

Lessons for Network Leadership and Practice: Insights from a Five-year Study of the Savory Global Network

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Abstract

This article summarizes findings from a five-year research partnership between University of Colorado Boulder researchers and the Savory Global Network team. Here we highlight five key lessons and themes for network leadership and practice identified through our study of the Savory Global Network activities. These lessons and themes are:

1. Networks can help create a ‘Sense of Belonging’ and ‘Not Being Alone’ while supporting a process of transformative change.
2. Developing a ‘Shared Language and Identity’ can support connection-building and navigating conflict.
3. Building a ‘Community of Practice’ across a global network can help to support collective action and connections among participants.
4. Developing ‘New Supply Chains’ for ‘Economic Revitalization’ can be a powerful driver for network participation.
5. Creating ‘Place-specific Regional Networks’ as part of a larger action network is a relatively untapped pathway for wide-scale change.

In conducting this study, we used multi-event ethnography to support data collection through attendance at dozens of Savory Global Network events. For the analysis and to help us develop our findings, we used qualitative coding and a community-based research approach. Through this work, we offer suggestions for network researchers and practitioners to improve their capacity to study and foster transformative change through their research and program efforts.

Introduction

When the founders of the Savory Institute were designing structures to expand the global practice of Holistic Management (which involves a decision-making framework for land managers and others managing complex systems), the known organizational design for entities with a global impact did not align with their values. The founders wanted to keep the institute small and agile, governed with distributed power and little to no bureaucracy. To do so, they spent years studying the places in the world where Holistic Management had taken root,

including Australia, Argentina, Canada, the United States, and South Africa, among others. What they found is that the practice of Holistic Management was adopted and incorporated into people's decision-making processes when two conditions were present:

1. Land stewards formed management clubs around the practice. These clubs were spaces where land stewards gathered regularly to help each other with their holistic financial plans, holistic planned grazing, reviewing their holistic context, and other practices.
2. Land stewards consistently monitored land using Holistic Management's ecological monitoring for the management process. This process allowed them to track changes over time, examine their management decisions, and explore how their holistic contexts guided shifts in the land's ecological functions.

From these insights, the founders embarked upon a journey of creating a global network of 'hubs' to model these early management clubs.

The Savory Global Network (herein described as 'the Network'), by its leaders' own definition, is an experiment in rapidly expanding the use of Holistic Management through a grassroots global movement to regenerate the world's grasslands and shift human consciousness toward honoring our connection with the Earth. The goal of the Network is to bring one billion hectares of land under the practice of Holistic Management, with the social infrastructure to achieve this goal by 2025.

The network remained committed to this goal through the upheaval of the global Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the network shifted to virtual meetings and courses, relying on tools like Zoom and WhatsApp to gather leaders from Israel, Turkey, California, Colorado, Montana, Uruguay, Ecuador, and Brazil in a recent course. At the time of publishing, there are 54 "hubs" in the Savory Global Network. The Network can be understood relative to the Savory Institute through a social configuration of hubs and land managers connected with these hubs (as shown in Figure 1).

