"We're more than evaluators": Evaluators as boundary agents to support transformative change
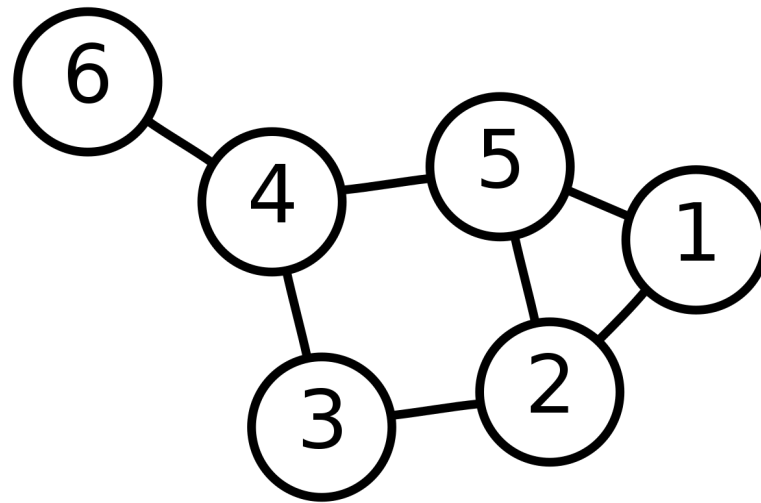
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Today you will…

- Increase your 'systems literacy'
- Develop skills in conceptualising and mapping networks
- Establish some visibility of your 'self' as part of the system
- Have fun!

Why?

- **Transformative change** is not about more or less of something – it's about doing **lots of something** differently

- We need to recognise **our place** within the systems (webs of interactions) that exist

- What are **our priorities as it relates to systems change?**

- **Most importantly, how do we want to present ourselves or '**show up**' when it comes to working towards systems change?**

Our role as 'linkers'

- We need to think about our priorities – what are the 'long-term outcomes' we want to produce via our work?

- What is the role of linking disparate groups or people to achieve those outcomes?

- What's the 'logic' that underpins those linking activities?
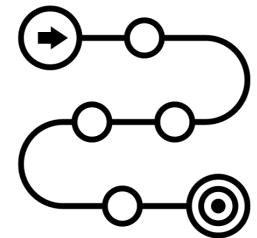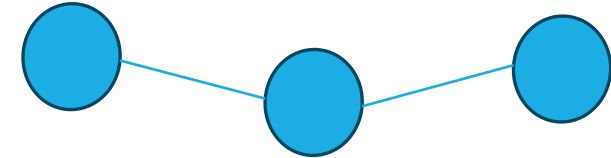
Boundary agents or 'spanners'

- Interpreting networks involves understanding the **patterns and structures**

- One key one is the role of a '**spanner**'

- In effect the **spanner** is an element that bridges otherwise **distinct networks**

