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Commitment and identity: An Exploration into the Integrative, Interactive and Emergent Nature of Community Led Policy Making and Implementation.

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Abstract

Social networking is changing the world of international government, finance and business. Amongst other things members of social networks are demanding greater transparency in corporate and government institutions. Research shows that there is a change in the balance of power in decision making and this in turn is leading to more innovative and sustainable solutions. Community led (bottom – up) innovation projects using social networking technology are emerging as a leading source of creative power engaging the wisdom of crowds as opposed to the single - mindedness of policy makers. Research shows that transparency, shared commitment, empathy and trust play an essential role in their success. Consequently, for community led networks to be effective, their members must be competent in building and maintaining excellent inter; intra; and extra - personal relationships. Analyzing data from multiple sources participating in the European Commission's "Digital Agenda 2020" programme, the paper concludes that the success of this and programmes like it will depend on the desire of members to acquire history - making identities by maintaining identity defining commitments across the network. Implications for theory and research are discussed.

Key words: *Knowledge economy; innovation diffusion; trust and commitment.*

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to apply a commitment based analytical model (Abrahamsson, 2002) to better understand and explain the human network dynamics associated with the efforts of an association of European regions seeking to accelerate the impact of ICT on the quality of life of citizens, business and government. The paper elaborates on the interpretations of Flores (1993) and Gadman and Cooper (2009) as they relate to understanding the dynamics of leadership, commitment and its operation in community based networks. It provides a review the research method and proceeds to theory induction by an analysis of contributing behaviour exhibited by members of this community. Research on the core commitment structures of community based networks has not been well established, let alone compared with those of traditional communities and the overall lack of a theory suggests a qualitative grounded approach to develop analytical categories and propositions (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Meyer, 1997; Strauss & Corbin 1990). This paper shows that successful community based networks are made up of conversation generated commitment structures that bond members to each another and suggests possible implications for theory, research and practice.

Community led social networks enabled by information and communications technology ICT) are driving changes in policymaking that are invalidating existing practices. With over 1 billion people online worldwide, community led social networks are a force of unprecedented power and for the first time in human history, mass cooperation across space and in time is happening. Whether engaged in business, government, finance or philanthropy, community led social networks are gaining increasing popularity yet their success requires specific competences related to the ability to satisfy the deep concerns of members with commitments that matter (Gadman and Cooper, 2009). Research has shown that individuals participating in community led social networks have specific concerns and distinct ideas about how these should be satisfied (Callon, 1980; Van de Ven 1986) and this can lead to disagreement which can impede the transformation process (Dougherty, 1992). While it has been shown that some amount of disagreement is useful for producing more innovative solutions (Amabile, 1996), the evidence suggests that insurmountable disagreements result in delays, suboptimal compromises and most often, failure to ever

build a sustainable community. According to Gadman (1996) an effective balance between positive and negative disruption is established when actors gain trustworthy identities by listening to and committing to address the concerns of community members. Advances in neuroscience have linked the need for trust to oxytocin, a single neuropeptide which, amongst other things helps generate empathy, generosity and trust. However, oxytocin has a very short "shelf life" and as a consequence the quality of social interactions cannot be taken for granted and requires constant attention. Evidence suggests (Gadman and Cooper. 2009) that successful community networks produce synergistic results when concerns are addressed through committed action. This cannot happen without a clear understanding of the drivers of concerns at various levels in the business and the committed action of individuals to address those concerns.

Information and communications technology (ICT) is changing the way we relate to one another. For the first time in human history we have a way of networking socially which is enabling an entirely new way of communicating. While some social networks simply allow us to stay in touch, others play a major role in changing accepted ways of doing things. While there is much emphasis on the power of these community led networks to bring about changes in everything from household products to the leadership of nations, little attention is paid to their sustainability. The next section looks at the reasons why social networking is so attractive and explores the main elements which contribute to their success.

Commitment and Trust in Social Networks

Recent studies suggest that social networks can engender trust and the more they are used, the greater the levels of trust they generate. According to Zak (2011), trust goes to the heart of our economic and social systems and is essential for successful economic transactions and that nations with higher levels of trust enjoy stronger economies than those on the other end of the spectrum. This link between trust and prosperity explains the difficulties encountered by New Member States and Accession Countries as they seek to adjust to privatisation in the European Union? Research shows that the systematic corruption which led to the fast acquired personal wealth following privatisation in Russia still exists in these New Member States and Accession Countries. For these fledgling communities, notions of

transparency and freedom of information are anathema to the self – interests of business oligarchs whose powerbases are made up of relatives or close associates of government officials, even government officials themselves, not to mention criminal bosses.

