Chapter III

Social Network Mapping Software: New Frontiers in HRM

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Abstract

Recent developments in social network mapping software have opened up new opportunities for human resource management (HRM). In this chapter we discuss how social network mapping information may provide critical inputs to managers for increasing the effectiveness of their HRM programs.

Introduction

In a knowledge-driven economy, returns on effective management of human capital are likely to exceed those available from more efficient management of financial and physical assets. In order to realize these returns, however, companies must go beyond notions of productivity and cost effectiveness, and
develop new approaches and management techniques to tap the knowledge, intellect, and creativity used to achieve these outcomes. Mapping and understanding social networks within an organization is an approach to understand how social relationships may affect business processes. Network perspectives build on the general notion that economic actions are influenced by the social context in which they are embedded and by the position of actors in social networks (Granovetter, 1985). Research on social networks indicates that network structure and activities influence employees and affect individual and organizational outcomes (Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001), and provides motivation to explore this rich field for possible inputs in human resource management (HRM) activities. In this chapter we suggest ways in which social networks can be analyzed using network mapping software and how some the information derived can be used meaningfully for HRM.

What do networks within organizations look like? How do we efficiently construct and analyze maps of these networks? What effect do these networks have on HRM activities? What opportunities exist to use social network mapping information to improve HRM activities? These questions are significant for organizations that want to manage their social and human capital efficiently and effectively. Given that vigorous network activities usually take place within organizations, and that social capital may have a direct bearing on human capital management, it becomes important to examine how these social processes affect HRM activities. Recent developments in social network mapping software help organizations to discover and analyze network structures. While such software has been available for quite some time, only recently have high-quality tools become readily accessible to mainstream business users. Partly this is because of improvements in computing power (i.e., modern computers are more capable), but there has also been significant improvements in the functionality and usability of the software. Our discussion highlights the capabilities of some of these software applications, as well as their implications for various HRM functions.

What are Social Networks?

The social network theory (Uzzi, 1996; Ibarra, 1993; Granovetter, 1973, 1985) emphasizes that human decisions are, to a large extent, functions of the ties between people (Burt, 1992). Individuals obtain support, information, and
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