



Effectively
Managing
Transitions

INITIATE

Identify and Build Relationships with Network Opinion Leaders Inside and Outside Your Unit

PRINCIPLE

The size of your network is not the critical driver of success—who you connect with is. Identify and engage people who are opinion leaders, or network influencers, to create legitimacy, reputation and organizational know-how. These relationships pull you into opportunities and successful outcomes sooner.



“I pay close attention in meetings regarding who listens to whom, who defers to whom and who is called out as a trusted source. If you watch and listen, you can pick up a lot that helps you very quickly.”

MANAGING TRANSITIONS

Entry into a new organization, changing roles, new responsibilities and promotion all place demands on you that can most efficiently be met by leveraging networks. Make transitions successful by investing in networks in three ways:

Initiate

Jumpstart productivity and inclusion by cultivating essential connections broadly and before you need help from others.



Engage

Energize people in your network and pull colleagues to you and your ideas when engaging with new groups.



Refine

Re-calibrate networks and collaborative practices for long-term effectiveness and well-being.



People transitioning into a new role are often told to create a large network and close ties to formal leaders. Our research shows that neither a large network nor close association with a leader early are the keys to rapid integration. Rather, having an accurate understanding of the *influential informal network* and creating ties with *opinion leaders* helps people build reputation and legitimacy. Taking these steps early establishes a robust network in one-third the typical time as newcomers leverage the expertise and credibility of their established colleagues.

You can become productive more quickly by identifying and engaging opinion leaders within your team or unit—and within other levels, locations or functions. Informal opinion leaders are respected for their knowledge, experience, organizational wisdom, passion or how they operate. Consider connections with four types of network influencers:

- **Central Connectors** have many informal connections and are influential within a group—typically within a function, location or capability.
- **Boundary Spanners, or Brokers**, have ties across groups or geographies and can help to integrate networks and perspectives.
- **Energizers** create passion and enthusiasm in their interactions.
- **Resisters** are negative influencers. They may be vocal about their opinions, passively resist or simply pursue goals misaligned with your objectives.

Kathryn accepted a role leading a department that chronically underperformed and had been resistant to the change efforts of several previous leaders. Right away, she sought to understand the hidden team dynamics, asking, *Who do you go to if you have a problem or a question?* “If I could get one or two influential people on board, they would start pulling others on board.” Kathryn assigned a quiet influencer to lead a project and drew her out in team meetings by asking questions or bringing up topics where she had expertise or interest. Similarly, Kathryn worked to engage a person on the team who was vocally negative, asking her what she does better than anyone else. “I made sure to bring those topics up, and I pulled her into the conversation. People heard her talk positively, and she started feeling more a part of the team.” As these and other influencers contributed in positive ways, the negative energy dissipated, effort increased and performance improved.

Shortly after joining a global firm, Ricky leveraged the informal network to identify and engage influencers across silos and countries. He began with three people in his business unit and asked, *who do you know who is plugged in to each market and function?* “In one area, no one in my group knew anybody directly, but someone said, *I do know someone who might know somebody*. It was very informal, but I eventually got to the operations VP in a key market.” In conversation with him, introductions were made to the finance and HR managers, whose involvement and influence eventually led to a strategic initiative and repeatable business model.

MAKE A PLAN TO IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE NETWORK INFLUENCERS

A connection with a network influencer leads to more successful outcomes for your projects and goals, as well as early opportunities for you to prove yourself and be drawn into future work.

Identify a project, goal or initiative that is a priority in the next 6 months: _____

Make a list of potential influencers and a way to connect with or involve each one (e.g., invite to a meeting, bring in to advise, give an assignment, accomplish something together).

INFLUENCERS TO IDENTIFY	POSSIBLE INFLUENCERS	IDEAS TO INVOLVE INFLUENCERS
Central Connectors. Who has connections and is influential within a group—typically within a function, location or capability? Often, key Central Connectors are under the radar and not in formal leadership roles.	Notice: Who is deferred to or agreed with in team meetings? Who sways others without authority? <hr/> Ask: Who do you go to for information or help? Who knows the history of this group or project? <hr/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Boundary Spanners, or Brokers. Who has ties across groups or geographies? Their power lies in bridging otherwise disconnected groups though they may not be formal influencers in any of them. They are key to integrating perspectives and solving problems that impact multiple groups.	Notice: Who knows or represents the concerns of various groups? Who is trusted across groups? <hr/> Ask: Who spends time with these groups? Who would know about the internal dynamics of both? <hr/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Energizers. Who creates passion and enthusiasm in their interactions? Energizers overcome resistance and create followership by interacting with people in ways that leave them feeling optimistic, appreciated and purposeful.	Notice: Are people energized or drained? Who leads the most engaged teams? <hr/> Ask: Who are the people everyone wants to work with? Who creates energy in their interactions? <hr/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •
Resisters. Who complains, criticizes, passively resists or is simply pulling in another direction and is influential in the network? Resisters have an uncanny ability to stall momentum and de-energize their colleagues with negative comments, cynicism or lack of interest outside their narrow sphere.	Notice: Who is vocally negative or critical? Who may quietly disagree/undermine? <hr/> Ask: Who is affected by a change but is not involved or on board? Who might have different goals? <hr/>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

NETWORK TIPS

- **Don't rely on your first impressions to identify influencers.** People are notoriously bad at this. Influencers are often introverted or off-the-radar people that you would not assume to be opinion leaders. Watch the group to see who people defer to. Ask team members who they turn to for help or who might be for or against a given initiative.
- **Reach out to senior leaders.** Your leader and others higher in the organization have good visibility into broader parts of the organization. Ask them for referrals and introductions to those you should reach to.
- **Enroll each influencer in a unique way.** Know what they care about and engage them at that level. Look for common interests or perspectives; try to understand barriers. Seek areas where you could potentially partner in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals.