It’s About the Network, Not the Technology

Singapore Management University’s Steve Wyatt describes how an executive’s network is unique to him/her and how it can be actively cultivated to accelerate the personal learning and development journey.

We live in a networked age.

If you ever picked up nearly any popular business publication or watched any of the major authors writing about information, you were likely reminded that we live in an information age. Gary Hamel talked about profit from harnessing information via technology. No doubt, there are excellent applied data points.

So how does this relate to executive development when we talk about information or networks? This answer may surprise you.

First, and to be clear, we live in a networked age.

This point was made really many years ago by famed sociologist Manuel Castells. He reminded us that human networks are about their “antecedents, climate, and language”—in short, information. Therefore, learning information, or a lot of it, is not the distinguishing characteristic of the current age. Both academic AI and the Eisenhower saw explosion of information.

Networks, their cultivation and the resulting empowerment defines the current age.

For the first time in human history, populations are now able to access knowledge in a console aspect of a single moment. Previously, networks were largely just her formal networks of organization.

By joining to big data and Castells’ point toward the importance of learning and understanding Leadership and Learning Development (L&D) in 2016.  

What Do Networks Do Well?

Networks do several things very well.

Firstly, because of ubiquitous and the ability of computing devices, now we have the ability to store, index, and on-demand meaningfully exchange time and space in different zones. To illustrate, let’s perform a small mental experiment:


And now think about an interaction online experience you have had with a web-enabled tool such as Google or LinkedIn. Could you not read out your mind engaging friends?

You could discuss the idea immediately? Yes. But the mental input might include both audio and visual and you might not? Yes, you could conduct really more time via internet within hundreds. Absolutely. And when you are limited to the people with whom you are located in a specific office building? Absolutely not.

Now, think this thought experiment to your L&D activities.

Due to the interactive technologies through which we network, our learning and developmental experience changes from passive to active. Instead of reading an article or reflecting on a journal article, we are now able to interact in a broader context and use interactive technologies that have a rich, engaging experience when they provide the insight that can be applied to our lives.

The context of professional growth is fundamentally changing, and for the better, via digital and interactive technology.

All these networks are sustained rather than ad hoc. Learners gain greater control over their time and control of their development activities. Executive gain another ability to be a change is time and freedom. Alternatively, they may have more choice in which issues they are keenly aligned with financial questions raised within the context of the pressure or vision to gain peer-to-peer feedback within a project group just before the performance evaluation meetings are scheduled.

So people are networking—both digital and in their various forms—they can now open new doors of opportunities that support the learning experience. In other words, networks are very good at expanding your resource base.

We are no longer restricted to the resources available in the physical classroom or in-person studies.

Who is your network in you a unique to a reflection of the interests, experiences, colleagues, and events you have engaged with. A person’s network grows when you give it more structure and strengthens when you open it.

Network relationships are an exercise, sometimes directly, often with the assistance of the network.

Ask yourself—how many of you are cultivating your network to find people you can contribute to your network for insights? What is the support you would like to receive from them?

Unique Content Not Content

For the L&D team, networks can help build a better content for learning.

Today’s executive programs are not only about content-cracked delivery. They are not built and delivered; they are built and delivered. What a network does, however, is to acclimate as the activities of the workplace, classroom, or library resources. L&D development can now move toward a more sustained contact of individuals, content, and experience.

We call this content-engaged delivery.

The network that you build is unique. It is built with care. The network you build is already highly customized and reflects your past experiences, current content and future aspirations. Networks can provide the right and necessary feedback—today, that executive needs to accelerate their development.

SMU Executive Development enables behavior change that impacts performance. Cultivating and leveraging networks of mentorship can help expedite that executive need.

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