

2. Network as an structure

“Life is like a network and not as a organization chart”

The multimillionaire H.Ross Perot was the one that coined the famous phrase which we start this section. Life is like a thread interweave, multiple and flexible bonds, a spider net. This assortment is valid for personal life and also for social relationships; although it seems that there are some differences between women and men differential socialization.

According to some investigations, some women that hold responsibility jobs in companies or political structures develop a leadership and team work type based on network structure. And this is translated into creation of new ways of organization, where the interrelation between people and work is fundamental, in detriment of the hierarchic position. And this is a fundamental conceptual distinction because the network structure is opposed to hierarchic structure. These professional experiences that start at the end of the 80's, have also helped as a base of the organization structure in the social networks.

Dr. Helgensen (1993) explains that, in the course of her investigations, she observed that, when interviewed women described their functions in the organizations, generally they referred to themselves as located in the middle of the structure. Their communication was therefore, not to the bottom but to the outside. They felt “connected” to the people in their environment and they expressed this model of structure as one determined by an influence nucleus around there were orbits and radial lines. This is a spider net plot, adjusted in each moment to the necessity of survival and the development of the organization in questions.

This model influences women's language, but also the management they develop and the way to plan their reunions. It is not a chance that there are women in their majority that have applied the “circular management diagram” based in the personnel rotation in different jobs and organizations functions, so everybody enrich with this circular diagram.

Reunions that are planned do not have the unique objective to transmit information from the president male or female as many times happen in the traditional political organizations we know, but they are used to communicate projects and ideas between different teams that are part of the organization.

