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Leadership of Organizational Networks: An Exploration of the Relationship between Leadership and Social Networks in Organizations

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Abstract: Viable and productive social networks in organizations result in many positive outcomes, thus, leaders should intentionally desire to build the strength of these networks. Traditional leadership approaches have tended to ignore the important role of organizational networks in leadership, yet leadership effectiveness in many organizations now hinges upon the leader's ability to operate and lead within a networked context. This multiple-case study used social network analysis (SNA) and in-depth interviews to explore the attributes and behaviors that are related to acts of leadership and building viable, persistent organizational networks. A broad range of possible antecedents has been proposed in the literature—but most of the assumptions have been poorly explored until now. The findings of this study suggest that leaders can influence networks by understanding and employing the concepts of awareness, trust, and intentionality. The factors identified in this study are the first steps in helping leaders understand how to become network leaders.

Keywords: Social Networks, Organizational Networks, Social Network Analysis, Leadership, Network Leadership, SNA, Collaboration, ONA

Introduction

VIABLE AND PRODUCTIVE social networks in organizations result in many positive outcomes for organizations. Thus, leaders should intentionally desire to build the strength of social networks and embed them into the culture within their groups and organizations. These organizational networks can change cultures, enable collaboration, adapt to globalization, leverage Information and Communication Technology (ICT), enable organizational learning, encourage innovation, and bring value to organizations and their clients. A strong and viable organizational network provides access to others, to information, to ideas, and to resources—and those connections assist in solving problems and creating new opportunities.

In globalized, interconnected, matrixed, virtual, and knowledge-intensive organizations, attempts at sense-making can no longer use organizational charts or formal structures as the only guide. Parkhe, Wasserman, and Ralston (2006) posited, “Of all the phenomena that have gripped the business world in recent years, few match the impact of networks. Quite literally, networks are reshaping the global business architecture” (p. 560). Parkhe et al. go on to say that network theory, and the implications of network theory, affects “management, strategy, organizational behavior, human resources management, entrepreneurship, alliances, knowledge and learning, and international business” (p. 567).

However, intentional network-building behaviors are complex, elusive, and have not been positively identified or empirically tested at group and organizational levels. Leadership approaches and paradigms have tended to ignore the important role of organizational networks in leadership (Bass, 1990; Brass, 2001; Burt, 1997; Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2002). Effective leadership requires more than just individual knowledge, skills, and attributes; it also requires the development of relationships with others (Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Cross & Parker, 2004; Grayson & Baldwin, 2007; Greenleaf, 1977; Ibarra & Hunter, 2007; Kanter, 1982; Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Brass and Krackhardt (1999) stated “Actors are embedded in a complex web (or network) of interrelationships with other actors. These networks of relationships provide the opportunities and constraints that may be the causal forces of leadership” (p. 180).

From a network perspective, Burt (2000) and Klein, Lim, Saltz, and Mayer (2004) proposed that research has been focused on the consequences of network strength rather than the antecedents that build and encourage networks in an organization's culture. Kilduff and Tsai (2003) stated, “Most... tend to capture snapshots of network processes” (p. 109) without a clear understanding of how the network was developed or changed. Kilduff and Tsai suggested that network research is still absent “a fully adequate explanatory model for the actual formation, reproduction, and transformation of social networks



themselves” (as cited in Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1413), and that research is needed to analyze “individual actor attributes, motivations, cognitions and behaviors in actual social context” (Kilduff & Tsai, p. 67). Many scholars (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003; Bovasso, 1992; Cross & Baird, 2000; Cross & Parker, 2004; Cross, Parker, Prusak, & Borgatti, 2001; Hutt, Stafford, Walker, & Reingen, 2000; Levin & Cross, 2004; Nohria, 1992; Rollag, Oarise, & Cross, 2005) have suggested attributes and behaviors that may lead to network building (Table 1), but those assumptions have not been tested.

