

TO GET WHERE YOU'RE GOING YOU NEED A MAP

Having a schematic showing you who really works with who in your organisation can uncover all kinds of interesting things.

—
by JANINE MACE

Imagine being able to pinpoint who you really need to get onside in order to accelerate change through the business. And it's not the CEO or senior managers.

Sound fanciful?

Well not if you are using tools that map the invisible social networks and connections within an organisation, explains Cai Kjaer, a partner at consulting firm Optimice, which uses specialised tools to chart organisational connections.

"They provide an X-ray of the relationships and how the business works," he says.

Unlike organisational charts, social networks take the form of the webs of trusted relationships employees forge to perform work. These can cover everything from routine work to socialising, innovating, mentoring and expertise sharing. Research

"THE WAY WORK IS EVOLVING SHOWS CONNECTEDNESS IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT, SO MAPPING IS A USEFUL TOOL TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT INTERNAL CONNECTIONS."

PENNY LOVETT, FORMER HR DIRECTOR,
BUPA AUSTRALIA

indicates just a few per cent of employees are 'super connectors' and play roles such as 'hubs', 'gatekeepers' and 'covert brokers'.

Penny Lovett, former HR director at Bupa Australia, believes identifying these networks is becoming more important with growing workplace flexibility.

"The way work is evolving shows connectedness is increasingly important, so mapping is a really useful tool to find out more about internal connections," she says.

"When you think about organisational mapping and networks, traditionally they show a formal hierarchy, but everyone knows work and influence flows through an organisation in a different way to the chart. By understanding this web and pattern within an organisation, it can drive performance to a higher level."

UNKNOWN BUT VITAL

Informal networks are at the heart of the push for greater use of social media in organisations. As Kjaer notes, "The rise of LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook shows the inherent power of networks."

Mapping an organisational network can identify hugely influential people who may be largely invisible to management, but essential to making things happen within the organisation.

Lovett believes mapping is "a way to lift up the hood of an organisation" and provide it with an edge. "Mapping network and cooperative flows means you can see the key influencers and connectors and where there is strong cooperation. It gives the organisation the ability to address its failure points," she explains.

Kjaer agrees that identifying and mapping this information is valuable. "Social network analysis (SNA) is increasingly important, as managers need to identify and tap into these invisible networks."

Peter Williams, head of Deloitte's Centre for the Edge Australia, believes identifying super connectors can improve organisational collaboration and innovation. To leverage their influence, the firm has mapped this group internally using a mix of email, phone, data and Yammer records.

"We asked who are the big 'hubs' in the network and who is the 'glue'. Understanding who the glue is in an organisation is very important - if the glue is removed problems can occur," he explains. Hubs are seen as the important (and not in a conventional status type of way) people in an organisation's network and the glue is their connections. "Organisations often underestimate how important these people are."

An often-quoted case study demonstrating this occurred in the US, where a low-level administrator was terminated in a cost-cutting exercise. After her departure, the organisation found she was the key 'hub' for millions of dollars in sponsorship and tradeshow contacts,

most of which were lost following her departure. From an HR perspective, there are huge opportunities to use SNA right across the activity cycle and, in particular, with new hires.

"It can take six months to get a new hire on board, but if you connect them to the right people, it can dramatically decrease that time and increase the speed at which they can build relationships," says Kjaer.

Williams agrees the speed of on-boarding can be increased through internal social networks. "It allows people to feel part of something quickly and allows you to promote key cultural values and what is good about the organisation."

Mapping social networks also allows HR and senior management to determine whether connections are occurring the right way within the business.

