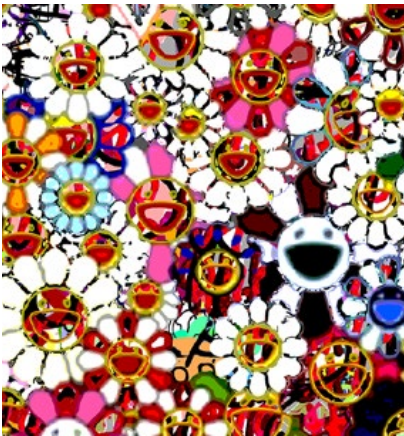




Cultivate social networks

Use networking to break down organizational silos



Didier Avril, série Storytelling

Our sources

This synopsis is based on the publications presented below and on the back page.

The Hidden Power of Social Networks

Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business School Press, 2004.

Never Eat Alone

Keith Ferrazzi, Currency Doubleday, 2005.

Social networks have not always had a good reputation. Although they are sometimes recognized as necessary for success, they are often associated with unscrupulous social climbers willing to do anything to get ahead, or with people who want to influence things behind the scenes for dubious motives.

This image does have some truth to it. However, it would be a pity to stop there without acknowledging the truly positive side of networks. For organizations, active social networks can be a valuable way to combat organizational silos and thus accelerate the flow of information, facilitate effective decision-making, and encourage people to take initiative.

Managers would therefore benefit from getting involved in the development of such networks, both for themselves and for the members of their teams. To achieve this goal, the publications we have selected provide several tips, of which several stand out in particular:

- **Think of building your network not simply as a way to advance your own interests, but rather as a part of your social life that enables people to help and support one another more effectively.**
- **Analyze the networks of your subordinates and work with them to resolve any deficiencies.**
- **Encourage your subordinates to develop personal links with one another and to expand their networks to other parts of the company.**

In this synopsis...

- 1 The value of social networks
- 2 Develop your network
- 3 Support networks

1 The value of social networks

Social networks don't have a particularly flattering image. They are certainly seen to be critical to success in some arenas, particularly those involving sales and business development. However, social networks are often associated with more or less underhanded means by which individuals advance their selfish interests to the detriment of the common good. The typical "networker" has the image of someone who

Although social networks are often viewed with suspicion, they can be very useful to companies.

is quick to distribute business cards, is not particularly honest, and is willing to stoop to hypocrisy in order to fill his or her address book with good contacts.

This stereotype does have some truth to it. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to assume that anyone who makes an effort to develop and maintain a network of contacts must have reproachable motives. The publications that we have selected show that the clichés surrounding networking (Figure A) are often unfounded. In particular:

Effective networks cannot be maintained without sincere caring

The unpleasant attitudes often associated with the image of networking turn out to be ultimately counterproductive. Indeed, two things are needed to network effectively:

- **People must truly get along.** Networking efforts are often thought to be driven by immediate personal interest. It is consequently often assumed that a good networker must be hypocritical toward people he or she doesn't like if some benefit can be derived from the relationship. This conception is false. Indeed, this sort of attitude generates merely utilitarian relationships which are often limited to exchanging favors from time to time or to sharing scant information. To the contrary, mutual esteem fosters more enriching relationships and is ultimately more beneficial for everyone concerned.
- **Networks must be based on authentic generosity.** "Jaded networkers" generally try to use their contacts to serve their own selfish interests. However, this behavior rarely pays in the long term – who wants to help a blatant social climber? Those who manage to build the most complete – and ultimately the most effective – networks

do just the opposite. That is, they try to do nice things for people they know without expecting anything in return. In this way, they generate real feelings of gratitude and respect, and can thus build lasting relationships founded on mutual trust and sincerity.

Effective personal networks therefore rarely emerge from purely utilitarian relationships. In addition to giving people the pleasure of relating to others, interpersonal relationships generally facilitate the achievement of personal objectives: they facilitate access to the right information and to the right people at the right time, they ensure that one gets the support he or she needs, etc. However, people who have built a solid capital of trust over time find it easier to reap these benefits than those who attempt to exploit a list of superficial contacts opportunistically.

