# SNS Interview Series 3: Interview with Andrew Shipilov

The goal of the Interview Series for the SNS forum is to introduce our community members and build connections and meaningful relationships that thrive on mutual interests and support. We are excited to feature Professor Andrew Shipilov as our guest in this edition.

**1. Please tell us a little about yourself.**

I graduated from the University of Toronto Rotman School of Management in 2005 and since then I have been working at INSEAD. I teach strategy and innovation related topics. I also direct an INSEAD program on Managing Partnerships and Strategic Alliances. That program is an opportunity to teach some of my research on networks and ecosystems to the executive audience, so that I can also learn about exciting and recent new case studies. I am a co-author of a book published by Wiley "Network Advantage: How to Unlock Value from Your Alliances and Partnerships". I am currently an Associate Editor at the Academy of Management Annals. I also served as an Associate Editor for Strategic Management Journal for six years. My current research interests include inter-firm networks and ecosystems.

**2. What's one interesting fact about you that your colleagues probably don't know?**

In the afternoons, I really like walking in the forest. Fontainebleau is the right place to be for this. Being surrounded by nature often helps me think through research problems. The best thing about the Fontainebleau forest is that it was originally designed for royal hunting, thus most of the paths are wide and straight. Thus, someone who is lost in thought has no problem finding the way back.

**3. What aspects of network-related research are you most passionate about?**

I really like the concept of intellectual brokerage, and I try to apply it to my research. I believe that theoretical contribution is often made when a well-informed author takes theories from one domain and moves them to a different (related) domain. Network research is essentially a study of complex systems that emphasizes interdependencies among actors. There are some complex systems principles that cut across different levels of analysis, such as people, organizations or even technologies. For example, high interdependence among actors creates stability. The lack of connection among some actors creates an opportunity for recombination. The actor's centrality is an indication of access to resources and possibly control, but it is also difficult and costly to build and maintain. Things diffuse through different linkages among people and firms, and what an actor's alters are like is typically very meaningful for the focal actor's conduct and performance. When examined this way, network research can be applied to enrich new fields. For example, while most of my research is on inter-organizational partnerships, I recently published a few papers on ecosystems. There, I applied network analytic principles to think through the role that ecosystem technological interdependencies have on firm performance or act as drivers of acquisitions. So, I carried some of the core network-related research principles into a new field. This was a lot of fun, because I got to read about research on technology and innovation. Hopefully my work helped technology and innovation researchers to re-discover networks research.

**4. What inspired your research interests in networks, and when did you realize that you want to be a network scholar?**

I grew up in the former USSR. I saw how the social and economic system collapsed around me overnight. I also saw firsthand how people relied on social networks to survive. You had to know someone to get anything done, even to buy good quality bread, meat and cheese. Thus, social networks completely replaced old institutional mechanisms. This planted a seed in my mind that it would be really nice to learn if there is science to getting things done in an informal economy. Oddly enough, I have not written much about interpersonal networks and transition economies. It seemed like David Stark already said it all in his own research. So, I learned from my own advisor Prof. Joel Baum how to do inter-organizational network research. And I have been in his debt ever since.

**5. Would you like to give any advice to more junior researchers who are studying social networks?**

This is a mature field now. It will probably not be very novel to work on another inter-firm networks paper examining boundary conditions of payoffs to brokerage or closure. However, there are multiple adjacent fields that you can carry network ideas to. I have done that with ecosystem strategy; I am sure you can do that for a different field. It is also important to have a novel context. I was very sad when several years ago one of the reviewers nudged me to stop writing papers about networks of investment banks. But then, in retrospect, this was a nice wake up call to see if there is a totally new context to which network ideas can be applied to.