commitment by WWF and the world's largest seafood processor Unilever to partner to form MSC.

In 2010, the MSC topped in an independent assessment of wild capture seafood certification and eco-label programs. It achieved a score of 95.63 against criteria for credible programs, a score that was 30 points higher than the second-place program. The report concluded that the MSC is the only program to be designated “compliant” with the criteria of the evaluation.

Also by this time major retailers like Walmart, Wholefoods, Marks & Spencers, and Sainsbury's had committed to MSC-labeled products. Seafood in the MSC program:

- Produces annual catches of close to 7 million metric tonnes of seafood. This represents over 12 percent of global capture production for direct human consumption.
- The fisheries already certified catch close to 4 million metric tonnes of seafood. This is over 7 percent of the total global capture production for direct human consumption.
- Worldwide, more than 3,000 seafood products, which can be traced back to the certified sustainable fisheries, bear the blue MSC eco-label.

Example 8. Raising the poorest of the poor

Sam Daley-Harris' degree is in music. But in 1977 his Yoga teacher invited him to a meeting on stopping hunger. “If I thought about it, I would have said ‘there are no solutions . . . someone would have done something about it if there were,’” says Daley-Harris. But that was his beginning. He

stresses that he started like almost everyone else does, by feeling hopeless about ending global poverty.

He began organizing and inspiring people to take action through an NGO called Results. “In 1984 we got a video about Grameen Bank, and by 1986 we had legislation introduced on micro-enterprise and had 100 editorials on the topic. Eunnis (Grameen Bank, Nobel Peace Prize Winner) Mohammend joined our Board in ’88.”

A Results 1994 conference called for reaching 100 million families with microcredit, with a particular emphasis upon women. The goal was to do this by 2005 and the Microcredit Summit Campaign was launched in 1997 when more than 2900 people from 137 countries gathered in Washington, DC.

After reaching its goal, the Microcredit Summit Campaign is now working to ensure that:

- 175 million of the world’s poorest families, especially the women of those families, are receiving credit for self-employment and other financial and business services by the end of 2015.
- 100 million families rise above the US\$1 a day threshold by 2015.

Example 9. The funding of war

The 1999 movie *Blood Diamonds* presents the story of a fisherman in the war-torn West African country of Sierra Leone. His dreams about his son becoming a doctor are shattered when rebels invade his village and kidnap him to work in the diamond mines. The ensuing story involves a Zimbabwean mercenary smuggler, mercenary South African forces, and rebels who trade the diamonds directly for arms to continue their war and killing. Although the film includes the inevitable Hollywood touches, it tells the basic story of diamonds funding and prolonging chaos, death, and instability.

This cycle spurred a meeting in Kimberley, South Africa, of diamond-producing states, the diamond industry, and NGOs to discuss how to stop the trade in “conflict diamonds.” With the support of the UN, in 2003 the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KP) began as a joint government, industry, and civil society initiative to stem the flow of conflict diamonds.

Today the trade in conflict diamonds is essentially stopped by the Kimberley Process without offices or staff. However, its participants include 75 countries, the World Diamond Council representing the international diamond industry, and civil society organizations.

The KP imposes extensive requirements on its participants to certify shipments of rough diamonds as ‘conflict-free’ and prevent conflict diamonds from entering the legitimate trade. Participating countries must put in place national legislation and institutions; export, import, and internal controls; and also commit to transparency and the exchange of statistical data. Participants can only legally trade with other participants who have also met the requirements of the scheme. International shipments of rough diamonds must be accompanied by a KP certificate guaranteeing that they are conflict-free.

Example 10. Changing the definition of success

In the early 1990s, the concept of “triple bottom line” was developed as a new way of thinking about business success. By the middle of that decade, multi-national companies were being overwhelmed with requests for data about their impact on a wide range of issues. CERES, a coalition of environmental organizations and socially responsible investors, decided to see if something could be done to give greater focus to the dispersed activity. It convened a series of meetings with people involved in the various aspects of the emerging field of triple bottom-line accounting.

Out of these meetings, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) arose with the vision *that disclosure on economic, environmental, and social performance become as commonplace and comparable as financial reporting, and as important to organizational success*. It is a network of four defined groups: business, labor, civil society, and “mediating institutions” (accounting, foundations, and consultants).

Today it operates with a global office in the Netherlands and focal points in Australia, China, Brazil, and India. It has developed three generations of an evolving Reporting Framework with Guidelines, with numerous supplements for specific industries and NGOs. GRI has tracked more than 1350 organizations that formally issued a GRI-based sustainability report in 2009 – this is a 25 percent increase on the prior year. Studies suggest there are many more GRI reporters that are not formally documented.

The examples’ shared characteristics

These networks are dealing with an incredibly diverse array of issues, and they seem to be achieving important results. What is going on here? How are these types of outcomes being achieved? Are these just isolated

examples, or do they represent something new and enduring? Do they represent an approach that can address the big challenges of environmental sustainability, equity, economic well-being, peace, and stability? Sure they might do some good things, but they must have big short-comings too! And can they really last, or are they a short-term phenomenon? These questions are at the heart of this book.

