**Team Project: Senior Manager Case Analysis**

Research shows that managers who aspire to positions of executive leadership succeed by effectively synthesizing the capabilities of the individuals on their teams and in their firms. In this way, leaders transcend their own individual limitations by leveraging the knowledge and resources of others. The purpose of the assignment is to show how personal networks enable leaders to share their resources with others.

Your task is to analyze the social network of a senior manager using the concepts discussed in the course. This is an opportunity to spend some time reaching a deeper understanding of how the social relationships of successful managers and senior executives are developed, managed, and executed to get things done.

Anticipate having to interview a top manager at least once to gain an understanding of his or her situation, the nature of his or her network, and the way in which it is managed. The names of your subjects will be kept strictly *confidential; if necessary use an alias when discussing your interviewee in your group. Always use an alias in the paper*. The choice of the manager is up to you. He or she may come from inside your organization or be a contact in another organization. Try to choose someone who you believe will be candid, open, and insightful.

The analysis is composed of two steps.
- *First*, you will interview your manager, one-on-one, and gain an understanding of his/her network and how it is used to get things done, such as building a cross-functional team, forming a political coalition, or developing contacts to a power structure.
- *Second*, you will share your insights and findings with your group with the purpose of developing a research paper that identifies the general patterns of success and failure found to exist across your managers. You should answer two general questions, the details of which will become more apparent as you are introduced to the course material. Those questions are: What structural configuration of contacts creates the most significant opportunities for managers in organizations? How are individual relationships developed to build expectations of trust and reciprocity that lead to exchanges of mutual benefit?

Presentation Format

The analysis should be no more than 10 double-spaced pages with 12 point font and 1" margins all around. Specifically, the paper should have a four-part structure:
(1) A brief description of each manager's situation (position, type of company, number of people being managed) and the problem being faced (no more than 1 paragraph per manager);

(2) A network diagram summarizing the network relationship of each manager. Each diagram should be no more than a half page in size and placed in an appendix and;

(3) An analysis of how these managers use the resources lodged in their network ties to get things done. This part should analyze the characteristics of effective and ineffective networking strategies as used by the different managers that make up your sample.
    At a minimum, you may want to concentrate on what interpersonal strategies are used to cultivate contacts and expand a network. Consequently, you want to discover: How managers effectively build trust and commitment from their network contacts?; What kind of strategies are used to ensure that the information obtained from a contact is accurate and timely?; What tactics are used to successfully gain the buy-in of powerful actors or circumvent them?; and so forth.
    Similarly, you will want to explain what kind of structure (size, density, number of structural holes, cohesive, entrepreneurial, monopolist) is most successful depending on the objectives of the manager. For example, What pattern of network ties is most successful in assembling successful teams? Or How are networks structured to optimize job mobility, trust, or commitment?

(4) Have a conclusion section titled: "Recommendations for Kellogg Students." This section should be one page and include concrete recommendations for building value into the vital activities of Kellogg students. They should focus on what students could potentially do the next day in their teams, the next summer in their jobs, or during the first years after graduation. For example, describe how what you learned can help students do better in selecting company presentations; meeting company presenters; making contacts during their first summer jobs; switching fields from banking to general management or consulting; preparing for the transition from employee to partner; and so some other critical activity related to career advancement or building company equity.

In general, the most informative analyzes go beyond description (a story of what was done) to an explanation of why it happened the way it did using the analysis tools from class. Well-organized answers that stress the most important factors rather than simply provide a data-dump of all possible factors are evaluated more highly. Ask yourself this question: What did I learn from this analysis that is most useful to me in managing my success and the success of others? Please additional information on how to approach your interview, what kinds of questions to ask during your interview and samples of previous senior manager case analyses are available on my website.

## How to Collect Data

You may want to record each interview and transcribe important passages that can be added to your research paper. Quotes add concrete examples and color to your analysis.

(a) Part of your analysis, should focus on how ***contacts and relationships*** are cultivated. Many managers will cite trust, reputation, or status as key processes by which relationships are developed. Your job is to find out how and why these processes work and how managers use them in practice. Use follow up questions and probing to get at how and why different networking processes work or don't work.

You will probably have to probe to get at these answers. For example, if a manager states, "Our trusting relationship enabled us to transfer private information." You should ask, "How did you develop trust? Do you think you can use the same methods with everyone? (i.e., is it always possible to be completely truthful with everyone?)

What key events lead to the creation of trust? What is the relationship between trust and reputation? How did your reputation form? Are there downsides to always playing your cards face up? What are they? How do you read a situation beforehand?

What role do third parties or private norms play in enforcing non-written agreements? How important is exclusivity to trust?

Is it difficult to balance social and economic relationships? What processes have and have not worked for your manager?

What would you do differently to create some of your ties today? Where are the weaknesses in your present relationships and why?

(b) Similarly, you will want to explain what kind of ***structure*** (size, density, number of structural holes, cohesive, entrepreneurial, monopolist) is most successful depending on the objectives of the manager.

Most many managers will talk about who is in their network (persons and positions). Ask how key persons were met? Was the meeting serendipitous or proposed? Why this person rather than another person with similar skills, background, or knowledge? Was there an intermediary that made an introduction?

Does he or she forms many/few ties? Probe the response by asking what are the pros and cons of each strategy?

How is the manager positioned on diversity? How does the manager deal with issues of timing, access, and referrals? Where is the manager's sponsorship if he or she needs it?

The objective is to describe general patterns of success and failure by inductively generalizing from your sample of managers. This section should show original thinking and demonstrate your ability to apply the tools described in class to a real life situation.

## How to Approach your Interview

Interviewing skills are extremely important to managers and consultants because they are a major tool by which to collect data about competitive processes and outcomes. Use this opportunity to test and develop your skills. Furthermore, you will learn what makes a good interviewee (i.e., how they present information). This knowledge will enhance your performance on job interviews.

Let the manager free associate about his or her career and the critical events that shaped it (noting how the critical events were spawned by or renovated the social organization around the manager). A good way to get interviewees to reveal their knowledge about their experiences is to let them tell you a story how they found a key job, a collaborator, or a competitive opportunity. After listening to the story, then try to map it onto your understanding of how social networks are used and managed. Embedded in these stories will be the kernels of insights that will help you model their social network. As they tell stories, listen carefully and identify the key "concepts" we have discussed in class in their narrative. In particular, identify what factors lead to these concepts and what performance outcomes follow from them. This will give you the basis on which to develop a model of how networks affect performance.

You will probably go into the interview with a set of questions. Use these questions as an outline and be prepared to give up your sequencing. It is your job to navigate back to them when the time is ripe. If you try to stick too closely to your outline you are likely to lose the interviewee's attention and stall the interview when the conversation shifts in another direction.

## Getting Started

Start with general questions that describe the structure and composition of the network. Here are some questions to get you started – they are far from exhaustive or sufficient and should be added to the questions listed in the syllabus. You should discuss what and how you will ask questions with your teammates.

- Who are the four or five people who have contributed most to your professional growth and where are they in the network?
- If you look back over the last six months, who are the four or five people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Just list their first names or initials.
- Consider the people with whom you spend your free time. Over the last six months, who are the three people you have been with most often for informal social activities such as going out to lunch, dinner, drinks, films, visiting one another's homes, and so on?
- How do you nurture relationships with your key contacts.
- How does your style of interaction differ depending on who you're interacting with?
- Who do you see as your single, most important contact for your continued success and where are they in your network?

- You can also reverse the above questions to identify those people at your interviewee's company have made it the most difficult for him or her to carry out job responsibilities? Again, just list the person's first name or initials (and remember that these data will not be released from the Research Program).