

Chapter 1.13

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

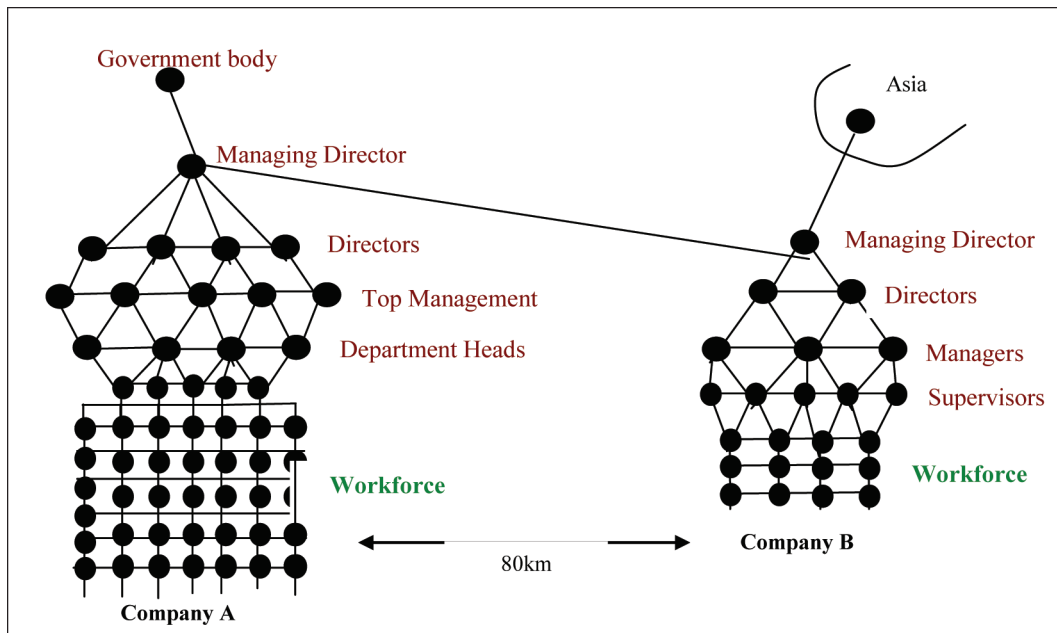
point, and the *ties*, lines of social connectivity (Scott, 2000).

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

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Figure 1. Social networking



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 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

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