Using organizational social networks data to build strong teams

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Business is like sports. The best team win. But how do leaders build great teams? This is the challenge that every leader faces every day. There are a number of ways to build a great team and data analytics is one of the methods.

How many organisations know which employee or employees?

- Can efficiently build cross-boundary teams;
- Can allow new employees to know and get used to the organization fast;
- Are at risk of burnout;
- Can stimulate innovation within the organization;
- Are likely to stay or leave the organisation and will that attrition leave the organization at risk of losing knowledge, skills, and connections;
- Can fit into the team(s) and how does informal communication move around the organisation.

How many organisations understand which informal team that may not necessarily be represented on the organisational structure exist within their organisation? In this article, we will discuss some of the applications of organisational social network analysis (ONA) to build sustainable organisations and teams.

Chief Talent Officer of GM AI Adamsen once described ONA as a new lens to evaluate how people show up in an organisation. Similarly one of the world's foremost expert on the subject, Professor Rob Cross explained that "ONA can provide an x-ray into the inner workings of an organisation – a powerful means of making invisible patterns of information flow and collaboration in strategically important groups invisible"

Employee value that enables organisational success is a result of a combination of human capital which comprises of the traits & skill sets that enable employees to perform and social capital which is the relationships & networks employees build to enable them to get work done. Employees with rich Social Capital can contribute more meaningfully to business value-creation. Although Human Capital is visible, easily quantifiable and usually quite static, Social Capital is dynamic but intangible and difficult to quantify.

Analysing networks allows the organisation to understand who is influential both positively and negatively. When an organisation wants to drive change within the organisation they have to use people who are influential to make sure everyone accepts that change. After analysing networks of communication either via emails, calls or face to face, the organisation will understand who is at the center of every communication and is highly likely to influence others in both negative and positive ways. General Motors use ONA to disrupt itself from the inside. An article by MIT Sloan Management

Review outlines how the different role brokers, connectors and energisers play in a network in discovering, developing and diffusing innovation within an organisation and essentially how to disrupt from the inside. Microsoft also combined data from Workplace analytics (email and calendar Metadata, not content) with engagement and business data to better understand manager effectiveness.

Understanding who is turning to who for information within the organisation help to enhance learning and development for both new hires and people within the organisation. Instead of using old methods of learning, an organisation can identify hidden experts in different areas and allow them to train and mentor all the other team members that need capacitation. This is more effective not only because the experts will be able to explain and mentor effectively, but because the other employees or team members will be able to listen and absorb the knowledge since they trust and are used to getting all information from them. Motivating these employees at the center who may be high performers will likely push engagement for the whole team upward. A European Retail Bank applied ONA and discovered that, despite employees in each branch having the same training and similar demographics, the performance was very different. They used digital badges to assess whether there was a correlation between network strength and branch performance. The results indicated that the highest performing branches had the most cohesive, interconnected social networks.

In terms of preparing people for succession, analysing networks will enable an organization to identify which of the employees' potential new leaders are basing on influence and knowledge. These people will then be coached, trained and rewarded to allow them to pull more team members with them hence building a strong team.

Organisations are able to use past employee networks or communication data to predict who is likely to leave the organisation in the future. Who will leave the organisation has an impact on the organisation in terms of information flow, driving change, knowledge transfer and organisational revenue. Ways of retaining these employees if they are good performers may then be implemented.

Using ONA to uncover a number of issues that are hidden within the organisation. These data-driven insights will help organisations build strong teams that can allow them to survive this era of disruption. There are many ways to build a strong organization but definitely using data-driven insights from your employees and building a strong team gives a competitive advantage to the organisation.

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