The Value of Overlaps of Network Connections: Who is connected to whom and why does it matter?

Sana Marroun, University of Western Sydney

Doctoral Consortium Paper

ABSTRACT

Business and social networks both play important roles. There has been considerable work on both kinds of networks but little work that considers the ways in which these networks interrelate and impact on each other. Nor has there been much consideration on the kinds of value that emerge from the interactions of business and social networks. This paper brings the different literatures of these areas together, report's findings of preliminary investigation and proposes a method by which investigation in this area can progress.

Key Words: Social networks, business networks, networking, network value

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INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

At the heart of the IMP tradition are networks and the relationships contained within them (La Rocca, 2009). These networks contain both social and business connections and interactions (Ford et al, 2002). Social networks play important roles in business. At the most basic level they provide psychological well-being. This is because people are inherently social and need connections to others to effectively perform (Asch, 1952) including in the sphere of business. Literature suggests we participate in various types of social networks that create business value, including personal, professional and organisational ones. Personal networks include family, friends, and close associates (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). These networks are built through mutual interests, liking and long term connections and help to ground us. Professional networks include colleagues and peers. They are based on common work interests and tasks, and are used to facilitate one's knowledge base. They can be internal or external, such as professional network organisations (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). Inter organisational networks include entities dealt with in other organisations, often they are concerned with whom you know in another firm who assists you in meeting objectives (business teams, project groups, committees, and councils). These networks are based on power, knowledge and influence (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). Organisational level networks often play vital roles in facilitating firms' business interactions with one another (Marroun and Young, 2010; Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). Sometimes networks emerge naturally a consequence of dealing with others on a continuing basis. People also deliberately develop and use networks to enhance their professional and economic well being (often referred to as networking) (Brown et al. 2007).

There has been considerable work on these various kinds of networks and on ways networking occurs, but little work that considers the ways in which these various forms of social networks and the networking associated with building them interrelate and impact on each other. Nor has there been much consideration of the kinds of value that emerge from the interactions of business and personal networks. This research considers the relationship between various networks and potential synergies of social networking and business network value creation. In particular focus is on the way which social relationships and networks assist in the building of and creating value in business relationships and networks and vice versa.

Various marketing literatures look at networks in different (though not necessarily contradictory) ways. In the business to business literature, networks of firms are recognized as providing competitive and collaborative advantage (Wilkinson and Young, 2005). This advantage is most often considered in economic terms and from the firm's perspective. Specialization, reliable supply, acquisition of business allies, etc. are the components of the value sought through the development of network relationships (Young and Wilkinson, 2002). Such value is further conceptualised as the building of social capital. Defined as a set of social resources embedded in relationships, social capital encompasses the norms and values associated with these connections (Hewitt and Forte, 2006; Dudley, 2004). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1997) further built on the work done by Moran and Ghoshal (1996) and

proposed three dimensions of social capital including structural, relational, and cognitive (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimension indicates that through social interaction an individual can receive certain advantages i.e. access to information (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The relational dimension focuses on the foundational assets of the relationships i.e. trust (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). And finally, the cognitive dimension is concerned with a shared understanding and paradigm i.e. an organisation's mission statement (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The above dimensions of social capital are relevant to this research as through these dimensions the value creation of firms can be understood.

This perspective recognises the interplay of business and personal relationships. Specifically there is recognition that relationships can be often embedded in business connections, such relationships can include personal trust, and social connections like individuals' friendship can play an important role in creating value (Wilkinson and Young, 1994; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Gummesson, 1987;). Often the assumption is that these personal relationships emerge as a result of doing business (Halinen and Tornroos, 1998) although the relationship can run both ways with personal relationships being the basis for the development of business ones.

This is recognised in the international business literature which discusses the varying propensities for different cultures to require a personal relationship before a business one can be built (e.g. Johnson, Cullen, Sakano, Tomoaki, 1996). This notion is also reflected in consumer marketing literature which highlights the often-important role that personal networks and relationships play in generating business, e.g. retailers and service providers are chosen based on personal connections. This choice may be based on a direct and personal connection with the provider or an indirect one, with decision-making based on information derived from other personal relationships (Kraut, Steinfield, Chan, Butler and Hoag, 1999). A related area in this literature considers the importance for marketing of personal connections (e.g. in generating credible word of mouth). This has been long recognized by marketers but this has arguably become even more important recently with a growth of interest in the nature and role of referral networks (Finkelstein, 2010; Yolum and Singh, 2005; Anon, 2002).

The information revolution (internet) has introduced a substantive change to the character of connectedness and hence the nature and role of social networks and social networking activities (Gleave et. al. 2009). It is argued that the growth of personal and professional online social networking sites, the quantity and resultant ease with which information is moved through the social network and the role that these networks play has increased the overall importance and need for understanding networks both within an online and offline context (Gangadharbatla, 2009; Brown, Broderick and Lee, 2007).

Research Questions

RQ1a: What is the nature of overlaps between personal, professional and business networks of professionals and the perceived value the networks and their overlaps provide?
RQ1b: How do networks and their overlaps influence one another and impact on network evolution?
RQ2a: What value do business professionals place on deliberate networking activities?
RQ2b: What patterns of behaviour do professionals display while interacting in purposeful facilitated networking activities and what are the reasons for (effectiveness of?) these behaviours?

This research acknowledges and integrates literature in a range of disciplines including

psychology, sociology, management and marketing which all seek to explain human behaviour in different ways. The literature review is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on networks and their structural properties and positions itself within the domain of social psychology. The second part focuses on —networking‖ activities i.e. those activities that lead to network connections. This conceptualization is positioned in environmental psychology.

LITERATURE TO BE REVIEWED

At the heart of the IMP research tradition is centrality of relationships and networks in facilitating business transactions and thus economic performance. More specifically the foundation work highlights the central role that interactions play in the development of business relationships (e.g. Hakansson and Snehota, 1995, Ford et al. 2003, Turnbull et al. 1996). While the IMP group focus on the business relationships of firms with other firms, there is recognition that a company is a nexus of relationships between the individuals within the organisation as well as including the relationships that these individuals have with other customers, suppliers and other organisations (Hakansson and Snehota, 1995). These interactions between individuals who interact actually define organisations' business (La Rocca, 2009).

