Netiquette 2.0: Moving Forward at the Speed of Trust
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When Stephen Covey published *Speed of Trust* in 2006, it marked a recognition that relationships are important to mainstream organizations and that trust-building is key to mobilizing their value. As the social sector increasingly builds networks of organizations to learn; engage with diverse others; and, to speed up knowledge development, we see how these loose relationships have value. But what do we really know about building trust in networks -- structures that are less "hard-wired" than formal organizations -- and how to work well in relationships without the defining bounds of role and structure?

In her *Network Weaver Handbook,* June Holley, the denizen of network practice suggests, trust depends on being able to actually demonstrate reliability, reciprocity, openness, honesty, acceptance and appreciation in networked relationships

She stresses that networks need to intentionally develop a culture of trust and lists five components that contribute to culture of trust:
1. Values and behavior
2. Framing and valuing trust-building;
3. Activities that build trust;
4. Network rules that coach and help manage misunderstandings before they become conflict; and, ,
5. Systems of reporting and accountability.

Learning together about networking practice is the purpose of the Ontario-based **Network Thinkers Network**. Recently we asked ourselves what we know about the subtleties of relational practice that build trust in networks. We speculated on the elements of "network etiquette"-- that layer of practice that we might frame as good manners for successful networks. We noticed that success requires participants to develop a set of skills and behaviours that are often different from the way we are used to working in more formal settings. Without the formal "rules" of an organization, a network creates – consciously (or unconsciously) - a set of interpersonal practices that shape the way members build participation and cohesion around purpose. The network both requires and fosters skill development in network etiquette.

Good manners are usually transferred implicitly – only children get explicit instruction on the norms of social behaviour. Yet with new social practices like networks, relational skills that suit the form must often be learned. For example, if you are used to working in an academic setting where individual practice and achievement are honed and rewarded, or in a business setting where competition and close team confidence are the norms, the manners of a network of seasoned non-profit collaborators will feel pretty unfamiliar.

Policies, rules and roles are the ways that more hierarchical organizations define relationships and bind the work of individuals together. Etiquette is the next level down on the ladder of informality. In a network, participation is looser, people tend to come and go in a direct relationship to the degree to which they can meet their own interests through the network – learning, generating opportunities, or perhaps finding potential collaborators.   Manners are an expression of culture – the informal and often unacknowledged agreements we establish on how to be together. For some networks, good manners and common interest may be the only glue that binds. We asked what happens when good network manners are clearly articulated and intentionally framed to support the purpose of the network. Join us in trying this out.

Network etiquette – The Difference between Practice and Manners

Good network manners and good network practices are not the same thing. Practices shape function – *what* we do; manners shape interpersonal relationships – *how* we do it together. Network practices include how and how often to connect, who will facilitate or plan, leadership turn-taking, emergent topic setting, who is invited and how, use of technology – phone or webinar, people in the room or often some combo. They are what networks do to schedule, frame and contain network conversations. June Holley identifies the many roles that members can take on in network practice including: guardian, facilitator and connector. Maintaining the functions of the network is the role of the network guardians. They ensure continuity and participation and it is common for members to move between and to share roles. We are learning that being explicit about functions and who the guardians are is essential to network success. While the guardians certainly influence network etiquette, good manners are something everyone develops together. What follows is a lexicon of the good manners of network etiquette we have discovered.

Netiquette 2.0: A Lexicon of Good Network Manners

In a network we co-create our way of being together. Members participate because they share an interest, and this means that we bring both our professional selves and our "human" selves forward into the network space: sharing who we are in our work and what piques our enthusiasm and passion; where we struggle and what we envision as possibile; and building relationships. Personal transparency and alignment with the mutual purpose of the network builds trust and allows for relationships not based on "rank" or power of position.

Networks are "living" structures that shift over time. Participation and experience produce a process of continuous mutual shaping of behaviour as new members join in. Working together without much formal structure requires individuals to develop norms of how to be together. These norms or manners become embedded in the network culture and are transmitted simply through modelling and repetition in practice. Collectively, we simultaneously learn and teach the "way" of being with others in our network. There are, we suggest, several kinds of good network manners.

Setting welcome manners create a continuous feeling of "we" in the group**.** These include protocols such as cc-ing all on network email conversations, regular round-table introductions that invite people to speak to interest as well as role, and ensuring new participants are explicitly welcomed. Communication norms that are deliberately inclusive such as avoiding acronyms, explaining jargon, recapping history and avoiding "insider" conversations based on unexplained

experiences are good manners that encourage diverse participation and so increase the opportunity for learning.

