



Effectively
Managing
Transitions

REFINE

Avoid Common Career-Derailing Network Traps in Transition

PRINCIPLE

Be alert to network traps that cause otherwise high performers to struggle. Adjust patterns of collaboration to avoid these invisible traps. Role transitions—into a new organization, lateral moves and promotions—are high-risk times if you are not attuned to ways your network might undermine success.



“I had support and advice from a close work friend from my previous role, but I struggled to connect with the people who could help me when I moved to a new unit. I didn’t get up to speed as quickly and it made my job harder.”

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.

Our research over more than two decades has revealed four traps, or network archetypes, that derail rising stars, high performers and leaders. The self-imposed pressure to produce quick results or the misguided advice of many self-help books to simply build a big network can derail otherwise high performers.

During role transitions, be alert to the common network traps and adjust patterns of collaboration and connection to avoid network failure.

- **Defend against the tendency to turn to people who you relied on in your prior role.** The *biased learner* places too heavy a reliance on a few trusted, well-liked or familiar people, or over-values one or two groups. Very often, people transition roles but continue to hold on to 60-70% of their most trusted ties back in the area they came from. Allowing certain voices to be too influential gives you a biased view of what is important.
- **Avoid over-reliance on your past expertise and personal judgment.** The *disconnected expert* does not know when the skills they have used in past roles are insufficient. If you do not build a new network and seek input, you will struggle to understand a new context, see new approaches or know what you need to learn or behaviors to change. You will miss opportunities to leverage others to address skill gaps or extend your capability.
- **Don’t overlook or underestimate the value of the informal network.** The *formalist* over-relies on titles, org charts and positional authority and does not adequately engage network opinion leaders and informal influencers. Without access to the informal network, you are blocked from valuable ideas and information and are likely to be surprised and frustrated when things do not unfold as expected.
- **Refrain from becoming too-central in the network.** *Bottlenecks* create a heavy reliance on themselves that cannot be sustained. If you are overly involved, you use everyone’s time inefficiently; teams become frustrated. You may struggle to deliver results at a time when you are building your reputation.





Janelle drew in people with fresh views when she took on a new role in the same company, including employees in her function and related groups, operations leaders, even outsiders with no knowledge of the business. “If you’ve been around the business a long time, you have to reach out, learn and ask people to punch holes in your thinking.”

Niall, another experienced leader in a new role, had no ego about learning. “I don’t need to be the smartest guy in the room ... You have to ask, *In this role, what don’t I know?*” He built internal relationships, hired for specific product and customer knowledge and turned to junior team members for insight. And Shelia intentionally focused on the informal paths of influence and collaboration by seeking out marginalized voices and places where formal structures of collaboration had broken down.

KNOW YOUR NETWORK RISK

Are you unintentionally limiting your success or risking derailment due to common network traps? Look at the symptoms below and **consider which trap is your greatest risk:** _____

Brainstorm actions you could take to avoid the trap and **list one step to take right away:**

TRAP	SYMPTOMS	ACTIONS
Biased Learner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You over rely on colleagues or contacts you've known a long time. You turn to the same core of people for information, ideas and execution and rarely branch out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plot out areas you need to connect to: functions, teams, locations, levels. Schedule meetings with formal and informal leaders. Be aware of the tendency to get advice or information from the same 2-3 people. Seek at least 1 more perspective. Do not assume your view is the right/best one, especially if it is confirmed by a few long-standing network ties.
Disconnected Expert 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are sure your expertise or track record will provide the know-how for success in your new role. You hesitate to ask for feedback or lean on others to identify and fill in skill gaps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek feedback and advice from others who have been in your role or similar situations, or who have complementary skills or expertise. Use newness to your advantage. Give yourself permission to ask questions, seek help or admit what you do not know. Maintain ties with a small set of colleagues who know you well and will provide personal support and help you make sense of things.
Formalist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You equate influence with formal authority and invest your time proving yourself to formal leaders. You rely on you manager or other formal leader to be the go-between to other groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask your manager for a list of people relevant to your work. Go meet with those people and then at the end of every meeting ask for names of two other people you should meet. Take time to meet and build relationships with peers, informal influencers and internal/external experts—even when you don't see an immediate need or value.
Bottleneck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You establish yourself as the expert and decision-maker. Meetings don't start or lead to decisions without you. Work stalls waiting for you to weigh in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify categories of information, decision rights and tasks that can be reallocated and/or dispersed among various people. Don't say yes to every meeting request. Send others. Or, bring a direct report or team member with you to take on tasks. Be sure colleagues communicate directly with each other and know where expertise/information resides within/across groups.

NETWORK TIPS

- **Continually refine.** Don't assume your current network is all you need for long-term viability and success. What relationships can you prune or put new limits on? What ties should be reinvigorated or created?
- **Pay attention to *who* as well as *what*.** As you engage in new work, get in the habit of thinking about the network early on. Who is influential and connected? Who could benefit from being involved? Who has been needlessly pulled in? Who has been left out?
- **Make it a habit to ask, *Who else should I talk to?*** When making a new contact or beginning something new, this question will open the door to a more effective network. Small investments to get a full perspective early on will have a big payoff.