Even in such corrupt communities, Gadman (1996) argues that trust and commitment remain essential to their sustained success because they form a tightly controlled community even if motivated by fear and greed. So whether for good or evil, commitment to alleviate concerns plays an essential role in determining the outcomes of purposeful relationships (Abrahamsson and Livari, 2002). Gadman and Cooper (2009) suggest that it takes a special type of leader to build and maintain commitment based communities. Long before social networking technology existed, Heidegger (1962[1927]) reminded us that: "We are naturally world disclosers and by means of tools, technology and coordination we awaken coherent spaces or worlds which make possible a distinct and pervasive way in which things, people and selves appear and in which certain ways of acting make sense" (p.17). Much emphasis today is placed on disclosing new worlds through the use of social networking technology but much less is known about the community based networks they enable, especially why some succeed where others fail. Gadman and Cooper (2009) believe this is because ICT is only one component in a complex web of human and technological dynamics which have at their centre the need for people to express their deep concerns and to be able to trust that someone will commit to address them to their satisfaction (Ridderstrale and Nordstrom 2004, Flores, 1998). Like other social networks, community based networks are webs of relationships that generate material or social value through complex dynamic exchanges of both tangible and intangible goods, services and benefits. They challenge existing theories of transaction cost economics, which regard organisations as efficient contractual instruments (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1985) by demonstrating that efficient contracting depends upon effective cooperation, without which successful competition would not be impossible. While dinosaurs like Alan Sugar still operate within the "your fired" paradigm, it is clear that the values underpinning that paradigm are inconsistent with those required to run new internet based models of collaboration and cooperation seen in successful social networks. At their core, community led social networks are characterised by values of transparency, shared commitment, empathy and trust. Research show that when these values are skilfully enacted, they lead to the free flow of information and the generation of knowledge across an ever widening and inclusive

landscape of participants. The purposes and principles behind community networks are more consistent with theories of knowledge transformation (Nonaka and Takauchi, 1995) in that they comprise of individuals capable of self - organising to a point where there is no breakdown in the cost and quality of the contract. They do this through orchestrating the "speech acts" (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) which make up network of commitments (Winograd and Flores, 1987). These commitments drive and coordinate action among the members of the network. These examples suggest a more synergistic relationship between transaction cost (Coase 1937) reasons to organise and those based on commitment and knowledge (Conner and Prahalad 1996) in that both offer some economic advantage to members. Conner and Prahalad (1996:478) go so far as to say that the primary contribution of the knowledge – based view is to round out transaction cost theory by recognising knowledge based transaction costs. Unfortunately, because the organisational models supporting this approach tend to be highly nuanced and pluralistic (Hock 1999, von Hippel 2002) many community led initiatives fail because their members fear loss of identity and control and consequently fail to take advantage of the power which comes from well coordinated and committed networks of people.

In considering the challenges associated with knowledge disclosure, diffusion and utilisation (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus 2001) across community led networks, it is important to note that while their popularity continues to grow, the diffusion and manifestation of innovation becomes more challenging when increasing levels of personal and financial commitment are required (Mauer, Rai and Sali, 2004). This paper concludes that the success of community based social networks depends on the desire of participants and the organisations they represent, to be authentic (Heidegger, 1962) by maintaining identity defining commitments across the network (Gauntlett 2002, Spinosa et al., 1997). This holds significant implications for theory and future research.

Trust is fundamental to all relationships, yet as Einstein once famously said, "what would a fish know about water?" While being fundamental, it if possibly the most misunderstood aspects of successfully organised action, especially in internet based models of collaboration. While not an issue when meeting people at a cocktail party, trust becomes increasingly important when the need for committed action to address concerns is required.

The formation and leadership of community led networks is critical if people are going to be willing to share their knowledge and shape their concerns in ways that flow with the concerns of the overall community. Commitments (big promises) are made in response to requests from people or groups to satisfy their deep concerns. When commitments are made and met they drive levels of trust higher and those who make such commitments establish identities as such. They can be relied upon which is a most fundamental quality of human interaction. Only humans can "give their word." In the next section, the paper reviews the various theories associated with commitment and identity.

Commitment and Identity

The paper explains why and under what circumstances people in community based social networks become committed and how this leads to identity creation. One view is that people identify with the organisation of which they and the recipients are a part (Kogut and Zander 1996). Such identity when linked to shared values, beliefs and assumptions might be considered a cultural identity (Schein 1992, Laine – Sveiby 1991) or disclosive space (Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus, 2001) and might also be reflected in such things as shared coding schemes (Hansen; Nohria; Tierney 1999), language and cognitive schema (Winograd and Flores 1997), the convention and rules by which people coordinate their actions and make decisions (McKinney and Gerloff 2004) shared moral values and convergent expectations (Flores 1993). In other words it reflects committed participation in a shared cultural identity (Weeks and Galunic 2003).

According to Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (ibid), core assumptions behind community based networks is that people participate by converting what they know, both individually and collectively, into tangible and intangible value that they offer to the network to satisfy deep collective concerns. They accrue value by engaging in that process and as a consequence, realizing new worlds of possibility in that new disclosive space. A natural consequence of this awakened reality is the establishment of an identity as someone who makes life worth living for themselves and those around them. Successful community based social networks are made up of such people.

