Trouble in a Geographically Distributed Virtual Network Organization: Organizing Tensions in Continental Direct Action Network

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This study examines the impact of geographic dispersion and technological mediation on the organizing processes of a virtual network organization. Listserv and conference call records from the approximately two-year existence of the Continental Direct Action Network were analyzed in order to examine how the virtualness of this organization impacted participants’ perceptions of opportunity, balance of latency and mobilization, formation of a collective identity, and formation of affective bonds. The results reveal some of the local/global tensions that may exist in the organizing processes of virtual network organizations. They also demonstrate that an identity tension may emerge when new geographic localities join an already existing virtual network organization. It is suggested that new routes for informal communication among geographic localities may be necessary in order to enhance these processes and socialize new members into the network.

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Introduction

In social movements, the new norm is organizations that span the globe, forge alliances among several parties, and have the ability to mobilize protests against global organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Gerlach, 1999; Knoke, 1990). However, organizational communication research has just scratched the surface in attempting to understand these organizational forms (Ahuja & Carley, 1998; DeSanctis & Monge, 1998; Goldman, Nagel, & Preiss, 1994; Monge & Folk, 1999; Palmer, 1998). Research is needed on the internal dynamics of social movement organizations (SMOs) (Melucci, 1998), especially the internal dynamics of virtual SMOs. The research reported in this article uses a case study to examine how the virtualness of an SMO impacts its most basic organizing processes.
The case study examines how virtual communication impacts organizing processes in SMOs. Relying on social movement scholarship (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Melucci, 1988; Tarrow, 1992, 1996, 1998), we define four organizing processes that occur in social movements: the framing of external opportunity, the tension between mobilization and latency, the framing of an organizational identity, and the formation of affective bonds. In this analysis, we examine how the virtual structure impacts each of these processes. Using Continental Direct Action Network (CDAN) as a case study, we examine the internal communication of an SMO from emergence to demise.

Virtual Network Organizations

A virtual network organization is defined as “a geographically distributed organization whose members are bound by long-term common interests or goals, and who communicate and coordinate their work through information technology” (Ahuja & Carley, 1998, p. 5). Virtual network organizations are considered one of the new organizational forms that technology makes possible (Dutton, 1999). Previous research and theory related to virtual network organizations has focused on management of risk (Grabowski & Roberts, 1998), structure (Ahuja & Carley, 1998; Nohria & Berkley, 1994), organizational identification (Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 1998), use of technology (Palmer, 1998), roles (Bosch-Sijtsema, 2002), trust (Ariss, Nykodyma, & Cole-Laramore, 2002; Crossman & Lee-Kelley, 2004; Handy, 1995), and management of workers (Rollier & Liou, 1998; Staples, Hulland, & Higgins, 1998). A concern at the core of these studies is how information communication technology and geographic distribution effect organizing communication. The present research is similarly focused on the impact of these factors.

Social movement scholars have recognized that changes, similar to the changes in for-profit organizations described by virtual network organization scholars, are occurring within and among SMOs. Researchers have examined the geographically distributed and technology-mediated structures that appear to be operating in the environmental movement (Gerlach, 1999) and the landmine ban movement (Rutherford, 2000). Other researchers have noted the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), both in terms of number of organizations and the density of alliances among NGOs (Guidry, Kennedy, & Zald, 2000; Smith, 1997). An increase in the use of information communication technologies has greatly impacted the social movement sector (Meyers, 1994). However, despite an increased recognition of the impact of virtualness, little research to date has examined how geographic dispersion and reliance on information communication technologies have impacted SMO organizing.

Social Movement Theory

Social theory has sought to explain the dynamics of social movements. Social movement scholars (McCarry & Zald, 1977; Melucci, 1988; Tarrow, 1992, 1996, 1998)
have identified four organizing processes that occur within most SMOs: framing of external demands, managing mobilization and latency, framing a collective identity, and forming affective bonds. In the following sections we describe each of these processes and the potential impacts of virtualness on the processes.

Framing External Demands

The framing of external demands is one of the key organizing processes for SMOs. Political opportunity theorists note that changes in external political signals can indicate possible fruitful mobilization. Tarrow (1996) identifies several types of external opportunities including changes in policy regarding an issue, changes in representatives, changes in the groups addressing an issue, and state change. More broadly, external demands can be conceptualized as any requested action made, mobilization opportunity considered, or external opportunities available to SMOs. We define framing external demands as the process of defining social issues of interest and selecting opportunities for mobilization (i.e., protests, campaigns). Although all organizations are impacted by the way that they frame the external world, these processes are particularly central for SMOs, since they are organized to engage issues and organizations external to the SMO (Tarrow, 1992, 1996, 1998). The framing of these external demands mediates the impact of opportunities on the SMO (Guidry et al., 2000; Tarrow, 1996).

Framing is an important process internally for SMO members and externally for publics. Internally, framing creates “mentally stored clusters of ideas” that guide information processing (Entman, 1993, p. 53). After SMO members collectively define the social issue and select opportunities, the SMO attempts to frame the issues for publics in protests, materials, and mass media campaigns.