I first became aware of these networks while making a modest contribution to a report to Secretary-General Kofi Annan called *Critical Choices: The United Nations, networks, and the future of global governance*.⁹ The lead author, Wolfgang Reinicke, is known for his concept of Global Public Policy Networks (GPPNs). I had been working on issues of multi-stakeholder and in particular cross-sectoral (business, government, civil society as three organizational sectors) collaboration. Wolfgang referred to such collaboration as “horizontal” across society, and local-to-global as “vertical” collaboration.

I was inspired by the potential of these networks, put together some money and people, and continued investigating them. However, I found that the people in the networks did not think of their goal as “public policy,” but rather transformational change. Moreover, although Wolfgang’s political science perspective was useful, I found the organizational-, network-, and societal-development and change traditions I worked with more helpful to them in their development. Consequently, I coined the term “Global Action Networks,” popularized as “GANs.”

Other people use different terms for a similar group of organizations. This includes nation-state and multi-actor *regimes*,^{10,11} *earth governance*,¹² *issue networks*,¹³ *collaborative governance*,¹⁴ and *global governance organizations*.¹⁵

When I refer to GANs I’m speaking of a very specific type of network that combines to a significant degree seven specific characteristics. There are a few dozen similar examples that share seven particular characteristics of these ones. Many others have three or four of these characteristics, but a very modest number combine all seven. Some possess these characteristics “more or less,” but they would resonate with them as aspirational.

Characteristic 1. Global and multi-level

GANs aspire to be global, although many are currently active in fewer than 60 countries. One of the amazing qualities of GANs is how rapidly they become global. Outside of businesses conducted over the Internet, creating a global corporation within a few years would be impossible. GANs have a movement- and viral-development approach.

The GANs presume they will be global, and they think globally. That means that they think of the key challenge they are addressing as requiring a global effort, and that they will have a critical role in developing that effort. This criterion eliminates some initiatives that might fit the other ones, such as is the case with the Global Partnership to Eliminate River Blindness, which is really an African activity.

GANs also aim for a local-to-global presence – the multi-level part – sometimes referred to as “glocal.” This emphasizes their interest in “where the rubber hits the road” and on-the-ground action. The FSC is not simply advocating forestry standards, it is actively working to apply and further develop them; the Global Water Partnership is not simply interested in a theoretical construct of “integrated water resource management,” but in working with partners around the world to give life to it.

Four factors influence how global and multi-level the GANs are:

1. **The role of wealth.** Several of the networks, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (the Global Fund), are products of a donor agency mentality with Northern countries aiming to achieve some desired outcome in Southern (developing) countries. Through their government Ministries and Departments, wealthy countries (and some foundations) put money in a common pot to more effectively coordinate their efforts and build the necessary scale to address a problem in poorer countries. In the case of blood diamonds, (brought to attention by a Hollywood movie by the same name) the distinction is between poorer countries where diamonds are mined, and richer countries where they are purchased.
2. **Their stage of development.** Of course physical presence is related to age – unlike Athena who emerged whole from the head of Zeus, a global network does not suddenly appear. Even when sponsored by an existing global network, substantial effort and time is required to give life to a new initiative that spans the world.
3. **Local conditions.** Some countries and cultures are more open to the strategy of GANs and the particular issue of a GAN than others. The Global Compact, for example, had significant initial difficulty in building a presence in the US because the litigious tradition of the US made companies fear their participation would make them vulnerable to suits. In China and Arab countries, the lack of robust civil society organizations makes the GANs’ cross-sector organizing strategy problematic.

Issues of a GAN may simply not be relevant in some countries. For example, the Mountain Forum has no place in the Netherlands, nor

in Bangladesh. And some countries have elected a non-GAN route: for example, TAI has little European presence in its work to ensure participatory practices in environmental decision-making since the Europeans have selected a government-led approach with the Aarhus Protocol. Building Partners for Development in Water and Sanitation is quite specialized and would not be of interest to countries committed only to public sector planning, development, and delivery of water and sanitation services.

4. **The GAN membership strategy.** Some of the networks are closed to new members, or set significant hurdles to membership. For example, although anyone can join the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), companies must agree to monitoring and ethical performance standards that many would find overly onerous. Although GANs in general are about creating a “vanguard” of standards, GANs like ETI have decided to set themselves on the “elite vanguard.”

Characteristic 2. Diversity embracing boundary spanners

To be effective global networks, embracing diversity is absolutely necessary. They must have global representation in their decision-making, and be flexible enough in strategies to be supportive of distinctive local cultures – not just tolerant of them. One huge challenge is linguistic. No one would claim it is satisfactorily addressed, since English is almost always the language of global meetings with little or no provision for translation. And of course embedded in the English language are particular ways of looking at the world.

GANs are also places where people of very different wealth meet. This includes people from wealthy countries meeting people from poor countries, and within countries people of different wealth meeting. Bridging wealth means GANs also bridge traditional donor/recipient divides. And in many of the GANs wealthy corporations with substantial resources work side by side with NGOs.

