

Social Network Analysis

WHAT IT IS

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a research technique that focuses on identifying and comparing the relationships within and between individuals, groups and systems in order to model the real world interactions at the heart of organizational knowledge and learning processes.

Essentially, SNA aims at illuminating informal relationships: 'who knows whom' and 'who shares with whom'. This allows leaders to visualise and understand the diverse relationships that either facilitate or impede knowledge sharing.

THE PROCESS

The SNA process involves:

- Collecting information about relationships within a defined group or network of people.
 - Identifying the target network (e.g. team, group, department).
 - Collecting data by interviewing managers and key players regarding specific needs and problems.
 - Outlining and clarifying objectives and the scope of analysis.
 - Determining the level of reporting required.
 - Formulating hypotheses and questions.
 - Developing a survey methodology and the questionnaire.
 - Interviewing individuals in the network to identify relationships and knowledge flows.
- Mapping out the network visually: mapping responses either manually or by using a software tool designed for the purpose.
- Generating a baseline through the analysis of data from the survey responses.
- Using this baseline for planning and prioritising changes and interventions to improve social connections and knowledge flows within the group or network.

- Designing and implementing actions to bring about desired changes.
- Mapping the network again after an appropriate period of time.

BENEFITS

After social relationships and knowledge flows become visible, they can be evaluated, compared and measured. Results of the SNA can then be applied by individuals, departments or organizations to:

- identify who are the persons playing central roles (thought leaders, knowledge brokers, information managers, etc.);
- identify bottlenecks and those who are isolated;
- spot opportunities for improving knowledge flows;
- target those areas where better knowledge sharing will have the most impact; and
- raise awareness of the significance of informal networks.

KEY POINTS AND PRACTICAL TIPS

- ✓ To conduct a successful SNA, It is important to know what information to gather in the first place. As a result, it is vital to put a great deal of thought into the design of the survey and questionnaire. Effective questions typically focus on a variety of factors, such as:
 - Who knows whom and how well?
 - How well do people know each others' knowledge and skills?
 - Who or what gives people information about a specific theme/relationship/process?
 - What resources do people use to find information, get feedback/ideas/advice about a specific theme/relationship/process?
 - What resources do people use to share information about theme/relationship/process?

[Source: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement]

FIND OUT MORE

- RAPID Toolkit - Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A guide for development and humanitarian organisations, Ben Ramalingam, July 2006 www.odi.org.uk/Rapid/Publications/Documents/KM_toolkit_web.pdf
- EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme e-learning course: Collaboration and Advocacy Techniques www.foodsec.org/DL
- Bogatti S., Brokerage, 2005 www.analytictech.com/essex/Lectures/Brokerage.pdf
- Cross R, Nohria N, Parker A, 2002. Six Myths about Informal Networks - and How to Overcome Them. MIT Sloan Management Review 43 (3) www.chsrf.ca/knowledge_transfer/pdf/digest_20051124_e.pdf
- Freeman L.C. , Visualizing Social Networks, Journal of Social Structure www.cmu.edu/joss/content/articles/volume1/Freeman.html
- Davies, R. , 2003. Network Perspectives in the Evaluation of Development Interventions: More Than a Metaphor www.mande.co.uk/docs/nape.pdf
- The International Network of SNA, with a comprehensive list of resources www.ire.org/sna

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This practical guide was developed to accompany the e-learning course entitled "Collaboration and Advocacy Techniques" published by the EC-FAO Food Security Information for Action Programme and available at www.foodsec.org. This guide and the associated e-learning materials are based on the ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme publication by Ben Ramalingam entitled "Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A guide for development and humanitarian organisations" available at www.odi.org.uk/rapid.