



## Leveraging Your Social Networks

**By Lewis E. Frees, Ph.D.**

Social networks are multidimensional self-organizing webs of relationships – each with its own purpose – that tie an organization together. We form and sustain social networks out of common interest or purpose...something that matters to everyone in the network. Virtually anything that matters to you exerts pull which in turn attracts a social network.

Some networks may overlap. You may connect with the same person around a variety of common interests. Your neighbors (a network formed because of physical proximity) may be your golf friends (a network formed through mutual interest in the sport). Networks can overlap.....The person you go to with a work related question may also be a social friend.

Some networks are unique to a specific outcome and may be extremely short-lived. If you call a help line connected with a specific piece of software, your network consists of one person whom you have most likely never talked with before and may never talk to again.

Networks can also become interdependent and can be mutually reinforcing. We know this intuitively when we find common interests in sports or music and so forth. When the same people are in multiple networks with each other because they have multiple sources of significance or importance, the effectiveness of one network affects the others. Social deficit in one network can degrade another that is overlapping. Social capital always builds stronger social networks.

At their best, social networks give birth to the best thinking and cultural attributes of the individuals that comprise the network into a quality of both wisdom and culture that results in a whole that far exceeds the sum of the parts. They are the seedbed of innovation...the creation of new forms. At their worst, they are