



Changing Our Mindset: Thinking Like a Network

EPA/BAY PROGRAM: HABITAT GIT SPRING MEETING

2 MAY 2024

Build partnership and network science literacy to support near- and long-term Habitat GIT goals



Common language: **working with others is a spectrum**



A high-level overview of **systems thinking and network science**



An **interactive exercise** to **inspire some out-of-the-box thinking and conversation** around what we might learn from nature and apply to **how** Habitat GIT teams/work groups think and operate

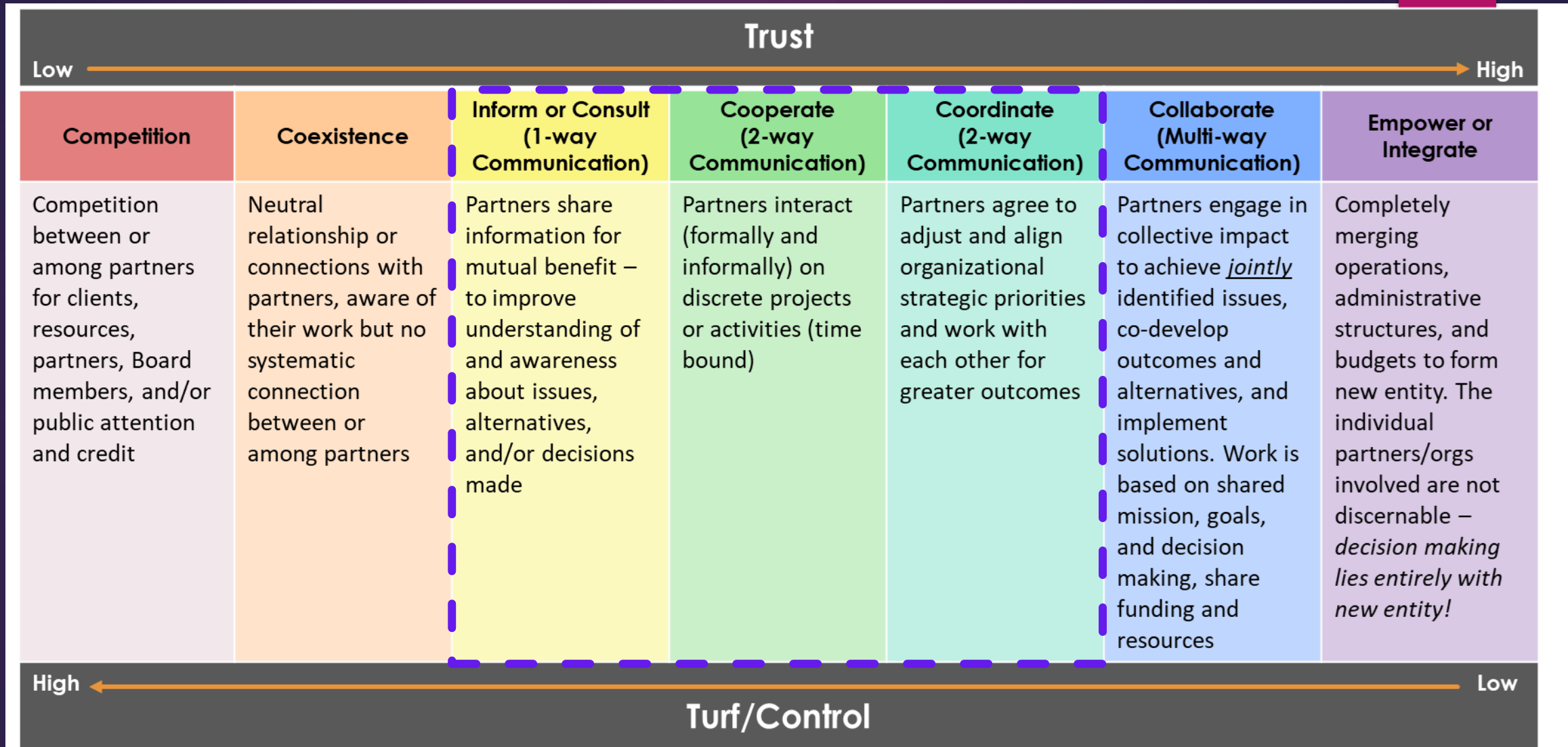


Shifting our mindset



Participation is a Spectrum

SETTING THE FOUNDATION





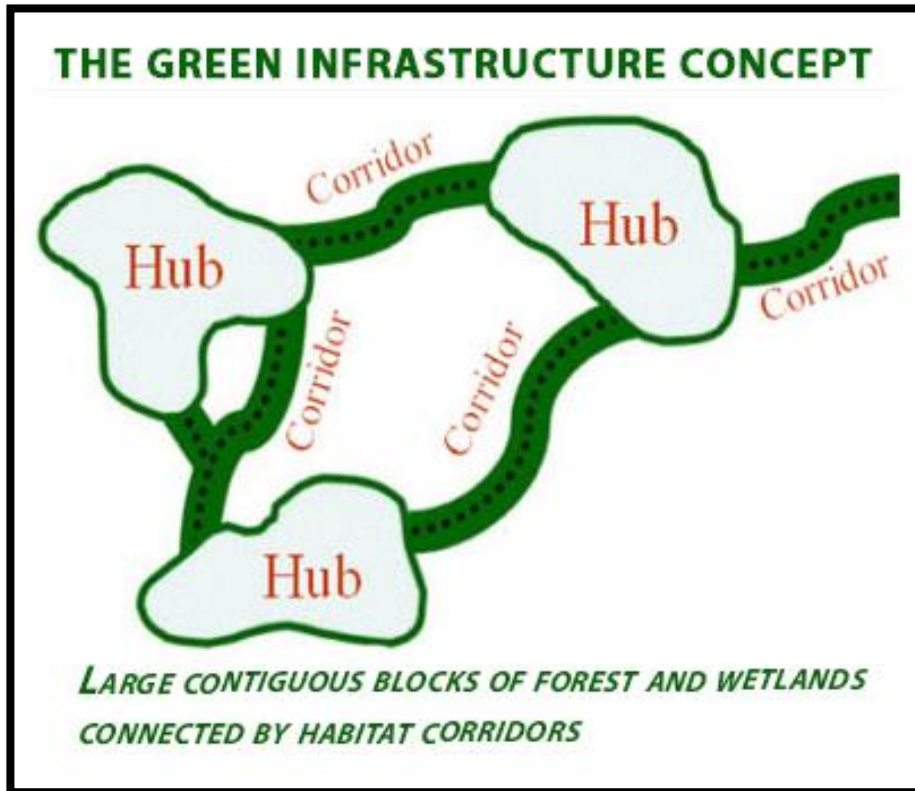
Menti #1



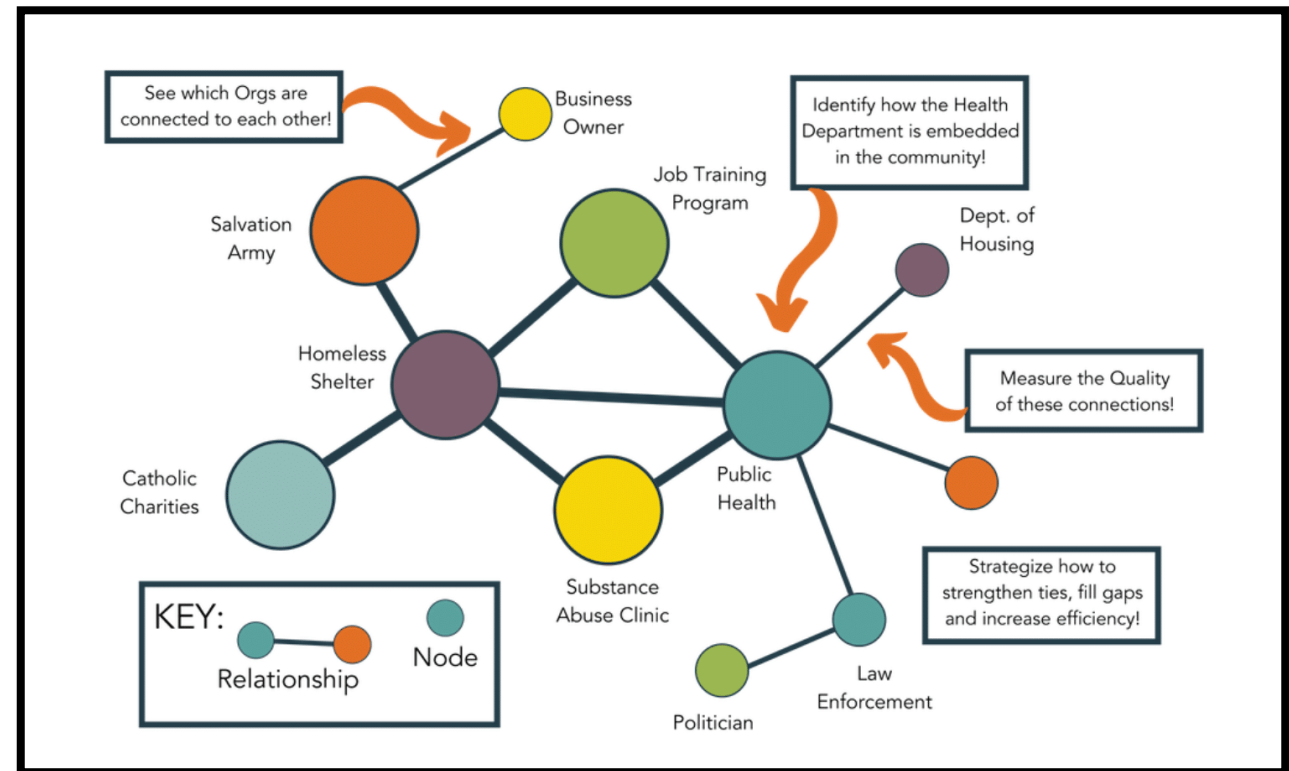
Systems Thinking and Network Science

SETTING THE FOUNDATION

Ecosystem Networks and Social Networks



Maryland Coastal Training Program - Home (coastaltraining-md.org)



Social Network Analysis for Foundations: Six Ideas to Scale Impact - Visible Network Labs

Systems Thinking → Systems Approach

- **Systems thinking and frameworks, along with systemic problem analysis, facilitates work across scales, sectors and disciplines,** which can lead to a more **comprehensive understanding of a complex system** and **inform the co-development of tailored interventions designed through multisectoral, cross-disciplinary efforts**¹

