

Your Shadow Org Chart

Which unseen relationships are keeping your org running?

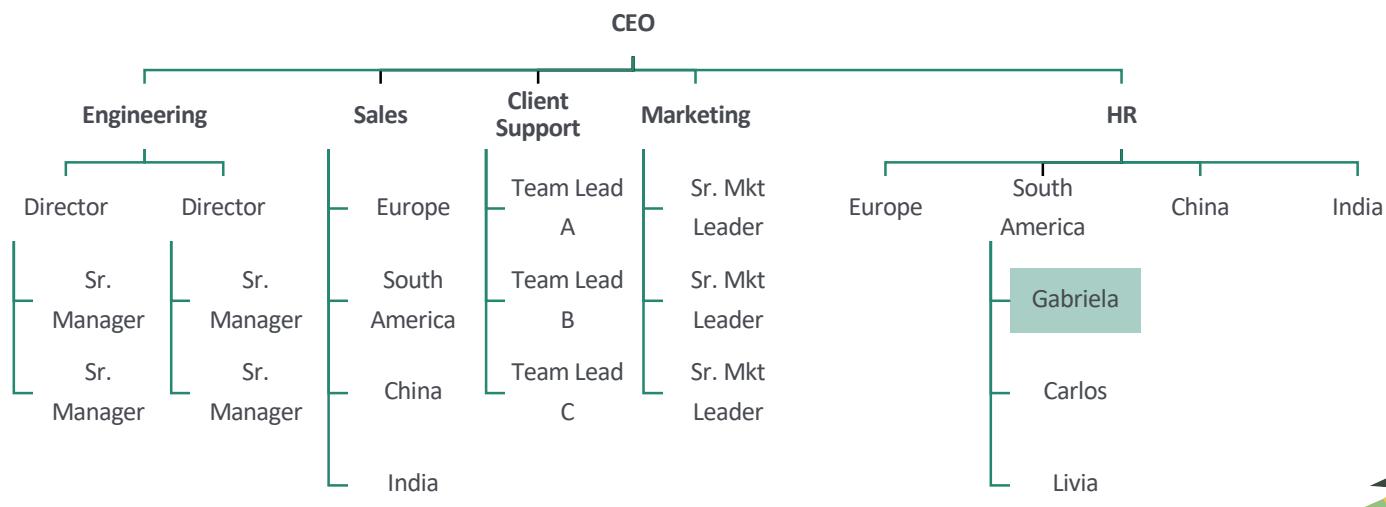


Organizations are called organizations for a reason: people work and collaborate in an organized fashion. To help visualize that connectivity, we often build and keep org charts handy. Still, practiced leaders know that the traditional org chart never captures the **full** view – the behind-the-scenes people and relationships really making things happen. For leaders who want to pull that curtain back, a different tool exists: the *organizational network*.

In every organization, employees develop relationships with others. It doesn't take long for them to see past their 'on paper' org chart and learn who truly knows what, who is helpful, who can solve problems, and who is a source of good information. Whether these relationships are formal or informal, professional or personal, they are the true transmission belt through which work gets done. This 'network of humans' is called the *organizational network*, and despite its uninspiring name, it is the key to understanding how work gets accomplished in your company.

Let's explore how an organizational network analysis (ONA) meaningfully fills in the troublesome gaps of the lowly org chart.

Below, we see a (simplified) example of a common org chart. Let's focus in on Gabriela. What we can see here is that she is an HR Business Partner who reports to the head of HR in South America, who in turn reports up to the corporate head of HR.



