

The Motivations and Behaviours of Professional Networking

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Sana Marroun, University of Western Sydney

Louise Young, University of Western Sydney and University of Southern Denmark

Abstract

This paper focuses on the reflections of managers as to the nature and value of professional networking. Most often this has been considered as a “pre-relationship” stage when the assumption is that relationships are being sought and relational opportunities explored. Most work in this area focuses on the determinants of the successes of networking, i.e. under what circumstances a relationship is built and/or on the nature of the success, that is the nature and scale of the value that such relationships produce.

This research shifts the focus to the activities of seeking and building contacts and a deeper understanding of how the short and long term value that is sought influences this process. The research is informed by the literatures of relationship value development, networking as a behavioural process and environmental psychology. The sequence of behaviours that occur during the course of an event and the thought processes that guide these interconnected actions, rather than particular actions are the focus.

Transcripts of thirty in-depth interviews with managers who participated in networking events are analysed using the programme, Leximancer. Leximancer quantifies key concepts occurring in text based by the way words travel together, thereby summarising these discussions. The interviews focus on what participants think they did at the events and why they behaved as they did. This is augmented by reflections stimulated by photos taken at events. The analysis shows that: 1) there is considerable variation in the reflections on the nature and motives behind networking behaviour, 2) the mental processes that underpin the observed behaviour guides behaviour in ways that are not always obvious to an observer, 3) there are different value dimensions within managers’ reflections which differentially impact on behaviour. The paper concludes with consideration of how firms can best utilize networking events to build their profile and business and how managers can use networking events to build their own relationship and network competence.

Introduction

Let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start. When you read you begin with A B C. When you sing you begin with Do Re Me... (Rogers and Hammerstein 1959)

Relationships are a central focus of IMP research. However there is little IMP work that considers the very beginning of B2B relationships, i.e. the when, where, how and why contact first occurs and an interaction takes place and the influence this has on formation of a business contact and a relationship that (perhaps) emerges. In business, first contacts can happen accidentally but are often engineered; people seek those that they think can be beneficial and/or they continuously think strategically about the value of forming contacts with the people they meet in a range of situations (Ibarra and Hunter 2007).

This paper considers non-accidental beginnings, in other words the seeking of business contacts. We consider motives and actions before, during and after managers network with prospective contacts and the value they perceive they receive in doing so. The more specific context of this research is to consider the nature and value when attending organised networking events.

A lack of attention to the activities occurring at relationships' very beginning is surprising. According to complexity theory, path dependency is inevitable in social systems, i.e. the actions at critical junctures determine the subsequent evolution of systems. This combined with complex systems' high sensitivity to starting conditions means that that it is likely that relationships' evolution very much depend on their very beginning (Wilkinson and Young 2002).

Networking may not lead to sales but can nevertheless provide value. In the popular and practitioner media the value of networking for personal and professional advancement and the ways this can and should be done is much-discussed (e.g. Powell 2014). This has led emergence of an industry who sell services including seminars, workshops and coaching to improve networking skills (e.g. firms such as The Strategic Business Network; <http://www.strategicbusinessnetwork.com/about/importance>) as well as firms who build and sell access to "high quality" networks.

Their promotions often focus on the importance of the very beginning – the initial impression. For example in *Forbes Magazine* Van Petten (2011) argues that assessments that are difficult to overturn are made the first moments of contact and this echoes throughout academic literature where in considering the beginnings of friendships appearance (Dion, Berscheid and Walster 1972), reputation (Raub and Weesie 1990) and social skills (Baron and Markman 2000) were originally considered. More recently the subtleties of the persona that is projected in initial encounters, things such as trustworthiness, confidence, etc., have been the focus (e.g. Cuddy, Kohut and Neffinger 2013). While there is no consensus as to what drives attraction in first contacts, throughout, it is recognized that networking facilitates building a contact base and that this can ultimately provide economic benefit (Garrett 2015). And a common thread through much of this hype, rhetoric and serious discussion is the importance of the very early stages of contact in building relationships.

The remainder of this paper considers the very early stages of relationships via the literatures of business relationships and their development, networking as a means of relationship development and environmental psychology. Following this, a study which considers the

motivation, activity and perceived networking value of those who attend networking events is presented. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for practitioners and future research.

Theories of Relationships and Networking

Multiple strands of literature inform this research with the nature and role of relationships at the core. The assumption is that business relationships are necessary and desirable. Contacts are made and relationships emerge because there is “double search” by interested parties for them (Alderson 1965). The double search occurs within the very beginning of the relationship process. One form of double search is networking; the nature and environment of this process is the focus of this study. The value perceived to emerge from networking including possible contacts and relationships are a further focus.

The Nature, Processes and Evolution of Business Relationships

Theories of social psychology tell us that relationships are needed for physical and emotional well-being, i.e. man requires not only the security and specialization that relationships allow but also needs relationships to enable effective cognitive and emotional functioning (Argyle 1991). In addition to individual relationships, a wider network of connected social relationships furthers well-being both by providing informational, contactual and social resources and more generally providing a coping mechanism that provides social support (Brissette, Scheier and Carver 2002) and buffers individuals from stress and alienation by providing psychological security, (Cohen and Wills 1985) and social capital (Thompson 2005).

