## SCALE IDEAS & IMPACT

# Network Leadership Practices to Scale a Capability in a Global Manufacturing Organization

## CASE CONTEXT

A well-rounded leader combines technical skills and business knowledge in a role to develop new processes across multiple units. She engages networks based on expertise and influence to solve shared problems and implement solutions broadly.

## FEMALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL LEADER

Industry: MANUFACTURING

## 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.

**Margaux's career path reflects her interest in bringing different perspectives to any problem. She earned a PhD** in biology, worked in academic research, then crossed into industry work with a pharmaceutical firm. She earned her MBA and later gained further training in statistics and analytics. "I am primarily a scientist, but I believe there is additional benefit to having formal training in areas outside of science." She currently is in a process development role with a global pharmaceutical company, where she has worked for nearly ten years. Her work crosses business functions and research practices, often taking ideas and processes that work in one space and adapting or scaling them into other areas.

To be effective establishing new, consistent systems, Margaux has gained a fundamental understanding of the network and learned to influence without authority. *High-performers like Margaux think of work in ways beyond themselves and beyond a narrow scope. They see where opportunities exist and view possibilities or projects as elements or pieces to be mapped onto various people in the network*. "That's a differentiator between somebody who has more of a managerial focus versus a leadership mindset. Earlier on in your career, you are more focused on your immediate area. As you move up in the organization, it becomes more important to be able to identify how your local space might have tie-ins with other parts of the organization."

"I've seen a lot of areas trying to tackle the same problems with one-off, unique solutions. They may work well in those areas in the short-term, but not when we want to transition that knowledge to other parts of the organization. Without having that connectivity and seeing the big picture, those systems aren't scalable."

To begin, she tries to understand a problem and potential solutions by working though the network. *She'll work with an initial group to get their framing of the problem space, then branch out to find other potential players or stakeholders*. "When you start to think bigger, you don't stop at your immediate group or closest contact. I try to hop across networks to get to other areas, other expertise … Each person is a conduit to see how much further we can go to have a broader discussion." For example, one team developed a set of tools with one part of the business in mind—but it didn't map well for one of Margaux's groups. "The initial conversation was along the lines of, While these tools are a good start they don't really address all our needs … I bet we are not the only area that has gaps. Who can we reach out to?"

## Network Insights

As a result of that conversation, a more expansive, cross-boundary group was formed to address the challenges and create a scalable solution.

As relevant groups and potential collaborators are identified, Margaux faces the challenge of getting them engaged and involved. Sometimes the conversations are open and exploratory; other times the need is more defined or specific. Effort may be minimal or significant, depending on the scope and complexity of the problem. "When work is similar or closely aligned or I have relationships, the conversation is easier … Other times, I need another person in the network to reach out, where they have the relationship or connection … I try to start with people or areas who seem willing and interested, share transparently about our issues and challenges, then allow time for that person to provide their perspective and see if there is commonality. Where we could potentially join together?"

With a clear sense of a need and shared interest, Margaux invests in getting the right people on the project as well as the necessary sponsorship. She lines up formal support and resources based on the size and nature of the project, but what she does to engage influencers has the greatest impact on acceptance and implementation. She brings influencers on board as both sponsors and team members, as well as finding allies who could work behind the scenes to push naysayer or resistors along. She facilitates the group to find solutions, beginning by setting aside assumptions and preconceived notions. "It is important not to get too far down the path with a solution before we fully explore what the problem is. That is a pitfall. I encourage groups to step back and not be constrained by what we currently have available. What is the ideal state? ... I want everyone to have a chance to air concerns as well as their ideas before narrowing to a certain path of action."

To overcome the resistance to change needed to scale and harmonize work, Margaux works to show benefits as widely as possible. "When that wall gets put up, you have to show that the idea will work and that the impact will outweigh the initial investment or the struggle. If you have involved multiple voices and groups, you will be more successful in trying to influence change at the broader level."

- **Learn to see opportunities and map them to the network to scale beyond yourself.** High-performers see possibilities or projects, break them into pieces, map the parts onto capabilities in their network and, finally, help that group integrate. This requires a fundamental understanding of the network for both expertise and engagement.

- **Frame the problem and establish solutions early by working through the network.** Focus on interactions with core influencers to understand dimensions of the problem space. Then, hop across networks to get to other expertise, perspectives and novel solutions.

- **Reach out to influencers—both supporters and resistors.** Provide transparency about issues and challenges, look for common interests or perspectives, try to understand barriers. Seek areas where you could potentially join together to provide a more unified voice.

- **Integrate influencers into the project to create "pull" for the new idea or initiative.** Network influencers and formal sponsors both add legitimacy. The influencers can also bring people on board (and give strategic pressure to more recalcitrant areas) to adapt new ways of working.

## Avoiding Scale "Killers" In Projects

Good ideas don't get implemented across boundaries or on a large scale for various reasons. Margaux's top scale killers are:

1. **Lack of sponsorship when you thought it was secured**. If sponsorship is not sustained, employees will commit time (and might legitimately want to) but then are taken off the effort or become too busy to contribute. Sponsors need to be engaged, asking questions and supporting people and time.

2. **Wrong experts—or maybe the right people without enough time—are identified for the team**. Set clear expectations with sponsors to ensure the people with the right capabilities and the needed time are put on the effort. The right people need to be in the room to have meaningful discussions.

3. **People give their own voice rather than representing their function or group.** Team members and sponsors need to test ideas with colleagues to understand impact and concerns. Not having discussions to capture a broad range of feedback and to communicate what the team is doing will kill a project or slow uptake.

### 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.