- There might be multiple spanners, but this is a part of **understanding system structures**
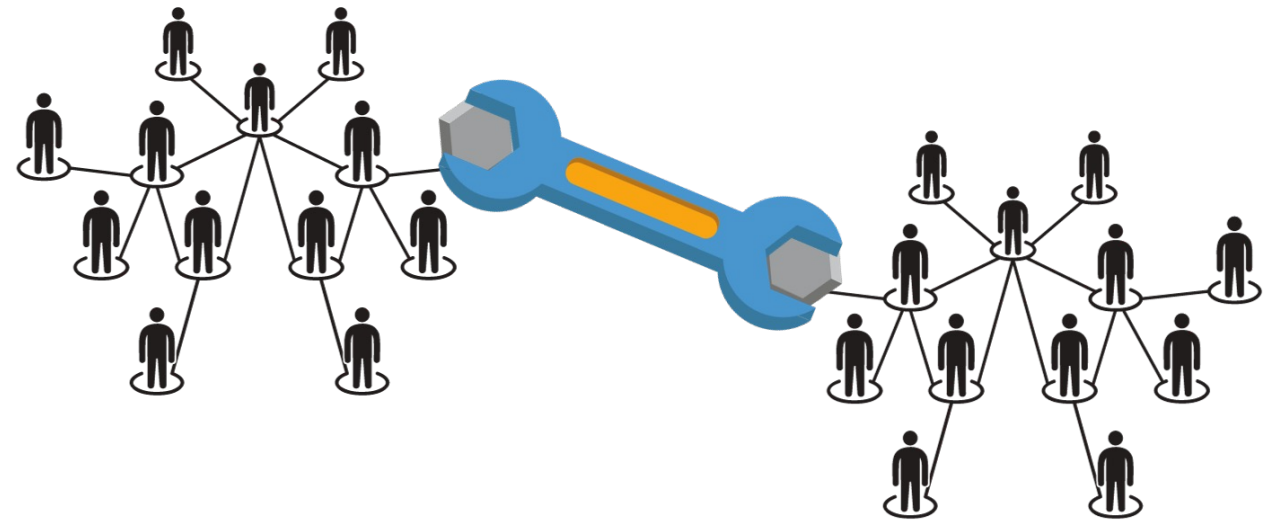
The 'how to'

1 Define the 'level' – are you mapping individuals, groups, organisations? Are there any boundaries or limits (e.g. geography) that can help frame our network?

2 Identify individual elements - the 'dots' – and write them down. Think of placement in terms of 'gravity' – individual dots will gravitate towards each other based on their **closeness.** The same team or organisation = higher chance of being close. Use the quadrants on the template to help with this.

3 Draw 'links' between the individual elements based on the existence of a connection. Consider the nature of the connection – is it formal or informal? What 'happens' to action or manifest that connection?

4 Make sense of the network – the connections, gaps and opportunities

Activity 1: Map your network

- Write your name in the oval in in the middle of the page (you)

- Think about four organisations that you've worked with or engaged with recently – write the names of each of these in the small circles in each of the quadrants

- Draw a line to connect yourself to each of these

FIRST PERSON CONSULTING

Developing network maps

1. Define the 'level' – are you mapping individuals, groups, organisations? Are there any boundariesor limits (e.g. geography) that can help frame our network?
2. Identify **individual elements** – the 'dots' – and write them down. Think of placement in terms of 'gravity' – individual dots will gravitate towards each other based on their **closeness.** The same team or organisation = higher chance of being close. Use the quadrants on the template to help with this.
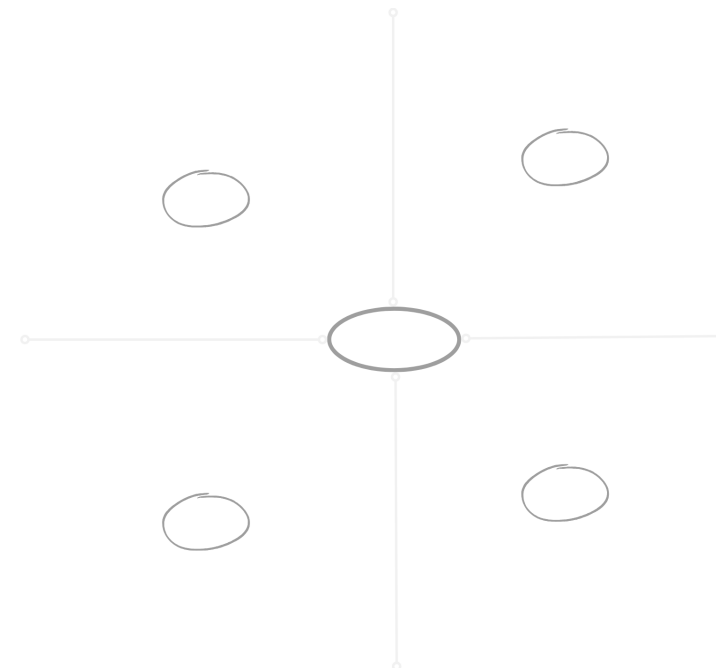3. Draw 'links' between the individual elements based on the existence of a **connection.** Consider the **nature** of the connection – is it formal or informal? What 'happens' to action or manifest that connection?
4. **Make sense** of the network – the connections, gaps and opportunities. What patterns (or lack thereof) do you see?

