

Network analysis of participation in Open Space groups in the IRC Round Table on Impact Evaluation

Rick Davies, Friday, May 23, 2008

This note documents the results of an opportunistic analysis of data that became available as a result of the Open Space sessions on Wednesday 14th May. Open Space discussions are different in that participants in discussion groups are allowed and encouraged to move between groups whenever they want to, at any time during the group sessions, not only during the group sessions.

Background

According to the records given to me by Deirdre Casella there were eight issue groups, which met over three sessions (having 3, 2, 3 groups respectively). We have records of the 26 people who participated in those groups. However, this information probably has some errors:

- Understating the numbers of people who participated in more than one group in the same session. Six of the 26 are listed as swapping groups at some stage.
- Mixing information on who actually was in a group with who initially signed up for the group, but may not have necessarily taken part in that group. This is because not all session reports have been sent in yet.

A network perspective on the Open Space groups

There are two types of networks that can be identified with this data:

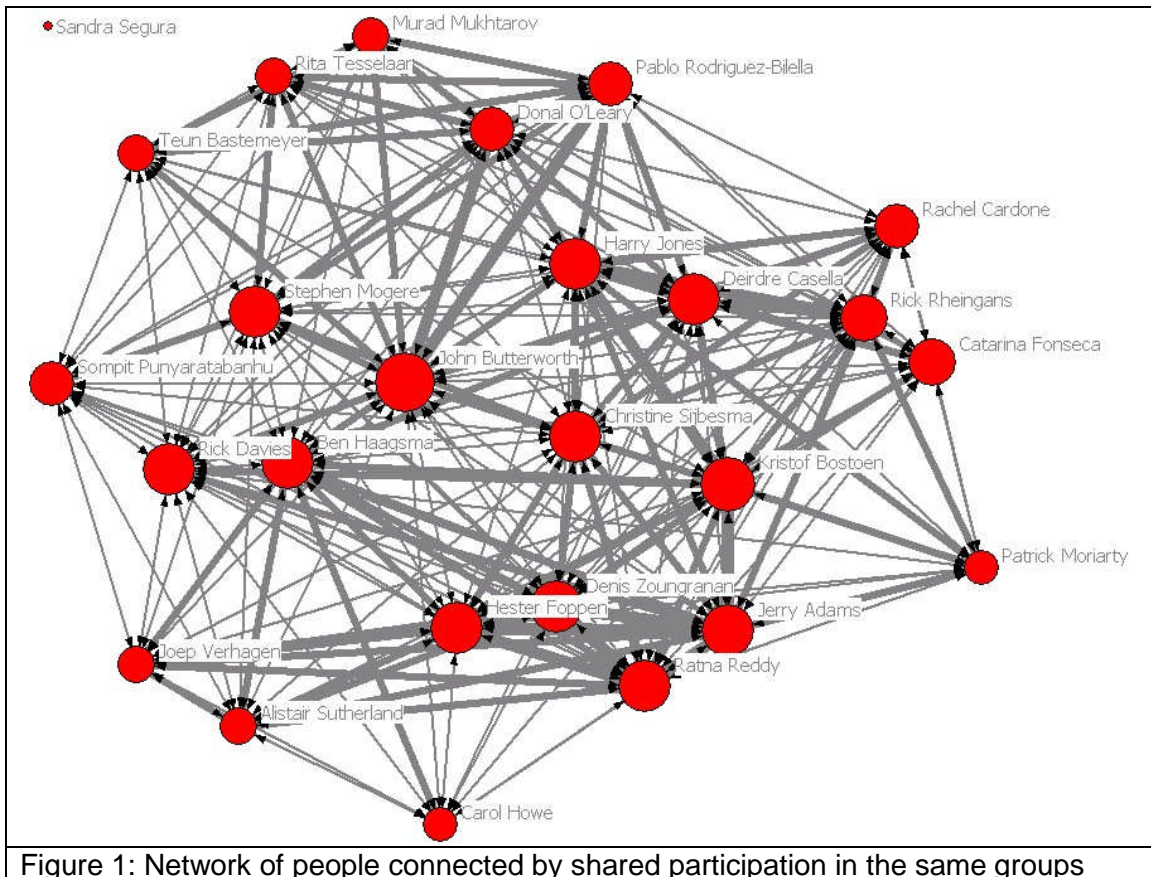
- **A network of issues**, where issues are connected to each other by an overlapping set of people who participated in discussion of those issues. For example, seven people attended both these issue groups:
 - Measuring partnerships for service (R&D) delivery
 - IE for a district level WASH governance intervention (design & details) where we are developing methodology & change for “good governance”
- **A network of people**, where people are connected to each other by their joint participation in the same issue groups. For example, John Butterworth and Pablo Rodriguez-Bilella participated in the same three issue groups.