The value of cooperative relationships for both social and economic purposes was recognized by early marketing scholars (e.g. Alderson 1965). Relationships have continued to be a focus in marketing both with the “birth” of the IMP group’s relational research and the growth of “relationship marketing” in the 1990s in services (Berry 2002, Bendapudi and Berry 1997), consumer marketing (Gruen 1995) and business marketing (Evans and Laskin 1994, Payne, Christopher, Peck and Clarke 1998). However much of this work and that which follows is concerned with customer retention (Berry 1995), drawing on the earlier work of writers such as Levitt (1986) and Jackson (1985) who argued that keeping (industrial) customers was a, if not the, central task of firms, (However there is an alternative focus in the literature of international business where there is consideration of elements of attraction and repulsion in making contact and forming relationships that allow market entry in discussions of psychic distance (e.g. Conway and Swift 2000)). This is in marked contrast to the study of personal relationships, particularly of close relationships where there is a massive amount of popular and scientific literature that considers the social and biological factors that cause attraction such that the relationships that sometimes follow can be predicted (see Wilkinson, Young and Freytag 2005 for an overview of the biology and psychology literatures).

In business marketing relationships are often conceptualized as commencing with the first transaction and as being built within subsequent transactions (Levitt 1986). Relationship “development” is conceptualized as a process where factors such as trust, satisfaction, social bonds and relational investments impacted on an entity’s development of commitment (e.g. Anderson and Weitz 1992; Wilson and Mummalaneni 1986) within repeat transactions and growing attachment to the trading partner (Jarvis and Wilcox 1977). In other words,

development happens after some attachment has been formed. However, this work does not address how the attachment happens.

The much-cited work of Ford (1980) and Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) presents models of relationship development which include a pre-relationship stage. In these models relationships develop as they "mature" through time and through continuing transactions - which often increase in scope and/or frequency. The business relationship cycle is usually conceptualized as a series of discrete stages, initiation, development, management and termination or institutionalization. A small amount of subsequent work in B2B has further considered the initiation phase, articulating it in part as a "pre-relationship" stage concerned with identifying and investigating potential suppliers (e.g. Anderson 2001). However there is limited concern in the contemporary relationship marketing literature with these very early parts of relationship process. This may in part be because relationship development models depict low levels of activity, usually conceptualized in terms of infrequent communication, lack of firm or relation profitability, and/or low levels of communication complexity (Dwyer et al 1987; Anderson 2001). We speculate that such a lack of activity is difficult to reflect upon and/or describe and therefore may be seen as relatively unimportant - with focus is directed to other areas.

Another explanation is that pre-relationship activities are difficult to manage and are therefore often avoided. The time frame for exploration of relational partners is long and in many/most instances the contacts made bear little or no fruit. Exploration is concerned with experimentation with new alternatives. "Its returns are uncertain, distant and often negative" (March, 1991, p. 85). There is some work, mostly in the management literature, which has considered the circumstances under which exploration strategies are more likely and what the nature of these strategies is likely to be (e.g. Gupta, Smith and Shalley 2006). Learning, innovating and finding resources are the usually-given reasons for exploration (e.g. Rosenkopf and Nerker 2001). There is less work that more specifically considers relationship exploration, i.e. strategies concerned with expanding business contacts and/or more generally identifying and evaluating relationship alternatives.

A stream of literature that is of particular relevance in understanding the value that contact building and relationship development bring is that of the social capital. Relationships provide (and indeed are) social capital (Burt 2005). While not the primary focus, conceptualizations of social capital highlight the value of contractual (as distinct from transactional) relationships (e.g. Flap 2002; Lin 2002; Burt 1992, 1997). And social capital is strongly linked to value creation (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998).

In relationship initiation, the interaction activities associated with bridging – which involves building social capital via interaction between different social groups, with loose bonds between actors the goal – is particularly relevant (Eklinder-Frick, Eriksson and Hallen 2011). (This is distinct from bonding – where activities which build strong connections within groups are the goal). There is a need to balance processes of bonding and bridging (Daskalaki 2010). Effective patterns of bridging (and bonding) promote the creative potential in organisations as well as facilitating collaboration (Slotte-Kock and Coviello 2010; Lin et al 2011).

The importance of bridging in terms of contact-building is particularly prominent in the literature of social networks. Social networks are collections of interpersonal and/or business relationships. The composition and interrelation of these collections have important structural

properties such as who interacts with whom and the nature of the connections between individuals (liking or not and the strength this) (Re and Adar 2007; Fleisher 2005). Social networks play a range of important roles in society operating in personal, professional and business spheres, often linking them together in particular through the creating and transferring of knowledge (Wasko and Faraj 2006).

The Processes of Networking

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).