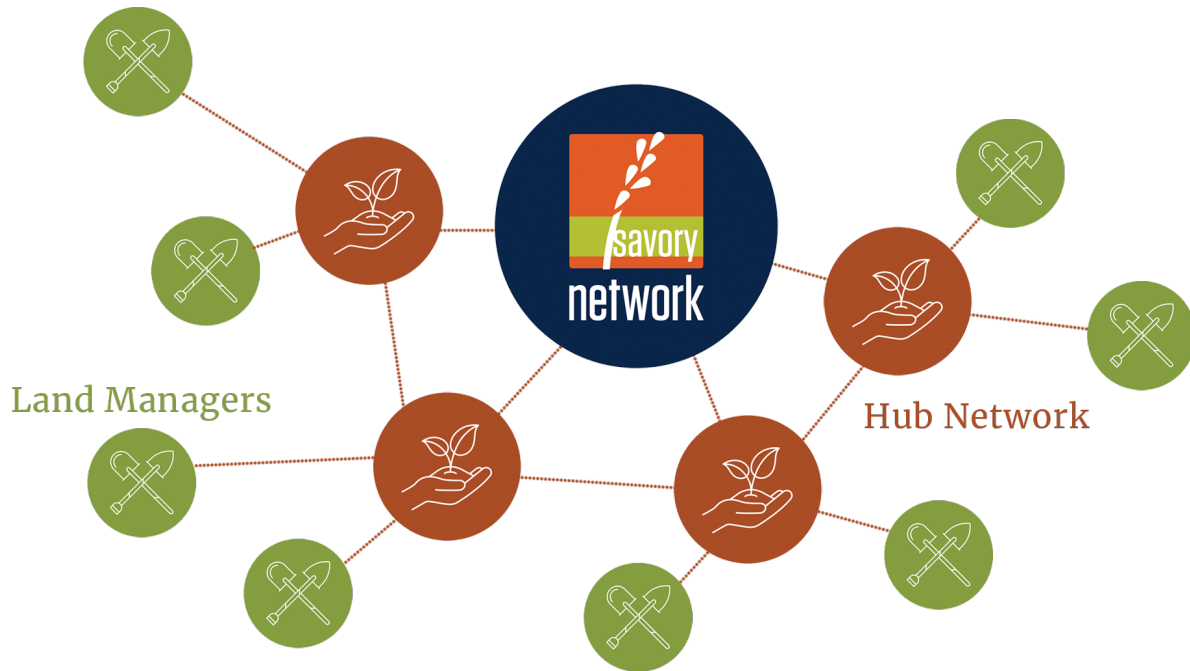


Figure 1: The Savory Global Network's structure relative to the Savory Institute, which coordinates the network. The inner circle represents the Savory Institute as a network steward, which coordinates hubs and hub leaders, who coordinate groups of local land managers using Holistic Management.

What is a Savory Global Network Hub?

Savory Global Network Hubs (herein referred to as Savory Hubs) create a community around Holistic Management. They provide ongoing support to land stewards in their region, offer Savory Institute accredited Holistic Management education courses, and Ecological Outcomes Verification (EOV) monitoring and verification services. Holistic Management is described in more detail in the next section below. EOV is, in the Savory Institute's words, "a practical and scalable soil and landscape assessment methodology that tracks outcomes in biodiversity, soil health, and ecosystem function." (SI, 2018, p. 2).

A Savory Hub is an organization, company, farm, or other business entity that is part of the Network. Savory Hub leaders undergo extensive Holistic Management and Hub Leadership training with the Savory Institute, preparing them to be change agents in their region. Hubs are designed to provide ongoing support to farmers, ranchers, and other land managers in transition from conventional management practices to Holistic Management and regenerative agriculture.

Savory Hub leaders are community builders, both locally and globally. As hub leaders connect land stewards in their region, they are themselves connected to other hub leaders in the Network. To accelerate the impact of the work, the aim is to quickly transmit learning and new knowledge

from each region of the world throughout the global network. The global network is designed to connect people with shared vision and values across cultures, geography, and economies. In this way, the Network's primary function is to support holistic managers in regenerating grasslands to create global-scale social and ecological shifts.

What is Holistic Management?

Holistic Management is based on a decision-making framework that considers financial, ecological, and social factors (Butterfield et al., 2019). It was first developed over 40 years ago by Allan Savory, a Zimbabwean biologist, game ranger, politician, farmer, and rancher, who sought ways to preserve the savannah and its wildlife in southern Africa. The early practice of Holistic Management was built on Savory's observation that grassland health roots in a healthy relationship between large herds of wild herbivores and local plant life. Teaching and learning Holistic Management aims to help ranchers develop strategies for managing herds of domestic livestock to mimic those wild herds to renew the land. A deeper aim now is to give land managers, farmers, ranchers, environmentalists, policymakers, and others a management framework to integrate with natural systems, resulting in decisions that balance key social, environmental, and financial considerations. The core components of Holistic Management are the 'whole under management' and the 'holistic context.'

These two structures take the form of statements, usually written with words, pictures, or oral stories. The 'whole under management' defines what is being managed and who the decision-makers are for that whole. The 'holistic context' defines how the decision-makers want their lives to be within that whole. It then describes the environment and behaviors needed to support that quality of life now and far into the future. The 'holistic context' enables decision-makers to choose actions and make management decisions that align with the quality of life and future resource base. Thus, anyone who creates and uses a holistic context, including a community group or an individual managing their own life with no direct connection to managing land, can be said to be managing holistically.

