



Connected
Commons



Leadership
Resources

Avoiding the Bottleneck Network Trap



INSIGHT BITE



The Bottleneck



THE BOTTLENECK



ISSUE



The bottleneck creates a heavy reliance on himself or herself. Bottlenecks use their own time – and that of others – inefficiently, so they invisibly hold up work and innovation in the network.

OUTCOMES



Bottlenecks may experience personal burnout. The organization's dependence on them means it fails to use expertise on the network's periphery; the network is slower to respond to opportunities and threats, and innovation stalls.

NETWORK REMEDY



Identify categories of information, decision rights, and tasks that can be reallocated to alleviate overloaded points and draw others into the network. Shift behavioral tendencies that are creating excessive network reliance on the bottleneck.



Avoiding The Bottleneck 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

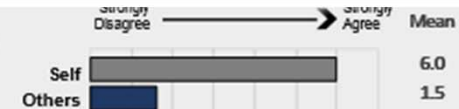
The bottleneck occurs when people create too heavy a reliance on themselves in networks. Bottlenecks use their own time – and that of others – inefficiently, so they invisibly hold up work and innovation in the network.

I strive to build capability around me so that I avoid the network trap of the bottleneck.



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.

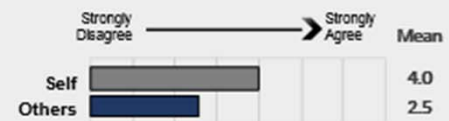
I leverage relationships to help me keep my skills current and avoid the network trap of the disconnected expert.



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 Bottleneck Network Trap



Ashley – promoted to manage a 200-person customer-service department



Increased the scope and volume

Worked to overcome her high-achiever, “do-it-myself” and engage the network

After a surge in the collaborative intensity, focused on developing her team and delegating effectively

“ It was a huge step for me to not always be the person who has to do everything”



Avoiding The Bottleneck Network Trap



Built the internal and external network, meeting with clients as well as internal sales and customer support teams, frontline managers and data experts

Designated and developed teams to be on-point for client interface at multiple levels.

Worked with a valued, up-and-coming leader to help manage the overload and provide a learning and visibility opportunity for him.



Avoiding The Bottleneck Network Trap



Surge into the network

Leverage boundary
spanning ties

Employ a PULL philosophy

Practice letting go



Avoiding The Bottleneck Network Trap



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LEARN &
ADAPT

A Do-It-Myself Manager Learns to Rely on the Network

CASE CONTEXT

A rising-star leader is pulled into a crisis with a key client shortly after being promoted. To solve the problem and fix the relationship, she engages the network, fosters learning and manages collaborative overload. She discovers the value of letting go and working through others.



FEMALE

Level: MANAGER OF
MANAGERS
Industry: HEALTHCARE

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 plays 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.



Not long after she was promoted to lead a customer-facing department of 200 employees, Ashley was faced with an angry client, whose negative experience was jeopardizing the company's long-standing relationship. The client's representative was also known for having high demands, being quick to call out problems and wanting to take a deep look at operations and solutions.

The business needed the problem to be resolved and the relationship mended. Personally, Ashley was in the spotlight. She approached the problem at its root, to trace back the experience of individual customers using the service as well as the experience of the client who contracts the work. "That's where networking came in into play. Instead of sitting there and putting an action plan in place on my own and demand that my staff follow it, I went out to talk to people on the client side, the sales and support side, my frontline managers, the data people. I talked to people who have interacted with this individual before and know his personality. I needed their information, ideas and insight about what we can do quickly and what long-term plans we should put into place. What ideas do you guys have? I had to listen to what they had to say and not just make a decision on my own of what I thought we should do."

"To be honest, that's been a growing experience for me because I'm quick to think *Hey, here's what we should do!*"

Frustration, negativity and defensiveness had the potential to block Ashley and her team's energy and motivation to solve the problem. "I wanted to make sure we took it on as a challenge and really turn it around ... We had to pay attention to the negative. Something happened to cause the client's reaction and perception. So, if it is what it is today, what can we do to make it different? We could get hung up in that negative piece of it, and there were times I got frustrated through the process. But, by going through this to help that client, we would learn and improve my overall business."

For herself and her team, Ashley focused on the positives. Doing well meant improving and building experience in an important market. It was an opportunity for her team to be seen as successful. "I also had an up-and-coming leader on my team, and I thought this was a great opportunity to engage him and really give him a chance to have leadership exposure. He would help me with the challenge, but it was a good way for him to step in and grow and develop as well."



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IN SUMMARY:

Surge on entry

Adapt 6-9 months in

Don't be a hero