The IMP work extends this notion. At the heart of their work is recognition of the importance of relationships connected within networks. Relationships in networks provide opportunities for further interactions (following on from the work of Granovetter 1983) beyond one's immediate relationships and that they influence and are influenced by the relationships within them and that networks and their constituent relationships co-evolve.

This research addresses the personal interaction components of business "relating" using it as a framework. This involves visiting the literature of relationships and networks and includes a range of contributors from the extended IMP group. Also considered is the literature of networking. This area has been less addressed in IMP-based work. Specifically, this review focuses on the previously-identified overlaps between business, professional and personal networks. In part, this is considered in terms of the value gained, by firms and individuals, when engaging in facilitated and purposeful networking events/activities. This approach requires acknowledging and integrating research in a range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, management and marketing which all seek to explain human behaviour in different ways. The literature review is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on networks and their structural properties which positions itself within the domain of social psychology. The second part focuses on —networking‖ activities i.e. those activities that lead to network connections. Conceptualization of these is positioned in the area of environmental psychology.

NETWORKS

The Social Psychology of Relationships and Networks

Theories of social networks are fundamentally informed by social psychology. Social psychology has long recognized the value of social relationships - we are inherently social beings (Asch, 1952) and the influence of personal connections is a central part of this (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Relationships are defined as an interdependent process of continuous interaction and exchange between at least two actors (that can be at an individual or firm level) (Holmlund and Törnroos 1997). The collection of individuals directly and indirectly linked/connected together by a set of relations is known as a social network. Mutual trust and

commitment are at the core of forging these connections with others which is recognized as more readily emerging within continuing relationships (Young, 2006; Batt and Purchase, 2004). This has important flow on effects as it is trust that guides the extent that information is perceived as credible and acted upon (Denize and Young 2007). Such credibility is particularly important in making high involvement decisions in business (Mohr, Webb and Harris, 2001). The absence of trust between individuals and/or firms directly hinders the possibility of establishing relationships and building networks in any context (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007).

There has been a lot research dedicated to the concept of trust. A review of the many descriptions and definitions of this concept has resulted in the identification of three dominant characteristics that lead to the need for trust (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007). The first is vulnerability. Here there is an assumption between actors that opportunistic behaviour will be avoided which further encourages open and honest interactions (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007; Deakin and Michie, 1997; Deakin and Wilkinson 1998). Risk is the second characteristic of trust. Actors will refrain from taking any action particularly if they perceive themselves to be in a risky and ambiguous situation (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007; Chiles and McMackin, 1996). The third characteristic of trust is positive expectations (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007). The ability to somewhat anticipate the behaviour of the other actor be it an individual or firm encourages the presence of trust (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2007; Lane and Buchmann, 1998). Relationships evolve over time and temporality is therefore a vital component of relationships. It takes some time before a sequence of interactions can be labelled an effective relationship. Both the past and future expectations related to business relationships influence the present state‖ (Holmlund and Törnroos 1997 p. 3). The three characteristics of conditions under which trust arises in relationships and networks further inform this research as in order to explore the connections made between professionals at social networking events it is important to understand what is required to form continuing effective relationships and network partners for the professional and/or firm.

Not only does trust play a pivotal role in facilitating connections between individuals and/or organisations. Trust is also instrumental in the evolution of relationships and networks (Gadde et al., 2003) because it is a sentiment made up of a number of emotions (Young, 2006). Sentiments and emotions allow us to make sense of and interconnect parts of our social world. Social psychologist, Fritz Heider's (1958) balance theory explains the way in which people usually maintain stability in patterns of their emotions (referred generically as liking and disliking of others as well as their feelings about inanimate items). Trust allows us align us and our perceptions of others in our (evolving) networks. The concept of balance has been applied to explanations of the functioning of larger interpersonal groups (e.g. Situngkir & Khanafiah, 2004), negotiation processes and relationship development (e.g. Gummesson, 1997), perceptions of groups such as the US Supreme Court (e.g. Pilialoha & Brewer, 2006), matchmaking (e.g. Chapdelaine, Kenny, & LaFontana, 1994), the connection between voters and their political parties (e.g. Ray, 1999), bargaining (e.g. Kette,,, 1986), and developing a comprehensive theory of self-esteem, self-concept, implicit attitudes and stereotyping (e.g. Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek, & Mellot, 2002).

Heider (1958) was interested in the perceptions of a person, with respect to another person, and an object of mutual interest which could also be a third person. Heider noted that the patterns of perceived relationships among the three entities could be in one of two states: balanced or imbalanced (Young and Johnston, 1999). ―By balanced state (or situation) is meant a harmonious state, one which entities comprising the situation and feelings about them fit together without stress‖ (Heider, 1958 p. 180). Imbalanced states produce tension which may be resolved by changing the relations or by distancing oneself from the situation.

In other words, relationship participants – consciously and unconsciously – strive to equilibrate (i.e. evolve) towards balanced states. The concepts of balance and equilibration can be used to explain the evolution in a business network setting (Bairstow and Young, 2011).

Balance theory states that connections between entities (individuals or firms) must be either positive or negative for relationship to be considered balanced. There are many factors that are instrumental in facilitating positive linkages between entities in relationships, they include: proximity, increased interaction, familiarity, similarity of beliefs and goals, predisposition towards certain sentiments and perception of potential benefits (Heider 1958). The same factors also play a role in forming negative linkages, for example a decreased level interaction or contact could result in dislike. Heider's balance theory informs this research by providing a theoretical basis of exploring how networks evolve over time. As perceptions of others change, relationships are ended and/or commenced (i.e. new people become known to an individual and are added to a network) and/or the nature of what is valued from relationships and networks evolves, the network is —rebalanced‖ to accommodate the changes (Young and Wilkinson 2004). In a social networking context where new relationships are deliberately sought, this is process is likely to be particularly prominent.