The Holistic Management body of knowledge evolved into two curriculums over time. They are called the commercial curriculum and communal curriculum. The commercial curriculum focuses more on private landowners in places like the United States, where land is owned by individuals or organizations that behave like individuals. It also includes methods of conducting Holistic Management planning procedures that involve calculations, relying on the written word, and thus the ability to read, write, and do the math. The Holistic Management planning procedures are Holistic Planned Grazing, Holistic Financial Planning, Holistic Land Planning, and Holistic Ecological Monitoring. The communal curriculum focuses on communal land managers who share land that is generally owned by a government. It includes the same content modules but uses oral traditions, storytelling, and pictures to teach Holistic Management so that literacy and mathematics are not required of everyone for the community to practice Holistic Management. It also includes modules on holistic grazing plans where fencing is not an option, when communal herds of livestock may be combined to create one large herd, and where community mobilization may allow a whole community to reach decisions together.

According to Savory Institute data, at the time of writing, Holistic Management practitioners are working across six continents. More than 14,000 people have been trained in Holistic Management, and more than 40 million acres are holistically managed worldwide.

Exploring the Future of Network Leadership and Practice

Translocal action networks with a global footprint, such as the Savory Global Network, are a relatively new form of collective governance and a way of organizing to accomplish a shared purpose and mission (Loorbach et al., 2020; Waddell, 2011). They can help to disrupt stagnant and hierarchical power structures that may limit transitions toward more regenerative and sustainability-focused ways of being. Furthermore, action networks offer opportunities for experimentation and sharing knowledge across wide geographic scales, allowing for the rapid adoption of new practices (Loorbach et al., 2020). However, the practice of network leadership is an emerging area of expertise with opportunities for growth. This article describes lessons learned from a five-year research and practice partnership between University of Colorado Boulder researchers and the Savory Global Network staff and hub leaders to support the growth and expansion of network leadership and practice. To these effects, this article aims to highlight the lessons and potentials of network leadership and practice developing across the Savory Global Network toward improving future practice.

Research Methods

The ideas and themes presented in this article were developed as part of a collaboration between University of Colorado Boulder (CU) researchers and the Network leadership team. From 2018 to the time of writing, the CU Boulder team conducted ethnography at dozens of events and meetings with the Network membership. These events and meetings include Hub Gatherings, Hub Candidate Bootcamps, and Design Labs, Discovery and Opportunity Innovation Sessions, Holistic Management Trainings, Hub Monthly Calls, and Savory Institute team meetings, both online and in person.

Data Collection

The CU team used institutional ethnography (Delgado et al., 2014; DeVault, 2006) to gather data for this research. Institutional ethnography aims to understand the culture within and across institutional configurations and systems. Institutional ethnography is an appropriate method for understanding the qualitative ways distributed and multi-cultural organizations operate in the contexts of leadership, structure, and distinct theories of change across sites. Through this type of ethnography, the CU team generated hundreds of pages of field notes and documents, alongside participant quotes, informal interviews, and participating directly in events and meetings.

To understand network leadership and practice in the Savory Global Network context, the team used the lenses of sustainability transitions and translocal diffusion (Loorbach et al., 2020). Sustainability transitions represent a systems view for understanding how societies can be guided from less to more desired trajectories. Translocal diffusion is a framework for examining

decentralized social innovations such as action networks similar to the Savory Global Network. These lenses helped us to situate our findings in broader discussions of network leadership and practice in the context of wide-scale social and ecological systems shifts.

Analysis and Developing Findings

In analyzing the data, the CU team worked closely with the Network leadership team. Initially, the CU team analyzed the ethnographic data using a process of qualitative coding based on the translocal diffusion framework (Loorbach et al., 2020). This analysis yielded a series of initial themes. The CU and Savory teams then discussed these themes and identified which would be most beneficial to focus on towards improving Savory Global Network leadership and practice while also thoroughly conveying the findings. The themes and descriptions below are the results of this collaboration, which has been conducted in the spirit of community-based research (Strand et al., 2003), where academic research aims to support both general and applied knowledge creation in direct coordination with research participants.

This article reflects a shared understanding of the research findings between the authors, who are members of the CU and Savory teams, respectively. In conveying the findings, we paid specific attention to making a useful contribution to practice for a wide range of network leaders and practitioners and toward identifying the next steps for the Savory Global Network. The lessons and themes below represent the essence of these findings.

Lessons and Themes for Network Leadership and Practice

Lesson and Theme 1: Networks Can Help Create a ‘Sense of Belonging’ and ‘Not Being Alone’ While Supporting a Process of Transformative Change

What does this theme mean?

It can be a lonely and isolating experience to create change in one’s community, especially when you or a small team are the only ones championing your mission. Sharing a sense of belonging and connection with the greater whole can support action and inspire us to move forward in our community-based work. Networks can help to make this sense of belonging possible.

Why does this theme matter?

