



ENABLE EXERCISE #36

Exploring the Layers of Your Network

Our brain size evolved to accommodate social groups that contain roughly 150 people (Dunbar, 2014). A small number of our social-network members, around five, consume much of our time. One reason why we keep only five people close is because that is how many other people's mental states we can understand at once (Lewis et al., 2011).

We also have limited time and cannot distribute it evenly between the remaining 145 network members. Instead, we organize our social groups into layers of varying sizes — 15, 50, 80 — based on genetic relatedness, potential for intimacy, and other forms of relational closeness.

Instructions: Open your cell phones or email accounts and count the number of people with whom you have communicated over the past 3 days (e.g., text messages, phone calls, emails).

Next separate them into three categories:

- Sympathy Clique:** people you turn to in times of emotional distress
- Support Group:** people you often see and who can help you achieve your goals (e.g., giving you a loan, helping you with a class project)
- Outer Layer:** people with whom you have only weak relations (e.g., a cousin you have not seen in 2 years)

According to Dunbar (2014), the sympathy clique and support group should have about 5 and 15 members, respectively.

What does this exercise say about your own social network?