The focus of social networking research has largely shifted to social media networking. Internet-based social communication is often perceived as credible and important (Brown, Broderick and Lee 2007). The processes of networking have been researched in the sphere of social media (e.g. Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels 2009, Heller Baird and Paranis 2011), but there has been very limited consideration of it in face to face settings. 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). Similarly important are those networks of professional-based direct personal contacts such as work colleagues in professional development and value creation. Social media contacts are generally perceived as more distant than are those that are maintained through face to face contact. This is case for both personal/social networks and professional organisational ones (Tsai and Ghoshal 1998).

When this networking process is considered, it is most often normatively, i.e. focusing on how to network more effectively (e.g. Szeto, Wright and Cheng 2006) rather than considering how people do network. There is recognition that a possible way of building professional and organizational networks is to attend events partially or solely intended to provide like-minded people with a forum for meeting and forming advantageous links (e.g. O'Brien 2006). Again, previous work focuses primarily on guiding effective networking at events (e.g. Kuzma, Shanklin, and McCally 1992) as opposed to the micro level behaviours that attendees engage in when preparing to attend an event, engaging at an event and their action after the event. It is the latter, more descriptive nature of networking that is our focus.

Networking and Environmental Psychology

This research considers the behavioural process of networking in the framework of behaviour setting theory and its offspring, environmental psychology (Barker 1968). In line with Uhrich and Koenigstorfer (2009) we argue this is a suitable theoretical framework in which to investigate the processes and environment of social interactions, in this case professional event networking. This is particularly suitable because our focus is on behaviour occurring within 'a specific context/environment' (Giuliani and Scopelliti 2009 p.376). These theories see both the environmental and/or social ecology and behaviour occurring within it as interacting parts of a system. This emerges from Kurt Lewin's field theory (1951) which

focuses on explaining human behaviour by looking at the environment where the behaviour takes place and considering the relationship between a person and their context.

“Environment” includes natural environments, social settings, built environments, informational environments and learning environments (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982; Mayo, Pastor and Wapner 1995; Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009). There are a number of different contexts within which the theory of environmental psychology has been applied. Study contexts include but are not limited to: the natural environment and sustainability (Gifford, 2007), residential environments (Craig, 1973), workplace environments (Mayo, Pastor and Wapner 1995), entertainment environments like sporting events (Uhrich and Koenigstorfer 2009), institutional environments like schools and hospitals (Craig, 1973) and retail store environments (Donovan and Rossiter 1982). These findings suggest that physical environment and its atmosphere have an impact on the behaviour of participants. For example, not surprisingly 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.

The underlying premise in this kind of study is that real world behaviour has both structure and pattern that can be observed and explained in part in terms of the setting in which it occurs (Barker, 1968). This theory is widely used in studies in behavioural ecology, social psychology, and behaviour studies although not in mainstream psychology (Propov and Chompalov, 2012) and has been used in foundational studies of situational factors in consumer behaviour (Belk 1975) and the impact of retail settings upon consumers (Robert and John 1982). In more contemporary contexts, it is used as part of the theoretical underpinnings in studies of service scapes (Bitner 1992) where service delivery and consumption behaviour have been considered in terms of the way in which a physical environment is able to influence the behaviour people in physical complexity venues such as hotels, restaurants banks and hospitals (Bitner, 1992). This has been extended in the study of social service scapes (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy 2010) where the influence of individuals upon each other is included and this interpersonal influence has been shown to influence the service environment.

Belk (1975) has suggested a framework for analysis of situational and behaviour factors that are part of the environment of behaviour. This “behavioural setting” is not limited to time and space but also includes the sequence of action patterns or behaviour that takes place and includes: i) easily discernible physical surroundings, ii) social surroundings, i.e. other people who are present, who they are, what role they have and the interactions that occur, iii) relevant units of time including past and anticipated events, iv) task definitions, i.e. the intentions underpinning the focal behaviour such as shopping (which was Belk’s focus) or networking and v) ongoing conditions such as feelings of acute anxiety, pleasantness, hostility and excitement and momentary moods such as tiredness and illness.

While studies of behaviour settings in environmental psychology have not included networking, the behavioural setting framework can be seen to have particular relevance for analysis of behaviour in this setting. In professional event the interaction between interacting participants is a major contributor to the environment. And, the theories of the social service scape are also relevant to the observation of and reflections upon networking at events that is the focus of our study, the discussion of which follows.

Methodology

The research reported here is part of a larger multi-method study. Data was collected at business networking events run by the Western Sydney Business Connection (WSBC), an independent not-for-profit organisation established in 1985 with a focus on (mostly SME) business-to-business networking and development. At their events, observation was used to ascertain what networking is, i.e. the ways that people actually “behave” at different kinds of networking events. In addition data was collected about how participants remember their behaviour.

Both are relevant. Previous research highlights reflection is insufficient because behaviour at networking events is not accurately self-reported (Nisbett and Ross 1980, Nisbett and Wilson 1978). Instead the reflections of those observed are accounts of how they think they behaved. However observation alone is insufficient because it does not give insight into why behaviour occurred. The focus here is on reflections of recalled behaviour and reasons for it, however future analysis will focus on both the actual behaviour observed and (systematic) differences between behaviour and recall of it.

