

Methods for Leveraging Human Networks

Networks are all the buzz these days. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Innocentive, and other Web 2.0 initiatives deliberately tap into social networks to connect, share knowledge, and innovate.

But which tools are right for your company? This brief article identifies a few of the more common and more effective tools.

Methods Usually Used to Identify Hidden Knowledge and Talent Resources

1. *Network Mapping* uncovers the flows and bottlenecks in information exchange, decision making, expertise, and learning in the organization. The resulting network maps visually depict interactions between departments, divisions, and organizations.
2. *Social Networking* tools such as LinkedIn provide ways of connecting people with common interests, backgrounds, or organizational affiliations. Companies are beginning to create home-grown applications or adapt commercial applications in order to create internal knowledge directories and facilitate connections between employees.

Methods Usually Used to Tap Into Collective Wisdom

3. *Pulse Groups* bring employees together in real time to share knowledge, identify challenges, and plan actions before presenting proposals to executives. This is just one of many non-technologically dependent methods of leveraging human networks.
4. *Prediction Markets* use crowd sourcing to predict product, service, and industry direction as well as topics for future R&D investments. Companies such as IBM have used prediction markets to choose new development projects.

Methods Usually Used to Share Information

5. *Blogs* disseminate information across wide networks and provide windows into previously obscure areas. See Paul Levy's blog runningahospital.blogspot.com for a good example of how one CEO uses this tool.
6. *Shared Work Spaces* include virtual meeting rooms, knowledge repositories, project planning, and discussion sites for dispersed teams. They provide online, searchable libraries and discussion forums for people across an enterprise or, in some cases, across supply chains. Teams can develop their own knowledge repositories through wikis.



7. *Web & Video Conferencing* allows real-time, visually connected meetings across geography and time zone.

Methods Usually Used to Increase Innovation and Knowledge

8. *Communities of Practice* bring together people with common interests, such as a programming language, customer group, or product line, to share insights and ideas. Self-organizing and informal, communities of practice can launch problem-solving initiatives, sponsor conferences, or develop products. The key to communities of practice: allowing enough freedom for creativity to emerge.
9. *Innovation Jams* engage large groups in intensive, innovation sessions. Used by companies such as Proctor & Gamble, these sessions aim to identify out-of-the-box, value-added ideas in a short period of time.

Methods Usually Used to Increase Competence and Connection

10. *Mentoring* matches employees for 1:1 learning experiences. In informal chats or formal meetings, a more experienced employee helps a less experienced employee learn and grow by asking questions, sharing insights, and connecting people together.
11. *Cohort Programs* are often incorporated into training, leadership development, and onboarding initiatives. Employees complete a series of activities as an intact unit. Connections between members are encouraged to continue after the series ends, thereby creating a network of peers distributed across the organization that share a common background.

These are just a few of the many methods available. Which ones are right for your company?