



SoL France

Société pour l' Organisation Apprenante



NETWORK MANAGEMENT

SELF-ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this network self-assessment tool is to evaluate the degree of use and the success of networks in the organization. Other objectives are to increase the awareness of managers who participate in the self-assessment and to offer a common language in a domain where numerous models and theories flourish.

It focuses on the integration of networks in the overall management of a company and leads to evaluate all of the networks functioning in it. However, it does not allow the self-assessment of a specific network: another tool would have to be created to meet that need. The assessment method for assessing the quality of network management is similar to the one used in the EFQM model and can be considered as a complement to that model.

When used jointly with the Organizational Learning Self-assessment tool (also developed by SoL France), this Network Self-assessment tool allows broadening and deepening the inquiry on all types of networks: production and learning networks, competence networks and communities of practice.

I. Domains and Criteria

1. Existence of real networks

- a. Network members are not formally, hierarchically or functionally linked to one another.
- b. Participating to networks is based on voluntary commitment.
- c. Members of networks share a common purpose (project, shared history, domain of competence) that constitutes the departure point of each network.
- d. Networks cut across the formal organization. They are not part of the official organization chart and their monitoring system is distinct from the formal reporting system.
- e. Networks have a strong autonomy in setting their own objectives and do not have an operating mode which is predetermined and imposed from the outside.

2. Purpose of networks

- a. Networks enable the organization to achieve its strategic goals.
- b. Networks contribute to the development and dissemination of new work methods, processes and practices.
- c. Network members establish inter-personal relationships among themselves and share a common culture.
- d. Belonging to one or several networks offers members opportunities for personal and professional development.
- e. Networks enable and facilitate change for people within the organization.

3. Human characteristics of networks

- a. Openness prevails and information is accessible to all, in a convivial atmosphere.
- b. Development and dissemination of knowledge are approached systematically within networks and benefit from the appropriate support (leaders, facilitators, tools).
- c. Each employee is responsible for the development of their individual competences within the network, and that dimension is recognized by their manager in their yearly performance review.
- d. The performance assessment and acknowledgment system includes sharing knowledge and information dissemination within networks as one of the evaluation criteria.
- e. The performance assessment and career development systems take into account experience as a network leader or facilitator.
- f. Internal mobility – geographic or functional – is part of the organizational culture, with an emphasis on cross-fertilizing and broadening competences.

- g. There is coherence between management styles within the organization and leadership/facilitation styles within the networks.
- h. Network members adhere to and respect the values and ethical code of the organization.

4. Networks lifecycle

- a. Existing networks are able to adapt to events and changes, and particularly to shift to a less active role for a while, if necessary.
- b. Network leaders acknowledge the stages of networks evolution and adapt their role to the network's purpose: production or learning.
- c. Networks know how to "manage" their evolution from one stage to the next, particularly through the transition from creativity to concrete action.
- d. The existing network portfolio is balanced: there is a good balance between stages of evolution and between network purposes.

5. Structure et organization

- a. The organization is fluid with few hierarchical levels and few titles, and favorable to cross-organizational projects
- b. Different units within the organization exchange information and best practices regularly through formal or informal cross-organizational networks.
- c. The development of networks is supported by senior management, with the corresponding human and financial resources.
- d. Senior executives make sure that the contribution of informal networks and communities of practice to organizational learning is conserved, particularly in the midst of restructuring or reengineering interventions.
- e. In each major unit of the organization, there is a sponsor for the creation and development of networks.

6. Tools

- a. Network leaders and facilitators have access to a practical guide or methodology enabling them to steer network through its lifecycle: creation and getting started, defining its purpose and shared values, organizing and functioning, preparing, facilitating and following up on meetings, disseminating results, reducing or closing down the network activity.
- b. Networks have access to communication and information sharing with the use of information technology (intranet, workflow, forums, etc.) in order to facilitate their operation.
- c. Knowledge-management tools have been developed in or adapted to the organization and are utilized by the networks (e.g. shared data banks, text writing methods).
- d. The organization has a specific control system that enables to monitor the progress of various networks, both in terms of processes and results.


7. Leadership and facilitation styles

- a. Network leaders and facilitators have the appropriate skills (relational capability, leadership, ability to create and sustain a climate of trust and conviviality within the network).
- b. Network leaders and facilitators meet regularly to exchange on their roles, and to enhance their skills; they have access to and enroll in specific training sessions on facilitating networks.
- c. Network members are exposed to introductory sessions on network participation or participate in meetings which promote networking.