Social Networks

Social networks are collections of interpersonal/business relationships. The composition and interrelation of these relationships have important properties. There is a large body of literature that uses Social Network Analysis to consider the structures of networks in terms of who interacts with whom, the nature of the connections between individuals (liking or not and the strength this) (Re and Adar 2007; Fleisher, 2005). While not widely studied in marketing, the structure of social networks have been the subject of both empirical and theoretical study in the social sciences for over 50 years (Wasserman and Faust, 2005; Watts, 2004), partly because of inherent interest in patterns of human interaction, but also because they have important implications for the spread of disease, behaviour, innovation and knowledge (Newman, 2001). These studies provide insights both as to the structural properties of networks and highlight effective methods for the study of them.

Social networks both emerge naturally through kinship, school, common acquaintance and there also are deliberate attempts to build social nets. The literature that focuses on the value of naturally emerging networks argues that the exchange in help and support between actors is one of the main benefits of engaging in these networks (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). The literature that considers deliberate attempts by individuals and/or businesses to build social nets highlights the kinds of value that building of networks provides including job search, promotion of products and services, knowledge management, collaboration opportunities (Anderson, 2008; DiMicco, Millen, Geyer, Dugan, Brownholtz and Muller, 2008; Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993).

It is argued that the nature of social networks has fundamentally changed in recent times (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). With the emergence of widely available electronic technologies and social networking sites, personal and professional networks have grown (Keenan and Shiri, 2009). As a result arguably, the scale of deliberate networking activities has increased enormously (Keenan and Shiri, 2009; Kumar, Novak and Tomkins, 2006). Conscious participation in networks has increased awareness of their value (for both firms and individuals) and had led to further network activities (Wilkinson and Young, 2005) and further network growth.

Business Networks and Relationships

No business is an island (Håkansson and Snehota, 1989). Although the study of networks and relationships in business has long been studied (as discussed by Wilkinson, 2001), their importance in delivering value has received increasing attention in recent business and marketing literature (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010; Anderson, 2008; DiMicco, Et. al., 2008; Keenan and Shiri, 2009). It is acknowledged within such literature that business relationships develop over time through a chain of interactions taking place between professional and/or organisational counterparts (Holmlund and Tornroos, 1997; Smith, Carroll and Ashford, 1995). Such interaction is at least in part for the strategic purpose of developing relationships and networks (a set of connected relationships between firms) and is seen as critical for the success of an organisation and its employees (Holmlund and Tornroos, 1997; Smith, Carroll and Ashford, 1995). —Firms do not operate in isolation but must seek to collaborate with other network actors to achieve their goals‖ (Batt and Purchase, 2004 p.169). Network relationships often span different sectors and include both formal cooperation between employees and firms (Smith, Carroll and Ashford, 1995) as well as the informal ties that exist between them (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993).

As discussed earlier, there are different types of social networks that exist, including personal, professional and organisational networks (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010). Yeung (2005) presents a network typology of firms for the purpose of understanding how social actors govern their organisational network; they include extra-firm networks, intra-firm networks and interfirm networks. The development and management of *extra-firm networks* (for example connections with research institutions, NGO's and local authorities) as suggested by Yeung (2005) is able to assist in the governance of the organisation as a whole.

The second typology, identified by Yeung (2005), is *intra-firm networks* which are made up of employees and managers that work together to build core competencies for example innovation and knowledge sharing. Another dimension of intra-firms networks that are has received attention within literature is the focus on understanding the informal networks that emerge within a firm (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993). These informal networks often take precedence over the formal structures of an organisation as the —complex webs of social ties form every time colleagues communicate and solidify over time into surprisingly stable networks‖ (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993 p.104). In investigating the informal and social ties between employees Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) identified three types of relationship networks. The —advice network‖ focuses on the actors within an organisation that are relied on to provide information, the —trust network‖ includes those employees who share information and support each other in times of need and finally the —communication network‖ identifies those employees that regularly discuss work related issues. By identifying the informal networks that are present within an organisation, Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) argue that managers will be able to better leverage these networks for the success of the organisation.

The creation and management of the third typology known as *inter-firm networks* has been argued to significantly enhance the overall performance and success of an organisation by creating important synergies (Yeung, 2005; Holmlund and Tornroos, 1997). Holmlund and Tornroos (1997) takes this a step further to suggest that in terms of inter-organisational networks there are three types of actors each operating on different yet embedded network layers (Figure 1). They argue that human actors in a business network form connections on a social network layer. This layer reflects the way in which individuals and groups are interconnected with one another across the business network. Resource and firm actors are considered to be closely related and positioned in the resource network layer and production

network later respectively (Holmlund and Tornroos, 1997). Resource actors supply those resources required by a firm to manage the production process for example financial institutions and consultants. The firm actors are described as those actors that are involved in performing production activities within the business network.

Figure 1: Three Network Layers in a Business Network
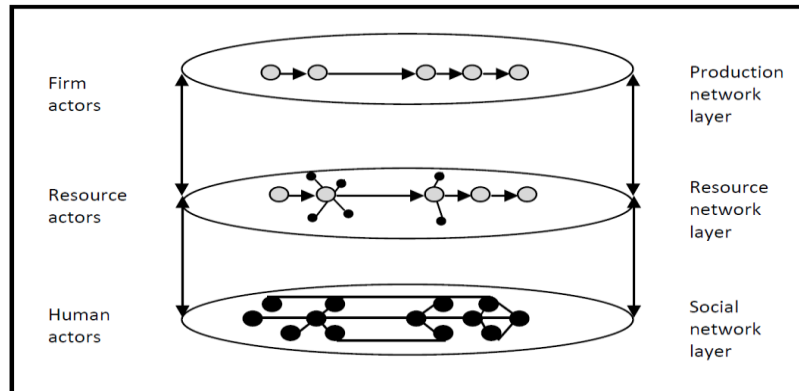
Source: Holmlund and Tornroos, 1997, p.308

The above discussion of some of the different typologies of business networks, the levels in which business networks take place and the categorisation of the different types of business network actors illustrates the multi dimensional reality of business relationships and networks. A substantial search of the obvious areas of literature did not uncover any attempt to date to explore together these different dimensions of business relationships and networks or the value gained by business networks in conjunction with professional and organisational representatives that attend facilitated networking events.

