

Umbrella Organizations: Governance, Organizational Identity, and Communication

A Case Study: Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs

Esa Grigsby, Ellen Howard, Marlon Jimenez, AnaCapri Mauro

Wilderness conservation is a complex and multilayered topic. Discourse and proposed actions centered around conservation are influenced by ecological research, legislative and administrative processes (regional, national and international), recreational and outdoor practices, perceptions of nature, and other themes depending on the context. Because of the multiple scales at which discussions about conservation occur, societies may organize around conservation in many formal institutions. This paper delves into umbrella organizations as one type of organizational structure that environmental institutions can choose to utilize.

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Attempts to restructure policy are not always straightforward; it involves many hoops of bureaucracy and time delays. A way to circumvent these setbacks while still promoting environmental action is coalition building. Lazyer stresses that this is an alternative method where advocates can “join forces with groups that may have different values but similar objectives” (2011). Engendering action via coalition building can be pragmatic and beneficial to its various proponents, albeit challenging to maintain cohesiveness. This is no easy feat and much scholarly literature has attempted to address this issue.

The term *umbrella organization* (from now on referred to as UO) is generally used to describe a type of governance mode for a network of organizations. The organizations that function under an umbrella organization are known as *member organizations* (from here on referred to as MOs). Provan and Kenis posit, “in a general sense, all network organizations are seeking to achieve some end that they could not have achieved independently” (2008). However, every network organization has different goals, needs and structures. In order to understand and address how different UOs can successfully achieve their objective as a network, we examined theories of governance, organizational identity and communication.

Provan and Kenis provide a theoretical framework to examine several factors that can help identify which modes of governance are more beneficial for networks with different characteristics. They provide three main types of governance: shared governance (1), where all members take equal part in the network decision-making processes; lead organization (2), where one or a clique of MOs have centralized power; and NAO or Network administrative

organization (3), where a separate Administrative Organization is established to govern the network. Below we provide their general framework as a chart.

Provan and Kenis **Modes of Network Governance**

Table 1
Key Predictors of Effectiveness of Network Governance Forms

Governance Forms	Trust	Number of Participants	Goal Consensus	Need for Network-Level Competencies
Shared governance	High density	Few	High	Low
Lead organization	Low density, highly centralized	Moderate number	Moderately low	Moderate
Network administrative organization	Moderate density, NAO monitored by members	Moderate to many	Moderately high	High

Fig. 1: Key predictors of effectiveness of network governance forms as modeled by Provan and Kenis

UOs are usually network administrative organizations, where (1) participants are moderate to many, (2) the network-level competencies or required network-level tasks are high, (3) trust among members is mainly between one member and the UO, and (4) the consensus about broad network-goals is moderately high. Understanding these factors can help UOs to examine whether their governance practices are necessarily what the network needs at certain times. For instance, a UO with many MOs might consider the question of how inclusive the decision-making processes ought to be, and whether it should centralize its power to be more efficient. If it decides to centralize power to obtain more efficiency, it will have to also ensure that it has moderate trust from its MOs, or else the network can suffer from the further centralization of power (Provan and Kenis 2008). Another important thing to consider is that after a network has shifted to a highly centralized mode of governance such as the case with most UOs, it is very difficult to go back to less centralized modes of governance.

A concern of ours was the potential for the structure of an umbrella organization to inadvertently normalize its values for all MOs. For example, a highly centralized UO might start to mandate obligatory guidelines by telling organizations what to do, and how to do it. Because of this, the entire network could become stuck in a routine mental rut and therefore continue to use the same methods, even if they are only working for some MOs and not for others. In the framework proposed by Provan and Kenis, moderately high goal consensus is a positive trait for umbrella organizations. However, UOs should be conscious of the fact that, if their MOs possess very diverse internal goals, mandating inflexible goals might compromise the commitment of

different MOs. A way around this normalization of thought is found in Eisenberg's paper where he discusses "strategic ambiguity". This is a strategy used by network organizations to write their goals and objectives. The theory is, that in writing ambiguous and general statements all organizations under the UO will feel unified under these goals, and yet, they will each interpret the goals differently, thus leading to what Eisenberg calls "unified diversity" (1984). This strategy preserves creativity in how to accomplish these goals (which can be changed based on the geographical location, or social, economical, and political environments surrounding the various MOs), while still giving each organization a sense of purpose and unity under the larger UO.