Another set of **manners focuses on shared facilitation of conversation**. Without a formal chair, network members often share facilitation leadership and self-structured group process. Any member may draw out those who speak less, gently intervene with those who take too much time or are not adept at turn-taking. Adaptive agenda setting allows for the emergence of new topics in the discussion. Sometimes it is helpful to recognize that each participant carries the "ghost patterns" of prior group experience, accepted manners from a different context. Participants who have worked together before can bring powerful facilitative influence to the process, either positive or negative, by modelling shared patterns that influence the etiquette of the network.

Still another kind of network **manners support the network's purpose of exploring** for learning and opportunity rather than a traditional organizational focus on consensus-building or decision-making. These include: drawing out another's experience, especially if they are new to the group; holding the "tension of difference" between viewpoints rather than convincing or trying to reach agreement; asking questions that build collective understanding; and, offering synthesis of important areas of conversation and listening well.

Good Manners for the Inclusive Use of Technology

Technology has a powerful role in enabling network participation. Many networks depend on a blend of technologies for participation including phone and web options. Rather than relying on assumptions about access to, or familiarity with the use of technology tools, it is essential to ensure that these tools do not to create barriers to participation. Some best practices include: always offering instructions with the technology you choose and providing more than one mode of connection – web-based, phone or in-person-so that participants can choose what works for them. Selecting tools that allow for access (i.e. no cost, requiring bandwidth not available beyond urban areas etc.). It is also helpful to consider web-based platforms that allow for shared documentation storage and access.

Email is the standard form of invitation for most professional networks. Again a few **good email manners**: cc everyone to ensure others are aware of conversations, dates and times and agendas. Don't cc-all if the emailer asks for a response to a specific request; be concise and to the point in network emails and use a neutral but friendly tone. When you are planning a conference call, a network guardian should send out conference call co-ordinates in a calendar notice before each meeting. Don't rely on people's memory of the phone number from the last time you met. Always include a toll-free number for participants if some participants are not in the local zone.

Once you are convened, pay attention to **conference call etiquette**. The members on the phone in a mixed online/in-person group are always at a disadvantage. Because they cannot see the visual cues of others they will often struggle to figure out when to speak – or once they finally have the "floor", hold it for too long. Good network manners increase and even out participation. Try this: introduce people on the phone before those in the room to focus on the presence of those on the phone and "tune" those in the room to phone-listening; deliberately ask for phone contribution from time to time to facilitate participation; call for a "round" where

each person takes a turn to speak to draw out diverse perspectives; and check to see if the phone participants can hear well in case the location of the equipment needs adjustment. In the meeting room, have a visible list of the names of the phone participants.

Web-based platforms facilitate network engagement by making it possible for everyone to see the same information on the screen in real time, from wherever they are participating. Most software also offers an easy way for virtual participants to ask questions, comment via a chat function or participate in polls. There are **good network manners for web-based meetings** as well. First, if you are leading the session, ensure that you are familiar with the tools and preload and test any presentations. Include a welcome slide showing dial-in information on the first slide. Explain how virtual participants can use the chat box for comments, ask questions, obtain technical help and use polling functions. Again, keep the list of the virtual participants visible and refer to it often. Encourage the use of virtual hand raising and invite and use posted comments. It is often very helpful to have another network member monitor the chat box to ensure participant engagement.

Good manners can come naturally in familiar settings – and in unfamiliar settings they help you to manage. As we invite more and more diverse participants into networks, we must tend to the process and make manners explicit. Good manners support inclusion, encourage participation and a space for trust to grow amongst participants. With trust come opportunities and learning, and the catalyst to drive new practices and strategies, amplifying innovation and collaboration across our usual silos, boundaries and organizations.

Learn More:
- Access an overview of Stephen Covey's *Speed of Trust* or order a copy of the book
- Read *Building Networks and Movements for Social Change* in the Stanford Social Innovation Review
- Read *Building Smart Communities Through Network Weaving* by Valdis Krebs & June Holley
- Meet June Holley and visit her Network Weaver website
- Download *Catalyzing Networks for Social Change: A Funder's Guide* published by The Monitor Institute
- Watch the video *What is a system? Transformation through Nonprofits* with Marilyn Struthers
- Check out the Network Thinker community of practice on LinkedIn for monthly conference call and in-person meetings exploring network practice. The network meets up again in the Fall of 2015. Join in for the notice of the next meeting.