



How Effective Networks Help Leaders Thrive Amid Ambiguity and Change

Mid-level managers and senior leaders today face relentless ambiguity, uncertainty, and volatility in their work environments. Rapid market shifts, organizational upheavals, and unforeseen crises (from technological disruption to global pandemics) define the modern landscape.

Succeeding in this context requires more than individual talent or technical know-how, it demands **resilience, adaptability, and a support system** that can buffer shocks.

An effective professional network is an underutilized asset that bolsters these capabilities. An open, diverse, and deep professional network – rich with resources and perspectives – can be a lifeline that helps leaders navigate uncertainty, adapt to change quickly, maintain their mental well-being, and even rebound professionally after setbacks. This eBook discusses how robust networks empower leaders to thrive in volatile conditions.

What Are “Open, Diverse, and Deep” Networks?

Effective professional networks are more than a collection of contacts — they’re structured in ways that expand thinking, increase adaptability, and provide support. **Open networks** provide opportunities for leaders to access novel information by connecting individuals or groups who are otherwise not connected. Individuals with open networks are better positioned to sense change early, respond with agility, and stay grounded during uncertainty. **Diverse networks** expose them to fresh perspectives from people from different backgrounds, functions, and worldviews, helping leaders avoid group-think and develop more creative, inclusive solutions. And **deep networks** include trusted relationships that offer emotional support during high-stress moments.

How does an open, diverse, and deep network aid leaders in key challenges common to volatile environments?

Navigating Ambiguity & Change



Diverse perspectives for sense-making: Access to varied perspectives and expert insights helps a manager make sense of complex, unclear situations and identify creative solutions. This accelerates learning and adaptation during change. Leaders who actively seek out diverse viewpoints are better equipped to navigate complex challenges and drive innovation within their organizations.

High Volatility & Risk



Resource and knowledge exchange: Broad professional connections enable leaders to quickly source information, advice, or resources when faced with volatile conditions. For example, a leader can tap contacts in another department or a peer in their external industry network to brainstorm a response to an unprecedented problem. Such bridging connections help leaders handle surges in workload or crises more agilely.

Stress and Uncertainty



Emotional support and resilience: Deep, trust-based relationships in one's network (close colleagues, mentors, former bosses) act as an emotional anchor. These confidants provide empathy, encouragement, and a sounding board during turmoil. Social support buffers stress and protects well-being during tough times. Knowing that "you are not alone in the fight" instills confidence and perseverance.

Career Setbacks



New opportunities and faster recovery: An expansive network – especially one rich in weak ties – serves as a safety net in the event of job loss or career setbacks. Weaker, arm's-length connections often broadcast fresh job leads and introductions that one's close circle might not know about ¹. In contrast, strong ties tend to be more motivated to help a job seeker, including leveraging their own networks or vouching for the job seeker to help them obtain a job ². A balanced network of strong and weak ties improves a leader's ability to land on their feet after disruption.



Networks Foster Resilience and Well-Being

Resilience is often framed as an individual trait, but recent research shows it's deeply social. Leaders facing ambiguity and high pressure draw strength from their networks — not just for advice, but for emotional support that buffers stress and protects mental health. A study of 150 leaders during COVID-19 found that the most resilient didn't go it alone — they leaned on a wide range of relationships for stability and support, demonstrating that **resilience is a team sport**³. Trusted peers, mentors, and even family members provided empathy, perspective, and practical help that allowed them to keep leading through crisis.

Workplace social support can be a powerful buffer against burnout and emotional exhaustion. Support can also help workers recover more effectively from daily pressures, improving their ability to stay engaged and resilient over time. In leadership roles especially, having a network of trusted peers and mentors is more than just a personal comfort — it's a strategic advantage. These connections not only offer emotional encouragement but also create an environment where leaders can recharge, refocus, and maintain high performance through uncertainty and change.

