



Connected
Commons



Leadership
Resources

Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



INSIGHT BITE



The Formalist



THE FORMALIST



ISSUE



The formalist has an inaccurate perception of the informal network and therefore fails to leverage it as a means to get work done.

OUTCOMES



Formalists may suffer personal frustration if things do not happen the way they expect them to. In an organization, their plans will often be implemented ineffectively and opportunities will be missed.

NETWORK REMEDY



Identify brokers, marginalized voices, overloaded points, and fragmentation where networks are not being tapped effectively.

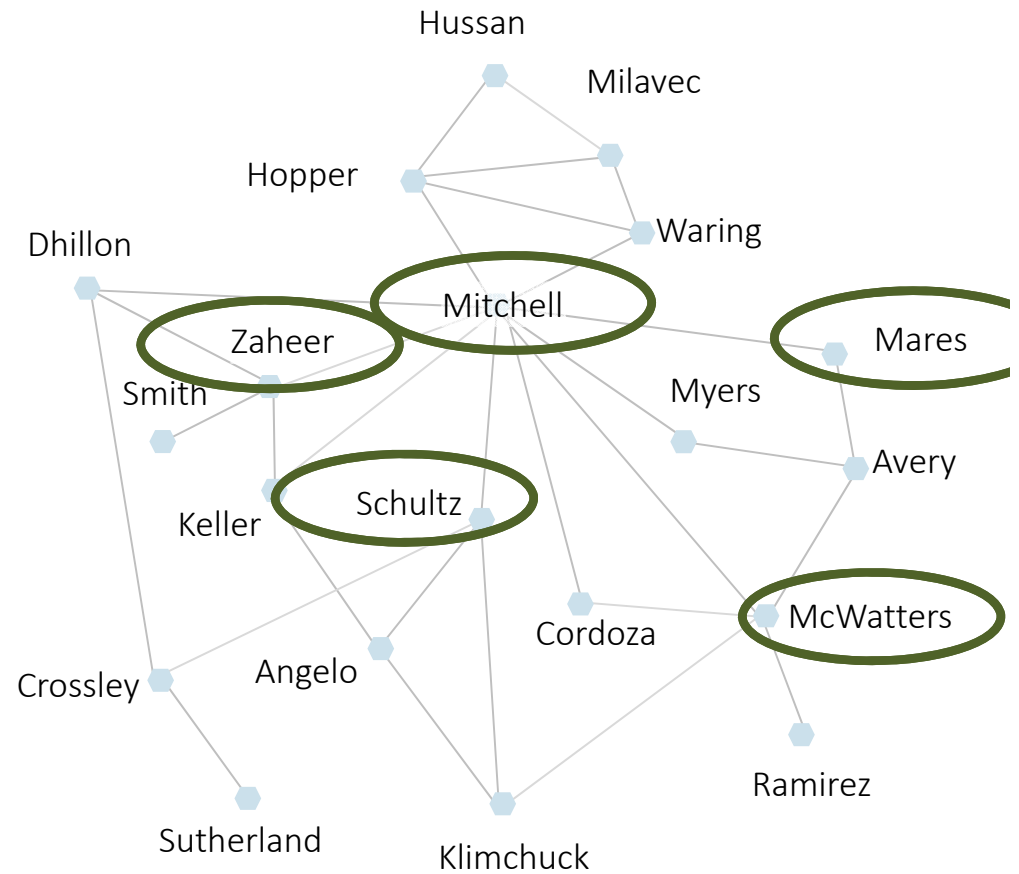
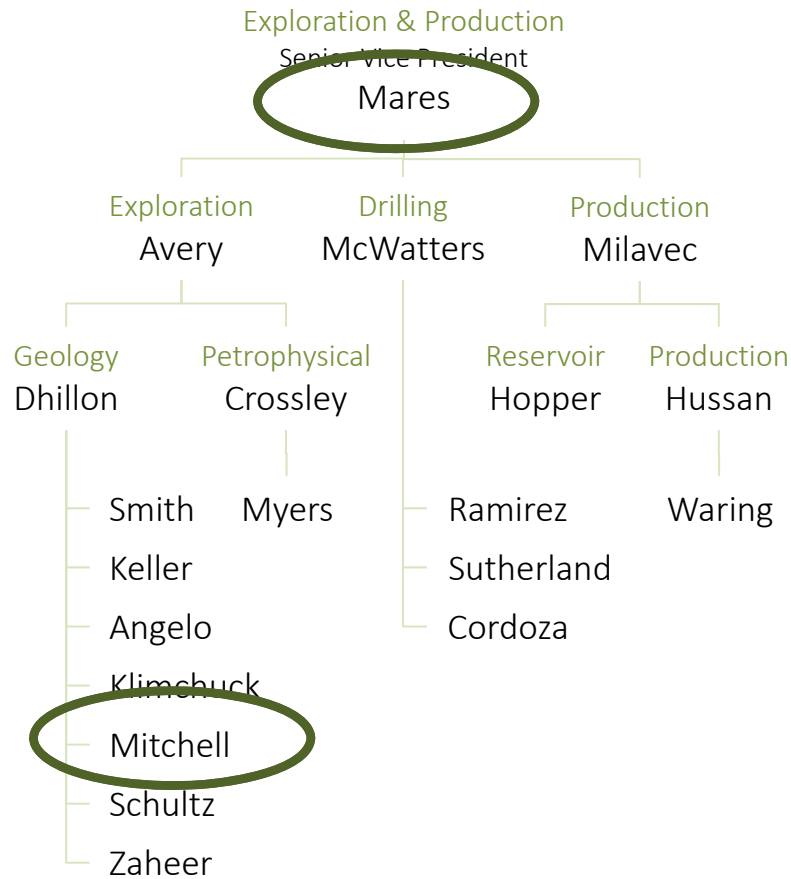


The Formalist



Hierarchal Structure

Network Structure





Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



Avoiding Network Traps That Derail Careers

If not cultivated and adapted to current demands, networks can hurt performance and derail careers. Our research over the past two decades reveals four common derailing traps for rising stars and leaders in transition.

