

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
School of Labor and Employment Relations

LER 590SN
Social Networks in Human Resource Management

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Class time: Wednesdays 11am – 1:50pm
Course Website: On Compass

Course Overview:

Social networks and social capital are necessary features of organizational life. Social networks describe the structure and characteristics of social relationships among members of a connected group. Understanding social networks and how they operate can provide a powerful tool for uncovering how information and resources flow within and between organizations.

Understanding social networks can also help explain how individuals cooperate and compete within organizations, how creativity and innovation operate, why otherwise similar individuals exhibit such different levels of performance. Social networks can provide resources for individuals in various domains of organizational life, including in their job search, in seeking collaborators, and in facilitating cooperation and organizational commitment.

This course provides a framework for analyzing the social networks and social capital within organizations. In this course you will encounter key concepts from social network analysis, including, 1) how do social networks form and evolve, 2) how do social network positions and structures affect various outcomes such as performance and innovation, and 3) how should we manage our own social networks as well as the networks in our organizations. In this course, you will encounter various types of social networks, including communication, work-flow, alliances, friendships, and collaborations. We will also discuss social scientific research on social networks from a variety of disciplines and introduce (briefly) the methods of analyzing social networks. With appropriate understanding of relevant theories and principles, our focus will be on the application of the concepts and tools to real-world situations.

Reading List

Required Texts:

1. Cross, Rob and Andrew Parker. 2004. *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations*. Harvard Business School Press.
2. Additional articles **available online at course compass page.**

Evaluation, Assignments, and Course Policies:

Evaluation:

Response memos (50%)
Reflection Paper (20%)
Final Exam (20%)
Participation (10%)

Response Memos:

Students will submit a **2-page** double-spaced response memo ahead of each class session. The memo will should summarizes and synthesize the key themes of the readings and answer the accompanied discussion questions. These discussion questions will serve as departure points for class discussion. Response memos **should be submitted via the course compass page** ahead of each class meeting.

Reflection Paper:

Students will write a final reflection paper that describes and analyzes a compelling example of the use of social networks in a real world situation. This example can be based on either your own personal experiences, a compelling news item, or events that have happened to people you know. Regardless of the source, the events you choose must be based on fact. Describe the event, and drawing on concepts covered in the course, explain and interpret how social network processes and concepts were involved. The paper will be no longer than **5 pages**. More detailed guidelines will be announced later. The paper is due on **April 28**.

Final Exam:

There will be one final exam worth 20 percent of the total grade. The final covers all material from class and will be a combination of multiple choice and essay format. The final will be administered on the course compass webpage.

Academic Integrity:

The academic standards of the University protect the quality of education and research at this institute. These standards of conduct are detailed in the Code on Campus Affairs.

As a student, you should avoid obtaining (1) answers for any assigned work or examination from any unauthorized source; (2) working with another person or persons on any assignment or examination when not specifically permitted by the instructor; and (3) observing the work of other students during any examination. You should also avoid providing answers for any assigned work or examination when not specifically authorized to do so, as well as informing any person or persons of the contents of any examination prior to the time the examination is given.

The Code of Campus Affairs also discusses plagiarism. A student should neither fail to credit sources used in a work product in any attempt to pass off the work as one's own, nor attempt to receive credit for work performed by another, including papers obtained in whole or in part from individuals or other sources. Any problems of academic integrity on an individual assignment will result in a student receiving a failing grade for the whole course. Conduct yourself in such a manner, at all times, to avoid any suspicion of wrongdoing. Avoid helping anyone else break the rules. Enrollment in this course indicates you have read and accepted the terms of this course outline.

Course Schedule

Week 1:

[March 31]

Topics:

Introduction to the course
Major Themes in social networks

Week 2:

[April 7]

Topics:

Key network concepts: nodes, edges, centrality, structural equivalence, closure.
Social capital

Required Reading:

1. Cross and Parker, Chapter 1. "The Hidden Power of Social Networks"
2. Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, and Tsai. 2004. "Taking Stock of Networks and Organizations: A Multilevel Perspective" *Academy of Management Journal* 47(6)

Response Paper Questions:

1. Examine Table 1-1 in Cross and Parker: "Common Social Network Applications." How do you see these various applications as being valuable for human resources professionals?
2. Examine the Figure 1-2 in Cross and Parker: "How to Read a Network Diagram." On your own paper, draw out a similar social network for a group of characters in a TV show, movie or novel that you're familiar with (you don't need to submit the graph, but please bring it with you to class). What do the lines represent in your toy network? Who are the central characters? Who are the peripheral characters? Do some groups of characters tend to cluster together? Why?
3. Consider the section in Brass et al entitled, "Antecedents of Interpersonal Networks" on the 2nd page. How might these antecedents explain the structure of the network in your toy network from Question 2?

