



EXECUTE
WORK
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Early Buy-In & Engaged Network Ensure Uptake of New Process

CASE CONTEXT

An experienced manager creates a cross-functional project team to resolve a long-standing, inefficient strategic process. The effort involved getting commitment from senior leaders and creating a solution that would work across divisions and in multiple locations.



MALE

Level: MANAGER OF MANAGERS

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.



Tristan is an engineer who has developed projects and worked around the world. Fifteen years ago, he joined

a consulting firm that manages financing and partnerships to drive infrastructure development around the world. He's built expertise and perspective from managing work in Asia and Latin America. His experience has included technical roles as well as operational ones in planning, procurement, financing, IT and regional portfolio management. Five years ago, he moved into a corporate role, as global director of IT. He runs a team of 160 staff and a \$50 million budget.

Stepping into this role, Tristan realized how the lack of standardized processes created tremendous amounts of excess work and redundancy of effort. Each region or unit had developed their own way to track and report their portfolio. Consolidating and comparing information could not easily be done at the corporate level. Tristan proposed creating standardized reporting as a key step in simplifying work and providing needed information. "Early on, we collected the reports that people were using, and I came up with more than 500 different types of reports. Nobody was using the same format, the same dates ... The criteria to analyze and include was different ... Nothing was similar." While senior management thought it was a good idea, it was not popular among the business leaders. They liked to do things their own way, even if the end result would simplify their work and provide other benefits. "Having the mandate from a senior VP and an operational VP was important. Top-down influence is needed, especially to work across silos ... If an initiative is seen as too IT-driven, it will not work."

Tristan partnered with an operations director, who provided political support. With the goal of creating agreement around a common report and the IT support needed to execute, Tristan set up a small working group. The team included top experts in each area, representatives of each region and local practices or units. Knowing that the work would be tedious and require compromise, Tristan also factored in ability to collaborate and reputation and network influence when looking for team members.

For everyone on the team, the project was an additional task. However, they were motivated to achieve because it was a high-visibility project that would have direct impact on their groups moving forward. The extra hours involved were seen as worthwhile, as long as the meetings were productive. "It was highly valued because, first of all, it came from the top. And, because it would become a corporate tool, nobody wanted this to fail. What we came up with they would use, so it had to be good."

The idea was easy to agree on—the challenge was in the execution. “Very often people have been doing their stuff for years, so changing is not easy. Nobody is ever willing to compromise. I let them know that harmonizing our work equals compromising—compromise is needed for our work to be effective and well received.” To keep the team engaged and moving forward, they met every Friday, when they felt their primary responsibilities had been met and they could focus on the project. They would sometimes go for a nice lunch out or a drink after work. “It was also a good group; we had lot of fun.”

The work was completed in three months, with the team members each working along the way to share updates and gain buy-in among their colleagues. When the new reports were ready to go live, Tristan’s team made sure the official reports were the only ones used across the company. The now-standard documents had a logo and a time stamp, so there was no confusion. “We pushed management. We said, if you want to use these reports, and be consistent and eliminate differences, you have to insist on only using these reports. If you don’t have the logo, you don’t have the right information.”

Next, the team did a road show to all the business units. Tristan had a great way to make the case for the new reports: he carried a stack of papers a foot-and-a-half tall—all the previous types of reports. “It was convincing to say, *This was the situation. Now look, just a few pages ...* It was the first time in my career that I did something new and at the end of a meeting there was applause!”

For Tristan, the work of standardizing the portfolio reporting was not just an IT project or a reporting system. It was a commitment to simplification and democratization of data. Individual reports, with in-depth information, can be generated and top-line comparisons and data are presented on a dashboard. By standardizing and automating the data, managers at all levels can see what is happening and get answers to many of their questions. Everyone works with a shared set of information, so the data isn’t in doubt. “The new process has democratized the access to data. You don’t need to be an expert anymore to get information. We have brought a level of transparency to our work, within the business units and across the company.”

Network Insights

- **Use data to create case for change with formal decision-makers.** Employee engagement surveys, efficiency data and or demonstrations of ineffective work practices secure commitment to a project or effort. The same proof-points *plus* leadership support also serve to motivate others to be involved in the work.
- **Identify the project team by expertise and reputation in the network.** This ensures needed skills and information are brought in, directly and through connections they can leverage. As team members communicate the case for change through their network, they build support and smooth the path for implementation.
- **Obtain broad buy-in with tangible and emotional presentation.** Use road shows, props or other mechanisms that showcase need for change and connect the solution to personal need or experience. Tristan used a visual of a foot-and-a-half of paper forms to show how everyone did the same work dissimilarly—people recognized their own frustration as a company frustration.

Embracing a De-energizer Early & Seeing Them Flourish

One person named to Tristan’s project team was known to be negative and difficult to work with. “But, because of her role, not having her on board would have made the task absolutely impossible.” His strategy was to engage her early by giving her significant responsibility.

The leader of the working group was very tactful and excellent at building relationships and managing teams. “I told him, *You cannot ignore her. She will undermine the work if she is not supporting it.*”

The team member was put in charge of a key, high-profile process. Giving her responsibility and voice on the team made her feel valued and that the work was important. It gave her a tangible role and got her invested in a good outcome. The idea worked well. Her commitment helped avoid problems downstream in terms of support and implementation, and her ideas and contributions were highly valued. She rose above her reputation, too.

“I have to say, she did a good job. It was a good way to engage her. It was good to see her contribute and collaborate so well.”

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.