WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method comprising:

examining records that describe transactions between entities;

constructing, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is separated from said first entity by N tiers, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 1; and

calculating a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of a characteristic of said second entity.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

3. The method of claim 1,

wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said calculating said relevance is also a function of a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates a criticality for said second entity selected from the group consisting of industry classification, transaction value, and product details.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

8. A system comprising:

a processor; and

a memory that contains instructions that are readable by said processor to cause said processor to:

examine records that describe transactions between entities;

construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is separated from said first entity by N tiers, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 1; and

calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of a characteristic of said second entity.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

10. The system of claim 8,

wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said calculating said risk associated with said first entity is also a function of risks associated with said one or more intermediary entities.

11. The system of claim 8, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

12. The system of claim 8, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:
weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

13. The system of claim 8, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

14. The system of claim 8, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

15. A tangible storage medium, comprising:
instructions that are readable by a processor to cause said processor to:
examine records that describe transactions between entities;
construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is separated from said first entity by N tiers, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 1; and
calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of a characteristic of said second entity.

16. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

17. The tangible storage medium of claim 15,
wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said calculating said relevance is also a function of a relevance associated with said one or more intermediary entities.

18. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

19. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

20. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

21. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method comprising:

examining records that describe transactions between entities;

constructing, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is N tiers from said first entity, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2, wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities; and

calculating a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

3. (canceled)

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates a criticality for said second entity selected from the group consisting of industry classification, transaction value, and product details.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

8. A system comprising:

a processor; and

a memory that contains instructions that are readable by said processor to cause said processor to:

examine records that describe transactions between entities;

construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is N tiers from said first entity, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2, *wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to* said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities; and

calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

10. (canceled)

11. The system of claim 8, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

12. The system of claim 8, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

13. The system of claim 8, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

14. The system of claim 8, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

15. A tangible storage medium, comprising:

instructions that are readable by a processor to cause said processor to:

examine records that describe transactions between entities;

construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions, wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is separated from said first entity by N tiers, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2, wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities; and

calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

16. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

17. (canceled)

18. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

19. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

20. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

21. The tangible storage medium of claim 15, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method comprising:

(I) executing a discovery process to perform operations of:

(a) examining records that describe transactions between entities; and

(b) constructing, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions,

wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is N tiers from said first entity, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2,

wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said discovery process includes a recursive mapping operation that:

(i) utilizes, in a processing loop within said discovery process, a stack that stores entities of interest, and

(ii) repeatedly considers said records to find an entity in a tier, and thereafter find a related entity in a next tier, and continuing until reaching tier N; and

(II) calculating a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

weighting said characteristic with a value that indicates a criticality for said second entity selected from the group consisting of industry classification, transaction value, and product details.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

7. A system comprising:

a processor; and

a memory that contains instructions that are readable by said processor to cause said processor to:

(I) execute a discovery process to:

(a) examine records that describe transactions between entities; and

(b) construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions,

wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is N tiers from said first entity, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2,

wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said discovery process includes a recursive mapping operation that:

(i) utilizes, in a processing loop within said discovery process, a stack that stores entities of interest, and

(ii) repeatedly considers said records to find an entity in a tier, and thereafter find a related entity in a next tier, and continuing until reaching tier N; and

(II) calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

9. The system of claim 7, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:
weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

10. The system of claim 7, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:
weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

11. The system of claim 7, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

12. The system of claim 7, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.

13. A tangible storage medium, comprising:
instructions that are readable by a processor to cause said processor to:
(I) execute a discovery process to:
(a) examine records that describe transactions between entities; and
(b) construct, in a database, a data structure that represents a relationship network, based on said transactions,
wherein said relationship network represents (i) a first entity and (ii) a second entity that is N tiers from said first entity, where N is a whole number greater than or equal to 2,

wherein said data structure provides a path, from said second entity to said first entity, via one or more intermediary entities, and

wherein said discovery process includes a recursive mapping operation that:

(i) utilizes, in a processing loop within said discovery process, a stack that stores entities of interest, and

(ii) repeatedly considers said records to find an entity in a tier, and thereafter find a related entity in a next tier, and continuing until reaching tier N; and

(II) calculate a relevance of said second entity to said first entity as a function of (a) a characteristic of said second entity, and (b) a relevance of said one or more intermediary entities to said first entity.

14. The tangible storage medium of claim 13, wherein said relevance is indicative of a feature selected from the group consisting of (a) a risk to said first entity, and (b) an opportunity for said first entity.

15. The tangible storage medium of claim 13, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates that said second entity is N tiers from said first entity in said data structure.

16. The tangible storage medium of claim 13, wherein said instructions also cause said processor to:

weight said characteristic with a value that indicates criticality for said second entity.

17. The tangible storage medium of claim 13, wherein said relationship network comprises a supply chain from said second entity to said first entity.

18. The tangible storage medium of claim 13, wherein said relationship network comprises a customer chain from said second entity to said first entity.