The participants were those people who were observed during one of eight WSBC networking events. Observation involved first recording description of the event and its organisation, then following several informants during an entire event (i.e. switching between several attendees), photographing them in their networking context every few minutes and recording descriptions of what they were doing, i.e. how they moved around the event venue, who they spoke to, the nature of the groups they formed and joined, the length of and engagement in conversation, and comments about what appeared to be happening, i.e. perceptions and interpretations. They were recruited via the WSBC providing contacts, the researcher approaching people at events and asking them to participate, asking people who approached the researcher and appeared interested in the research to participate and through snowball sampling with those attending earlier events recommending further participants.

Following the observation and survey phases which were conducted at the events (see Marroun et al 2013 for discussion of the survey and its findings), follow up interviews 45 and 60 minutes in duration were conducted. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to assist in establishing rapport and allow exploration of the complexities of relationship development and networking processes (Burns and Bush, 2006; Neuman, 2006). The interviews were conversational in style and questions were used only as needed to guide the discussion with a different order of discussion for each interview the result. The interviews included a discussion of the nature/role/history of the 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 were sought as well as description of their networking processes. A portfolio of photographs illustrating the different phases of a networking event was then presented to them (as suggested by Harper, 2002). This process, known as “photo elicitation”, assisted participants to recall and share the experiences and interactions that they had during the networking event at which they were observed.

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, a portfolio allowed the interviewer to develop a semi structured interview script to guide discussion of through issues

illustrated by the photo. These photos provided further stimuli for the informant (Clark-Ibanez, 2004). The use of photographs facilitated the ability to elicit stories, examples and anecdotes of business networking activities. 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 Kärreman, 2000). Furthermore, discussion of photos was more time efficient than watching a video – an important consideration when interviewing business professionals.

The interviews also involved participants describing their experiences of an event. Prior to doing this they were asked to describe their existing networks both in general terms and using an Ego Net template similar to those used in social network analysis where they indicated the people/organisations that made up their network and indicated links between them. As part of this, they were asked to position these actors in their personal, professional and/or organisational networks. The Ego Net exercise was then used to stimulate participants to recall the structure of their networks and produced a visual cue to further aid their discussion. The categorization of network contacts and links as personal, profession and organizational and discussion of overlaps between them, prompted further conversation regarding the participant's management of their social relations, e.g. their propensity to mix business activities with pleasure and business contacts with personal friends. In addition the history of network contacts, i.e. how they came to be and have evolved was explored.

Their history of attending networking events and the circumstances leading to their attending them was then discussed in conjunction with the value that they gain by attending. Their more specific networking process was also considered, i.e. planning or reflection prior to the event, their recall of their behavior during the event (differentiated according to how they behaved at the beginning, middle and end of the event) and reasons for the behavior and the way in which the participants then follow up with contacts made after the events. During discussion of the behavior at the event, the previously-mentioned photo elicitation was used. Two types of photographs were shown to participants –generic, in that that they captured general event situations, and/or focused, where the informant was in the photo which had been taken during the event where they were observed. The participant was then encouraged to make comments as to what they saw in each photograph, including indicating whether this was typical of their event behavior/process or not.

With informant consent, interviews were recorded and were transcribed in a consistent format, to enable lexicographic analysis. The transcripts were analysed using the computer programme Leximancer (www.leximancer.com). Leximancer is a software analysis tool that is gaining increased recognition (Young, Wilkinson and Smith 2015 forthcoming). It identifies and codes key concepts occurring in text based by the way words travel together - directly and indirectly (Smith and Humphreys 2006). The basic assumption of this form of semantic analysis is that there is an underlying meaning and structure in the way we write and speak. In other words, we assume that informants communicate consciously, as well as unconsciously, meanings and connections in the things they discuss, the order in which they discuss them, and in the words used.

Leximancer performs both conceptual and relational content analysis. Content analysis is a research technique for breaking down text into categories based on explicit rules of coding (Krippendorff, 2004) and allows the researcher to analyse large volumes of data in a systematic way, to discover and describe the issues of focal importance to the interview subjects. Conceptual analysis, the most common form of content analysis, involves the detection of explicit and implicit concepts in the text. Relational analysis measures the

relationships between concepts. In **conceptual analysis**, transcripts are measured for the presence and frequency of concepts. Such concepts can be words or phrases, or more complex definitions, such as collections of words representing each concept. One of Leximancer's main features is that it automatically extracts its own dictionary of terms for each document set using this information. That is, it is capable of inferring the concept classes that are contained within the text and extracting a thesaurus of terms for each concept. This approach relieves the user of the task of formulating their own coding scheme. **Relational analysis**, by contrast, measures how such identified concepts are related to each other within the documents. Leximancer measures the co-occurrence of concepts found within the text, automatically extracts this information, and represents the information visually for comparison. By doing so it displays the main relationships between concepts. One of the strengths of the Leximancer system is that it conducts both forms of analysis, measuring the presence of defined concepts in the text as well as how they are interrelated. (Leximancer Manual 2011). The process is deterministic and results in an explicit and reproducible coding that reflects the semantics and interrelationships present in the text. Leximancer uses the thesaurus produced for each concept to code the text so two sentence blocks of text (the default) reflecting concepts are identified. The co-occurrences of concepts are also computed and there is readily accessible linkage to the original text via a browser. This facilitates interpretation of meaning and allows the focus on particular research problems and relevant text. The analysis results in a summary concept map depicting the importance, relative location of and strong links between concepts and output includes the metrics that underpin the map.