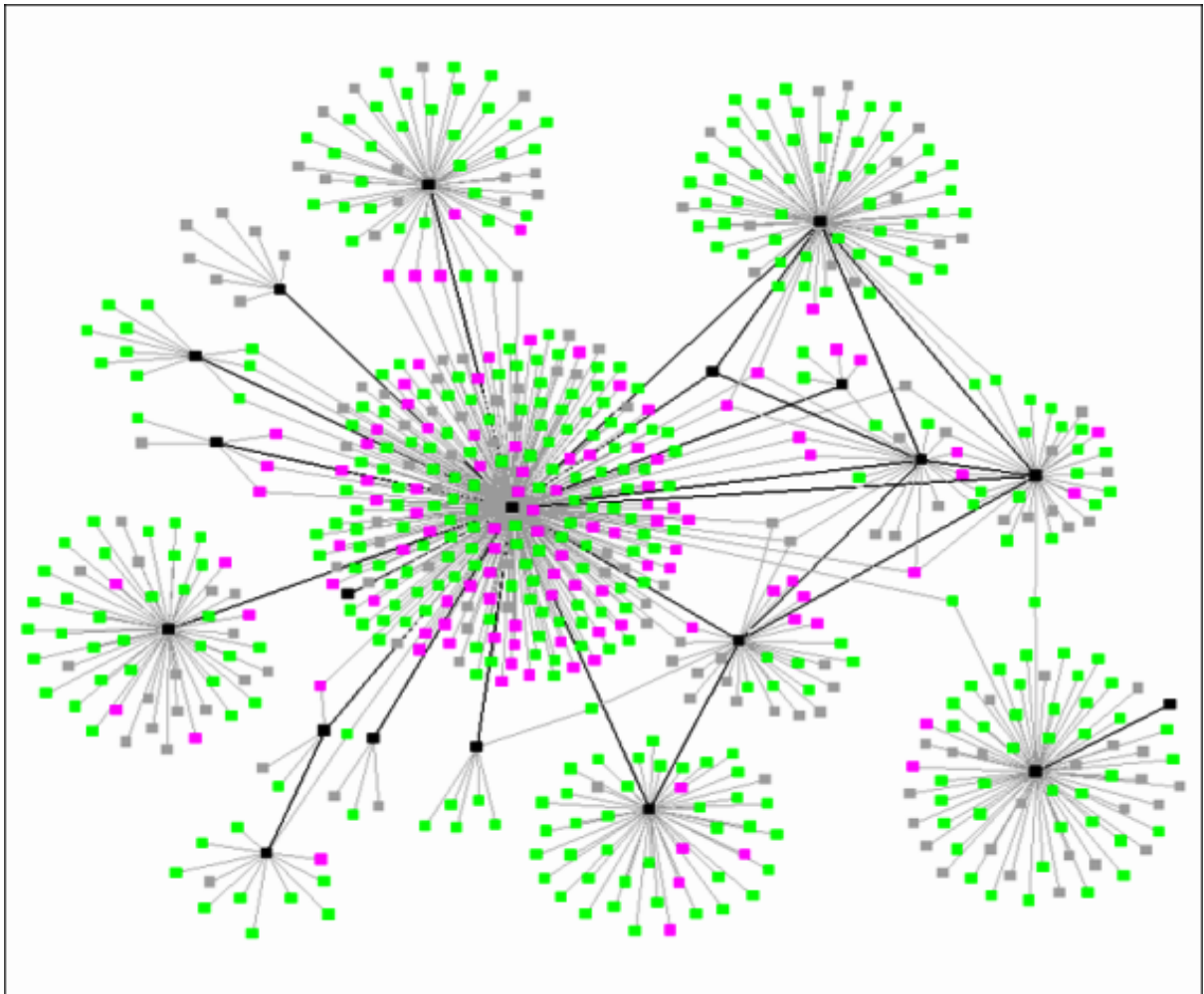


Figura 2¹. Social Networks

So there are clear the differences between the concepts of hierarchy and network. These concepts are opposed because the most desirable position for some might be the most dangerous for others. In practice, the head of the hierarchy is in the vertex of the pyramid and the centre of the orbital system in the middle of the hierarchic progression. To reach the higher level is the objective of the hierarchic level, and further they get, the better. This vision involves perceive as dangerous and immobilize the fact to be in a central position. The differences also are in the type of communication because while from the hierarchic point of view you compulsory must use the correct channels and filter and select the information, in the orbital point of view you value the fluid, direct and not determined communication.

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One of the main values of these new structures is the importance of the team correlation, before the individual contribution. This wide compromise- a compromise with the totality or the group- is implicit in the image of the “spider net”. The orbital and radial lines and compromise the entire group: each point of contact is also a link of union.

The fundamental thing about this system is the inclusion, not the exclusion as it happens to the most of the ones we know them. In short, it is about an strategy governed by opportunity, that operates through intuition and it is characterized by perseverance, all typical characteristics of women education.

These first studies were developed in North America and gave rise to strategies to improve commercial and economical relations. From there emerged the so called “Networking” or personal contact net with a concrete objective, to maximize companie’s benefits. Nevertheles, with time, the use of this networking, validated by its contrasted efficiency, go extended to other fields of action, and nowadays it serves as a base for many lobbies or power groups and different alternative organizations.

The principle of Networking lean on the following principles:

- The people’s movement takes place in social circles
- The personal relation network is not free because people move in defined social circles (there are studies that show how difficult it is to relate with people of different social class as ours)
- Social circles overlap in some points (there is the possibility of mobility between social class and friendship circles, work, etc.)
- Social circles are related among themselves
- The contact management demands a frequent interaction
- The world is a handkerchief (six steps are enough to connect anybody in the world with another). This supposition has enough experimental support if you accept it as an average number instead of an exact number. Any case it is a clear sample of the relational proximity that unite human beings and networking potential.

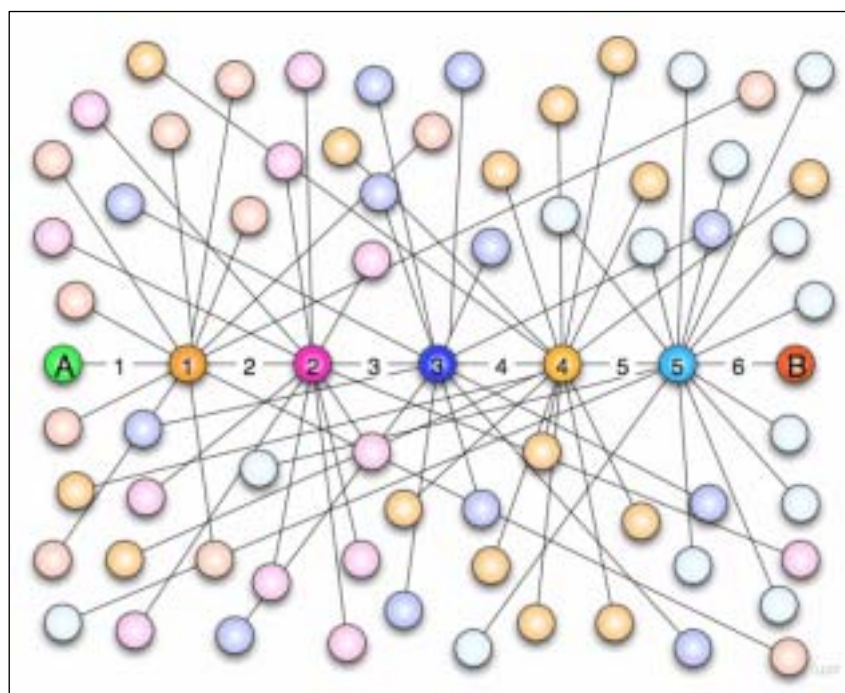


Chart 3². The world is a handkerchief (“six degrees of separation”)

- Relations can only be created with the face to face
- To establish a durable relation it is necessary to have a certain number of hours of relation
- Face to face is not necessary to maintain a relation
- The approximate number of possible interrelations of a person along its life is 1.000.000

As it can be observed, some of the former principles that defined the first networks of personal contacts that were organized are now obsolete due to the massive use of information technologies. For example, the believe that some relations can only be created face to face, with personal knowledge, although they can be maintain without later presence contact. Nowadays, we are all witnesses of relations that are made in the Internet without any previous personal contact, although all experts think that in some common path, a physical knowledge of the other network participants is necessary. This is the reason why most of the networks combine presence and virtual actions.