The framing of external demands may be of special importance to virtual network organizations. The virtual network form is without boundaries (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992), and differentiating between external and internal demands is nearly impossible. However, this absence of boundaries can be advantageous. Contingency theorists argue that the virtual network form has a unique advantage in especially complex and turbulent environments, since its lack of boundaries allows it to adapt more quickly to changes (Achrol, 1991; Cravens, Piercy, & Shipp, 1996; Djelic & Anamo, 1999; Goldman et al., 1994; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992). However, contingency theorists view external demands as market demands, rather than the type of demands posed by social movement theory. Thus, it is not clear how this lack of boundaries will impact organizing in SMOs. Therefore, we begin to explore this area by asking how the virtualness of CDAN, the case examined in this research, impacted its framing of external opportunities.

RQ1: How did CDAN’s virtual network structure impact the framing of external opportunities?

In this case study, we examine how CDAN members framed external protest opportunities, solicitations to participate or endorse an activity, and the process
CDAN members used to evaluate external opportunities. We considered how CDAN’s virtual structure facilitated and failed to facilitate processing these opportunities. Finally, we considered the mixture of local DAN activities and national/global activities that CDAN determined to be worthy of its attention.

**Internal Dynamics**
The internal dynamics of SMOs are integral to the change they seek (Melucci, 1998). Melucci argues that SMOs create “social spaces” to practice the type of society that they eventually wish to have. Many newer SMOs operate on a collective network principle. Melucci (1994) describes the structure of these movements as “a hidden network.” This type of network, he says, “allows multiple memberships; is part-time with respect to both the life course and to the amount of time it absorbs; and requires the personal commitment and affective solidarity of those who belong to it” (p. 127). These networks disperse the load among their nodes and thus more effectively deal with the problems of turnover and burnout. Internal processes in these SMOs include: the tension between mobilization and latency, the formation and maintenance of a collective identity, and the formation and maintenance of affective bonds.

*Mobilization and Latency*
Melucci (1994) states that these networks handle the problems of burnout and turnover by operating in two modes: mobilization and latency. Mobilization is the process where resources and communication are brought to bear on the social change that the SMOs wish to make in the world (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Melucci, 1994). These resources include a support base (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), strategies and tactics (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), leaders (Zald & Ash, 1966), core technology (Hannan & Freeman, 1977), funding (Freeman, 1979), and relations to society (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Latency, in contrast, is “a sort of underground laboratory for antagonism and innovation,” where a network can “work out all of the kinks” (Melucci, 1994, p. 128). Membership can change dynamically in this phase. As long as the network exists, the movement exists. Only minimal maintenance is required for network latency. Minimal maintenance of a social movement may include such activities as only occasional network meetings or listserv check-ins. Minimal maintenance may also include only occasional refreshing of an Internet presence, such as a Web site, or just making sure that such a presence is still available. Minimal maintenance would include any activity that makes sure that the network is still a presence, even when not engaged in any actual mobilization activities.

Both latency and mobilization are important to SMOs, and they require different communications strategies. Latency communication should be inclusive and accepting of diverse viewpoints within the movement. This type of communication is conducive to negotiating identity, socialization, and the development of best practices (Cohen, 1985). The communication should be such that people can leave the movement to attend to other affairs and return. Mobilization communication keeps
people focused on the task at hand and the goals to be realized. Both types of communication may be influenced by the virtualness of the organization.

Virtual network organization research has tended to focus on for-profit organizations and the business implications of these new organizational forms (Ahuja & Carley, 1998; Grabowski & Roberts, 1998; Handy, 1995; Nohria & Berkley, 1994; Palmer, 1998; Rollier & Liou, 1998; Staples et al., 1998; Wiesenfeld et al., 1998). However, to date, this research has not examined the impact of the virtual network form on mobilization or latency. The virtual network structure complicates the latency/mobilization dynamic. In a traditional localized SMO, the entire organization moves from one phase to another. The geographically dispersed network structure raises the possibilities of phase fractures within the network. Geographic nodes (i.e., the local DANs) in the virtual network form operate with a degree of autonomy. This may lead different geographic nodes to mobilization or latency. If some geographic nodes are in latency while others are mobilized, especially around national/global issues, it may lead to tensions within the SMO. Thus, we also investigate:

RQ2: What latency and mobilization tensions can be attributed to CDAN’s virtual network structure?

Collective Identity

A third SMO process is the creation, maintenance, and modification of collective identity. Collective identity is the combination of SMO members’ “cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). At the organizational level, collective identity is how a movement sees itself and how it defines itself through its actions. Collective identity is transmitted through the network via communication processes such as framing, “in which identities are announced, or renounced, embraced or rejected, and modified or reframed in the course of various interactions” (Snow, 2001, p. 7). This process involves the collective naming and negotiating of the organization’s identity.

The virtual structure of an SMO has the potential to impact collective identity. Since members are geographically dispersed and have no headquarters, collective identity in the local geographic nodes may be in tension with the larger collective identity of the virtual network SMO. Handy (1995) contends that virtual network organizations have a more difficult task in establishing trust among members, and should travel in order to establish that trust. Wiesenfeld et al. (1998) found that organizational identification was moderated by the number of days spent working virtually. Together, these authors note that the processes of developing a collective identity can be impacted by the degree of participation and the virtual structure of the organization. However, both of these authors address these processes in for-profit organizations, where the current research examines a virtual SMO. In addition, these authors fail to recognize how the framing process may or may not lead to
a collective identity that transcends geographic distance. Therefore, we examine the role of framing plays in the development of such a collective identity.

