

Get your network working



Report of a BME
networks
development day
Hosted by brap
September 2010

brap
making equality work for everyone

Collective

There is a power behind networks.
Connecting to others has always been
the way to get things done. Networks
create opportunities, move people
outside of their comfort zones and get
things done!

But networks that aren't formed
naturally can sometimes struggle.
They lose momentum, members
become disheartened: the network
dries up.

It doesn't have to be this way...

Introduction

brap hosts a regional BME network in the West Midlands called **the Collective**. With over 350 members, the Collective aims to **connect** with organisations doing similar work; **share** expertise and experience with others; and **influence and change** local policy to ensure that BME social businesses and the people they work with are considered.

Over the last two years of supporting the network and recruiting new members, brap has first-hand experience of the challenges associated with creating a vibrant, thriving network.

To share our experiences and learning we organised a development day for BME networks from across the country.

The aim of the day was to:

- understand more about what it means to run a network well
- explore the use of e-media as a means to facilitate communication in networks
- explore the power of networks in relation to the governments agenda for 'people power'
- network and have fun!

To achieve these aims, we wanted to provide people with:

- opportunities to reflect on their network, its purpose and how to make it more effective
- opportunities to network with other networks
- space to think about how to re-align the objectives of people's networks to the future environment

On 28 September 2010, brap hosted a development workshop for **25** BME networks from across the country. Organisations from **Lancashire to London** came to hear ideas and strategies for improving their popularity, sustainability, and 'stickability' (if you're wondering what that means see page 9). This is a brief summary of what they heard...

Why do networks fail?

Evidence shows that networks – whatever their aims – struggle to survive beyond their first 12 months. However, many of the barriers preventing success are common to all networks, so knowing the problems other people faced can help you prepare for what might crop up in the future. Here are some of the issues participants mentioned on the day, plus some more generic issues we've identified through research.

“ BME networks constantly have to justify their existence to stakeholders/funders – they don't really believe we're needed ”

“ often we're perceived as privileged – people think we're the first to get funding and resources ”

“ there's sometimes an internal competition in BME networks – they can fragment into different identities and groups ”

“ we're the first to go when cuts are made ”

“ funders often don't have a real understanding of the true equalities issues and sometimes fund BME networks out of 'PCness'. This means we spend time meeting their outcomes instead of genuinely promoting equality and human rights ”

In the second session of the day, Business Development Manager **Siobhan Harper-Nunes** explored the barriers and obstacles to creating a successful network. An interactive session, the participants openly and honestly recalled some of the challenges they faced when setting up their own networks – most of which are listed here...

Problems facing all networks...

negativity from members and funders

limited time of members to contribute manage network

egos!

mission drift

inability to respond to changing social/political environment

poor marketing and publicity

stagnation

The key features of a successful network

Problem	Solution
mission drift	all successful networks have a clear, engaging mission which they communicate to members and the wider community. Reiterating your vision reminds people why they signed up and reinforces buy-in, which unites different identities, groups, and people
poor people skills	get the right people – as you'll see on page 8, the most successful networks have the right types of people behind them (such as connectors, maverns, and salespeople). Remember, a lot of your network's most productive communication will be done by a handful of people...
limited time of members	...but don't forget that members are the engine of your network. It's important to be open and honest at the start, so people have realistic expectations about what's involved. Also, ensure people feel they have a place in the network and a specific job to do
stagnation	creating a series of short-terms goals and sharing your successes when you achieve them can help energise your group and create momentum. Remember, when measuring and sharing your impact don't forget the small wins!
egos	a difficult one...a clear and common purpose usually helps; but if that doesn't work try rotating the chair!
changing social/political environment	keep it fresh – make sure you're up to date and still needed by constantly listening to members and asking them about their needs and concerns
lack of funding	don't forget the importance of passion, drive, and enthusiasm in making your network grow.
lack of understanding	successful networkers tend to do their research – both about why networks succeed and about the prevailing policy/funding environment
poor publicity and marketing	as you'll see over the page, successful campaigns have at their heart a simple, powerful idea. Make sure you know what yours is. You might also want to use the social media guide on page 11 to help you think about communication.

