



SCALE IDEAS & IMPACT

CASE CONTEXT

A senior HR leader steers global talent toward collaboration through identification, recruiting and entry practices. With a mindset of hiring for expertise, curiosity and collaboration, his team is bringing in top talent and helping them build effective personal networks.



MALE

Level: SENIOR 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.



How Talent Practices are Creating a Collaborative Workforce in a Global Manufacturing Organization

Two decades, multiple HR roles and experience across divisions and regions have marked Martin's career at a global manufacturing company. As he moved into roles of increasing responsibility, he navigated economic and market shifts and now has his eye trained on the future. As head of North American HR, his focus is talent acquisition and talent management. "My role is to make sure we are bringing in the right talent and developing the right people to be as ready possible for the future."

Several large shifts are taking place to drive Martin's approach. One is a signification level of retirements over the coming two-to-five years. Long-tenured employees, holding substantial skill and institutional knowledge, will be replaced by mid-career leaders, diverse experts and skilled technicians. While the attrition places enormous pressure on Martin's group, he views it as an opportunity. For decades, the company has been organized around specialties, product lines and geography. "We are structurally built around silos. We have strong business units with independent mindsets. We are trying to change culture to be a truly global company." At the same time, he operates in an rapidly changing industry and the company is facing disruptive change. "Our business today will not be same as tomorrow." All these factors impact what Martin is looking for in hiring and developing employees.

"Our work is so complex ... We need a new level of curiosity, of being interested in others ... We are looking for people who are adaptable and demonstrate learning agility, curiosity and insightfulness. That is why we need to collaborate and connect the dots across the silos ... We are taking this very seriously and strategically in the way we are looking for talent, the way we are getting it and how we are integrating it."

"You can argue whether you can develop curiosity or if it is in your DNA. I strongly believe that curiosity and creativity are fostered by diversity ... not diversity in a legal sense. When I am surrounded by people who are not like me, who do not think like me, who have different backgrounds and experiences, that sparks my curiosity and helps me see things from a different angle."

Our research shows that Martin is correct. Non-insular networks have a substantial effect on enterprise thinking, retention and creativity of people in their roles. The challenge, then, is how to find the right people and help them create valuable, non-insular networks on entry.

Martin is developing his recruiting function to be savvier in its knowledge of the various functions, industries and companies where they compete for talent. They are building their referral and network strategies, including bypassing university hiring for many early-career positions. Instead, they are using social media to locate people with two or three years of experience, noting that these newcomers have stronger collaborative skills and integrate more effectively into the business.

Martin has also shifted to proactive hiring. Rather than waiting until a job must be filled, he is using analytics to forecast openings and hire top talent, knowing they will be ready to fill openings within 12 months. "Hiring in advance gives me time to focus on who we want and the right quality, rather than rush to fill and pressurizing the system ... My relevant performance indicator is not 'time to fill.' I care about the conversion rate. I want to bring five resumes to a business leader and he wants to hire all five because they are all good. That says we are spot-on in terms of what he requires and that HR completely gets it."

Once employees are hired, the company is using various cross-functional experiences to help them create non-insular networks and think about solving problems across silos. Job rotations, shadowing programs and cross-functional talent exchanges promote a broader perspective of the company and how specific functions interrelate. "Our goal is to create that network and understanding of what other groups are doing and how things fit in the big picture. Plus, it promotes collaboration ... collaboration isn't easy if they don't understand other people's environment and pressures."

As the company pursues a customer-focused, collaborative way of working, Martin is also attuned to the challenge of collaborative overload. Simplification is the counterweight to the over-communicating, over-engineering and over-perfecting that can come with collaboration. "The world is complex enough. We cannot have complex organizations, complex processes and complex tools. As we scale new work, as we take on massive change, as we hire and develop talent, we need to try to simplify as much as we can, remove unnecessary work and focus on purpose."

Network Insights

- **Strategically re-building a workforce in a global organization requires a network approach to hiring.** For this firm, the drive to operate in an enterprise fashion (crossing silos and focusing on customers, not business units) led to talent management practices that identify and recruit based on demonstrated curiosity, proactivity and collaborative skills.
- **People analytics can be used to define hiring needs and bring talent on board in advance of specific vacancies.** This allows a proactive and network-based recruiting strategy to obtain top talent with both experience *and* collaborative skills. Hiring reactively often brings in experience but not the culture fit and collaborative skills that are so critical.
- **Non-insular networks have a substantial effect on enterprise thinking, retention and creativity of people in their roles.** On entry, help people develop rich, boundary spanning ties within the organization and externally (associations, clients, suppliers and academic institutions). Cross-functional experiences (on-boarding, short rotations, staffing, virtual forums and internal communities) speed development of non-insular networks.

On-Boarding Levers that Reduce Voluntary Attrition & Speed Time to Performance

Companies invest enormous resources on identifying and recruiting talent, and then often drop the ball with on-boarding. Our qualitative and quantitative research over 20 years show three network levers to be critical on entry:

1. **Foster pull versus push.** Retention and performance is predicted by creating pull and having established players reaching to newcomers. Consider programs that have well-connected people reaching out (simple pairings often triple the connectivity of newcomers). Teach newcomers how to morph what they know to other people's challenges and create energy and purpose in those interactions.
2. **Help newcomers understand and replicate networks of high performers.** Employees who develop a network action plan on entry enjoy higher retention and productivity benefits.
3. **Form similar-tenure cohorts.** Connectivity (through virtual or face-to-face forums) allows newcomers to have a way to ask questions and share experience. The effect of these ties dissipates over time but having these relationships in the first year is a strong predictor of retention.

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.