RQ3: How did CDAN’s virtual network structure impact its collective identity communication?

**Affective Bonds**

In addition to mechanisms for mobilization, latency, and the maintenance of a collective identity, Melucci (1994) identifies the formation of affective bonds as an important SMO process. Affective bonds are emotional ties that may either bring people into a group or that may be formed and reinforced during collective actions. These emotional ties provide motivation for individuals to participate in collective action (Jasper, 1998). Additionally, emotional ties can help drive collective actors towards their goals (Jasper, 1998).

The formation of affective bonds depends on communication within the network (Snow, 2001). A tight-knit communication network that encourages interaction among the members of an SMO can lead to the development of affective bonds. Hian, Chuan, Trevor and Detenber (2004) found that relational intimacy could even be stronger in computer-mediated relationships than in face-to-face relationships. However, their experiment required social interaction among the participants, whereas in bona fide virtual network organizations interaction is not required. Indeed, Sias and Cahill (1998) found that proximity is a predictor of friendship formation in the workplace. By extension, the propensity of individuals to form friendships in virtual SMOs might be inhibited by geographic barriers. The virtualness of the organization might impact the degree to which informal communication occurs among geographically distant parties. Each of these factors leads us to investigate the formation of affective bonds in the CDAN network.

RQ4: How did CDAN’s virtual network structure impact the formation of affective bonds?

The following case study will demonstrate how a virtual network SMO struggled with the effects of geographic dispersion and technological mediation on their organizing processes. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how this strategy impacted basic organizing processes like the framing of external opportunities, the latency/mobilization tension, collective identity, and affective bonds. While geographic dispersion and nonhierarchical structure offer advantages of greater flexibility and response to turbulent environments, they also present organizing challenges. These advantages and challenges are evident in the CDAN case.

**Continental Direction Action Network Case**

The November 30th (N30) protests in Seattle marked a watershed moment for SMOs related to globalization (Danaher & Burbach, 2000). CDAN was the primary SMO that brought together international protest resources to shut down the WTO in late
1999 (deArmond, 2000). However, by April 17, 2001, this group dissolved and gave away its funding to other groups.

CDAN was a coalition of antiglobalization activists who were actively involved in the shut-down of the WTO in Seattle and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)/World Bank protests in Washington D.C. This group attempted to spread their direct action techniques to other antiglobalization events such as the protests at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) protests (Center for the Advancement of Non-violence, 2002). CDAN organized itself nonhierarchically around geographic affinity groups that would delegate a “spoke” to participate in spokescouncil meetings, composed of other spokes. According to early organizer Nadine Bloch, CDAN’s mission was, “to provide this framework to connect people so that we have the strength or the power in numbers that we can actually do global work” (WTO history project, 2000, ¶26). CDAN wanted the antiglobalization movement to be as global as the entities it was fighting. As such, the group acted as a globally distributed network of smaller direct action networks (DANs). The business of the larger group was conducted, except for one meeting early in the group’s history, through spokescouncil phone calls and a listserv. The purpose of this case study is to examine the way that the virtual network structure impacted the processes essential to SMO organizing.

Method

A case study methodology is utilized in this research. Case study methodology is a “real-life” methodology (Sypher, 1990) that seeks to describe “events in such a way as to enhance our understanding and bolster our insights in ways that other methods could or normally would not do” (p. 4). The current research used a grounded theory approach to the case study methodology. Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1991) prescribe this methodology for the reconstructed case. They argue that grounded theory case study analysis should not only be descriptive but “identify appropriate strategies that were used or that could have been used to solve problems experienced in that particular situation” (pp. 209–210). In other words, not only must a case study follow certain steps and be grounded in research and theory from the relevant fields, it must also highlight solutions that were used in the case, or suggest strategies for solving those problems.

Procedure

This research utilizes the online listerv and spokescouncil meeting minutes of CDAN. The researchers downloaded all archived listserv messages and spokescouncil meeting minutes from the organization’s website. This yielded 305 pages of text. Listserv messages accounted for approximately 87% of text. The researchers engaged in a two-phase coding processes.
Axial Coding

First, the researchers engaged in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this process, the researchers examined the data from varying SMO processes that had been identified in previous research. These included: external opportunity, mobilization, latency, collective identity, affective bonds, and other.

External opportunity was indicated in the transcripts in three ways. First, requests for CDAN action of any time (endorsement, protest, funds, membership request, etc.) was coded as an external opportunity. Second, discussions of potential impacts of opportunities the group recognized for protest and lobbying were coded as external opportunity. Finally, discussions of the number of different opportunities and how to manage these different requests were coded as external opportunities.

Mobilization communication indicated when CDAN reported engaging or planned to engage in action that had the potential to impact social issues about which they cared. This included protests, production of materials, and financial support of direct actions against corporation/government groups. In contrast, latency communication was indicated when the group discussed the support functions of the organization, such as meetings to discuss budget, lags in membership communication, letter-writing to supporters, and training.