¹ Browne et al. (2021) Systems Approaches to Combatting Wildlife Trafficking: Expanding Frameworks to Facilitate Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration; Mahajan et al. (2019). Systems Thinking for Planning and Evaluating Conservation Interventions;

- **Ignoring the complexities of systems and system actors when planning and evaluating conservation efforts creates risk,** and can **increase the chances of misidentifying and framing conservation problems,** and/or **developing solutions and outcomes that undermine the ability to deliver desired conservation results**²

² Mahajan et al. (2019). Systems Thinking for Planning and Evaluating Conservation Interventions; Larrosa et al. (2016) Unintended Feedbacks: Challenges and Opportunities for Improving Conservation Effectiveness ; Polasky, S. (2006) You Can't Always Get What You Want: Conservation Planning with Feedback Effects

Why Partner Networks?

- ▶ “The **urgency and scale of conservation challenges** coupled with **limited results to date**, argue for a new approach...partner networks hold the potential for meeting systemic conservation challenges.”
- ▶ “...**often assumed that controls and performance accountability systems ensure quality impacts, when in fact, shared values and trust among funders, nonprofits, and beneficiaries can actually lead to superior results.**” (p. 122)
- ▶ To ensure collaboration success, **leaders at all levels must go in with a fundamentally different mindset – letting go and shifting their focus from organization-level gains to achieving co-created mission- (and vision) and place-based impacts**¹