March and Cyert (1963) recognized that firms are not monolithic profit – maximizing entities but rather complex and structured systems whose overall behavior is affected by decisions made sequentially and independently by their members (Cyert and March 1963; Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; March and Olsen 1972). Consequently, it is possible to conclude that organizations are comprised of autonomous individuals who utilize possibly different methodologies to achieve some level of performance (Malone and Smith 1988). Differences create pressures for isomorphic adaptation and emphasize the need for legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). At the organizational level, institutional theory posits that legitimacy is a key success factor for organizations, defining legitimacy as acceptance of the organization by its environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Consequently, legitimacy is gained by adopting positioning strategies which indicate conformance to the essential characteristics of the institutional environment. It is also the means by which organizations and their constituents define their identities and in so doing favorably shape their environment for their own ends (Gauntlett, 2002). In order to explore the ways individuals maintain legitimacy while forming their identity in community based networks, it is necessary to understand what kind of practices they perform such that they produce personal and network identities that matter. According to Flores and Spinosa (1998), people are considered history making or entrepreneurial (Spinosa, *et al.,* 1997), when they involve two interrelated activities: interpreting which actions are appropriate given their intense concerns and positioning their actions so that they are accepted by those who matter. Developing such an identity engages listening which ultimately influences others to adopt a point of view more closely aligned with that of the influencer and to take on new practices which change the way the world appears to people. This history making capability requires a keen awareness of intense personal commitment and the skilful expression of that commitment in action in some domain of interaction. Heidegger's (1962 [1937], pp. 352-8; 434-44) emphasis on shared public spaces offers such a domain and an opportunity to explore community based networks like the one described in this study, to examine the positioning strategies of their members and the public and personal identities they create.

To gain an identity as someone who makes life worth living for people it is necessary to engage in high quality interactions. Such interactions are measured by the strength of the commitments generated as one person or group promises to deliver results to another person or group in such a way that ultimately there can be agreement that the promise was

met and the need satisfied. According to Spinosa, *et al.,* (1997) this involves two interrelated activities: interpreting which actions are appropriate given their intense concerns and positioning their actions so that they are accepted by those who matter. Nowhere is this practice more evident than in the modus operandi of Steve Jobs and other executives at Apple Corporation. Since its inception, Apple has repeatedly invented the future by reinventing the past by developing innovative products which they release to the market in small doses over time before launching what appears to be a "rule breaking" product. In the next section, the paper explores how these practices take place internet based social networks.

Identity Building, the Internet and Architectures of Participation

According to Adams (2004) the internet is revolutionary not because of the great search engines and enormous library of interconnected information but because it's two - way communications technology allows large numbers of people to interact with each other. While some interactions such as those on Facebook and Twitter might be considered trivial, many more are purposefully designed to satisfy the concerns of large communities. The quality of these interactions is measured by the strength of the commitments generated as one person or group promises to deliver results to another person or group in such a way that ultimately there can be agreement that the promise was met and the need satisfied (Winograd and Flores 1987; Flores and Spinosa 1998)). In other words, commitment structures deliver value because they are held together by the strength of the collective promises and actions of their members and identity built on the extent to which a person's word is their bond. For example, they commit to be reliable and they adopt positioning strategies like letting others know what's going on. They alert them if problems arise and they offer counter - proposals designed to resolve the problem to another's satisfaction. They use the internet to build legitimacy through core commitment structures based on trust (Winograd and Flores 1987). Table 1 describes six aspects common to all commitments.

Table 1. Six Aspects of Commitment

Aspect of Commitment	Description
Focus	Defines the target of one's commitment. This target can be an organisation, project, community, etc.
Strength	Defines how deeply an actor or group is attached to an entity. An actor is more or less committed than simply being committed or not.
Conditions	Define what has to be done in order to fulfil the requirements of the commitment. E.g. explicit requests outlining conditions of satisfaction.
Durability	Depending on the commitment target, the durability of the personal contract varies. E.g. commitment to career may last a lifetime while commitment to a project is shorter term.
Essential Forms	At least three forms of commitment exist: Affective, normative and compliant. These form a composite which changes over time. Because they engender attachment they are regarded as the essence of commitment.
Levels	The unit of analysis in commitment studies. 1) Individual 2) group or team 3) organisation. Each can have a commitment towards an entity

Depending on the focus of commitment and the circumstances, an actor may be committed to a community network in different ways. According to Von Hippel (2001), they may feel its benefits (affective component). They may have an emotional and rational investment in the project which drives their continued participation (durability component). Finally, the community may be bonded by the strength of the collective promises of its members (normative component). Most researchers agree that it is the affective component which is the most desirable (Meyer and Allen 1997; Gadman and Cooper, 2009) because it is that aspect which enables bonding at each level of commitment.