There is however considerable research into the ways in which networks bring value to firms. This has been underway for over 30 years, for example the IMP group's published work on relationships goes back to the early 1980s and on networks to the early 1990s and network functions have been considered in B2B and channels work throughout the 20th century (as discussed by Wilkinson 2001). IMP researchers consider the business relationship as a process which has at its heart, connected exchange episodes between the groups of actors involved. Value emerges as a result of effort and investment (i.e. putting money, time, skill, etc, into the joint activities of the relationship and into their management). These investments facilitate organisational learning, adaptation, co-ordination, commitment and trust building from both parties and through these actions value can be created for each (Manjak & Durrieu, 2000).

Researchers such as Manjak & Durrieu (2000) highlight that there are various forms of value to considcer. These include the economic value that business relationships and networks provide, but there are also a significant non-economic values that can emerge through business relationships. Such value potential includes knowledge sharing (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993), innovation (Smith, Carroll and Ashford, 1995), creation of synergies (Batt and Purchase, 2004), sharing of resources (Sugarman, 2010), strategic alliances (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993), access to markets (Yeung, 2005), and source of a sustainable competitive advantage (Smith, Carroll and Ashford, 1995). Wilson and Jantrania (1996 in Manjak and Durrieu, 2000) conceptualise relationship value along three dimensions as economic, strategic and behavioural (psychological) ones.

Value is idiosyncratic, i.e. it is in the eye of the beholder. Thus there are many different kinds of value, arguably as many types as they are relationship/network participants. "We can classify the relationship value as perceived value, desired value or value judgement (Flint et al. 1997). This is in line with Manjak and Durriey (2000) who indicate that value includes a number of abstract elements including implicit beliefs that guide behaviour desired value which is concerned what customer wants to have happen and value judgement which involves an assessment of the value, i.e. an assessment of what has happened (Manjak & Durrieu, 2000).

IMP researchers acknowledge that business networks, and in fact networks in general do not have an inherent centre or strict borders. It is argued that this makes the structures of networks fluid in nature allowing them to change and evolve over time (Batt and Purchase, 2004; Hakansson & Snehota, 1995). Ford et al (2002) argue that "There is no single, objective network. There is no "correct" or complete description of it. It is not the company's network. No company owns its. No company manages it, although all try to manage in it. No company is the hub of the network. It has no "centre", although many companies may believe that they are at the centre" (p.4).

Research into the role(s) personal relationships play in B2B networks shows that such relationships guide and direct networks and are guided and directed by them (Kraut et al. 1999;Cross and Prusak, 2002; Awazu, 2004). Top levels of management have strong interconnections, e.g. senior executives are on the same boards, in the same clubs, attended the same universities (Kanter, 1994; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). And, managers report that personalization is a valuable outcome of business relationships, facilitating further business capabilities and improving relationship performance (Young and Wilkinson 1997). Personal relationships have been seen to facilitate business by ―extending‖ the firm (Wilkinson and Young, 2005) thus expanding business opportunities and providing better access to marketing capabilities and better quality marketing intelligence (Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996; Webster and Morrison, 2004). Firms are not only made up of complex internal relationships and networks but also external ones that assist in building the organisation. It is therefore surprising that there has been little work that considers the role played by social relationships and networks in business relationships and networks. Hence one of the main objectives of this research is to explore this complex internal-external system of network interplay. The focus is on how professionals that engage in social networking activities where external actors are able to benefit from such interactions either on a personal, professional and/or organisational level.

NETWORKING

A central idea in IMP literature is that continuous interaction leads to stable relationships. In these relationships, actors are tied together by various socially generated actor bonds and these bonds have different characteristics and serve different purposes (Andersson and Tuusjärvi, 2000). There hasn't been a large body of literature within the IMP group that looks at Networking with regards to the psychological interaction of people. Having said that there are members of the IMP group like that of Cova (sociology/consumption), Bolis, Johnston and Young that look to examine the interpersonal sphere of interaction. Furthermore, it is important to note that within the area of networking the IMP literature has mainly focused on the issue of building personal relationships.

Networking encompasses the deliberate activities or chance encounters by individuals that

allow for the initiation, development and ongoing maintenance of network connections (Keenan and Shiri 2009; DiMicco, Et. al. 2008). There are a number of different motivations identified within literature in an attempt to understand why individuals and firms spend time and resources to engage in networking activities. These motivations include meeting new people, keeping in touch with friends and colleagues, as a form of entertainment, media sharing, campaigning projects and ideas, career advancement, knowledge sharing, managing existing relationships, for self-promotion, advertising, marketing and information mining (DiMicco, Et. al., 2008; Ofcom, 2008). Communication is often seen to be at the very core of networking (Denize and Young, 2007). Such communication, which relates directly to theories associated with word of mouth, occurs in two main ways either through the use of electronic mediums (e.g. blogging, emails, comments and posts within online networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook) (Gangadharbatla, 2009; Brown et al. 2007) and/or through personal interaction (having a face to face conversations) (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993). Both forms of communication will be discussed below in reference to current literature and gaps identified.

Online Networking

With the emergence of online networking sites and the popularity with which it has been adopted by consumers and business professionals alike there appears to be an exponential increase in the ability of an individual person or organisation to share their opinions, experiences and recommendations with hundreds if not thousands of network partners be it through _friends' or _followers' (Tombs, 2010). The interpersonal connections developed and maintained within online social networks have proven to be a powerful source of influence for the people socialising within the network (Keenan and Shiri, 2009; Hewitt and Forte, 2006; Stutzman, 2006; Subramani and Rajagopalan, 2003). Websites that encourage socialising are often designed to allow users to share media, make comments and chat with other users of the site (Keenan and Shiri 2009). Currently many scholars have attempted to assess the sociability value of social networking sites and their ability to facilitate interaction between users (Keenan and Shiri 2009; Preece, Maloney-Krichmar and Abras 2003). Such studies may inform this research as electronic interactions are likely to be used in conjunction with face to face interactions (the focus of this research).