Tips from *The Tipping Point*

In his 2000 book *The Tipping Point*, author and journalist Malcolm Gladwell argued that in order for any trend to become widespread in popularity a number of key criteria need to be met. Analysing trends as though they are viruses, infecting increasing amounts of people as they grow and spread, the large majority of his book is dedicated to exploring three key concepts, known as

- the Law of the Few
- the Stickiness Factor
- the Power of Context

Have you ever wondered why some ideas and campaigns really take off, while others – equally important – never quite get the same attention? In the third session of the day, brap CEO Joy Warmington explained how insights from the bestselling book *The Tipping Point* help answer this question, and why it's an important read for anyone trying to build a successful network.

The Law of the Few

No matter how widely known they become, the success of most campaigns and ideas can be attributable to the involvement of a few key people, each with a particular set of skills. In *The Tipping Point* these people are called

- connectors
- mavens
- salesmen

In order for a trend to be adopted by mainstream society, each of these types of people has an important role to play.

Connectors

A connector is someone

exceptional, whose social connections, energy, enthusiasm and personality spread the idea amongst as many people as possible. They are people that all of us can be connected to in relatively few steps because they occupy many different worlds, subcultures and niches.

It is worth noting the **importance of acquaintances** in catalysing trends. Acquaintances occupy different social circles than good friends, which allows them to spread the word to a greater number of people, from a greater number of backgrounds. Acquaintances represent a source of social power – the more

acquaintances you have, the more 'powerful' you are. Of course, the flip side of this is that if you have more acquaintances you're also more likely to hear about trends in wider society (which you may miss out on if you have a smaller social circle). Connectors are seen as the key players in spreading and 'infecting' new people with trends.

The more acquaintances you have, the more likely you are to 'infect' large numbers of people with your trend, and the more likely you are to become infected with trends earlier on in their development.

Mavens

A maven is an expert in his or her field. They know everything there is to know about their chosen speciality and have the knowledge and social skills to start word-of-mouth epidemics. Often mavens want to help for no other reason than because they like to help – which is an effective way of getting someone's attention.

The 'business' version of a maven is the consultant, who is extremely knowledgeable within certain specific areas, and helps people to make informed decisions.

Salesmen

A salesman is extremely successful in influencing people's decisions and behaviours. You may have an extremely influential personality, but in order for a trend to flourish it has to be *sold* well.

Put simply, if you have a greater number of salesmen, greater numbers of people will be influenced in adopting new trends.

- Who are your connectors – do they instantly come to mind?
- Who are your mavens – the wise owls in your group?
- Who are your salespeople, what tactics do they use and can they 'sell' in different contexts and to different audiences?

The Stickiness Factor

So we know the kinds of people who have to be involved if your network is to be a success. But what about the idea or 'message' behind it? The second idea in *The Tipping Point* is the 'Stickiness Factor' – the degree to which trends and campaigns 'stick' in the mind of those they spread to.

The Stickiness Factor relates to the specific content of a message which renders its impact memorable. The right people can help a message spread, but if the message isn't worth spreading, it's doomed to failure. The stickiness factor says that messages must have a certain something which means they remain active in recipients' minds. Moreover, they must be deemed worthy of being passed on.

What exactly makes a message sticky? Well, it's hard to pin down – the particular characteristics will vary depending on the specific circumstances and situation.

Successful TV programmes like *Sesame Street* have very sticky properties which makes them popular with children. But these are different to the characteristics that make Twitter and Facebook sticky.

But even if you can't say precisely what will make your idea sticky,

The Tipping Point points out that stickiness is often 'against' what conventional wisdom would hold.

The Power of Context

The final factor is the role the wider environment has in shaping how successful trends become. If the environment is just right, the trend will completely take off.

Broken Windows

What's interesting here is that little things can have a big impact on human behaviour. For example, in the 1990s New York city introduced a zero tolerance policy on crime. They found that by clamping down on crimes like fare dodging and vandalism, the level of more violent crime fell across the city.

