



Innovation & Organization Alignment



ABOUT

- Leading edge provider of healthcare management services
- Double-digit growth over more than 4 years continuing to accelerate
- Continued innovation central to success

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- Deliver top-notch service and innovation despite rapid growth
- Maintain an edge in rapidly-changing fields of technology
- Quickly solve problems and innovate through sharing of specialized expertise

Case Study Summary

SOLUTIONS

- Reduce collaborative overload, especially among the top connectors
- Make expertise more easily available through targeted network connections
- Create agility by connecting across select, high impact organizational boundaries

IMPLEMENTATION

- Build executive support and commitment by delivering a series of individual unit ONA reports
- Involve network brokers and central connectors in a series of Business Partner Collaboration Meetings to strengthen working relationships and knowledge exchange
- Leverage personal assessments to address collaborative overload

Building Networks for Growth and Agility

Part I: Strategically Targeting Network Development

Executive Summary

A high growth leader in healthcare innovation needed to more efficiently service a rapidly expanding client base and better share specialized expertise to quickly solve problems and develop innovative new products. Recognizing the role of networks in these collaborative activities, they turned to organizational network analysis (ONA) to identify strategic targets for network development. The ONA revealed three main priorities: (1) reducing collaborative overload, particularly among top connectors, (2) making expertise more readily available through the network, and (3) creating agility by better connecting across high-impact organizational boundaries. To drive change, the company first engaged executives with network reports specific to each one's unit. They then chose targets with direct business relevance and a high level of energy for change at the executive level. Identified groups would participate in a series of Business Partner Collaboration meetings to produce structural changes in working relationships and individual network development plans.

The Challenge

After more than four years of double-digit growth, executives at HealthIncite could see how escalating demands were straining their ability to deliver top-notch service and innovation to their clients. An increase in the number of clients meant employees needed to manage larger portfolios, and increasingly complex programs required them to coordinate across more diverse parts of the company. Meanwhile, the company needed to maintain their edge in rapidly-changing fields of technology and ensure that specialized expertise was available on the spot to quickly solve problems and produce innovative new products.

The company recognized that staying agile through rapid growth required them to build networks that would support collaboration and knowledge-sharing. But employee workloads were maxed out, so efforts to build networks would have to be strategically focused with a clear pay-off. They turned to organizational network analysis (ONA) to guide their network development priorities.

The ONA revealed three main priorities: (1) reducing collaborative overload, particularly among top connectors, (2) making expertise more readily available through the network, and (3) creating agility by better connecting across high-impact organizational boundaries.

A broad-based ONA revealed three main priorities.

Priority 1: Reduce collaborative overload, especially among the top connectors.

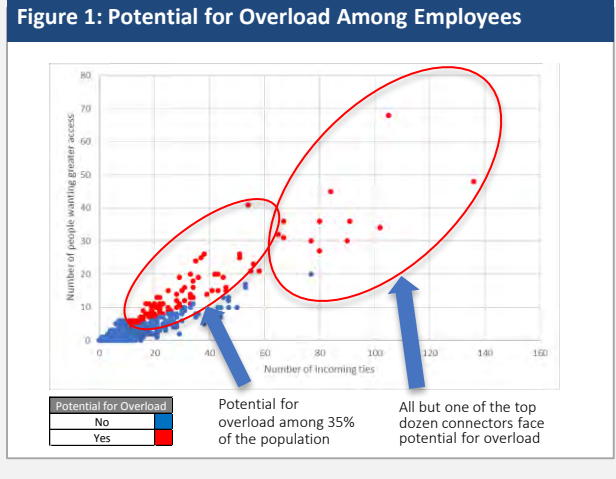
As shown in Figure 1, the company relied heavily on the top dozen connectors. As the company grew, its networks had not evolved to reduce dependence on the top dozen and develop alternative sources of decision-making and expertise. Not surprisingly, all but one of those key people faced collaborative overload, and limits on their availability could slow the essential processes through which HealthIncite served its clients.