This paper shows that successful community based networks are made up of conversation generated commitment structures that bond members to each another. This rich network of commitments delivers value by addressing the deep concerns of community members and ultimately the beneficiaries of their work. The essential purpose of community based networks is integrative interaction producing results greater than the sum of individual

actions (Richardson 2004). Because people make up community based networks the currency of commitment is the making of requests which are met with promises that are kept. This suggests that richly synergistic communities are like magnets attracting people who enjoy this affective component of commitment. Especially when it enables them to "show up in the world" and in so doing, make a difference "in the world" that makes a difference such that the world is not the same as a result of their actions. Ironically, in the community studied here, this quality appears present at every level except amongst senior executives. In spite of this drawback, a core group of individuals has worked diligently to address the concerns of the community and as a consequence are being regarded as people who can be trusted. In this community - collective model (von Hippel and von Krogh 2003) newcomers pick up on this trusting identity and are willing to share with existing members and derive benefits from revealing their ideas (Callhoun 1986; Taylor & Singleton 1993). This is possible because their ideas can be reviewed and commented upon by others and in terms of learning benefits, the group's feedback can be direct and specific to the newcomer. Such architectures of participation (Raymond, 1999) include low barriers to entry by newcomers and some mechanism for balancing the need for control with the need for improvisational innovation. This architecture of participation allows for a free market of ideas in which anyone can put forward proposed solutions to problems; it becomes adopted, if at all, by acclamation and the organic spread of its usefulness. Ultimately, the reward for such rich networking is the ability to progress toward levels of knowledge and discovery beyond those achieved by conventional means especially awareness of one's own identity through core commitment revelation. Research on the core commitment structures of community based networks has not been well established, let alone compared to those of traditional communities and the overall lack of a theory of suggests a qualitative grounded approach to develop analytical categories and propositions (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Meyer, 1997; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

The theory development in this paper is based on the European Region Information Society (ERISA) an association of European regions seeking to accelerate the impact of ICT on the quality of life of citizens, business and government. The paper is organised as follows; firstly it provides a review of the research method employed in the study. It then provides a history of ERISA related development data before proceeding to theory induction by an

analysis of contributing behaviour exhibited by members of the ERISA community. Conclusions are offered regarding the implications for theory, research and practice.

Research Method

This section describes the research method employed in the study. It proceeded in three phases: Sampling of the case, data gathering, and data analysis. One case was selected in order to increase the depth of the analysis, acquire and report experience with the gathering of new and unfamiliar data (Numagami 1998). ERISA was sampled because it was hoped that it would reveal areas as yet undiscovered in current research into identity creation in community based networks. For example, the following comment points to reasons why regional and national identities differ, "it is interesting that in many European Countries, especially those who have been subjected to dynamic "border re-arrangement" in the last century – refer and relate more strongly to a "regional identity" than a national identity…. Not sure how relevant this is – but for instance Istrians, Piemontese, Liguirans, Malapolskans, Bavarians, Extramadurans have very strong regional affinties.. The English (apart from Yorkshire) don't suffer the same perspective." ERISA also offered an ideal sample because it was in the initial stages of enabling each member region to move from policy to practice in the key areas of government, infrastructure, health, education and business. As is common with such challenging projects, concerns expressed by individual communities are rarely treated as important to the community as a whole and the arising conflicts offer a rich source of data into the challenges of moving from policy into practice in networked communities. The data covers the second phase of the European Broadband Portal (EBP11), a key ERISA program which commenced in January 2011 and is due to run until December 2012. According to one senior executive, "this is part of an ongoing program of development ERISA runs EBPII (European Broadband Portal phase II) in order to garner support and action at a Regional Level (Region is a political layer just under local and just below Government)". The research covers events occurring during its critical launch phase in three regions in Piemonte – Italy; Istria – Croatia; Trikala – Greece; and two at a country level in Poland and Bulgaria. Data were gathered from interviews and observations made during launch events taking place between April and October, 2011. The analysis was inspired by the writings of Winograd, Flores and Spinosa (Winograd and