Taking issue with smaller criminal activities influenced the way people acted. This is similar to an idea sometimes called the *Broken Windows Theory*. This theory says that people take cues from their environment, so seemingly minor signs of deterioration can, over time, result in major forces of deterioration within a community. If there are a large numbers of broken windows in a city, for example, people walking down the street past broken windows are contextually exposed to acceptance of deterioration and this starts to affect their behaviour.

The Magic Number of 150

Gladwell also highlights the unusual properties tied to the size of social groups. Groups of less than 150 members usually display a level of intimacy, interdependency, and efficiency that begins to dissipate markedly as soon as the group's size increases over 150. This concept has been exploited by a number

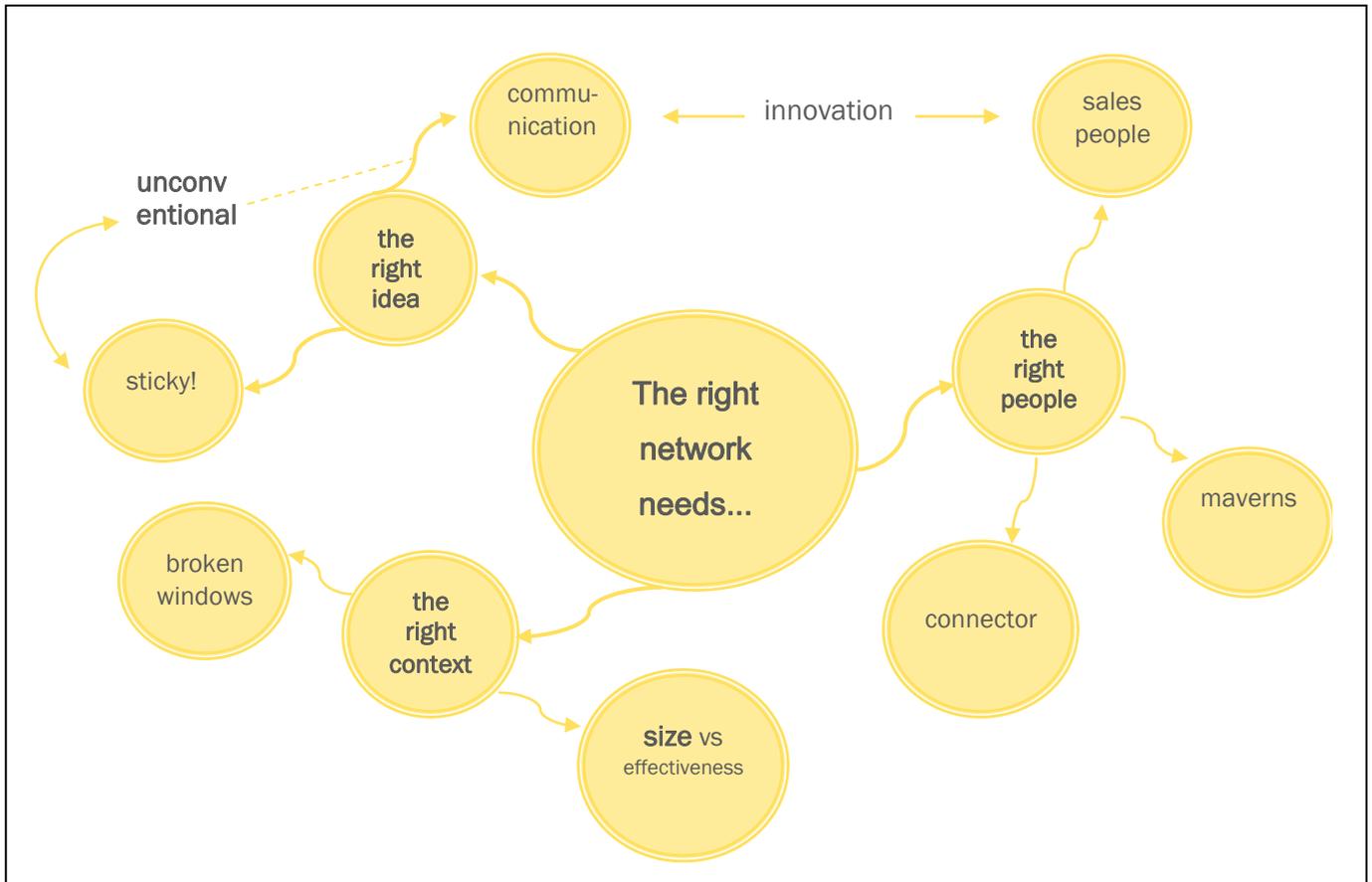
of corporations that use it as the foundation of their organizational structures and marketing campaigns.