Trap 1 – The Bottleneck

The bottleneck occurs when people create too heavy a reliance on themselves in networks. Bottlenecks use their own time – and that of others – inefficiently, so they invisibly hold up work and innovation in the network.

I strive to build capability around me so that I avoid the



Trap 2 – The Formalist

The formalist relies too heavily on formal structure to implement plans. S/he has an inaccurate perception of the informal network and therefore fails to leverage it as a means to get work done.

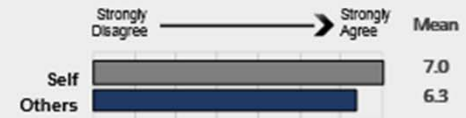
I strive to understand and leverage the informal network in order to avoid the **network trap of the formalist**.



Trap 3 – The Disconnected Expert

The disconnected expert does not leverage relationships sufficiently to address skill gaps – deficiencies of technical expertise, decision-making ability, or interpersonal style – brought on as a product of a transition requiring new capabilities.

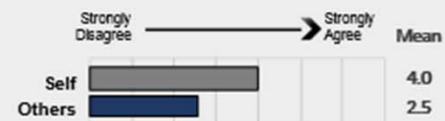
I leverage relationships to help me keep my skills current and avoid the **network trap of the disconnected expert**.



Trap 4 – The Biased Learner

The biased learner allows certain people (such as those from a similar functional background or physical location, or with common values) to become disproportionately important in information and decision interactions.

I strive to maintain a diverse network of relationships to avoid the **network trap of the biased learner**, where certain people have a disproportionate "voice."





Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



Shelia – promoted to lead a corporate function for a global financial institution



Took a long-term view

Relied on relationships and collaboration

Did not try to impress formal leadership or gun for promotion

“I am effective because I know how different pieces come together, and I know people at every level and throughout the business”



Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



Conducted one-on-one interviews with all her direct reports. Kept open-ended to learn professional and personal aspirations

Built relationships with external stakeholders early. Identified network influencers and experts her team should be connecting with to build productive, cross-unit relationships.

Became a connector to help people see how they fit in and who else they should know.



Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



See and leverage informal networks

Ask for a list of people relevant to your work

Don't try to prove yourself through immediate change

Engage both positive and negative opinion leaders



Avoiding the Formalist Network Trap



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LEARN & ADAPT

Moving into a Senior Executive Role: Take Time to Set Priorities & Build Trusting Relationships

CASE CONTEXT
An experienced leader takes on a senior-level, corporate role. Rather than pushing through a new agenda to make her mark, she takes a longer-term view. She focuses on building trust, breaking down silos and reframing priorities.

FEMALE
Level: SENIOR 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.

Shelia took an indirect path to a senior-level job at a global financial institution, where she has been for 22 years. Most of that time, she worked in investments, on numerous teams, in multiple locations and on a diverse range of deals and projects. Five years ago, she switched to corporate and was promoted a year ago to CIO. Leading a corporate function was never Shelia's goal, and she thinks that has been a professional advantage. "If I had been gunning for a job at this level, if I had that lens in everything I did, I'd probably not be in this role. I would have been selective on the projects I worked on or more focused on getting my face time. Instead, I was focused on collaboration and relationships ... I often say my only professional skill is that I know this company—I am effective because I know how different pieces come together and I know people at every level and throughout the business."

Her path to senior leadership may not work for all, but she maintains her belief in the value a strong network, effective collaboration and trust. When she took over IT, she decided to invest in understanding the people and the context, rather than pushing through a 100-day plan, which she had done in a prior role "The last role involved creating something new and I needed to energize and focus the team, but this context was different. Leadership had been a revolving door and the team was change weary. They were not necessarily going to be excited about my new ideas I tried to have a steady hand ... I deliberately did not have a 100-day plan. Implicit in that, you're telling the people, *You've been doing all of these things wrong and in a 100 days, look how much I could fix it.* That's disrespectful to them and would suck too much energy out of the group."

Shelia's existing relationships within the IT function helped her cut to the heart of what was going on and what was needed. And, she spent hours listening to and connecting with the many people she did not know. "I had to get people comfortable with me so they'll talk to me." She learned that most people were not seeing the whole or collaborating with other teams. She began to introduce people to others where there were overlaps and connections, including people in two teams that were doing essentially the same work. "Coming in, my greatest value was being a connector and an integrator. I helped people to understand how what they were doing connected to the business, to the broader mission and to each other."

She also began to shift the emphasis away from narrow processes or activity-based metrics. "What are we trying to achieve? Our goal is to change the business ... Talking about the *why* and redefining what success means has been difficult, but that's been a big part of my effort."

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IN SUMMARY:

Start: who do I meet?

Ask: who else?

Build: trust