Our Leximancer analysis was conducted in two phases. First an overarching summary of the reflections of event attendance was done. This was followed by analysis that focussed on the behaviour settings within the informants' event networking.

1.1 The perceived nature of event attendance

Figure 1 presents an edited summary map of the 30 interview transcripts. Editing involved merging similar concepts (e.g. *event* and *events*) and removing concepts with no semantic meaning (e.g. *guys*, as in "you guys"). The map also includes the "tags" for the speakers in each interview, i.e. the facilitator (top left) and the interviewee (bottom right). The tags are pseudo-concepts that represent the entire discourse of the facilitator versus that of the informants and positions this relative to the other concepts.

Figure 1 summarises the interviews in terms of the themes and concepts emerging. Themes are clusters of interconnected concepts that are depicted in the map as balloons. Concepts are made up of the words that are interconnected either because they occur together within two sentence text blocks and/or occur with similar words (e.g. the words "gun" and "rifle" might never be used together but might well be in a common concept because they are used with similar words). Concepts are components of themes and their nature and position relative to each other reflect the nature of a theme and the discourse as a whole. Concepts are shown as spots. The concepts are connected by lines that indicate which are the strongest linkages, i.e. the degree to which concepts were discussed together, discussed using the same language, etc.

Using the default size setting of 50%, the five themes shown in Part A of Figure 1 emerged from the Leximancer analysis: ***Events*** (green), ***Networking*** (blue), ***Look*** (brown), ***Business*** (pink) and ***Doing*** (purple) (bold italics are used hereafter for the names of themes). The themes separate into two groups with ***Events*** and ***Networking*** closest to the *Facilitator* tag at

the top of the map and the other three themes closest to the *Interviewee* tag. This proximity indicates that 1) the Facilitator's speech was more likely to contain text coded as the concepts in the *Events* and *Networking* themes and the Interviewee's to contain concepts coded as *Business*, *Look* and *Doing* and 2) the distance between the tags indicates that the Facilitator's discourse was conceptually different from the Interviewee's.

The concepts in the Event theme, *event*, *attend*, *networking*, *started* and *interested*, are concerned with the how and why of attending the events (italics are used hereafter for the names of concepts). The concepts within this theme are the most tightly clustered indicating that they are the most closely related to each other, i.e. were fairly consistently discussed together during the interview. The concepts in *Network* are concerned both with the nature of *professional* and *personal networks* and the value to the *organisation* of particular (indicated by *example*) networks. The proximity of the *Network* and *Event* themes and the position of the concept *value* indicate that *value* is also discussed in conjunction with *networking* at particular *events*. The concepts in *Business* are about the particular activities that happen at events, people *talk*, *meet* a particular *person* or *someone* they were introduced to, exchange *cards*, *meet* someone seated at their *table* (often events include meals and seating is around tables). The *Look* theme is concerned with the strategic elements of attending events, i.e. why people attend; informants look for benefits by starting *relationships*, making *contact* with *different* people in *industry*. They emphasize that this is *work* for them, i.e. requires effort. The *Look* theme is most concerned with reflections of what they did at the event they recently attended, they *speak* to people, move around the *room*, join *groups* of people, seek *opportunities*, get their *name* out there. The pattern of links in the *Doing* theme with the concept links radiating out from the *Interviewee* tag are not very connected to each other indicate that these are talked about in turn rather than collectively. These concepts are most associated with the photo elicitation phase of the interview. Overall the map reflects the nature of the interviews and the way they were structured. It also highlights that in informants' minds the activities of event attendance are not directly associated with networking but not to as great a degree as anticipated. Informants instead consider their goals, establishing *relationships* and *contacts* and indicate they seek these (*look*) *events*. However they do not strongly associate these with *events* and *networking* and building *networks* in their discourse.

Table 1: Summary Analysis of Interview Transcript

A) Edited Discovery Map	B) Ranked Concept List			
	Concept Name	Frequency	Relativity	
	<i>Speaker Tags</i>	Facilitator	7160	100%
	Interviewee	2858	40%	
	<i>Word-like Concepts</i>	event	1160	16%
	business	945	13%	
	networking	611	09%	
	talk	607	08%	
	network	569	08%	
	look	512	07%	
	time	470	07%	
	work	465	06%	
	someone	423	06%	
	Professional	325	05%	
	different	305	04%	
	personal	301	04%	
person	265	04%		
doing	262	04%		
use	229	03%		
met	211	03%		
meet	208	03%		
organisation	191	03%		
contact	188	03%		
opportunity	180	03%		
relationship	179	02%		

Part B of Figure 1 shows the frequency of concept occurrence. The most frequently appearing concepts are the speaker tags *Facilitator* and *Interviewee* with 7160 and 2858 two sentence blocks of text respectively associated with each. (Inspection of the transcripts shows that the Facilitator used shorter, simpler sentences and Interviewees used long, less structured sentences, influencing the counting of the number of text blocks). The 22 most frequently occurring concepts are also listed in Part B with the most frequent concept in each of the five themes highlighted. The ten most frequently occurring concepts are concerned with *networking* (611 coded as this concept) a particular *event* (1160), the continuing *network* (569) including its *professional* (325) elements that are built upon and the activities of *business* (945) – *talking* (607) to *someone* (423), the *time* (470) involved and exploring events, i.e. having a *look* (512).