Particularly distinctive is that GANs have a multi-stakeholder strategy that takes them across the traditional network boundaries of the three organizational sectors of business, government, and civil society (non-profits). A multi-stakeholder strategy also means bringing together the “whole system” of people influenced by, and who influence, an issue. However, occasionally some stakeholders are intentionally excluded, such as with the exclusion of the tobacco companies from the Tobacco-Free Initiative since their interests were diametrically opposite.

For the Cooperative Programme on Water and Climate key bridging was across divides between policy makers (usually governments and international NGOs), techno-experts (scientists, business people, engineers), funders (foundations and donor agencies), and communities (local activists and community members).

Although GANs often start with an emphasis upon global and national, longer-term success usually hinges upon global–regional–national–local boundary spanning. In many ways GANs are the first truly global assemblies. Unlike some traditional global boundary spanners that depend upon creating strong collective identities – such as religious organizations – at least as important for GANs is the ability to preserve the distinct identities of members. If people coming from diverse perspectives cannot successfully articulate and represent them and mobilize the resources of their stakeholder group, their value to the GAN will be lost.

Characteristic 3. Inter-organizational networks

If you are after global action, individuals as an organizing unit provide weak leverage. Most individuals have less influence and resource access than organizations. Organizing individuals to realize the scale of action the GANs aim for would be an even greater organizing challenge than their chosen strategy to network organizations. Sometimes GANs' participants are even associations of organizations – the GAN then being a network of networks like the World Water Council.

Consequently, at the global level the role of individuals as participants and members in the networks is very marginal as opposed to the role of organizations. Transparency International (TI) began as a network of individual members and individuals still have a modest (and diminishing) role, but TI quickly shifted to a network where a specific organization is usually accredited as a national chapter.

In some cases, the distinction between individuals and organizations is finessed – the GRI, for example, specifies that individuals do not represent an organization's interests because of concern that this will undermine the needs of 'the whole' – but in fact, 'Organizational Stakeholders' are a key membership category.

Networks also are associated with a different power dynamic than traditional hierarchical organizations. They support diversity by facilitating marginalized people to find each other and entrepreneurialism by encouraging decentralized action.

Characteristic 4. Systemic change agents

This is perhaps the most complicated of the attributes and is difficult to explain or to assess. By “a system” I mean a set of independent but inter-related elements comprising a whole with regard to an activity, goal, or function. So think of the “system” at play with the issue of corruption. There are those who pay bribes, those who receive them, the legal apparatus that makes that possible, and the broader social networks and cultural values that are involved. That system is the focus of TI when it brings together the diverse organizations necessary to address corruption.

GANs’ core change strategy is to change what is possible, and this usually means changing the very way people think about an issue – TI’s Peter Eigen first had to make corruption a discussable issue. Then GANs build visions of how things can be different and create the necessary capacity to go about making them different. This usually means changing rules, procedures, laws, and values.

With its particular issue system, a GAN aims to reach the “tipping point”¹⁶ where organizations will no longer be considered “legitimate” and will be denied opportunities if they don’t follow the new rules and integrate the values. For example, the MSC and FSC aim to make selling products that do not reach their certification standard very difficult and costly – their certifications being seen as so desirable that there will be a modest premium for them and that both retail and wholesale purchasers demand the certifications.

Characteristic 5. Entrepreneurial action learners

The truth is that often GANs do not know exactly how to go about implementing their strategies, or how successful they will even be. More often than not, they are trying to do things that no one has ever tried to do before, although with books like this one about their experiences they have increasing guidance. This means that GANs are continually involved with experiments and innovating, and they have to develop good learning systems to efficiently and effectively draw appropriate lessons from them.

GANs’ learning challenge is complicated by the diversity they embrace and the complexity of the systems and issues they address. They need to draw upon a wide variety of expertise and integrate it into actions. And the expertise is both about content – AIDS, forests, diamond markets, for example – and about processes and structures – about how work gets done, and how to develop a robust network of unprecedented scale and complexity to do it.

This learning involves application and development of new methodologies, tools, and processes. The Sustainable Food Laboratory draws its name from a new methodology referred to as “The Change Lab.” It is not only developing a sustainable food system, but also a new approach to change.

A significant challenge for GANs is to pay attention to developing these approaches and use them. People in the GANs find the “action” part much more compelling, and the “learning” part requires much more discipline. However, it is important to avoid repeating mistakes and building a GAN’s effectiveness.

Characteristic 6. Voluntary leaders

Bjorn Roberts, Corporate Partnership Manager for The Climate Group, comments: “We’re a coalition of the willing . . . there is the formal membership structure, but we’re also a wider group of leading business and government organizations.” The GANs are networks of organizations willing to take leadership to address a specific issue. They do not have power of coercion through jail, taxation, or fines. For this, many criticize them. The Global Compact has been accused of “blue-washing” and misuse of the UN’s name as cover for bad business practice. The FSC became entangled in enormous controversy in Indonesia and was accused of mis-use of its logo. It was trying to create a strategy to work with large companies who could not immediately make a commitment to ensure all their products are sustainably harvested.