- ▶ This shift recognizes a **need to blur the lines between partners...networked power breaks down hierarchy silos** that hold us back²

¹ Wei-Silkern, J. and Silver, N. (2013) Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success, pg. 127 – 128;

² Institute for Conservation Leadership (2021) A primer on networks



Interactive and Inspirational

HOW DO BIRDS FLOCK?

Collaborative Conservation: Partnerships in Practice (C2P2)



How do Starling Birds Flock?



Menti #2

SAME LINK AS FIRST EXERCISE



Reflections and Take Aways



Mindsets: Organization v. Network

SETTING THE FOUNDATION

Organizational Mindset

Narrow mission & identity
(organization-level goals)

Tightly controlled & planned

Top down, made by bosses

Proprietary, acquire resources
and promote own services
and expertise

Individual expertise and effort
(silos), focused on a particular
goal/objective/output

Foundation

Direction

Decisions

Cooperation

Activity

Network Mindset

Shared mission & identity
(network-level impacts)

Focus is on learning,
connection, trust & emergent
planning and work

Bottom up, made by people
closest to the work

Open and share resources,
promote the services and
expertise of others

Interdisciplinary, systems
thinking, social-eco lens,
relentless focus on achieving
the shared mission and vision



Faren R. Wolter, Ph.D.
Chesapeake WILD Program Coordinator
& Conservation Social Scientist
USFWS, Science Applications
Chesapeake Bay Field Office
Faren_wolter@fws.gov

Questions?