Holistic Management’s effectiveness has many supporters and detractors globally (Gosnell et al., 2020). As a hub leader, being isolated in one’s community while trying to support adoption can be a struggle. As a part of the Savory Global Network, hub leaders benefit from motivating stories and creating solutions to challenges despite these struggles of local isolation. In this way, the network supports local and global change by helping hub leaders work collectively at large and small scales of action. Network members report feeling isolated because they practice agriculture and see the world differently than their neighbors. When they can connect to others

with a shared worldview, they report a sense of finding their family, coming home, and hope, feeling inspired and energized.

In sharing deeply held values and worldviews, such as the intrinsic integration of people and ecosystems, network members connect with relative ease around diverse projects, have great interest in what each other is doing and how they address challenges, and find that even though there are cultural differences, many of their challenges have similar characteristics. This can facilitate hub leaders learning from each other in timely and relevant ways to support the livelihoods and lands they care for. Supporting a sense of belonging and alleviating isolation appears to be an essential function of the Network on behalf of its participants and a driver for ongoing network participation. This sense of belonging may also support continued involvement in the broader regenerative agriculture movement.

What does this theme look like in practice?

Events such as Network Gatherings, Trainings, and Hub Calls have been shown to help attendees feel part of the larger movement. This is commonly evidenced in reflections at the end of larger gatherings where excitement, new hub-to-hub connections, mentorship relationships, and renewed inspiration for taking action are abundant. Reinforcing a sense of connection over time can raise spirits and create momentum to continue in the work of being a change leader. Inviting cultural exchange around local foods, traditions, customs, and language also helps celebrate each hub's uniqueness while supporting relationships across hubs.

Furthermore, especially since early 2020, most network interactions have been digital and use community platforms such as Hivebrite, WhatsApp groups, email, Zoom, and Google Classroom, among others. Sharing documents, scientific papers, videos, resources, documentaries, and job opportunities with each other is also common. Attendance at events has also increased globally as barriers to access, such as costly flights, visas, etc., are removed in these digital contexts.

Members also tend to reach out to the network when in need of support and fresh ideas. An example is seeking ways to validate or communicate about Holistic Management practices for potential supporters, partners, funders, or adversaries. Further examples are mentorship relationships, where senior members of the network support the efforts of newer members as their hubs continue to develop. Both of these modes of connection, in addition to gatherings, help inspire members to take action.

What does this theme mean for network leadership and practice?

Drawing on network thinking and leadership approaches may help create long-term momentum, a sense of belonging, and support capacity for action during time-sensitive and challenging times. An important question in this context is: How can network practitioners and hub leaders support a sense of belonging when creating regional networks to support resilience and engagement within the larger or local movement they are a part of?

Every hub or network context and cultural setting is different, yet the leaders are important parts of a greater whole, for example, the Savory Global Network and regenerative agriculture movement. Finding ways to amplify local benefits through global connection is an important next step for the Savory Global Network and hub leaders in local settings. In this way, an important question is: Can network and hub leaders act as boundary walkers (Blank et al., 2006) between a global movement, local culture, and place-specific needs to support change and inclusiveness within and across contexts?

Lesson and Theme 2: Holistic Management Can Serve as a Shared Language and Identity for Building Connections and Navigating Conflict

What does this theme mean?

A shared language and identity can help coordinate action across a network, locally and globally (Lejano et al., 2013). In this context, ‘language’ refers to a shared vocabulary specific to a movement’s culture, while identity means that one sees oneself as part of a particular group. Having a shared language and identity can help to unify participants and guide collective action and problem-solving.

Why does this theme matter?

For members of the Savory Global Network, Holistic Management is an ‘on the ground’ practice of ranching and land management and a language for cross-cultural communication and identity building. Being an expert in this language and its applications can help affirm one’s identity as part of the Network and the regenerative agriculture movement more broadly. As a network and movement, having a shared language, such as Holistic Management, can support individual and shared goals by creating a point of commonality for shared action and navigating conflict within the network and across regional lines of difference. Goals this shared language and identity may help to support include community connection and cohesion, regenerating land at wide scales through collective action, and developing new supply chains for regenerative products and economies.

What does this theme look like in practice?

