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Proactive Leadership and the Role of Information: Identifying Strategic Networks of Information

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Abstract

[Excerpt] Networking is supposed to be essential to successful leaders. But what is the importance of networking conceptually? Typically it is thought to be the ability to remain in and sustain contact with people as information and opportunity sources. Strangely few leaders actually understand the concept. Otherwise they would position themselves to receive other forms and channels of information and opportunities. People are only one form of this vital leadership resource. What are the others? And if they can be identified, how would one go about developing expanded networks of information and sources?

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Proactive Leadership & The Role of Information: Identifying Strategic Networks of Information

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Networking is supposed to be essential to successful leaders. But what is the importance of networking conceptually? Typically it is thought to be the ability to remain in and sustain contact with people as information and opportunity sources. Strangely few leaders actually understand the concept. Otherwise they would position themselves to receive other forms and channels of information and opportunities. People are only one form of this vital leadership resource. What are the others? And if they can be identified, how would one go about developing expanded networks of information and sources? An explanation follows:

Smart leaders cultivate opportunities. They do not simply wait for chance or luck to come their way. They position themselves to take advantage of situations created by themselves as well as by others. This is what is loosely referred to as "being in the know" or taking advantage of connections or being in the right place at the right time. Whatever it is, it is not luck. It is more likely what I, as an information specialist, refer to as "enhancing serendipity".

There are many ways to enhance serendipity. The most methodical of these is to take an information environment scan. This involves asking strategic questions such as, "What is the nature of the industry in which I work?" "Who are its key players and key competitors?" "What must I know to be on top of things, to see patterns, trends, opportunities and more?" and, most importantly, "What resources are at my disposal to make these assessments easily and efficiently?"

While I do not have the space or the time to elaborate on all the elements involved in answering these questions, I will point to a few principles.

The nature of your work or your industry has a **framework**. Usually these are defined and monitored by various governments and governmental agencies in addition to key professional or occupational associations. In essence, understanding your industry requires you to ask "Do I know who regulates me?" This is very important. If you do not understand the box in which you operate, how can you think "out of the box"? To give a clear example of this, simply look at the following link concerning Engineering and Natural Sciences Managersfrom the Occupational Outlook Handbookproduced by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. This one simple source provides numerous clues on how to acquire potentially key information. Among the elements it points to are:

- Nature of the Work;

- Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement;

- Employment;

- Job Outlook;

- Projections Data;

- Earnings;

- OES Data;

- Related Occupations;

- Sources of Additional Information

An associated publication called the Career Guide to Industries further enhances the information. Look at Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services as an example.

The key players are not just people but associations and other institutions concerned with your industry. What are these? There are information sources to help you answer these questions easily.

Once you understand these sources, how do keep current about their developments? Well, the same can be said about your personal networks. How is it that you keep up with them? The answer is as opportunity permits. Sometimes this is via cocktail parties, sporting events, conferences, meetings, etc.

In the world of information this is done by keeping strategic Internet links and electronic updating services active. Most of these are free if one knows where to look. Simple Google searching is not enough. The best information is found via the Deep Web[Editor's Note: see also Deep Web Research 2009by Marcus P. Zillman] – a topic that I will cover in another commentary. If you are not familiar with some of the better Internet sources, I suggest that you start with RefDesk.comproduced by the mother of Matt Drudge.

If you have information specialists working in your organization, you should ask for their special attention. This is a topic about which I have written – The Personal Information Trainer.

If you are in a major city, it is likely that your public library will give you free electronic access from your home or business to strategic databases. Yes, there is no need to pay high prices for access to key business and information rich databases. Unfortunately, smart business leaders are not bright enough to know what surrounds them for free. Their concept of networking is too limited.

Again, networking means that you keep connected with information and opportunity sources. These can be people, institutions, data sets, articles, books, news, video, movies, and more. But there is only so much time in the day. That is why strategic enhancement of serendipity is necessary. As a leader, you want to be in the right place at the right time for yourself and your organization. The right kinds of information can help you do this.