Flores 1987) on commitment based networking and its relationship to the Gadman and Cooper (2009) concept of Open Source Leadership. Understanding these networks requires a description and explanation of commitment characteristics and their relationships, which together describe the process of developing commitment in a community based network. The characteristics, relationships and actors performing them are identified and described in this section on the basis of the analysis. Flores draws on the works by Heidegger (1962 (1937)), Kierkegaard (1985) and Hegel (1979) but rather than giving any detailed description of the philosophical underpinnings of their writings, the intent here is to further elaborate the interpretation of Flores (1993) and Gadman and Cooper (2009) as it relates to understanding the dynamics of leadership, commitment and its operation in community based networks. Winograd and Flores (1987) have opened the discipline of tracking, mapping, and combining commitments based on the constituting power of human speech. In their writings on computers and cognition, they have stated that there is a general structure for forming commitments for actions to satisfy concerns. Concern, to them, is an ongoing generalisation of need. Through the focus on concerns and commitments, new views of the world emerge. One view is "the identification of the new institutions arising alongside old ones." This is explained as follows: "Mapping social institutions in terms of their concern and commitment structure tells us what is genuinely new and what is a new way to accomplish old goals" (Flores & Spinosa 1998, p. 357). In this paper the social institution to be mapped is the ERISA European Broadband Portal (EBP11) community as it takes on a radically new approach to Broadband infrastructure development across Europe. If this is accepted, EBP11 can be seen as a new institution arising alongside more traditional ones and possibly a genuinely new way to achieve sustained results. In the words of Flores and Spinosa (ibid), "If we are to evaluate whether a change has occurred, we have to look at the changes in concerns and commitments, *i.e.*, the changes taking place in the respective actors' commitment networks" (p.357). Once familiarity is gained with the way commitments drive action, it is no longer necessary to understand in advance all component parts of whatever social action is sought. Rather, it becomes necessary to identify concerns and begin forming commitments to address them. Open Source Leadership (Gadman and Cooper, 2009) is the basic organising skill that forms and manages commitments to deal with concerns. As Flores and Spinosa (1998) put it, "On the basis of one commitment, many others can be grown" (p. 357).

In order to fully capture the experiences of participants and the context of the programme, data were gathered from seminars, workshops, round table sessions at a series of interactive conferences (I – Conferences) with secondary sources coming from original concept papers, WIKIs, magazine articles, news features and links to other projects on the European Broadband Portal (e.g. For example, ERISA's "E - Region Hub" Portal offered a rich source of information from working groups like e – Business and e – Government to key findings from reports, white papers and commissioned studies on contemporary and historical stimulus packages. Also recorded webinars were available on a range of topics, from infrastructure sharing to opportunities in emerging markets. The data are presented here to validate a series of overarching themes which together make up the analysis of the data. Wherever possible the analysis was checked with programme members to ensure accuracy of interpretation.

ERISA History and Development Characteristics.

This section provides a brief history of The European Regional Information Society Association (ERISA), its wider context, objectives and an overall characterisation of the development process. ERISA was awarded the service contract for the creation, animation and maintenance of the second phase of The European Broadband Portal (EBPII) by the European Commission. The development of the European Broadband Portal was initiated by the European Commission (DG Information Society & Media) following an open Call for Tender for the supply of a "Web Portal for Exchange of Good Practice for Broadband Deployment". The project commenced in January 2008 and lasted for a period of 30 months. Following a review and approval this second phase commenced in January 2011 and is scheduled to run until December 2012. As one member of the executive team put it "As part of an ongoing program of development, ERISA runs EBPII in order to garner support and action at a Regional Level (Region is a political layer just under local and just below Government)." According to a Senior Program Manager, "the key objective remains to get regions to initiate action that will move their telecoms infrastructure towards the EU Digital Agenda goals of everyone having 30 mbps and 50% of Europe having access to

100mbps by 2020." He went on to say, "In order to make this happen ERISA identified 5 models for action. The following three are proving the most successful:

- Bottom-up broadband – these are community led and driven initiatives
- Public Sector Outsources – where the public sector take leadership, responsibility and ownership of the infrastructure but outsource the design and build to private sector
- Joint Ventures – where public and private sector create Public Private Partnerships to achieve infrastructure development with joint ownership.

Our challenge at ERISA is to engage at the regional level and initiate action". According to the ERISA web site, the EBPII program seeks to put in place a coherent on - line community of relevant stakeholders, providing them with the tools for effective sharing of experiences and good practices and a participatory environment for seeking common and shared solutions. Their aims are as follows:

- Stimulate the exchange of best practices and the sharing of experiences;
- Utilise the broadband blueprints to deliver the practical solutions that change people's lives
- Facilitate demand aggregation and joint procurement;
- Act as a central information platform, publishing calls for tender, expressions of interest, awards and other notices;
- Become in this way a virtual meeting point between community broadband champions, suppliers and rural, urban, municipality, regional and national governments;
- Permit sparsely populated areas to coordinate their demands for broadband, establishing a critical mass for technological solutions, next generation access and such as satellite, that provide large coverage.