Communication about collective identity was indicated when discussion focused on what CDAN was, when the group discussed past triumphs in order to plan current action, and when the organization questioned its directions. In addition, collective identity communication was indicated when newcomers to CDAN were taught the basic principles of the social movement and/or were taught about collective actions in which the group had participated in the past. Communication about affective bonds was indicated when the group shared emotional stories with one another, acknowledged each other’s personal contribution, or provided emotional support to one another.

Process Coding

Through the axial coding, the central concept of virtual network structure emerged as an explanation of the various actions occurring in each of these categories. After identifying this central concept, we engaged in process coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Process coding encourages researchers to examine evolving interaction over time. It is through this coding that the reconstructed case was developed.

Writing the Reconstructed Case

After process coding, we began to write the reconstructed case. Each of the research questions focused on how each of the above processes/communication was influenced by CDAN’s virtual network structure. In order to understand how the virtual network structure impacted each of these processes, we examined incidents of miscommunication and non-communication among organizational members. In addition, we compared CDAN’s organizing processes to established descriptions of SMO organizing processes. Finally, we noted factors in CDAN’s organizing that lead to the
disbanding of the group and how those factors related to its virtual network organizational structure.

In order to write the case, we reviewed the data a third time, highlighting passages from the listserv and spokescouncil minutes that demonstrated the developing tensions related to the virtual network structure. These passages were used in the results and discussion to build the reconstructed case. In the next section, we first review the case and then address each of the research questions.

Results and Discussion

CDAN formed in response to the 1999 WTO N30 protests in Seattle. The organization was somewhat astounded at its success, prompting several members to attempt to create a sustainable network out of this successful group. CDAN had one face-to-face meeting shortly after the WTO protest. During this meeting, they developed the CDAN Principles of Unity. These included commitment to anti-globalization causes and consensus decision-making.

The remainder of the CDAN meetings and information sharing were conducted through the listserv and spokescouncil teleconferences. Early local DAN groups included Seattle, Los Angeles, New York, Northern Humboldt, Boston, Dallas, and Denver. The groups began organizing in support of Los Angeles’ local DAN’s protest of the Democratic National Convention. The actions in such places as Los Angeles became a rallying point and point of pride. Chris Crass, who moved from San Francisco to Los Angeles to participate in the actions, shared these reflections in early October 2000:

While living in LA, I went to lots of rallies and marches in the city—from anti-vivisection/animal liberation protests, to large actions against the Gulf War, to demonstrations against police brutality. I grew up with a lot of the organizers who were working with Rise Up!/LA Direct Action Network. I was looking forward to working with friends, but I was also excited to be part of a mass mobilization in the streets of LA.

Stories like this, concerning the “early” days of CDAN, stirred the imaginations of activists. They promised both a feeling of accomplishing something great and working together in solidarity and friendship.

In part due to the early success of the group, local DANs began forming and contacting the group to join. At one point in time, 19 local DANs existed. Every week, new conferences, speakers, and issues were brought to CDAN for support. One of the key turning points occurred when the San Diego DAN developed a nationwide proposal against Citigroup. Using CDAN principles, they submitted the proposal for the support of the group. However, rather than accepting these proposals, conversations ensued concerning the identity of the organization as either an organization or network. According to the minutes of an October 7 meeting, Heather from the Humboldt County DAN asked a fundamental question about CDAN’s organizing.
Was CDAN a network of independent groups or an organization? Instead of provoking a discussion or eliciting answers from those in attendance, this crucial question of group identity was largely ignored.

Shortly after this incident, further problems with new members began. Another SMO was raided by federal agents and the group began to have concerns that they were being monitored. CDAN created barriers for local DANs to enter the network. These included several levels of assurances that the group was not spying for the federal government. Several groups had trouble providing sufficient support that they were who they claimed to be.

By this point and time, older groups began to be absent for spokescouncil teleconferences and failed to respond to listserv queries. Several members of older groups had either fallen into latency or had dissolved altogether. This frustrated many of the newer members, who became resentful that they could not get responses. Newer groups seeking affiliation, such as Baltimore, found that spokes in CDAN had never seen their proposals for membership. When CDAN did respond, it did not do so in a timely fashion. Finally, the listserv went silent, except for a brief discussion of what to do with the monies left in the bank account several months later.

In the next sections, each of the organizing processes is discussed. The impact of CDAN virtualness on each of these processes is highlighted. Finally, we make suggestions for mechanisms that could benefit other virtual SMOs.

External Opportunities and CDAN
RQ 1 inquired how CDAN’s virtual network structure impacted its framing of external opportunities. CDAN began with a bang. The protests in Seattle marked a huge success in the minds of most antiglobalization SMOs. In part, their success was due to their protest strategy. CDAN organized broad coalitions of anti-WTO groups, ranging from the Ruckus Society to the AFL-CIO. They created a protest structure that had layers of involvement (de Armond, 2000). People who were willing to be arrested were put closest to the police. Those who wanted to be engaged were given other tactics. The groups were connected through walkie-talkies and laptops. When the police jammed their signals, they bought cell phones (de Armond, 2000). The result was that the protestors had a clearer layout of what was occurring in the city than the police did.