Social networks are as useful to the organization as to individuals

Networks are an essential part of organizational life, without which companies would find it difficult to function properly. Networks are often wrongly seen as exclusively promoting the selfish interests of isolated individuals. Yet, a network also benefits the circles in which a given individual moves:

FIGURE A Some unfounded clichés...

Networking, an activity that consists in actively building and maintaining a network of contacts, is subject to a number of unflattering stereotypes that do not always correspond to reality.

It is often thought that...

Networking consists in developing contacts with a definite goal in mind.
Networks work primarily based on mutual favors ("I did you a favor, now you owe me one").
Good networkers are very social people with a gift for that sort of thing.
Networking necessarily requires people to compromise themselves and be hypocritical.
The success of networking depends on the number of relationships you establish with "influential people."

Yet, it is often true that...

Networks are most effective when the underlying relationships are based on a longstanding bond of trust, rather than on superficial contacts developed exclusively for opportunistic reasons.
The quality of human contact is fundamental when developing relationships. Keeping strict accounts of services rendered makes relationships purely utilitarian and dooms them to dwindle away.
Networkers have a wide range of personalities. In any case, fast talk and a big ego are not much help in building solid relationships.
Being yourself is the golden rule for building healthy relationships and real trust with other people.
Parameters like the level of trust, the different kinds of people you know or the ability to mobilize the members of your network are just as important as the number of contacts in your address book.

- **Information circulates better.** Information generally circulates better through social networks than through official channels, because it reaches those concerned very rapidly and is often transmitted through dialogue that is richer than a simple official announcement. The internal networks maintained by the members of an organization thus play an important role in ensuring the efficient flow of information and are a good complement to official communication channels.
 - **Silos are broken down.** The ability to mobilize the knowhow of individuals and get the members of the organization to collaborate actively is recognized to be critical. The personal network of contacts of each member of the organization can contribute to this goal. Such networks help people find out what is happening in other parts of the company and take account of the issues of other departments. Moreover, they are instrumental in creating a feeling of belonging to a community that cuts across geographical, functional and hierarchical boundaries.
 - **Decision making is more consensual.** Networks are effective in helping to forge a collective mindset, gather opinions and test reactions. In this regard, they are an effective tool for engaging a large number of people in the decisionmaking process and ensuring that decisions are accepted by the largest possible number.
- So, it is important not only to have your own good network, but also to encourage others to develop one of their own. We shall see that this involves doing two things simultaneously:
- Optimize the time devoted to developing your network;
 - Establish an environment that is conducive to network-building by the other members of the organization.

2 Develop your network

Many people would like to spend more time developing their networks, but find it difficult to fit this objective into their schedules. There are two ways to overcome this challenge:

- Target your efforts;
- Optimize the work required to maintain your contacts.

► Target your efforts

Given the time required to build and maintain a network, relying purely upon chance meetings would be a mistake. To build a good professional network, a targeted strategy must be pursued with perseverance:

■ Clarify your objectives

If you do not direct your efforts toward a clearly delineated goal, your network is likely to be inconsistent and inefficient. You must consequently define your networking strategy to meet specific needs. For example, depending on whether you want to build your career in a profession or in an industry, the kind of network to develop will not be the same. Moreover, you should identify departments

A certain level of discipline will help you fit network-building into your schedule.

in your company with which it would be helpful to cooperate smoothly, or with which you would like to develop a closer relationship. Your networking objectives may also concern your interests outside work. Do you want to play a role in your city, in politics or to serve a social or humanitarian cause? The point is not so much to have a single objective as a clear idea of the type of contacts you would ideally like to develop over time.

■ Identify people you want to meet

Once you have clarified the arenas where you want to develop your network, such as the marketing department of your company, an industry or a professional circle, you should develop a list of the ideal contacts that you would like to make. For instance, this could be a specific expert, a given company, the head of a non-profit organization, etc.

Implement a strategy to open doors

It is often difficult simply to go out and meet the people on your ideal contact list. However, analyzing this list will help you understand the types of contacts that would be likely to lead you to a given person one day or another, and imagine how to direct your efforts accordingly. Often, the best place to start is with the people you know, e.g. your friends, family, colleagues, school alumni, etc. You could start by simply asking them to whom they could introduce you. You can then capitalize on these new relationships to pursue your strategy (Figure B). Many other drivers are also available, of course, such as volunteering for a cross-functional project, working for a non-profit, joining a club, attending conferences to make contacts during breaks, etc. You can also try to make yourself more visible to make others want to meet you. This can be done in different ways, depending on the context. You could write a report, circulate a memo, publish an article, join the board of a non-profit, etc.