According to one ERISA development executive, "the EBPII blueprints are designed to "bridge the gap" from policy to practice, to bring solutions to life, to make a vision a reality and to contribute directly to the "Digital Agenda" (Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth)." However, he qualified this by saying "we need to keep the EC / EU / 2020 agenda low key… and secondary to local concerns. We have to accept

that the actions might not deliver the 2020 targets but they are moving in the right direction"

Data presentation and Theory Induction

In this section, propositions are developed towards a theory of core commitment structures in community based social networks engaged in the process of innovation. Through the application of commitment based community networking, the propositions are grounded in documented strategies of people diffusing innovative ideas through synergistic community action. According to Abrahamsson (2002) the key concepts constituting the basis of such networks are actors, drivers, concerns, actions and outcomes. See figure 1.
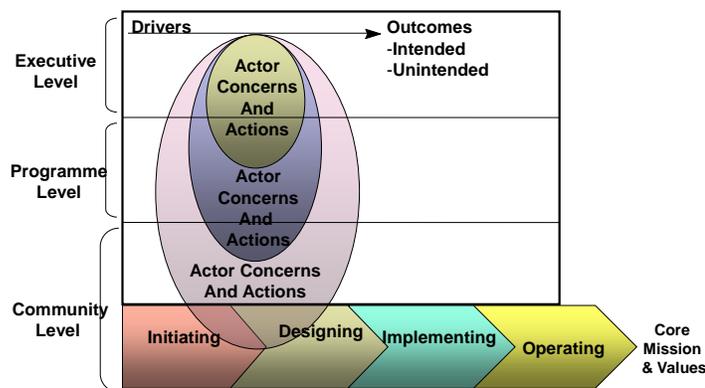
These categories are introduced and defined in the following sections.

Actors

In this paper, three levels of actors were considered: Executives concerned with improving competitive excellence; Program managers concerned with integrating strategy with action, and community members concerned with successful implementation and ongoing operation. (Hage, 1980; Curtis *et al.* 1988). First, at each organizational level, actors participate in EBP11 for different reasons and subsequently are affected by the program in different ways. Second, the distinction between different organizational level actors allows

the layered analysis of the changing commitment forms and drivers in the commitment process, which in turn provides a richer view into the dynamic complexities of the commitment phenomenon in the case studied. Adapting the levels of actors to reflect a more interpretive approach, the analysis regards actor roles as respectively: improving, integrating and operating (Gadman 1997). Reviewing the many EBP11 conversations taking place over networks such as WIKIs, BLOGS, discussion forums and I Conferences, it is clear that EBP11 attempts to change these commitment networks at each level, so as to increase the ability of the network to produce higher quality results within given time and resource constraints and to make individual members understand the benefits of the EBP11 core mission. As one executive said, "While the phase I of EBP focused very much on creating web based communities and amassing online knowledge bases the key perspective of Phase II was to take the on - line collaborative knowledge and try to embed that in local communities. That requires different and not web enabled relationships." This comment is illustrative of the way leadership action takes place at the program and executive level where the task is to sponsor the project by providing the resources for performing the improvement actions. Maintaining uniqueness and direction through monitoring progress and promoting the EBP11 core mission and values throughout the organization also takes place at these levels. For example, during one conversation executives said "Our challenge as ERISA is to engage at the regional level and initiate action. As such, it provides a service to sponsors and our "show a man how to fish" philosophy ensures that a key element of the EU intervention is to show people how to get involved in securing EU investment in their telecoms futures." Another executive said, "With over €2bn specifically for infrastructure unspent across Europe this should be a tangible incentive – but it apparently it is not. Being explicit about the mission, making the targets and goals clear, showing how to get money, while showing how to organize the program gains very little traction." Each operating level was defined and mapped against phases such as developing the commercial model and financial plans and their supporting technical architecture and engaging stakeholders to work in joint collaboration with ERISA. These operational stakeholders represented a range of concerns e.g. local and regional authorities were concerned about access to broadband in their territory. While national authorities were concerned about implementing national broadband strategies. Community and other groups were concerned about lack of access to affordable broadband. Industry players and associations were concerned about their engagement in successful public

private partnerships. National and European policy makers were concerned about access to ICT and its impacts at local and regional levels. So with these concerns, it was possible to understand the drivers of commitment. As one program manager put it, "local characteristics are important, for instance – one country says, "anything is possible" promise the world and then doesn't do anything…. Another says "nothing is possible" wont commit to doing anything and nothing happens…. In both cases nothing happens… but – and this is a key point – in both cases the opportunity is presented as an external opportunity – an opportunity from somewhere else. In other words an opportunity for the EU to do something important." He went on to say, "never has the phrase "not invented here syndrome" been more important. When trying to help regions focus on developing telecoms infrastructure against a backdrop of economic meltdown, significant government cost cutting, mistrust of the banks and of Europe in general, it's not surprising that the programmes do not get attention."

Commitment Drivers

Research in other disciplines (e.g., Sabherwal & Elam 1995, Meyer & Allen 1997) has shown that the development of commitment is influenced by various drivers. A potential driver is anything affecting the concerns of the actors and can occur in the macro and micro environment as well as within the organization, group or team.

The drivers identified in organizational behavioral literature were mapped to the proposed four categories:

1) Project drivers - Reflect the objective features of the EBP11 project, such as costs and benefits. They indicate reasons for EBP11 to exist. For example, it was reported that "While the phase I of EBP focused very much on creating web based communities and amassing online knowledge bases the key perspective of Phase II was to take the on-line collaborative knowledge and try to embed that in local communities."

