

Task 3b: Theories relating to Networks

After analysing the Reader on 'The Networked Professional', I was introduced to many theories and concepts that may provide value in terms of developing my own Professional Network. I will discuss my initial impression of the concepts and also explore how the mentioned theories might help me make more effective use of my Networks.

Before analysing the theories it is important to define what is actually meant by a 'Professional Network', so that you have a clear understanding of what it is you are trying to develop and progress. A Professional Network is a 'work related community held together by either close working affiliation or more distant but common work interests or needs'. There are many different forms that a Network can take, for example it may be formed of close relationships or more distanced ones, it may have a formal identity or an informal identity. Whichever form it takes, your Professional Network is a highly important part of your current and future professional life. The effective engagement of your Networks can impact on your success and the theories I am about to discuss might help to produce further benefits for you in terms of Networking.

Cooperation basically describes how much you engage with your network and how much time, energy, dedication you are willing to place into it. How much will you cooperate within your network and with the people affiliated with your network? Robert Axelrod (1984) poses the question 'when should a person cooperate and when should a person be selfish in an ongoing interaction with another person'? The theory of Cooperation is linked with 'The Game Theory'; games where one player succeeds at another's expense. Axelrod (1984) identified the importance of the notion of cooperation and in particular the benefits of 'cooperating fully with others until you reach a point of maximum benefit and then to defeat.' The Game Theory focuses on the results of cooperation and the decisions to cooperate or not. My place of training was a big pre-established network and I must say during my three years I developed and utilised the network as much as possible. I would ask tutors for advice, borrow sheet music from fellow students, use the resources that were available to me etc.. But I was also eager to cooperate with others and would help others whenever I was in the higher point of the network for that particular need. It is interesting because there were always certain people that were not willing to cooperate; they wouldn't help you with a routine or lend you sheet music. For me, I would simply keep a mental note of this and not be as keen to cooperate with them in the future. The game 'Prisoner's Dilemma' is a great example of how cooperation can be used within a network. It allows players to achieve mutual gains from cooperation, it allows for the possibility of one player exploiting the other and also the option that neither player will cooperate. Studies showed that the strategy of 'tit for tat' was the winner, the idea that you will cooperate as much as the other person. You don't give more and you don't give less. In the majority of cases I believe this is how cooperation works; of course there will always be those who give more than others but this is the way of the world. I think Cooperation is essential in the development of Professional Networks and a theory which I already apply to my personal networks.

'Affiliation is a social process that provides us with a network of support that will help us when we are in need' (Crisp and Turner, 2007). It has been proven that humans enjoy and benefit from affiliations with

others and we form close relationships as a social result of psychological processes in the brain. However there are differences in both people's desire and need to affiliate. The principle of Homeostasis is linked with affiliation and explains how individuals seek to balance their interactions with others to a preferred level. Dependent on whether you are introvert or extrovert your desired level of affiliation will vary (O'Connor and Rosenblood, 1996). This controlling concept links with the 'Privacy Regulation Theory'; individuals seeking to maintain privacy at their preferred level. These examples are Psychological Determinants of Affiliation but there are also biological and cultural explanations that can explain the differences in people's *need* to affiliate (Crisp and Turner, 2007). Brain Imaging studies (Johnson and Colleagues, 1999) show that introverts are higher in arousability than extroverts. Introverts will steer clear of Social Interaction as this could create uncomfortable levels of arousal, whereas Extroverts have low levels of arousal, therefore will seek out social situations to stimulate a desirable level of arousal (Crisp and Turner, 2007). There are also Cultural differences which explain the difference in people's need for affiliation. Hofstede (1980) describes 'The more individualistic a country the more its members desired affiliation'. In these countries people don't tend to form close relationships; they have many distanced relationships. Collectivist cultures develop few but deep and long lasting relationships, therefore they don't have a great need for affiliation. Why do we affiliate? It is actually an inherited trait and we have a tendency to seek out others and form close relationships and it is this trait that helps us to survive and reproduce. Inevitably it provides us with a network of support that will help us when we are in need. As a Professional in any industry it is vital to have this 'network of support', our lives are hard enough without having to face every struggle alone. Your colleagues and peers should be there to help and the more you affiliate with them and give your time and energy, the more likely they will be to affiliate and share with you. A successful career requires effective Professional Networking - the concept of affiliation suggests that we have an innate need to network professionally, no matter what status in the network we have the same needs in terms of affiliation. We need to develop and grow our Professional Network sideways and upwards, after all you never know when the 'sideways node' is going to take a leap up the ladder. I am constantly trying to keep strong links within my networks; as the stronger the link, the more dependable the 'node'. In today's busy society technology is a great tool to connect and network. Even if you are too busy to actually meet in person (which I believe is always better, but sometimes not possible) you can send an email, blog, contact via social media sites, the list is endless. I believe affiliation is essential to create and develop a strong Professional Network and it is definitely a theory that I constantly try to apply and adhere to. There is nothing worse than hearing from someone, whom you haven't heard from in years purely because they want something. If that person had remained in contact and every so often had 'touched base', then I would definitely be cooperative and affiliate with them, however I am always reluctant in those situations.

