



Connected
Commons



Leadership
Resources

Avoiding the Biased Learner Network Trap



INSIGHT BITE



Relational Network Traps



BIASED LEARNER



ISSUE



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.

OUTCOMES



Poor strategies, inflexibility, and unethical decisions are all potential outcomes if certain voices become too privileged.

NETWORK REMEDY



Identify and correct overinvestment and underinvestment in relationships.



Avoiding the Biased Learner 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.

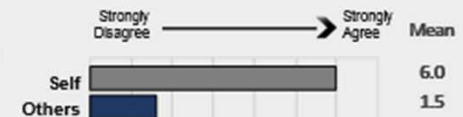
I strive to build capability around me so that I avoid the network trap of the bottleneck.



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.



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."





Boundary Spanning Ties Are Critical



Boundary Spanning Ties Are Critical To Individual Innovation and Performance on Four Fronts



Emergence/Creativity Ties

Identify silos or boundaries where value could be created by bridging across two thought worlds. This may be across expertise domains, functions, clients, etc.



Professional Growth Ties

People that you seek out or voluntarily offer feedback to you – whether on work, interaction or decision-making topics. At least one person that holds you accountable.



Depth/Best Practice Ties

Identify others with similar expertise – cross geography, company or functional lines -- where connections could help promote depth, currency or efficiency in your work.



Sensemaking / Landscape Ties

People or practices that help you get an accurate picture of the network important to work you are trying to get done. Predictive accuracy is associated with performance over time.



Avoiding the Biased Learner Network Trap



Brenda – promoted into a global role after 20 years in manufacturing

New business and technical knowledge and strategic work

Sought out range of perspectives, open to learning from all stakeholders

Learned what she did not know, took criticism seriously, and focused on gaining credibility and building trust

“A lot of my time was building networks that were not there before”



Avoiding the Biased Learner Network Trap



Built the network to supplement skill gaps. Attended meetings and built relationships with people who have technical and business expertise – and diverse views.

Sought advice and knowledge from people who have held similar roles.

Found “truth tellers” who would give brutally honest feedback about how she is approaching the new role.



Avoiding the Biased Learner Network Trap



Don't over-rely on
current network

Seek out people who
have done similar work

Find two or three confidantes


In each interaction ask:
Who else should I talk to?



Avoiding the Biased Learner Network Trap



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Connected Leadership | 



LEARN &
ADAPT

Networks Provide Expertise, Support & Purpose to Enable Senior Executive to Adapt & Thrive

CASE CONTEXT

A leader transitions into a global role by building new relationships to gain needed perspective and support. Initially, she is very involved to learn the work and the network. Then, she prioritizes her time and attention in ways that add the most value in order to build bench strength and prevent collaborative overload.



FEMALE

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.



Brenda has spent 20 years in a major manufacturing company, progressing across functions and roles and moving

up the ranks. She has run highly technical teams and high-volume work. A track record of managing tough jobs led to a plant manager post. A few years ago, she shifted to a global role, managing a group that maps out future manufacturing processes and interfaces with numerous engineering and operations teams. She has adapted to this senior role in ways that have allowed her to be effective, while also gaining satisfaction in the work.

The shift to a global role posed business and technical challenges. Plus, the work was long-term, large-scale and strategic, rather than tactical and self-contained. "When you run a plant, you are all in one location. It's easy to get to know people ... In this job, I found it challenging because people are spread out, so I'm traveling 60 percent of the time. And, we are working on strategies that are going to drive change in the future versus, *I need to make my numbers today.*" She also had multiple stakeholders and functions to engage. "It's very important to have a good, strong relationship with my functional partners and make sure we are aligned on what's important ... A lot of my time is building those networks that weren't there before."

Initially, Brenda listened and sought feedback to fill in gaps in her perspective and knowledge. "The first 30 days, you just listen. You meet your direct reports, your peers, the teams. *How are we structured? Are deliverables clear? Are we efficient? Do they see themselves as a team?* ... I had my perspective on areas I thought should be a priority, but that's just one perspective. It's arrogant to walk in and say, *I am going to fix these five things.*" She spent time in meetings within her group and in one-on-ones with managers who are the critical interfaces with external teams. In one instance, she got valuable feedback on the integrity of a key process and took time to understand it and do something about it. That initial openness established relationships that have since proven valuable and reciprocal. "The more that people see that you are open to hear their perspective, the more they are willing to share information upfront ... I've built credibility, so that same guy now calls me about product changes or cost overruns and says, *I'm going to work with your team to manage it.*"

Brenda's instinct to reach out, hear a range of perspectives and learn from new people is in contrast to the instincts of many leaders who rise to senior roles. Research shows that people tend to over-value their expertise and existing network. They continue to rely on trusted ties—holding on to 70-80 percent of ties from the prior role, rather than seeking out new experts, advisors and allies. This behavior creates unintentional bias about what is

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IN SUMMARY:

Cross boundaries

Listen to diverse views

Respond to feedback

