



# Networks

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## Key points

- Leadership happens in leader-follower relationships, so if there is no relationship, there can be no meaningful leadership
  - The stronger the networks within an organization, the higher the likelihood of leadership developing within an organization
  - Analyzing your organization's network and finding ways to broaden and strengthen it is an important dimension of developing leadership
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**Without networks, there is no leadership.** Leadership is embedded in social systems and in the relational realm of actors, which means that without relationships there won't be leadership. This implies that the more numerous and stronger the networks of an organization are, the higher the potential for leadership (development) is.

**Leadership is a social process.** The dominant ties of leadership are leader-follower relationships, including leader-member relationships in teams. In high-quality leader-follower relationships, actors exchange information, expertise, and advice; they act as social support for and trust in one another; they provide each other with feedback and decision-making power; and they bring opportunities (such as important assignments or career development options) to each other's attention.

**Building networks, building social capital.** The connections and relationships between the actors that make up networks are the basis of well-functioning organizations. Building, cultivating, and strengthening such networks is the basis of acquiring social capital – for individuals as well as on the level of the whole organization – as this leads to mobilizing broad networks

**What formal organizational structures do to networks.** While networks are configured on the organization level, they are much broader and complex than an org chart can represent, and they exist, in large part, as informal connections between people. What formal organizational structures (most often) do, is "hard-code" network positions and thus limit, or at least rigidly channel, leadership potential. By taking a network perspective, you're able to amplify LD interventions extending the lines and boxes of an org chart.

**Understanding networks.** In addition to the importance of leader-follower relationships, various other characteristics of networks influence leadership. Here are some central inputs when thinking about networks:

- Different networks exist inside and outside an organization. The most basic way to differentiate networks relates to their mode of formality (formal vs. informal) and span (internal vs. external for a team, group, or organization).
- Networks take time to build and can manifest in different ways. Networks differ in their size (number of actors), their density (number of actual vs. possible links between the actors), and their cohesiveness (the actors' loyalty towards the networks). There are strong (with lots of intense interchange) and loose networks (those that are loosely bound). Additionally, an actor's position or status within a network can vary from being central or marginal to the network, and close or distant to the networks' members.
- From a leader perspective, there are three types of networks that are particularly relevant. Task networks provide the resources, such as information, materials, or political access, that help leaders to accomplish work. Ties in career networks can facilitate developing leadership by offering mentoring or sponsorship, and securing key assignments or organizational visibility. Friendship and social support networks are informal connections based on trust, and these networks potentially accompany and aid leadership development processes.

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## Tools

 [See tool section and downloads](#)

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