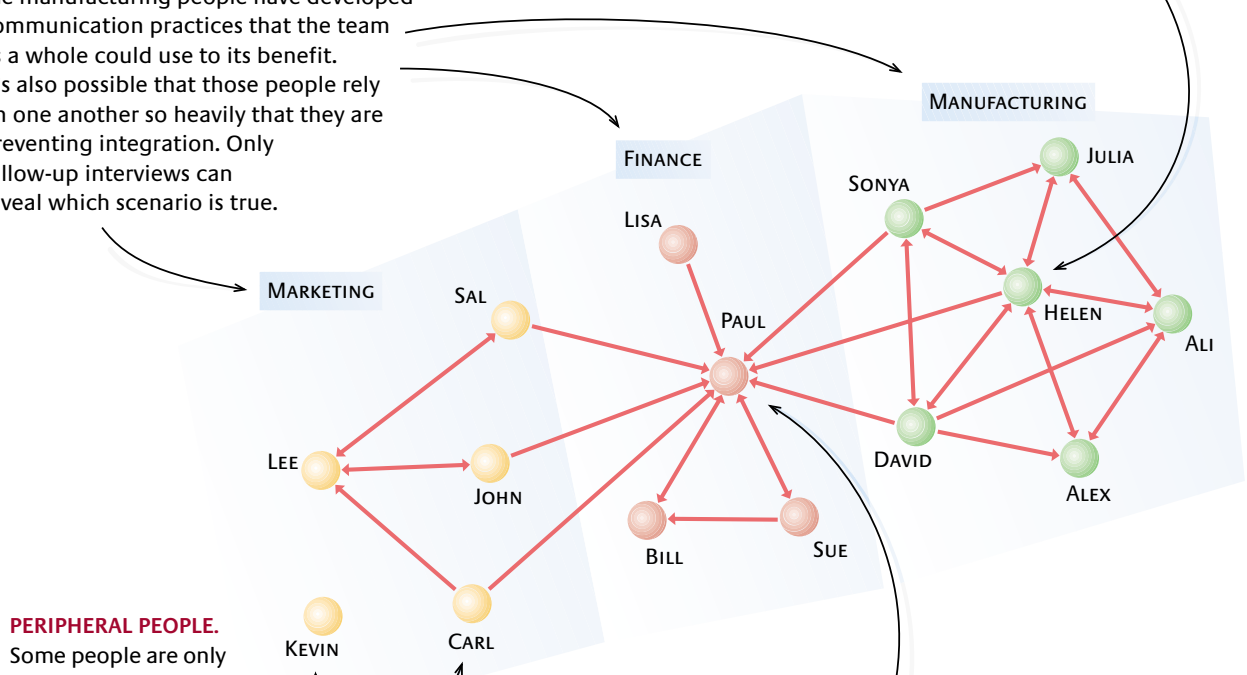


## How To Read a Network Diagram

Information collected from social network surveys can be used to create network diagrams that illustrate the relationships between members of a group. This example shows the flow of information within a globally dispersed product-development team.

**SUBGROUPS.** Groups within a group often arise along the lines of location, function, hierarchy, tenure, age or gender. In this case, the team is split by function; very little information is being shared among the three groups. Moreover, connections in marketing and finance are sparse, while the manufacturing subgroup is tightly knit. That can be a good thing or a bad thing. Perhaps the manufacturing people have developed communication practices that the team as a whole could use to its benefit. It's also possible that those people rely on one another so heavily that they are preventing integration. Only follow-up interviews can reveal which scenario is true.

**LINES AND ARROWS.** Each line indicates an information link between two people; arrows represent the direction of the relationship (incoming arrows show that the person is a source of information; outgoing arrows show that the team member seeks information from the linked party). Thus Helen has two-way relationships with each member of the manufacturing group but limited or no contact with marketing and finance.



**PERIPHERAL PEOPLE.** Some people are only loosely connected to a network; a few may be completely isolated — members in theory but not in practice. In this network, no one goes to Carl for information, and Kevin is out of the loop entirely. As is true with central people, the diagram alone doesn't say anything about the value of peripheral people. Such outsiders often turn out to be underutilized resources, and integrating them can be critical to a network's effectiveness and efficiency. Of course, sometimes people are isolated for good reason: They lack the skills, social and otherwise, for the job. By identifying peripheral people, network analysis enables appropriate developmental action to be taken.

**CENTRAL PEOPLE.** Network diagrams make clear who the most prominent people within a group are. On this team, nine people rely on Paul for information. His colleagues in finance come to him, but so do people in marketing and manufacturing. Paul himself does not reach out to people outside of finance. The diagram alone can't tell us if Paul's impact is positive or negative. If the group is overly dependent on him, he may be a bottleneck, slowing the flow of information and holding up decisions. On the other hand, people like Paul often play a very positive role in a network — providing not only valuable information but also cohesion — and would render the group much less effective if they left the company.