Leveraging Hidden Influencers to Support Change
A Partnering Resources Case Study

Situation

After fifteen years, the pension administration system could no longer support the needs of a growing organization and rapidly changing member needs. The organization embarked on an effort to replace it. During the five-year implementation process, IT would need to maintain the old system. Leaders would need to help staffers, who are inexperienced in newer coding languages, adapt to change. Many feared that this would be difficult since most employees had grown up with the organization and had little experience with change. Leaders wanted greater insight into how to help the workforce adapt.

Response

The organization launched a network study to understand how change occurred within IT. The study generated maps showing where expertise resided, who was served as informal influencers, and who was positioned to be a change agent. Among the results were:

Several Hidden Influencers Uncovered. The list of Critical Connectors—people with disproportionate influence over the whole—included several people who completely surprised the leadership team. In response to one name, a leader exclaimed, "I've never heard him say a word!" That individual, although invisible to the executive team, was known among his peers for his ability to get things done. He was added to the organization's retention list. Another surprise Critical Connector was invited to join the Organization Change Team and help guide the initiative.

New System Architects Identified. The study revealed individuals who both earned high trust from their peers and possessed a flair for innovation. Those four people were placed in influential positions within the modernization teams.

Allies Repositioned. The study identified people who successfully combined three qualities: high trust from their peers, the ability to innovate, and deep expertise in the old system. These people were recognized as special assets since they would be able to speak credibly about the benefits of the new system and help bring people along the path to change.

Unexpected Findings. The study revealed that the head of one group inadvertently served as a bottleneck by encouraging decisions to go through him. Another pattern showed tight communication between the architects and IT leaders, but none between architects and the rest of the organization.

Results

Three years into the modernization effort, the organization continues to use the network study results to inform talent assignments and utilization. Two hidden influencers contribute significantly to the Organization Change Team. Coaching the bottlenecking leader to clarify decision parameters and encourage staff has resulted in more timely action and more confident staffers. Finally, steps taken to increase interactions between architects and teams have resulted in less rework and more effective management of enterprise technology standards.

Client Profile

Industry
Pension Administration

Division
Information Technology

Operating Budget
$56.5M

Staffing Level
~350 employees

Key Responsibilities
- Maintain network and system performance
- Administer the pension administration system
- Provide solutions to address evolving organizational needs

Strategic Goal
Upgrade the antiquated software platform with a modern system

Partnering Resources Solution
- Assess the IT organization to find hidden influencers and subject matter experts
- Use information to staff teams maintaining the old system and building the new system
- Seed change teams with influential informal leaders