After Seattle, CDAN had momentum. They protested at the 2000 Democratic and 2000 Republic National conventions, and sent a contingent to the IMF protests. They were frequently approached by groups requesting support for their proposals so that they could “put the CDAN endorsement” on their flyers. An organizer for the Citiaction group posted to the CDAN listserv,

> We would like to say to the world that the Continental Direct Action Network supports and endorses the Citiaction campaign, and be able to advertise this fact on our web site and in various forms of literature . . . We would like to have the various local DAN groups individually become part of the citiaction campaign and organize local events to whatever degree they see fit.
CDAN was also invited by the Citiaction Campaign to take “some ownership” of the campaign and develop its own statement of purpose. However, among the various DAN spokes, this proposal developed little but talk.

The national groups took advantage of fewer and fewer opportunities over time. One potential reason for the decline was burnout. Although information technology allowed each opportunity for protest to reach the group, there was little consensus in how to handle all of the requests. The openness of the network made them susceptible to constant proposals and requests for support. One of the CDAN spokes, Rahula, from the North Humboldt DAN, raised the issue of endorsements of actions by other organizations:

Personally, I feel like we need to clarify our whole endorsement process before moving forward with any more endorsements . . . The relationship between CDAN and certain ngo’s is a big controversy in some circles right now. while I wouldn’t want to see CDAN operate solely in reaction to knee jerk critics, I also think we should consider where those critiques are coming from and how we wish to address them . . . Taking on a campaign that was initiated and controlled by one of the ngo’s in question may be something we should give extra thought to.

Though Rahula made it known in this post that she was speaking for herself and not her local group, it raises the issue of CDAN’s susceptibility to endorsement requests. Rahula was also one of the many spokes who raised the question of whether CDAN was an organization or a network.

Another potential impact of the virtualness on the framing of external opportunity was the inability to distinguish local, national, and global purposes. Each of the local DANs had several local issues and events that they organized. For example, during the October 7 conference call, the North Humboldt and San Diego groups were reporting holding solidarity actions with the U’wa, a Columbian indigenous tribe that was fighting Occidental Petroleum over access to tribal lands. The San Diego group was also planning an activist training camp for November. These local events were organized and run without the need for the larger network. However, larger national or global events were difficult to organize, since the local DANs were busy with local issues. The virtual network, though it had geographic advantages, also had geographic liabilities for CDAN.

Mobilization and Latency
RQ 2 inquired how CDAN’s virtual network structure, which made it so successful in organizing the Seattle N30 WTO protests, influenced the tension between mobilization and latency. After its initial success, CDAN was bombarded with requests to from local DANs to become a member of the CDAN network. After approximately one year, there were nearly 19 local DANs who were officially members of CDAN. They each had joined at different times, and were in different stages of their local formation. This often led to disjunctive reports during spokescouncil meetings. For
example, the following summary of regional activity from a spokescouncil meeting is very typical of the meetings:

*** REGIONAL CHECK INS — Seattle: haven’t had a meeting in awhile; thinking about the next big think [sic] locally, and the next big thing extra-locally. No big current projects right now. — Southeast: Students are just getting back; a lot of anti Wal Mart work being done; having a network picnic next month; doing SOA work. — Denver: haven’t met or had a chance to discuss CDAN issues. Denver has a working group call “the future of our dan” to discuss things. There was an action in Aspen last week at a globalization conference (is that right?), they shouted down Wolfenson (?). — Nohum: haven’t met recently due to dnc; regrouping, dealing with old growth logging issues. — San Diego: working on a proposal against Citigroup; dealing with deregulation issues, planning to go to a globalization conference in Tiajuana. — NYC: a lot of R2K legal follow up; also considering a Citigroup campaign. Supporting several strikes; ready to evaluate next steps.

In this very typical example, different regional groups were in different phases of development. Melucci (1994) contends that SMOs need both latency and mobilization phases. However in CDAN, some local DANs were in a mobilization phase, like NYC and San Diego in this example. Meanwhile, other local DANs, like Seattle and Nohum (North Humboldt County, California), were in latency phases. The CDAN movement was fractured in terms of the phases in which its various locals operated. There were tensions among the various local DANs as a result of these phase fractures. Social movement theory provides little guidance on this type of phase fractures in an SMO. However, our research demonstrates that in geographically-dispersed networks that rely solely on mediated communication, it can be difficult for those members to know who is in a latency phase and who is in a mobilization phase. Melucci’s research does not account for this and assumes that an entire movement, or network, is in latency or mobilization phase.

For CDAN, these geographic tensions were troublesome to groups that were in a mobilization phase. Many could not understand why some groups moved to latency. In March of 2001, Heather from the NoHum group was asked at one point to work on the procedural issues that CDAN used in its formal consensus process. She responded:

The problem is that NoHum DAN is not really meeting anymore. I am not sure when we will start meeting again. But, as of now, most of us were working on our own campaigns. I want to wait till after the FTAA to assess (sic) where NoHum DAN will go and whether it will continue.

