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School of Communication and Information

Organizational Resilience Following Environmental Disaster: The Emergence of the Domino Effect Model

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Results

We found that resilience is a multi-level communicative phenomenon that utilizes both bureaucratic and network processes to facilitate internal rebuilding and the development and strengthening of relationships with stakeholders and organizational partners. Resilience follows a step-by-step process that begins with individuals within the organization, involves both staff and volunteers, and then progresses to external relationships and partnerships. Research suggests that this process is sequential, and while organizations may skip steps, they complete the process in order.
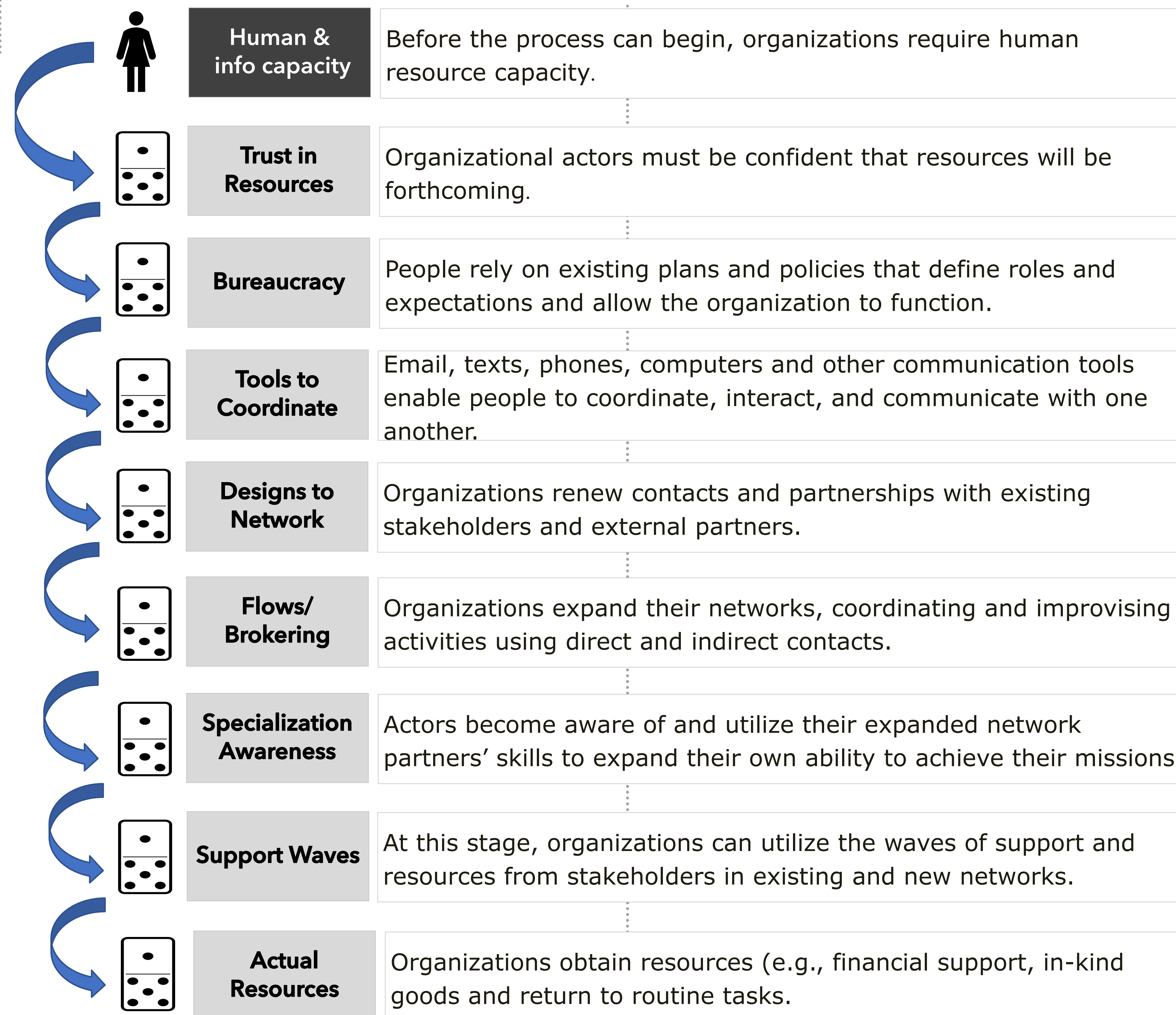
Discussion

