

Profile of Network Coordinators

Diverse, highly educated, committed

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In 2006, IDRC completed a wide-ranging evaluation of the support it gave to research networks during the decade 1995-2005. This assessment included a review of IDRC's documentation, interviews with key players, a learning forum, and a telephone and e-mail questionnaire survey addressed to hundreds of network coordinators and members.

Among its findings, this survey generated an extremely detailed body of data summarizing demographic and professional characteristics of 110 coordinators, as well as exhaustive information about their involvement with the 80 networks they managed. Here follows a small sampling of that wealth of information.

LOCATION: WORLDWIDE

The coordinators surveyed are based in no fewer than 39 nation states. The best-represented region is South America, Central America, and the Caribbean. About one-fifth live in Canada.

GENDER: NOTABLY FEMALE

It appears that IDRC-supported networks channel women into leadership positions, because six out of ten network coordinators are female. These women are more likely than their male counterparts to hold a doctorate degree, to work in a college or university, and to be over the age of 50.

Male coordinators, on the other hand, probably work for a non-governmental organization (NGO) or an international organization, and they are more likely to be satisfied with the impact of their networks on their individual and organizational capacity development.

AGE: THE PRIME OF LIFE

The average age of the coordinators surveyed is 48 years. Only one-fifth are under 40.

These younger people are more likely to be professional staff than managers, and to work for an international organization. They report more communication barriers within their networks and have a greater tendency to point to foreign language issues and a lack of resources as the cause.

Older coordinators, meanwhile, tend to work in a college or university, to have a doctorate, and to report no communication barriers in their work. They are also more likely to say that their networks have been "very successful" in achieving their purpose.

LEVEL OF EDUCATION: HIGH

Network coordinators tend to be very well educated, most having earned either a doctorate or a master's degree.

Those with a doctorate are more likely to be involved in networks that have an economic focus. They more often cite building research capacity and enhancing research quality as purposes of their networks. And they are more inclined to report IDRC as being a donor to their networks as opposed to playing other roles.

Those whose highest degree is a bachelor's or master's, meanwhile, are more likely to cite NGO and IDRC involvement in their networks, and to have community members as network members.

FIELD OF STUDY: FEW SURPRISES

Social scientists constitute about half the survey sample. Obviously perhaps, they tend to lead networks with an economic focus, while natural scientists are more frequently involved in natural resource management.

Natural scientists are more likely to work for an international organization. Their network members tend to be located in developing countries and their networks to have larger numbers of individual as opposed to organizational members. Intriguingly, they also more frequently report that the fundamental purpose of their networks changes as time passes.

JOB TITLES: MOSTLY PROFESSIONALS OR EXECUTIVES

Just over half the coordinators surveyed work as professional staff in their home organization. These people tend to be younger. Networks with these coordinators are more likely to include members affiliated with government and academia.

Coordinators who are executives or senior managers are more likely to belong to older networks that are based in an NGO. These people have more experience with IDRC, and more often report IDRC being a formal advisor on their networks. They also more frequently mention activity in facilitating communication and interpersonal relationships as part of their role as coordinator, and are more inclined to report that their networks have influenced policies and laws than are professional staff and others.

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT: A KEY FACTOR

Coordinators are employed in different types of workplace, with universities and colleges, NGOs, and international organizations being the most common. This variable explains the greatest number of differences among coordinators. Here are just a few of the survey's many findings in this area:

- * Coordinators employed in academia are more likely than others to report their networks' purposes being directly related to research, that is, building and enhancing research capacity, and carrying out research.
- * Coordinators who work for an NGO are far more likely than others to point to their own individual capacity development as being a consequence of their network involvement.
- * Coordinators based at international organizations are disposed to mention as an "outcome" of their networks broadening the perspectives and information available to policy-makers, and affecting policies and laws.

COMPENSATION: MIXED

The chance that any coordinator will get a salary varies radically, depending on the kind of institution where the person is based. Among those linked with a college or university, nearly four-fifths are volunteers – but three-quarters of those who work with NGOs or an international organization are paid. Just over half the networks in the study are managed by some sort of shared coordination arrangement.

Overall, almost 40 per cent of network coordinators are volunteers. These people are more likely than paid coordinators to reside in Canada.

Paid coordinators, on the other hand, are more likely to be natural scientists, to spend more time on network business each week, to have network members in developing countries, to experience communication barriers, and to be linked with IDRC as a formal advisor. Paid coordinators are also more frequently involved with financial administration and with coordinating research efforts by their networks.

Almost half the coordinators joined their networks during the latter five years under study, 2000-2005. Only 17 per cent report having ten years or more experience with their networks. And fully one-quarter of the coordinators took up their leadership role only since 2003.

“It has tremendously improved my understanding of other cultures and language diversity in Asia and its impact on sharing knowledge most relevant for poverty alleviation and the use of ICT tools for this. This is something I did not know very much about.”

- coordinator of an IDRC-supported network, on the impact of network experience

GENDER

Men	38%
Women	55%

AGE

Under 40	19%
40 to 49	31%
50 and older	39%

EDUCATION

Doctorate	51%
Bachelor's or Master's	39%
Other level	10%

FIELD OF STUDY

Social scientists	51%
Natural scientists, computer scientists or engineers	27%
Other including law, medicine, health, business	22%

POSITION IN ORGANIZATION

Professional staff	51%
Executive or senior managers	35%
Other	15%

HOME ORGANIZATION

College or university	25%
NGO	25%
International organization	18%
Other including IDRC, government, private sector	32%

REMUNERATION

Paid coordinators	55%
Volunteer coordinators	38%

Column totals may not equal 100% due to lack of response