On the following pages I have presented some examples of both of these types of network diagrams. They were produced by using Netdraw¹, which is available free on the internet (but you need to use UCINET² to import data from a spreadsheet first).

¹ Netdraw at <http://www.analytictech.com/downloadnd.htm>

² UCINET at <http://www.analytictech.com/downloaduc6.htm>

Figure 1 shows a network of people. It shows all the connections made throughout the day. Thicker lines = stronger connections (number of groups they both participated in). Bigger nodes = more people that person was connected to. This type of diagram is complex and hard to interpret.



The network in Figure 2 on the next page is a “tip of the iceberg” view. It only shows people connected by the strongest links. In the whole group, most people were connected to others by participation in one group. But some were linked to others by participation in up to 3 groups. The diagram shows those linked by two or three groups.

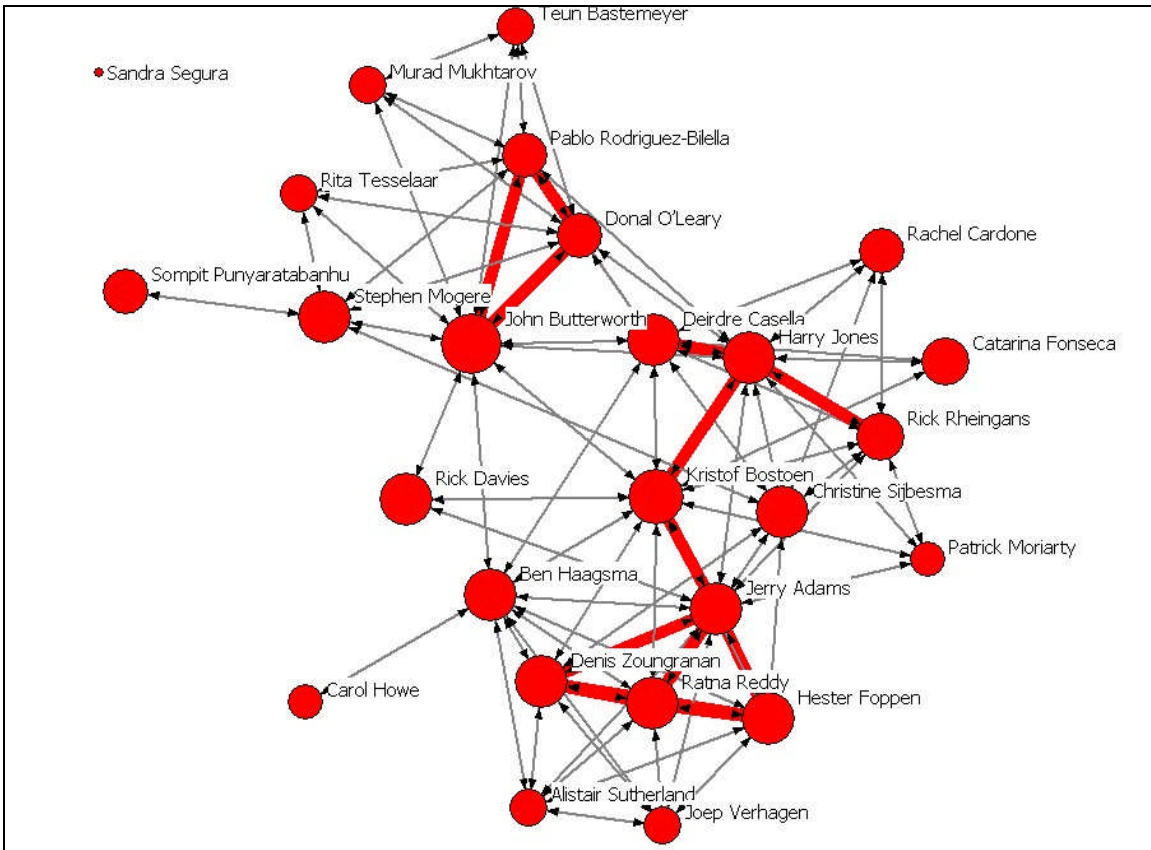


Figure 2: Network of people strongly connected by shared participation in the same groups (two or more groups). Red links = strongest links.