8. Interface with the organization

- a. Senior and middle managers have a positive attitude towards networks and support them.
- b. There is synergy between networks activities and the objectives, strategies and key practices of the organization.
- c. Networks are connected to functional units in a way that generates mutual reinforcement.
- d. HR reward and recognition systems encourage managers to participate in and contribute to the activities of networks.

9. Performance Indicators

- a. At a minimum, networks generate orientations or recommendations that are translated into projects within the organization; some production-oriented networks are themselves in charge of pursuing these projects.
 - b. Networks use indicators to track the learning that takes place or the actions that are implemented.
 - c. Networks are a vehicle for disseminating the new ideas or practices that they propose.
 - d. The domains covered by networks have a level of results that is similar or superior to that of the best competitors.
 - e. Network members take part in external and internal forums to present their learning and results.
 - f. Internal networks are extended and amplified by external networks in which some of their members participate.
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II. Assessment Method

The assessment applies in general to a whole organization. However in largely decentralized groups, it is possible to apply it to an operational unit, in as much as it enjoys a relatively high level of autonomy.

The evaluator assigns a percentage to each criteria, combining the two following elements :

1) the degree of excellence of the approach

2) the degree of deployment of the approach.

Then he/she computes the mean of the percentages by domain and for the whole assessment.

Approach	Value	Deployment
No real approach or value-added	0%	No effective implementation
A few documented attempts Occasional reviews Partially integrated in normal operations	25 %	Applied to only one fourth of the potential areas and activities
Proofs of systematic and solid application Reviewed regularly for its effectiveness Integrated in normal operations and partially used in planning	50 %	Applied to approximately half of the potential areas
Obvious proof of systematic and solid application Obvious proof of improvement of activity based on regular reviews Well integrated in normal operations and in planning	75 %	Applied to approximately 75 % of the potential areas
Obvious proof of systematic and solid application Obvious proof of improvement of activity based on regular reviews Fully integrated in normal working mode Could serve as model for other organizations	100 %	Applied to all potential areas

For the Approach and Deployment, the evaluator must choose one of five levels 0%, 25 %, 50 %, 75 % or 100 % as presented in this table or interpolate between these values.

III. Glossary

Network

A network is a group of people belonging to various units, who interact in the pursuit of a common goal.

The networking mode is distinct from the hierarchical mode of interaction:

exchanges are based on volunteerism and reciprocity.

Some networks are oriented toward producing a visible result, whereas others are oriented toward process or learning among members.

In large organizations, internal networks can contribute, better than the hierarchy, to the creation and dissemination of knowledge and innovation. Network and hierarchy are complementary and interact with each other.

Competence Network

A competence network is a group of experts in a specific domain which enables the systematic exchange of know-how and experience.

The group functions as a network across the organization and with a light structure.

It is generally lead and facilitated by mutual selection of members who demonstrate intellectual leadership and creativity.

Sponsor

Within the organization, a sponsor's role is to energize the networks. This sponsor is close to senior executives and works in close collaboration with network leaders and facilitators, giving them support and following their work. He is an interface with senior executives, in order to gain their overall support and avoid disruptive interventions.

Network Lifecycle

The survival of a network depends on its capacity to evolve. In other words, a network which is based on the interest of its members for a common theme has few chances to last if it does not generate projects. These projects can originate in the network itself, in relation to its purpose, or they can be proposed from outside the network. The network will stay alive as long as it generates projects.

The network's lifecycle can include three stages:

- ☒ Stage 1: the learning orientation is predominant. The network defines its own purpose, which it tries to reach through experimental approaches. Each network member learns by participating.
- ☒ Stage 2 : the project orientation becomes predominant (condition for survival).It becomes important to produce something, to make results visible to justify the network's existence. Networks which start with an initial production orientation fall into this category.
- ☒ Stage 3 : the project ideas generated in Stage 1 are converted into concrete projects (with an ad hoc project structure). As long as the network generates these ideas, it has a reason for being. When it stops doing so, its existence needs to be questioned. Several options are possible :
 - Transform the network into something else (new mission, new functioning structure) and it is not necessarily a network.
 - Stop the network activity, purely and simply.
 - Let it go to sleep (limited activity and limited facilitation, but maintenance of the social links among members), in order to be able to reactivate it, if needed.

