



3.3.1 Perspectives on networking

It can be useful to think of networking as local, inter-institutional and international as well as varying in focus, e.g. teaching/ supervision, institutional navigation or research collaboration. No matter what kind of network you develop, it is important to think about the nature of the relationships you build as well as the usefulness of any connections. Here Jennifer describes her approach, which we think is a good one:

The other thing ...I've realised is you don't actually have to have lots of people in your network, just good people ...you [don't] need to have these big networks to get done what you need to do ...you need ...good strong people ... in your network who you trust ...so I'm nurturing those kinds of relationships right now, not just because I want to use them as academics, [but] because they're people I like ...we share some ideas and I'd like to work with them.

Epsilon adds an additional perspective, highlighting the long-term investment and the potential for reciprocity:

You go to conferences, you present there, certain people take notice, and you start discussions that way. So you end up with meeting people who have similar interests in that sense....And once you meet those people and build up that network, you have the ability to call on them to answer certain questions if there is something in their work you don't understand, or if you—if they have some data that you would like some access to do some comparisons—your approach versus their approach—they are open to that because they know you and they like to get cited so it works both ways.

Beyond meeting face-to-face

While networking is often associated with face-to-face meetings at seminars and conferences there are other approaches that may be more time and cost effective. For example, if you have limited opportunities to travel or attend conferences social media allow you to create and maintain networks.

Involvement in academic publishing is another way to network at a distance. Reviewing or editorial service in your discipline allows you to keep up to date with developments and communicate with a range of researchers. Below Hannah describes how she developed her network through involvement in publishing:

And when you're trying to get it into more international journals, then obviously it takes time, doesn't it? ...I'm on an editorial board for the [national organization's]



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journal, so I've been involved with them ...it's a different level altogether [from international], but it's all...good ...getting yourself...the networks, isn't it.

The impact of moving

Moving disrupts your established institutional networks, but others in your network can help you to become established in your new location. For example, Regina wanted to move after her degree, so 'the year before I finished [my degree] I started networking at [a university in the new city] looking for opportunities.' After moving, she prioritised building new connections: 'I believe I will find that network [I want] here ...I will look for it and I'm sure I can find it, it just takes a lot more work [having moved].'

Flora also described the stress that came with moving to a new institution, building new networks and becoming comfortable working with new people:

[I] think the stress maybe comes from...I just started ...a month ago ...and it is the stress you get when you change the place you work, you just have to connect with new people, you have to know them and interact with them and kind of get the feeling who will help you, who is nice, who is a jerk ...it's more that kind of stress than the kind of stress of discovering something new and also like the [way functions] science is slightly different so I need to adapt.

An international move that changes language and/or culture presents new challenges to networking as well. CM experienced this in moving to a country where she worked in English as another language: It is 'different between [my home country] and here in terms of my ability to network, and also the cultural difference. But fine, I mean...this is part of being immigrant.'

Structures to create networks

Your networks will grow faster if you seek out or create structures that increase opportunities for networking. Below, Regina and CM describe two structures that support networking across fields. Make sure that you are aware of similar opportunities to suit your situation.

Regina joined an inter-institutional group with an interest in statistical analysis:

And we have started just this year a 'stats chat' ...to support people and that is growing and I hope that it becomes really established and sustainable. And that is a source of support for me ...a good networking opportunity – and it is open to all the universities as well as the health centres, so anyone who wants to come can come but it is organized by my team ...So I hope that grows.

CM took part in an institutional program to provide initial networking introductions; thereafter, people decided whether to continue the connections:



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It was two days ...people who were interested in [similar] issues ...we had some workshops about what our interests are, and what issues we would like to further investigate, or maybe do something jointly together. So it was interesting, first, to know other people who are looking at [the same thing] in other Departments ...The aim was to network and then ...if you would like to apply for something ...if there is a call, we can contact each other and put something together ...there is nothing like getting to know people personally and for them to know you in order to facilitate many other activities in the future ...[but] I learned that ...one-off events need follow-up, that if there is something that you're keen to do, you need to...to put lots of energy to maintain it and keep it and develop it.

Understanding 'the game'

Understanding how things work, whether in your institution and department, the scholarly organizations you belong to or in research collaboration, there are unwritten but often important rules that you will only learn through networking and, as Jennifer, notes, you will be providing your network reciprocal support:

I suppose part of [understanding what is going on] is making sure that you've got people to talk to, so making sure that ...you're creating networks, you're friends with people, you give something, you exchange something ...being a full partner in a network ...so you have that feed of ideas and information and activities.

Useful resources

Tips for networking at conference: <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog/2013/sep/26/academic-conference-five-tips-research>

Using social media to network: <http://blog.impactstory.org/linkedin-networking/> -

Online, social networking:

<https://www.researchers-like-me.com/>



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