

Mapping Inter-organisational and Inter-personal Relationships

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Abstract. This position paper describes an analysis approach which compares organisational structures and social networks of organisational members. The mapping approach is illustrated with a case study of relationships in not for profit organisations.

1 Introduction

The TESS (Theory for Evolving Socio-technical Systems) project [5] is investigating the relationships between people in social networks and the role of inter-personal relationships within groups. The motivation is to analyse how social networks contribute towards group effectiveness and how people identify with groups and collective aims. Small Group Theory [1] predicts that one of the desiderata of effective groups is a well developed social network, which can help coordinate individual action, as well as developing trust between members to work collaboratively [2]. However, there is little firm data on the contribution of individual relationships to group success. This paper reports a preliminary analysis of a case study of social networks and group working in charities, or not-for-profit organisations, in the USA. The aims of this position paper are twofold: first to propose and illustrate a visual mapping approach for the analysis of inter-organisational as well as interpersonal relationships; and secondly to report a preliminary investigation into how relationships contribute towards group success.

2 Case Study

The data for this report comes from a study of not-for-profit organisations in State College, Pennsylvania, USA in May-June 2007. Not-for-profits, or charities in the UK, are good test cases for studying the intersection of social and organisational relationships. People tend to work for charities because of a deep personal commitment to society, a community or a cause, so their work becomes more than a commercial job. Individuals who work for charities tend to share similar interests and

world views hence there is a good chance that they will be members of the same social networks. Furthermore, since charities depend on the good will of many people to function economically, i.e. via donations of money, materials, labour, etc., social networks may well be more important for the success of charity organisations than of commercial companies or other goal-related groups, such as hobby and sports societies. Charities are also an important part of social capital within communities.

Data was collected from five organisations via interviews with 12 key personnel in those organisations, by attending meetings, and by documentation analysis from websites and other public sources of information on the charities and their personnel.

2.1 Organizational Mapping

One charity was focused on since it represented an innovative organisation which could transform the way charities might collaborate. Charities, from their nature, tend to run on a minimal budget, to keep costs to a minimum while delivering the main focus of their mission, be that social care, performing arts, or environmental protection. However all charities have core business functions which they need to maintain to deliver their mission; for example, fund raising, volunteer management, accounting and finance, personnel records, and activity reporting. These core business functions require IT support, but IT is rarely considered to be an essential business function itself. Hence most charities have these functions but they are rarely efficient and are prone to IT reliability problems, especially in the smaller organisations. A prototypical map of a charity structure and the inter-role relationships is shown in figure 1.

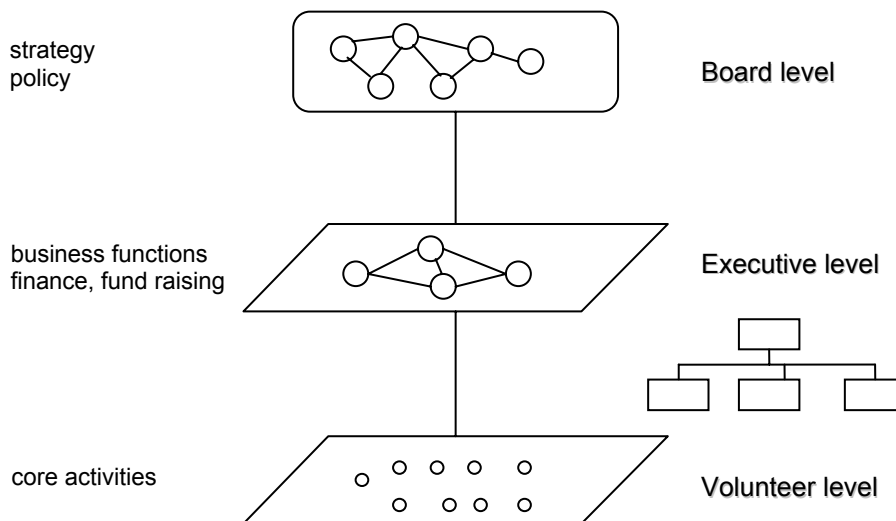


Figure 1. Organisation map of a prototypical charity organisation, showing role relationships and functions

