

# INTRODUCTION

## THE NETWORK COMES OF AGE

The network is coming of age as a mature, useful, and pervasive form of organization. Networks have been around for a long time, but now they are moving from the informal to the formal, from dealing with peripheral concerns to doing “real work”—getting things done and coping with complexity.

Life has become too complicated for hierarchy and bureaucracy. With change as the underlying driver, organizations need more speed and flexibility, greater scope and sharper intelligence, more creativity and shared responsibility. Teams offer part of the answer—our collective rediscovery of ancient human knowledge about the power of small groups. Networks—of teams and other groups joined together, which we call “teamnets”—offer another, newer part of the answer. The rest of the answer to our organizational challenge lies in the accumulated wisdom of hierarchy and bureaucracy, their timeless elements.

Huh? The wisdom of hierarchy? The timelessness of bureaucracy?

We feel a little like Nixon going to China for this message:

*Don't throw out your hierarchy. Save some  
bureaucracy.*

We have been known as the “networking people” since we wrote *Networking: The First Report and Directory*, our first book, published in 1982, the year we founded The Networking Institute. Networks have been our mission, our passion, and our bread and butter.

This book puts networks in the context of earlier forms of organization, offering a way to use the new powers of networks together with the best mix of hierarchy, bureaucracy, and small groups.

When we finished the manuscript for *The TeamNet Factor* at the end of 1992, we felt strangely unfinished. That book made the case for networks with numerous examples, general principles, practical tools, and exciting possibilities. We still needed to place networks, the emergent form of organization, in a broader and deeper context.

*The Age of the Network* is the “prequel” to *The TeamNet Factor*.

Read *The Age of the Network* first. It is shorter, has a broader focus, and is more personal, exploring the underpinnings of networks, the links among people, their relationships, and consuming issue of trust. Here, using new examples, we offer an executive summary of the core principles and practices that are expansively detailed in *The TeamNet Factor*.

The two books are complementary. Each stands alone, with unique elements and focus, yet they share a conceptual coherence, spectrum of examples, and writing style. We offer some pointers to the companion text as well as to other chapters in this one, our restrained effort to emulate electronic random access hypertext in a serial printed book.

The Industrial Age medium of our Information Age message captures again the tricky transitional reality of this millennium-approaching time that we inhabit. The forces of old and new seem equally demanding, and the zigzags of life, both personally and globally, seem more extreme and more frequent with each passing year.

This book will help you cope with change, forge your own destiny, and join with others to accomplish together what you cannot do alone.

*The Age of the Network* has five sections:

- I. “Looking From Above,” the introductory overview (chapter 1);
- II. “The Big Idea”: how all the forms of organization fit together and why this moment is so timely for networking (chapters 2 and 3);
- III. “Principles and Practice”: tools for networks and how to use them (chapters 4, 5, and 6);
- IV. “Expanding Links”: looking in more depth at the network’s most distinguishing features (chapters 7 and 8); and
- V. “Looking Ahead” with trends for the future (chapter 9).

We all have personal learning preferences, that is, what we need to feel comfortable with new ideas and information. In both books, we bring out concepts with a rich variety of examples and offer methodology along with vision. This gives you an opportunity to see networks through multiple lenses, since no one view is complete.

? Short for time or want to get the whole context before a sequential reading? Skim the book by paging through and reading the heads and indented text to get the basic ideas. Check out the graphics and bulleted lists if you have a few more minutes.

? Some people tell us that they start with the first and last chapters of books, hence our overview in “Looking From Above” and conclusions in “Looking Ahead.”

? Just want the big ideas? Read the first three chapters.

? Is practical application your first test? Go for the three chapters in Section III.

? Looking for what’s really new here, the human dimension, and trends? Read the three chapters in Sections IV and V.

Enhance your understanding by comparing examples from your own life with our principles and observations. Think about your most

successful team experience; then use your imagination to visualize what's possible.

Most important, remember that the Age of the Network belongs to all of us. The future of our organizations—our organic ways of being and doing together—rests in our collective hands.