1.2 Behavioural Episodes in the event attendance process

What doesn't emerge from the map and concept list of figure 1 is a sense of the process, i.e. the behavioural settings/episodes that characterize event networking. To explore this, user-defined concepts (UDC) were generated for further lexicographic analysis. In this analysis additional concepts are sought whereby words that represent an important concept that the researcher wishes to focus on form the seed of a “new” concept. The concept is likely to already exist but cannot be visualized because these words are instead in other, more general concepts (Leximancer Manual 2011). It is important to note that Leximancer does not create

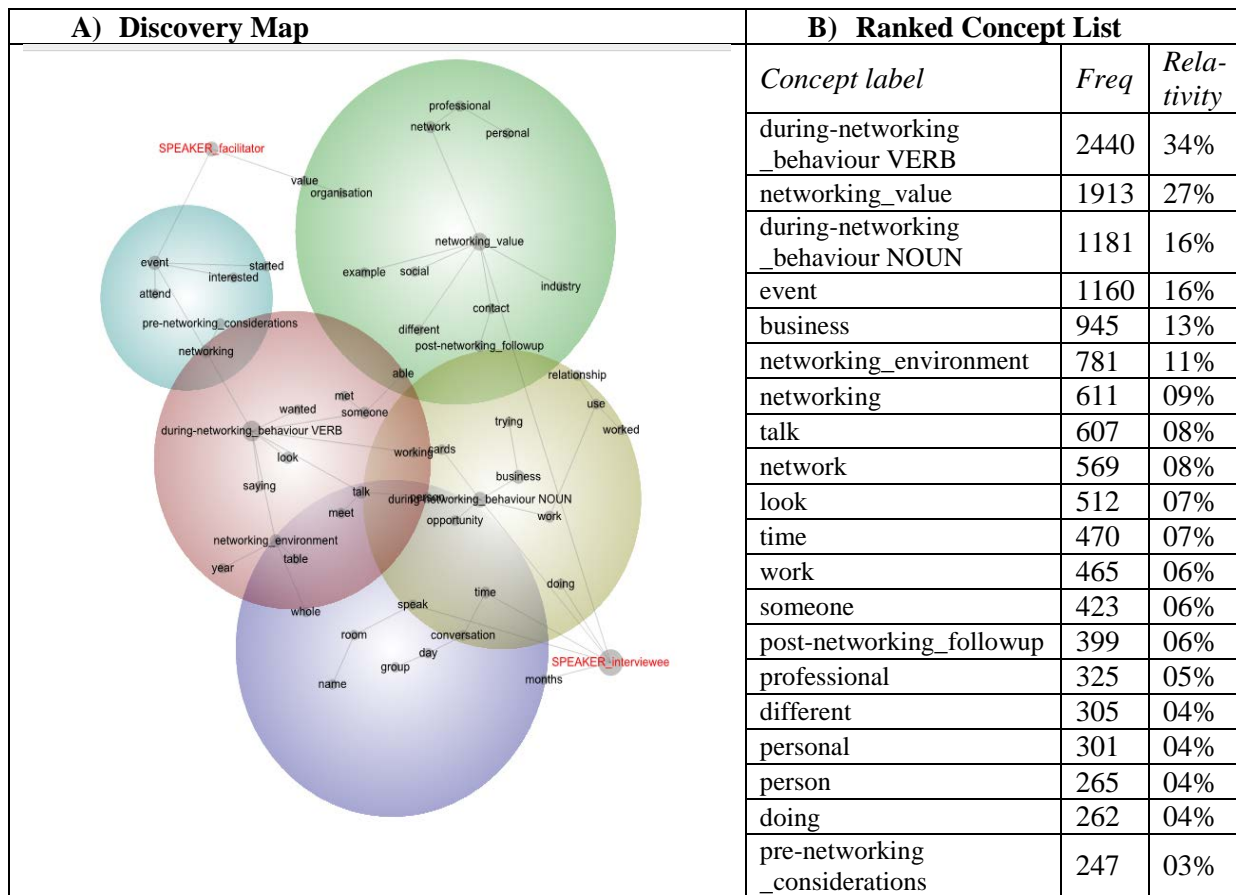
links, connections or relationships where they don't exist in the data. However if there is sufficient conceptual connection an additional concept is created, and positioned in the map according to its "relatedness" to the existing concepts.