Internet-based social communication is shown to be often important and credible (Brown et al. 2007; Schiffman and Kanuk, 1995). However, the relative importance of Internet social network contacts remains less than close friends and family in making important decisions (Young, Donald, Benn and Freeman, 2008; Ofcom, 2008) and direct personal contacts such as work colleagues have also been shown to be more important than their Internet —equivalents‖ in professional development and value creation. Networking is by no means a new concept or idea; however it appears that individuals and organisations are becoming increasingly aware of their networking capabilities and the importance of maintaining contacts with others (Zofi and Meltzer, 2010; Keenan and Shiri 2009; DiMicco, Et. al. 2008). As argued by Gleave et. al. (2009) social life has shifted online with the adoption of digital communication. The wider implications of this revolution are not yet clear however. There is, for example, little understanding of how _increasingly digital network savvy individuals and organisations' engage in face to face networking activities/events and how this has changed from the practices of the past.

Personal Interaction Networking

Building and maintaining personal networks is an integral part of our social lives (Ofcom, 2008). For many, professional network building is also a frequent and important activity

(DiMicco, Et. al. 2008). While as indicated earlier some proportion of this networking can be done within an online forum, but much is also conducted through personal interactions. Examples of activities that facilitate personal networking include social gatherings with family and friends, participation in community work and extracurricular activities, etc. Professional networking activities include socializing with peers and/colleagues and attending trade shows, conferences and networking events. These network activities are not completely separate for many individuals. Theories of small world networks (e.g. Watts 2004) tell us that friends of friends are likely to be colleagues or peers, i.e. the ideas of six degrees of separation (Sugarman, 2010) or the Kevin Bacon Index (Adamic, 1999).

The Environment of Networking

The primary focus of work to date is on how professional networking activities improve one's own professional standing and its benefits (DiMicco, Et. al. 2008). However there has been little work that has considered the extent/way that this kind of networking provides value to one's work/organization and the extent to which seeking advantage for the organisation is what motivates and/or facilitates professional networking (as distinct from seeking personal benefits). The proposed research asserts that both need to be considered. Insights into the impact of social networking on business network development emerge from considering theories of business relationship and network development in conjunction with those of social networking (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Holm, Eriksson and Johanson, 1996). However this has not been a focus of work to date.

When individuals attend events or engage in activities that facilitate a process of networking, it is not only the outcomes of their attendance that is important but in addition the processes that occur within the networking event environment must be considered. Environment is defined broadly within the field of psychology to include natural environments, social settings, built environments, informational environments and learning environments (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Mayo, Pastor and Wapner 1995; Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009). Environmental psychology (a contemporary branch of psychology) provides a suitable theoretical framework in which to investigate environments (Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009). The foundation of environmental psychology stems from Barker's (1968) concept of ecological psychology which dealt with _the study of human behaviour as being situated in a specific context/environment' (Giuliani and Scopelliti 2009 p.376). Over the years our understanding of environmental psychology has evolved and today many scholars agree that this involves the study of environmental influences - including buildings, other people, landscapes, etc - on individuals' psychological processes, attitudes and behaviour in that environment (Giuliani and Scopelliti 2009; Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009).

There are a number of different contexts within which the theory of environmental psychology has been applied they include but are not limited to the natural environment and sustainability (Gifford, 2007), residential environments (Craik, 1973), workplace environments (Mayo, Pastor and Wapner 1995), entertainment environments like sporting events (Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009), institutional environments like schools and hospitals (Craik, 1973) and retail store environments (Donovan and Rossiter 1982). The findings from such studies suggest that environment and atmosphere have an impact on the behaviour of participants. For example, Donovan and Rossiter (1982) found that in a retail environment which had bright lights and upbeat music shoppers were likely to spend more time in a store and interact with sales staff. However there has been limited, if any, research that apply the theories of environmental psychology to a face to face networking environment, particularly within a business context. This is despite there being organisations whose primary service is the offering of social networking opportunities via providing functions and events.

Understanding the optimal physical and social environment to facilitate this would provide substantial value to them and to their customers.

One group of literature that provides potential insight for the proposed research is that of the social servicescape. In social settings it has been shown that individuals stay longer in a setting which facilitates high levels of social interaction than those that facilitate low levels of social interaction (Tombs 2010). The social-servicescape is an extension of the services literature conceptualization of the servicescape (as originally proposed by Bitner, 1992). However the servicescape neglected consideration of the influence of individuals in the service environment including actors such as the service provider (in this case network event organisers) and other patrons (in this case other event attendees), but rather focused mainly on the physical aspects of the environment (atmospherics). The concept of social-servicescape places greater focus on the way people act within an environment and the extent action is influenced by it; this positions the concept more firmly within the area of environmental psychology. With this theory in mind, this study aims to include consideration of the impacts of the physical and social spaces in which networking are occurring.

PROPOSED RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The literature review highlights that while there is acknowledgement in the relationship and network literature of the activities needed to build and maintain networks, there are few specifics of how to do so. Similarly, while networking literature acknowledges that the nature of the network and its relationships (i.e. its network properties) are important there is little if any indication of how and why. Combined with this is a failure to differentiate the nature of and to articulate the interaction between social, professional and interfirm networks. While in part they overlap, there is the need to consider the nature and extent of the overlaps/interactions between these various networks.

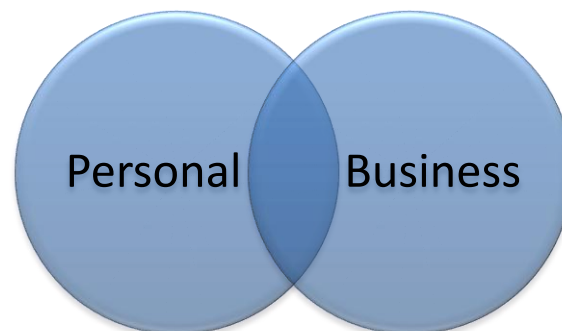**Figure 2: Proposed Research Diagram**

Figure 2 represents interpersonal network overlap in its simplest form i.e. as a simple Venn diagram which illustrates the interconnectedness of the two network types. For each individual size of each network and the degree to which they overlap will differ. However further detail is needed if the framework is to consider key aspects of network process and network evolution in sufficient depth. A more detailed process diagram is needed to indicate evolutionary devices such as cross over effects and systematic combining (Wilkinson et al 2007). Therefore, a more detailed version of Figure 2 follows which focuses on these processes.