► Effectively maintain your network

Maintaining your network takes a lot of time once you acquire a large number of contacts. Yet, this task is essential and will determine your ability to call upon these contacts when the day comes. You must therefore use a methodical process and ensure that it fits as well as possible into your regular activities.

■ Schedule periodic "booster shots"

Regular contact is essential to maintain relationships. Yet, don't hesitate to adjust the frequency of these contacts depending on the importance you accord to each relationship. For example, some networking experts recommend classifying your relationships into different types and deciding how frequently you should telephone or e-mail each type. You might decide, for instance, to make monthly calls to

most strategic contacts, quarterly calls to people with whom you would like to maintain an active relationship, and yearly calls when you simply don't want to lose sight of someone. Planning this schedule on a computer or an electronic agenda will keep you from falling behind and from letting your network deteriorate.

Offer added value to each contact

A simple e-mail "to say hi" has little chance of making an impression on the person who receives it. Yet, to maintain the relationship, each interaction must leave the other person with an impression that is as vibrant as possible. Think to include small details that will lend particular interest to a phone call or an e-mail, such as a photo of your last meeting with the person, a copy of an article, notes on something interesting you have read recently or the title of a good book. Such details may help or please the other person and also help him or her remember you. These are just several examples among possible inexpensive things you can do to make the contact stand out and keep it active.

Systematically organize group meetings

Whenever possible, don't hesitate to arrange a meeting with several people at the same time, for example, for a meal or a sports event. Face-to-face conversations are irreplaceable to maintain a relationship, but it is difficult to find the time to meet each contact individually. This problem can be solved by organizing meetings with several people at the same time. This arrangement also gives an opportunity for your contacts to meet one another, which will in turn help them develop their respective networks.

3 Support networks

Some contexts are more favorable than others to network building. Managers must therefore make sure that the environment in which their team operates is favorable to it. There are three main ways to do this:

- Analyze the networks in the organization;
- Ensure that team members know their colleagues and understand what they can contribute to one another;
- Encourage people from different departments to meet and collaborate.

► Analyze the networks in the organization

Analyzing the networks in a team or organization does not necessarily require the help of specialized experts. Ordinary managers can personally conduct such an analysis and derive relevant conclusions. This task is facilitated by breaking down the analysis process into three key steps:

Map the network

The point of this exercise is use interviews or surveys to evaluate the contacts that each employee maintains with the other members of the team. The precise type of questions posed will naturally depend on the context

There are a number of ways for managers to help their subordinates establish effective networks.

and targeted objectives. For example, focus could be placed on the quality of mutual support and cooperation, the speed of access to information, and the effective utilization of available expertise. Based on this analysis, a map of existing networks can be drawn

FIGURE B Transforming contacts into relationships

When you meet someone in a formal setting, you may have just a few moments to start a friendly relationship. The following recommendations can help you achieve this:

- **Prepare for meetings.**
When you attend a conference, a trade show or any other gathering, you should arrive knowing beforehand who you want to meet and how you intend to go about meeting them.
- **Find something in common with your contact targets.**
Research the people you want to meet, to find out whether you have something in common with their professional or academic background, geographical origins or hobbies, in order to create a bond from the very start.
- **Go beyond bland niceties.**
Asserting your personality and what makes you different generally makes a bigger impression on other people than merely sticking to social niceties.
- **Offer help.**
People are more interested in maintaining contact with someone who offers to help them and who clearly adds value.
- **Don't reveal everything about yourself immediately.**
Make people curious to know more about you and what you could bring them.
- **Rapidly make contact again.**
If possible, try to set up another meeting while your contacts still remember you clearly.

Based on **Never Eat Alone**, Keith Ferrazzi, Currency Doubleday.

and then employed to understand and improve the situation (Figure C).