Week 3:

[April 14]

Topics:

Network Formation & Network Dynamics
How do individual characteristics affect networks?
Networks and Inequality.

Required Reading:

1. Cross and Parker, Chapter 2. "Across the Great Divide: Finding and Fixing Critical Disconnects in Organizations"
2. Agneensens and Wittek 2012. "Where do intra-organizational advice relations come from? The role of informal status and social capital in social exchange" *Social Networks* 34(3).

Response Paper Questions:

1. Cross and Parker describe a number of individual characteristics that can explain why network clustering and fragmentation occur. What are the key dimensions that they identify? How might these dimensions explain network clustering and fragmentation in a network you are familiar with?
2. What is an "advice seeking network?" According to Agneensens and Wittek, how do status and social capital explain the formation of advice seeking networks? How might this information be important to managers who are concerned about information flow in their organizations?

Week 4:

[April 21]

Topics:

Network Positions and Individual Performance

Networks and Innovation

Bridging and Brokerage

Organizational Behavior Simulation: Leveraging Networks. On HBS Coursepack

Required Reading:

1. Cross and Parker, Chapter 3. "Knowing What We Know: Developing an Sense-and-Respond Organizational Capacity"
2. Cross and Parker, Chapter 5. "Pinpointing the Problem: Understanding How Individuals Affect a Network"
3. Burt 2004. "Structural Holes and Good Ideas" *American Journal of Sociology* 110(2):349-399.

Response Paper Questions:

1. According to Cross and Parker in Chapter 3, how does one's network position affect access to knowledge and expertise? How might these positions affect individual performance?
2. According to Cross and Parker in Chapter 5, why are boundary spanners and information brokers so important for organizational performance? What might be the disadvantages of relying too much on particular boundary spanners or information brokers?
3. According to Burt 2004, what is a structural hole and why is it advantageous to occupy a structural hole? What are the advantages and disadvantages of structural holes?

Week 5 (Reflection Paper Due):

[April 28]

Topics:

Managing Social Networks
Networks and Teams.
Networks, Trust, and Collaboration
Networks and Workplace Mentoring

Required Reading:

1. Cross and Parker, Chapter 6. “Building Bridges: Initiating, Developing, and Maintaining Networks”
2. Cross and Parker, Chapter 7. “Breaking the Mold: Aligning Organizational Context in Support of Social Networks.”
3. Schweer, Assimakopoulos, Cross, and Thomas. “Building a Well-Networked Organization. *MIT Sloan Management Review* Winter 2012.
4. Srivastava, S. B. (2015). Network intervention: Assessing the effects of formal mentoring on workplace networks. *Social Forces*, 94(1), 427-452.

Response Paper Questions:

1. In Chapter 6, Cross and Parker argue that “redundant relationships” or excessive connectivity can be a productivity drain. How does this argument draw on insights about network structure and productivity from our class?
2. In Chapter 7, Cross and Parker discuss Human Resource Practices that can be used in developing and managing social networks. What are the key recommendations from this discussion? Do you see overlaps between these suggestions and key topics and themes in your LER coursework?
3. According to Schweer and colleagues, how can an organizational network analysis help managers improve collaboration and talent management? Consider the network centric approaches to talent management in the figure on page 39. How can human resource professionals contribute these dimensions of network centric talent management?
4. Srivastava discusses four mechanisms through which formal mentoring programs help improve networks and produce network change. What are these mechanisms? How do these mechanisms relate to key concepts or themes discussed previously in class?

Week 6 (Final Exam):

[May 5]

Topics:

Analyzing Social Networks and Social Network Methods.
Gathering and Coding Social Network Data
Working with social network data
Creating social network graphs
Calculating network centrality.
Applying social network analysis methods in your organization.

Required Reading:

1. Cross and Parker, Appendix A. “Conducting and Interpreting a Social Network Analysis”

Response Paper Questions:

1. After reading Appendix A in Cross and Parker, what would you say are the key barriers to conducting and using a social network analysis in an organization?
2. Imagine you wanted to conduct a social network analysis of the students in LER. Drawing on Appendix A, describe how you would design such a study?

Final Exam (on Compass) Opens after Class