

Design principles for clever network actions

Version 1.0, July 2020

Made by Paul van der Cingel

Network Weaver The Netherlands

All pictures free from copyright from Pixabay.com

Time to act

Some people believe that in order to move a network to action all you need is an energizing network meeting with motivated and capable people.

Alas, it usually takes more than that.
Self-organization does not emerge automatically.

This slidedeck offers some design principles for clever network actions that foster a culture of selforganization.



Redefining “activism”: What is it that I want to activate today with the power of my attention and intention?”
- May East

FAQs

1. Why “clever” network actions?
I use this word to stress the difference with the SMART acronym.
2. Are these design principles evidence-based by scientific research?
No, they are not. Instead, they are based on practice-based evidence.
3. Where can I share things I learned from using these design principles?
Anywhere, as long as you share them! One possible platform for sharing is <https://networkweaver.com/>. In that case, reach out to June Holley.



Design Principle 0 : Get some sense of what is already going on

Before rushing into action, get together with people in the network to make sense of the present situation. Comparing it to a sports game, it kind of looks like this:

Purpose of the game and the playing field:

- What is the complex challenge at hand?
- Why are we getting together?
- What are we trying to achieve?

Players:

- Who are stakeholders and how are they connected to each other?
- Network visualization is helpful here!

Game play:

- What has been going on so far?



Design Principle 1 : Small is beautiful

Keep your action as simple as possible

- E.g. finding a new potential network participant
- E.g. doing some deskresearch to find out what is going on in networks in other cities / regions / countries

Keep your action as small as possible

- Remember that in networks, small changes can get amplified significantly and spread quickly
- Use a short planning horizon. This urges you to update other people quickly on the outcomes of the action, which helps to keep momentum / maintain flow.



Design Principle 2 : Do not work alone

Collaborate with someone else in taking explicit ownership of your action

- Prefer actions in pairs (a “twosie”) over a large project team
- Taking ownership means communicating explicitly to the rest of the network that the two of you move to action

Collaborate with someone that you don't know that well (yet)

- That way, the simple action can build trust between you two. That might accelerate collaboration on more complicated stuff in the future



Design Principle 3 : Don't be a problem solver. Be a value creator

A network action creates value. It does not necessarily solve a problem

- It's like crossing a river by feeling the stones. You progress step by step. You have some sense of direction, but you cannot predict your exact next step because it depends on how stable you feel standing on the stones of the previous step.
- Each step creates value, though, in the sense that it helps you to cross the river.



Credits:
“value creator” inspired by Windesheim
River metaphor inspired by a quote by Deng Xiaoping

Design Principle 4 : Stay in the game

A network action is always connected to a larger movement in the network

- You should be able to make clear to others in the network why you expect your action to create value
- It is kind of like being two birds in a large swarm. The two of you are moving to action, while at the same time coordinating your movement with the movement of other birds in the swarm. Though the swarm continuously changes its form, it remains a coherent 'entity'.



Design Principle 5 : Make it easy to follow up

A network action always inspires people to do a follow-up

- Imagine that you are debriefing and sharing the outcome of the action. Try to make sure that people will ask, “what’s next? Or, “now what?”
- It does not necessarily have to be you two that will do a follow-up.
- Helpful questions from the field of journalism to generate interest in a follow-up:
 - Who else (... could we approach to...)?
 - What else (...could we investigate)?
 - Where else (...could we find interesting case studies)?
 - When, too (... did this kind of developments take place)?
 - Why else (...could this have happened)?
 - How else (...could people have tackled this issue)?



Design Principle 6 : Build in a debrief in advance

Before you move to action, let other people know in advance

- When –
- how –
- with whom you are going to share the outcomes and evaluate



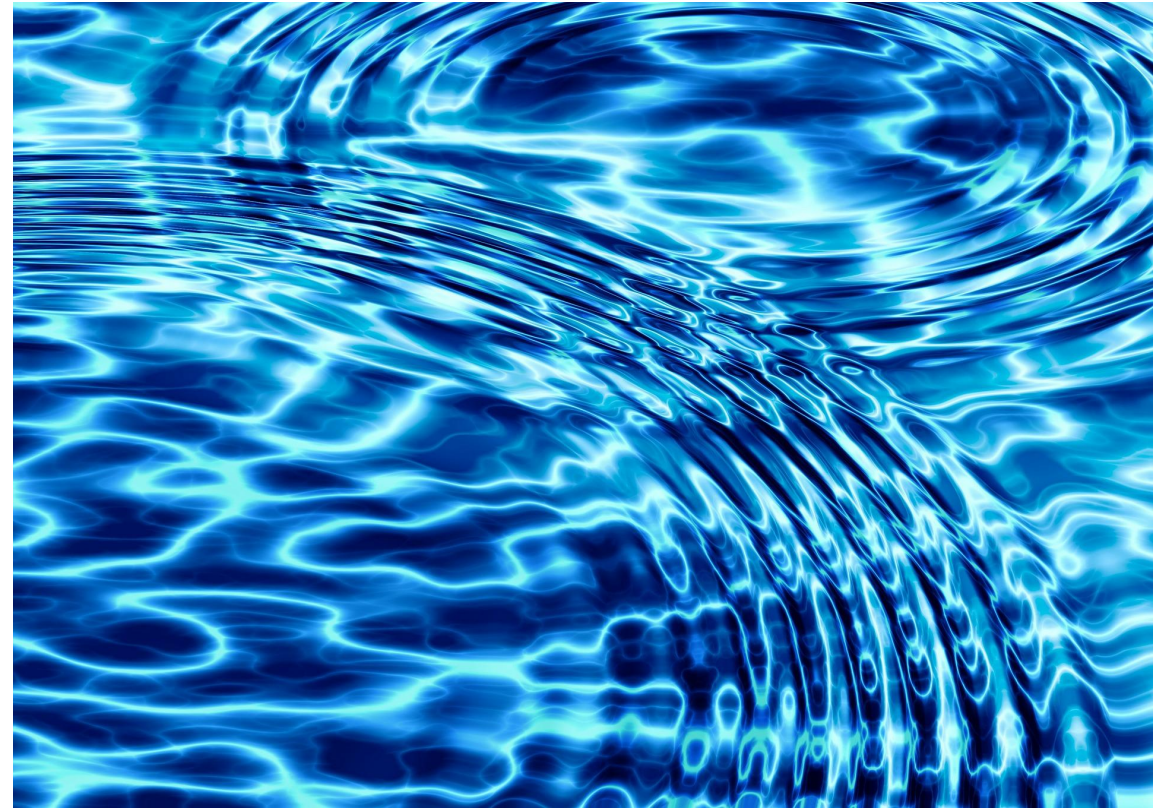
Design Principle 7 : Share lessons learned

Hopefully, your action yields actual results, like new resources, new people that connect to the network or new knowledge.

But being in action, you also learned lessons that might be shared with the network.

Please do!

- What did this action teach you about the game?
 - Did you learn more about the purpose ?
 - Did you learn more about the players?
 - Did you learn more about the gameplay?



Design Principle 8 : Be a role model

Show that you practice what you preach

Set the example

- Dare to share your lessons learned (even if things went wrong)
- Try to live up to items from the Network Weaver Checklist. Or even better: choose one and tell other people in the network that you are specifically working on that one in the coming months.
- Try to be playful
 - work like you are gaming, less like you are making a jigsaw puzzle
 - make room for fun
 - appreciate surprises as learning opportunities