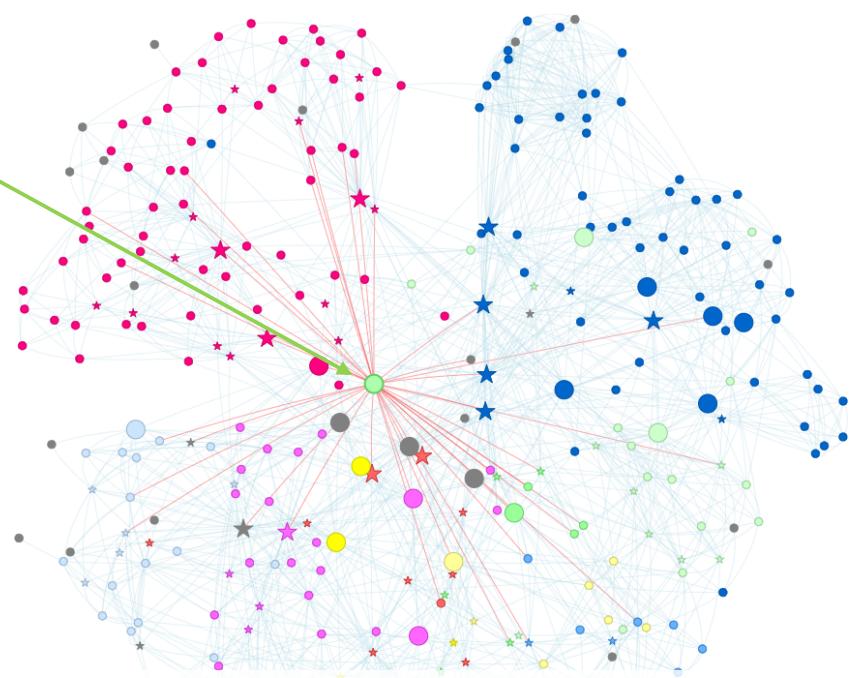
A little reductive, isn't it? One of the most troubling aspects about reviewing an org chart by itself is how replaceable Gabriela appears. The space she occupies within the organization itself appears deceptively small.

Conversely, here is Gabriela from the lens of an organizational network.

It brings her everyday work relationships to life.

Here, we can see her relationships (lines) with managers (stars) and non-managers (dots), regardless of whether they are part of her org chart.

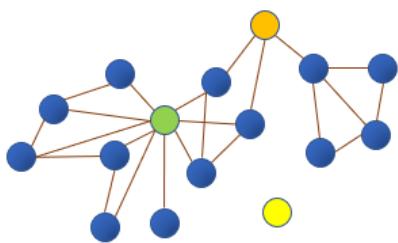
The size of her node indicates how well she is connected within this company of roughly 300 people.



Notice that the size of her node is bigger than that of many of her managers. You wouldn't know it from the org chart, but Gabriela is better connected than many leaders. This network also reveals that Gabriela connects the Development Department (red area in the top left) with the rest of the organization. This highlights Gabriela's role as a key connector in this company. Her coworkers have identified her as a key go-to person for their HR questions, and it's clear that her support is instrumental for many managers in this company.

Organizational networks give objective value to those unseen extra miles we invest into our working relationships.

Now that we've visualized the value, here is a basic example with the typical key terms and definitions to keep in mind when executing and discussing the results of your organizational network analysis (ONA):



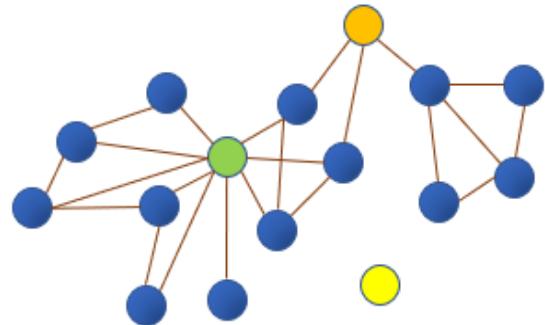
Organizational networks primarily consist of two elements: **nodes** (people) and **connections** (relationships). In the example on the left, we have a small department of 15 people. Each line connects people who are working with each other on a regular basis. You can easily see how individuals with few connections tend to reside in the periphery of the network, while highly connected people are positioned in the center.

In our example, the green node is '**high central**'. Connectors like this are often brokers of information and highly influential. Imagine a technical expert that bottlenecks internal processes because she is overloaded, or conversely an effective project manager who coordinates the work of many people.



Notice also the orange node near the top of the network. This individual is a **network spanner** - the main connection between the small team of four on the right, and the rest of the department.

Communication likely flows through this individual, so this individual is key to ensuring that each side knows what the other is doing. There are situations in which this is a good idea; for example, if you want to protect a valued resource from unreasonable requests. Still, siloing individuals like this should be deliberate and purposeful; some talent leaders might see this node and put tools in place to ensure the team of four are receiving information from the other departments regardless of the effectiveness of this node's communication.



Thinking back to Gabriela, the organizational network analysis quickly uncovered her role as a silo breaker. Her actual value and sphere of influence are outsized for her current position on the org chart. [The identification of 'hidden gems' like Gabriela happens quite often when ONAs are deployed.](#)

Organizational Network Analyses (ONAs) reveal the untold stories of your organization..