Understanding networks and their antecedents is important, as collaboration is now required across functional, social, demographic, cultural, and organizational boundaries (Charan, 1999; Cross & Parker, 2004). Networks in groups are associated with many positive outcomes—social identity, teamwork, individual performance, economic results, job satisfaction, learning, innovation, career advancement, and organizational performance (Baker, 2000; Berry, 2004; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988; Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002; Cross & Parker; Davenport, 2005; Dickson, Rainey, & Hargie, 2003; Gargiulo & Benassi, 2000; Hutt et al., 2000; Monge & Contractor, 2003; Nebus, 2006; Rollag et al., 2005; Seibert, Sparrowe, & Liden, 2003; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Because organizational networks have shown to be related to many positive outcomes, a better understanding of the concepts of network leadership and network building will provide value to organizations.

Leadership is changing from individual and dyadic relations to multiple relationships across numerous boundaries (Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005), yet leadership theories have not sufficiently considered relationships outside of the dyadic nature of the leader-follower relationship (Bono & Anderson, 2005; Sparrowe & Liden, 2005). Organizations are changing to highly-matrixed, evolving organisms, and organizational performance is primarily a result of the effectiveness of cross-functional processes (Rummler & Brache, 1995). However, the organizational network literature has underemphasized the

importance of the formal dyadic relationship between leader and member (Burt, 1992). Thus, leadership research and organizational network research each recognize the significance of the relationships that are outside of their current focus (Sparrowe & Liden) and research is needed to address the gap in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the beliefs, attitudes, attributes, and behaviors that are related to acts of leadership and building strong, viable organizational networks. As outlined in Table 1, a broad range of possible antecedents have been proposed that relate to leadership and networks—but most of them have been poorly explored in the literature.

Although there has been no empirical research regarding acts of leadership and their effect on organizational networks, there has been much research regarding organizational networks, leadership, and the possible intersection of the two fields. There are a number of leadership attitudes, attributes, beliefs, and behaviors that may contribute to the building and shaping of networks. Studies have used personal characteristics as antecedents and networks (structure, node position, strength) as outcomes. Those studies have investigated homophily, education, cognitive complexity, social status, tenure, communication skills, self-monitoring, and locus of control (Albrecht, 1979; Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Mayo, 1998; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001; Monge, Edwards, & Kirste, 1983; Monge & Eisenberg, 1987; Roberts & O’Reilly, 1979). However, research is needed at the group and whole-network level in organizations to understand how individual acts of leadership affect network evolution, strength, and structure at the group level and organizational level (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Doreian, 2006; Monge & Contractor, 2003). This study uses group-level and network-level measurements as outcomes, and actor-level attributes, behaviors, and cognitions as antecedents.

Table 1: Suggested Antecedents and Barriers to Networking in the Literature

Attributes (antecedents)	Behaviors (antecedents)	Cognitive (antecedents)	Barriers
Affective Relations	Accessible	Accurate perceptions	Authenticity
Authenticity	Brokerage	Accepts ambiguity	Alignment

Energy	Coach / model	Awareness	Homophily
Homophily	Collectivism / integration	Conflict management	Negative relationships
Interaction Skills	Communication	Culture / norms	Organization structure
Personality	Intentionality	Experience / tenure	Personality
Proximity	Power	Horizontal thinking	Performance / task
Structure	Reciprocity	Motivation / recognition	
Trust	Tactics	Value / commitment	

The critical questions for this study were: What is the effect of leadership on organizational networks, and how does the process of building networks take place from the perspective of leaders and followers? What acts of leadership encourage and facilitate relationships that become linkages and organizational networks? ICT tools enable collaboration and, to some extent, encourage collaboration and networking. But what beliefs and behaviors from individuals encourage and build a climate of collaboration and networking?

This study focused on task-oriented, information-sharing networks between individuals and groups in one large, highly matrixed, and knowledge-intensive information-technology company. The study was nomothetic (de Vaus, 2001) in that it focused on leadership behaviors that affect networks and not on other factors that may affect networks such as formal structure, work management practices, human resource practices, organizational culture, type of tasks to be performed, design of the facilities, ICT, friendship, or homophily.