Want an electronic copy of this template or more resources on systems mapping? Follow this QR code to the FPC website.

Activity 1: Map your network

Refining the map:

- How can you categorise these?
  - Industry / role / goal alignment, etc

- Are they all in the same sector?

- Would they be connected to each other?

- What is the nature of these connections?
  - Funder
  - Service delivery
  - Information (to or from)

Activity 2: Make connections

Instructions:

- Group yourselves with one others on your table

- If you've (somehow) identified the same organisations – 'link' them – but importantly, draw a link between yourselves!
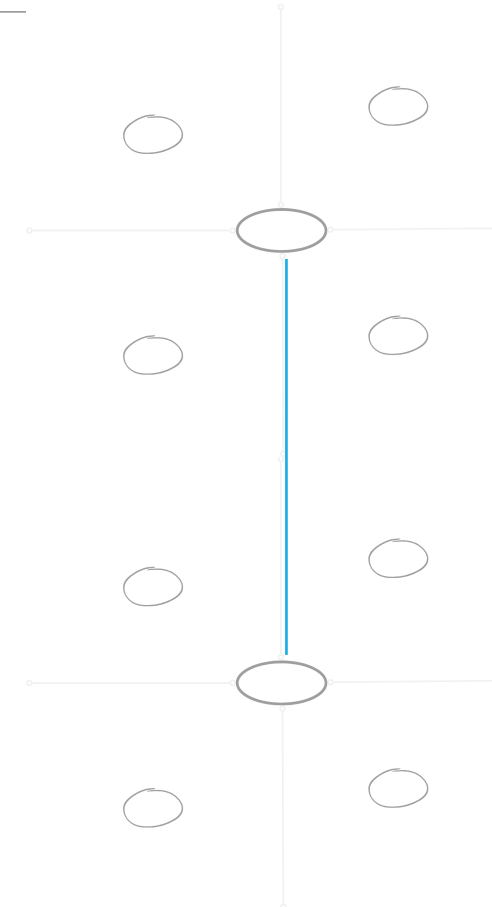
Activity 2: Make connections

Instructions:

- Look around the whole table

- Compare your maps and how they connect (or don't)

Think about the following:

- Can you see some common organisations?

- Are there 'sub-networks' or communities on your table? For example, these could be based on:
  - Sector
  - Geography

- Does anyone link across these sub-networks?

- Is there anyone with no groups in common with the rest of the table?
  - can you find a connection?

Activity 2: Make connections

Instructions:

- Pair up with someone else on your table (2 or 3 people)
- Are there any common organisations?
- Link these up
- Are there 2nd order connections?

Activity 3: Spanning networks

For those linked with wool: You are the network spanners

Your role is to go and share some information with those we have connected you with:

- About what your table observed in Activity 2: i.e. did your table have:

- Common groups (by Sector, geography, etc)

- Were there sub-networks and connections between them

Everyone else:

- Think about the 2nd layer connections – what other groups are connected to your original 4

- Add more organisations to the individual maps – link these to your 4 existing groups

Examples from practice

- The 'usual' approach is that we would develop a network map for a program

- We (FPC) are **not** typically in this map – despite the fact that we are connected to all of these groups in some form

