EXECUTE WORK EFFICIENTLY

Improving Program Effectiveness in a Global Services Organization

CASE CONTEXT

A driven senior leader engages subject-matter experts and network influencers to improve client deliverables and outcomes. She pays attention to both process and culture to make client satisfaction tracking and communication program effectiveness a consistent and company-wide effort.

FEMALE

Level: SENIOR LEADER

Industry: PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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.

INNOVATE EXECUTE SCALE THRIVE ADAPT

A 30-year career in marketing and communications with a single company gives Hayley a deep understanding of clients and their customers—as well as a clear-eyed view of how this professional services firm operates. She's been hands-on with client work and managed countless teams and projects. She spent time immersed in process, driving improvement and helping develop new services. Now as part of the senior leadership team, she has a broader knowledge of the business and is responsible for evaluating the impact of the firm's work. "We do a lot of programs for our clients and have a lot of products. We had gotten away from knowing the results of those efforts. We didn't have a consistent way to follow up and measure. We couldn't see benchmarks or patterns and be more effective with our solutions ... My job now is part process change and part culture change in service of program effectiveness."

Before formally taking on the company-wide effort, Hayley had been pushing the work for some time, linking better metrics to increased revenue and client growth. Good, consistent data about impact would generate client loyalty and growth, and support sales and marketing efforts to potential customers. "There was a lot we could do to make our services and products more effective for clients, but we weren't being consistent. I was always bringing it up, *How can we get people more focused on this?* I started a task force of our senior leaders to work on this." During one task force meeting, Hayley saw that no progress had been made and there was no accountability. "I got mad; I was seriously disappointed that people weren't trying to make a different on that ... Not long after, my boss brought me into his office and said, *You have so much passion around this. I just think you need to be in charge of this and not do anything else*." Her boss understood the importance of the work—as did an influential board member—and saw that it needed full-time attention. "It was an intersection of what he knew I could do when I was focused and that this was an area that we've talked about but haven't made real progress on."

The original task force included members of the executive team, plus leaders within key functions, like marketing, product design and business development. The task force had done a good job of defining the problem space and initial ideas for next steps. Hayley created sub-teams as a way to address specific topics and move efforts from high-level plans to action, such as developing case histories or building analytics into programs. Hayley looked for people who would naturally have interest in or knowledge of each topic, as well as well-connected or influential people in the network who would ease the implementation and adoption of change.

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"For each sub-team, I needed expertise as well as people who are forward-thinkers, people who are just in the thick of things, people who are curious about new things … That was key. If I could get influencers talking about something, we had a chance of making it part of our story and into our work with clients."

A few of the sub-teams also brought in outside experts or groups. Hayley tapped into her network to bring in some academic resources for advice. Another sub-team looked to outside experts to better understand how automation and process documentation could be done more effectively. The original task force remained connected, too, with each member having a role within a sub-group or to bridge groups in ways that helped integrate and scale the work. "That idea of how to best use the task force came from another executive. She added that layer of discipline to their work that I'm not sure would have been my nature to do."

Currently, the most significant outcome is a pilot project involving 50 client programs. The sales force and solutions design teams now have a set of standard metrics and a documentation process to help develop and manage client programs in the future. The process has gone through a series of prototyping and feedback cycles, creating improvements to the work as well as generating interest in measuring effectiveness and impact. "Moving forward, I see the network as my leverage point to get all the teams thinking, *This is part of my job* … I am starting to work with the people who manage the project managers, to bring them in as deputies in a way. They need to be connecting this and asking their project managers: *How's the program working? How are you measuring results?"*

Recognizing that this work will not be completed in a short time, Hayley is pleased with the progress so far. She is more clear about the potential to increase client satisfaction and drive new business. "Now that I'm immersed in effectiveness and impact, I appreciate having this as my role, as my focus. It grew out of something I had a passion for and I am starting to see progress. I can see how our pilot project is already starting to translate into client conversations and how we think about our work."

Network Insights

- **Set up teams or task forces around solving problems, then staff with the network in mind.** Task force members should be identified based on expertise *and* network influence. This helps speed implementation later on.
- **Ensure task force members have clear line of sight to purpose.** Show people how their individual efforts contribute to the larger effort and publicly celebrate accomplishments. Both provide a sense of purpose to people that pays off in greater effort and engagement.
- **Manage meeting cycles efficiently.** Use structures to ensure efficient meetings and set norms of behavior so time is not wasted by people not being present or coming unprepared.
- **Pilot products or processes for improvement and for buy-in.** Engage in prototyping and testing to get feedback for the work, but also to inform and involve network influencers. This helps build commitment to the work and the outcomes.

Decrease Collaborative Overload with Better Meetings

Meetings are essential for collaboration, but they can also be incredible time wasters. "People are saying, *We have too many meetings; I can't get my work done*. But, we can't just have fewer meetings. I don't see how you do that and actually get good collaborative work done and serve our customers." Instead of cutting back on meetings, Hayley focused on driving meeting efficiency. Here's how:

1. Be clear on *who* and *what*. Have an attendee list based on clear need and clarify their expected role or contribution.
2. Use a meeting structure that is clear with objectives, agenda, timeline and facilitative roles.
3. Hold the norm of personal accountability. Expect everyone to prepare for meetings, read the pre-reads and, if a person misses a meeting, take ownership to find out what was missed. Spending everyone's time to catch-up one or two people is de-motivating and takes time away from work that requires face-to-face interaction.
4. Allocate time based on the requirements of the task. Sometimes it is more efficient to push through in a two-hour meeting than try to accomplish everything in one-hour meetings. Momentum gets lost as people get back up to speed, so periodic meetings spread over time can actually waste a lot of effort.

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.

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