Method

A two-stage process was used to explore this phenomenon. The first stage employed quantitative social network analysis (SNA) to reveal the ties and networks from the perspective of individuals in order to do case screening (de Vaus, 2001; Patton, 2002). That is, the first stage was a quantitative measurement (SNA) of formally established groups using extent of networking (egocentric network size) as the outcome (Collins & Clark, 2003; Oh, Labianca, & Chung, 2006) in order to select a purposeful sample for further study. The groups were based on formally defined groups, each under one first-line manager (FLM), but were not defined as teams because they do not collaborate within the group to accomplish common objectives (Stewart, Manz, & Sims, 1999).

The second (inductive) stage used in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data from the selected cases. This approach has been advocated by network researchers who suggest there is a natural fit between quantitative SNA and qualitative studies (R. Burt, personal communication, August 4, 2007; Emirbayer, 1997; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003).

The participants were North American sales professionals in a large information technology and services company. Their work is highly matrixed, virtual, collaborative, knowledge intensive, technology intensive, and structurally distributed across multiple organizational and physical boundaries. The organization provides a rich context for studying network leadership, as the selected groups and their leaders rely heavily on resources and linkages outside of their immediate group. The industry, structure, and type of task were controlled by using similar groups in one large organization (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Eighty members in 12 groups, all with similar roles, were invited to participate in the study.

The first stage used a paper-based, egocentric network survey. Demographic information was collected for department, age group, gender, tenure in role, and organizational tenure. Egocentric designs do not require a priori enumeration of a population of nodes, instead, they ask the individual (ego) to recall and provide a list of names (alters) that are members of ego's network. The instructions stated that this was a task and collaboration network assessment and the request for alters was being limited to first-order work relations (Marsden, 2002; Nebus, 2006):

Please identify up to 20 people who are important in terms of providing you with information to do your work or helping you meet your client's needs. These people can come from within [company name] or outside.

The quantitative network and demographic data were analyzed using SPSS and UCINET (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). The extent of networking (group network strength) was determined based on the mean degree of individual egocentric network size at the formal group level (Collins & Clark, 2003; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003; Oh et al., 2006; Weare, Loges, & Oztas, 2007). Group-level network strength was determined by mean degree because it is less sensitive to group size than the standard network density measure (Weare et al.), and because it controls for response-rate effects.

The six groups that were selected during the first stage moved to the second stage for further study. In-depth group interviews were conducted to uncover the leadership antecedents of the networks. The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed to explore the significant statements, to provide a description that captures the essence of the data, and to develop cross-case themes (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2002).

Results

The results endorse many of the assumptions offered in the literature, providing empirical support for un-

tested assumptions and suggesting a framework for future study. The response rate for the survey was over 90% and participants were normally distributed across groups and demographic attributes. The overall extent of networking was extremely high, as most respondents nominated 20 alters. Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations (Spearman’s rho) are depicted in Table 2. *T*-Tests considering outdegrees by gender were not significant. As expected, tenure was associated with age group (tenure in the company, $\rho = .65, p < .01$; tenure in role, $\rho = .35, p < .01$). Also as expected, tenure in company was associated with tenure in role ($\rho = .46, p < .01$) and with network size ($\rho = .25, p < .05$).

The quantitative analysis of primary importance for case selection was differences between groups regarding the size of their networks (outdegrees). A one-way analysis of variance indicated that the groups did not differ on the number of individual outdegrees (all *F* tests were nonsignificant). Because all groups had similar yet extensive networks, six cases were randomly selected for the interviews. Forty-one participants engaged in the second stage, including 33 members of the six groups, the six group leaders (FLMs), and two executives.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Demographics and Outdegrees (N = 79)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Age Group	3.41	1.16	—			
2. Tenure Company	2.91	0.91	.71**	—		
3. Tenure Role	2.13	0.76	.34**	.41**	—	
4. Outdegrees	18.49	3.23	.09	.25*	-.13	—

Note. Demographics are ordinal. Age group is coded 2 = 20s . . . 6 = 60s. Tenure(s) are coded 1 = less than 1 year, 2 = 1-5 years, 3 = 5-10 years, 4 = 10+ years. Outdegrees are ratio, capped at 20 nominations.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