At the board level, a network of relationships is modelled, while the executive level shows both a network of relationships and the hierarchical organisation chart. This enables social and working relationships in a peer-peer basis to be compared with the more formal organisation hierarchy. At the volunteer level, network relationships are modelled. The board of the charity (called trustees in the UK) are responsible for policy and strategic management. Board members also tend to be heavily involved in fund raising through individual relationships and their public roles. Social networking helps to transfer ideas between charities as well as recruiting individuals to serve as board members. The executive-level members vary from one person to several staff depending on the size of the charity. Business functions are delivered by these individuals who are usually, but not always, paid employees. Individual relationships at this level are important for smooth running of the organisation without the overhead of line-management control. The third layer is populated by the volunteers who give their time and expertise to help achieve the charity's mission. Individual relationships at this level are important for recruiting individuals into the organisation. Coordinating the volunteers and their activity is a key role of the executive members.

2.2 Inter-organisational Mapping

One initiative to help charities solve their common problem of providing efficient business functions and IT support for the same, is to share common facilities which can include a building for office space, business and IT support, administrative personnel and common business processes such as fund raising and publicity. The CASE (Community for Arts, Society and Education) is an umbrella charity which aims to create a multi-tenant not-for-profit facility, so several charities can share the building, office staff, IT support facilities and business functions. Approximately 120 such shared facilities exist in the USA and Canada. The organisation map for CASE is illustrated in figure 2.

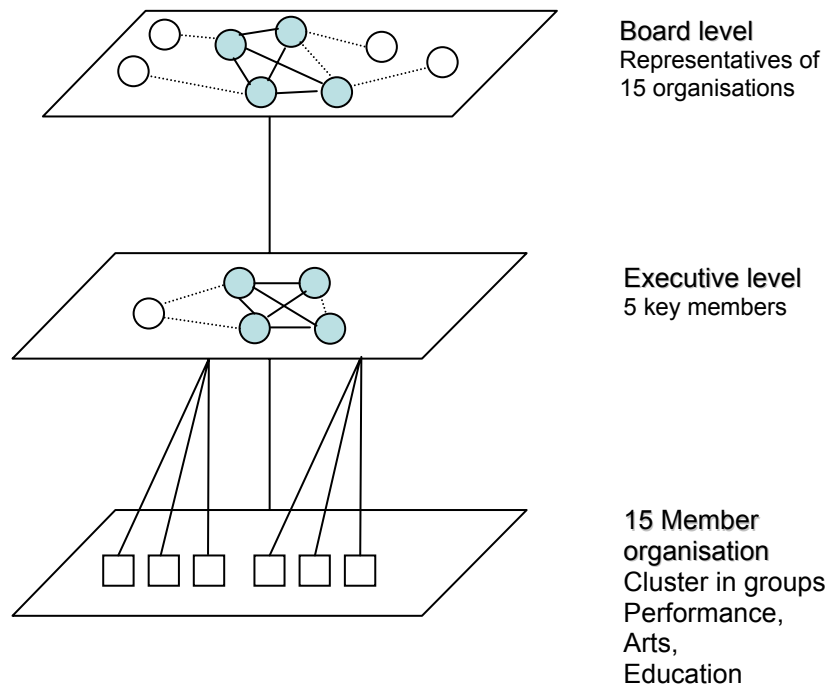


Figure 2. Organisation map of CASE showing organisation structure and member organisations. Four individuals (shaded) were members of both the board and the executive team

The organisation structure of CASE is more complex than a standalone charity since it aims to serve many charities. In common with other charities it has a board which is responsible for policy and strategic management; however, in CASE the board is also composed of representatives from the client organisations as well as the prime organisers of CASE itself. The executive is composed of five individuals who are the main contributors to and organisers of CASE itself. Four of the executive team are also board members. At present there is no operational or volunteer layer, although this will arise when a building is found. As all members of the CASE board and executive are also members of client charities, there is a potential conflict between their loyalties between CASE and its clients. However, personal relationships within the board membership could also reduce the need for governance between CASE and its client charities, and hence save money by reducing transaction costs, e.g. legal fees for contracts [6].

