

Session 2: Actors and Networks – Who to Involve? (11:00–12:30)

Objective

Identify the diverse actors in an innovation network and understand their roles. Participants will learn how to conduct a **Network Analysis** to map stakeholders around an initiative. They will also be introduced to the **Triangle of Co-Creation** framework, which distinguishes constructive roles (change agents, managers, suppliers) from less productive ones (activists, gatekeepers, survivors) in relation to a network’s structure. By the end of the session, participants should be able to prioritize which relationships to build in an innovation project and recognize what role they themselves – as advisors – play in the mix.

Presentation - Introduction (20 min)

Open with the question, “*Who needs to be part of an innovation for it to succeed?*” Refer back to the spiral stages: at each stage, certain people are critical. For example, in Inspiration, you need enthusiasts and early adopters; by Realisation, you also need gatekeepers on board. Highlight that innovation is **social** – it happens in networks of people, not in isolation. Successful agroforestry innovations often involve farmers, researchers, extension advisors, agri-business, local officials, Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), etc., forming a support web around the idea.

Introduce the **Network Analysis tool** as a method to map this web. This tool “puts an initiative in the middle” and maps actors in relation to it. Draw a simple diagram on a flipchart to illustrate: write a sample initiative (e.g., “Agroforestry Training Centre in Ireland”) in the centre. Around it, draw concentric circles or clusters for different roles:

- **Partners/Carriers (“We”):** Those who carry the initiative forward (core team/owners). These are the primary innovators or change agents who feel ownership (maybe a farmer cooperative or an NGO launching the training centre).
- **Users/Beneficiaries:** Who will benefit if this initiative succeeds? For a training centre, users might be local farmers seeking knowledge, or agricultural students.
- **Suppliers/Contributors:** Who provides key resources or inputs? Maybe funders (government program, EU grant), land providers, technical experts providing content.
- **Links/Connectors:** **People or entities that** connect the core team to others. Perhaps a well-networked advisor (that could be the participant! who connects the initiative to policy makers, or a respected farmer who links to the wider farming community).
- Optionally, **External Factors:** The tool sometimes includes impersonal factors (market conditions, regulations) on the outer periphery– these are not actors but elements that matter.

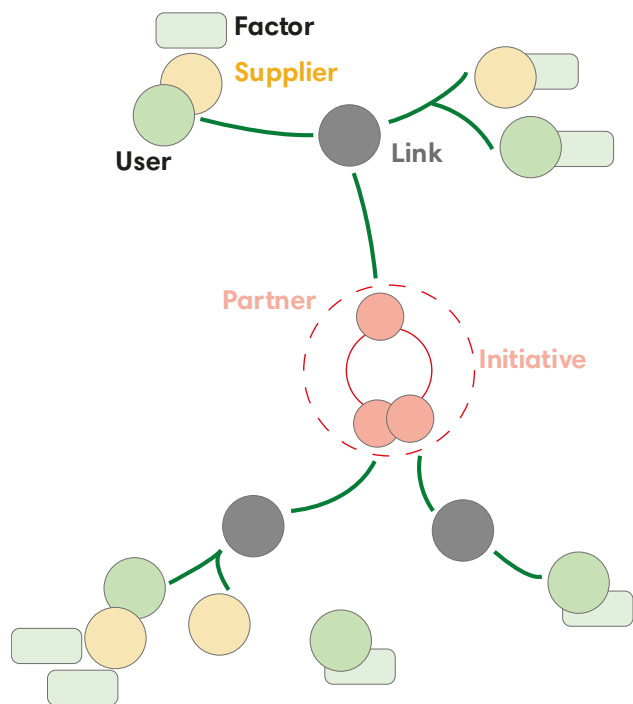


FIGURE 3. Network analysis diagram (modified from CECRA)



In this schematic, the initiative is at the centre of a network. “Partners” (or carriers) form the inner circle of those committed to the project (dark green). Around them are various actors (light green circles with patterns) categorized as users, suppliers, or connectors (links) depending on how they relate to the initiative. The outer boundary (“They”) represents the wider context or external stakeholders who are not yet engaged. By visualizing who is where, the analysis helps identify missing connections and priorities for engagement .