Use the network maps to stimulate discussion

Although social networks are often vaguely understood to exist and to be critical, they generally remain invisible. Helping people visualize these networks is therefore very important. The authors of *The Hidden Power of Social Networks* assert that even simply showing department members the resulting map is enough to trigger good discussions on the configuration of the network, its deficiencies and the means to improve it. For example, as a result of these discussions, many people who speak very rarely to one another become aware of the benefit of getting together. Very often, the network is rapidly reconfigured as a result and becomes much more efficient.

Take corrective measures

Some deficiencies highlighted by the map do not always resolve themselves spontaneously. In such situations, managers must make the necessary decisions. Figure D presents several examples of frequent problems and the types of initiative that can be used to resolve them.

► Tell people about the expertise of other team members

Cooperative relationships are not established unless people see the benefit of talking and working with one another. Yet, people working in the same department are frequently unaware of exactly what their colleagues know. The authors of *The Hidden Power of Social Networks* state, for example,

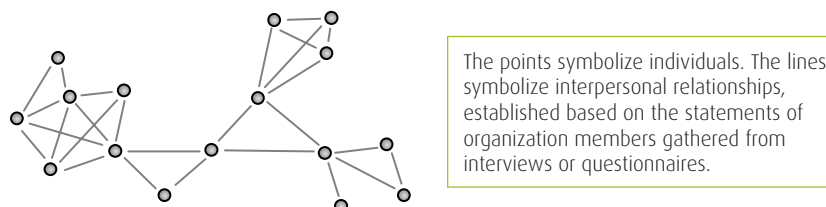
that they have often met people who work in the same office without understanding exactly what everyone else is doing! Managers who would like to encourage network-building must actively combat this phenomenon in the following ways:

Communicate regularly on the role and expertise of respective team members

Periodic updates must be provided on how the company operates, as well as the identity, function and skills of the people who work there. Likewise, explanations on individual roles and expertise should be given whenever the organization changes, or when people leave or arrive in a new position. Experience shows that without such reminders, people quickly forget what their colleagues do when they don't work with them on a daily basis or when their

FIGURE C Map the internal networks of the organization

Developing visual representations of the internal networks of a company can be very helpful in analyzing them. A network map should help visualize the existing interpersonal relationships within an organization. It looks something like the diagram below :



It is possible to draw several maps of the same organization, depending on the angle from which the analysis is conducted. For example:

Angle of analysis	Possible questions
Regular professional contact	With whom do you work regularly in the course of your work? "With whom are you in contact most often?"
Accessibility	"Who can you contact rapidly when you need it?"
Knowledge of the expertise of other people	"With whose skills are you very familiar?"
Access to strategic information	"Who do you call to obtain information essential to the success of your assignments?"
Energy	"Who has the energy to motivate you?" "Who tends to bring you down?"
Type of shared knowledge	"Who do you ask to get new ideas?" "Who helps you when you want to improve processes or methods?" "Who do you ask to find out what is going on in the company?"
Personal dimension	"With whom do you have good rapport?" "Who could you imagine meeting outside work?"

Based on *The Hidden Power of Social Networks*, Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business School Press, and *Karen Stephenson's Quantum Theory of Trust*, Art Kleiner, Article published in *Strategy + Business*, issue 29.

domain of expertise is too remote from their own. For example, a consulting firm decided to establish a department in which half of the members were strategic consultants, and half were IT specialists. Several months later, despite a shared office layout, contact between these two groups was observed to be very limited. The company had been in such a rush to move ahead with the physical integration that it forgot to introduce people to one another, and they continued to function in separate silos.

Capitalize on people with the best “connections”

Understanding the role and expertise of the other people in the organization is certainly important. However, it is equally important to understand who these people know and how to benefit from their networks. By highlighting the role of these “links,” a company established in three continents made great strides in improving cross-border collaboration between units in Europe, the U.S. and Australia. It identified several people who had unofficial long-standing relationships with units on other continents and used these people

as official liaisons. All employees were asked to go through the identified liaisons to get to know their colleagues on the other side of the world who were working on subjects similar to their own. The involvement of these middlemen helped team members target the right contacts depending on their needs. Communication improved fantastically, thereby accelerating the development of global centers of expertise.

