A Holistic Network View of Knowledge Workers

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Agenda

- Framing the issues
  - Measuring network change over time
  - Understanding individual effectiveness
- Summary
What exactly are social networks and why should we focus our attention on them?

Key Reasons Why Social Networks Are Important

Where Work Happens
• Lack of boundaries
• Informal networks increasingly important

Where People Engage
• Join and commit to people
• Trust accrues in networks of relations

Where Knowledge Lives
• Rely on people for information
• People can provide more than databases

BUT...
• Invisible
• At odds with formal structure
Lack of integration in a global research function makes it difficult to execute strategy
There are a number of high leverage network analysis applications

- Supporting strategic partnerships (e.g., joint venture, alliances, consortia, etc.).
- Assesing strategy execution (e.g., core competencies or market strategies).
- Improving information and decision-making in top leadership networks (e.g., top team and next layer).
- Integrating networks across core processes (e.g., commercial lending or software development).
- Improving innovation (e.g., new product development, research and development).
- Finding and supporting communities of practice (e.g., promoting connectivity or finding opinion leaders).
- Ensuring integration post-merger or large scale change (e.g., targeting collaboration and correcting over time).
Social networks can be improved by focusing efforts on three levels; the organizational, group, and personal levels

- Organizational context and leadership
  - Planning, operations, HR, technology, culture, leader behaviors, etc.
  - Sixty point diagnostic

- Relational development
  - Latent networks
  - Stages of development

- Individuals & network planning
  - Intervening based on position
  - Assessing/planning individual connections
The organizational context diagnostic indicates effective practices and where they can potentially be improved.

- This organization has the potential to improve collaboration by reallocating decision making rights, changing its recruiting practices and ensuring that projects are staffed with the relevant expertise.
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- Measuring network change over time

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Summary
Computer software allows us to visualize changes in networks over time.
Many of the benefits of SNA become apparent when comparing before and after diagrams of relationships within an organization.

**After completing the SNA**

- **Conducted a lengthy, facilitated session with managers and executives**
  - Showed SNA diagrams with names, which sparked a frank discussion on whose expertise was not being tapped and who was a bottleneck.
  - From this emerged greater self-understanding, the will to change, and set of interventions.

- **Implemented changes that led to improved integration of social networks**
  - Staffed internal projects with members of each group.
  - Introduced mixed revenue sales goals with managers accountable for selling projects with both kinds of expertise.
  - Made personnel changes to remove a bottleneck; transferred this person to another group.
In this pharmaceutical company a major organizational initiative and a change in the way people worked resulted in greater interaction between functions.

First network analysis

- In the first network analysis there was a functional split between the groups, and CP was acting as a bottleneck.
  - The focus had been on integrating across locations rather than functions.
- The second analysis indicated that targeted organizational changes had brought about greater interaction between the functions.
  - Two of the functional groups were merged together.
  - A refocusing of the group towards more of a consultative approach increased interaction between the functions.
  - The removal of the person acting as the bottleneck and promotion of a more collaborative individual increased cross-functional interaction.

Follow-up analysis
A closer look at the network indicates that there are four people who have become more important sources of information.

Beth and Amy both took on management roles, David had a change of position in the group.

Paul moved from being a team lead to playing a more independent role.

Clare, who was the leader of the group, delegated work to her team leads and took on a more strategic role.
When we look at the people who are in both networks, 79% of “awareness” ties have remained the same and the overall number of ties has increased.