Explain how to do a quick Network Analysis in practice: you gather your core team and literally draw this on paper or use cards for each actor. Ask guiding questions: *“What is needed for our initiative? Who has or controls that? Who benefits? Who could block this?”* Place actors on the map accordingly. The result is a clearer picture of the human landscape. Advisors can then ask, *“Which relationships should we strengthen first?”* Perhaps you notice you have partners and suppliers but no clear links to the end-users – that is a gap to fill. The tool thus guides stakeholder engagement strategy.



Activity – Practice Network Mapping (30 min)

In this 30-minute exercise, participants work in small groups (3–5 people) to apply the Network Analysis tool using AF4EU RAIN examples:

Spain (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/spain>),

Ireland (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/ireland>),

France (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/france>),

Netherlands (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/netherlands>),

Germany (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/germany>),

Italy (<https://af4eu.eu/rains/italy>).

Each group is assigned one country and given a flipchart and markers. Over 20 minutes, they briefly review the link and draw a simple network map of the initiative by identifying key actors: partners (who is driving it), users (who benefits), suppliers (who provides resources or knowledge), and links (who connects actors, such as advisors or facilitators). Encourage participants to use guiding questions (displayed on a slide or handout) to explore relationships, highlight strong and weak connections, and identify any missing stakeholders. Trainers circulate to support groups, offering prompts where needed. After mapping, each group gives a short 1–2 minute report, sharing one key insight (e.g. a missing actor or weak link). For example- *“One key actor we realized we need to involve is...”*, or *“Our map showed that we lack a good link between ... and ...”* Discuss briefly: Did any map surprise them? Are there common actor types that appear across cases (e.g., farmers, advisors, policymakers)? Reinforce that in agroforestry innovation networks, it’s normal to see a mix of practitioner knowledge (farmers), scientific knowledge (researchers), and facilitation (advisors), among others. The advisor often plays the **link** role – connecting the “we” (core group) to the wider “they” (external stakeholders).



Triangle of Co-Creation (20 min)

Transition to a complementary perspective on roles: not by project position (user, supplier) but by **behavioral role in the change process**. Present the **Triangle of Co-Creation** model. Draw a triangle on the board with labels on each corner: “Change Initiator”, “Manager (Structure)”, “Supplier (Contributor)”. Explain these are the *complementary positions needed for co-creation*:

- **Change Initiators (Change Agents):** The drivers of new ideas, providing the push for change (in networks, these are often the enthusiastic innovators).
- **Managers (Structure Responsible):** Those who take care of existing structures and ensure stability – in a network, they might be the organizers or people mindful of rules/constraints.

- **Suppliers (Resource Providers):** Those who contribute whatever is needed (knowledge, labour, funding) to make the innovation happen.

In a healthy innovation network, these three roles complement each other: initiators bring ambition, managers bring order and legitimacy, suppliers bring support. Often, participants have formal titles that align (e.g. a researcher might act as a “*supplier*” of knowledge, a cooperative leader as “*manager*”, a farmer-champion as “*initiator*”), but roles can be fluid.

Now, around the triangle, draw a circle and label three points on the circle: “*Activists*” (near the initiator side), “*Gatekeepers*” (near the manager side), “*Survivors*” (near the base, opposite the free actor. Explain these as **defensive or non-contributive positions** people might take

- **Activists:** People pushing change *at the cost of* structure – they might dismiss rules or others’ concerns recklessly. Their passion is high but they can risk blowing up a network if unchecked (fanaticism).
- **Gatekeepers:** Those who hold power or cling to the status quo (structure) *without* accommodating needed change. They can block innovation by saying “*we’ve always done it this way*” or by not allowing new ideas to pass through.
- **Survivors:** Individuals mostly looking out for themselves – they neither drive change nor support the collective structure. They may comply on the surface but avoid risk or contribution, just hoping to get by (often draining energy).