Create databases

In large organizations or companies scattered across a number of locations, databases can accelerate network building. Existing information on individual knowledge and expertise can effectively be consolidated in such databases and made available to everyone. This is why many organizations like British Telecom or the World Bank have developed information systems to make it easier for thousands of employees to contact one another. Although such systems are undeniably useful, they are rarely the whole answer. Their effectiveness depends on taking certain precautions, as **Figure E** explains in detail.

Foster the development of personal relationships

Even when people understand what their colleagues do, this is not always enough to get them to cooperate. They must have both a desire and a legitimate reason to contact someone when the need arises. Simply managing a company directory is not enough to create an effective network. Managers must also foster the development of an environment conducive to interpersonal collaboration. Several management practices can be very helpful in this regard:

Encourage autonomy

Many people tend to rely on the boss when they are confronted with a problem that goes beyond their scope of responsibility, or when they are looking for information. A better idea is to encourage people to hook up directly with those who can help them, and give them relevant contact information to do this, if necessary. This helps employees develop their own networks and get used to employing them.

FIGURE D Common network deficiencies

Problem	Possible Solutions
Bottlenecks A person occupies a position that is so central in the network that he or she cannot handle it all and paralyzes the system.	- Relieve the person in question of some responsibilities. - Explain the problem to the other members of the network and ask them to try to contact one another directly more often.
Exclusion of an individual A person has very few contacts with the other members of the network and his or her skills are thus underutilized.	- Change the person's position in the organizational chart or geographically. - Reallocate tasks to the person to facilitate his or her integration.
Closed circuits A team keeps to itself and becomes isolated from the rest of the organization.	- Bring new people into the team. - Try to set up meetings and opportunities to collaborate with other departments. - Periodically ask people from outside the team to participate in team efforts and meetings.
Geographical dispersion Geographical distance separates people and makes contact and collaboration difficult.	- Establish technological solutions to facilitate contacts. - Consider a geographical reorganization.
Excessive dependence on one person Information and contacts strategic to the organization are controlled exclusively by one person.	- Ensure that other team members also have access to these contacts and information. - Develop a buddy system, where some tasks are allocated to two people simultaneously.

Based on *The Hidden Power of Social Networks*, Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business School Press.

Foster geographical proximity

The physical layout of the work environment has a considerable impact on interpersonal communication. This fact must be taken into account in order to facilitate contact between people who would benefit from meeting. Chrysler, for example, totally revised the office layout of its new vehicle design department in order to bring designers closer to R&D staff. The resulting contacts greatly improved the flow of the development process.

Don't hesitate to be directive if necessary

Introducing people from different backgrounds is not always enough to ensure the formation of durable relationships. If a manager feels that employees would truly benefit from working together, he or she should not hesitate to push things in the right direction. For example, the manager of an internal auditing department recently created at a bank had to do just that. His department included former consultants, bankers and IT experts. Each group was aware of the expertise of the others, but they were still not cooperating well together several months after the department was created. Seminars were subsequently organized to help people reflect on ways to combine their

know-how more effectively. This effort was demanding, but it enabled people to develop common work practices and get used to capitalizing more fully on the expertise of their colleagues.

Regularly use crossfunctional teams

It is important for people from different parts of the company to have frequent opportunities to meet and collaborate. Actively ensuring that project teams are composed of a diverse range of participants is an effective way to achieve this objective. For example, this approach is frequently used by many consulting firms, which have a strategic stake in sharing and building global knowledge and expertise. Some even include team members from offices in other countries, despite the cost that this adds to the project and despite the fact that local resources may have been available. They do this because they understand that this policy is extremely effective in simulating interoffice exchange and thus greatly enhances the overall performance of the organization.

Recognize the ability to play as a team

The evaluation system should encourage people not only to perform

individually, but also to contribute to collective success and to share their know-how with the other members of the organization. Some companies officially make this an official performance criterion, against which managers are asked to evaluate their subordinates regularly. Others prefer to reserve financial or honorific rewards for people who are seen as the best team players, rather than those who perform the best individually.