The GANs must walk a difficult line. They must ensure that they are continually advancing the boundaries of good practice, and yet encourage more organizations to adopt the practice. The accompanying strategy is, of course, to influence government regulators who *do* have the power of coercion, and to do this globally.

Characteristic 7. Global public goods producers

. . . public goods are those that share two qualities – non-excludability and non-rivalry, in economists’ jargon. This means, respectively, that when provided to one party, the public good is available to all, and consumption of the public good by one party does not reduce the amount available to the others to consume. Traditional examples of national public goods include traffic control systems and national security – goods that benefit all citizens and national private actors but that none could afford to supply on their own initiative.¹⁷

GANs' public goods creation role is reflected in their activities that:

1. optimize the positive public impacts of public expenditures such as those associated with the Millennium Development Goals and private investment,
2. address negative externalities of globalization,
3. support more equitable development globally,
4. work for an environmentally sustainable future,
5. develop sustainable wealth generation, and
6. nurture greater social cohesion – developing positive relationships between organizational sectors, across national boundaries, and among diverse cultures.

In keeping with this global public good creation, legally GANs are almost always an NGO, a non-profit organization (or a program of one) or, occasionally, an intergovernmental organization as is the case of the Global Compact. The issues GANs focus on in some ways reflect divisions not uncommon with governments, their agencies, and ministries. However, the issues are often relatively specialized – rather than a Ministry of Health, they are constructed around specific health challenges and diseases; rather than a ministry of public works, the Global Water Partnership and World Water Council have much narrower, distinctive, and complementary roles. On the other hand, some of the GANs focus upon cross-cutting issues that traditional governmental structures have great difficulty addressing – such as the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development and the Global Reporting Initiative, which are concerned with triple bottom line (economic, social, and environmental) reporting.

A growing phenomenon

GANs are a post-Cold War phenomenon, for good reason. However, there are three networks that pre-date that period and have most of the GAN characteristics. One is the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, with origins in 1863. The International Committee of the Red Cross, part of the Movement, is distinctive because it is an NGO that is “custodian” of the Geneva Conventions that are the product of governments, and because it has a permanent mandate under international law supporting its activities. Other parts of the Movement have a similarly unusual government and NGO character. For example, the American Red Cross Society is established by its own Charter of the Congress of the US.

The Chairman is appointed by the President of the US, but other Board members are elected by members of the Society.

The Movement is an impressive example of a GAN, comprising almost 97 million volunteers, supporters, and staff in 186 countries. It reaches and supports around 250 million people annually through its programs; the value of the contribution made by youth volunteers in Africa alone is estimated to be worth more than \$1.4 billion per year.¹⁸

The second oldest GAN is the International Labour Organization (ILO). It was founded in 1919 in the wake of World War I, in the belief that lasting peace is dependent upon decent treatment of working people. After the UN was established, the ILO became an agency of it. However, it is unique as the only “tri-partite” UN agency. The ILO Governing Body is composed of 28 government members, 14 employer members, and 14 worker members. Countries of chief industrial importance permanently hold ten of the government seats. Government representatives are elected at a Conference every three years, taking into account geographical distribution. The employers and workers elect their own representatives respectively.

The ILO’s tasks are promoting rights at work, encouraging opportunities for decent employment, enhancing social protection, and strengthening dialogue on work-related issues. Over the years and through its close UN affiliation, it has become quite bureaucratic and weak in some GAN characteristics like “entrepreneurial action learner.”

The third old GAN was founded in 1948 and is IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. It describes itself as the world’s oldest and largest global environmental network – a democratic membership union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. Although governments usually refuse to be “members” of NGOs, IUCN’s members include over 200 government and over 800 non-government organizations.

IUCN is perhaps best known for production of the “Red Book” which catalogues endangered species. It runs thousands of field projects around the world to better manage natural environments and develop leading conservation science.

During the Cold War when groups of countries were split into ideological camps, creating organizations to take truly grounded global action was highly problematic. Moreover, given the heavy dominance of government in Communist countries and the lack of independent business and civil society organizations, multi-stakeholder initiatives were not possible. The best that could be done was academic exchanges, cultural tours, and sports events that were devoted to demonstrating ideological superiority.

Nevertheless, there were a couple of important GAN initiatives in less ideologically charged and yet critical arenas. One is the Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR). It brings together 15 research institutes, funders, national governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to move research results from laboratories to farmers' fields. Over 300 farmers organizations are currently engaged in collaborative research programs with CGIAR centers. Today more than half the land growing improved varieties of the world's ten most important food crops is growing varieties with CGIAR ancestry.

Additionally, growing out of a 1985 health conference in Canada came the Healthy Cities (Communities) Movement. Although associated with the World Health Organization (WHO) and originating with health professionals, it developed a much broader concept of health. It envisions that people are healthy when they live in nurturing environments and are involved in the life of their community. The key focus is at the local level, and the vision involves connecting diverse people and organizations in communities. Although the Movement as a network continues to be active in Europe with the support of WHO, its global presence has greatly diminished.