3 Relationship Mapping

In the interviews, individuals were asked to identify the people in the organisation they worked most closely with and characterise those relationships as professional, social or mixed, as well as giving an estimate of the closeness in any social relationships. The individual relationship map for one charity which was involved in provision of free health care to the poor is illustrated in figure 3 as an overlay on the organisation chart.

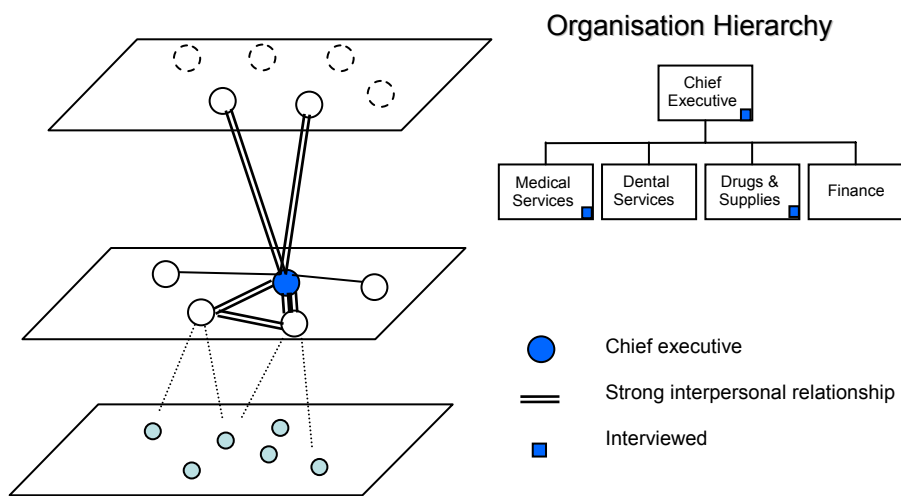


Figure 3. Community Healthcare organisation chart and relationship map

The relationship map of chief executive is illustrated. She interacted with two colleagues who also held managerial positions coordinating volunteer doctors and provision of medicines and supplies. She also had close relationships with the chair of the board and two key board members. All these relationships were characterised as mixed social and professional, with the relationships between the two colleagues at the executive level being rated as close. The chief executive and her colleagues also knew many of the volunteers personally. Hence the chief executive's relationships provided a social and organisational glue not only to ensure smooth functioning in the core business functions but also between the executive team and members of the board. The close relationships spanned only part of the organisational hierarchy; however, medical supplies and drug suppliers were the most important business functions, so these were underpinned by personal relationships. This pattern was observed for two other chief executives who were interviewed in other charities. These relationships helped the Community Healthcare organisations to function effectively without formal monitoring and line-management control procedures, because problems were anticipated and solved by frequent interpersonal communication. While

most communication was face to face, frequent e-mail contact also played a part, especially between the executive members and the board as well as the volunteers.