According to Young, clarity of organizational identity is an integral element in establishing a successful structure. Cohesion among MOs works to fuel a successful larger entity such as a UO. This can be actualized through clarity of a collective identity, where the branches of a UO can agree on an authentic set of objectives and even values. This way groups can come together under a unified mission and execute their plans of action. Attempting to provide theoretical framework in how to encourage this cohesion among coalition structures, Young identifies what organizational identity is, and its importance for effective functioning. He postulates how resolution of organizational identity can help solve structural dilemmas. Organizational identity as theorized by Albert and Whetten is that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization (1985).

In this article, Young identifies two struggling non-profit organizations whose lack of clear identity leads to problems with structural organization. Girls Incorporated (GI), is a non-profit UO whose initial purpose was, "to unify and support existing girls clubs, to foster the development of new ones, and to maintain high standards for these clubs" (Young). Over the years, a set of national goals was established, its mission statement revised, and direct programming and advocacy changed direction. Changing its name to Girls Club of America, it focused its outreach on juvenile justice, teenage pregnancy, and legislative activity focusing on youth employment and education systems. It redefined its advocacy support and outreach to focus on more broad issues placing new emphasis on service to girls from underprivileged backgrounds. The largest set-back to the now Girls Clubs of America (GCA), is that it remains attached to the old GI organizational structure, which does not reflect its revised contemporary orientation. Tensions between the national and local leaders are concerned about funding pressures and merging with local youth-serving organizations. The new program development has raised the question of how to balance initiatives of national staff and local initiative and leadership. Reaching a common identity will require the consensus of these two stakeholders groups, the traditional constituents of GI and the national board of the organization. This concept of organizational identity enables us to examine how nonprofit UOs struggle to restructure themselves in order to survive and prosper in a changing environment.

Another factor to consider is what Provan and Kenis call external legitimacy, which could be described as the reputation, respect, and reliability with which non-network entities perceive a UO (2008). A network's external legitimacy depends on how it interacts with non-members, such as potential clients or funders or other contributors. A strong and positive external legitimacy can be helpful for the network members because they can derive external legitimacy for their own organizations by virtue of association with a UO. In other words, the way an umbrella organization communicates with non-network entities can have repercussions on the social reputation or image of each MO.

Finally, we should examine not only the nature of these communications but the medium by which they are accomplished. In their article, Nohria et al. examines two main strategies for organizational communication: face-to-face interactions and electronic interactions. Nohria et al. states that electronic communications are effective in routine exchanges (i.e. sending reports, providing or soliciting information) and face-to-face communications are effective when topics of the exchange are uncertain or ambiguous (i.e. in a discussion environment, problem solving, etc.), (1992). Face-to-face communication not only allows for a quick response time which is needed when discussing complex topics, but it allows the interlocutors to establish a basis of trust, which, as we stated above, is between a UO and its MOs (Nohria et al. 1992). Nohria et al. also state that if electronic information is used in a situation where face-to-face interaction is essential, the messages trying to be transmitted often appear as "noise" that will be ignored rather than a meaningful idea that someone will respond to and use to begin a dialogue. Conversely, if face-to-face communication is used in a situation that would better suit electronic communication, the organization is likely to have wasted valuable time and resources. Network organizations can tailor their means of transmitting ideas in order to save time and to be more effective communicators.

Discussion: A Case Study

The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs (FWOC) was founded in 1932 to "preserve and enjoy nature" (Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs). Recently, FWOC has experienced difficulty recruiting young outdoors enthusiasts and young people interested in conservation. Our current research project focuses on what governance and organizational structures and practices might be beneficial for a UO such as FWOC, in order for them to meet their member and conservation objectives.

FWOC's Conservation Objectives
1. To secure additional protection for qualified areas of wilderness on public lands

2. To protect wildlife, native plants, waters and lands in wildlife refuges and through other means
3. To preserve the natural integrity of areas valuable for recreation
4. To promote stewardship of forests on public and private lands, while preserving remaining old-growth forests
5. To protect and restore the quality of air, water, and soils and the integrity of rivers, lakes, wetlands, coasts, grasslands and deserts

Fig. 2: FWOC's conservation objectives as laid out on their website.

FWOC's website underlines its conservation objectives in a forthright manner, which can be viewed in figure 2. Each year FWOC devises an agenda of possible threats and compiles a list of resolutions that displays the breadth of issues that concern conservationists (Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs). These resolutions weld together a coalition that can harness the energies of thousands of concerned members and provides a springboard for action to enlist the support of public officials and legislators (Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs). These aims and FWOC's proposed method of action show that their philosophy aligns with traditional conservationists. Inspired by the U.S. Wilderness Act of 1964, this ideology practices "fortress conservation" where wilderness is "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Dowie 2009). FWOC's current MOs such as Angora Hiking Club, Montana Wilderness Association, and Trails Club of Angora, promote this sense of wilderness, where humans are invited temporarily to experience the beauty of the Earth and maintaining its pristine "otherness".