But after the fall of the Berlin Wall, new opportunities arose for networks of diverse participants globally. They were inspired by new thinking about traditional divisions, and the FSC was one of the first to explore how adversaries might actually work together. All of the GANs described as examples at the beginning of this chapter are from this period. The fast pace of development of the 1990s slowed with increasing skepticism about networks and "dialogue" associated with them. Today almost every issue has a GAN, and several issues have more than one. Some GANs have died and some are active at a relatively low level. However, there are several dozen today, and about three or four dozen have a significant presence.

They represent an innovation that is as distinct from business, government, and civil society organizations as those three types of organizations are from each other. "We're not a business, not an NGO," comments Ernst Ligteringen, Chief Executive of the GRI. "From a business perspective, we move slowly. From the NGO side, we're moving at a fairly quick pace. I tell NGOs: 'Yes, we consult, but we're not only about consultation. GRI is also focused on maintaining a momentum in the development of sustainability reporting.'" However, the GANs are at an early stage of development and are still not widely recognized as unique.

Their stage of development is comparable to business corporations during the age of the railroad in the late nineteenth century. Only then did

the corporate form really take shape, with the demands for coordination of activities with increasing precision over global distances and time zones. Recognition of the importance of the organizational form was marked with the founding of the first business school in 1908, the Harvard Business School.

Governments as we know them today really only developed with the rise of the welfare and nation-state after World War I. Before that they were comparatively modest in extent of activity, and often associated with individuals, ruling families, or oligarchies rather than citizen accountability. Today we have Schools of Government and of Public Administration to train people for those particular institutions.

And at the beginning of the twentieth century civil society organizations were largely associated with religious and labor organizations. Since the 1960s, there has been tremendous growth in NGOs to span almost every issue from human rights, health, and education to the environment, peace, and development. Parallel with these developments we have the rise of centers of learning and capacity development for civil society.

The founding period of a new organizational type like the GANs is a period of general confusion, experimentation, and intense learning. They operate with a different *logic* and *assumptions* that are discussed more in the final chapter that summarizes the experience of GANs and describes their potential future as critical global governance organizations.

People bring to GANs their experiences from other types of organizations, and naturally enough try to apply those experiences. Pioneers in GANs have looked to inter-governmental organizations like the UN and the WHO as possible role models, and this has led to inappropriate appropriation of concepts like “Secretariat”, which can limit GANs’ development of their potential. Other pioneers have looked to NGOs like Amnesty International as role models, without accounting for the fundamentally different dynamic that embracing of business, government, and civil society generates. Although business corporations have less often been taken as role models, it is not unusual for a person from business – often on a GAN board – to try to make a GAN “more business-like” in its operations.

To realize their potential GANs must be recognized as a distinct type of organization that requires unique skills, structures, processes, and strategies. Given GANs’ early development stage, we still do not know what all of these are, but there is rich learning from GAN pioneers. This book aims to present some of that learning to avoid repetition of mistakes and further develop the knowledge and competencies necessary for this type of network to reach its full potential.

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INDEX

- Aarhus Convention, 4
- The Access Initiative (TAI), 4–5, 12, 30–2, 56, 62, 117–18, 131, 138, 160, 171, 181–4, 186–7, 197, 202, 207
- action learning, 48, 54, 58, 61, 64, 95, 163, 165, 175, 178, 182–3
- action research, 50, 53, 62, 118–19, 162
- Allee, V., 37, 81, 141, 199
- ambiguity, 44, 146, 149–51, 170–1, 203
- Amnesty International, 19, 202
- Annan, Kofi, 2, 10, 173, 227
- assumptions, 19, 22, 44, 46, 93–4, 97, 99, 104, 106, 109, 117, 156, 168, 179, 197, 199, 204, 213, 216, 226, 227–36
- Berkamp, Ger, 134, 190, 206, 211
- Boards, *see* Councils
- brand, 5, 60, 79, 124, 127, 187, 197, 205, 220, 223
- Building Partnerships for Development in Water and Sanitation, 187
- bureaucracy(ization), 17, 57, 59, 64–5, 95, 154, 181–2, 202, 213–14, 223, 225, 234
- business models, 103–4, 129, 152, 184, 186, 188, 214
- butterfly effect, 35, 151
- capacity-building, 192
- Castells, Manuel, 1, 20
- CERES, 9, 73
- certification (certifying), 7–8, 14, 28, 30, 46, 56, 58, 65, 111, 113–14, 125, 129, 133, 139, 143, 169, 200, 222
- Chandler, Alfred, 44
- change
- Change Lab, 15, 55
 - incremental, 161, 167, 169–70
 - tipping point, 14, 20, 64, 96, 105, 112, 121, 191, 212–13, 221
 - types of, 37, 96–7, 113, 161, 167
- chaordic (organization), 126
- chaos, 8, 35–6, 126
- China, 9, 11, 102, 104–5, 135, 180, 210, 219
- Climate Group (The), 15, 28, 32, 93, 129, 219
- coherence, 22, 24–6, 28, 65–6, 95, 127, 139, 157, 199, 222
- Cold War, 16, 94
- committees, 16, 25, 51, 104, 128, 130, 133–4, 143, 201
- communications, 21, 23, 39, 54, 56, 63, 66, 72, 89, 92–3, 108, 133, 136, 142, 145, 162, 171–4, 177–8, 182, 192, 223, 226, 235–6
- Communities of Practice (CoPs), 39–42, 147, 175–6, 192
- community organizing/development, 47, 103, 127, 156–7, 197
- competency, 60, 142, 144–6, 154–9, 166–92, 204
- competition, 82, 190, 211, 218, 220–3
- complex (adaptive) systems, 32–9, 70, 146, 152, 157, 163, 165, 230–3
- complexity
- change oriented, 37
 - cultural, 37
 - dynamic, 37, 39
 - knowledge-centered, 36–7
 - spatial, 36, 90
- concept mapping, 76–7, 88–9, 90–1
- constituency feedback, 164
- Consultative Group on International Agriculture Research (CGIAR), 18
- Cooperative Programme on Water and Climate (CPWC), 13, 39–41, 57
- coordination, 19, 22, 25, 59, 88, 147
- corruption, *see* Transparency International
- councils, 131, 133–5
- Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCM), 96, 131
- Daley-Harris, Sam, 7, 99, 203, 205, 207
- De Freitas, Andre, 60, 127, 201, 215
- design principles, 125–8
- development state, 225
- dialogue, 5, 17–18, 60–1, 64–5, 94, 98, 105, 107–14, 115–16, 119–20, 168, 177, 209–11
- generative, 108, 110–111