As a shared language, Holistic Management helps the network move through challenging issues and conversations while maintaining a united point of commonality. For example, during the early days of rolling out the Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) program, there were many disagreements about what practices should be allowed and what exactly was being verified. During a session with all attendees at one Hub Gathering, these disagreements led to very charged and disruptive conversations. Yet, several times during the conversation, attendees brought the conversation back to the group’s shared “holistic context” and “wholes within wholes” ideas, which are essential to Holistic Management. Drawing these ideas as points of commonality helped the group maintain cohesion while navigating a tense topic. This

demonstrates the ‘more than land management’ function of Holistic Management as a shared language supporting action within and across the network.

Hub leaders can also understand each other’s diverse challenges by sharing their holistic contexts and related Holistic Management concepts, whether they are veterans or new members of the network. They also support each other using this shared language. For example, one’s holistic context can be a way to see the whole person and one’s dreams, aspirations, and challenges in support of cross-hub communication, solutions sharing, and problem-solving. As a further example, when someone asks, “What is your enterprise’s weak link?” which is a holistic financial planning concept, a fellow hub leader knows how to answer and can make suggestions that support growth and problem-solving. This shared language has supported community building among diverse hub leaders across network activities.

Considering shared identity, beyond the simple idea of network membership, hub leaders tend to share a reverence for nature and natural processes, care about future generations, share a commitment to ongoing learning and endeavor to embrace shifting circumstances adaptively, both socially and on the land. Though the spoken language of the global network is English, the shared vocabulary of Holistic Management can help to bridge cultural, linguistic, and regional barriers. Through Holistic Management as a shared language, hub leaders can be supported in communicating and collaborating despite regional and cultural differences.

What does this theme mean for network leadership and practice?

Developing a shared language across a network is a challenging endeavor. In the context of Holistic Management, there is a deliberate effort to keep the language consistent. While the core principles of Holistic Management aim to be relatively straightforward, its implementation can be augmented with local culture. In this way, when developing local networks, it is important to ask: What is ineffable about the shared language (e.g., Holistic Management), what might be adapted locally, and how? How can local language support and translation be better facilitated to assist these processes?

The body of Holistic Management knowledge is constantly evolving, and learnings from the network are incorporated into the body of knowledge. This knowledge is first compiled by the Savory Institute and then re-distributed to the network. The goal is consistency and shaping a shared language instead of fragmented dialects of a once common and shared language. With this in mind, important questions are: To support feedback from the network, what are the non-hierarchical feedback mechanisms around this shared language from the local to global contexts? How can these mechanisms continue to evolve and help empower hub leaders locally and globally?

Learning and Theme 3: Building a ‘Community of Practice’ Across the Global Network Helps Support Collective Action and Connections Across Participants

What does this theme mean?

A community of practice is a group of professionals or ‘do-ers’ who share common professional language, practices, activities, training, and social experiences. Yet, they do not necessarily work in the same places (Li et al., 2009). A community of practice also has senior and junior members, where junior members learn from senior members about how to engage with the community and draw on its practices effectively. For example, nurses in one part of the world work in different places and contexts but would easily understand each other as kin in a community at a nurse’s conference or meetup (Andrew et al., 2008). Nurses also require similar training no matter where they live and work. There are also nurses with relatively more experience who can share insights with junior colleagues. The same is true for land managers and participation in the Network, which can be understood as a community of practice managing holistically and supporting each other to take action within and across the global food system.

Why does this theme matter?

Holistic Managers are usually surrounded by non-practitioners. Globally, most farmers and ranchers do not have a ‘holistic worldview’ as Holistic Management describes it. For various reasons, they adhere to practices within the industrial paradigm, which can be understood as reductionist, extractive, and transactional. This working context can make it hard for Holistic Management practitioners to develop, grow, focus on, and stay aligned with the practice. Connecting with, learning from, and building relationships with fellow Holistic Management practitioners, for example, through the Network, can help to maintain one’s trajectory.

Furthermore, Holistic Managers make decisions and take actions that impact the land daily, while as members of the Savory Global Network, they take action to change the food system. These actions influence complex systems such as ecosystems, communities, and families. Members of the Savory Global Network work together across wide distances to create change based on shared goals, visions, and practices. As network members and hub leaders sharing skills, insights, and capacities as a community of practice towards local and wide-scale change are key functions of the Savory Global Network.

What does this theme look like in practice?

One way to understand the Savory Global Network community of practice is that members 1) share a holistic worldview, 2) practice and expand the adoption of Holistic Management, and 3) lead hubs contributing to regional change toward regeneration. Developing and building on each other’s capacity to grow in these ways is at the heart of the network’s community of practice.