To address this, Figure 3 presents my proposed framework which combines the work of a number of different contexts. The literatures of personal (e.g. Ofcom, 2008), professional (e.g. Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993) and inter-firm (e.g. Yeung, 2005; Holmlund and

Tornroos, 1997) networks all describe processes of network evolution and development. The framework highlights the commonality of process in its centre section. In all of these contexts over time relationships are built via deliberate and chance encounters which build new contacts that interact with existing relationships and thus evolve the network. The left and right sides of the figure respectively indicate the development processes of social and business network settings (with professional networks seen as combining aspects of both). In the social network the process of network evolution is mediated by the history of past interactions which influence perceptions of what is sought. Business networks are also built via new and existing contacts and through history (as the outcomes/value of the networks influences their continuing development) and they develop through time as the advantages and value provided by networks facilitate further network activities.

The centre section of the figure also highlights that the two kinds of networks overlap with some members of the social network likely to be part of the professional and/or business networks (this can include families who run businesses together, employees who are also friends, suppliers who are also part of the same community as their customers, etc.). In other words, the social network can be a source of membership and value for business networks and vice versa.

While the figure indicates that these networks are separate, this depiction is only for clarity. In fact as already indicated the networks overlap and shape each other. People are in more than one network and their primary place in the network is evolving, i.e. a business contact can become a friend and remain both or the business and/or friend connection can cease without necessarily ending the other aspect of the connection. The figure also provides a guide to the various forms of data collection which are proposed (discussed in a subsequent section).

Figure 3: Proposed Research Framework
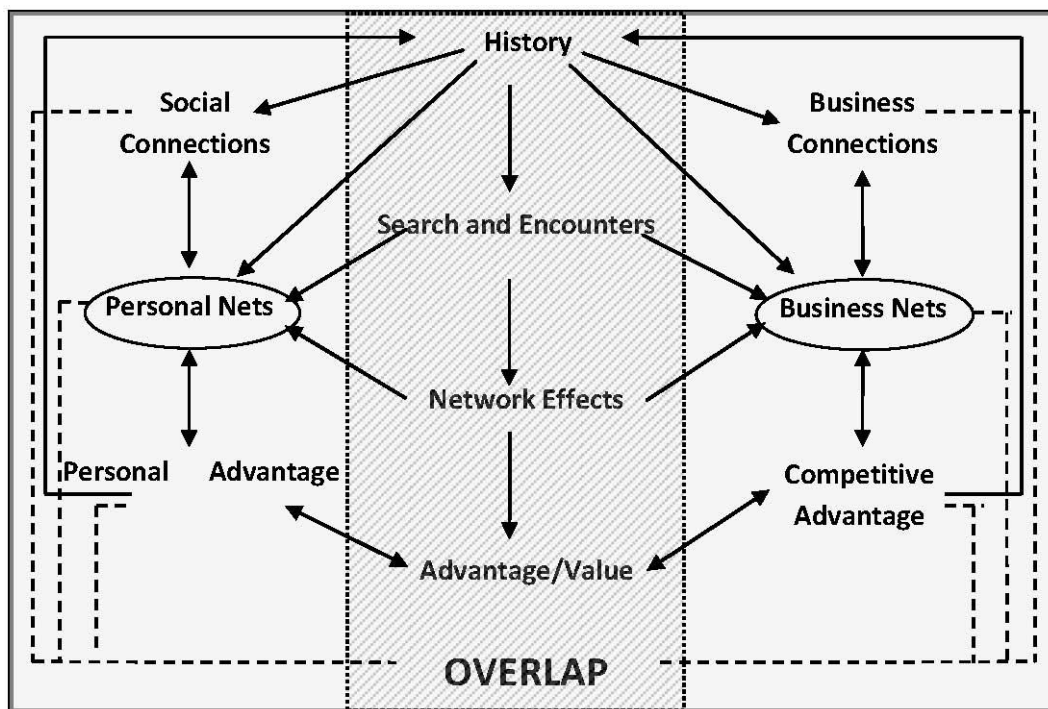
This proposed research framework will assist the researcher in addressing those gaps identified within the literature and discussed above.

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Relating to Research Question One, Objectives to do with researching the nature of networks and their overlaps are:

1. To explore the different kinds of social networks that professionals have.
2. To identify the nature of overlaps between personal, professional and business networks of professionals.
3. To investigate the nature of the (perceived) value that networks and their overlaps provide to professionals.

Relating to Research Question Two, Objectives to do with the interaction behaviours that professionals undertake to build and develop their networks are:

4. To explore the ways in which professionals are deliberately and inadvertently networking to build and maintain their networks.
5. To understand the way professionals see their activities contributing to the building and maintenance of their networks.

RESEARCH METHODS

The objectives indicate use of a mixed method approach which includes observing networking and comparing this to reflections of networking as well as collecting reports of networks and their evolution and overlap. Observation primarily relates to the centre section of Figure 3 which is concerned with the process of networking, i.e. interacting which occurs and its effects. Reports on networks provide insight to the processes depicted around this networking, i.e. the advantages that networking brings and the context and history it creates which in turn influence the needs and goals of future networking activities. This multi method approach is also in line with previous work. Previous collection of network data to describe networks has included ethnography (i.e. observation), questioning, and secondary data (business contracts in place, sales data, etc.) (Keenan and Shiri, 2009; DiMicco, Et. al. 2008; Fleisher, 2005). To study the processes outlined in Figure 3 and effectively compare them across network types, innovative methods are needed. Previous approaches are insufficient because previous studies have primarily focussed on network descriptions. Social networks are typically mapped and analysed for network properties (such as density, connectedness) or in terms of the character of individual nodes (e.g. number of connections relative to rest of network, position, etc).

