



EXECUTE
WORK
EFFICIENTLY

Influencing Without Authority by Knowing the Network

CASE CONTEXT

A financial manager learns the value of networks through key experiences in his career. Later, when he is charged with implementing a policy across all regional offices, he engages key opinion leaders to drive acceptance in places where he has no direct authority.



MALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL
LEADER

Industry: FINANCE

HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS LEVERAGE NETWORKS TO DO 5 THINGS

Based on 20 years of research in more than 300 organizations, we know that the quality of your professional relationship play a significant role in your success. We have extended this research to describe the way high-performing leaders leverage their networks to: Innovate, Execute, Scale, Thrive and Adapt.



Maaran works in financial operations of a multinational company, where he has quickly learned to leverage a peer

network across several countries and tap into an extended network of influencers in India, his home country. “The value of networks was one thing I learned from being involved in the company leadership development program ... It’s not just about networking and meeting people. It’s about how we are able to see information differently or can extend help to somebody else. And how we can find help as well.”

Maaran took this message to heart during that development program and has stayed connected to most of his peers, all of whom work in various businesses in different locations. He meets his colleagues for a meal or a drink if they travel to his city, or when work takes him to other locations. They serve as a referral network for each other, too. Maaran hit it off particularly well with one colleague, a business leader operating in Europe. The two would regularly share updates and talk through challenges.

“We went out to dinner together when he was in my country, and I could see he was struggling to manage his Indian operations being in Europe. He faced a couple challenges—time zones, the culture and the way the operations worked. The level of responsibility of management and the maturity of the organization were not what he expected. I could see he was struggling quite a bit. We talked about trying to recruit someone to run the Indian operations, and how to fill that role. I told him I could help for a time to bridge the gap between the expectations of Europe and what the challenges these locals were facing were. He was very excited to hear that, and we agreed I would meet the team over here ... I was able to build relationships and support, do some training and help recruit for key roles. So, my colleague was able to succeed and not struggle so much.”

That experience—created out of a willingness to help—also benefitted Maaran. “It helped me because I got to learn a different business altogether. I met different people and found resources that were not available to me in my part of the organization. And, it raised my profile in the company. It was quite helpful because my work was appreciated and recognized.”

In another instance, Maaran got a referral to a leader in another division for advice on updating a key process. “I was able to learn quickly from them and not reinvent the wheel for us ... The network does help in terms of leveraging other experiences. Rather than making your own mistakes you can learn from their mistakes.”

Maaran's network mindset became essential when he was responsible for rolling out a new government policy to every office in India. "This was a very challenging task in context of the country and the perceptions of the people. All locations across India had to abide by the new policy; it was compulsory; there was no leeway for non-compliance ... But I could not bring everyone on board myself, or reach out directly to each location. So, I used influencers to be ambassadors for the policy. I thought, if I am able to bring on board these influencers, maybe they would help me and use the network to get people to appreciate the policy and adhere to it."

Maaran identified influencers in each location in several ways: some by his personal network or referral; others by observing how people interact with each other when he was on site. "When you visit you can see certain people are de facto leaders. They are not formal leaders. When you meet a bunch of people you can notice who people listen to, who is valued for their input ... If you can identify the right one or two people and get them on board, the odds of getting the rest of the group on board is higher than if you had tried to get to them all directly."

To educate and engage the influencers once they were identified, Maaran focused on building relationships and establishing trust. "Not everyone who is an influencer will agree with you or support you. They won't all buy in to what you want them to do, so you have to find the motivation for each one. They were different people, so I wanted to understand what each person wanted or why they were resistant before I tried to get them on my side."

Maaran was careful not to over-do his requests for help. He understood he and his team had to be willing to give as well. "Sometimes it was just important to be appreciative and give positive recognition. Some people were motivated if there was a way to do something for them, so we tried to address a challenge or give some support."

With the network approach, the new policy was implemented successfully—and much more smoothly than Maaran expected. And, through the process, he continued to build connections that will allow him to be successful in the future as well.

Network Insights

- **Work through network influencers.** They will help you diffuse ideas and get engagement in what you are trying to accomplish.
- **Don't rely on your impressions to identify influencers.** People are notoriously bad at this. Watch the group and ask questions about who they turn to.
- **Enroll each influencer in a unique way.** Know what they care about and engage them at that level.
- **Maintain interest and support.** Recognize and appreciate influencers in ways they want to be acknowledged.

3 Ways to Build Networks to Support Execution

Effective personal networks enable people to accomplish things that surpass their own abilities. Maaran found that various kinds of connections and relationships helped him gain information, resources and political support—and he was able to give the same to others.

To be more efficient and effective in executing day-to-day work, special projects and crucial strategies, invest in and leverage networks in these ways:

1. Build relationships ahead of need. Give first so that relationships have been seeded and early trust developed. This increases the willingness of others to help and boosts the efficiency of interactions when support is needed.
2. Engage key opinion leaders early on to diffuse ownership. Look to identify Central Connectors, Brokers, Energizers and Resisters.
3. Deploy the network to influence without authority. Rather than cascading through formal channels, work through others who have the relationships and influence that you are missing.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS

Building on 20 years of research with more than 300 organizations, the Network Leader Research Project seeks to understand the approach and strategies that enable certain leaders to consistently achieve peak performance. The research includes 160 in-depth interviews conducted by Rob Cross, a Professor of Management at University of Virginia's McIntire School of Commerce. The Connected Commons is currently focusing its research on leadership effectiveness, talent optimization and organizational alignment and change—three areas where network insights can clearly drive performance. For more information visit www.connectedcommons.com or email Rob at rlcrossjr@gmail.com.