Example #1: Unlikely cross-functional partnerships that should be replicated

At Rhabit, we recently reviewed the Organizational Network of one of our clients. We noticed that one of their software developers was connected to a small group of people in their Sales department. What initially seemed to be an anomaly was in fact the visual representation of a highly effective relationship that had developed between this developer and sales team. Salespeople regularly asked this developer to help with RFP responses, answer difficult client questions, or simply educate Sales on new trends.

The developer was a silo breaker in that he was able to explain complex issues on laypersons' terms and was a 'secret weapon' for these few salespeople. Completely self-driven and without mandate from supervisors, this employee took on a vital function in this company that may not have been seen otherwise.

Our client acted on this discovery by replicating his role and finding other motivated and qualified developers to help Sales with their questions.

Example #2: Unsung change agents that push your people through the unknown

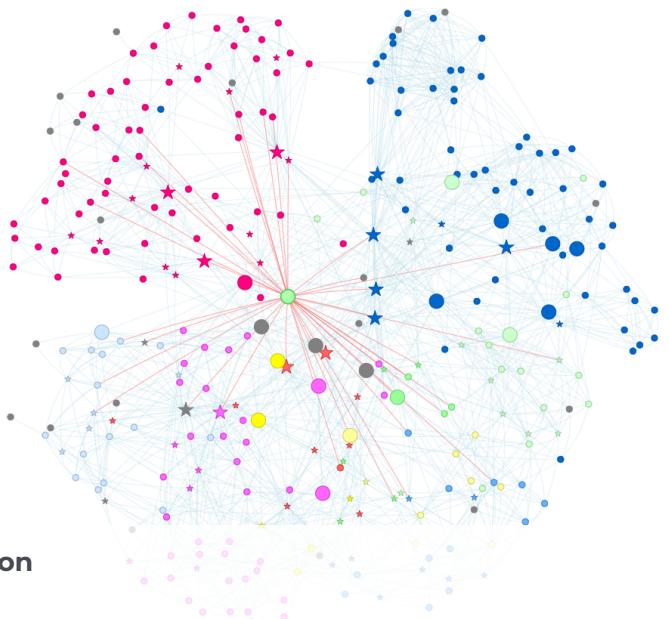
Change is never easy, and motivating an entire organization to change direction can be daunting. We have observed that most of our clients tackle change by cascading change top-down, ensuring that layer by layer of the company is bought in and starts accepting the new initiative or procedure. [Organizational networks open an entirely new approach.](#)



To explore this, let's revisit our earlier example.

Just like Gabriela, the large dots represent non-managers that are highly connected. For a change initiative to succeed, *these are the change agents that a company needs to target first.*

These are the very individuals who can make or break change. With this information, companies can talk to these change agents early on, address their concerns, and secure their support, before the new initiative is formally rolled out.



Example #3: The ties that bind your global organization

Remote work has become very common today, and the larger organizations grow, the more necessary it is for them to span multiple geographical regions. Despite all the tools available today, being physically apart makes collaboration harder. Video conferencing, screen sharing, and chat messaging are all tools that require discipline, especially by co-located workers who must make sure that remote colleagues are not left out of the loop.

Organizational Networks allow organizations to quickly identify whether the right people and departments are connected. Is your Marketing department headquartered in the East adequately connected to your remote Marketing specialists in the West? Is your office in Spain an island of its own? In these situations, a company's leadership can easily course correct by adjusting reporting structures and potentially mixing up a purely regional company architecture.

Stay vigilant. Highly connected networks don't always represent effective, healthy relationships.

In a recent example from a Rhabit client, an ONA revealed that their customer service professionals had established direct working relationships with software developers. What started as a well-intentioned shortcut to address urgent customer needs developed into a dysfunctional network in which customer requests circumvented vetting and prioritizing activity, putting undue strain on the developers. Our clients responded by better supporting the customer service team with more consistent release updates, the scheduled maintenance windows for the remainder of the year, and increased communication on product changes in general.

Organizational Networks are invaluable tools in a talent leader's toolkit, yet frequently underutilized. If your talent management software features an ONA functionality, we encourage you to connect with your account manager to learn more.

If you'd like to see Rhabit's Organizational Network in action, contact us at hello@rhabit.co with 'Organizational Network Analysis' in the subject line – we'd love to meet you.

