



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental  
Development Organisations

# Effective NGO Networks

# NGO Networks?

Many reasons for NGOs to form coalitions:

**Fundamental question for any network:**

**What do the members want?**

**Often, members are not quite sure!**

Mix of expectations:

- Information services
- “Trade union” for NGOs
- Representation & Lobby
- Leadership for the sector
- Capacity building
- Support
- Joint work, yet autonomy
- etc etc



# Dilemmas of NGO Networks

## Accountability

Look after **members' interests** ("trade union" function)

Be **representative** (broad membership, few quality criteria)

**Service** provision (efficacy, tendency to centralise)

Look after **members' needs** as identified by themselves (member-led, often short-term interests)

**Process** oriented (capacity building)



## Organisational Effectiveness

Look after **members' mission & purpose** (interests of the poor)

Be **unified** (high entry threshold, shared standards)

**Facilitating** members (ownership, but often slow or inconclusive)

Look after **members' strategic needs** (leadership role for secretariat/ Board, longer-term interests)

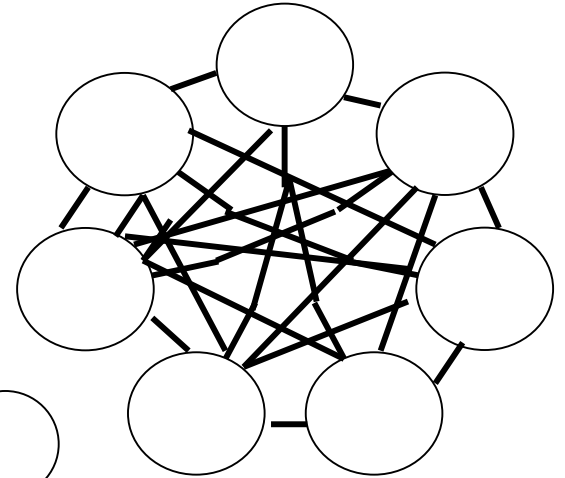
**Output** oriented (implementation)



# What do members want?

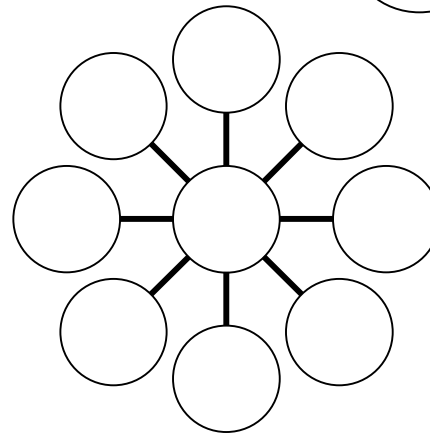
## A **Web:**

Members are encouraged to network amongst each other;  
Great cohesion and common work, but little policy influence.



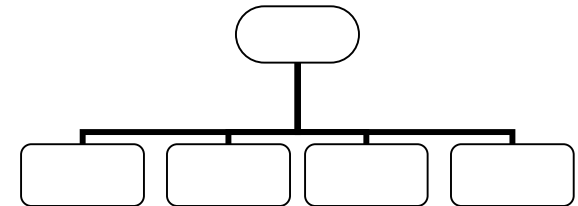
## A **Wheel:**

Members turn to the secretariat for services and support;  
Centralisation reduces legitimacy, but increases impact.



## A **Representative:**

The network represents the sector;  
Leadership role, and quality control.