Networking still is the methodology and theoretical base of many of the present networks, although they have transcended to the business field and they take care of social and political aim.

Types of communication networks

Most part of the analysis made about the networks that have taken place in professional field, both the ones that have gender perspective and the general studies that do not contemplate this vision. In these analyses they start assuming that communications in a group have the same shape that the structure of the same group. According to the observations made about the type of communications between people and the establishment of personal contact, there are many types of communication networks might be described. Of course, networks can be big and very complex, but basic types like Chart 4 facilitates their identification and comprehension.

Communication networks can be more or less centralized and their level of centralism is directly related to the easiness of the inside leadership to come up. Therefore, networks in wheel and hairpin shape forces the information to run by the same person, and easily becomes the group leader. This networks are not so satisfactory to people that are part of the group although on return, they are fast and efficient in easy tasks. Circle networks difficult the arising of leadership because all people have the same capacity to control information. In this chain networks or multiple channels might be people better situated than others to be leaders, but they do not have to control all the information. The less centralized networks generate more satisfaction, and they can solve complex tasks and they are more innovative.

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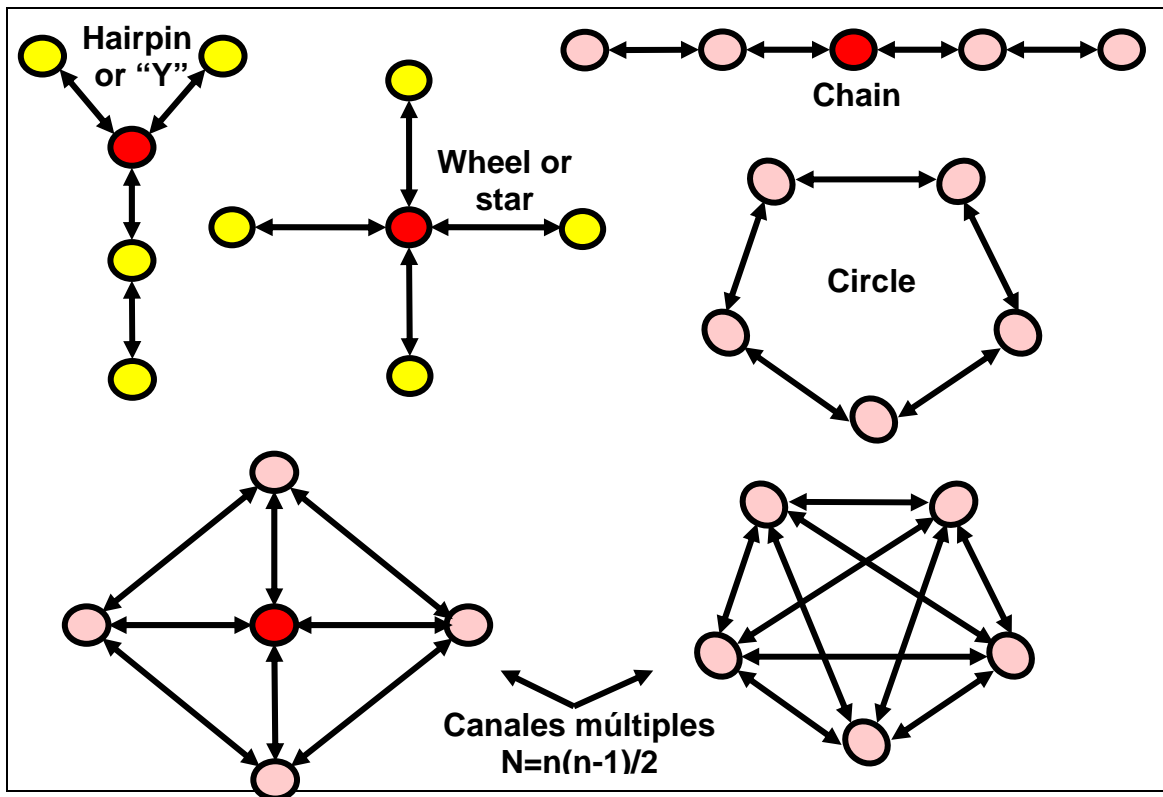


Chart 4. Types of communication networks (Alex Bavelas and Harold Leavitt, 1950)

Table 1. Characteristics of the communication networks by their topology

	Typo de network		
	Channel	Star o Wheel	Multiple Channels
Speed	Few	High	High
Precision	Low	High	Medium
Leadership	Limited	High	Limited o none
Satisfaction	Little	Few	High

As it can be observed, among the different types of networks, the most satisfactory one is the one with channels or multiple ways, and once more, the spider net, although it implies the decrease or the vanishing of one leader according to different leaders (affective, knowledge, etc.)