Clearly those in the NoHum DAN group felt they needed time off from DAN to pursue other interests. This was hardly the first fracture in the network. Elijah Saxon from the Seattle group reported to the DAN listserv in February:

So long Sea-Town! Hello all, There is no more Seattle DAN. We have not met for many months, and everyone is doing other things like citiaction, ftaa, IMC,
etc., I don’t know what the process for formally removing Seattle from the network, but I think it is about time.

Elijah’s post reveals several significant issues that were never dealt with by CDAN as a whole. These issues included no process for leaving the network and a failure to incorporate other movements into a broader anti-authoritarian network. The failure to communicate about these issues apparently caused a ripple effect as DANs started leaving. Other DAN groups that tried to organize on a regional level were pulling apart. Cathie Berry, who worked with the DAN group in the Southeast United States reported the problems with keeping together a group that was dispersed over a larger geographical area:

well, as you know, we are no longer SEDAN. the hope was to have the most active groups represent themselves on the call. the problem is, there really doesn’t seem much to be going on out there. asheville dan has been the most active, but they too are in a low, as a matter of fact, the woman who was to be the spokes, stepped down last week, and we have no replacement at this time. i am really busy with student teaching and have no time or energy that is needed to really keep this all going, so for right now, we have no spokes. i just wanted to let y’all know why i and this region have been so quiet lately.

This is a clear example of how difficult it was to keep together DANs that were organized in a larger regional area. Even within these regions, there were geographic tensions. But these geographic tensions were not present in the initial group, since everyone was in mobilization phases. The network had no mechanism, formal or informal, for accommodating latency.

However, as groups were added and local DANs began to develop their own activities, the group began move in different directions. This tension was further exacerbated when a proposal to mount a large protest against Citigroup was proposed by the San Diego DAN. The San Diego DAN asked CDAN to endorse the proposal. However, many local DANs had moved to latency phases, and were in no position to mobilize a campaign against Citigroup. This tension led to the following prototypical statement from a local DAN in a latency phases:

. . . since each local dan is autonomous, I’m not sure why it is so important to get a cdan endorsement. The focus of each group obviously varies according to location and the makeup of its members. While a Citigroup campaign may be appropriate for some, it may not be for others. And I personal feel like it’s absolutely ok for one, or several, dan groups to take on a campaign that one or several other dan groups do not.

In a sense, the groups in latency were asking for others to go ahead. However, the local DANs in the mobilization phase looked for “legitimate” reasons why some of the groups in a latency phase might not want to participate. They asked about the tactics used, the philosophy of the protest, and for legitimate differences in opinion.
None came from those in the latency phase. Instead, these groups became more and more quiet. Calls for increased participation from groups and total mobilization were frequent, especially from the New York group who never entered a latency phase during the existence of CDAN. Instead, New York analyzed the current situation by examining the numbers of those who were “officially part of the network” and those who were currently active.

Header: 19 groups
NYC, NC, Southeast groups, Seattle, San Francisco, Miami, Santa Cruz, Buffalo, MidHudson, Texas, Baltimore, Denver, Kentucky, San Diego, Arizona, Los Angeles, Vermont, Chicago, Northern Humboldt . . . now just think how exciting it would be if everyone showed.

The groups in latency phases responded to these calls for mobilization from the NY group by further withdrawing. The network continued to urge DANs out of the latency phase. This lead to statements from the spokes in the mobilization groups like “Please don’t be so quiet—what are you all up to???” Finally the mobilization groups became so tired that the listserv went quiet for several months, only to be interrupted by a brief email about how to disperse the remaining funds the bank account.

Framing of Collective Identity
Another vital process for SMOs is the framing of a collective identity (McPherson, 1990; Snow & Benford, 1992). Collective identity is how the movement describes itself. RQ 3 asked how CDAN’s virtual network structure impacted the formation/maintenance of a collective identity. CDAN originally defined itself as a network of local organizations committed to democracy, local autonomy, and consensus decision-making. However, their identity was evident in the frequent references back to the protest in Seattle. Success at fighting global trade and finance organizations was clearly part of CDAN’s mission. As such, only policies dealing with antiglobalization were initially considered. Over time, with the addition of new DANs to the organization, CDAN’s collective identity began to change. This was evident in changes to its membership policy, as the group became more insular and less accepting of other groups. As shown below, potential new participants were required to show affirmatively that they were not federal agents and also began to require an endorsement from an existing DAN group.

At one time, the network simply ignored the piling requests for information from others. Over 120 email requests for information were ignored for nearly a month from groups that wanted to join CDAN, like a group in Buffalo, New York. Finally, there seems to be evidence that people wanting to come into the CDAN network were confused about what being in CDAN was all about and that CDAN was equally confused about some of the groups wanting to become part of the network. Brooke Lehman from NYC DAN wrote the following to the group from Dallas that was applying for membership on October 6, 2000:
Though our by-laws do not require it, all the CDAN groups that presently participate function non-hierarchically in decision-making. I am confused by how your group uses consensus given the distinctions between directors, steering committee, and general membership.

