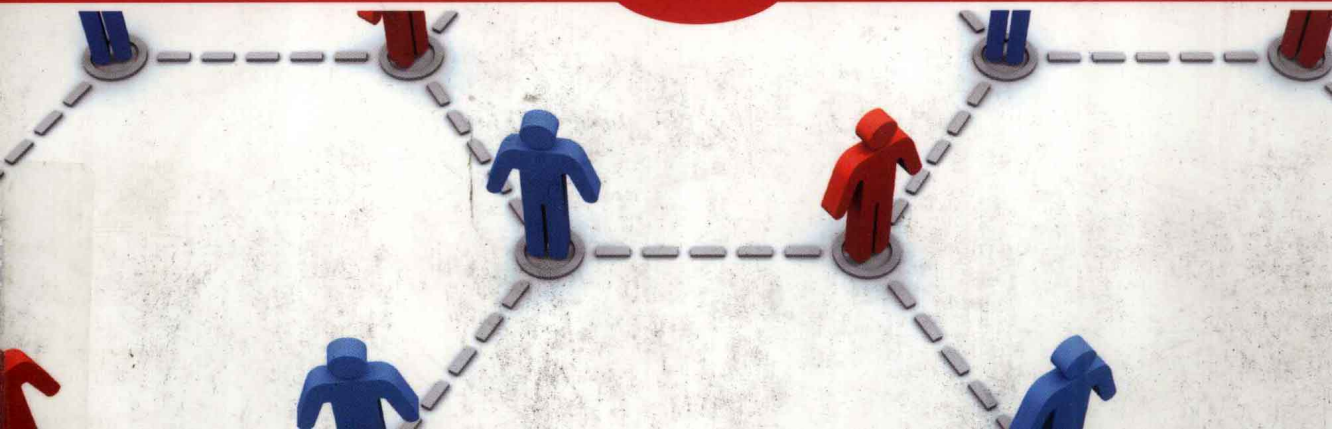




THE ORGANIZATIONAL NETWORK FIELDBOOK

BEST PRACTICES, TECHNIQUES, AND EXERCISES TO
DRIVE ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION AND PERFORMANCE

ROB CROSS, JEAN SINGER, SALLY COLELLA,
ROBERT J. THOMAS, AND YAARIT SILVERSTONE




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EDITORS

Rob Cross, Jean Singer, Sally Colella,
Robert J. Thomas, and Yaarit Silverstone



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome! We wrote this book as an effort to move from theory to practice in the important domain of organizational networks. Recent books have helped to explain why leaders should pay attention to informal networks, how a network analysis can yield surprising insights into how work gets done in an organization, and what principles inform a network perspective. In this book, we speak to those of you who are wondering what comes next. Having examined the networks in your organization, how can you use what you've learned? Having adopted a network perspective, how can you embed it into your organization's operations? What approaches can help you either repair specific trouble spots in a network or develop the kind of collaborative environment that can yield tangible performance improvements?

Much has been written on networks and network analysis recently. In part, this is a product of social media and networking technologies, which have altered—to some degree—how people connect in and outside of organizations. But this focus on networks also seems to be a broad response to a competitive environment that has sent leaders scrambling to find new and different paradigms that will boost performance. Most leaders are desperately seeking a multiplier effect—a way to get more from their organizations' talent and other resources. But after a decade when almost every large organization in the world adopted some form of matrix structure, applied yet another technology enabling employees to instantaneously

connect, or adopted a cultural change program urging more collaboration, what we have to show for it is a lot of overloaded employees.

In response, more and more leaders are coming to understand that behind any new formal structure or collaborative technology is a web of relationships that drives growth, innovation, and overall organizational performance. Indeed, business value is increasingly created through the rapid formation (and dissolution) of networks of people who represent expertise, critical resources, and decision-making power. Using the tools and techniques of organizational network analysis (ONA), managers can map and assess these relationships between people and groups. By challenging the often implicit and flawed assumption that “more is better” when it comes to collaboration and networks, and by making visible the disconnects between existing networks and those required to support an organization’s strategy, the approach helps managers see and take action on the traditionally invisible relationships through which value is either created or depleted.

But after conducting an organizational network analysis and examining the results—perhaps seeing fragmentation between groups that need to be tightly connected, talented employees whose expertise is not sufficiently leveraged, or an excess of connectivity that is slowing everything down—leaders then ask, “Now what? What do we do with these insights? What are some effective ways to act on them?” This book is our response to those questions. Our purpose is not to advance the scholarship on organizational networks but to give leaders some practical approaches for strengthening the key networks in their organizations.

Most of the contributors to this book represent the corporate members of The Network Roundtable, a group of nearly 80 organizations—including large corporations, consulting firms, and government agencies—that formed to advance the understanding of how network analysis can be used to enhance organizational and personal performance. We asked these professionals, all of them highly sophisticated users of network ideas, to describe the most effective approaches they have used to strengthen connectivity and the organizational context in which they implemented changes. The result is not just a compilation of highly practical network-building activities; it’s also a collection of stories about organizations working to drive a paradigm shift, from a focus on formal structures to an understanding of flexible networks.

We have divided the network interventions into five thematic sections, but many of them could serve multiple purposes or could be tweaked to suit various agendas and organizational circumstances. Some of the contributors present workshops and programs in great detail, providing interventions that you could use in your own organization tomorrow. Others describe broader network-based approaches and therefore offer valuable principles and lessons. Some of the workshops and exercises presented here could work as standalone network-building

activities; others could be a component of a leadership development program or of a large-scale change effort. It's important to note that not all of the interventions must be preceded by a full organizational network analysis. Many contributors here report that although it is ideal to go into these activities with insights from an ONA, organizations can reap benefits even if they forgo that first step.

We invite you to explore all of the network-building approaches presented here and to consider which might be appropriate for your organization. In doing so, we hope that you will be better able to reap the considerable benefits that well-managed organizational networks can offer.

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