The Mentorship Program, where veteran hub leaders support the learning and capacity of new hub leaders, is a primary example of the network’s community of practice at work. At one hub training, for example, a mentor used the example of building a car engine to help explain some of the concepts of network thinking to a hub candidate in a way that worked particularly well for that candidate. The mentor’s personal skill as a communicator, experience with the network, and commitment to the community of practice made this learning and growth moment possible. This

is just one of many examples of beneficial mentor and mentee or junior and senior network member interactions, sharing ideas to ‘help it all make sense.’

Members of the network’s community of practice also collaborate for mutual benefit in various ways. For example, working together on projects; reviewing pitches, presentations, documents, and talks; inviting each other to speak on webinars, panels, and events; and creating businesses together. For example, REP Provisions was created by hub leaders who met at a Savory Global Network training. Network members also help to define the network activities and influence decision-making, such as around the structure and goals of the Land to Market and EOV Programs. As a network and community of practice, these activities can help foster a shared identity and capacity for action toward the greater aims of personal, collective, and ecological well-being.

What does this theme mean for network leadership and practice?

This theme guides several key questions that network and hub leaders can consider in developing large-scale and local networks: How can we look for ways to support the ongoing growth and development of the community of practice we are a part of? What are the opportunities, challenges, and insights emerging in my community of practice, and how can these be supported, identified, and communicated? What lessons from a global community of practice can support (e.g., hub) leaders in developing regional communities of practice toward achieving local goals?

Lesson and Theme 4: Developing ‘New Regenerative Supply Chains’ for ‘Economic Revitalization’ Supports Wide-scale Network Participation

What does this theme mean?

The global economy is partly driven by supply chains linking producers to consumers. Yet, many communities are struggling economically in the face of degrading ecosystems, globalization, extractive practices, and historical marginalization of many kinds. The ‘regenerative movement’ aims to improve these conditions by improving soils, revitalizing economies, and supporting community well-being. Developing new supply chains rooted in regenerative agriculture that support these goals is a major aim and driving factor within and across the Savory Global Network.

Why does this theme matter?

Developing ‘regenerative supply chains’ can provide an economic incentive for producers to transition to managing holistically, among other goals. Regional supply chains can also provide investment opportunities for reinventing the production and consumption of food and fiber. The Network also aims to redefine our collective relationships with the land, each other, and all we consume. Developing new supply chains can be a motivating factor in developing and encouraging participation action networks to these ends. Furthermore, one of the Network’s guiding principles is that redesigning the global supply chains for food and fiber can support

redistributing power and control of the global food and fiber production systems. An ideal is that this system can transition from hierarchical and centralized to more distributed modes of decision-making and exchange. Savory Global Network leaders and many members claim that we must find a new way to produce food and fiber to survive on this planet. In the face of global, social, and ecological tipping points, such as land degradation and climate change, this appears to be a key motivation and driver for participation in the Savory Global Network.

What does this theme look like in practice?

The Savory Global Network is created dynamically by its members. This is also true of the Land to Market and EOV programs. While the Savory Institute is a steward of this work, the foundations of the new supply chains and associated economic revitalization are guided by hub leaders across local and regional sites. Participating in this process is at the core of Savory Global Network activities.

Key examples of creating new supply chains include developing new products and local action networks. For instance, Studio Hill Farm is part of a team developing the Regenerative Food Network, endeavoring to redesign an entirely new food system in the Northeastern USA, building upon Land to Market program principles. The Robinia Institute is developing a regional food network and processing facility, creating business entities to guide land ownership transfer and train land stewards in Holistic Management and regenerative agriculture. Product labeling systems like the EOV program can be part of new supply chain development. Producer networks and brands seeking EOV verification include Richards Grassfed Beef, Thousand Hills Lifetime Grazed, and Hickory Nut Gap Farm. These are only a few examples of projects whose leaders hope to create new economic models and supply chains that function within a system of collective action.

The Savory Global Network serves as a steward of these new supply efforts for hub leaders. It represents a social configuration helping to connect producers and consumers at each supply chain stage, creating a knowledge and experience base to help others on this path while supporting a sense of connection to the greater movement. Alongside building a community of practice to these effects, the network supports hub gatherings, online conversations, and emerging partnerships with producers and brands, such as Epic Provisions. By facilitating these points of engagement, the Network, hub leaders, and commercial partners create a shared vision and spaces to configure these new supply chains across stakeholder groups to collectively profit while shifting the food system in ways that align with shared social, moral, and ecological imperatives.

What does this theme mean for network leadership and practice?