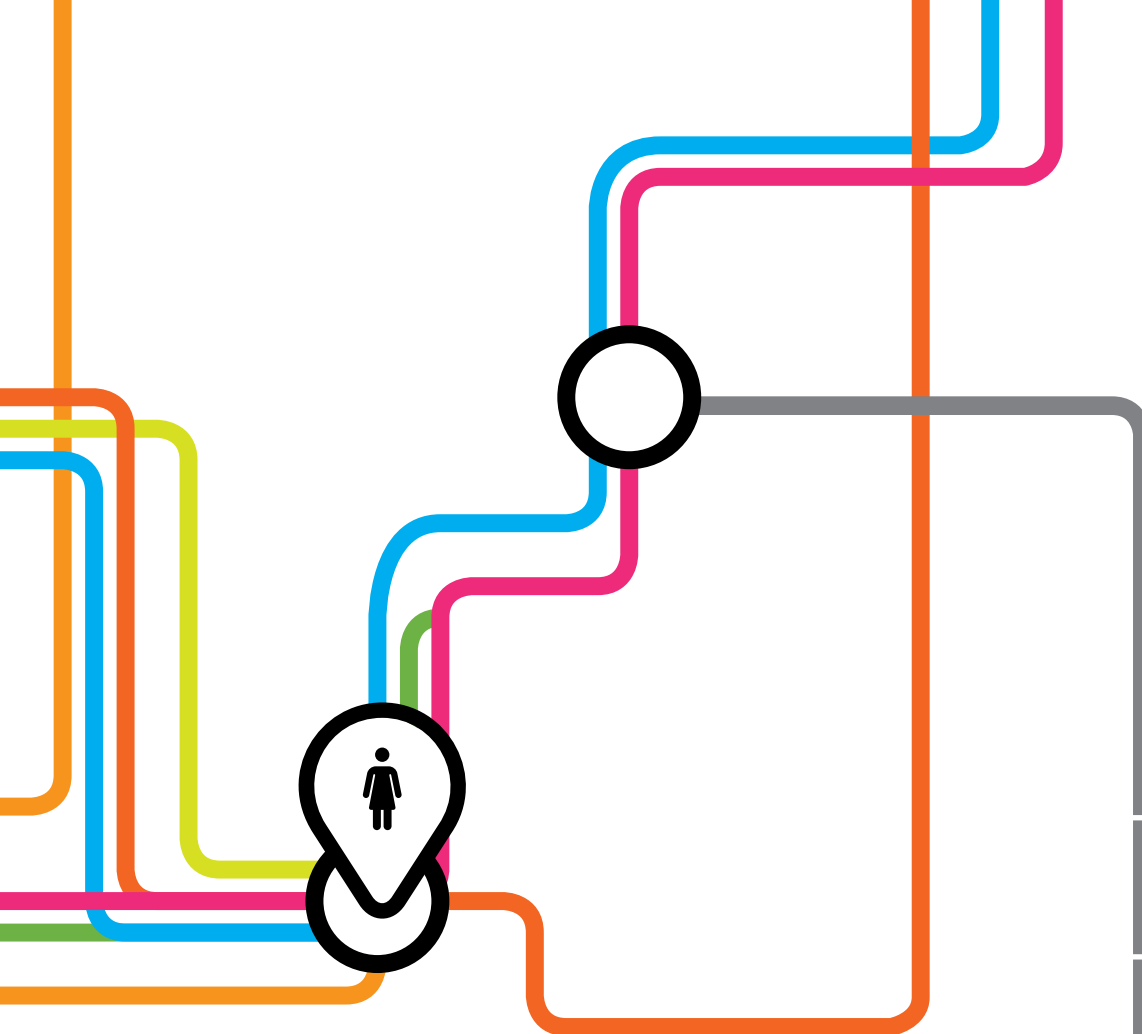
"HR has a huge role to play in identifying whether these interactions are right and the way management wants the organisation to work," Kjaer explains. He cites the example of mapping an inter-national airline to determine team interactions. "This led to deep conversations about the way they worked together and those who were on the fringe of the network."

HR can also use the data to undertake interventions to improve collaboration, change behaviours and resolve personal conflicts.

"The maps allow you to be very specific about the level of the intervention and this can be down

"THE RISE OF LINKEDIN, TWITTER AND FACEBOOK SHOWS THE INHERENT POWER OF NETWORKS."

CAI KJAER,
PARTNER, OPTIMICE



to the individual or team level,” Kjaer explains. “You can then re-map to see if the relationships have changed. This is a concrete way to prove the value of HR.”

Analysing hidden networks can also assist HR in talent identification and retention.

“You must have special skills if you are a key ‘hub’ person and have been there for only a short time. This is usually due to either a structural reason or, more likely, being a high performer,” Kjaer says. By identifying these individuals, they can then be included in teams for mission-critical projects and in programs for talent and knowledge retention.

“You need to identify what networks people have and determine how to ensure their relationships get handed over when they leave,” Kjaer says. “SNA brings visibility and transparency to a process that was largely hidden before.”

The value of informal networks was highlighted recently in a successful change management in the July/August issue of *Harvard Business Review*. “When it comes to change agents, our study shows that network centrality is critical to success, whether you’re a middle manager or a high-ranking boss,” the authors noted.

During organisational transformations, SNA can help map the shifting processes and relationships, explains Christine Gardner, an organisational development manager within the rail industry. “Through simulations, you can see the impacts of

potential changes. This leads to an increased understanding of where risks creep in and where HR may need to make interventions,” she says.

“It’s a very valuable tool and a great opportunity for people in HR, especially if you are shifting people and processes around. It helps ensure you are not inadvertently introducing risk into your system.”

Lovett agrees that SNA can be very powerful in a merger and acquisition situation and when integrating business resources. “It helps with planning change activities and making them happen.”

Ensuring teams that work collaboratively are located close together is important, so Kjaer often works with architects and building designers to ensure team proximity following an organisational restructure. Key influencers can also use their position as a hub within a network to spread information quickly as they have a large number of connections.

