Social Networks

What is it?

Social Networks are relations among people who share interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections (i.e., work, community, or groups). Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter and Google+ are some examples of services that help facilitate social networking. In a decade's worth of research, one MIT expert indicated that "engineers and scientists were roughly five times [more] likely to turn to a person for information as to an impersonal source such as a database of file cabinet."[1] In other settings, research has consistently shown that "who[m] you know has a significant impact on what you come to know because relationships are critical for obtaining information, solving problems and learning how to do your work."[2]

How do I start?[3]

Most leaders have only a vague idea of the networks around them and often don't consider the possibility of trying to manage them to boost their organizations' performance.

Image Source: Activate Networks

A decade of research has shown that those who are in the top 20% performer category throughout their careers tend to tap into networks to compensate for weaknesses in formal structures and obtain a multiplier effect on key talent and expertise in their organization. When building their social networks, top performers consider the following:

- **Manage the center of the network:** They open collaborative bottlenecks and develop high performers who make them and their colleagues more effective

- **Leverage the periphery of the network:** They rapidly integrate newcomers and engage under-connected high performers

- **Selectively bridge organizational silos:** They facilitate effective collaboration at key intersections in the network (bridging organizational lines or physical distance)

- **Develop awareness of colleagues' expertise throughout the network:** They ensure that the best expertise in a network is known and brought to bear on new problems and opportunities

- **Minimize insularity:** They manage targeted relations with key internal and external clients and stakeholders

Image Source: Kinetic Knowledge

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[1] Allen, T. (1977). *Managing the Flow of Technology.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
[2] Cross, R., & Parker, A. (2004). *The Hidden Power of Social Networks.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
[3] Activate Networks. http://www.activatenetworks.net/how-it-works/

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Important Tips[4]

- Be aware and stay open to reaching out to experts outside your immediate network. Networks naturally evolve to become more closely knit, leading to insularity.
- Leverage the tendency for people to gravitate to only a few advisors for development needs.
- As your role changes, recognize how your needs have changed. You must adjust your network to include people that can help you fulfill new responsibilities and expand your skill set.
- Make sure your role, career goals, and responsibilities are not static. You must purposefully manage your network, ensuring that it provides the information, support and expertise you require.

How can I learn more?

- **NASA Knowledge Notebook – Social Knowledge**

  http://appel.nasa.gov/2006/07/01/the-knowledge-notebook-dont-neglect-social-knowledge/

- **Create a Social Network Analysis**

  http://www.activatenetworks.net/how-it-works/

- **Building a Social Network**

  http://fortune.com/2012/01/24/the-real-way-to-build-a-social-network/

- **Five Easy Steps to Building a Network Profile**

  http://www.designdamage.com/from-social-networking-to-profile-building-5-easy-steps/#axzz3IgPMQFXy

- **NASA Knowledge Notebook – Knowledge is Social**

  http://appel.nasa.gov/2012/11/01/the-knowledge-notebook-where-is-the-knowledge-at-nasa/

- **NASA Knowledge Map**

  http://km.nasa.gov/knowledge-map/

- **NASA Knowledge Network**

  http://km.nasa.gov/knowledge-network/