The individual relationship map for CASE is shown in figure 4:

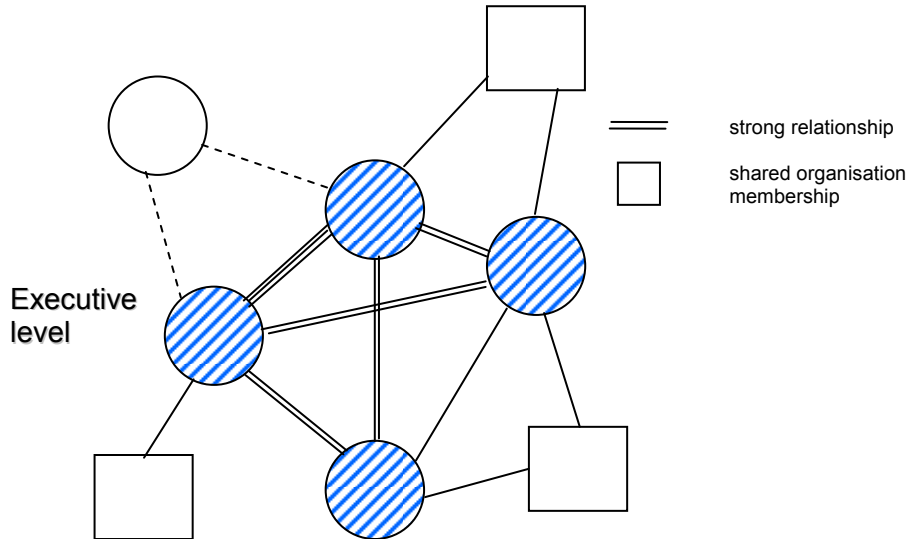


Figure 4. Individual relationship map for CASE: executive level

Four of the five executive team members were interviewed. They all had close individual relationships which were mixed social and professional (shown with diagonal shading in figure 4), although the one member of the executive team, who was not interviewed, did not appear to be included in this social network. For two executive board members their relationship also appeared in the client charity in which they were both board members. Inter-individual networking was common among board members in most of the charities we studied as the same individuals appeared on several boards, and this became more apparent if the history of board membership was considered.

Although several CASE board members were also on the boards of two or more charities, the relationships between CASE board members, apart from the inner executive team, was less clear. One client organisation board member who was interviewed did not appear to work closely with any members of the CASE team and no particular relationship was reported. In this case, membership was seen as a simple business proposition for lower costs in the parent organisation. This dissonance between the individual relationship network and organisation map may pose problems for CASE in the future. The inner executive team all network closely together and have developed trust, which bodes well for delivering their objectives. However, some of the client organisations may have a more tenuous link with CASE. Furthermore, as meetings are infrequent and CASE is not the focus of their main activity, social relationships have less chance of forming. If conflicting goals appear between the client charities, the lack of trust may make resolution more difficult..

4 Conclusions

This exploratory study in social and organisational relationship mapping has shown the potential for juxtaposing and overlaying social relationship maps on organisational structures, to see where the absence of social ties may make inter-organisational relationships more difficult to achieve. The key variable is trust[3]. Social networks promote trusting relationships which in turn provide the motivation for effective collaboration and social oil to smooth over conflict. Within the charities we studied, the chief executives had close relationships with professional colleagues that reduced the overhead of line management, while the relationship with board members promoted shared awareness between all three layers of the organisation, and reduced the need for corporate oversight and governance. Networking of individuals in the community who shared many board memberships enabled transfer of knowledge and mutual fund-raising benefits. However, when new organisational structures were introduced, such as the CASE common facility, it appears that social relationships had yet to mature to provide an effective glue between the executive and client organisations. Only time will tell if the organisation succeeds in spite of this.

This study was limited to interview-based subjective reports of relationships, which can be improved by analysis of relationships from interactions or messages exchanged. Social networks are then analysed for centrality and connectivity of individuals; however such single viewpoints do not illuminate the associations or potential clashes between organisational structures and inter-personal relationships [4]. While network representations can afford inspection of central or peripheral membership of groups, network diagrams need to be juxtaposed with organisational hierarchies to understand how organisational design helps or hinders working relationships. Another approach is to overlay social relationships on geographic maps to locate where individuals live, and thus investigate how distance may affect relationship formation and maintenance. Multiple-view mapping as illustrated in this paper can provide further insights into the links between organisational structures and social relationships.

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