While this theme may not apply to every network type and configuration, it is worth asking how the network, be it local or global, is interfacing with the broader social and economic systems it is a part of. An example question in the context of the Savory Global Network might be: How does Savory Global Network's growth and change tie into this process of developing new

regenerative supply chains? In broader network contexts, questions might be: How can network-wide exchange and collaboration support new supply chains? How might culturally inclusive collective action be a part of these new supply changes? In what ways might new supply chains create issues in how the network functions? How can regional networks be effectively created to support place-based goals and wide-scale supply chain shifts?

Lessons and Theme 5: Creating ‘Place-specific Regional Networks’ is a Relatively Untapped Pathway for Wide-scale Change

What does this theme mean?

The Savory Global Network is a global network with hubs and representatives working locally yet coordinating across continents. Yet, most hub leaders hope to create local and regional change that contributes to the larger mission of global social and ecological regeneration. This day-to-day work requires connections with farmers, ranchers, policy-makers, producers, suppliers, retailers, and consumers. Many hub leaders have shaped their missions around creating a “regional network.” These proposed regional networks look different from hub to hub, with most aiming to draw on local opportunities and needs to align with the hub’s holistic context. Despite this variety, there are similarities across many of these regional network visions, drawing upon the Savory Global Network’s own hub model for inspiration.

Why does this theme matter?

Organizing in decentralized ways, such as action networks – in relation to partners, allies, and colleagues – is an alternative to the top-down model of most agricultural production and supply systems. Regional networks may allow for ways of scaling and rapidly deploying ideas, information, knowledge, communication, and exchange that are otherwise challenging to achieve. Regional networks may also support a redistribution of power as decision-making and representation are shared among members. These factors can support collective actions, such as political lobbying, distributor price negotiation, and creating opportunities for experimentation that benefits all within the network system and beyond (Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010).

Furthermore, regional networks, as opposed to global networks, may be able to take advantage of local culture, language, relationships, customs, and practices in ways that could be difficult in the context of global-scale action. Furthering the growth of regional networks may be essential to bringing about change and bridging action across global and local scales.

What does this theme look like in practice?

As of yet, most regional networks in the Savory Global Network, as guided by hub leaders, are in the fledgling stage. Many hubs have such networks as part of their larger vision, yet continue to lay the foundations for these networks as outlined in their hub visions. Many of these regional network plans build on and are inspired by the Network hub model with a vision of localizing this model and style of interaction guided by regional needs and cultures.

Notable examples of active regional networks led by hub leaders include the UVE guild of Savory accredited professionals; the Nordic and Turkish Hubs working to create new ways to learn regenerative agriculture skills and support access to land for agriculture through enterprises and apprenticeships; and the extended farm school and training network of Ovis 21. However, creating regional networks remains a future vision for many hubs and may be an important next step in the Savory Global Network's overall development.

What does this theme mean for network leadership and practice?

Large-scale networks can be the stewards of nested regional networks. Learning how to nurture, design, and develop these regional networks is an important next step in understanding the potential of action networks for guiding global-scale change. As examples in the context of the Savory Global Network: How can hub leaders be supported in their efforts to build and sustain regional networks (if that is their goal)? How can the Savory Institute assist in translating materials into local languages and dialects so they are culturally relevant in support of regional network growth? Furthermore, in general contexts: How can regional networks uplift and support collective action with, led by, and for marginalized peoples? How can a community of practice effectively support leaders in their regional network development efforts? What are the tools and skills of a 'regional network leader', and how can these be presented and taught to future practitioners?

Discussion and Reflection

Through this article, we endeavored to explore how the past five years of Savory Global Network activities might inform 1) the general practice of network leadership and 2) the improvement and expansion of the Savory Global Network's efforts at the global and local levels in the years to come. To do so, we have built upon a five-year ongoing partnership between researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder and the Savory Global Network leadership team. We organized our findings around five key themes to inform network leadership and practice across a range of contexts. We believe this information advances thinking about the possible role of networks, and network leaders, in guiding wide-scale social and environmental change informed by grassroots action.

While the themes above were presented in the context of the Savory Global Network, they can be framed more generally as follows:

1. Networks can help create a 'Sense of Belonging' and 'Not Being Alone' while supporting a process of transformative change.
2. Developing a 'Shared Language and Identity' can support productive connection-building and serve as the foundation for navigating conflict.
3. Building a 'Community of Practice' across a global network can help support collective action and connections across participants.
4. Developing 'New Supply Chains' for 'Economic Revitalization' can be a powerful driver for network participation.

