

DATAHACK: LEVERAGING SOCIAL NETWORKS IN DRIVING CORPORATE PERFORMANCE

MCCHRYSTAL GROUP

The corporate world is awash with buzz words—organizations live in fear of black swan events, often desperate to stay ahead of disruptors. No executive wants to be featured in the Kodak- or Blockbuster-style case studies covered by the core curriculum of nearly every MBA. Wall Street analysts, private equity investors, and companies themselves are devoting unprecedented resources to dissecting the numbers behind what makes for a successful organization. But one area that remains under-studied is what creates organizational success in the first place: the people and how those people really interact. As more and more companies move beyond simple line and block hierarchical reporting into cross-functional, layered matrices, executives are looking to leverage their companies' internal networks to drive organizational performance.

Though organizational network analysis has established itself as a major field in academia, it is still burgeoning in the world of corporate organizational design. Analysts studying networks in the corporate world face unique challenges. Corporate management often lacks the understanding of how to best utilize network analysis findings, in worst-case scenarios using them to make performance management decisions rather than insightful re-alignments of their organization's networking and communications. As such, the data that analysts obtain from surveys are often anonymous to protect employee identity, making the linking of a respondent to his/her exact networks difficult. Additionally, given a world in which we are asked to rate our experience every time we take a flight or order a pizza, analysts must cope with increasing survey fatigue, and hence, less complete datasets.

Facing all of these challenges, we are asking hackers to leverage several organizational performance and network analysis datasets collected from a variety of industries in order to better understand the nature of social network influence in the corporate world. More specifically, looking across datasets from companies diverse in size, location, revenue, and industry, what kind of impact can influencers have on both their peers as well as the company's overall success? What actionable insights can we derive from these datasets in order to improve a company's performance?

We ask Hackers to offer their perceptions of the generalizability/scalability of their findings. Do they believe that their insights and selected implementations are unique to the datasets they are working with, or do they believe these trends could be consistent for an entire corporation, across industry, etc.?

Potential Guiding Questions:

What makes corporate network influencers influential?

- With just a cursory look at the data set, researchers can quickly understand who the most influential people are in the organization. However, what remains enigmatic is understanding why they are truly influential—these range from the tangible and obvious to the hidden and nuanced. Potential factors include: their subject matter expertise, client relationships they've built, role in unofficial or social business practices, etc.
- To what degree and in what manner do network influencers impact the way an organization operates? How do the different reasons behind their influence change the way that their impacts are felt? How do the perceptions of others in the organization (as seen in their energy scores) impact the extent to which an individual can be influential?

To what degree do network influencers actually change an organization?

- Along with the network data, hackers will also have access to how respondents rate the organization along a number of variables. To what extent do the most influential employee's views of the organization spread through the organization?
- If these network influencers truly do impact the organization in a tangible and consistent manner, how can we best leverage them to lead the organization? What kind of models can we develop that can be both predictive in terms of understanding the extent to which network influencers can champion initiatives and ideas and/or equip organizations to better understand behaviors that make for successful and unsuccessful influencers?

Working with anonymized networks

- Because of the nature of most corporate data privacy and Human Resources policies, analysts are rarely able to identify survey respondents to the individual level. How can we overcome this obstacle to provide robust analytics? To what degree can we be confident of network analysis with incomplete data?
- To what degree can we estimate the impact of the incomplete data and anonymization? While we can know what percentage of the organization did not complete the survey, we cannot know exactly who was missing from the survey. Additionally, how confident can we be that the phrasing of the questions isn't influencing the respondents' answers?

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