As Mauro et al. concluded after surveying Lewis & Clark College students, current young adults who display interest in environmental issues tend to express a higher interest in hands-on work outdoors (2014). These students generally valued activities such as reforestation efforts, trail maintenance, and invasive species removal over social and legal action such as drafting or implementing resolutions and policy. This conclusion provided some insight as to why FWOC has encountered such struggles in recruiting new, young members. FWOC and young environmentalists hold very different views on wilderness and the conservation thereof. As exhibited in the word usage in *Outdoors West*, the biannual publication that FWOC distributes to its members, FWOC very strongly values resolutions and conservation policy. *Outdoors West* illustrates the policy work that FWOC is initiating; it outlines the resolutions that FWOC and its MOs agree to follow. Very little space is dedicated to organizing hands-on activities, especially those initiated by FWOC. Many MOs have a more experience-based view of conservation that would support the tactile ambitions of a younger generation. Simply put, FWOC devotes a great deal of time and effort maintaining their resolutions, but the younger generation they hope to attract does not share that interest. If these people do not share the same core values as an

organization, there is very little chance they will choose to join it. The discrepancy between FWOC's values and those of young environmentalists reveals an opportunity for FWOC to morph as a UO into one that appeals to their target younger generation.

Fostering Connections: Networking for New Members

In order for FWOC to gain the members it desires, it may look to improve its networking to create a more visible presence among its MOs and other similar unaffiliated organizations. Networking involves looking at the connections and collaboration between organizations and the members that comprise them. Using the idea of strong and weak ties, one is able to create a web of people who connect to multiple different actors. It is these integral actors that then form the "linking ties" who bring the people or organizations together (Ennis and West, 2014). After these initial ties are established, they serve as the catalyst for new connections with young environmentalists and/or organizations. As the UO, FWOC is in the perfect position to act as a network facilitator to encourage the recruitment of new young environmentalists at different network levels.

Networking, however, might require that FWOC temporarily shifts its focus from its conservation resolutions to its MOs. Its conservation goals would take a supporting role in the quest to strengthen communication and collaboration among the MOs. It is also possible, however, for FWOC to maintain focus on its conservation goals by providing member services like educational endeavors regarding, for example, hands-on conservation work. These member events would not only be beneficial in their educational value, but also serve as miniature networking events in and of themselves. As the facilitator of these sessions, FWOC would also be perpetuating the conservation ideals they hold dear. FWOC does already have an annual conference that brings the MOs together, but more frequent and informal events would help foster connections between organizations and provide a more solid network that can attract more young environmentalists that could eventually get involved with FWOC directly. FWOC would only need to facilitate these events as long as they see necessary as, according to Ennis and West, the role of the umbrella organization is to "provide both the trellising and nutrients for this [the MO's] growth" (2014). This idea is also supported by Nohria et al. who state that face-to-face communication helps to foster interpersonal connections that unite the organizations under the UO and a sense of shared objectives, as well as to build the trust necessary to a network organization, (1992). As FWOC's networking increases, the MOs will not necessarily need FWOC's guidance anymore and then FWOC can return, if it so desires, all of its focus back to conservation resolution and policy.

Member Benefits

Mentioned above, Dennis R. Young theorized how organizational identity translates into organizational structure. He describes the economy, goal-seeking system and the polity as three

possible arrangements for a networking group to unite under a given structure. Currently FWOC falls under an ambiguous or hybridized category of organizational structure, combining the goal-seeking system and polity identity (Young 2001). The polity, based on persuasion and consensus-building, recognizes that there may be larger interests at stake. Its MOs possess similar interests yet diverse approaches and priorities to these interests. On the other hand, the goal-seeking system allows its various organizations to work collectively towards a common objective. FWOC does not necessarily follow the governance mode put forward by Provan and Kenis, for FWOC does possess centralized power characteristic of goal-seeking systems. In other words, FWOC does not exercise unified control and command over its MOs, instead they remain autonomous and sovereign. FWOC may be utilized as a forum to work out common positions, strategies, and collaborations, and thus formulates collective action.

Alternatively, FWOC's structure could be renovated to work towards greater action among its organizations or utilizing certain elements of the *economy* system, where benefits and services are shared collectively, that are otherwise unattainable in the open market. Providing incentives and shared information networks could shift the cohesion of the organization, incentivizing MOs to collaborate on projects by utilizing these reciprocal services. Members could continue to remain autonomous under FWOC while the umbrella organization exploits economies of scale in purchasing information, education programs, specialized supplies, public relations and other services too expensive to secure individually.