The domino effect model posits that organizational resilience begins with individuals operating in isolation and relying on plans. Without individuals being willing or capable to work, the dominos remain inert. When individuals do mobilize and communication technologies permit, isolated work moves to dyadic interaction and coordinated work inside the organizations. When foundational aspects of resilience processes are met, organizations swiftly move into group interaction internally (e.g., group emails and conference calls) which then supports the organization to strategically mobilize external networks. In other words, internal functions support a move to mobilize and draw on communities. The interorganizational networks then reconnect through a small world phenomenon where networks of networks become reoriented and in turn, contribute to community resilience.
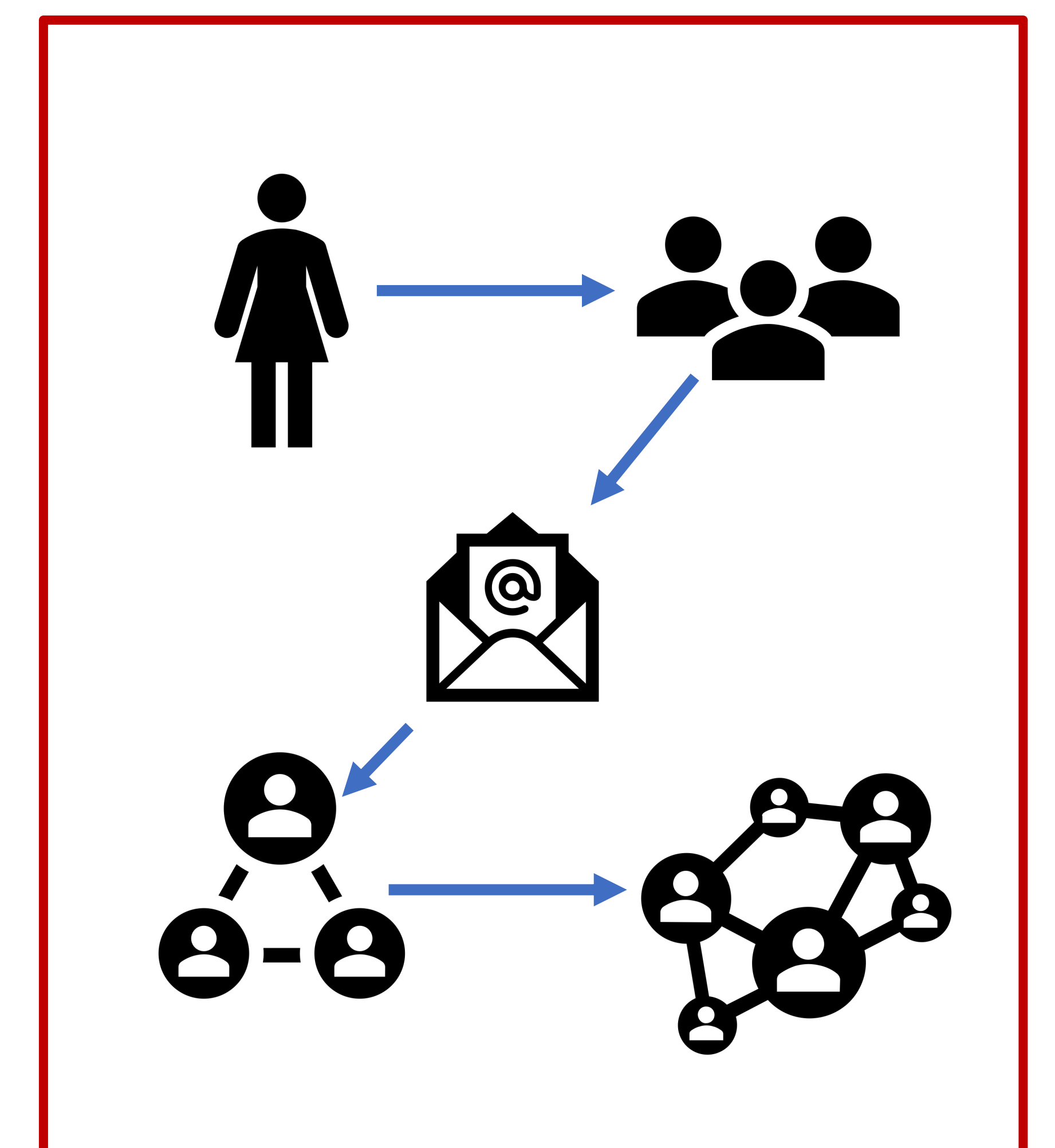
What Communicative Processes Do Organizations Use to Recover From Environmental Disasters?

We investigated communication processes at four interconnected networks of not-for-profit organizations that serve vulnerable populations.

RQ1. How do bureaucratic and network processes coevolve following a disaster?
RQ2: Do these processes have a sequential order?

Methods

We used grounded theory techniques (Glaser & Strauss, 1988) and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) to analyze:

300 hours of **site observation and shadowing.**

In-depth **interviews** informants (**n=31**).

Hundreds of pages of **documents, website materials.**

Human & info capacity	Before the process can begin, organizations require human resource capacity.	
Trust in Resources	Organizational actors must be confident that resources will be forthcoming.	
Bureaucracy	People rely on existing plans and policies that define roles and expectations and allow the organization to function.	
Tools to Coordinate	Email, texts, phones, computers and other communication tools enable people to coordinate, interact, and communicate with one another.	
Designs to Network	Organizations renew contacts and partnerships with existing stakeholders and external partners.	
Flows/ Brokering	Organizations expand their networks, coordinating and improvising activities using direct and indirect contacts.	
Specialization Awareness	Actors become aware of and utilize their expanded network partners' skills to expand their own ability to achieve their missions.	
Support Waves	At this stage, organizations can utilize the waves of support and resources from stakeholders in existing and new networks.	
Actual Resources	Organizations obtain resources (e.g., financial support, in-kind goods and return to routine tasks.	