Figure 3 below shows the same network, but with the actors relabeled in terms of the organisations they work for. If IRC's intention was to create links between IRC and others, then this network diagram suggests that may be in process. None of the three identifiable clusters are made up solely of IRC staff. IRC staff are scattered across the whole network, and either belong to, or are connected in to, each of the three clusters.

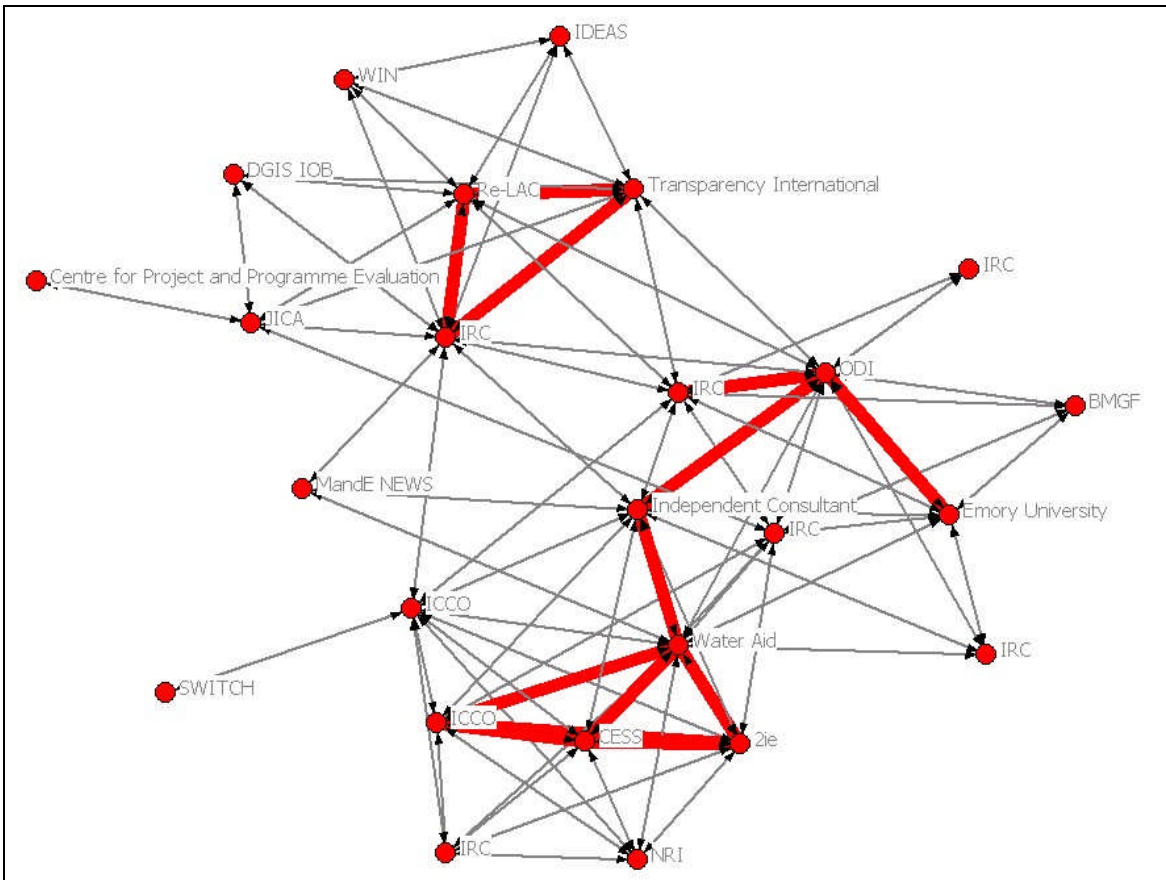
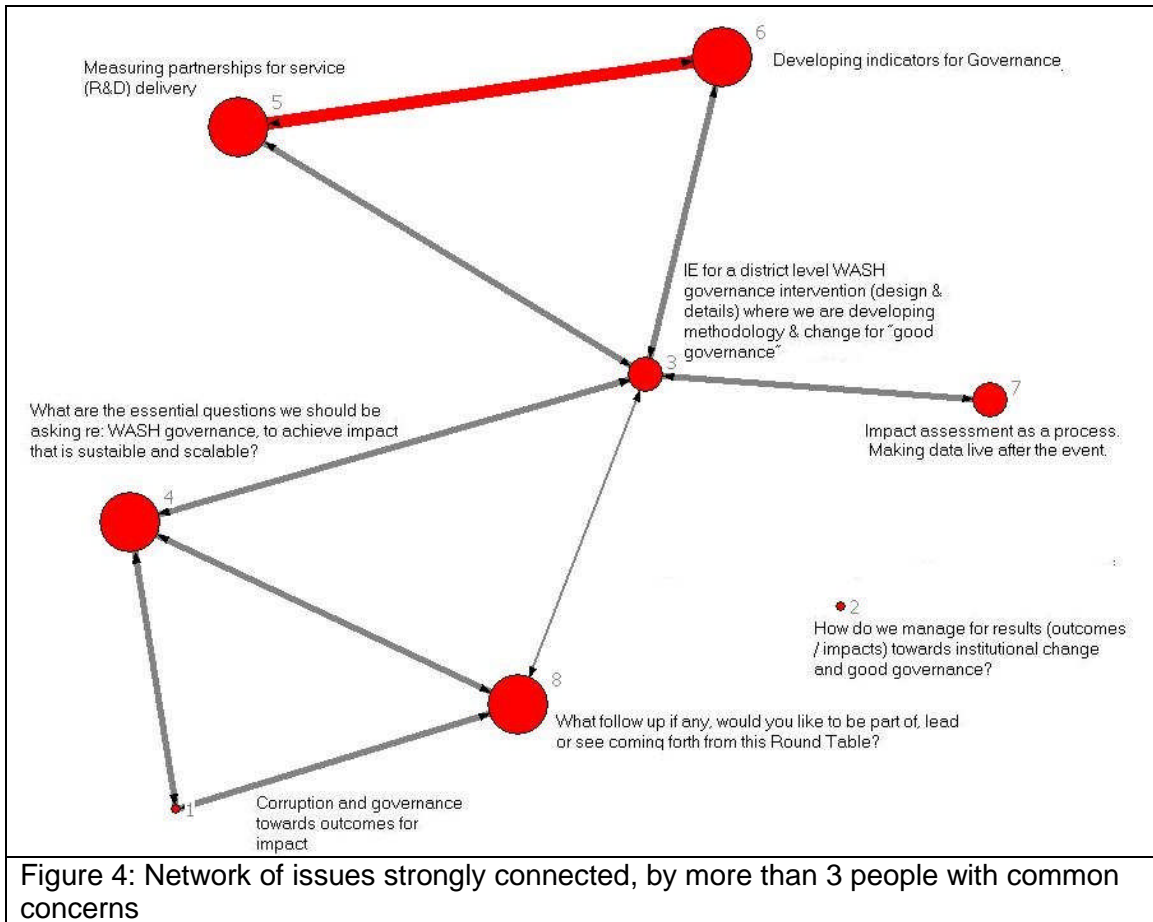


Figure 3: Figure 2: Network of organisations strongly connected by shared participation in the same groups (two or more groups). Red links = strongest links.

Figure 4 below shows a network of issues, but only those connected by links which were above average in strength (i.e. number of people attending the same groups). Here the average issue group was connected by three people. But some issue groups were connected by up to 7 people.

Caveat: The links shown in this diagram are not conceptual links, of how the issues are connected. It would be better to see this as an ecology of ideas. With different groups of ideas existing together in the same setting (i.e. in the same people's minds)



The interpretation of the network diagrams

The structure of these networks can be interpreted both in the light of the organisers' expectations, and simply as a reflection of the participants' interests. The organisers' may have had expectations about the structure that would result, based on their personal knowledge of the participants (who likes who, who dislikes who, etc). They may have also had more deliberate expectations, about being able to create linkages between specific types of people, and specific types of issues.

When interpreting the resulting networks it may be helpful to look at some structural features present in most networks, and who is occupying those positions. Such as:

- The existence of clusters (most noticeable in Figure 2)
- The existence of nodes which are highly connected to others (e.g. KB in Figure 2)
- The existence of isolates (see Figure 3)
- The existence of nodes which act as bridges between clusters (e.g. issue 3 in Figure 3).