



## **Chapter XIII**

# **Managing Interorganizational Networks**

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### **Abstract**

*This chapter introduces the challenges facing interorganizational knowledge management networks. Examples from DuPont, the knowledge management working group of the federal government, as well as the Construction Industry Institute give concrete examples of how these challenges were faced and overcome. The authors hope that their industry experience and years of working in these networks help the readers to apply these principles to their own networks.*

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### **Introduction**

Interorganizational networks are formed because large organizations and companies know they may not communicate well. Any knowledge management network has

at its core people who understand the organization very well. There are always opportunities to save money, manage information, and collaborate more effectively. Knowledge-based networks may appear to work seamlessly but in order to deliver value, some guiding principles need to be applied. A larger organization such as DuPont benefits immeasurably from formal and informal networks, but behind the scenes this is the result of creative leadership and individual contributions. Most large organizations have groups which do not “play well” with each other for various reasons. Like many virtual organizations, people come together to work on common problems, but still have to answer to their management when it comes to budget, time, and resource allocations.

Managing interorganizational networks for knowledge management is difficult unless you have several things: clear vision and scope, clear sponsorship, and actual projects to complete that show value. Many times, this type of network finds itself unsponsored, without a clear goal or product, and the afterthought of the organization. This is even clearer at times when knowledge management is not necessarily a favorite initiative of upper management.

The knowledge management network in DuPont, a large multinational corporation, has been in place since at least 1999. The purpose of the DuPont knowledge management and collaboration network is to act as a champion and driver across DuPont businesses in order to improve productivity and create growth. The team works together to provide examples of new tools and processes, to publicize resources and activities that are available, to serve as role models and stewards, and to publicly recognize good practices.

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## **Deliverables and Demonstrating Value**

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As with any organization in a business that requires profit, a network cannot survive without deliverables and showing real value. Most networks are very good at knowledge sharing and “show-and-tell.” The meetings can turn into this quite easily if not redirected. Show-and-tell has value, but the network cannot sit on its laurels and expect that this fills the void and demonstrates the value of the organization.

Other meaningful tasks to complete include collecting and testing good and best practices, and acting as the “test bed” for new tools and processes. Many new corporate processes, such as testing collaborative tools, need to involve a cross-section of the organization. A good knowledge management network can provide a ready-made group of energetic and experienced testers. This in turn can allow new products and tools to be more easily evaluated, saving time.

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