Types of Organizational Communication: Pros and Cons

Another aspect to consider is the type and manner of communication that occurs between the UO and the general public (its preferred demographic) as well as between the UO and its MOs. It is important to realize that the goal of communication is different with respect to these two groups (the general public vs. the UO's MOs). Because of the nature of a UO, the types of interactions that occur in intra-organizational communication (between the UO and its members) tend to be more ambiguous and uncertain because there is a focus on policy, networking, determining objectives, and carrying out these objectives. According to Nohria et al. for this type of communication to be most effective, it should occur face-to-face. FWOC might want to consider using this type of communication in its interactions with MOs. More importantly, however, is the means of communication a UO uses to reach its target demographic. In this case, electronic communication would likely be much more effective because the nature of the information being communicated (updates on what the UO has been doing, basic information about the organization, how people can get involved, etc.) is objective and unambiguous (Nohria et al. 1992). This would allow the UO to reach out to a larger audience and to create an internet presence which may lend them more prestige (social legitimacy) and therefore more funds and members. This is an important for FWOC to consider because of the decreased engagement with their target demographic. Perhaps part of the solution lies in the way they communicate with the

youth they're trying to attract. We will further discuss the benefits of electronic communication and media in a social context later on in this paper.

An additional component of communication discussed above was Eisenberg's notion of "strategic ambiguity." By creating goals and objectives that are broad and general, a UO can create "unified diversity" and therefore unite all of its MOs under the same goals. This creates a sense of shared purpose while still allowing them freedom in the interpretation of these objectives. In turn, this preserves diversity and creativity of thought. After reading FWOC's conservation objectives on their website, we believe that this is an aspect of FWOC's goals. This is important because it's essential for an organization to be aware of the implications of how it presents itself and only after understanding these implications will FWOC be able to decide if this is something that they desire. (See fig. 2 for a list of FWOC's objectives set for its MOs.) These goals are broad and many things that a MO may choose to do could fall under one of these aims, therefore giving MOs a certain authority to pursue the projects they see fit, and to accomplish them as they see fit.

Website Comparison: American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) and FWOC

We chose to analyse FWOC's use of technology for general outreach and network interactions with external entities, and compare it to an additional UO as a method to consider and evaluate different practices regarding technology usage. The American Wind Energy Association shares a direct interest or investment in environmental concerns and utilizes a different approach to its use of technology for outreach purposes. It was founded in the 70s to promote the research, development and utilization of wind energy (American Wind Energy Association). For these reasons the AWEA is a worthy organization to compare to FWOC.

One of the first things we noticed on AWEA's website was how clearly they state the benefits of becoming an associate member. These benefits include access to new scientific research, a membership in a network that can influence relevant legislative activities, and opportunities for advocacy. The detailed history of the organization and its mission are easily accessible on the website, including news about new legislation or opportunities for the wind energy industry. In comparison, FWOC's website provides minimal information about what exactly it does and what services or benefits it provides for its MOs. Another thing we can learn from AWEA's website is that they use their website as a platform to regularly advertise new jobs in the wind energy sector, as well as regional and national events to attract new people interested in wind energy. Their website engages and guides visitors who could potentially be interested in learning about, working for and joining AWEA-related projects.

As Eimhjellen posits, "newly founded and less institutionalized organizations, norms, practices and structures are less stable and the organization or group may be more susceptible to changes,

or to being shaped by new technology” (2014). It is possible that the different uses of communication and technology between FWOC and AWEA are directly related to the fact that FWOC is 40 years AWEA’s senior. If FWOC only engages with its members face-to-face or through emails and telephone, then their use of technology is mostly for internal purposes. If their network objectives are mainly internal, then it makes sense why their website does not really communicate with the general public. FWOC may be use to only engaging conservationists face-to-face, or through legislative debates, which might limit their ability to connect with a wide range of individuals.

An aspect FWOC could consider is social media. Social media use is very prevalent among young professionals, and AWEA’s website’s visitors are exposed to a lot of information that speaks about and exemplifies the work and influences of the UO in the wind industry in the US. The AWEA is able to distribute information to augment its social legitimacy. By interacting with non-network entities and advertising and informing website visitors about their achievements and events, AWEA manages to build a stronger presence and reputation among external entities. This could have multiple benefits, such as gaining the attention of possible MOs, because of its ‘big name’ or reputation among wind industry actors. It also has the potential of attracting new young people who identify with their values to work for AWEA, such as young scientists, economists or politicians. Given that FWOC is interested in attracting young people, FWOC might want to consider AWEA’s technology use and outreach practices. Perhaps technology can be used as a tool in adapting to and taking advantage of external changes such as the increasing use of social media. Investing in the implementation of some of the tactics from AWEA’s website might require some structural changes, or perhaps the only costs would be hiring specific employees to work in network interactions through social media.

