



## Investigating Social Networks and Informal Work Practices in the Workplace

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### ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the ways informal work methods reshape professional operations. Employees who maintain formal connections outside their organization create informal networks leading to impacts on inter-employee communications and joint work activities as well as knowledge transfer. This study evaluates organizational information flow and innovation and problem solving through strong ties by using Social Network Theory as its analytical foundation. The research examines the effects of organizational social networks on professional environments as well as alternative work methods together with their influence on professional networks and informal activities. The study identifies potential risks concerning information isolation and membership restrictions which can happen within informal connections. The organization should develop inclusive networks while also utilizing informal leaders to mandate equilibrium between formal structures and informal methods of collaboration and innovation. Knowledge about informal work practices managed through social networks leads to improved organizational outcomes together with increased employee engagement

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The integration of new technology and corporate reorganization led to major alterations in the workplace structure, ultimately fostering a flexible work environment. The study of workplace transformations focuses on how social connections and informal work methods shape employee behavior and outcomes in the workplace. The way individuals engage with each other is influenced by the social connections within the workplace, encompassing both official and unofficial employee bonds (Burt, 2004). Social networks play a dual role in providing information and facilitating teamwork and problem-solving, ultimately enhancing the performance of organizational teams (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993). Business operations conducted in unofficial, informal settings involve employees collaborating and organizing their tasks outside of the usual organizational structures. Informal work practices such as peer-to-peer mentoring, spontaneous knowledge sharing, along with unstructured communication are included.

Organizations should recognize the importance of social networks and informal work practices, as they greatly influence company performance, employee creativity, and workplace morale. Research findings suggest that informal professional networks act as efficient channels for exchange of information quickly, which can speed up decision - making processes and promote creativity within organizations (Uzzi, 1997). The informal networks not only offer advantages but also bring about organizational control challenges, equality concerns, and the potential for excluding employees. New challenges arise in hybrid and remote work settings as a result of the impact of digital communication tools on the formation of social connections, as pointed out by Boschma (2005). Organizations must comprehend how social networks function within their current work environments in order to effectively utilize their advantages and mitigate their drawbacks.

This study looks at how informal work methods as well as social networks impact workplace outcomes in contemporary organizations. The study will look at the informal relationships among employees, their interactions at work, and how these factors impact productivity, innovation, and work satisfaction. The study examines how organizational policies and technological tools impact informal practices within organizations, offering insights into how they can be used to support these dynamics effectively.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Non-regulatory unwritten systems are followed by employees to carry out work operations within organizations. There are many necessary daily practices that go beyond the rules and job requirements set by an organization. Hislop (2003) suggests that official work practices include informal communication techniques, decision-making processes, and working methods, as well as the development of personal relationships that are not explicitly outlined in organizational structure guidelines. The requirement for adaptable work methods in intricate and ever-changing settings impacts the effectiveness of these strategies and can result in deficiencies in management as well as accountability systems.

According to UNESCO Information City, organizational communication often occurs outside of established communication channels. Formal communication methods consist of reports, emails, and official meetings, whereas informal communication is often seen in social gatherings as well as employee networking events. This form of communication allows for problem solving, decision-making, and innovation due to its adaptability and speed. Trust as well as strong relationships that form through casual conversations are essential elements in creating a cohesive team and boosting morale within the group (Wegmann et al., 2015).

Informal work procedures are developed by employees to circumvent bureaucratic obstacles that hinder their performance at work. Individuals depend on their personal networks to discover various strategies that can help them navigate constraints within the system (Starbuck 1992). Adaptable solutions may improve initial results, but they can lead to varying performance outcomes that create confusion and disagreements among employees about official protocols.

Flat hierarchical organizations that empower employees create both formal and informal systems for making decisions. Workers rely on their intuition, past work experience, and relationships with colleagues to guide their decision-making process, leading them to opt for methods that are not based on standardized protocols. Creative choices are made through informal decision-making processes as employees are able to explore ideas outside of traditional formal decision-making protocols (Mintzberg 1979).

