NETWORK PERFORMANCE:

THE POWER OF SOCIAL LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR

- CHARLES JENNINGS

There is little doubt that social behaviors and social learning impact performance. And, organizations need to be aware of this and respond accordingly.

Two years ago, the well-respected analyst firm Bersin by Deloitte published its findings on the impact of informal and social learning on talent development. Bersin reported that organizations with strong informal learning capabilities, including the adoption and use of social learning tools, are 300 percent more likely to excel at global talent development than organizations without those competencies.

This Bersin report is just one of an increasing number of surveys and empirical research studies that suggest social learning has a clear, positive and significant impact on individual, team and organizational performance.

NETWORK PERFORMANCE IS ALL ABOUT COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION.

NETWORK PERFORMANCE

There is also a growing awareness that people who exploit social media and use social means for their development are more likely to excel in the workplace than those who don't. The Corporate Executive Board's 2013 study, "Building High-Performance Capability for the New Work Environment," found that network performance is becoming increasingly important. The board describes network performance as the ability to not only perform well at individual tasks but also build and exploit relationships that help achieve objectives.

Network performance is all about collaboration and cooperation.

Around 50 percent of the people surveyed in the Corporate Executive Board's study reported an increase in the work they do with co-workers in other locations as well as an increase in the number of people involved in making decisions.

This is clearly a general trend. More and more knowledge workers are required to deal with complexity and ambiguity as much of the repetitive transactional work is being delegated to technology. And, the importance of building and maintaining robust social networks is becoming increasingly important.

ENTERPRISE CONTRIBUTORS

The board's study also found that although 57 percent of employees performed well at individual tasks, only 17 percent were high network performers or "enterprise contributors." Globally, the figure was 17 percent. Yet, these network performer skills are critical for organizational performance. These are the people who drive innovation and provide the "glue" across and beyond organizational boundaries that is so important in our increasingly connected workplaces.

SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES FOR NETWORK PERFORMANCE

The skills and capabilities needed for leaders, managers and workers to become high network performers and effectively exploit the social world, include:

- **Effective teamwork:** The ability to work well in distributed teams across time zones and cultures.

- **Organizational awareness:** The ability to navigate a range of organizational structures to achieve outcomes.
- **Self-awareness:** The ability to understand your own personality strengths and to utilize them effectively when working with others.
- **Systems thinking:** The ability to apply logical analysis to understand complex processes and systems.
- **Collaboration and cooperation:** The ability not only to work collaboratively in teams focused on specific outcomes, but also to work cooperatively.
- **Connected leadership:** The ability to lead and manage others in the new connected workplace environment.
- **Personal knowledge management:** The ability to make sense of, and continually learn from, the constant stream of information encountered from social channels.

NETWORK AND SOCIAL MINDSETS

These capabilities don't exist in isolation. We all need to focus on building, and helping others build, social mindsets. We need to remember that it's a mindset issue more than a skills issue.

Jane Hart, an expert in the area of social learning, makes this point very clearly, "It's not just adding social media to instructional programs. Learning in today's networked workplace is about learning with and from one another as we face new challenges. We can't learn to be 'social' by being taught about it. We have to 'live' social."

Charles Jennings is a director of the 702010 Forum, Duntroon Associates and the Internet Time Alliance. Email Charles.