5. Creating ‘Place-specific Regional Networks’ as part of a larger action network is a relatively untapped pathway for wide-scale change.

This work situates closely in the studies of sustainability transitions, transitions governance, and network theories of change (Loorbach et al., 2020; Loorbach et al., 2017). It also situates within work-around network evaluation (e.g., Patton, 2019; Taylor et al., 2015). In these contexts, we found that the synergies between a community of practice, a shared language for action, and a sense of belonging are notable and could be considered important factors in network development across various contexts. It is interesting to note that in the case of the Savory Global Network, the shared language, Holistic Management, is both a social tool for cohering and connecting the network and a practical land management and decision-making tool. An effective, shared language for a network can serve both a cohering and a practice-based function, creating a sense of belonging that helps to further the network’s overall goals.

These observations leave cause to ask: Who decides what constitutes the ‘shared language’? For example, suppose a central authority decides. In that case, it may limit the autonomy of the network. In contrast, without some form of governance, there may be a loss of shared understanding across the network due to vocabulary ‘drift’ and use variation across contexts. Navigating this tension of ‘making’ people use a certain vocabulary versus ‘letting’ them decide how best to use it and what its use implications are could be an important factor to consider in successfully using this idea of a ‘shared language’ for network success. Furthermore, translation and linguistic subtleties need to be carefully considered in the process of globalizing or localizing any universal vocabulary set.

Developing new supply chains as a network is also a relatively unique function of a network that has yet to be carefully examined or highlighted. Further understanding how an action network interfaces with broader systems of economics and policymaking could be an essential next step in developing knowledge about network practice. Similarly, understanding how a larger network can support the development of regional sub-networks while allowing for local cultural relevance and autonomy is an important, open question around network leadership and practice that we have highlighted through this work. As a whole, our findings represent novel insights into the activities and dynamics taking place across a global or translocal action network guided by a mission of wide-scale social and ecological change.

Affordances and Limitations

In applying these results to future network leadership and practice, several affordances and limitations might be considered. First, this research represents a case study of a single network. This makes this work valuable as a forward-looking evaluation for the Savory Global Network and as a humble and informative case study for network leaders and practitioners more broadly.

Secondly, academic researchers and the network’s staff conducted the analysis and writing. This lends to the article’s on-the-ground relevance for the Savory Global Network and yet could draw into question the academic validity of the proposed narratives and findings. We prefer to view

drawing upon participant perspectives to interpret the findings as a strength rather than a limitation, as doing so also lends a degree of authenticity to the expression and application of the results. To these effects, we also present the findings with transparency and in acknowledgment of how they were developed.

A third affordance and limitation is that in a complex network ecosystem such as the Savory Global Network, it is unlikely possible to claim a complete view of the network through data collection and analysis. This is because the network is global, with network sites and hub leader participation varying from site to site. It is possible that the flavor of the results reflects an incomplete view of the experience of participation in the network and its future needs. This work represents a distinct and longitudinal snapshot of major cross-hub interactions throughout the research timeline. To these effects, we recommend that network leaders and Savory Global Network participants consider expanding upon these findings to support inclusiveness and relevance for the widest possible audiences. For network leaders more broadly, we suggest considering your own network contexts and creatively considering how our findings may best apply to your specific contexts.

Conclusions and Future Study

This article resulted from a five-year research partnership between University of Colorado researchers and leaders of the Savory Global Network. In this ethnographic and community-based study, we developed five lessons and themes for network leadership and practice. We also see these findings as the starting point for a series of applied training materials for network leaders and practitioners. We plan to develop a workshop series that helps attendees learn how they might build more effective and inclusive networks at the global and local levels.

Questions that may guide future research include:

- What perspectives were missing from this study that could help scholars and practitioners learn the practices of the Savory Global Network?
- How might these lessons apply in a range of transformative network contexts, such as those working with completely different domains of practice or cultural settings?
- How might the identified themes be operationalized for engaging in, teaching, and determining if the related practices, needs, and standards have been met?
- How can these findings support the on-the-ground experiences of struggling communities, and what fundamental considerations might augment the approach?

We suspect that in answering these questions, one would find that different contexts, cultures, and domains of practice would find these findings useful though in need of adjustment. This may particularly relate to those working with non-Western frames of knowing and forms of collective action. We hope that in presenting the findings with contextual examples, future researchers and practitioners can draw what is useful from them and leave behind what is not towards developing

place and context-based network leadership practices that support grassroots change and wider-scale systems transitions.

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