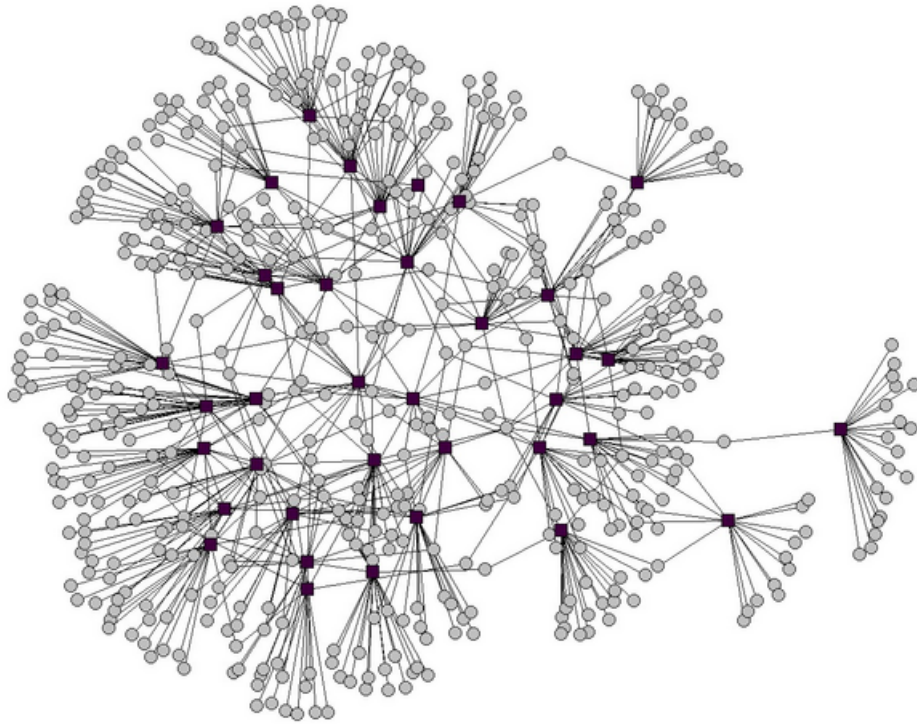


Figure 1: Visualization of the Egocentric Network of the First Unit

From a network perspective, Figure 1 visually reveals the egocentric networks of the participants in one unit of six groups (36 egos, 554 unique alters, 667 ties). The black squares represent the egos and the grey circles represent the alters.

The alters were extremely dispersed, leading to a deeper examination of organizational boundaries. It was determined that the unit collaborated with 180 other business units across organizational, functional,

and physical boundaries. That is, the 36 participants from the business unit shared information with alters from 180 other business units to accomplish their tasks and meet their client's needs. Figure 2 visualizes that dispersion; the shapes of the nodes represent the functional divisions of each business unit. The heavier the line (darker links), the more ties that existed between the two business units (ego unit and alter unit).