In addition, the ONA showed more pervasive collaborative overload, impacting over a third of the employee population. According to one employee, “There is definitely not a lack of willingness to collaborate, it is a lack of hours in the day.” To service larger client portfolios, people would need to more efficiently collaborate, and gain skills in recognizing and purposefully managing their sources of overload.

Priority 2: Make expertise more easily available through the network.

HealthIncite employees found it difficult to locate the experts they needed across an ever-changing organizational landscape. Fully 47% of the population cited not knowing whom to reach out to as a top impediment to accessing expertise. Without easy access to diverse sources, people default to the ones they’ve always used, with resulting over-reliance on the most well-known people. As one

ONA revealed key points of collaborative overload for the company to target



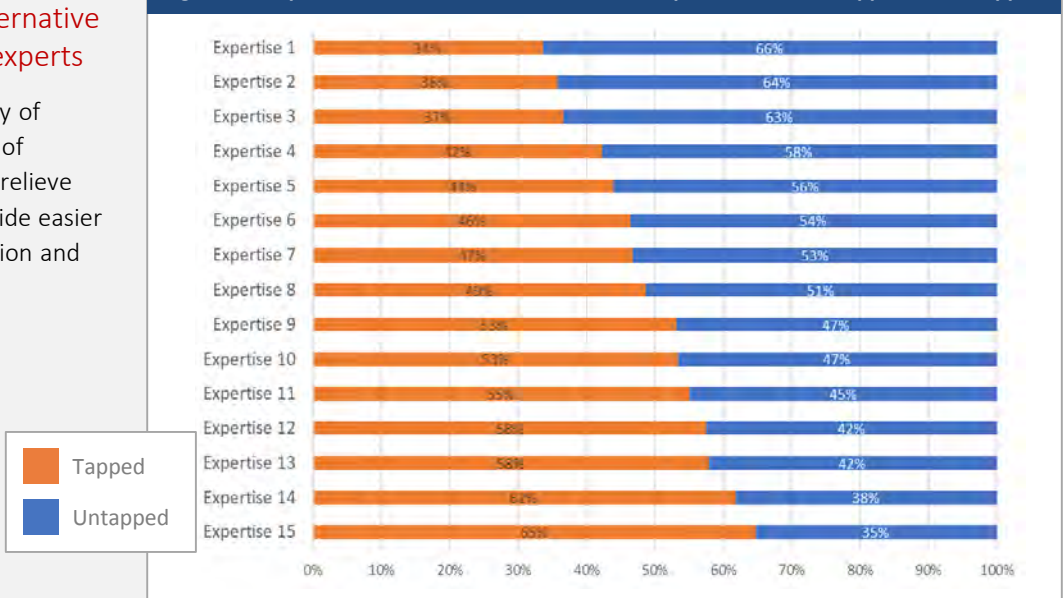
employee put it, “Sometimes in a company this big it’s difficult to know who to reach out to when a problem arises. I typically ask the same two or three people for input...”

Meanwhile, the ONA showed that on average, across 15 different areas of expertise, 51% of self-identified sources of expertise were going untapped. HealthIncite had a major opportunity to raise the visibility of relative unknowns on the fringes of the network and develop secondary sources of expertise — making expertise more broadly accessible and reducing the load on the most popular sources.

Untapped sources provided an alternative to overloaded experts

Raising the visibility of untapped sources of expertise helps to relieve overload and provide easier access to information and problem-solving.

Figure 2: Proportion of Self-identified Sources of Expertise that are Tapped vs. Untapped



Priority 3: Create agility by connecting across high-impact organizational boundaries.

One of HealthIncite’s most important opportunities was to better connect the client-facing and operational sides of the business for better coordination on both sales and

product delivery. As shown in Figure 3, the ONA identified units that were less connected than expected for their size. We combined this with employees’ “wish lists” for improved collaboration to identify the partnerships where investments in network development would provide the most value.

ONA identified high impact targets for network development

Three key groups show low incoming connections for their size.

