

DIFFUSION NETWORKS AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

For this project, I chose to examine the communication network at my place of employment, Sullivan Middle School. I chose twelve peers to interview, selecting two teachers each from 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, two Special Services teachers, two elective teachers (grades 6-8), the school guidance counselor, and the school principal. Furthermore, I tried to get a mix of teachers who are new to our district as well as some of the veterans. The results from the survey are outlined in the chart below.

Figure 1 – Response Chart

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
A	*****	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
B	Y	*****	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
C	Y	Y	*****	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
D	Y	Y	Y	*****	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
E	Y	N	N	Y	*****	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
F	Y	Y	N	Y	N	*****	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
G	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	*****	Y	N	N	Y	N
H	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	*****	Y	Y	Y	Y
I	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	*****	Y	N	N
J	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	*****	Y	N
K	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	*****	N
L	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	*****

Legend

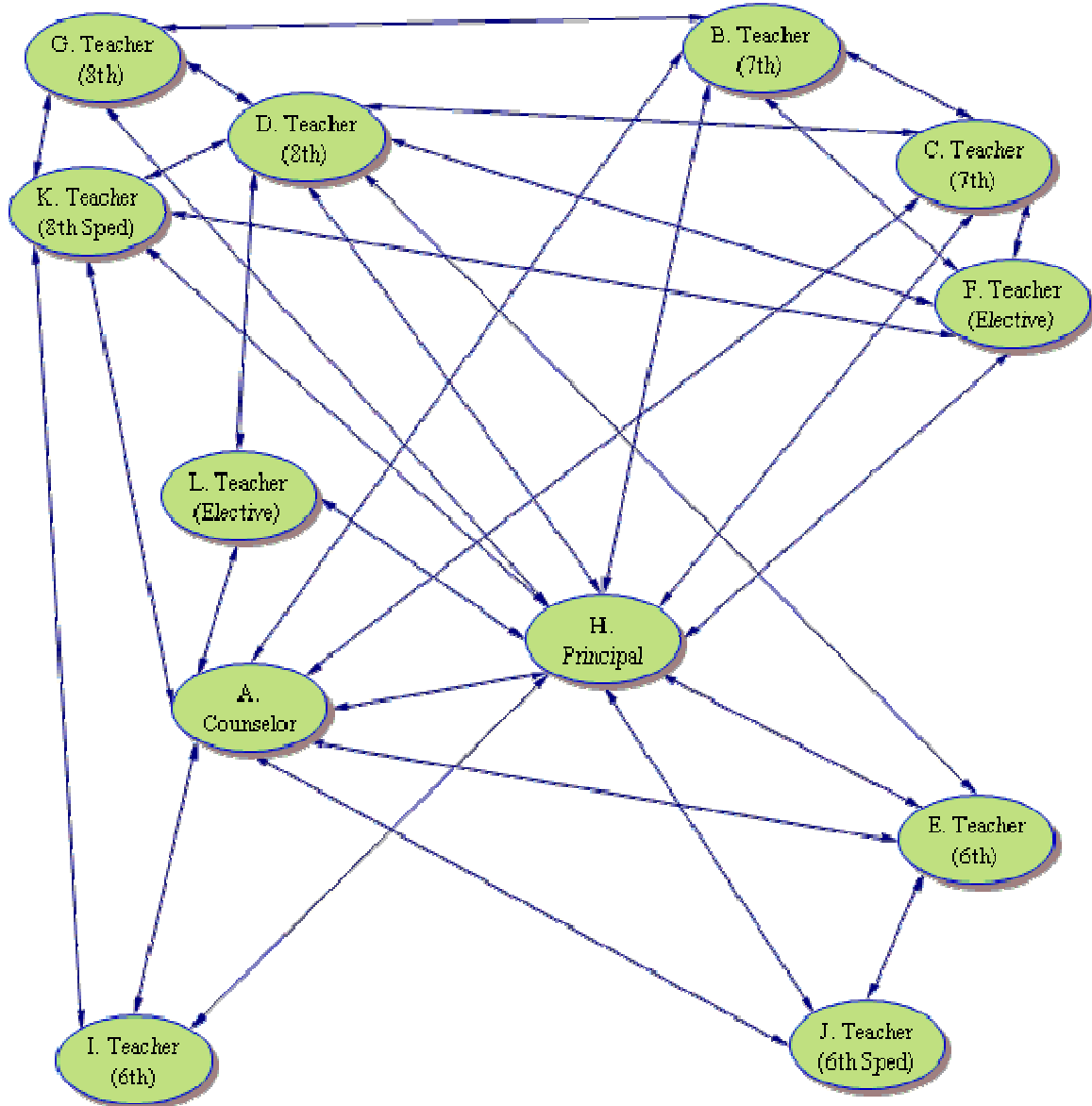
Y 2-Way Yes

Y 1-Way Yes

N No

To organize this data, I created the following diagrams. I placed the icons representing the survey participants in the approximate classroom/office location of those individuals in our middle school building. The 7th and 8th grade are located in two separate halls in the back of the building, the 6th grade is located in two halls in the front of the building, and the other survey participants are more centrally located. It is also important to note that there is no centrally located teacher's lounge, but rather two small lounges. One is near the 7th grade hall and the other is at the front of the building in one of the 6th grade halls.

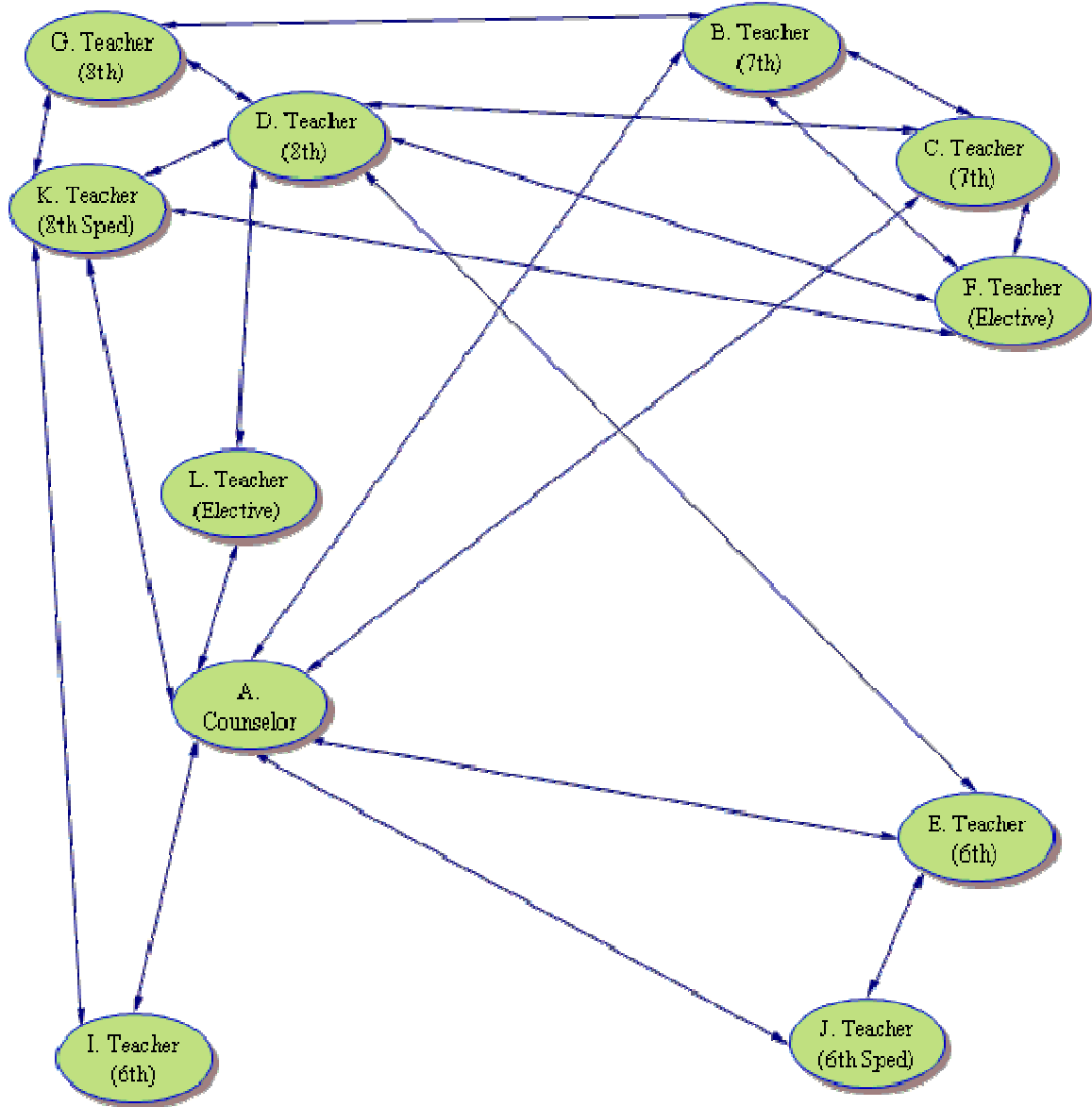
Figure 2 – Communication Network Map – All Survey Participants