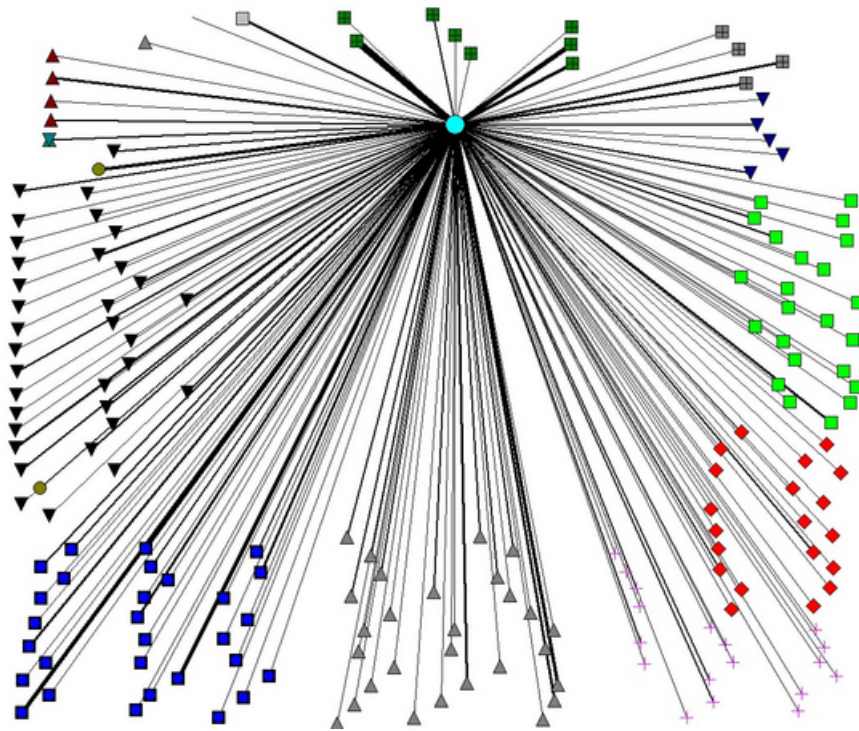


Figure 2: Visualization of One Unit’s Egocentric Network as Shown by Business Unit (Individual Nodes) and Functional Division (Shapes of the Nodes)

The qualitative results from the interviews were robust, suggesting three primary themes (awareness, trust, intentionality) and three secondary themes (energy, alignment and measurements, learning and

diversity). Each of the three primary themes includes multiple sub-themes as outline in Table 3, and these themes were evident across all six cases.

Table 3: Themes and Sub-Themes

Primary Themes		
Awareness	Trust	Intentionality
Accurate perceptions/ understanding	Benevolence-based	Apply/action
Benefits / importance	• Authenticity/ sincerity	Expect/embed
Values networks	• Individualist/ collectivist	Tactics
Task	• Best interests in mind	• Modeling
• Task defines	Competence-based	• Coaching
• Task limits	• Competence	• Events/programs
	• Experience / tenure	• Mapping
	• Responsiveness	• Skills
Secondary Themes		
Energy	Alignment and measurements	Learning and diversity

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the characteristics and behaviors that are related to acts of leadership and building healthy organizational networks. The results of this study are the possible leadership antecedents and barriers to organizational networks.

The network analysis found no statistical differences between the networks of the 12 groups in the sample. Tenure in role and tenure in organization were statistically related to outdegrees but they only accounted for 10% of the variance. It seems that the demands of role and task overwhelmed any potential variances between FLMs and the extent of networking displayed by their groups.

The long-term culture embedded by the senior executive also contributed to the high levels of networking in the organization. He was recognized by the participants as an effective networker, and he had been in a position of influence for a long time over this population. The participants agreed with Kilduff and Tsai's (2003) view that networks are responsive to the ongoing efforts of individuals, primarily the senior executive.

Specifically, the findings suggest that leaders can influence networks by understanding and employing the concepts of awareness, trust, and intentionality. The bulk of the discussions were on trust and intentionality. The discussions on awareness were substantial, but primarily in the context of operational networks.

Awareness. Awareness was a major theme in this study, supporting several topics from the literature such as awareness, accurate perceptions, horizontal thinking, values (i.e., are networks valued), and commitment to networking (Cross & Parker, 2004; Hutt et al., 2000; IBM Center, 2006). Leaders first determine if networking is important in their environment and if it is needed to accomplish their objectives. They also consider if networking is valued, and if they should advise the organization that they are committed to networking (Hutt et al.; IBM Center). The current findings supported the literature that leaders are aware of networks (awareness, horizontal thinking; Cross & Parker) and value networks because of the numerous benefits to the organization (Berry, 2004; Davenport, 2005; Rollag et al., 2005).

Participants who networked extensively were able to cite the benefits and importance of networking as applied to their performance and their careers. Those with more experience and more career success tended to display a long-term perspective on the importance and benefits, while those with less did not seem to understand long-term, purposeful, and strategic networking. Less experienced participants in this study admitted they were unaware of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of others and unaware of tools or pro-

cesses to reach out to potential collaborators. The literature had suggested that awareness of knowledge, skills, and abilities is one of the first steps in network building (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Cross et al., 2001). A few participants were not convinced of the return on investment or the plausibility of networking in a very large, multinational organization.

A sub-theme under awareness was accurate perceptions and understanding. Awareness and understanding of networks in context is essential so that networking can be supported, embedded in the culture, and expected by leaders. As identified in the literature (Cross & Parker, 2004; Hutt et al., 2000; IBM Center, 2006), aware leaders support networking by removing barriers that inhibit networking such as alignment, measurements, task guidelines, process, and lack of opportunity.

