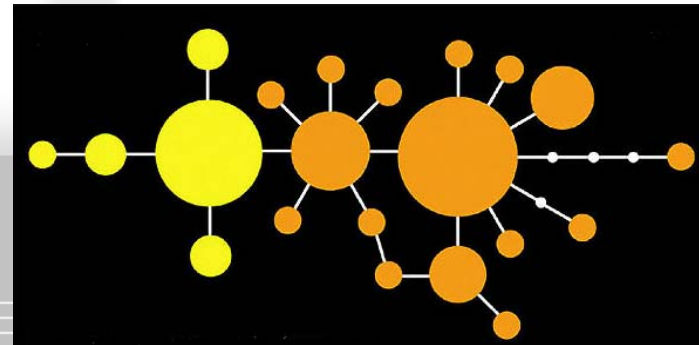# Knowledge Networks
## Promises and Pitfalls

**Ronald Sultana – TTnet annual meeting – Thessaloniki – 8-9 December 2005**

# Key points

- TTnet as a 'knowledge network': the broader context
- Why networks?
- What is a knowledge network?
- Identity / characteristics of a knowledge network
- Characteristics of successful networks
- TTnet: adopting a North/South dimension?

# Increasing popularity of knowledge networks

KNs as an effective policy development strategy

KNs makes good use of complementarity and economies of scale

KNs facilitate capacity-building strategies

KNs support transfer of knowledge and know-how

- **At EU level:**
  - the Open Method of Coordination
  - peer learning activities
  - knowledge clusters

- **In a global perspective:**
  - policy development in a north/south perspective
  - donors stimulate creation of KN, sponsor initial activities, offer a communications infrastructure

# Some network types

- **'Policy communities'**

- **'Transnational advocacy networks'**

- **'Epistemic communities'**

**TTnet: an 'embedded knowledge network'**

**CEDEFOP** as an institution that possesses authority because of its publicly acknowledged track record for addressing VET issues – hence validating sets of norms and practices.

**TTnet as a source of inspiration for policy makers**

# Knowledge networks function as:

- an information exchange network

- a network coordinating research priorities and projects; and

- a research policy consultation network.

# Knowledge networks serve as…

- A platform for knowledge sharing
- A platform for policy learning

**Can lead to form**

- a Community of inquiry...
- Invisible colleges...

- Ideas are exchanges among groups of like-minded actors
- Collaborative research is planned and conducted

# Networks: the sum greater than the parts

- A network amplifies and disseminates ideas, research and information to an extent that could not be achieved by individuals or institutions alone.

- Moreover, a network mutually confers legitimacy and pools authority and respectability in a positive-sum manner.

**A network can often be greater than
Its constituent parts.**

# Why networks?

*"To gain more efficient use of internal resources through access to external resources"*

**Motivating factors:**
- Quest for personal and organisational learning
- Need to gain critical mass
- Observed or perceived synergies with other entities
- Desire to gain credibility
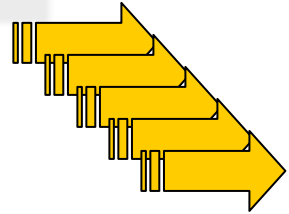- Desire to find and develop new projects

**Individual network members will remain active if they perceive that the network's activities have added value to their own work**

# Identity/characteristics of a knowledge network

- **Balance between:**

  - *Goal-orientation*: planning and execution strategies for working towards realistic goals

  - Preserving a *culture of informality* (a distinguishing feature from other forms of organisation)

- **Knowledge networks therefore:**

  - resemble a family, but

  - with a structure of professionalism

# What makes a network successful?

**P**

| | |
|---|---|
| **urpose** | **Objectives that are SMART** |
| **eople** | **'Fit' between members and vision** |
| **rocess** | **Flexible structure** |
| **lanning** | **Timing and positioning** |
| **roducts** | **Deliver outcomes to members** |

# 4 principal guidelines:

1. Establish a strong common focus around a concrete, widely shared problem or goal

   [sufficiently concrete to encourage new members to join; flexible enough to permit new members to contribute to the ongoing formulation & refinement of objectives]

2. Plan for mid-term evaluation at the project startup

   [e.g. criteria on which network is to be judged]

# 4 principal guidelines / ctd...

3. Set up a formal governance structure with transparent decision-making procedures

   [no single group hijacks or dominates agenda]

4. Plan realistic strategies for working towards solutions, while preserving a culture of informality

   [without preparation, networks break down, or benefit small core groups of active members only...

   culture of informality is essential to create commitment and a feeling of shared identity and ownership...]

# TTnet – adopting a north-south dimension?

- Many networks had an east-west orientation
- Current concern: north-south axis
- Some south-south networks in ToT:
  - GTZ's regional initiative
  - ETF's MEDNET
- TTnet: need for consolidating itself at EU level
- TTnet's potential contribution to north-south networking