Figure 3: Density Indexes Across Units

	Unit 1	Unit 2	Unit 3	Unit 4	Unit 5	Unit 6	Unit 7	Unit 8	Unit 9	Unit 10	Unit 11	Unit 12
Unit 1	0.84	3.10	-0.76	0.04	1.52	-0.18	0.71	-0.61	0.89	0.25	-0.98	-1.00
Unit 2	0.42	10.17	-0.88	-0.68	-0.76	-0.81	0.90	-0.66	0.63	-0.02	-0.90	-0.80
Unit 3	-0.61	-0.57	7.55	0.33	1.57	-0.82	1.17	1.75	-0.65	-0.62	-0.80	-0.27
Unit 4	0.27	1.38	0.18	6.90	3.80	-0.85	1.65	0.30	0.89	-0.50	-0.77	3.24
Unit 5	0.40	-0.52	0.60	0.86	11.35	-0.71	-0.71	0.69	0.13	-0.73	-0.90	-0.44
Unit 6	-0.65	-0.36	-0.81	-0.83	-0.22	1.20	-0.83	-0.33	-0.60	-0.61	-0.75	-0.54
Unit 7	0.17	2.01	0.72	1.35	-0.41	-0.86	12.62	-0.68	0.09	-0.29	-0.94	1.25
Unit 8	-0.44	-0.15	0.07	0.13	1.11	-0.68	-0.26	8.02	-0.70	-0.78	-0.95	-0.46
Unit 9	-0.12	2.01	-0.62	0.57	0.67	-0.68	0.29	-0.56	4.42	-0.28	-0.86	-0.18
Unit 10	-0.11	0.99	-0.98	-0.70	-0.33	-0.72	-0.47	-0.87	-0.16	1.23	-0.91	-0.68
Unit 11	-0.98	-0.49	-0.90	-0.79	-0.84	-0.78	-0.75	-0.75	-0.90	-0.83	6.51	2.87
Unit 12	-0.80	-0.60	-0.56	0.75	1.62	-0.61	0.50	-0.33	-1.00	-0.73	3.60	18.91

Higher than or at expected density
Lower than expected density

SOLUTIONS

Transition to action with individual unit reports.

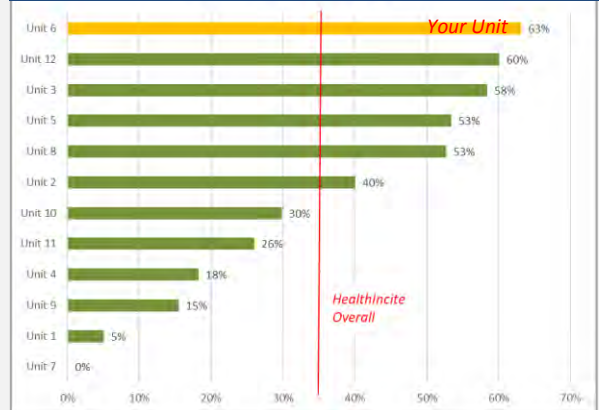
Based on the ONA, HealthIncite had data they could use to create purposeful, strategically driven connections that would help work processes operate more efficiently and make expertise more available to people when they needed it. But the company needed to transition from the ONA analysis phase to one in which they rallied the energy and resources required to put the network findings into action.

The first step was to build enthusiasm and support among members of the executive committee. The centerpiece of this effort was a series of unit level reports. Hour-long debriefs were conducted with each executive, delivering reports with specific findings for his or her organization. Each executive was able to see how his or her group compared to others on key dimensions such as reach across organizational boundaries and the proportion of people facing collaborative overload (See Figure 4).

