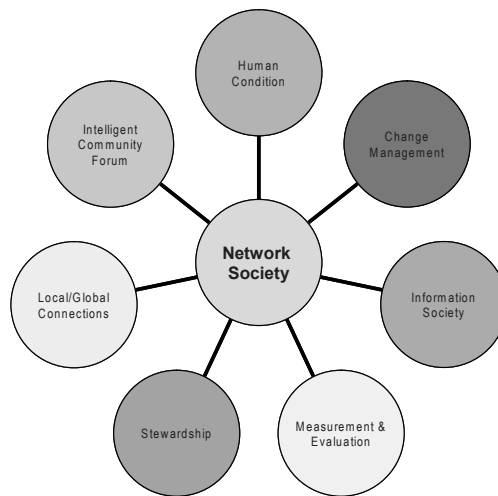


Chapter I

The Network Society



“In this early 21st century we are at the crossroads of the development of the network society.... The human potential embedded in new communication and technologies, in networking, in the new forms of social organization and cultural invention, is truly extraordinary.” Manuel Castells (2006, p. 20)

Overview: This book emphasizes the centrality of the human condition—those things that make individuals and communities uniquely human—in our vision of the networked community. It also emphasizes that, to achieve their goals, communities must pay attention to the measurement and evaluation of multiple dimensions. The topics covered in Chapter I include:

- The nature of the Network Society;
- Communities on the front line of the Network Society;
- The change management framework that guides each chapter of this book;
- The Intelligent Communities Forum (ICF) and its participating institutions;
- Evaluation and measurement as a strategy—measuring with purpose.

THE NETWORK SOCIETY AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

Key Concept: *The Network Society is a reality, but its effects are felt unevenly across the world. Each community is challenged to adapt so that its members can benefit from global membership in the network community.*

The classic conundrum of “the human condition” has been on the minds of the three authors throughout the writing of this book. The human condition refers to the tension that exists between who we are and who we could become, the ongoing struggle between human needs and human aspirations.

Basic individual needs include sustenance, activity, companionship and the enjoyment of leisure; these needs encourage the individual to seek stability and routines. In contrast, aspirations involve dreams, invention and exploration, which stimulate the individual to go beyond the current physical limits of his or her existence, to perpetually make changes.

These two forces—seeking stability and seeking change—are also present in the communities where individuals live collectively, where they work, play, rest and worship. Such communities are called upon to satisfy the basic needs of their members by offering the traditional municipal services of good roads and sidewalks, drinking water and sewage services, traffic control and police protection. To satisfy the aspirations of their members, these same communities are expected to offer increasingly more sophisticated services like daycare, training and education, challenging jobs, entertainment, and opportunities for self-expression. These individual and communal tensions are forever present and are part of a successful adaptation to the social and physical environment.

The arrival of the Network Society, in which everyone is connected to everyone else, puts stress on the human condition in multiple ways. For example, the easy formation and dissolution of virtual communities of individuals and groups connected electronically is inherently disruptive to a local community in which continuity is important. While this innovation in human communication easily erases the barriers of time and distance, and encourages both individuals and communities to imagine new visions of what is humanly attainable, it can also lead to situations that are socially undesirable. Our fascination with technology and its promotion as life enhancing can lead us to neglect dealing with the everyday world in which we live.

Human needs remind us that we are corporal and social in nature; we need to sleep, eat and drink, but we also need to play, laugh and dream. Information and knowledge can help us attain some—though not all—of these aspirations by extending the scope of social and economic exchange. Communication technologies can clearly connect us to larger networks of relationships, but two important questions

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