

A Critical Reflection on Reader 3, The Networked Professional

In this reader we look at the Networked Professional. It touches upon five main themes and concepts of a professional network. Before going any further I had to stop and define what a professional network is? It is 'a work related community held together by either close working affiliation or more distinct but common work interests or needs' (Reader 3). This reader highlights and shows us how important it is to have a professional network and it changed my viewpoints on how it can impact on our success, development, sense of value and enjoyment of our careers. Having a successful professional network can give us a platform which provides several benefits. The concepts we look at in the reader are Cooperation, Affiliation, Social Constructionism, Connectivism and Communities of Practice all five of which combine in creating "The Networked Professional".

Cooperation is a concept we come across in everyday life but after reading reader 3 and Axelrod's Game Theory my perspective of cooperation has changed and I have now been able to fully understand its importance and role it plays within our networks. At the end of the day cooperation boils down to how much are you willing to give? More over how much time and energy are you prepared to place into your network? How much will you cooperate with in your current networks and the people affiliated with them? Robert Axelrod (1984) links cooperation to the Game Theory. He asks 'When should a person cooperate and when should a person be selfish in an on going interaction with another person.' A great example of the Game theory is when Axelrod applies it to a particular game called the Prisoners Dilemma. When applying these theories he looks at whether one player should succeed at another expense and identifies the importance and the notion of cooperation. He explores the benefit of cooperating fully with others until you reach a certain point of maximum benefit and then defeat. He then looks at other angles when they don't cooperate at all and when one player exploits the other. Interestingly when he carried out experiments seeing what theory would work best, Tit for Tat came out on top every time. Tit for Tat meaning 'The strategy of starting with cooperation, and thereafter doing what the other player did on the previous move.' (Axelrod 1984).

I'm sure we have all had those situations when people only talk to you if they want something, or at college when you would lend your sheet music to people, only some more would return the favour. At the end of the day there is only so many times a friend will do your a favour before you reciprocate. I found it interesting to see the results of Axelrod's experiment and it has reinforced to me that cooperation is very valuable with in our networks and to enable us to have a successful network we must use it! The key to cooperation is give and take.

Another Key concept of "The Networked Professional" is **Affiliation**. Affiliation a concept in the field of social psychology that seeks to explain how humans enjoy and benefit from affiliations with others and the reasons why humans 'form close relationships' (Crisp and Turner, 2007 pp266) as a social result of psychological processes operating in our brains. Simply Affiliation is a social process in which we form relationships and gives us 'a network of support that will help us when we are in need' (Crisp and Turner 2007 pp266). Homeostasis (O'Conner &

Rosenblood, 1996) is one of the main theories of Affiliation, it shows us that everyone differs and we seek a balance of interaction, gaining a preferred level of affiliation with different individuals. (O'Conner & Rosenblood, 1996) Touches upon the fact that it may link in with preferred levels of stimulation and whether we are an introvert or an extravert. This also links in with us as an individual seeking different levels of privacy with certain people. It has also been suggested by Hofstede (1980) that it may vary between cultures.

I can relate to O'Conner & Rosenblood in the sense of having different boundaries within different relationships. For example there are things you can't say and do in front of your boss that you can share with your partner. Its just not appropriate and we have to know when to draw the line.

The reader looks at us expanding our affiliation with in our networks not only upwards but sideways too. As although when you think of networking within your profession you immediately think of 'climbing the ladder' but the reader has altered my viewpoint and shown me its important to remember where you came from, you never know when the people around you are going to be able to help you, and give you the step up the ladder you need.

Crisp and Turner (2007) show us that 'according to evolutionary psychologists, our tendency to seek out others and from close relationships is an inherited trait that helps us to survive and reproduce.' Which in my opinion is the essence of affiliation. Its all about the relationships we form with others and how they support us, whether it be with in a professional network or in our personal life.

Social Constructionism is another theory touched upon in reader 3. I found this concept one of the hardest to get to grips with, it offers an explanation of how the meanings about the world are made. 'One of the key principles is that through social interaction humans 'construct' meanings of the world and their experiences of it.' (Reader 3) This quote took me back to the reflection part of this module that we have been looking at previously. It explores the idea that by looking back and reflecting on our experiences we are able to learn and understand from them, enabling us to create a meaning from them.

It shows us the larger social processes we go through and can help us understand networking, whether personal or professional. Future networks as well as existing ones are made through us, the meanings and outcomes are not predetermined it all depends on how we engage with them. Through interacting with others we create meanings and understanding that can add value to our particular networks. It highlights our preferred way to engage the network and shows what extent we are willing to contribute to it.

The theory of **Connectivism** brought me back to the beginning of our module and Web 2.0. It looks at how we organise the information we learn, mainly influenced by the web. It is linked in with the 'Network Theory' and explains how nodes in a network interact. Connectivism is suggesting that traditional means of learning need to be modified. This section of the reader has

altered the way I view learning, it shows us that we do not just learn from a teacher, pupil relationship we can take others experiences and gain knowledge from them. Moreover Professional Networks can enable us to do this. We can look at other blogs and forums which we can gain information from and learn. I think especially since starting this course I have come to realise what a great tool blogs are and that I will definitely continue to use mine even after I am finished.

The web is full of so much information we would be silly not to use it. But as we touched upon earlier in the module you need to be careful as not everything on the internet is 'the truth' Gruber (2008) looked into theories of what's trustworthy on the net and focuses on both the Semantic and Social web. Both of which can be useful to us but we must be 'Net Savvy' to get the best out of it (Lorenzo, Oblinger and Dziuban 2007) . Awareness is the key, and along with a Connectivist approach we can learn a lot from what the interactive web has to offer especially from a professional network.

To sum it up 'This amplification of learning, knowledge and understanding through the extension of a personal network is the epitome of Connectivism' (Siemens 2004)

Communities of practice means a group or people who come together through mutual interests and shared experiences. Learning happens 'as the process of engagement in social relationships, rather than a process of acquisition of knowledge as an individual.' (Reader 3) It is a social way of learning and developing within and between the members within it. Having a supportive communities of practice can help shape the professional we are, it can give us a sense of who we are and what we want to achieve. Not only is it about what you can gain from it but its also about knowing you're part of something and the values that you can aquire in that sense.

I can understand this and find this valuable as I know with in my network of friends in the industry I have used this. An example would be, when a production has auditioned the previous year and one of my friends has been to the audition and got cut, because she had sang an unsuitable song. From that experience she could advise me to make sure I didn't make the same error. This is a valuable way to learn as we can't all experience everything so we need to take things from those who have been able to learn from things we haven't. Also its a good way of letting off steam at knowing sometimes that you're not the only one in those situations.

Previous to reading the reader I have not been aware of this theory but now I have come to realise I do this at least on a weekly basis, whether is be a rejection coffee or a catch up in the pub. Now I can fully appreciate this concept in order to get the best out of it.

'A community of practice therefore places emphasis on participation over acquisition of specific bodies of knowledge, and relies on shared interpretations of the community of practice more hierarchical formations of knowledge' (Lave and Wenger 1991)

All of the above theories have brought to my attention the way professional networks work and the concepts behind 'The Networked Professional'. I am coming across a personal theme in this module of awareness. A lot of the theories we are reading about I have been applying to my professional practice but just haven't been aware of doing them, and therefore not been taking full advantage of the benefits that come with them. Now I am able to do this and it is opening my eyes to how important these themes are. I think it's vital to be able to network well in our business as quite often it's not about what you can do but about who you know. This reader has altered my perspective and enabled me to fully understand the concepts behind networking therefore will hopefully allow me to become more successful when networking professionally.

References

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