2) Psychological drivers - Involve key individuals in the project, reflecting properties such as the need for identity as an achiever, past historical success, etc. For example, one

manager said, "Ownership – It's not budgets, technology, manifestos, targets or policies that drive change – its people. The objective of the process is people centred and is aimed at people taking ownership of the issues combined with a desire to fix the issue."

3) Social drivers - Originate from a group rather than an individual. These drivers are, e.g. power and politics, or public identification with the EBP11 project. For example, one team leader said, "we took the approach to train local facilitators and took very much a back seat during the meetings." It was noted that, meetings took place in the local language – and the EBP11 coordinator did not speak that language. A second coordinator said, "local expectation of a "workshop" is that they receive 5 presentations and get to ask questions at the end." It was noticed that when the facilitators (supported by some national and international experts) finished speaking after only 1 hour and broke down the meeting to discuss "their concerns" the participants seemed initially very 'uncomfortable'. This was not their unusual experience of these kinds of meetings. The deliberate attempts by EBP11 designers to achieve "bottom - up broadband" through community led and driven initiatives was embraced by the members. For example, one coordinator observed, "in one session attended by 80 people when asked to break up into 2 groups focused on the supplier and the consumer's issues – they broke into three groups…. The third group opting for an early lunch at the buffet provided. While they stood outside munching on sandwiches and doing the usual "networking and catching up with colleagues they normally meet at these kinds of events" their eyes were drawn to the action still going on in the conference room. Two groups were now very animatedly discussing the issues for consumers and providers, and giving up their concerns and issues. The "early lunchers" drifted back in and started to contribute to these discussions."

4) Structural drivers - Represent the contextual conditions surrounding the project: the environment for EBP11activities. For example one program manager said, "The key objective remains to get regions to initiate action that will move their telecoms infrastructure towards the EU Digital Agenda goals of everyone having 30 mbps and 50% of Europe having access to 100mbps by 2020. From a structural perspective, ERISA found that of the 5 models they identified for action, 3 turned out to be most successful:

1. Public Sector Outsourcing allowing the public sector to take ownership of the infrastructure while outsourcing the design and build to the private sector.

2. Joint Ventures allowed public and private sector members to create Public Private Partnerships.
3. Bottoms – up community involvement.

Concern and action

The concepts of concern and action together constitute commitment however action by itself does not bring about commitment but might be interpreted as a sign. This is consistent with the views expressed by the behavioural school of commitment research which emphasizes the role of action as commitment target. "[…] commitment targets should be actions rather than objects, as it is virtually impossible to describe commitment in any terms other than one's inclination to act in a given way towards a particular commitment target" (Oliver 1990, p. 30). Consequently, the research sought out evidence of the strength of a person's commitment by observing patterns and frequency of activity directed at addressing concerns. For example, one EBP11 coordinator commented that her commitment to involve users had two effects, "the audience generally was not expecting this level of consultation – so were pleasantly surprised, the second was that the facilitators (being local people) understood the issues and concerns that they expressed". While it was not possible to accurately gauge the psychological component behind the team's level of commitment, there were comments made which gave strong indications of commitment. For example, "In massively well attended EU conferences the emphasis is primarily "informing" participants. We regarded "being informed" as the least desirable feeling for participants. We set an ambitious target to test participant's commitment at the end of a one day conference – even when they had little chance to consult with their work colleagues before making that commitment. We asked the participants to drop their name badge (or a business card) into one of four boxes:

1. I want to be kept Informed of progress on these issues
2. I want to be consulted on decisions that will affect the progress of these issues
3. I want to offer my active support to resolving these issues by undertaking tasks
4. I want to offer my help to "lead" aspects of resolving these issues

Following the "interactive" local language, locally facilitated, locally led workshop we hoped to have at least a larger contingent asking to be consulted. What we experienced from conferences with approximately 80-100 attendees including Mayors, Regional Government Officers, Politicians, Local Business Leaders, Community Representatives, Technology providers, Telephony Providers, Public Sector Administrators was that is that where the agenda was set by the local community – with very little reference to the EU goals or roles, but still very much focused on the development of local infrastructure, the response from the audience delivered the following results

1. 9% - want to be kept informed
2. 9% - want to be consulted
3. 66% - want to play an active part
4. 16% - offer to take a leadership role

This is far beyond our initial expectations." What appeared to make the difference was a local agenda based on local issues and delivered within the local context. In other words, the patterns and frequency of actions and concerns indicated high levels of commitment leading to the scores shown above. This was a highly unlikely yet desirable outcome from a programme which had, up until this point great difficulty gaining traction and as a result large amounts of funding for beneficial community projects was unspent.