Failing to frame the collective identity, or socialize any new participants in the organization was one indication of the changing focus of the CDAN network. The updated membership guidelines were submitted after this lag in membership communication:

So you want to link to Continental DAN. We are happy to have you so long as:
1. You are not Feds 2. Your group has endorsed DAN Principles of Unity and structure and is committed to upholding these principles both internally as a group and externally in the work that you engage in. 3. You are not so close to another CDAN group (or so tiny) that it wouldn’t really make more sense for your group to coordinate a shared spoke with a neighboring pre-existing CDAN group . . . DAN is committed to “an organizational philosophy based on decentralization, direct democracy, non-hierarchy and local autonomy” and we are not interested in working in CDAN with groups that operate otherwise 4. If possible, [include] a note from an existing DAN, verifying that you are as cool and straight up as you make yourself out to be.

Several authors have noted that trust is difficult to establish in virtual network organizations (Crossman & Lee-Kelley, 2004; Handy, 1995). Clases, Bachmann, and Weghner (2003) note that shared bonds and shared experience in the practical realization of projects are keys to trust in virtual organizing. Handy (1995) argues that members must meet face-to-face to develop trust. As shared experiences in Seattle became less common and fewer people knew each other, trust seemed more tenuous within CDAN. Difficulty in developing trust in virtual network SMOs, like CDAN, may be exacerbated by animosity toward and suspicion of other organizations. Fear of government reprisal and infiltration made it difficult for CDAN members to have a high degree of trust in the network, constantly fearing that either the listserv or the integrity of the network had been compromised.

Another key turning point in CDAN’s collective identity was the Citigroup initiative. The Citigroup initiative asked each local DAN to sign off on an endorsement proposal. San Diego DAN hoped that the protest would “carry the CDAN name,’’ which had a considerable reputation after the Seattle protests. However, CDAN’s initial principles of unity were designed as a network based on decentralization and local autonomy. Soon after the Citigroup requests, other requests came for CDAN to endorse other protests. These requests for endorsement created an identity crisis for CDAN. Were they a network with local autonomy, and therefore not able endorse a protest? Or were they an organization, and therefore required to solicit agreement to endorse the same things? This point was highlighted by the North Humboldt DAN spokesperson:
all of this also brings up for me a big question that I feel has never been satisfactorily addressed or answered, which is, are we a network or are we an organization? I think a dan gathering will be a good place to do real work answering that question, but . . . as i consider a network to be preferable, I don’t see a need for things that are more appropriate for an organization, such as one main campaign for the whole of cdan.

The tension between being a network and being an organization was repeated throughout the lifespan of CDAN. At its inception, CDAN was a network; it operated like a network. However, external perceptions of CDAN precipitated an identity crisis. Since many of the originating DANs had moved to latency, the newer DANs were not socialized into the network identity. This left the newer DANs to rely on past experience, also known as anticipatory socialization (see Aldrich, 1999; Gibson & Papa, 2000). This past experience led these new DANs to organize in the form most familiar to them, that of an organization. They began to try to operate like an organization, which the older DANs resisted. Ultimately this identity crisis was part of the struggle that lead to the demise of CDAN.

Affective Bonds/Failure to Connect
RQ 4 focused on the impact of the virtual network structure on the formation of affective bonds. In general, CDAN did not express affective relationships or value affective bonds within their communication. Melucci (1994) contends that the formation of affective bonds is a key organizing force for SMOs. However, in part due the virtual network structure, participants failed to either form or value affective bonds within the larger CDAN network. When considering the first face-to-face membership meeting (which never occurred), the San Diego spokescouncil asked, “how effective it will be—will it be productive or just social?” The dichotomy between task communication and social communication is clear. Social communication was not considered a valued way to build CDAN, while task and training communication was considered valued. There is evidence that some of the DANs were using social face-to-face interactions to organize people. In the same minutes meeting report in which the San Diego spokescouncil expressed doubt as to the efficacy of “social” interaction, the Southeast DAN spokes reported that they “had an awesome picnic in Asheville with 65 people.” If similar social interactions could have occurred within the larger network, greater commitment to national campaigns may have been gained.

The failure to coordinate an interpersonal encounter between DAN members could be evidence of failure to build any affective bonds within the organization. Nohum DAN was largely left holding the bag for organizing the national meeting and frustration is evident in a July 12 listsev posting:

the deadline for input on the annual meeting is Sunday. But I’ve heard almost nothing from anyone. Nobody has requested more time, either. So, if i don’t hear anything by Sunday. I’m going to recommend to my fellow working group
mems that we just go for it. If you trust us to do it right, well that’s great and thank you. but this is a really great place for your input!!!

This failure to follow up on personal requests for assistance was a pattern with CDAN and may have contributed to the failure to build any affective bonds in the organizations as people experienced frustration with seeing their requests met with silence.

**Implications**

**Theoretical**

This research examined how the virtual network structure of CDAN impacted its organizing processes. We argue that these essential processes are transformed by the virtual network structure. The geographic dispersion of nodes within the virtual network made it possible for local organizing within nodes to hamper the effectiveness of the larger network. Evolutionary theorists refer to this organizing process as part-whole coevolution (Aldrich, 1999; Baum, 1999). In part-whole coevolution, the parts of the organization may evolve to meet their own needs and respond to their own environment. This local optimization can be a determinant to the whole organization’s effectiveness. CDAN’s inability to frame external demands as a large network, the phase fractures among DANs within CDAN, the lack of common identity across the network, and the suppression of affective bonds made global network organizing difficult.