FIGURE 4. Triangle of co-creation(modified from CECRA)

In the centre of the triangle, note the role of the **Free Actor**. This is essentially what an innovation advisor often is: someone who isn’t fixed to one corner, but moves as needed to keep balance. The free actor can talk to all sides, reduce gaps between them, and do “*whatever it takes*” to foster healthy collaboration (with or without formal mandate). It is the ultimate network facilitator role, ensuring initiators, managers, and suppliers coordinate.

In this diagram, the inner triangle represents constructive positions – **Initiators, Manager, Suppliers** – with a **Free Actor** at the centre bridging among them. The outer circle (green ring) lists the corresponding negative stances: **Activists** (extreme change focus), **Gatekeepers** (extreme structure focus), **Survivors** (interest only in self). The horizontal axis implies a spectrum from Change to Stability, and the vertical axis from “We” (collective interest) to “Me” (self-interest). A healthy innovation process needs a balance of change and structure, aligned toward collective “We” interests – that is where initiators, managers, and contributors working together (guided by a free actor) can co-create effectively.

Walk through a quick example using the triangle: Consider a local agroforestry network in France trying to introduce hedgerow intercropping. A **change agent/initiator** farmer proposes a novel approach (lots of drive for change), a **manager** type person from the agricultural board ensures compliance with regulations and that the group stays organized, and a **supplier** (perhaps a local seed company or a researcher) provides trees or expertise. If they collaborate, the project moves forward creatively *and* safely. Suppose one member becomes an **activist** (“*Let’s rip out all fences now, who cares about permits!*”) – they risk alienating others and causing chaos. Or if a key official is acting as a **gatekeeper** (“*You can’t do this, it’s not how we do things, no.*”) – they stall progress. Meanwhile, some farmers might be **survivors**, nodding along but not contributing or taking any risk, which can



sap group energy. The **advisor as free actor** might mediate here: persuading the official to give the idea a chance (easing gatekeeping), channelling the activist's enthusiasm in a more constructive way (maybe pilot first rather than all-or-nothing), and encouraging survivors by reducing perceived risk (e.g. securing insurance or small incentives so they engage).

Have participants reflect: *Which role do you naturally gravitate towards in a group? Are you more of an initiator (idea person), manager (organizer), or supplier (supporter)? Or have you found yourself being a gatekeeper or other defensive role at times? This ties back to the earlier objective of reflecting on one's behaviour. Give them a minute to jot a thought. Invite one or two to share if comfortable. It is often insightful if someone says "I realize I often play gatekeeper as an agronomist – I tend to initially shoot down wild ideas for lack of data" – a realization that can help them adjust.*

Wrap up Session 2

Emphasize that *who is in the network* and *how they behave* both matter. Advisors can use **Network Analysis** to ensure all the right actors are engaged, and use insights from the **Triangle** to navigate personalities and roles. If an innovation is stalling, maybe a needed actor is missing (network gap) or maybe the pattern of roles is off (e.g., too many gatekeepers, no active change agent). The advisor's job is often to fill gaps – sometimes literally being the "missing link" or acting as the "free actor" to break a deadlock.

Tip For Success: Mention that these tools (*Spiral, Network Analysis, Triangle*) come from real practice in Europe. For instance, the Spiral and Triangle were developed in the Netherlands to guide innovation networks in livestock farming. This reassures participants that these are **tested concepts**. Also, acknowledge that in real life, we do not walk around drawing triangles for people – these are mental models to aid our strategy as facilitators.

Before the break, suggest that the participants informally think about their own networks: "Over lunch, consider an innovation you are working on – do you have the right people involved? Who else might you need?" That primes them for the next creativity session, where we assume we have our network and now need *ideas*.