Importantly, the **diversity** of the network also contributes to resilience. Leaders with broader, more varied networks are better equipped to handle uncertainty and anxiety, because they gain access to more coping strategies, worldviews, and sources of strength. Engaging with communities outside one's immediate circle—industry peers, cross-functional teams, volunteer groups—gives leaders more “mental models” for problem-solving and perseverance. In times of change, these connections are what keep leaders grounded and capable of bouncing back.



Networks Provide Adaptability and Perspective in Uncertainty

When facing uncertainty, leaders need to make sense of complex, fast-changing information — and that process is inherently social. An open, diverse network acts as a kind of real-time radar, giving leaders access to multiple viewpoints and helping them interpret ambiguous situations more clearly. Through these relationships, leaders can quickly gather insights, learn from others' experiences, and identify emerging trends that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Diverse networks — ones that span across functions, industries, or geographies — help leaders anticipate and respond to change more effectively than those networks that consist solely of a tight-knit internal circle. These connections not only provide early warnings, but also challenge assumptions and stimulate innovation. By regularly engaging with people outside their own worldview, leaders avoid tunnel vision and become more flexible in how they approach problems.

In practice, this means faster adaptation. Leaders with robust networks often **form informal peer groups** to crowd-source ideas and test solutions — a behavior that spiked during the COVID-19 crisis ⁴. These networks also serve as real-time learning systems. Instead of figuring everything out alone, adaptable leaders rely on their connections to share lessons learned and avoid costly missteps. The ability to draw from a wide pool of knowledge makes leaders more responsive, confident, and successful in unpredictable environments.



Networks Enable Career Recovery and Mobility

In volatile times, career disruption is common — and a strong network can be a powerful safety net. **People with expansive networks rebound faster and land better jobs** after layoffs or transitions.

A 2022 study analyzing over 20 million LinkedIn users found that weaker online connections — those with fewer shared contacts or less frequent interaction — were associated with greater job mobility compared to closer LinkedIn connections ⁵. These findings offer useful insights into how broader networks can surface new opportunities. It is important to note that the study defines strong and weak ties based on LinkedIn activity. This research suggests that maintaining a variety of professional connections, even weaker ones, can create unexpected pathways during career transitions by hearing about novel job information. It does not, however, negate the importance of the deeper, trust-based relationships emphasized in leadership development, for rebounding from career setbacks.

This advantage isn't just about volume, it's about access. Leaders with diverse networks often hear about roles earlier, get referred more often, and are better positioned for high-quality matches. For mid- to senior-level professionals whose next opportunity may not be posted online, these relationships are critical. Even during career lulls, networks keep leaders visible and connected to emerging opportunities.

Beyond job leads, networks offer emotional momentum. During layoffs, promotions that fall through, or major pivots, it's often peers and mentors who provide confidence, validation, and perspective. Individuals who believe they have strong support networks remain **more optimistic, proactive, and grounded** through career uncertainty. In short: your network doesn't just help you get a new job — it helps you believe you can, which is just as important.



Conclusion

In today's unpredictable business climate, no manager or executive can afford to go it alone. **Open, diverse, and deep professional networks are indispensable for leaders dealing with ambiguity, uncertainty, and volatility.** Through these networks, leaders gain early insights, broaden their thinking, and adapt faster to change. They also find the **allies, confidants, and champions** who help them stay resilient and sane amid chaos. And when disruption strikes their careers, their networks often turn a potential downfall into an opportunity for growth – facilitating quicker recovery and upward mobility.

In essence, an **effective network serves as both armor and compass**: it protects leaders' well-being and equips them with direction when navigating the unknown. Cultivating such a network is an ongoing investment. It means reaching beyond one's immediate circle, engaging with diverse colleagues and communities, and nurturing genuine relationships over time. The payoff is a robust capacity **to weather storms and seize opportunities** that solitary effort alone cannot match. Leaders who prioritize building and maintaining an open, diverse, deep network are not only more resilient in the face of adversity – they are proactively shaping their ability to thrive in the next chapter of uncertainty. In a world where volatility is a given, **the connected leader is the prepared leader.**



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