The role and task of participants in this study, as defined by the organization, led participants to understand the role of networking concerning short-term task achievement. However, there was confusion regarding operational networking versus personal networking versus strategic networking. Selfish and career networking was perceived by participants as vicious or political behavior, and had a negative effect on networking.

Task assignments and achievement were a significant contextual influence in this study, as suggested by the literature (Brass, 1995; Burt, 2005). Task defined and required networking yet restricted the time available to network; task did not support or prescribe long-term, strategic networking (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). That is, most participants did not consider networking in the context of customers and co-workers "for life." Networking seemed confined to certain times, places, and contexts. Ibarra and Hunter discussed this dilemma as they described the differences between operational, personal, and strategic networking. Although not surprising in a sales context, most of the participants and most of the networks in this study were operational in nature. Aside from the executives, very few of the participants seem to understand the role of personal networking in building network skills and the long-term value of strategic networking.

Trust. As suggested often in the literature (Abrams et al., 2003; Cross et al., 2005; Hutt et al., 2000; Levin & Cross, 2004), benevolence-based trust and competence-based trust were key topics in the data. Benevolence-based trust (affective relations) was important in two primary contexts, authenticity and "best interests in mind."

First, the participants were concerned about the authenticity and sincerity of networking from their peers and supervisors, which is very consistent with the literature on networks (Baker, 2000; Cross & Parker, 2004; Davenport, 2005; Grayson & Baldwin,

2007) and on virtual teams (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007). Although the participants were persistent in pursuing clients, they were easily discouraged from networking when they observed attitudes or behaviors from their leaders or peers that demonstrated a lack of concern, sincerity, and authenticity. Baker posited that “managing relationships” could be authentic—not manipulative—yet manipulation was a major point of contention among the participants in this study. The more experienced participants seemed to understand that authentically managing relationships was essential to long term relationships and performance, and they suggested that the less experienced participants learn the concept of giving to others without keeping score (Fischer & Vilas, 1996).

Based on the present findings, this organization leaned toward the individualistic concerns outlined in the literature (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Pearce & Conger, 2003) and the tendency to focus on head-down task execution (Cross & Parker, 2004; Grayson & Baldwin, 2007). Early literature had hoped that network leaders could transcend self-interest, act as integrators and collectivists, and link resources into cohesive systems (Alvesson, 1992; Likert & Likert, 1976; Locke, 2003), but in this organization, personal or selfish networking seemed to be more common than networking for the benefit of others and the benefit of the organization.

Second, the participants questioned whether corporate (non-local) leadership had the participants’ best interests in mind. Lack of openness and consideration (opportunity to provide input) caused most of the concern. Local executives were more trusted by the participants, largely because they exhibited good interaction skills and open communication (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; J. Collins, 2001; Grayson & Baldwin, 2007; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005; Yukl, 2002).

The literature on affective relations in networking discussed psychological aspects of trust such as similarity, familiarity, physical attractiveness, and affective reciprocity (Ehrlich & Carboni, 2007), but the participants in this study seemed to be more influenced by the trust factors of authenticity and competence. Perceptions of competence-based trust in this study were based on the task competence, experience, and responsiveness of others. Given the operational nature of the networks in this study, “getting it done” and trusting those who can “get it done” were significant themes. Multiple opportunities to perform well together (with and for each other) over time led to long-term, competence-based trust. Participants also supported the literature’s view that experience and tenure might be important antecedents to network leadership (Burt, 2005; Pollock,

Porac, & Wade, 2004) because tenure and experience assist leaders in seeing and brokering connections.

Intentionality. The literature often proposed that intentionality might be the key missing ingredient in effective, sustained network building (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; Cross & Parker, 2004; Davenport, 2005; Grayson & Baldwin, 2007; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Intentional application and action with a long-term view, more so than a certain personality or attributes, are a way of avoiding the trap of reactive, operational networking (Ibarra & Hunter, 2007). Comments from executives in this study are consistent with the literature’s view that intentional leadership practices can affect the network and do result in individual and organizational performance improvements (Cross, 2005; Cross & Parker; IBM Center, 2006).

