



Effectively  
Managing  
Transitions

INITIATE

IDENTIFY AND BUILD  
RELATIONSHIPS WITH  
NETWORK OPINION LEADERS

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



MALE

Level: MANAGER OF  
MANAGERS

Industry: CONSUMER  
PRODUCTS

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.



# An Effective Global Network Increases Revenue & Replicates Success in Multiple Countries

## Ricky brings broad functional and management knowledge to his role as a strategy director for a global company.

His prior roles, both within the organization and in smaller firms, have involved general management and operations functions across Europe, Africa and the Americas. He currently runs a team of 26, half of whom operate away from the company's U.K. headquarters. **Shortly after joining the company, he had an experience that built out his network and taught him the power of connecting to influencers across the company.**

**Early on, Ricky understood he would have to leverage the informal network to identify and engage influencers across silos and countries. As he met people at headquarters, he asked, *Who do you know who is plugged in to each market and function?***

Newly responsible for several brands, Ricky learned that a once-popular brand had been languishing in one market in South America. The business model for decades past—selling through a local distributor—caused two problems: sales were declining due to inattention and revenue was unable to be extracted or reinvested due to legal and regulatory changes. “The way we were set up had us selling product, but not getting anything for it ... The core of the solution was clear—a new legal entity rather than the third-party distributor—but was there a way to make a more sustainable, better business over time? Could we do better than a shell to get the money out and have a business that created value?”

Ricky ended up working with a team of 18 people—a group that evolved through networks, not formal channels. The initial team was Ricky, his boss and a finance director, all U.K.-based and none with direct knowledge of the markets they were pursuing. **“No one in my group knew anybody in that business, but someone said, *I do know someone who might know somebody.* It was very informal, but I eventually got to the influential operations VP.”** In conversation with him, introductions were made to the finance and HR managers, who offered expertise and opened doors. Similarly, Ricky was able to get buy in for the idea from finance and legal in the U.K. and help from marketing and product development in Switzerland. **“Their involvement and influence made the difference.”**

Ricky and the dispersed team pursued their options. Importantly, the work was framed around a joint definition of the problem—not just a directive from headquarters. “We focused on what the brand was, how it had gone wrong and how to turn it around ... We needed all of us to decide how we were going to push this brand.” With a collaborative tone and shared understanding set, the project took off.

The right mix of expertise and collaborative skill was important in recruiting everyone involved in the project: “If you have a small team, one person who is not right is a huge problem.” Getting the best person in the GM role was especially important, given the combination of starting up a new business and working with an established brand and company. “The person I was looking for was a self-starter ... We had to operate as a start-up. We had to break everything to make it work again ... I thought all the candidates would love that, but some people couldn’t handle that amount of liberty or autonomy in decision-making.”

At the same time, the GM and her team needed to work within the broader team and in the context of the bigger company. “There was a lot of discussion around how broad the scope of the local team was ... They are close to the market, but they couldn’t go off and do whatever they wanted. There are checks and balances when you engage other people and then, hopefully, you get to the best answer.”

Ricky saw his role as one of facilitation within the network, helping navigate the systems and manage the collaborative tension. “I said, *I will support you in making things happen. If you don’t know someone, I will get you that contact.*” As there were roadblocks in the process, or communication challenges within the team, he worked to keep everyone aligned through regular team calls. He held one-on-ones to be sure ideas and issues were being raised and addressed. “There were little things, communication hiccups. I could say, *Look, it’s OK. It was not done maliciously and we learned.*”

The project was successful, with both an early win of nearly \$1 million and steady growth over time. What had been a shrinking \$3 million business is now a \$22 million business. The value of the brand in the market is strong. **Ricky has also applied the business model—and his global network process—to operations and products in three other countries. “It’s a repeatable model. We have used our experience to find the connections and add new businesses in the countries the company is already in.”** Personally, he loves working in global teams. “I have learned so much about people and how they think about problems and how to get to ideas and solutions.”

## Network Insights

- **Leverage the informal network to identify and engage influencers across silos or cultures.** Ricky began with three people in his business unit and asked, *who do you know?* to find colleagues with regional and technical expertise.
- **Don’t deliver a fixed plan to the network.** Spend time with cross-functional or cross-boundary influencers to gain mutual agreement on the problem space. Involvement at this stage also allows for innovative solutions and spurs ownership among stakeholders.
- **Staff the execution team with collaborative people who can thrive in the needed environment.** A network analysis can identify potential brokers and energizers; interviews can determine the fit for factors such as ability to thrive in an environment with little structure or interest in the challenge.
- **Build the network to deliver.** As the plan is shaped, expand the network internally and externally as required to scale the work or adapt the process to different locations or contexts.

## Creating Engagement & Reputation by Being Pulled Into Networks

Ricky has learned to overcome the “tyranny of distance” as he has managed global groups. Here are a few tips to keep the network engaged and effective.

1. **Structure time into your calendar to touch base with direct reports or core team.** “Because you won’t bump into people in the corridor, your calendar management has to be really good and you need to stay committed to those meetings.” Focus 1:1s and team meetings on current issues and creating connections or introductions to other people who may be resources. Connect off task as well—get to know people’s interests and aspirations.
2. **Alternate time zones so that no one feels continuously put out.** Rotate your morning and evening calls, so that the inconvenience is shared and people can bring different levels of energy to meetings over time.
3. **Get together face-to-face once or twice a year.** Include a range of ways to engage: bring in an outside voice (a customer or a subject expert), on-task conversation and planning, unstructured blocks of time and social activities. “Give time for people to have a drink, take a walk, go explore. The problems people have bubble up to the surface if you give them time.”

### ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS

Building on 20 years of research with more than 300 organizations, the Network Leader Research Project seeks to understand the approach and strategies that enable certain leaders to consistently achieve peak performance. The research includes 160 in-depth interviews conducted by Rob Cross, Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership, Babson College. The Connected Commons is currently focusing its research on leadership effectiveness, talent optimization and organizational alignment and change—three areas where network insights can clearly drive performance. For more information visit [www.connectedcommons.com](http://www.connectedcommons.com) or email Rob at [rlcrossjr@gmail.com](mailto:rlcrossjr@gmail.com).