Workers rely on their informal relationships with colleagues to navigate their workplaces. People become part of networks by forming informal connections based on trust, mutual benefits, and shared objectives. Colleagues create informal connections that help with sharing knowledge and advancing professionally, while also influencing how information is transferred within an organization. Network structures guarantee that the organization is safeguarded and functions in alignment with established power hierarchies and official protocols.

### **Social Network Theory**

Mark Granovetter is widely recognized as the individual who played a key role in moving forward and structuring Social Network Theory. He demonstrated in *The Strength of weak ties* (1973) that both Weak and strong Ties are crucial for networking as they facilitate information exchange and also affect transmission. Granovetter suggests that weak ties are important for bridging between different social groups because they provide access to new information and opportunities that strong ties do not offer. How Social networks interact with social relationships is established by the fundamental principles of social Network Theory. Here are the main principles:

Actors are referred to as nodes and connections are referred to as edges, making up the two primary elements of social networks. People who participate in building social networks can include individuals such as workers in a workplace or members of a community. The social networks use ties to represent

the connections or relationships between actors, and these ties represent a range of interactions, such as communication, friendship and collaboration.

The centrality measure evaluates the importance and impact of each individual in a network when compared with others. Actors in key roles have greater access to resources, information, and networking opportunities. Centrality assessment can be done in several ways. An actor's significance can be determined by analyzing the quantity of direct connections they have. Betweenness centrality measures an actor's tendency to act as a bridge between various other actors in a network by traveling through indirect paths, indicating their importance as a connector or intermediary to the system. Closeness centrality is a measure of how quickly an actor is able to link up with any other actors in a network, which is important for assessing the efficiency of information flow.

The theory can be easily applied to informal work practices because it focuses on the organic development of relationships that exist outside of traditional organizational frameworks. Informal networks are typically utilized by staff members to share information, resolve disagreements and collaborate on tasks. Network mapping can assist organizations in revealing concealed cultural elements and operational procedures within their systems that are not apparent through official reporting hierarchies.

A study indicates that informal networks are able to facilitate development and the transfer of knowledge by improving communication among staff members and cultivating trust among employees. When employees have strong connections with their coworkers, they can easily share information to enhance their problem-solving skills and the quality of their decisions. Weak connections offer organizations novel information and innovative suggestions that regular team members may not be able to obtain (Burt, 2004).

The Social Network Theory framework is a highly effective tool for examining informal work behaviors in organizational settings. This principle highlights how information is shared through social connections and relationships among employees. Businesses utilize the principles of Social Network Theory to create effective informal networks that enhance communication and boost organizational effectiveness.

### **The Importance of Social Connections in a Professional Setting**

The social networks within businesses play a crucial role in the organizational success. Hanson as well as Krackhardt (1993) found that along with formal channels, informal communication networks exist within organizations, enabling employees to exchange information, seek guidance, and make decisions. Informal networks enable employees to access crucial information and resources more quickly than through traditional communication channels. Strong bonds among group members lead to trust and collaboration, which improve team productivity and encourage innovative thinking. Granovetter's study in 1973 found that individuals in certain professions benefit from having weak connections with others in order to succeed. Employees who actively engage with a variety of social circles tend to be more likely to introduce

fresh ideas and different viewpoints, ultimately boosting creativity and innovation.

Social network platforms enable individuals to improve collaboration and develop social capital. Social capital is the benefits gained from connections as well as relationships that can be utilized for personal or group benefits, playing a vital role in achieving success in one's career through interactions in the workplace. In their study, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that employees who have a wide range of professional connections tend to advance more quickly in their careers because they have improved access to information, opportunities, and support from mentors and coworkers.