The executives understood the importance of expecting networking from their followers and embedding networking into the culture (Baker, 2000). However, most participants did not perceive that their first-line and second-line managers were effective networkers or that those managers expected the participants to be effective networkers. These results were consistent with the literature, in that leaders rarely take specific actions to demonstrate their support of organizational networks (Cross & Parker, 2004).

Aspects of intentionality were discussed by non-executive participants; however, most comments disclosed a lack of intentionality. Participants discussed networking in the context of their careers and their short-term tasks, but most did not seem to intentionally network for long-term performance and success.

Also as in the literature (Baker, 2000; Burt, 2005; Cross & Parker, 2004; Meshel, 2005), network tactics were discussed including modeling, coaching, events, mapping tools, and skills. Some examples of effective modeling by leaders were offered, but few were in the context of a leader-follower relationship. Of the coaching examples that were in a leader-follower context, nearly all were about career or short-term task achievement.

Most of the stories about events admitted that events were not viewed as effective for specific and intentional networking, which is consistent with the literature. The literature advocated face-to-face interactions as a way of improving networking, but events need to be specific and intentional by design (Cross & Parker, 2004).

Most participants were unaware of networking tools that could assist in relationship mapping, finding specific resources, or building community—even though those tools were available to them. ICT tools, however, were not a major topic in any of the discus-

sions and were not perceived as important antecedents to network building.

Secondary themes. Positive energy clearly added to positive perceptions of network leaders, but it was difficult to tell if participants viewed energy as a required behavior. They may have assumed its presence in effective networkers, and it was normally mentioned in context with personality and interaction skills. Positive energy and positive thinking discussions were in line with the literature's expectations (Cross & Parker, 2004; Ibarra & Hunter, 2007), especially the dimensions of personal engagement and the beliefs of progress and success.

Alignment and measurements were important issues in networking, both in the literature (Cross & Parker, 2004; IBM Center, 2006; IBM Institute, 2001; Hutt et al., 2000) and in this study. The data suggested that organizational networks do not flourish unless individuals are properly aligned, encouraged, and motivated by the organization, the leaders, and the measurements. Alignment and measurements (or lack thereof) affected both benevolence- and competence-based trust, supporting the literature's view that performance must be acknowledged (Baker, 2000; House & Dessler, 1974) and goals must be aligned (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003; Locke & Latham, 2002).

Learning and diversity (networking to learn; to learn about diverse others) were most often cited concerning well-connected friends, with only brief mentions in the context of work. However, some aspects of learning and diversity seemed related to authenticity (Baker, 2000) and brokerage (Burt, 2005), which are important topics in networking.

Most of the barriers cited in the literature were supported (as barriers) by the present findings. Barriers included lack of authenticity, lack of alignment, negative relationships, issues with organizational structure, annoying personalities, and performance/task issues. Negative relationships and annoying personalities may quickly derail networking (Klein et al., 2004; Labianca & Brass, 2006).

Several assumptions in the literature were not supported by this study, however, some of them (access, accepts ambiguity, reciprocity) may have been *assumed* in the context of this study and one of them (homophily) may have been politically incorrect to discuss in the group interviews.

Theoretical Propositions

Many of the factors revealed by this study—especially the theme of trust, the secondary themes, and the supporting factors—are common principles in leadership and organizational behavior. The other primary themes, awareness and intentionality, may be specific to network building in organizations that require networking to accomplish their goals.

Awareness of networks (primarily cognitive) and intentionality in initiating and developing networks (primarily behavioral) could be enacted underneath (in the context of) many different theories of leadership. Awareness and intentionality could be “things leaders do” regardless of their philosophy or style of leadership. Network leadership could be an extension or expansion of the dyadic leader-follower relationship. The concepts proposed by this study are not heroic actions; they are fundamental concepts that can be initiated by individuals at any level and in most organizations.

As mentioned previously, the experience and level (career success) of the participants was related to their perspective on network leadership. Less experienced participants assumed that networking was selfish and focused only on career, and they were unaware of the long-term purposes and benefits of networking. Networking, outside of short-term, operational networks, was not perceived as important and “expected” by leadership.