- differentiation, 45–6
 DNA, 126, 128
- earth governance, 10
 Ecoagriculture Partners (EP), 29, 57
 effectiveness, 15, 23, 32, 36, 66, 85, 113–14,
 127, 133, 145, 155, 159, 214
 efficiency, 31, 36, 66, 125, 206, 214, 223
 Eigen, Peter, 6, 14, 49, 56, 59, 61, 63,
 201–2
 emergence, 22, 33–6, 38, 110, 140, 193,
 234, 237
 entrepreneurial
 learning, 14–15, 17, 95, 179, 200–2
 social entrepreneurs, 55, 154
 Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), 12, 137,
 222
 evolutionary sociology, 45
 expertise, 14, 30, 46, 53, 60–1, 82, 88–9, 94,
 124–5, 127, 131, 133, 135, 142–3, 177,
 183–4, 192–3, 212, 235
 Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
 (EITI), 49–51, 63, 107, 202, 219
- Fair Labor Association (FLA), 5–6, 56, 60, 130,
 134–5, 137, 217, 221–2
 fair trade, 30, 57, 221
 Finance GAN, 209–11
 Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), 3, 11, 14–15,
 18, 26, 47, 56, 59–60, 65, 111, 127–8, 131,
 133, 135–6, 167, 169, 179, 201, 215,
 217–18, 221
 fractals, 126
 funding, 8–9, 28, 31, 40, 131, 137, 139, 182–3,
 185–90, 193, 214–15, 233
- Geneva Conventions, 16
 geo mapping, 78–9, 88–90
 Global Action Networks (GANs)
 and business, 15, 32, 158
 definition, 1, 10
 history, 44, 104, 173, 212
 Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN),
 31, 59–60, 75, 118, 128, 138, 140, 144,
 159, 201, 213, 218, 220
 Global Compact, 2, 11, 15–16, 24, 30, 63, 65,
 74, 93, 128, 130, 132, 138, 187, 190,
 204–5, 207, 215, 218–21, 229
 Global Finance Initiative (GFI), 51, 69,
 91, 155
 Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis
 and Malaria (Global Fund), 3, 11, 31,
 131, 133
- Global governance organizations, 10, 19
 Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), 49,
 136, 187
 Global Partnership to Eliminate River
 Blindness, 11
 Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed
 Conflict (GPPAC), 28, 56, 132, 190
 global public goods, 15–16, 27, 140, 184–90,
 210, 215, 217, 229, 236
 global public policy development process, 155
 Global Public Policy Networks (GPPN), 10,
 181, 227
 Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), 9, 16, 24, 56,
 69, 113, 128, 207, 213
 Global Water Challenge (GWC), 28, 57, 123,
 174, 189
 Global Water Partnership (GWP), 11, 16, 26, 56,
 93, 128, 150, 198, 215
 government, 1–2, 4–8, 10–13, 15–19, 24–5, 27,
 30–2, 37, 41, 44–5, 50–1, 53, 55, 59–60,
 63, 77, 82, 86, 93–4, 99–102, 111–12, 117,
 125, 127–8, 130–1, 136–8, 143, 149–51,
 154, 158–9, 167, 176, 180–5, 187–9,
 191–2, 200, 204, 209–10, 213–19, 221–2,
 225–9, 231–2, 234–5, 237
 role of, 27, 59, 132
 Grameen Bank, 8, 99, 207
 Greenpeace, 129
- Healthy Cities (Communities) Movement, 18
- Impact planning, assessment, reporting,
 and learning systems (IPARLS), 162–3,
 166
 innovation, 18, 24, 29, 32, 41, 46, 51, 69–70, 82,
 111, 123, 126, 129, 161–2, 199, 203, 206,
 213, 216, 231
 integration, 45–6, 48, 52, 132, 151, 200, 209, 233
 intergovernmental organization, 16, 137, 237
 International Bridges to Justice (IBJ), 93, 102,
 104–5, 107, 112
 International Centre for Trade and Sustainable
 Development (ICTSD), 16, 230
 International Federation of Organic Agriculture
 Movements (IFOAM), 30, 187
 International Labour Organization (ILO), 17,
 222
 International Red Cross Red Crescent
 Movement, 16
 International Social and Environmental
 Accreditation and Labelling Alliance
 (ISEAL), 30

- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 17, 24, 61, 65, 128, 133–5, 213
- ISEAL Alliance, 30
- issue crawl mapping, 72
- issue networks, 16
- Kahane, A., 45, 55
- Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KP), 8
- Kuhn, T., 98, 226
- leadership, 15, 36, 58, 61–3, 79, 81, 95, 111, 113, 118, 126, 142–3, 145–54, 164, 170, 184, 190–2, 197, 202, 212
- leaderful, 152–3, 191
- Leading Group for Innovation in Development Financing, 216
- learning
- action, 48, 54, 58, 61, 64, 95, 163, 165, 175, 178, 182–3
 - cycle, 48–9, 162
 - double-loop, 161
 - ecology, 175–7, 179–80, 192, 237
 - network, 48–9, 54, 61, 174, 176–8, 192
 - organization, 174, 176
 - single-loop, 97, 161
 - societal, 48, 100–1, 105, 117–18, 174
 - styles (emotional, physical, mental), 149
 - systems, 14, 40–2, 145, 162, 174–80, 192
 - triple-loop, 97, 161
- legal structure, 113, 136–7
- Ligteringen, Ernst, 18, 29, 185, 196, 213
- logic (organizing), 2, 19, 25–6, 51, 59, 65, 101, 120, 125, 140, 150, 154, 162, 191, 214, 223
- love, 45, 50, 147
- Madmundo.tv, 172
- management, 11, 37–8, 44, 55–6, 60, 65, 98, 108, 113, 118, 143–4, 147, 151, 159–60, 162, 168, 177, 189, 190, 197, 200, 202, 210, 214
- Managing for Clarity (MfC) Mapping, 69, 83–7, 89
- mapping
- concept mapping, 76–7, 88–91
 - issue crawls, 69–74, 87, 89–91
 - managing for clarity, 69, 83–7, 89
 - semantic clouds, 71–2, 87, 89–90
 - Social Network Analysis (SNA), 69, 79, 89
 - systems archetypes, 69, 74–6, 89–91, 169
- Value Network Analysis (VNA), 69, 81, 89, 223
- web scrapes, 69, 71
- Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), 7, 27, 56, 113, 130, 203, 215
- markets vs. networks, 21, 95
- Marton-Lefevre, Julia, 24, 213
- measuring impact, 145, 159–60, 162–6, 178, 188, 212
- membership, 5, 12–13, 15, 17, 58, 111, 126, 128–30, 134, 138, 188, 204–5, 213, 217, 219–20, 222
- mental model, 35, 70, 84, 89–90, 97, 156, 168, 234
- Microcredit Summit Campaign, 8, 24, 67, 130–1, 137, 140, 203, 205, 207
- Mountain Forum, 11, 63, 187
- movement(s), 10, 16–18, 30, 45, 47, 51, 53, 66, 96, 123–5, 157, 187, 198, 214
- networks
- advantages, 23–4
 - definition, 21
 - effectiveness, 23, 26, 32, 36
 - functions of, 28, 139
 - and hierarchy, 23, 198, 213
 - inter-organizational, 13, 23, 26, 45, 79, 95, 128
 - and markets, 21, 95
 - rationale for, 22, 23–5
 - roles, 77–8, 88
- Ostrom, E., 21, 26–7
- outcome mapping, 163
- paradigm, 98–9, 153, 223, 226–7, 230
- paradox, 36, 44–5, 146, 149–50, 170, 203
- politics, 6–7, 10, 27, 31, 53, 58, 60, 72, 81, 101–2, 106, 119, 132, 135, 141, 181–4, 190–1, 207, 210–211, 221, 223–4, 227, 229, 231, 233–4, 237
- Powell, Walter, 21–2
- power, 13, 15, 21, 27, 31, 35, 37, 45–6, 48–9, 52–3, 69, 98–9, 102, 106, 124, 127–8, 130, 135, 138, 140, 143, 147, 150, 158, 166, 175, 181, 183, 186, 190–1, 196–8, 205, 210, 226, 229, 234
- principle 10, 4–5, 117, 131, 138, 160, 181
- Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), 2, 27, 29, 60, 128, 130, 138, 201, 218
- public good, 15–16, 20, 27, 95, 140, 184–6, 189, 210, 215, 217, 229, 236