- We (evaluators) need to consider our (literal) place in these networks – what are the opportunities that we can help manifest? Does that conflict with our role as the 'evaluator'?
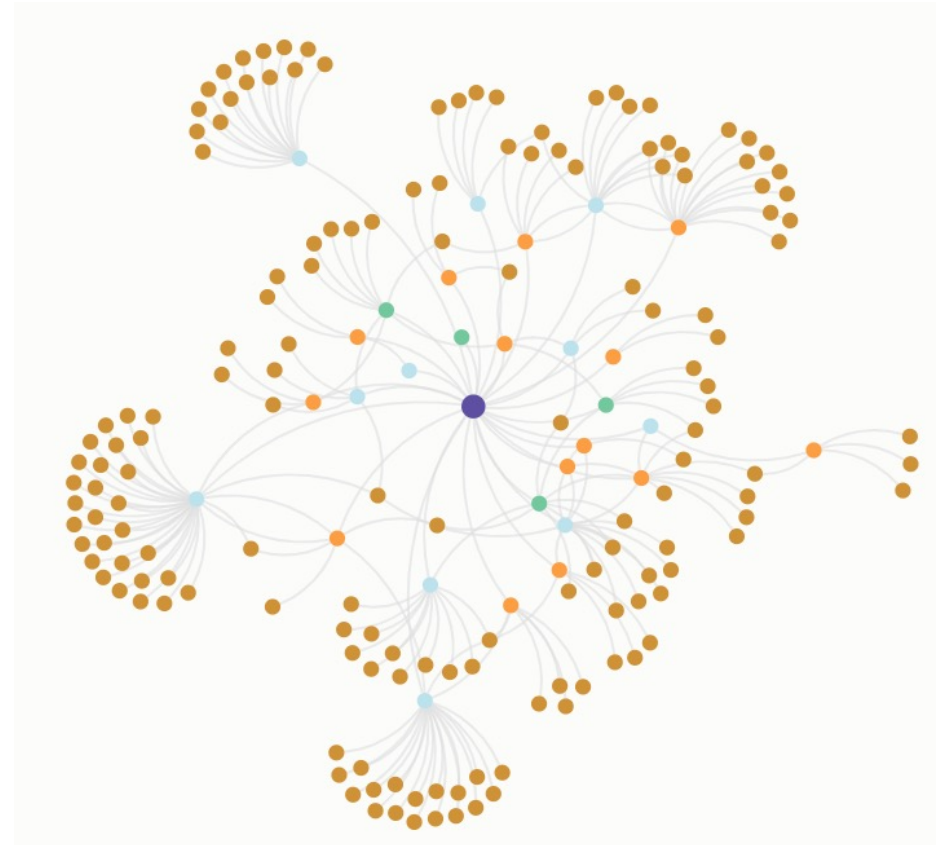
Examples from practice

- We were evaluating a Victorian-based health promotion grants program

- I became aware of a funding opportunity in the context of scaling programs with demonstrated effectiveness

- I shared the opportunity with the manager of the health promotion program, and flagged its relevance (in my view) to the grantees

- One of those subsequently applied and has been funded

- I ran a workshop on Monday on scalability and scaling – and I mentioned a project I'm involved in evaluating related to a parenting program with incarcerated dads in Canada

- One of the workshop participants works in the prisons context in Singapore – they were curious about results / data / lessons that were public

- I offered to link them up with the organisation in Canada – sent an email – took me 2 minutes!

Closing points

- We as evaluators are intimately linked to the systems and programs that we evaluate – we build relationships, connections and our own knowledge

- Those relationships, connections and knowledge = **power**

- We then need to reflect on what we do with that power – what are the outcomes / changes in the world that we are passionate about, and how do we want to 'show up'?

- In simple terms:
  - Who do you work with / know?
  - Who do they work with / know?
  - Where are you placed in the system relative to everyone else?
  - What can you 'inject' or 'insert' in the system to help shift the system? – think of it like a logic for your own practice

Closing points

- Developing these network maps or visuals is all about asking **clarifying questions**

- Who am I, and what am I trying to achieve?

- Who do I know, and how?

- What can I do with that knowledge, and what's my role in supporting transformative change?