# Each network should decide what it wants to be

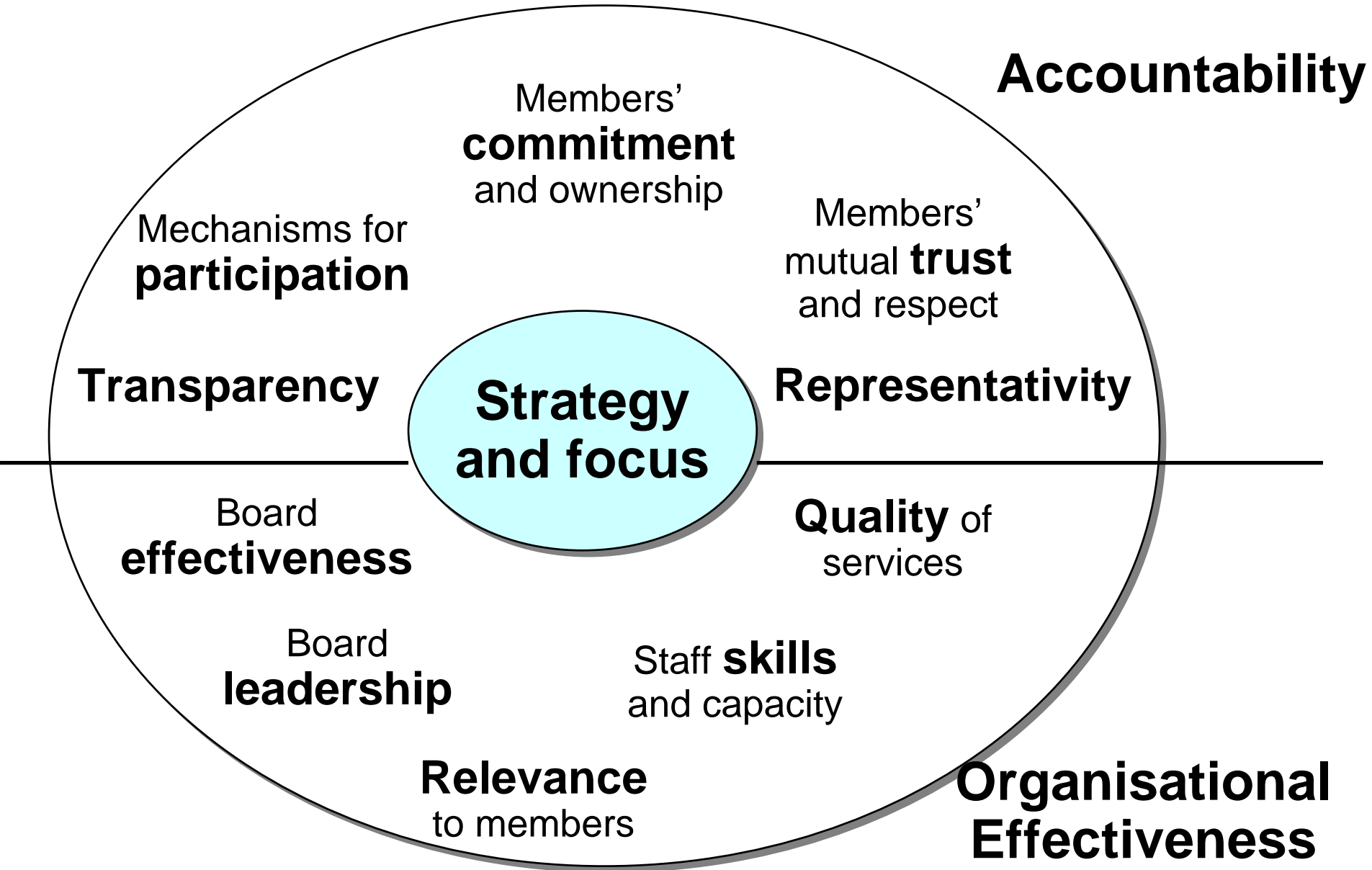
Key issues to consider:

- Membership criteria
- Goal and purpose
- Duration
- Level of formality
- Members' rights & responsibilities
- Level of ambition
- Limits to reasonable expectations