In contrast, this research also seeks to ascertain the ways personal networking creates business network value, i.e. insights into causal processes are sought. To achieve these insights both reflective and behavioural data is needed. That is, in addition to relationship/networking histories and vignettes, observation of networking behaviour and its consequences is needed. There are several reasons for this. The two forms of data provide different information. In addition, value comes from inter-relating the two data forms to increase reliability and create synergy of insight (Yin, 2009). Multiple interviews with selected informants also will be undertaken as effective study of relationships requires a longitudinal approach that allows the value realized from networking and the associated changes in networks formed by relationships to be considered.

Research Context

The source of the data will be the Western Sydney Business Connection (the Connection)

who have agreed to participate in the research. This is an independent not for profit organisation established in 1985 which is focused on business to business networking and development (WSBC, 2010). The Connection now represents a cross section of the 75,000 businesses in the Greater Western Sydney region and is totally self-funded by membership, sponsorship and its many business events, which allows it to be totally member focused (WSBC, 2010). The group's role ranges from business networking, the promotion of Western Sydney and investment attraction for Western Sydney, developing young business leaders, and growing business opportunities with key Asian countries (WSBC, 2010). Their members are business leaders, politicians and Local, State Federal Government representatives interested in - growing their business, developing business with Asia, encouraging young business leaders and the growth and development of the Western Sydney region (WSBC, 2010). As WSBC facilitates networking between organisations it provides an appropriate context for this study which aims to address this gap.

The Connection events are attended regularly by more than 200 leading CEO's, Managing Directors and General Managers (WSBC, 2010). One of this organisation's recent developments was the creation of an online presence on the social networking site Facebook. As of July 2010, the researcher was granted permission by WSBC to attend networking functions and events for the purpose of conducting this study. Having attended a number of events in 2010 and spoken to event organisers and board members, the researcher has a clear understanding of the style of events and types of people that attend. To confirm that the context of this study represents the general character of networking events, a number of interviews will be conducted with event organisers with such organisations as Rotary, Chambers of Commerce etc. and compared to the descriptions of WSBC and this author's own observations. Gaining background knowledge into the ways in which these organisations coordinate their events and the types of attendees that participate will ensure that the context being observed is not unusual.

Prior Work to Inform Method

Preliminary research was undertaken to inform the research design involved for investigation into nature of formal and semi-formal professional networking opportunities. Interviews were conducted with three people with considerable knowledge of the Connection who organize network events to determine the nature of networking events and to assist in determining relative effectiveness of different ways of observing networking activities at networking events. Informants included a past president of the Connection, a current board member of the same organisation and the committee chairperson for one of branches of the Connection which focuses on providing personal networking opportunities.

These interviews indicated that there are a wide range of motives for attending networking events and that motivation also depends on the nature of the event. Some events are more concerned with facilitating professional networking, i.e. assisting firms to make contacts with one another while others focus on personal network development. Irrespective of the nature of the event, the process of facilitating networking is fairly similar, i.e. setting up events so there is a critical mass of potential contacts (quantity versus quality). These informants further highlighted that people attending events often have networking strategies and there appear to be a wide range of these, examples they gave included pre-identifying people that you want to talk to and planning a pattern of movement through an event that will allow the meeting of as many of these people as possible.

The interviews confirm the need for the research design that includes observation of networking activity. This will be done by attending functions and observing the processes of

networking. (It is recognized that this does not provide a heterogeneous sample of networking activities but does allow effective observation of a large quantity of purposive networking.) Including observation as part of a multi-method design is preferable to solely relying on reporting by participants because all three informants indicated that not all networking behaviour is consciously planned, nor are the responses by others to networking approaches necessarily understood. In addition, by attending these functions, it is anticipated that there will be an opportunity to introduce the study to a large proportion of attendees and invite them to complete a short questionnaire to obtain some overarching data. The function will also serve to select and recruit from those observed (discussed below) participants (up to 6-10) for a series of one to three in-depth interviews to be conducted at a later date (with the first conducted shortly after the event where observation occurs).

Data Collection

The context for the observation and survey parts of the study as explained earlier will be social/professional networking events. All attending sit down events will be asked to complete a short survey. This will serve to identify them according to location; i.e. where seated which will assist in setting the larger context in which observation of selected attendees occurs (as suggested by Bates, 1997). As well, photographic sampling and electronic tracking will be undertaken to capture the interactions and movements of a subset of individuals during such events. Following this, in-depth interviews will be undertaken at a time and place convenient to those participating. The sampling and recruitment considerations of this study are discussed below followed by an explanation and justification of data collection methods.

Sampling and Recruitment

At the events facilitated by the Connection a funnelling type sampling and recruitment will be used. Specifically, every attendee's cooperation will be sought for the survey, a manageable number (yet to be determined) will be pre-selected for observation and interview and a subset of these of these will be selected for subsequent follow up interviews.

A survey will be left at each place (for sit down events) or otherwise distributed during the events and attendees will be made aware of the surveys and invited to complete them. This will capture general information from the large proportion of the population of event attendees. Prior requests for volunteers will be sent out by the Connection (judgement-based) on behalf of the researcher. It is anticipated that up to five to six attendees at an event will be systematically observed with each photographed on a 5-10 minute interval basis (time stamp digital technology to be used). These same attendees will be given tracking devices during the event to track and map their movements. It is proposed that a first run of interviews with attendees will take place as soon as possible after the event, and from this group a proportion will be selected to participate in one or more follow up in-depth interviews.

Observation and Photographic Surveys

Observation is central, as it is through this approach that insight into process, evolution and causality can be derived (Powell and Connaway, 2004). Observation is defined as "the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a natural setting" (Gorman and Clayton 2005, p. 40). This research method is seen as being relatively complex in that it most often requires the researcher to play different roles during the data collection process (Baker, 2006). The roles of the researcher have been defined as ―the characteristic posture[s] researchers assume in their relationship‖ with the people whom they are studying

(hereafter referred to as insiders) (Chatman, 1984, p. 429). There is a typology of four roles researchers can play in their efforts to study and develop relationships with insiders, including complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. The adopted role depends on the problem to be studied, on the insiders' willingness to be studied, and on the researcher's prior knowledge of or involvement in the insider's world (Baker, 2006). The role that this researcher will adopt while observing attendees during the networking events will be that of the _observer as participant'. This role focuses mainly on observing insiders while allowing for some involvement of the researcher for example conducting short interviews during the events (Baker, 2006).