Putting it all together...

So, what are the most important lessons we can take from all this? A successful campaign will...

- be sticky!

- be endorsed and sold by a few select individuals with particular skills
- spread its message in an innovative way that stands out from existing conventions
- have definite, defined goals, and the ability to achieve them
- be large enough to influence, but small enough to be meaningful to its members
- be noticed and adopted for mainstream usage



Using social media

Think social media is a waste of time? 2 billion videos are viewed per day on YouTube; 500 billion minutes are spent on Facebook every month; and 4 billion images are stored on Flickr. Social media is a powerful means of communicating to a mass audience, but many BME organisations lack the skills, confidence, and resources to make use of the many facilities on offer...or at least they think they do.

Puzzled by podcasting? Flummoxed by Facebook? Social media has the potential to get your message out there cheaper, faster, and wider. Yet research shows that BME organisations are less likely to be online and have a website. In the fourth and final session of the day, **Emma Wright** provided a DIY guide to social media.

Why use social media?

- staying in touch with your members
- adding new members
- marketing/reaching new members
- campaigning
- canvassing opinion
- organising meetings

What's stopping you using social media?

- **you may think its complicated**
researching and adopting new forms of technology can be daunting. Often, however, using social media can be easier than you think – after all, they're designed to encourage interaction!
- **it takes time to implement**
as we found out in the first session of the day, networks are not always well-resourced and members can have a lot of demands on their time. Even so, using social media doesn't have to be time-consuming and you can begin to see relatively big benefits in quite a short space of time
- **you're not sure why it would be useful**
...some of the time it won't be! Have a look at our A to Z of social media over the page to see the pros and cons of different tools and decide for yourself what might be useful.
- **the 'trust' issue**
the idea of people who aren't members of your network being able to see your event, stories, and news might not appeal. But if you're good – shout it from the rooftops!
- **take up could be slow by members**
as we said, it could take a while before members really begin to embrace your Facebook page or your Twitter site. Even so, social media can become an efficient means of communicating with people once you've overcome the initial hurdles.

An A→Z of social media

Social media	What it can be used for	Pro's	Con's
<p>Blogs</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voicing opinion on different subjects to a wide audience • Can be a free version of a website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to update • A free website! • Non-web-developers can easily create their own site • Can be customised to match your brand • Can be updated easily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some sites have a standard layout that can't be easily changed (unless you're an internet whizz!) • The website address may contain "Bloggers" or "Wordpress" • If you want to use your own, registered domain name there's a (minimal) charge
<p>Document sharing</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing documents confidentially with members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can access documents for reading and/or editing from any computer • Can have multiple users, so editing and updating can be done remotely • Different members can have access to different documents, so you control who sees what 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust issue! Are you really sure no one else can access these documents?! • For Dropbox you must install the programme in every computer that you access the documents from • With Google docs, their word processor and spreadsheets don't work exactly the same way as Word or Excel – that means you have to get used to a slightly new way of working!

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<p>Facebook</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campaigning • Passing on information about events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can reach a young audience • Easy to use • If there are new comments, members etc – you can be notified by email • You can reach hundreds of people • You can invite friends of friends (i.e. potential new members) • Increased exposure by members commenting on events, your group etc • Good for photo sharing as well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone needs to be regularly responsible for updating and monitoring your site. • You can't track how many people have viewed your page like a website • Any detractors can spread rumours about you to their network – libel laws are in place, but slight comments can't be stopped • Your page can have your logo and photos, but it can't be customised to match your brand identity • Can only join as an individual – once done, then you can create a group for your network and invite others
<p>Linked in</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'Facebook for Business'! Business networking online • Network with members and non-members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen as a more 'serious' business site • Can be linked to Twitter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can only join as an individual – once done, then you can create a group for your network. People will then join that group
<p>Ping</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking attendance at your network meetings, events, etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use • Keeps track of your meeting's attendees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has lots of personal/ informal options to plough through • Fairly new, so members that don't know about it may not trust it • Not so flexible if people are unsure if they can attend