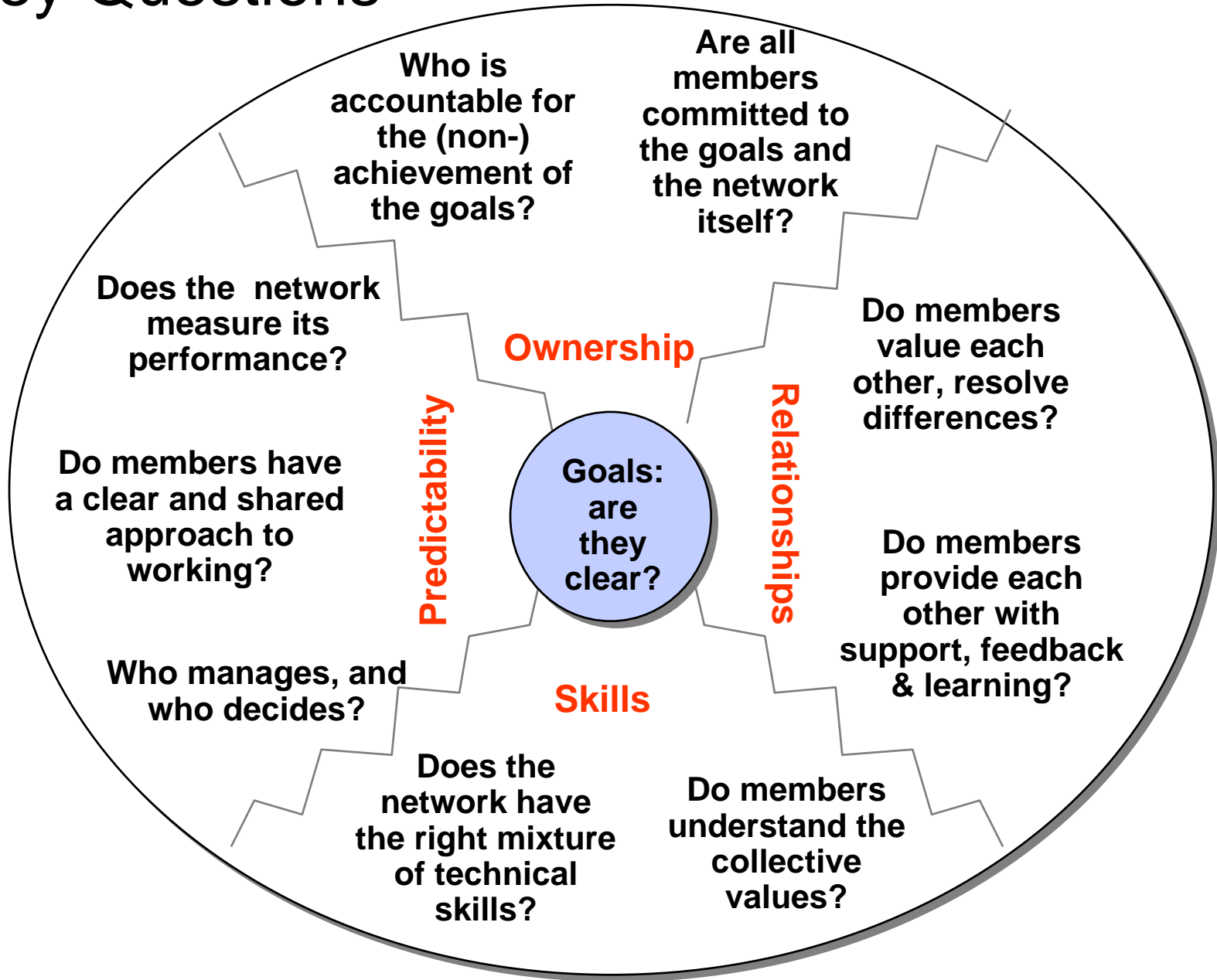


**What is the “glue” that holds the network together?**

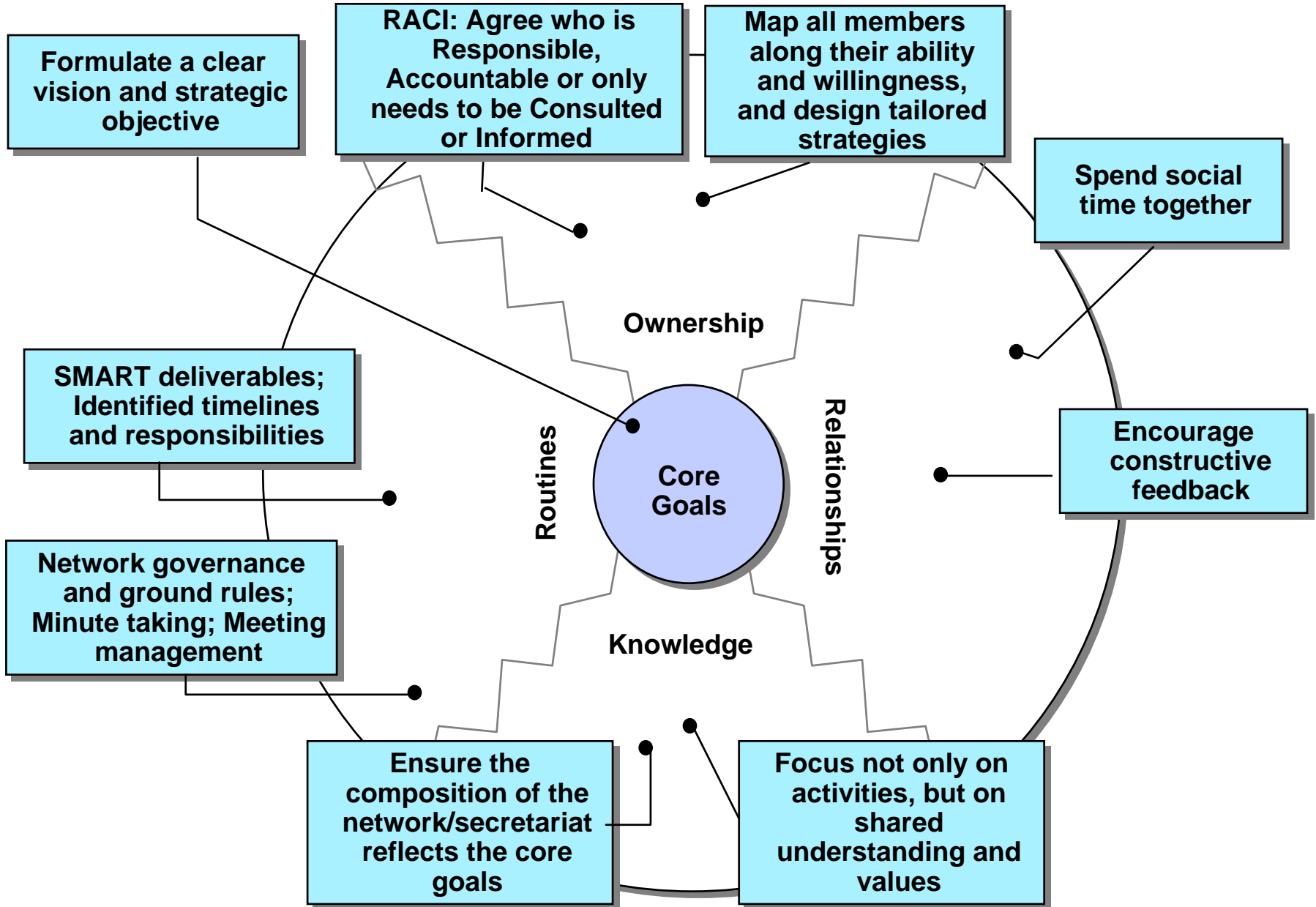
# Ingredients for a successful network



# Key Questions



# Tools to manage the network



# A Checklist for Success



## 1. Focus the Network!

- ✓ Goals: Agree **what NOT to do**;
- ✓ Glue: Agree shared **values**;
- ✓ Focus: Agree shared vision, and **purpose**;
- ✓ Balance: Agree where to balance on the **Network Dilemmas**;
- ✓ Focus: Work on only those **issues** that everyone agrees on.

**If members are to invest in the network,  
they need to know what it does,  
and what it doesn't do...**

# A Checklist for Success (cntd)

## 2. Accountability!

- ✓ Agree clear “Rules of Engagement”: be **predictable**.
- ✓ Be clear who decides what;
- ✓ Empower the secretariat to **lead**;
- ✓ Inform members about, and **explain**, all your actions;
- ✓ Allow the secretariat to know and **understand** all members;
- ✓ Rotate meetings, and allow members to get to **know each other**;
- ✓ Never, ever, abuse **trust** and confidentiality.

**Be decisive, and explain how you took decisions.**

# A Checklist for Success (cntd)

## 3. Efficacy!

- ✓ Break each overall goal into many small steps;
- ✓ Maintain a sense of momentum, by doing a lot of small things;
- ✓ Don't strive to be perfect: many average initiatives is better than one perfect one;
- ✓ Invest in the staff;
- ✓ Make sure the Board is in control, and feels responsible.

**Prepare for a marathon,  
but focus on running many small sprints..**