Observation data will be recorded using photographic survey techniques. There has been an increasing use of photographs in social science research which has been in part attributed to quality of reproduction and the growth of interest in visual presentations (Jenkings, Woodward and Winter 2008). Photographic surveys will be used for two main reasons. Firstly, taking photographs of attendees will allow the researcher to record observations and capture the interactions of individuals engaging in the networking events. This will allow detailed records of networking interactions and multiple reviewing and reanalysis of data (Spanjaard and Freeman, 2006). Secondly, these photographs will used in the subsequent interviews of selected participants. The analysis technique of photographic elicitation then will be used during the interview process (Jenkings, Woodward and Winter 2008, Clark-IbaNez, 2004) (discussed subsequently).

Photographic surveys will be used instead of videography for a number of reasons. First, taking photographs within a social setting is less intrusive than video recording and is particularly so in the observing of conversations. While this means the content of conversation is not captured in the observation, this is not the primary focus of this part of the data collection and will be considered during interviews. In addition, at the interview the photo taken will enable focus on critical incidents observed during observation. Third, photos will allow greater focus on the participants who have consented to participate and will assist to preserve the privacy of those with whom they interacted. Finally this technique will cause less self consciousnesses both during observation and at the subsequent interview than videography (Spanjaard and Freeman, 2006).

The use of photographs in interviews provides a number of benefits. Images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words… (it is) an interview process that provides a different kind of information‖ (Harper, 2002 p.13). In addition it allows the interviewer to develop a semi structured interview script while providing stimuli for the interviewee (Clark-Ibanez, 2004) and it is more time efficient than watching a video an important consideration in interviewing business professionals. The informants from the Connection agree this is the better approach than videography.

Survey Instrument and Tracking Device

As indicated earlier, it is proposed that a one page survey be distributed to all attendees during the networking events. This survey will seek to identify whether the participants make any new contacts at this event, whether they interact with contacts made at previous events or whether they are a first time attendee etc. Furthermore, tracking devices will be placed on selected attendees and their pattern of movement mapped. This enables better recording of physical movement in the environment, enables analysis of the broader patterns of movements and allows the researcher to focus on recording the social nature of interactions with photo survey.

Photo Elicitation and Depth Interview Process

Prior to the networking events requests for participation in the study will be sent out by the Connection on behalf of the researcher. Those attendees who agree to participate will be observed, photographed and tracked during the event. Following this they will take part in a follow up interview(s) shortly after their networking event. The in-depth interview will involve a number of components. Both semi-structured and structured (for building of network maps) questioning will be used in the interview. The less structured components of the interviews will include discussion of the nature/role/history of individual's social, and in particular, professional networks as well as consideration of the network(s) his/her organization is in. Explicit examples of overlaps between professional and organizational networks and vice versa and assessment of value emerging from overlaps will be sought as well as discussion of networking processes. The photos elicitation will involve the researcher putting together a portfolio of photographs in which the interview participant appears that can then be presented to them during the interview (as suggested by Harper, 2002). This will assist participants to recall their experiences at the networking events.

Use of photos will facilitate the ability to elicit stories, examples and anecdotes of business networking activities. Such stories present personally constructed views of a shared world (Hopkinson, 2003). Stories are a particularly effective analytical device for the study of co-created phenomena such as relationships and networks. The similar and different foci of the stories, the choice of what topics to relate with stories and the congruence and divergence of the stories presented all offer potential insights (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000). Hence photos, that encourage this type of reflection, will be invaluable.

A subset of those observed and interviews will be re-interviewed at least once to explore the longer term value that has emerged from networking activities (it is anticipated there will be some drop out). At these interviews, photo elicitation will assist in again prompting the participant's memory.

Data Analysis

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts will be initially analysed lexicographically (computer based content analysis) to seek commonalities in informants' reflections. This will guide the subsequent analysis. Subsequently, interpretation of discourse in response to photo elicitation will be undertaken using discourse and storytelling analysis. Some kind of network mapping (yet to be determined) from structured depth interview data (i.e. who or what kinds of people are in each informant's professional and organizational networks and any overlaps) will also be undertaken. (Note that the names of people may not be sought, rather descriptions of them and the nature, amount and reasons for overlap of networks is the focus.) The findings from this analysis will guide the selection of those who will be asked to participate in follow up interviews. Informants will be selected to be included in several longitudinal cases. They will be chosen theoretically and to maximize diversity. These cases will focus on the impact of networking and evolution of structure over time. Information from the survey and tracking data will be used to build a small number of case studies on networks and the activities that facilitate them. Patterns and drivers of these will them be sought. The unit of analysis will be simultaneously the individual (who is the sampling unit) and their three key networks. For each informant the personal, professional and their firm's network will be described. These will be compared as will the similarities and differences in their overlaps and similarities and differences in their patterns of change.

CONTRIBUTION

This research has the potential to make three important contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it can increase understanding of how business networks emerge and evolve. Understanding processes and sources of value allows greater understanding of how social beings participate and respond in markets – in contrast to current work which tends to focus on responses of individuals acting in isolation (action is addressed in episodic ways, i.e. how people influence individual purchase decisions, but not in terms of how personal social systems continue to influence and be influenced). Secondly, increased insight into networking practices and value of networking can assist organizations in determining how much value is received from these activities. This in turn has the potential to suggest ways that networking activities of employees can be further leveraged and more effectively designed to provide value to the organization as well as to the employee. Thirdly, the proposed method is innovative and evaluation of the relative contribution of components (and synergies arising) can assist in the further development of this kind of multi method approach and its applications to other contexts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this work addresses the interesting micro processes that characterize the building, maintaining and evolving of networks. More often, in the study of business networks the focus is the larger patterns of activities that take place. While this provides important overviews of process it leaves gaps in our knowledge about how network systems are built in bottom-up, self-organising ways. Increasingly it is recognized that understanding of these are central to building predictive models. This research will provide important insights at this neglected micro level.

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