Table 2. Election of the type of network depending on the complexity of the task

Variable	Simple Tasks	Complex task
Efficiency	Centralice	Descentralice
Satisfaction	Descentralice	Descentralizad
Participation	Descentralizad	Descentralizada
Fastness	Centralice	Descentralizada

Therefore, the question that drove the creation of social networks was: if women feel so comfortable in these types of structures. Why not promote it and improve it in the political life in a way that it helps them to achieve the social change we pretend?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES UNIT 2

a. Protagonists at work

To decide what type of network we want to create in near future, it is important that we detect which is our daily guideline of communication in our social relations. If you are professional women, it is important that you identify our way of acting at team work or when providing information to our colleagues at work.

Objective:

- ⊕ Analyze the communication system in the professional and political field, more used to improve its efficiency.

Proceeding

- 📄 Elaborate a brief test with questions about the communication way when you use the type: How many messages do you receive from me during the day? How does the information get to you? Does my communication get to you directly or indirectly? What feeling do you get at the end of the day regarding information and communication within the team? Is it satisfactory or disappointing?
- 📄 Each person will make up some questions according to their political or professional situation
- 📄 Ask 5 people of your social environment that value with sincerity the type of communication you practice with them answering the questionnaire.
- 📄 From here you have to reflect in a graphic the type of predominant network: chain, hairpin, wheel, circle or multiple channels. Contrast the efficiency and leadership grade of each one of them with the major punctuation extracted

Methodology

- ⊕ Individual and in a team

Time

- ⊕ Five hours

Materiales:

- ⊕ A questionnaire and some answer's sheet

b. New professional relation models

Many professional women practice different work methods from traditional, less hierarchic, more participative and equalitarian. The majority is leaning on the structure of the network to reach it.

Objective:

Detect different ways to exercise leadership by working in network with the closest teams.

Proceeding

- ▣ Read carefully the proposed real model experiences of women that occupy management jobs.
- ▣ Analyze closely the pros and cons of this models
- ▣ Make a comparison with other ways of acting
- ▣ Design possible improvement formulas at net work from a professional perspective at the light of the exercise results.

Methodology

- ⊕ Text Reading and result analysis. Individual.

Time

- ⊕ One hour and a half

Materials

- ⊕ Paper and pencil

Barbara Grogan, president of Western Industrial Contractors

Presides the Advising Council for the small company (founded by her) improving the exchange the ideas among the participants and forging new alliances among them. She explains the fact to occupy this central position as a way to promote the exchange or “encourage the information flow”. Her idea is the correlation of teams more than individual contribution” (Page 67).

Interview to Frances Hesselbein, main manager of The Girl Scouts

Frances Hesselbein applies circular management theories to the organization. She refers to herself as located in the middle of a structure, not over the dome, in the centre of a network. It doesn't communicate “to the bottom” but “to the outside”. At the moment of the interview, Sally Helgesen and Frances Heselbein are in a restaurant.

“Unexpectedly, Frances grabs the pepper mill and he puts it in the middle of our table. “This is me – she sais- in the centre of the organization”. He moves a cold tea glass and some sugar packets to create a circle around the mill. “And this first circle is my management team”. With some cups and their plates, Frances constructs a second circle around the first one. “This is the personnel that respond to the first team. And away from it there is another circle and another one. And they are all related to each other. He lifts some knives and forks and starts to form the radius to join the orbital radius. “As circles extend towards outside, there are more connections. So this galaxy gets more interweaved when it grows”. The table is in a complete disorder, but I am delighted. Frances has created the perfect image of a spider net. (page 65).

Interview to Carol Guilligan in “A different Voice”

“Concepts of hierarchy and “net” that arise in fantasy and thoughts of women and men imply different ways of structuring relations and are associated to different points of views about ethical principles and self identity (...). Those concepts are opposed because the desirable position for one can be the most dangerous to others. And because the hierarchy dome is in the pyramid vertex, and the orbital system centre in the middle of the hierarchic progression, the position that some define as dangerous, for others is safe (...). Women wish to be “in the centre of things” and shudder before the idea of being “isolated in the organization dome” (page 70).