• • • •

Although networking does not always have a particularly flattering image, it is an effective way to break down organizational silos, without necessarily involving the moral compromises with which it is often associated. Managers could therefore benefit from building their own networks, as well as from encouraging their subordinates to do likewise. When this happens, the entire organization wins, as people who feel closer to one another are able to share information more effectively and are more open to outside influences.

FIGURE E Use databases effectively

Many companies have developed databases to help their employees get to know what their colleagues do and where they are located. However, many also admit they are disappointed at how little these tools are used and how little impact they have on collaboration. There are three potential ways to improve this situation:

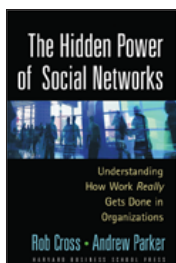
What to do	Why	Practical Tips
Consider databases as a tool that facilitates contact, but is not sufficient in itself	If people are not used to asking their colleagues for help in solving their problems, the best technological tool in the world will not suffice to change their behavior.	Start by working to change people's mindset and encourage collaboration.
Describe domains of expertise in a concrete manner	Many databases cite only the diplomas and general areas of expertise of employees. This information is not always helpful in finding someone who can help solve a specific problem.	- Describe expertise as precisely as possible. - Make a concrete list of accomplishments, particularly the most recent, rather than university diplomas or old experiences.
Do not exaggerate expertise	Some databases give the impression that the company contains only high-level experts. This tendency to exaggerate is detrimental to the credibility of the system and dissuades potential users.	- Ask managers to validate the description proposed by each employee of his or her own expertise. - Ask people to specify as well what they can't do, if there is a risk of confusion for users.

Our selection

To find the best ideas on this subject, we recommend the following publications:

The Hidden Power of Social Networks

Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business School Press, 2004.



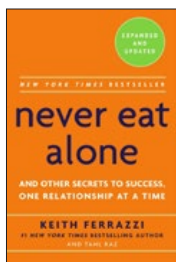
Devoted to the networks formed by employees in a company or department, this book attempts to understand how these networks function and how they could be improved to facilitate the effective flow of information. The analytical, disciplined, precise and straightforward manner in which the authors address the topic gets right to the heart of the issue with no superfluous meanderings.

In addition to offering high-quality thinking, this book can also serve alone as a how-to guide for managers who want to study the existing networks within an organization. Chapters 3 and 5 clearly explain how to do this, and are complemented by the very useful surveys and checklists in Appendix A.

We also recommend chapters 6 and 7, which contain many practical tips and illustrative examples on how to improve the way networks operate in an organization.

Never Eat Alone

Keith Ferrazzi, Currency-Doubleday, 2005.



Management literature is not always reputed to be particularly exciting, but this book is an exception. Admittedly, the topic is not in itself particularly original ("How to develop your networks?") and the advice that it proffers, although useful, is rarely revolutionary. However, the tone adopted by the author makes this book stand out. Obviously a highly gifted networker with a passion for human relations, he shares his daily experiences in a manner that adeptly convinces us that "we can do it too." The world he lives in and the social rules he follows are undeniably

US-centric. Yet, his enthusiasm and skill in establishing a sense of closeness with the reader makes it hard to remain indifferent.

Of the 32 short chapters in the book, chapters 1, 2, 6, 9, 15, 17 and 19 appear to be the most original, and should be consulted first for a quick read. In contrast, the last section (chapters 22 to 31), devoted to promoting a "personal brand," seems much more anecdotal.

Further readings

To explore this topic further:

- **Karen Stephenson's Quantum Theory of Trust**, Art Kleiner, *Strategy + Business*, Issue 29. (Article)
A detailed analysis of how networks function in organizations.
- **Use your influence effectively** (Manageris Synopsis 124a)
Develop your understanding of the mechanics of power and influence in the organization.
- **La logique de l'Informel** [The unofficial side of the organization], Gérard Pavy, Les Editions d'Organisation, 2002. (Book)
Develop your understanding of the unofficial side of organizations.
- **Leveraging Communities of Practice for Strategic Advantage**, Hubert Saint-Onge, Debra Wallace, Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003. (Book)
Organize networks to share ideas and generate knowledge in the organization.
- **Trust in the Balance**, Robert Bruce Shaw, Jossey-Bass, 1997. (Book)
The foundations of trust, a critical component in cooperative relationships.

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