While the above graphic is a bit jumbled due to the number of people included in the survey, some patterns are fairly obvious. First of all, the physical location in the building definitely plays a role in who people communicate with on a regular basis. Secondly, it is apparent that the

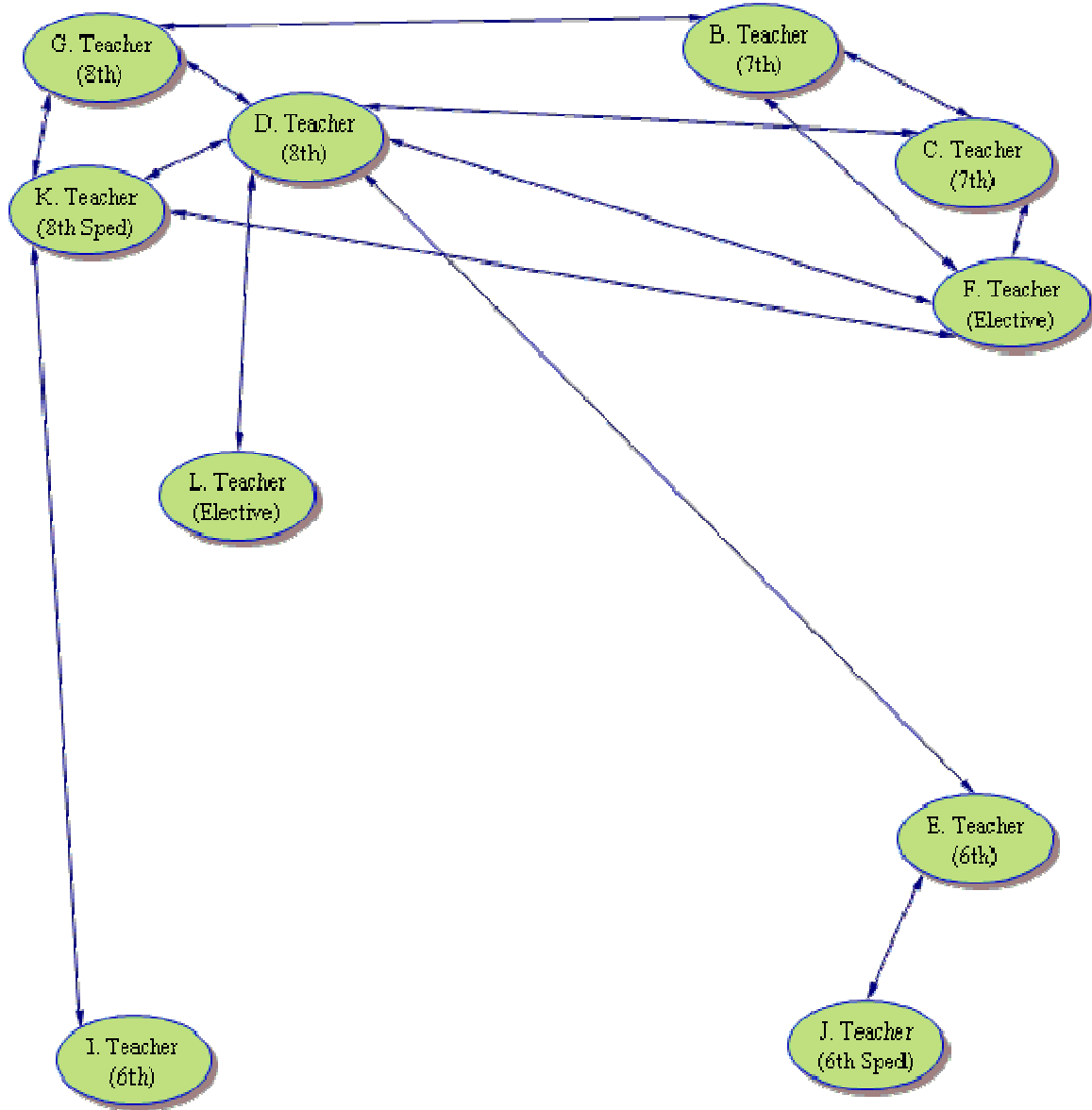
building principal is the primary focal individual in the communication network as she has connections to all of the other survey participants. To better illustrate the importance of the principal in the communication network, the following diagram contains the same information as above, but with the principal removed from the network.