To explore some possibilities, we should gauge FWOC’s interest in trying to connect with the general public through social media, and in what capacity they are willing to interact with non-network entities through communication technologies. On FWOC’s website, they do publish a yearly adopted-resolutions document (wilderness conservation policies). However, the one for 2014 has seventy six pages of text, which makes it a very dense and time-consuming read for possible young recruits who might not be fully interested (at least initially) in reading so much conservation policy. However, the fact that they do make their policies public suggests that they might be interested in the mass communication of information via the internet. If FWOC wants to distribute their policy and achievements in regards to conservation endeavors, perhaps a less dense but constant dissemination of information might be an alternative approach. Also, if FWOC were to strategically use technology such as Facebook, email lists, interactive websites, or videos, they could increase their presence in different social spheres and not only attract younger recruits, but also augment their external legitimacy which could have a positive ripple-effect when creating a stronger relationship with younger conservation enthusiasts.

Applications

This project lends itself well to further research. One important additional project could be a social network analysis that examines each individual affiliated with FWOC and its MOs. This analysis could examine where strong/weak ties already exist between organizations and individuals so that FWOC may capitalize on these connections. In addition, these connections can extend outside the scope of FWOC and its MOs to other groups in the area. Uncovering the relationships with these other groups can help to strengthen FWOC's network and increase the number of members of both FWOC and its MOs. Further investigation could be done regarding a way to structure a UO network in a manner that favors the constantly changing, globalized and diverse environmental discourse. Emphasis should be put on tailoring this structure in a way that will allow the organization to readily adapt to these changes without compromising the UO's capacity to meet its goals.

Throughout this process, it became evident that measuring effectiveness is quite challenging and very subjective, both to the researchers and the organization. In the future, a set list of criteria to analyze could be beneficial for determining effectiveness of organizations. In examining umbrella organizations and their effectiveness, we failed to address many other engaging topics. We looked to understand how structural implications of a UO work to aid in its association work. However, further studies could take this research and look at how diversity and demographics are understood within these structural boundaries. This research also lends itself to a better understanding of how the economics within UOs function and how they may be managed. Additionally, UOs could also be looked at from a political opportunity standpoint, assessing what factors allow organizations to develop and foster connections amidst multiple circumstances.

Implications

On a larger scale, the cohesiveness of organizational structures can be applied to international as well as domestic issues such as humanitarian relief. David McEntire stresses the importance of his theory of coordination for disaster-relief effectiveness. He establishes three requisites which enable disaster relief operations to achieve their goals. Without coordination or collaboration these set of diverse actors may not be effective in providing relief. These three requisites are identified as (1) Pre-disaster links or ties to help build familiarity among groups as well as stress collaboration, (2) Networks to quickly share and provide information, and (3) A willingness-based on incentives, to work with others (McEntire 1998). If organizations are unaware of each other or experience disincentives to work together (such as competition for funding or publicity), their objective of providing aid is put at risk of limited success. Proper contact, communication, and cooperation among humanitarian actors can furnish efficient and

effective response. With this in mind, agencies (disaster-related or not) must consider how coordination can be facilitated through modern communications technology (McEntire 1998). Establishing connections and networks such as UOs can garner the potential to work collaboratively in order to tackle large scale issues such as disaster relief. In the same way that disaster relief operations may experience difficulty achieving its objectives among a lack of collaboration, UOs may similarly benefit from this theory of coordination in order to facilitate successful execution of their goals.

Conclusion

Environmental thought concerning wilderness conservation is constantly changing, and the way that a UO operates within this discourse determines an organization's effectiveness in meeting and executing goals. By using technology and social media, globalized and ever more interconnected network organizations can adapt to external changes in perceptions and values around issues such as wilderness conservation. However, organizational structures may become deficit in valuable resources and time if they lack flexibility in adapting to change. Organizations could aim to adjust their structure to embrace change and to prepare for ongoing modifications in various contexts. If this is accomplished, it would remove the need to abruptly change structure and communication methods as the communities of stakeholders evolve. By using electronic communications, the UO can readily make changes to their website or social media in response to external social changes. Furthermore, a UO can also engage in conversations with different stakeholders and become informed about how values and perceptions of wilderness conservation evolve.

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