This case study examined how the virtual network structure impacts the framing of external opportunities. The structure appears to make the network more aware of many opportunities for mobilization. This is an important advantage for the network structure, allowing the network to quickly adapt to an ever-changing and global environment (Cravens, Percy, & Shopp, 1996; Djelic & Ainamo, 1999; Goldman et al., 1994; Ring & Van de Ven, 1992). However, this advantage quickly became overwhelming as the group struggled to cope with many opportunities and a quickly changing internal structure. One of the impacts of the virtual network structure was that the group had difficulty distinguishing between local, national, and global priorities. CDAN, initially formed to take on corporate globalization, gradually became involved in local DAN projects. This was due, in part, to the local autonomy aspect of virtual organizing, and may be a hindrance to collective action. This challenge has not been noted by previous virtual network researchers, who assumed that the goal of profits would unite for-profit virtual network organizations. Additionally, social movement scholars have not considered how geographic dispersion impacts these framing processes.

The geographic dispersion of the virtual network also negatively impacted CDAN’s phase processes. The group struggled with some parts of the network operating in latency while other parts were mobilizing. This is a new issue for social movement theory, since Melucci (1994) does not address the presence of multiple
phases within the same organization. The tension among the local DANs ultimately became destructive for this organization, because it failed to manage the tension well. In order for SMOs to survive the multiple phase fractures, groups must be able to enter and leave the network freely.

The virtual network structure also impacted collective identity of the organization. Dholakia and Bagozzi (2004) argue that for a virtual community to successfully build a collective identity, individuals must move beyond self-interested motivations to the collective welfare of the group. Individual DAN identity and interests were promoted above CDAN’s interest. The organization struggled with an overwhelming insurgence of new membership. However, few wanted to socialize new members into the collective CDAN. This led many new DANs to rely on anticipatory socialization (Gibson & Papa, 2000) to interpret SMO activities. These previous experiences led them to organize as an organization rather than a network. Rosenfeld, Richman, and May (2004) note that dispersed structures, like the virtual network form, tend to create subcultures within organizations. These subcultures began to affect CDAN, as conflicts over organizational identity arose within the organization. The tension between collective definitions of “organization,” which was insular and had legitimacy, and “network,” which was open, new, and gave members autonomy, ultimately became the identity crisis of the group. It is interesting that structure became the discussion above CDAN welfare and benefits. This discussion further illustrates the tension between the larger collective CDAN interests and the individual DAN interests.

The organizing tension highlights the role that “meeting” may have for virtual network organizations. Throughout transcripts, CDAN spokespersons highlighted the importance of meeting. The failure of the first annual meeting, the failure of spokespersons to show up to meetings, meetings occurring (or failing to occur) in local DANs, and the importance of regular teleconference meetings all highlight the importance of meeting. Virtual network organizations still need to meet as a group in order to sustain collective identity and to coordinate actions. While organizational members may not be collocated in space, some synchronous communication may be required for members to feel a part of a larger collective.

Finally, the technological mediation impacted the formation of affective bonds among participants. Social communication was devalued in CDAN and members lacked trust that is often developed through face-to-face communication. In addition, the antagonistic nature of the organization exacerbated the mistrust of newcomers. Affective bonds can be formed through technologically mediated communication (Hian et al., 2004) but virtual network organizations must make efforts to promote social communication online.

Practical

CDAN and other SMOs are choosing virtual network structures because of their many benefits, including flexibility, geographic dispersion, and cost-effectiveness (Parker, 1996; Rutherford, 2000). However, there are certain actions that must be
taken in order to avoid many of the pitfalls that CDAN experienced. First, virtual SMOs need to create public and private spaces for communication. Public spaces should be constructed from a public relations perspective (Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001). This might include features, such as opportunities to send messages to the organization, to vote on issues, request information updates, and complete opinion surveys. This online presence and interaction can be used to frame issues, recruit potential members, socialize new members, and provide a public forum to sort external opportunities.

Private spaces are also essential for virtual SMO communication. Owens and Palmer (2003) contend that these private spaces are important. “In-group discourses are based upon real-life activism and on efforts to confront and deal with internal conflicts. Consequently, they tend to be messier and more contentious than out-group discourse” (p. 340). Private spaces should include forums for group members to interact socially. The formation of affective bonds is essential for SMOs (Melucci, 1994). Through online social interaction, virtual network organizational members can form close and enduring friendships (Hian et al., 2004). Such interactions may encourage affective bonds that are so important for enhancing SMO members’ organizational commitment.

**Conclusion**

The current study demonstrates how geographic dispersion and use of information communication technology impacted the organizing processes of CDAN. While CDAN began strong, the organization had difficulty filtering all the opportunities that were available. The virtual network structure negatively impacted the balance between latency and mobilization, since different geographic locations were in different phases at different times. Finally, the virtualness of the organization impacted the collective identity and formation of affective bonds in the organization.

While the virtual network organizational form offers many benefits to SMOs, it also presents many challenges. These challenges may be overcome through the use of information communication technologies that allow for more informal communication. In addition, virtual SMOs must make a stronger effort to socialize new members than traditional SMOs. Research has just begun to investigate the potentials of this new organizational form.

**References**


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