Figure 3 – Communication Network Map minus the Principal



By removing the principal from the diagram above, our secondary focal individual becomes evident: the school guidance counselor. Based on this information, I have to deduce that the building principal and the guidance counselor are the opinion leaders for the middle school, as was to be expected. These are also the main individuals who connect the sub-groups, as is apparent in the following diagram, which also removes the guidance counselor from the communication network.

Figure 4 – Communication Network Map minus the Principal and Counselor



With both of the opinion leaders removed from the network, the sub-groups are very easy to identify as very few connections exist between them. Those teachers located near the 7th grade hall form one sub-group and those located near the 8th grade hall form another. There are also a few connections between the 7th and 8th grade sub-groups. The teachers located near the front of the building are mostly isolated in the organization, and are generally isolated from each other as well. The above diagram also reveals the major opinion leader and connecting individual among the teachers, which is Teacher E in the 8th grade.

For the most part, the data that I found corresponds to my own informal observations of the organization. As I suspected, Teachers I and J, who are new to our school this year, are among the most isolated. I also expected that Teacher E would be a strong presence in that she is a veteran teacher of nearly 30 years, all of which have been in the Sullivan School District. She is also a very vocal individual who is active in many committees and organizations.

There were, however, a few surprises. First of all, I was surprised to find myself (Teacher L) as isolated in the organization as I am. However, it is obvious from the survey that Teachers B and C forgot that I attend the 7th grade team meetings with them every week. This is understandable so early in the school year and it is my first year attending the 7th grade team meeting. Perhaps I also need to make more of an effort to open those lines of communication. I was also surprised to see how integrated Teacher C has become even though this is his first year in a K-12 school, having come from industry and higher education.

To answer our final question, it is hard to say how easy it will be for a change agent to use the communication channels in the organization. Obviously, any change agent would have to work through the principal, counselor, and Teacher E. However, the organization displays some characteristics of both a radial personal network and an interlocking personal network. According to the radial model, the building principal is the focal individual. However, there are quite a few connections that do not go through the principal, leading me to believe that we may have more in common with the interlocking model. According to the text, the radial model diffuses innovation more easily because it is not as ingrown in nature and allows for the “Strength-of-Weak-Ties” theory to be evidenced. Still, having worked for my principal for the past six years, I know that she is very open to innovation and is very effective at persuading her teachers to adopt those changes which she deems to be of value. Therefore, I have to conclude that a change agent can be successful as long as the principal and other opinion leaders are willing to come on board.