“In a limited budget environment, if you can identify a subset of people that will go out and influence others, it leads to a multiplier effect and may be a more efficient and cost-effective way to drive a new initiative,” Kjaer says.

“It will not replace ‘town hall’ meetings, but if you target the ‘king pins’ in an organisation, they can be used as advocates, or to help limit antagonistic views,” Williams agrees

How HR can use social networks



Accelerate change management initiatives



Identify and retain talent



Measure the success of integrations



Seed mission-critical teams



Create mentoring pairs



Accelerate the onboarding process



Promote the brand

getting these hubs onboard can help ensure the success of an initiative. "Those people who are most connected can help get information out and find out when things are happening. They can drive the overall strategy of the organisation," he notes. "If you can pull in and leverage the social connectors, it can be a major benefit for the organisation."

Although most organisations have numerous performance and organisational metrics, there is usually little hard data on how people collaborate. HR can use SNA to gain hard evidence on collaboration patterns and the success or failure of business integrations at the people level.

"It is evidence-based, so you can't rig the results and they are very valid for business decision-making," Kjaer says.

Network hubs generally know who and what is going on and where certain skills reside, so they have a vital role in driving innovation. They can help people build support for process innovation and deal with business exceptions and unusual situations.

Social networks can also assist with brand promotion – particularly with potential employees. "Understanding who the super connectors are is important, but it is also important to know their level of external connectedness and ability to link to others and amplify messages. For example, we use JoinMe@Deloitte and get employees to post job openings, as the networks of our people are larger than Deloitte's networks," Williams explains. "These links and external networks become a massive amplifier for the organisation's message." He believes new social media technologies represent an invaluable way to develop and leverage the power of networks within an organisation. "I see these tools as having endless uses and encourage HR people to see them as being about people-to-people communication. As communication is an HR professional's key role, they should be front and centre in their use," Williams says. "HR practitioners are often early adopters, but they need to drive that back through the organisation to encourage usage and to get older employees active with these tools as well."

HR needs to lead change in this area to capture the business benefits of social networks. "An organisation that is well glued together, where new ideas flourish and where people can pick up and run with them, is the type CEOs dream about. These tools can deliver all of this," Williams says. "They are not a time waster and in fact we are seeing the opposite, as tools like Yammer increase productivity and strengthen organisations." **HRm**

IDENTIFYING THE FUTURE

One person who knows the benefits of social network analysis is Christine Gardner.

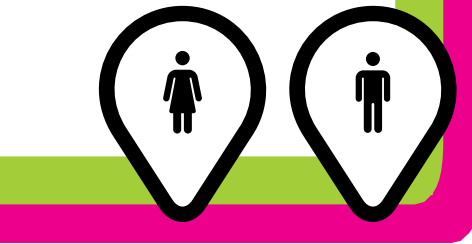
A change manager who now works as an organisational development manager within the rail industry, Gardner was responsible for implementing several SNA projects at a major state government rail organisation. The projects covered succession planning within the engineering division and collaboration within the operations management and timetable areas.

One of the key benefits was hard data. "These tools provide good evidence-based information, rather than soft, 'touchy feely' opinions. This can be very important when working with engineers and operational people," Gardner explains.

For the organisation, this was important, as the technical and engineering areas were very wary of consultants and their 'bag of tricks'. "They are very pragmatic, operationally focused people who had a problem," she says.

The projects looked at the organisation's graduate and future leaders program and ways of improving collaboration and connectedness up and down stream. "Working with our graduates and future leaders, we wanted to understand those people who were one to two degrees out and who could help graduates settle in and hit the ground running. We wanted to identify who would play a connectedness role."

"It provides insightful scenarios for leaders and helps determine the investments for the future."



Gardner commissioned Optimice to map the organisation's networks and gain a better understanding of roles and interactions. "We used that knowledge to find people who could play a strong mentoring and connecting role." The networks unearthed during the mapping process also assisted with knowledge management and succession planning. It pinpointed the people who held deep critical knowledge to ensure other team members had exposure to them two to three years out from a potential retirement or departure.

"We used it to accelerate the process of shoring up the risk of losing critical knowledge. This is very important in the rail industry where there is a lot of experience and knowledge built up over time," Gardner explains. "It was important to give management visibility of how the technical skill base would be three to four years out."

The SNA maps also allowed the organisation to test different HR scenarios. "It allows you to create simulations of what will happen so you can shore up your risk areas and plan ahead. This provides insightful scenarios for leaders and helps determine the investments for the future," Gardner says.

Mapping connections also focused employees on the value the business places on collaboration and innovation. Gardner says: "It highlights that people collaborating is a valuable part of a role and the giving and receiving of advice is an important part of how you do business."