**About Managerial Roles**

What do you think of when you hear the word liaison? Maybe it conjures images of a savvy political genius wielding behind the scenes influence. Or maybe it sparks shadowy visions of 'film noir' spies waiting at a foggy drop point. If you've had formal supervisory or even informal group leadership experience, you probably already know what being a **liaison** is about in the real world: it is simply connecting people to what they need.

Organizational researcher Henry Mintzberg identified nine other management roles in addition to liaison. These were then sorted into three categories: decisional, informational, and interpersonal managerial roles. Mintzberg originally focused on CEOs, but additional studies of managers at many levels of responsibility have confirmed that these roles apply generally, even if a manager may only enact a particular role for less than ten minutes a day!

In Mintzberg's model, four **decisional roles** address planning and implementation, and three **informational roles** focus on how managers receive and communicate facts and data in order to competently perform their work. **Liaison** is one of the three roles in the **interpersonal managerial category**, which is concerned with interactions between the manager and other people. The interpersonal roles cover a manager's connections within organizational and social hierarchies, whether the relationships are up, down, or across relative statuses.

**What is the Liaison Managerial Role?**

Managers act as liaisons when making contacts with people outside of their area of responsibility, both inside their organization and outside in the world at large. Being a liaison involves networking, but it is far more than just amassing the most friends on your profile. It is about linking people with resources. What do resources mean in the context of the liaison role? **Resources** could be other people, money, information, space, influence, or goods and equipment.

The liaison role should not be confused with the resource allocator role of the decisional managerial category. Where **resource allocation** is deciding where and how to distribute resources within the manager's area of responsibility, the liaison role is not in play within the manager's own domain and does not involve direct provision of resources. Rather, the liaison introduces contacts to possibilities and smooths the way toward connecting them with resources, but it is left to the contact to follow through with implementation.

**The Liaison in Action**

Let's look at the liaison role in the upper-middle levels of management. This illustration describes the liaison role for Mary. She's now the office manager for the casual games department at XYZ Media, but she started as the administrative assistant. Let's see how Mary's knowledge of the liaison role helped her. We'll start in the upper left of the image (also see video).

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**1. First, you can use positional influence or internal relationships within your organization to the potential benefit of external contacts.**

In our example, Mary volunteers to take meeting minutes for the board of the local symphony. One evening, board chair Jeff mentions his son's frustration with the poor internship opportunities available through his college. Dan would love the chance to get a foot in the door at a company like XYZ, but those companies aren't seeing the value of interns. Mary hadn't thought about bringing in college students, but she can think of at least ten different ways an intern could learn and contribute in her department. A few days later, she discusses her workload with the director of the casual games group, Evan, and pitches the idea of creating an internship. Evan loves the idea and digs out the company policy for internships. It turns out that it's easy to set one up!

**2. Next, grateful contacts are willing to provide favors by connecting you with their resources or sharing information you can't directly access on your own.**

Jeff appreciates the new opportunity, even though he knows Mary can't guarantee Dan will be selected. They begin to talk more often and learn more about each other's interests, skills, and extended networks. Now that he knows her better, Jeff realizes that Mary has a more extensive skill set than he at first thought, so he's comfortable recommending her to a more prominent position on the symphony board.

**3. The third step is to leverage these favors, introduce your contacts to your colleagues to make new connections, or turn outside information into intelligence by interpreting and sharing it for the benefit of your organization.**

Mary invites Evan and his wife to the symphony opening as her guests. While there, they run into Jeff and Dan. Jeff praises Mary's work on the board, while Mary is interested to meet Dan in person and learn more about his goals and specific interest in the XYZ organization. Dan dazzles Evan, who invites him to formally interview for the new internship position; he's also impressed by Jeff's assessment of Mary - perhaps he's been overlooking her potential!

**4. At this point, appreciative colleagues and organizational stakeholders accord you more status and credibility based on your position within the company.**

Evan is grateful to Mary for suggesting the internship and introducing him to Dan, who is by far the most engaged and knowledgeable candidate. He's more likely to take her suggestions seriously now that she has a proven record of success.