Outcomes

Only actions produce outcomes and outcomes bear relevance in this research since it has been shown that it is on the basis of outcomes that future actions are planned (Newman & Sabherwal 1996). In EBP11 the positive outcomes were both anticipated and unanticipated. For example, as one EBP11 coordinator said, "telling audiences what help they need seems to build their apprehension and concerns. Their perception is that "if I am going to need all this help it must be too difficult!" By the action of letting the audience formulate their own issues, EBP11 members were able to address their concerns with committed action. As one coordinator commented, "We learned to let them make some of the mistakes that others have made before – it is part of the journey and an important learning point is to have an open mind about what they will decide to take on." Another important outcome was an

awareness of the diversity of concerns each region held. For example a program manager said, "in Bulgaria – Government minister sees internet infrastructure and bandwidth as an important facet within an overall national program of regeneration that needs to be treated as an integrated whole with strong participation from leading national Telco's – looking for synergies across communications, industrial growth, services, agriculture, education, health and government." Whereas in Trikala, he said, "Regional Mayors / Leaders see the provision of access to internet infrastructure as a means for stronger engagement between government and its citizens - (helping to transform the [poor] relationship between government and citizens) and using this platform and engagement to deliver a wider range of services in Government, Health and Education at significantly lower costs but higher value to the citizen." He went on to say that, "in Istria – business and government working in partnership to create exciting new platforms and opportunities for the citizens of a traditionally successful, well educated community using such engagement as part of a wider program to join the EU." Whereas in Piemonte he said, "with a strong expectation for "Government led" initiatives the region in undertaking a distributed pilot to engage Extra Urban and Rural areas in broadband infrastructure development through a series of pilots on the outskirts of a major city and in several local villages. However one town is now motivated into considering a fully independent Bottom Up (community owned) solution led by the mayor and local businesses. In Poland – With current EU leadership there is a strong push to progress infrastructure investments particularly from certain regions with a stronger reputation for commerce and higher education standards and standard of living." So for each set of drivers of concerns the EBP11 team shaped their committed response accordingly with very positive outcomes.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this paper was to apply a commitment based analytical model (Abrahamsson, 2002) to the ERISA EBP11 program to understand the motivations and strategies supporting the desire of its actors to engage in the development of a Broadband Infrastructure across Europe. The research suggests that commitment based community networks are primarily concerned with the effective diffusion of innovative ideas. The study shows that in order to shift the concerns of a culture, community network leaders

must clearly articulate and gain "buy in" to the concerns to be addressed. They must create and maintain a clear focus and develop a shared sense of commitment among participants. The research reveals a complex interaction between the commitment drivers and the successful outcomes of the project especially the unfolding and alteration of commitments in time and through time at the improving, integrating and operating levels as circumstances change. In particular, it shows how over time the objective features of ERISA EBP11 in terms of cost and benefits diminish as obstacles are encountered and psychological and social drivers play a greater part. Indeed it is possible to say that ERISA EBP11 could potentially fail over time if constant attention is not paid to such changes in the concerns of its network of commitments.

The study has implications for research into the impact of community based networking strategies on strategic management. Firstly, it is important to recall that much strategic planning in business is preoccupied by public reputation, i.e. what the public recognises as important about the institution and its tradition. The new focus on strategy in both business review articles and in boardrooms reveals the confusions and difficulties business is having over determining self - image (Porter 1980, Prahalad and Hamel 1990). In taking the position that personal and corporate identity is neither wholly the result of total commitment (Gergen 1991) nor wholly the result of recognition - based identity (Hegel (1979), the implications require a deeper consideration of the challenges surrounding collaborative community models especially those based on the Web (Wilde and Hax 2001). Secondly, by suggesting that personal and community identity are outcomes of the well positioned enactment of a compelling concern to make something better than it was before, how do business leaders develop successful positioning strategies such that their committed actions result in the emergence of a new world alongside the old? Thirdly, empowerment of individuals is a key part of what makes community networks successful, since in the end innovations tend to come from small groups, not from large, structured efforts. The study shows that community based networks don't rely on containment or tight control of the environment to maintain their position, but rather, an exquisite balance and ability to respond to rapidly changing conditions. This kind of responsiveness is hard for a large network to achieve, but not impossible, especially in the presence of the kind of competition that virtual networking brings. Finally, the Internet is a community based network's greatest asset, making massive decentralised projects possible. On the other

hand, intellectual property is its nemesis and has the potential to stifle and restrict the creative capacity of free - thinking scholars, programmers, scientists, designers and engineers. There is increasing evidence to suggest that a philosophy, a strategy and a technology have aligned to unleash great innovation. The internet is simple, yet its power is profound. The power to bring people together in committed conversations that produce outcomes far greater than the sum of the individual parts. The distribution of knowledge is the key contemporary task and if knowledge empowers people, are contemporary systems ready for the disruptive influence of "Open Source Leadership'?

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