In line with the literature of behaviour episodes/settings presented earlier, UDCs of the networking process were conceptualized as five concepts. Three of these represented the networking phases: preparation for the event, behaviour during the event and follow up behaviour. In addition a concept conceptualizing the physical environment of during event behaviour was added (in line with the theories of environmental psychology) as was a concept to represent the value sought and achieved from networking and event attendance. Each of these five concepts was "seeded" with related words (based on the literature review and face validity). For *pre-networking_considerations* the seed words included: expect, invite, list, preparation, prior and research. For *during-networking_behaviour* the seed words were: approach, introduce, socialise, standing, walk, selling and networking. For (during event) *networking_environment* the seed words were: drinks, outside, speaker, room, hotel and table. For *post-networking_followup* they were: call, meeting, database, email, refer, ring and contact. And for *networking_value* the seed words related to value gained (as opposed to synonyms of the word value) and included: active, advice, brand, connect, contacts, referral and trust.

The analysis was conducted in two phases. First an analysis was run separately for each user defined concept and its nature and position in the Figure 1 map checked. This enabled us to ascertain that the hypothesized concept existed and that it was related to the existing concepts in the ways anticipated. As the five concepts were all viable and positioned similarly to our theoretically derived expectations, the five UDCs were then included together in the analysis. This showed that the during-network behaviour concept was over-connected to the other concepts. This diminished its explanatory power. To overcome this problem the concept was split into two with the activities (verbs) of during network behaviour in one concept (approach, chat, dealing, exchange, exchanging, giving, introduce, introduced, listening, look, looking, meet, networking, saying, selling, sit, sitting, socialise, speaking, spoke, stand, standing, stay, talking, thinking, touch, walk and working) and the objects and states associated with the event behaviour (nouns) in another (card, cards, conversation, conversations, deal, discussion, meeting, social, talk, work). This is consistent with behaviour setting frameworks (as previously discussed) and with theories of event structure that differentiate event processes and structure in this way (Abbott 2001, Bairstow and Young 2012)

Figure 2 presents the resulting six concepts within the conceptual map that was presented in Figure 1. In Figure 2 the size and composition of the theme circles, which represent the connectedness of groups of concepts, have altered somewhat to include these UDCs. Themes are a visualization tool to enable consideration of more or less connected clusters of concepts (i.e. the analyst can change the settings and produce maps with more or less themes within them). The theme changes are due to the greater connectedness between concepts as a result of the inclusion of these concepts play, i.e. the nature and quantity of connectedness has changed. This does not alter the frequency or position of the original concepts which, as already noted, are not altered by UDC inclusion. (There are slight differences in concept's positions in the two Figures but this is because random seeds are used to generate the map with slight variations the result. As already mentioned, all other parts of Leximancer's data processing and analysis are completely deterministic.)

Figure 2: Map of All User Defined Concepts with Speaker Tags



The additional concepts are positioned in the four of the five themes. *Pre-networking*, i.e. preparing for the event is within the **Event** theme which includes concepts relating to the *event*, *attend*(ing) it, (being) *interested* (in an event) and *networking* at it. The theme below **Event** fills the vacant space that was in the centre of the map in Figure 1. It includes the periphery of what was the **Business** theme in Figure 1 but primarily the theme functions to link concepts to its central concept, *during-network behaviour VERB*. This is the hub of a large number of varied concepts, i.e. it links the activities that occur at an event such as *wanted*, *talk*, *look*, *saying*, *working*, and *met*. It is also linked to *networking* and thus to the **Event** theme. This theme also includes the UDC *networking_environment*. *Networking_environment* is closely linked to the physical environment via the concept *table* (i.e. where one sits and thus who one is proximate to and able to network with for much of the event), and is proximate to *whole* and *room*. *During_network behaviour NOUN* is in the **Business** theme, which combines the **Business** and **Look** themes of Figure 1 and includes part of that Figure’s **Doing** theme. *During_network behaviour NOUN* is connected to concepts such as *business*, *work* and *opportunity* and to the event artefact, *cards*. The fourth theme, **Network**, contains the cluster of concepts *network*, *professional* and *personal* and the user-defined concepts of *networking value* and *post networking activities*. *Networking_value* is linked to social structure delimiters such as *contact*, *social*, *industry* and *network*. The concept *contact* links *networking value* and *post networking activities*. The fifth theme includes most of Figure 1’s **Doing** theme’s concepts. In Figure 2 the theme includes the general behaviour concept *speak* and the nouns *group*, *conversation*, *room*, *name* and *time*. These are linked to *Speaker_interviewee* but not to *during_network behaviour NOUN* as we

anticipated. This is probably because the discourse coded as these concepts primarily comes from the photo elicitation phase of the interviews.

The inclusion the additional concepts into the analysis results in additional explanatory power in the map in Part A of Figure 2. The position of *networking_value* in relation to the other concepts shows it is linked to *post-networking_followup* via *contact*. This indicates that contacts are at the heart of networking activities and are a key element of it. *Networking_value* is also close and linked to *industry* and *social*, indicating that these too are sources and/or recipients of the value emulating from networking. Also directly linked to *networking_value* is *network* (linked to both *professional* and *personal* but with the stronger link to *professional*), indicating that one's networks are the sources and/or recipients of *networking_value*. These associations emerge from the discourse of the informants as *networking_value* is directly linked to the discourse of the interviewees (*Speaker_interviewee*), and is not linked to the Facilitator (*Speaker_facilitator*), as shown by the direct link between the concepts.