- The more static nature of latent networks, such as being aware of others’ knowledge and skills, has important implications for interventions.
  - Brokers and boundary spanners should be identified based on their latent relationships rather than on who they go to for information at any point in time.
There are different ways people can become more integrated into a network

- The first network is focused around Jones and King with Brown and James being somewhat peripheral.
- In the second analysis Brown and James have become much more integrated into the network.
  - Interviews revealed that James was a classic entrepreneur who actively sought people out.
  - In contrast Brown was a highly reliable and trustworthy person who people were drawn to.
The information networks we have looked at are much more dynamic than the awareness networks

- People maintain and often increase their awareness relationships over time.
- People’s information network changes substantially over time.
  - This is often due to a change in roles.
  - It can also occur as a result of proactive networking.
- Some people become more central in the information network while others move out to the periphery.
  - Promotion often results in a move toward the center of the information network.
  - People who change roles often continue to be the point person from their previous role as well as their new one.
  - A move away from the center of the information network can be a good thing for a person who is overburdened or has become a bottleneck.
  - Projects that require dedicated time with only a small number of people often result in people moving out to the periphery of the information network.
Benefits and limitations of looking at networks over time

Looking at networks over time can help you better understand the following:

- Are interventions increasing effective collaboration.
- Are new people are being integrated into the network in a timely manner.
- What is the effect of major reorganization initiatives on strategically important networks.
- Are post-merger integration initiatives being successful.
- Is collaboration occurring between newly formed alliances.

Limitations of looking at networks over time:

- Networks do not stay constant, people join and people leave.
- The group may be reorganized or disbanded.
- The group may undergo a strategic change that affects the way people do their work.
- It’s difficult to repeat the analysis more frequently than once a year.
- If you do several analyses people’s responses may be tailored to fit your expectations.
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The distribution of an individual’s advice network has an important effect on what they learn.

In this commercial bank the CEO has advice relationships with six people in his top executive team and ten individuals from the various functional departments.

His advice relationships indicate a considerable bias towards commercial lending to the detriment of the other functional departments.
One executive was concerned with an excessively inward focus in his network and the concurrent effect on learning, politics and getting resources.

This executives network is biased towards people in the same group and on the same floor.

This person only reaches up to one person above them in the hierarchy.
Sixty interviews suggest knowledge workers rely heavily on relationships for more than just information

Key relationships we have with others:

- **Task accomplishment**: People provide us with a variety of things to help us do our work.
  - Information, resources, decisions/direction, actual help.

- **Career development**: People help us learn in ways that advance our careers.

- **Career/political support**: Influential people look out for us.

- **Sensemaking**: People can help us make sense of events, rumors or trends.

- **Personal support**: People sometimes provide support on a personal level.

- **Purpose**: For some of us, people provide a sense of purpose in our work.
A short exercise to determine a holistic view of your network

Step 1: List up to eight people you go to for each of the following types of help.

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<th>B. Career Development</th>
<th>C. Career/Political Support</th>
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A summary of your holistic network

Step 2: List out each of the people you named above and indicate the type of help you go to them for.

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Are you over or under invested in some people. What are the implications?

Step 3: Indicate the people you are over and under invested in. What are the implications?

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Knowledge workers manage unique constellations
Comparing different relationships within networks reveals the extent to which knowledge workers are supported

- In this consulting practice there is a relatively dense task accomplishment network but when we looked at the personal support network there were much fewer relationships. This was particular the case for the two smaller offices.
  - This gives us a good sense of the culture within the different offices.
- There were also much fewer personal support relationships between people from different offices.
  - This highlights the difficulty virtual workers have getting personal support.
Taking a holistic view helps us define how best to support knowledge workers

**Contingencies**
- Personality
- Career stage
- Job characteristics
- Demographics

**Outcomes**
- Performance
- Job satisfaction and commitment
- Retention
- Well being

**Actions**
- Leadership
- Practices
- Design
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Summary
Summary: A holistic network view of knowledge workers

The importance of a network perspective:
- In boundaryless organizations personal networks are becoming increasingly important.

Network change over time:
- The information networks we have looked at are much more dynamic than the awareness networks. This has important implications for how we intervene in networks.

Understanding and supporting individual effectiveness:
- Taking a holistic view of people’s networks help us to define how best to support knowledge workers.
Appendix
Selected publications on social networks

- **Books:**

- **Articles:**

- **White Papers:**