This supports Ibarra and Hunter's (2007) framework of three networks: operational, personal, and strategic. The discussions in this study changed as they moved from personal networks and friendship networks to organizational networks. The discussions on friendship networks started with personality characteristics and factors, but the discussions on organizational networks quickly transitioned to topics such as competence, effectiveness, performance, experience, alignment, and trust.

This study proposes that awareness, trust, and intentionality are important aspects of network leadership that must be considered, practiced, and studied. In other words, network leadership is an understanding and practice of collaborative leadership that employs awareness, trust, and intentionality in the process of creating and shaping effective, viable, and persistent social networks in organizations.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study support the literature concerning the benefits and importance of networks inside organizations, especially when those networks are built in advance of the business problem. However, many leaders may not understand the value and the ROI from these networks and their perception is that work interferes with networking. Work interferes because short-term results take precedence over all else and priority number two is one tenth the priority of number one in many organizations. Tools that integrate customer relationship management (CRM) and network relationships could alleviate the perception (of limited value) by improving client relationships, demonstrating performance benefits to the

organization, and improving the understanding of long-term networking.

This study also suggests that general, somewhat random networking and introductions are appropriate but not sufficient in building operational and strategic networks. This study confirms that effective networks are specific and are usually based on task, leader expectations, leader modeling, and trust, along with supporting and contextual factors. Leaders desiring to encourage and build networks must move from social introductions to specific and intentional network building.

In addition, leaders need to understand their personal effectiveness as network builders so they can be coached on desired behaviors (C. Collins & Clark,

2003). The findings from this study offer pragmatic value to leadership development professionals in highly-matrixed organizations that desire and require collaboration across functional and organizational boundaries (Nebus, 2006). Modeling by leaders can demonstrate the importance and characteristics of networking. Modeling communicates to followers that networking is an important part of “getting work done.” Measuring networks also demonstrates that the leaders are paying attention to networking and that networking leads to future performance.

A simple yet practical intervention plan is displayed in Table 4. Each step in the plan must consider the interconnection of the factors that have been revealed in the present study.

Table 4: Practical Approach to Building Networks

Build Awareness (Specific Awareness)	Build Trust	Develop Intentionality (Specific Intentionality)
1. Importance and benefits	3. Assess current state	5. Train/tools
2. Assess current state (of networks)	4. Interventions and alignment	6. Model/coach
		7. Expect/embed in the culture
8. Measure	9. Measure	10. Evaluate

Limitations

This study was situational, contextual, and subject to the limitations of any qualitative study conducted in only one organization. Findings from the present study may not generalize to other situations and organizations (Patton, 2002). Specifically, the context and assigned tasks of this sample in this organization strongly affected the extent of networking and the awareness of networking. Task was central to the participants’ role and accomplishment of that task motivated participants to network and collaborate across boundaries. The influence of context and the centrality of task are important considerations in this study and for future research.

Future Research

These new aspects of networks and leadership must be explored and tested. It is hoped that this exploratory yet pragmatic study will spawn additional research concerning leadership and networks, particularly as related to information sharing and collaboration across boundaries inside of organizations. Traditional studies have looked for the centrality of individuals and leaders, however, future network studies should measure healthy networks among and

between groups that can be attributed to acts of leadership.

Summary

Leadership effectiveness in many organizations now hinges upon the leader’s ability to operate and lead within a networked context. Healthy social networks in organizations result in many positive outcomes for organizations, thus, leaders should intentionally desire to build the strength of social networks within their groups and organizations. The themes identified in this study, awareness, trust, and intentionality, are the first steps in helping leaders understand how to become network leaders.

Yukl (2002) has proposed, “The most commonly used measure of leader effectiveness is the extent to which the leader’s organizational unit performs its task successfully and attains its goals” (p. 8). However, the fluidity and collaboration needed by many organizations in today’s global context suggest that leadership effectiveness in the future may be measured on a leader’s ability to lead a network, not a group or unit. This study adds to the understanding of characteristics and behaviors that are related to acts of leadership and building viable, persistent organizational networks.

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