

A NETWORK OF NETWORKS

The LLA is a partnership of organisations that operates as a "network of networks", characterised by the interplay of various network types with the ability to evolve in response to changing interaction patterns.

Networks, at their base, consist of the structure of relationships between actors (individuals and organisations) and the meaning of the linkages that constitute those relationships¹.

This focus on social ties and interactions, rather than individual actors, forms a foundation of network dynamics within the LLA. Some examples of networks include Loose, Hub and Meshed².

LLA networks have emerged following three phases. Firstly, through connecting events (e.g. LLA Leaders' Breakfasts, Conferences, etc) a partner develops connections with others and identifies a shared interest/dilemma/question. Secondly, an invitation to partners to join sense making activities (e.g. Roundtables) to generate knowledge about the dilemma and identify goals. Thirdly, a facilitator chairs the network to deliver ongoing activity for as long as shared goals are delivered.

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE NETWORKS

Administration and coordination essentials:

- Meeting scheduling: identifying a convenient date, clarifying if meeting is face to face or virtual, booking a space (if face to face) with refreshments, issuing calendar invitations and sending a reminder closer to the meeting date
- Communications to promote LLA networks
- Setting agendas to progress the work of the network and ensuring this is distributed one week before the meeting
- Chairing meetings to include discussion and decision making on key areas
- Thanking colleagues for attending after the meeting, sending notes/minutes of conversations, decisions and identified actions, setting follow up meetings (if required) and logging attendance/apologies
- Scrutiny of actions and matters arising
- Bring papers to the meeting, e.g. agenda/previous minutes
- Notify Sam Hallas (shallas@leedslearningalliance.org) so dates of meetings can be added to the LLA calendar

¹ Greany and Kemp, 2024

² Luke Roberts, 2024

CURRENT LLA NETWORKS

SEND (Primary Focused)
Centre for Inclusive Practice
Primary Leaders
Secondary Leaders
Further and Higher Education Leaders
Equity
Peace and Community Safety (anti-exclusion, anti-youth violence)
Community Cohesion
Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (Schools and FE)
Climate Crisis (Eco/Sustainability)
Recruitment and Development (Supply Pool)
Digital Tech Pathways
Digital Development (AI)
Professional Learning (Local and National)
Culture and the Arts

EXAMPLES OF NETWORK MODELS

Loose Networks:

- The LLA begun as a loose network and is beginning to develop other network types
- Characterised by flexibility and autonomy
- Indirect but highly linked connections
- Communication clusters around members with high interaction weight
- Actors can independently generate new connections
- Information distributed organically through self-organisation
- Adaptable to emerging needs
- Fosters innovation and a sense of belonging, especially for isolated members
- May have limited impact on systemic change
- Can evolve into meshed networks with increased interaction weight and regularity

Hub Networks:

- More structured, with a central organisation or "hub" connecting to multiple peripheral organisations
- Hub generates energy, acting as an amplifier and regulator
- Communication can be one-directional (hub to spokes) or two-directional (spokes to hub when providing information to the hub)
- Efficient information flow and resource distribution from hub
- Limitations include ignoring specific environments of spokes

- Sustainable only as long as the hub maintains resources and coordination
- Network longevity depends on the hub's management capacity
- New spokes can be added, but the hub must sustain these connections
- A meshed network might transform into a hub network if a central actor's influence increases

Meshed Networks:

- High connectivity across all actors
- Facilitates rapid and multidirectional information flow
- All actors can send and receive knowledge, leading to swift communication and adaptability
- Resilient to losing individual actors and capable of rapid change
- Incorrect information can quickly impact the entire network

In summary, the LLA partnership can utilise the unique characteristics of loose, hub, and meshed networks to address complex community needs. The regularity and weight of interactions are crucial in how these networks evolve, demonstrating their fluidity and responsiveness in addressing complex community needs.

FUNCTIONS AND MECHANISMS

To support a diversity of networks as they evolve, it is helpful to have clarity about the functions being delivered by LLA networks. Core functions and mechanisms could include:

Shared Goal/Interest/Values

- Storytelling
- Accept outcomes cannot always be predefined

Shared Ownership and Benefits

- Shared practices and attributes e.g. Circles
- Collective engagement
- Co-design skills
- Adapt to ebb and flow of member commitment
- Respond to partner specific communication needs

Shared Resources

- Releasing partner organization reps
- Time to engage with activity
- Venues to host activity
- Finances to support activity

Knowledge Generation

- Sense making activities - jointly make sense of information/data and develop a shared understanding
- Collaborative

- Shared practices and attributes

Knowledge Sharing

- Events – meetings, seminars, breakfasts, school visits, conference
- Publications

Constructive Challenge

- Consistent engagement at network meetings
- Shared language
- Mutual trust

Peer Support (professional/emotional/ learning & development)

- Peer support groups
- Professional learning groups

Action/Delivery

- Trusted convener – facilitating and supporting peer learning
- Key skills and qualities from lead facilitators and wider participants
- Feedback mechanisms to participants, partners and LLA Board

References:

1. Greany and Kemp (2024), *Leading Educational Networks: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Bloomsbury Academic)
2. Luke Roberts (2024), *Leading School and Sustaining Innovation: How to think big and differently in complex systems* (Routledge)