The social media tools that are used for communication create obstacles for the users. The research literature focuses on the exclusion and inequitable treatment of members within networks. Not being able to tap into informal networks within an organization can hinder an employee's career growth and ability to gather information (Ibarra, 1992). The presence of in-group/out-group dynamics and the development of cliques among coworkers contribute to increased stress in the workplace (Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employs secondary data analysis to support the main qualitative investigation procedures for workplace social networks. This research combines previous literature reports with observational studies of workplace networking systems and documentations of unofficial workplace processes. A combination of academic studies and organizational reports and industry research has been used in the evaluation process to explain modern concepts and research patterns about this subject.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Impact of Casual Work Behaviors on the Work Environment**

Employees in specific departments and teams develop unofficial ways of working together that differ from the organization's formal procedures via their shared habits of interacting with each other. These activities cover a wide range, such as mentoring sessions, sharing data, informal communication techniques, and fundamental decision-making tasks. Informal work techniques may appear distinct from formal procedures, but they actually evolve to meet day-to-day operational needs, allowing employees to adapt and respond effectively to work demands.

According to Orlikowski's (1996) research, organizations with a high level of knowledge intensity often rely on employees seeking help and sharing information directly with each other through informal practices. Training programs can be enhanced by incorporating informal mentorship practices, peer mentoring sessions, along with informal knowledge sharing to enhance both job skills as well as organizational understanding. The organization's flexibility is enhanced by these approaches, allowing employees to address difficult situations without the need for official permissions or instructions.

Informal work methods have both positive and negative aspects, but they can also create challenges for management decision-making. Based on current studies, these behaviors create informal hierarchies that weaken equitable and transparent management procedures (Poole and DeSanctis, 1994). According to Ibarra (1992), formal relationships among coworkers sometimes result in inequitable distribution of resources as well as information, benefiting specific social groups at the expense of those that are not part of the network. Casual actions sometimes lead to the circumvention of formal procedures, leading to decision - making processes that ignore organizational protocols, leading to issues of efficiency and ethics (Perry-Smith as well as Shalley, 2003).

### **Challenges within Casual Social Connections**

Organizations create information silos when valuable information and expertise become segregated within certain departments as a result of the informal networking structure. Sharing ideas is limited when employees who are not part of close-knit groups have fewer resources at their disposal. Some employees have access to a wealth of company information, while others work without understanding basic advancements or established protocols. Organizations are hindered in their ability to be agile when information is isolated within different departments, leading to duplication of efforts and hampering effective teamwork due to a lack of communication across networks.

When networks function in an informal manner, individuals or groups may face exclusion in addition to inequality, as they are unable to acquire important information or participate in decision-making processes. According to Ibarra (1993), individuals who do not have strong connections to influential networks may find it difficult to access resources and opportunities for professional development, which can impede their career progression. Employees are frustrated because they feel that their efforts are being overlooked or undervalued. Burt (2004) suggests that informal work environments establish a sense of organization through common traits such as company background and personal relationships, resulting in increased disparities in operations.

When creating tasks and duties, networks maintain informal qualities that enable actions to occur outside of conventional organizational structures. Informal networks have the potential to promote quick innovation and effective communication, but they may also lead to the adoption of unethical and risky practices to bypass organizational rules and regulations (Granovetter, 1973). When informal networks do not have appropriate formal oversight, the objectives and strategies of the organization may not be in sync with the decisions made within these networks, resulting in inconsistent implementation of tasks and allocation of resources.

Informal leaders hold the most influence and decision-making power within a network, serving as the main sources of information for other members. When a small group of informal leaders have complete control over decision-making, operations within organizations tend to become sluggish. The inadequate readiness of informal leaders to manage the flow of information in alignment with organizational goals can result in delays, restricted perspectives, and higher chances of mistakes.

Communication issues are able to arise in organizations with multiple locations and departments because of their informal networks. Organizations that heavily rely on informal communication channels overlook their formal systems, which are essential for ensuring consistent and effective information dissemination. Networks can cause communication issues by interfering with the flow of information, resulting in breakdowns in communication that can lead to conflicts within an organization (Cross and Prusak, 2002).