This map provides further insight into the role played by the interview participants in the interviews. As previously mentioned, the concepts close and/or strongly linked to each tag indicate something of the focus of that participant's discourse. *Speaker_facilitator* is, as before, linked to *event* and *value* (but the latter although in the same theme and reasonably proximate is not directly linked to *networking_value* and its concepts). *Speaker_facilitator* is only linked the networking process concepts indirectly – through *event* and *networking* to *pre* and *during network behaviour VERB* and through this to *networking_environment*. *Speaker_facilitator* and these networking process concepts are not linked to *post networking behaviour* and *networking_value*. *Speaker_interviewee* is linked directly *during network behaviour NOUN* and to *networking_value* as well as to mixed set of concepts to the left of the tag.

The different configuration of concepts around each tag provides further information about the interviews. The concept set adjacent to *Facilitator* is tightly connected which indicates conceptual consistency across the interviews. This is in part because there was a single interviewer using a guide. In contrast, the concepts linked to *Interviewee* are greater in number, more disparate and therefore are less tightly connected. This in part reflects that the discourse of interviewees emulated from thirty different individuals who had differing reflections to share.

The ranked concept list presented in Part B of Figure 2 further highlights the centrality and importance of the additional concepts. Thirty-four percent of interview text is coded as the actions of networking (*networking_behaviour VERB*), 16% of the text is concerned with the social structures and objects (*networking_behaviour NOUN*) that surround these actions and 11% is coded as the physical *networking_environment*. Twenty-seven percent of text is coded as *networking_value*. The *pre* and *post networking considerations* (with 3% and 6% of text so coded) are less prominent but are still among the 20 most frequently occurring concepts and have considerable amounts of the text coded. This in combination with the positions of these concepts in Figure 2's map shows that embedded in the discourse of the facilitator and interviewees is consideration of the process of behaviour and behaviour settings that characterize event networking.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings emerging from this analysis provide new insights into event networking practices and processes. The social and physical environments of networking combine with at-event activities to produce outcomes. More specifically our findings indicate:

- That value does emerge from and flow to peoples' professional and personal networks and that this happens in conjunction with building contacts and participating in other event follow up activities
- Some but not all elements of the physical and social environment are associated with networking value
- Other elements of the physical and social environment of the event are associated with networking behaviour
- Networking behaviour is less associated with networking value than anticipated.
- The researcher/facilitator and interviewees conceptualize event behaviour in different ways

Our findings emerge from combing a structured lexicographic/semantic with theoretically informed interpretation. This approach to analysis is particularly useful for this research problem. This automated lexicographic analysis provides a useful and reliable summary of informants' reflections and provides insights into the deeper processes that are operating which are further informed by the literature of behaviour setting. Furthermore, the lexicographic method enables some assessment of the interviewer effect – an ongoing issue in assessing the quality of qualitative work (Turner 2010). Here, consideration of the overall conceptual structure in both Figures 1 and 2 shows that Interviewees have a quite different conceptual structure within their discourse than does the Facilitator. The speaker tags (a quasi-concept that includes only the text spoken by each actor) are positioned about 180 degrees apart on the maps and have entirely different concepts associated with and these concepts are not substantially connected.

This is confirmed by co-occurrence analysis (not shown) which shows that the concepts that most frequently appear in each party's discourse are far from identical. In interviewees' discourse the most frequent concepts are *opportunity*, *group*, *working*, *conversation* and *meet* and in the facilitator's they are *event*, *attend*, *value*, *network* and *professional*. This tells us that a) there is some difference such that the interviewees were not excessively influenced by the facilitator during the interview and thus we can plan greater credence on the validity of their reflections and b) there is some similarity in that the concepts have, on the face of it, some overlap, i.e. both see positives in events. However Interviewees appear to be framing event activities in terms of future potential with concepts such as *opportunity*, *conversation* and *meet* that may lead to despite the facilitator's focus on actual outcomes with concepts like *value*, *attend* and *professional* and *network*.

These findings provide an important foundation for further research. A coherent framework in which to analyse the reflections of those who have networked at one or more events enables a richer and more comprehensive comparison of the observed behaviour at events and participants' reflections about it. This is the next step in this research project. Our primary goal in this analysis will not be to test informants' memories of how they behaved but rather to marry the different insights that each type of information provides (as discussed by Wilkinson and Young 2004) and thereby gain synergies of insight.

This research has obvious implications for managers. Companies invest in their staff by sending them to professional events (although this is not the sole reason for attendance). A greater understanding of event processes and perceived value of events can help organisations

to better allocate resources to events, provide training for staff who attend events to assist in improving their effectiveness at them and to determine who the best ambassadors for their organisation are. This research provides an initial step towards this understanding. In addition, an understanding of the nature of the value for the individuals in attending events can facilitate more effective networking practices and better utilization of the contacts that are made as well as better integration of these contacts into attenders' social and professional networks as well as the networks of the relevant organisations.

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