Survey Monkey



SurveyMonkey.com
because knowledge is everything

- Canvassing opinion from your members and wider audiences

- Easy to use
- Confidential
- Surveys can be set up how you like
- Allows for both tick box and in-depth answers
- Can be customized to match your branding
- Can turn the results of a survey into a portable .pdf document

- Can cost money if you need an extensive questionnaire (i.e. more than 10 questions) - £19.95 per survey or £16.67 per month

Twitter



- Can aid communication to members and non-members alike
- Keeping up to date with other policy makers, strategic people, etc

- Can be linked to your mobile/ blackberry to regular updates can be done via text messages
- Can design your page to match your branding
- Can be linked to LinkedIn, Facebook etc so that by updating Twitter, you also update the other sites automatically

- Huge amount of information if you follow other people
- Limited text – 140 characters!
- Has to be checked on a regular basis
- You need to have something to say on a regular basis to make this a success!
- 10% of users create 90% of the Twitter updates...or is this an opportunity?

Other useful sites

Flickr	www.Flickr.com	Photo sharing
Ning	www.ning.com	Create online social networks about any subject
SlideShare	http://www.slideshare.net	Sharing presentations, and get tips for your presentation
YouTube	www.youtube.com	Video sharing

Your facilitators on the day...



Joy Warmington is the Chief Executive of brap, one of the country's leading equalities charities. Under her leadership brap has developed a wide-ranging portfolio of work, with Joy herself managing projects for Macmillan Cancer Care, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Equality and Human Rights Commission, NCVO, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and many others. Joy is an author of over 20 books, reports, and articles as well as being a broadcaster and international speaker.



Emma Wright is the Community and Enterprise lead for brap. Her main responsibilities are to manage the LIFT programme, a four-year £500,000 project for the Big Lottery which provides business support to Black and Minority Ethnic third sector organisations across the West Midlands. Emma has previously managed flagship business incubation centres across the UK, for both biotechnology and media start-up businesses, and the West Midlands section of 'Inclusion Through Media' a national, Equal/ESF funded programme addressing inequalities and building skills in the media industry.



Business Development Manager **Siobhan Harper-Nunes** has over 20 years' experience supporting the voluntary sector, specialising in business and strategic planning, funding and income generation, and project and programme development. Prior to brap, she had a significant role at Birmingham City Council developing and running the External Funding Unit. Siobhan has a degree in Social Policy (specialising in Race and Social Policy) and a Masters in Urban Regeneration (specialising in community involvement in regeneration).

What next?

So, how are you feeling? A little daunted? A little confused? Well, hopefully, you're also feeling energised, excited, and eager to put these ideas into practice. If you're running a network give us call – we'd love to hear from you whether your network's been going for 10 minutes or 10 years.

As for us, we're developing a range of other projects and services to support organisations working with marginalised communities. If any of these look like they might be relevant to you, please feel free to get in touch and have a chat.

The Cultural Edge

Designed to support infrastructure organisations, commissioners and funders to better meet the needs of the BME third sector, this tailored programme of training will explore the history of the BME third sector and how this has shaped its 'present'; new equality legislation and its implications for the sector; what support the sector needs to become more entrepreneurial; how to capture impact; and much, much more...

Social media part II

Give your network the online edge! Learn how to recognise and identify a range of vehicles to communicate with your members, reach wider communities, and keep your message fresh.

Leadership for BME organisations

Accessible and flexible, this training package gives leaders and managers the skills to strengthen their leadership styles and qualities to better promote the needs and concerns of BME communities.

brap is a not-for-profit equalities charity, inspiring and leading change to make public, private and third sector organisations fit for the needs of a more diverse society. brap offers tailored, progressive and common sense approaches to equality training, consultancy and community engagement issues. Registered charity number 1115990



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