- Rainforest Alliance, 104
 reciprocity, 22
 reform, definition of, 37, 103–4
 regimes, 10
 regulators, 1, 15, 51–2, 119, 157, 182
 Reinicke, Wolfgang, 10, 181
 resource mobilization, 145, 184–6, 192
 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 4, 181, 225
 roles, *see* networks
 Ruggie, John, 225, 229, 237
- scale, 1, 11, 13–14, 22–4, 27, 31, 37, 53, 55, 60, 62, 64, 74, 82, 95, 100, 103–4, 111–12, 127, 130, 150, 154–5, 162, 187, 198, 200, 212–14, 220, 222
- Scharmer, Otto, 47, 100, 107
- secretariat, 3, 19, 24, 26, 40, 58–9, 62–4, 66, 107, 137, 140, 143, 169, 173, 186–7, 188, 198, 201, 206, 214
- semantic clouds, 69, 71–2, 87, 89–90
- Senge, Peter, 33, 55, 70, 74, 151, 156, 171, 176
- Slaughter, Anne-Marie, 1
- Snyder, Bill (William), 39–40, 174, 176
- Social Accountability International (SAI), 30, 137, 222
- social entrepreneurs, 55, 154
- Social Network Analysis/mapping (SNA), 69, 76, 79–81, 89–91
- societal learning, 48, 100–1, 105, 117–18, 159, 174
- sociology, 45
- stakeholder, 13, 22, 26, 41, 50, 52, 79, 81, 83, 86–7, 104, 114–15, 119–20, 124, 128–31, 134–5, 138–9, 157, 159, 165, 167, 190, 209–11, 217, 220
- steward(ing), 35, 55, 95–6, 149–50, 154, 167, 169–70, 173, 180
- Stop TB Partnership, 31, 150, 201, 219
- strategy, 1–2, 11–15, 21, 31, 34–6, 44, 46, 51–2, 56, 59, 62, 69–70, 76, 79, 81, 91, 93–4, 96, 99, 104–7, 111–13, 118–19, 124–5, 130, 137–8, 147, 154, 157, 164, 166–7, 169–70, 174, 179–80, 182, 184–8, 196–8, 200, 204–5, 207, 210, 212–13, 221–2, 226, 228–9, 234
- principles, 44, 54, 60, 125
- structural holes, 157
- subsidiarity, 126, 136, 205–6
- Sustainable Food Lab (SFL), 15, 54–6, 99–100, 102–4, 107, 111, 113, 152, 187
- Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), 220–1
- Sutton, Mike, 7
- system
 archetypes, 33, 69, 74–6, 88–9, 91
 and change, 100, 102
 complex (adaptive), 32–9, 70, 146, 152, 157, 163, 165, 230–3
 definition, 25, 83
 feedback loops, 33–5, 88–91, 178
 intelligent, 151–2
 unintended consequences, 33, 88
- Systemic Leverage Index, 165
- technology, 41, 47, 54, 56, 58, 60–2, 78–9, 84, 93, 100, 111, 114, 136, 140–1, 171, 177, 190, 226, 235
- theory(ies) of change, 25, 34, 106, 143, 162–3, 164–6, 199–200
- tipping point, 14, 64, 96, 105, 112, 191, 212–13, 221
- tobacco-free initiative, 12, 54, 129
- tragedy of the commons, 27, 69, 74–5, 228
- transaction costs, 21
- transformation, definition of, 37, 124
- Transparency International (TI), 6–7, 13–14, 24, 30, 49–51, 56, 59, 61, 63, 65, 79, 125, 128, 130–2, 137–8, 140, 147, 173, 178, 186–7, 191, 201, 204, 212, 218
- triple bottom line, 9, 16, 24, 59–61, 79, 143, 222, 230
- trust, 21–3, 44, 55, 80, 96, 117, 125, 127, 133, 138, 150, 153, 158, 198, 203, 215
- trustworthy, 152–3, 158
- Unilever, 7, 55, 104
- United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), 2, 5, 32, 57, 132, 183
- United Nations (UN), 2–6, 8, 10, 17, 19, 28, 30, 51–2, 59, 63, 65–6, 72, 74, 76, 78–9, 93, 128, 130, 132, 138, 173, 181, 201, 207, 209, 213–14, 218, 225, 227–9, 232–3, 237
- U Process, 47, 55
- Value Network Analysis (VNA), 69, 81–3, 89–91, 223
- van Heerden, Aurret, 6, 217, 221
- Van Tuijl, Peter, 132, 190, 196, 202, 205, 218
- viral organizing, 23
- visioning, 28–9, 32, 50, 54, 114, 139–40, 169–70, 235

- visual diagnostics, *see* mapping
- voluntary, 15, 94–5, 111, 126, 130, 154, 191, 196, 200, 213–14, 216–17, 236
- Washington Consensus, 225
- web scrapes, 69, 71
- Wenger, Etienne, 39, 174
- Wilber, Ken, 105, 117
- Williamson, Oliver, 21, 225
- World Bank, 6, 52, 56, 59, 63, 72–4, 99, 173, 178, 185, 225, 228, 230
- World Health Organization (WHO), 18–19, 54, 133
- world learning systems, 192
- World Water Council (WWC), 13, 16, 131, 135, 137–8, 190–1, 206, 211
- Youth Enterprise and Sustainability (YES), 69, 84–6, 140, 187