Social Networking

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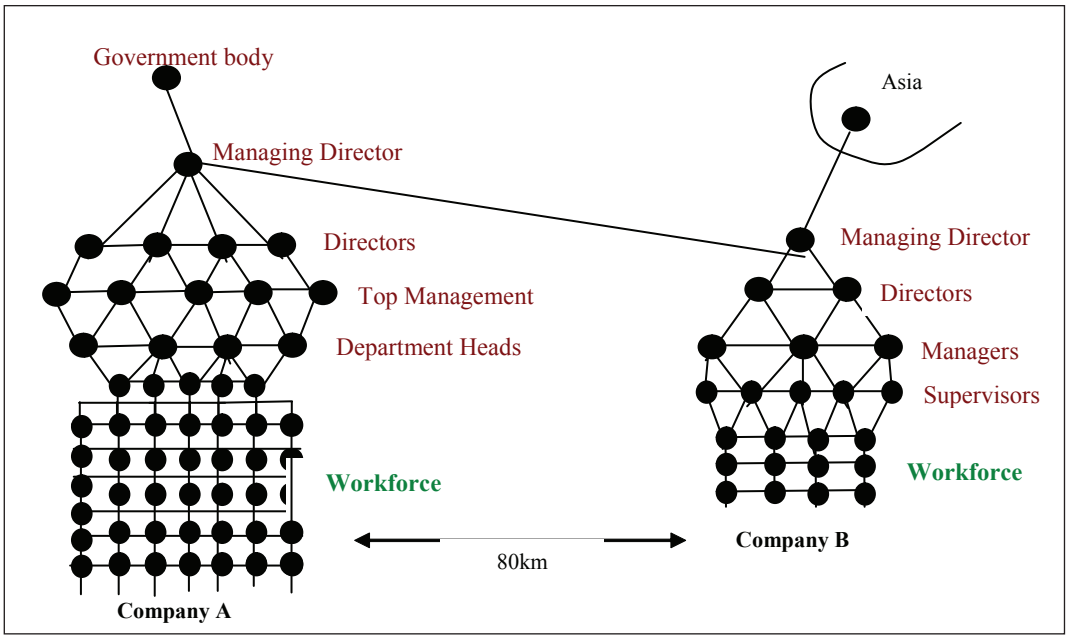
INTRODUCTION

It is in man's nature to form communities, and it is also in his nature to communicate. Psychologists hold that man is moved by instincts, desires which can only find full satisfaction in a community and by communication. Social networking (or network theory) is not an exact science and may reasonably be termed a social catalyst in discovering the method in which problems are solved; organisations are run to the degree in which individuals succeed in achieving goals (Freeman, 2004). In the network theory, social relationships are discussed in terms of *nodes* and *ties*: the former individual actors, the latter, relationships within networks frequently described diagrammatically where the *node* is a point, and the *ties*, lines of social connectivity (Scott, 2000).

Such social network diagrams can be used to measure the social capital of individual nodes/actors: a measurement, or determination of the usefulness of the network to the actors individually, as it is that measurement of usefulness to the individual which not only assesses the social capital of actors, but which by extension may shape and expose the very nature of the network as an entity. Loose connections (weak ties) reflect the greater possibility of openness in the network (Granovetter, 2003). This, in turn, is more likely to bring new ideas, new opportunities, and greater scope for innovation than close networks with many redundant ties. It is clear that "the friendly network" composed of friends already have common knowledge, common interests, and common opportunities. Better still, it has access to wider social geographies. Again, the group with links to many networks has potentially greater access to other social arenas and a more extensive field of information, and thus the individuals, have links to a diversity of networks, as opposed to those within a single network, and can exercise more power and exact more influence by acting as brokers between their own and other networks not directly linked. This "polylinkage," or "filling social holes," places greater emphasis on the qualities or attributes of individuals. The ability of individuals to influence their success depends largely on the nature and structure of their network. Figure 1 illustrates a social network. Company A is a large fashion design house, a national company.

Company B imports and packs material for A's use, but so far, A has little interest in a take over bid because of continuing government financial enhancements and certain tax concessions. A has, thus far, also ignored the lure of outsourcing to Asia, where it could control material at the point of manufacture. Company B imports most of the material A requires, and supplies A at a mark up sufficient to meet all the transport costs. B is in "comfortable survival," for as a condition of title to financial enhancements in an area of high unemployment. This interaction when examined within the social network characterizes, not only interdependence that exists between the companies, but the *in-group* factor, and however "shocking" a statutory body for justifiable reasons, supports the "cosy" arrangement (Wellman & Berkowitz, 1988). That arrangement, in

Figure 1. Social networking



a very real sense, runs contrary to Sociometry, which attempts to quantify social relationships and which Granovetter explained in finding that, "Power within organisations" comes from an individual's power within a network rather than the post or the title he or she holds (Granovetter, 1990). In the relatively simple example of companies A and B, the power of each company is totally dependant on government legislation, which was arrived at as the result of a debate in the House and a vote in parliament. Self evidently, the individual within networks A and B have little to do with the present state of business. B depends on A and A on the legislation derived from a free vote in parliament.

However, in a strike or work to rule situation, it is the individual who holds the power. Granovetter, in the final analysis, appears to be correct, if and only if the cosy status quo continues. It is a basic law of Physics that, "Every action has an equal an opposite reaction," and that law appears, so far, to hold true in Social Networking. There are, however, those who would claim that Social Networking or Network Theory is all theory, yet not really theoretical on account of too much methodology (Scott, 2000). The core problem with this stems from an apparent inability to test hypothesis in a mathematical way, that is, using statistics as the data by its very nature negates the random sampling, which statistics demands. Here, even the computer and its resources do not appear as being capable of handling larger and larger databases, where networks expand. We present examples of social networking which integrate sociology and psychology within everyday life. In particular, we use examples relating to an organisation's internal structure, but this can also be extended further to university classes as well as the politics associated with any group in relation to sports teams and then with work and sport aside another example given to address this essay topic is the rise of social networking Web sites such as *bebo.com*. As an overview there will always be the so called in-groups and out-groups, and so there will be the inevitable group politics associated with the individuals involved. Social networking was first created in 1954 by "J.A. Barnes" (Barnes, 1954) where he talks about social circles relating to casual acquaintances or friends and these connections are important as they have a direct impact upon productivity and individual motivation. Here, we concentrate on social networking in relation to analysis. The examples presented show how groups behave and how group politics affects everyone involved, whether it be working in a job or studying at university (Alexander & Danowski, 1990).