Social Constructionism is a concept of looking at 'how meanings about the world are made?' To explain, through social interaction humans construct meanings of the world and their experiences of it. When I thought about this in more detail, I was struck by how similar this was to the ideas on Reflection we had studied in Part 2 of the Module; we take our experiences and draw meaning and learning from them. In this view, the way we come to understand the world is a construction or creation of our own making. Crotty (2005) quotes "All knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context". The theory is that meaning is not

discovered but constructed and that people have to consciously engage with the world and the objects for meaning to come out of them. I also found traces of Reflection within this statement; you have to fully engage in an experience to truly reflect and learn from it. Humphrey (1993) states that "Before life on Earth the world consisted of 'world stuff', but the properties of the 'world stuff' had yet to be represented by a mind". Our current and future networks are created by ourselves and their meanings are not pre-determined, it is through our interactions that we construct the meanings. These meanings may be: values we attribute to a particular network or our preferred way of engaging in the network. Social Constructionism is not a concept that I was fully aware of and there are many aspects of the theory that I can take and utilise for my own Networking practice. In terms of Networking, it is essential to fully commit and engage with new and existing connections; the results/values of this connection will maximise if full dedication is given. It has made me aware of the importance of social interaction in order to develop the network and from these interactions we construct the meaning, therefore I will create/construct the relationship formed.

Connectivism is the organisation of learning and material, with special reference to the spread of the internet. In relation to Professional Networks: Connectivism provides an explanation about how networks both learn and provide the means for individuals to connect and learn. Therefore, in a Connectivist view a Professional Network is a system with which people can interact to learn. Siemen (2004) describes how there are 3 broad learning theories; behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. These three theories attempt to address how a person learns, however they were developed in a time when technology was not a huge feature in society. Nowadays technology hugely impacts on the 'Learning Experience' and it has reorganised how we live, communicate and learn. Vaill (1996) quotes "Learning must be a way of being - an ongoing set of attitudes and actions by individuals and groups that they employ to try to keep abreast of the surprising, novel, obtrusive, recurring events....". He explains that learning theories need to reflect the current social environment and in a sense 'move with the times'. Due to technology knowledge is growing at an exponential rate and it is true to say that half of what is known today was not known ten years ago, a term now known as 'half-life of knowledge'. This growth and development has led to new trends in learning, for example learners will move in a variety of different, possibly unrelated fields over their lifetime. I cannot count the amount of times I have asked the question 'Is it linked to what they studied?', proving that in today's society many people take jobs that really have no link to what they studied in. This is not necessarily a bad thing, however it does pose the question whether it was worthwhile studying the specific subject in the first place, if they aren't going to use the skills and knowledge acquired from it? Learning now occurs in a variety of ways and there is often a much more informal approach to learning. I feel that learning has taken a much more practical approach and for me this is much more beneficial. I believe you really learn from actually doing and no matter how much you are told about something, unless you do it for yourself you really won't learn - you need the experience to truly learn, which again links to theories on reflection. Technology is altering our brains and the tools we use, i.e. web 2.0 define and shape our thinking. The idea that a teacher transfers the knowledge to student is outdated in today's society and now learning is a much more continual process. 'Know-where' is a new term which refers to the understanding of where to find knowledge: you might not necessarily know the answer, but you know that you can find it. This term can definitely be linked to Professional Networks, the idea that you can utilise somebody in the network and use their experience and knowledge. I very often am unsure what songs to choose for auditions, so I will

contact somebody I know from the show, or someone who has previously auditioned for the company. Their experience and knowledge is filtered through the network to me. Launder and Dumais (1997) made a very interesting point "People have much more knowledge than appears to be present in the information to which they have been exposed to". Our Professional Networks allow us to gain knowledge from other people's experiences and the amplification of learning knowledge and understanding through the extension of a Personal Network is the epitome of Connectivism. I found this concept very interesting, if not slightly confusing at first. It made me aware of how much learning styles have developed: no longer does knowledge have to be transferred from teacher to student, we can use other people's experiences and utilise it to gain knowledge for ourselves. The knowledge is in the network to be shared and transferred between the connections, as long as we cooperate and affiliate to keep those links strong then we can depend on the knowledge and experience of others. I can really relate to the term 'know-where': the internet is a huge source of information ready to be accessed and the phrase 'I'm not sure, but I can find out' is highly featured within my vocabulary! Karen Stephenson quoted "Experience has long been considered the best teacher of knowledge. Since we cannot experience everything, other people's experiences and hence other people become the surrogate for knowledge". For me, this statement emphasised the fact that our networks and the people affiliated within them can be our source of knowledge: I need to utilise my network as much as possible in order to reach maximum benefit within my Professional life.

Members of a 'Community of Practice' come together because of mutual interest and they generate a shared experience of engagement in the 'Community of Practice'. Within this type of Network, learning happens as the process of engagement in social relationships, rather than a process of acquisition of knowledge as an individual. We are all engaged in a number of communities/networks and our sustained engagement within our 'communities of practice' produce learning – it is social learning developed within, and between the members within it. Lave and Wenger (1991) state that 'rather than learning by replicating the performances of others or by occupying knowledge transmitted in instruction, we suggest that learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community'. The members are fully immersed in the cultural practice, not just technical or knowledgeable practice. Often I see my Networks as a tool for gaining information and knowledge that I do not know myself and I forget that Networks/Communities of Practice provide much more than this. The theories about 'Communities of Practice' show that they can bring much more than just technical knowledge: the community develops its own sense and symbolism of what it is to be part of it, something which is very beneficial and invaluable. In my future Professional Networking I need to remember these benefits and try to remember the other attributes that come with being a member of the Network. Being a member of the 'Community of Practice' can help to shape the Professional we become, giving us a sense of who we are, what we stand for and what we want to achieve from our Professional life. It is easy to forget this and just see it as a tool for gathering new resources, contacts etc. so my aim for the future is to focus more on these aspects of being part of a Network and what it can offer me in this sense.

All of the theories mentioned offer ways in which to make more effective use of my Professional Networks. As with anything, there are certain theories which I am more drawn to, for example affiliation is something which I firmly believe in in order to be successful within your Networks. However,

'Communities of Practice' has really opened my eyes to a new way at looking at Networks and has provided new ways in which to approach my own Professional Networking.