The reports identified organizational boundaries where investments in network development were likely to deliver the greatest value for the unit. The executive could see details of the network structure through which the group interacted with important business partners. This opened the door to discuss strategies for leveraging people in key network positions such as brokers (people who connect across organizational boundaries) and central connectors (people with large numbers of ties) to drive more effective collaboration. (See Figure 5)

Executives saw how their units compared on key network metrics

Figure 4: Potential for Overload by Unit



The report detailed out for each executive the networks of knowledge-sharing in relevant skill areas, showing where people in the unit were involved and highlighting potential strategies for making expertise more available. In addition, key personal data showed collaborative demands on the executive, allowing him or her to determine where steps were merited to role model strategies to reduce collaborative overload.

By talking through the network findings specific to each executive, a discrete number of targets for action with direct business relevance and a high level of energy for change were identified.

The head of Human Resources played a critical role leading the transition from analysis to action. During the unit report discussions, she was able to synthesize the results for executives, enriching the findings with examples from the organization's day-to-day experiences and prompting executives to think about how networks supported their existing priorities. She connected the dots across executives so that the priorities for network development of one were tied into the relevant priorities of others, making for an integrated plan. Importantly, she launched a wave of momentum for action, ensuring that the ONA results did not become merely an interesting artifact, but instead the basis for organizational change.

Engage people in key network positions to build targeted connections.

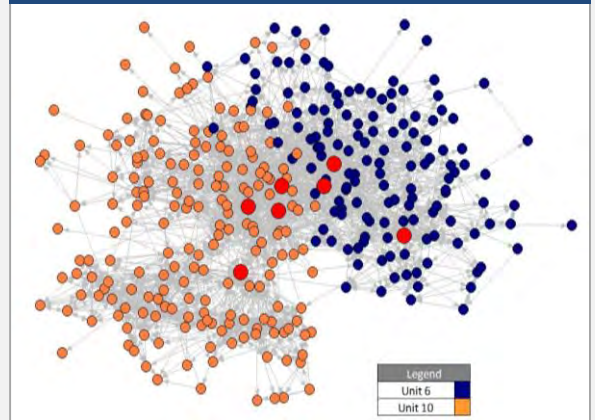
Initial actions were targeted to one key unit and their interactions with three of their business partners. Through a series of working sessions called Business Partner Collaboration Meetings, the units would work with each partner on strengthening their working relationships. Participants in these meetings included network brokers, as they often "speak the language" across groups and are able to play an integrating role. Also included were central connectors, as they tend to be highly influential and can help lead behavior change within the units.

Discussions would center on defining the collaborative needs of each business partner, brainstorming solutions

In Part II of this case study, "Implementing Collaboration Networks", we will describe the experiences and outcomes of the Business Partner Collaboration Meetings.

Executives for Units 6 and 10 can leverage brokers and central connectors (shown in red) to drive more effective collaboration.

Figure 5: Networks for Units 6 and 10



unique to each, and agreeing on strategies to access expertise more efficiently. As collaborative overload was a major issue, the participants would each take the Connected Commons collaborative overload assessment prior to the meeting. They would then have a structured discussion of their sources of overload and be able to support each other in implementing practices to better manage it. Outcomes from the meetings would include structural changes in how the groups work together, re-setting of expectations between them, and individual network development plans for participants.

About the Authors

Jean Singer, PhD, is a Principal at Collaborative Analytics and her practice is dedicated to helping companies improve performance in the areas of collaboration, innovation and change. She specializes in the use of organizational network principles and techniques and is a co-editor with Rob Cross and Sally Colella of *The Organizational Network Fieldbook: Best Practices, Techniques and Exercises to Drive Organizational Innovation and Performance*.

Laura Mendelow, MAOD, PCC, owner of MCG, is an executive coach, leadership trainer, and facilitator since 1994. From working with a broad spectrum of leaders in Fortune 500 companies, non-profit and government agencies, she has come to the conclusion, "when you 'get' people, you get results." Leveraging the ONA and other assessment tools, she works with leaders and teams to uncover key success factors beneath the surface to develop strategies with lasting results.

About the Connected Commons

The Connected Commons is a community of people who believe that in an interdependent world, networks are the organizing principle of our social and organizational lives. We seek to develop network ideas that advance the performance and well-being of individuals, organizations and society as a whole.