### **The Use of Technology and Working Remotely Can Influence Social Interactions and Casual Behavior**

The integration of digital technologies and the rise of remote work have introduced novel aspects to the fields of social connection research as well as informal workplace behavior studies. The integration of digital communication tools such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing has changed the way employees collaborate within companies. Boschma (2005) argues that advances in digital technology are improving network connections, particularly for teams working in separate or faraway locations. Some analysts believe that technology will diminish in-person interactions, potentially undermining the strength of informal networks that rely on established community relationships.

Organizations are currently examining whether informal work customs will continue with the implementation of hybrid work models as well as remote work setups. Remote work offers benefits such as flexibility and breaking down geographical limitations, however, it also presents challenges by limiting the spontaneous interactions commonly found in traditional office settings. Vartiainen and colleagues (2019) suggest that organizations should create creative initiatives that facilitate informal communication in the workplace and sustain virtual connections. Online platforms for casual conversations and the use of technology to connect during scheduled social events can help combat feelings of loneliness among remote workers.

The literature emphasizes the significant impact of informal work practices and social networks on the dynamics, productivity, and general success of the workplace. While social media platforms facilitate the sharing of information, collaboration and advancement of careers, they also highlight issues of discrimination and inequity. Informal work practices, while flexible and inclusive, can improve an organization's efficiency while also potentially raising issues related to fairness and transparency. With the increasing use of digital technologies and the rise of remote work, there is a shift in how networks and practices operate, necessitating a thorough analysis to understand the impact of these changes. As businesses adapt to evolving work environments, it will be crucial to acknowledge the significance of social relationships and casual work practices in fostering effective and diverse workspaces.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The connections that coworkers build in the workplace significantly influence the informal processes of work. Informal networks, which often function outside of the formal organizational structure, play a crucial role in

promoting communication, fostering collaboration, and solving problems. The theory of Social Network Theory offers insight into how networks function, emphasizing the importance of both strong and weak connections, the vital role of people in networks, as well as the value of social relationships within them. Casual networks that enable employees to access resources, share information, and also improve communication between various departments or levels of authority can result in increased innovation as well as efficiency. Nevertheless, these networks may also pose difficulties, like the presence of information silos or the exclusion of certain individuals in crucial discussions, which can impede collaboration and fairness within an organization.

As businesses realize the importance of informal relationships, they must determine how to harness the benefits while also effectively addressing any potential drawbacks. Recognizing and enhancing informal work methods can result in better communication, trust, and overall organizational effectiveness.

1. Organizations should promote the development of varied informal connections by fostering teamwork across departments and creating chances for individuals with diverse backgrounds and roles to interact with and exchange thoughts. This objective can be achieved by consistently engaging in team building exercises, participating in mentorship initiatives, and collaborating on projects as a team.
2. Organizations can leverage informal networks by identifying influential individuals within them and empowering them to serve as advisors or facilitators. These individuals can help overcome communication barriers, provide advice on how information is shared, and enhance the efficiency of processes. Recognizing and supporting these informal leaders can enhance the overall dissemination of information and resources throughout the organization.
3. In order to promote knowledge sharing, organizations should create casual environments - either in person or online - where employees can freely communicate as well as share ideas. Informal activities such as casual meetings or virtual conversations can facilitate the transfer of information that may not be formally recorded in standard protocols.
4. While informal networks offer many advantages, it is crucial for organizations to put into action formalized systems and procedures to guarantee fairness, consistency, and transparency. Blending formal and informal approaches in a harmonious way allows for the effective accomplishment of essential duties, while also encouraging flexibility and innovation through informal means.
5. The informal networks of organizations should be regularly reviewed to identify any potential weaknesses or isolated groups. Management can take a proactive approach in dealing with issues by understanding how information flows, recognizing possible barriers, ensuring crucial information is communicated to all staff, and fostering collaboration with all teams, not just a select few.
6. By strategically managing and enhancing informal networks, organizations are able to boost teamwork, creativity, and productivity at the workplace.

The Social Network theory offers a useful framework for understanding and improving informal practices, leading to improved organizational outcomes.

## FURHTER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research is still needed on this topic “Investigating Social Networks and Informal Work Practices in the Workplace”

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