Introduction to networking

**Session objectives**

* Postdocs given an opportunity to share their initial thoughts about networking.
* Postdocs given some definitions of networking and the key elements drawn out.
* Discussion of some of the academic evidence for networking to demonstrate its effectiveness, but balanced with an appreciation that it can be difficult (draining/anxiety-inducing) for some.
* Postdocs introduced to some of the key concepts of networking e.g. connection marketing and network diversity.
* Postdocs shown two videos from networking strategist Jeni Smith about building confidence ahead of networking and establishing trust in networks and relationships.

**Sessions this links to/is preparation for**

As the postdocs leave this session they should have a greater understanding of what networking is and why it is worthwhile engaging with it, particularly for their career development. The content of this session is good preparation for more advanced videos and resources provided by Jeni Smith on different aspects of networking, particularly at in-person and virtual networking events.

It also links well to the session on career exploration strategies where postdocs are taken through three strategies to explore different careers. All of these strategies end with a call to reach out to others. So, hints and tips for effective networking is useful here.

The video on Personal branding and positioning using LinkedIn also discusses how to expand your network on LinkedIn. There is another session on ‘Speaking with other professionals’ that is useful for anyone who has any barriers or fears around networking. Finally, the resources on conducting informational interviews also link well to this introduction to networking session, in terms of identifying and reaching out to people (being active rather than passive).

**Session format/s (inc. virtual/face-to-face/live or on-demand)**

* 1hr live virtual session or in-person.
* A recorded on-demand session (17 mins)

**Maximum number of participants for this session (also ideal participant/facilitator ratio)**

Audience participation in polls and chat, so would not suit more than about 30 participants. One facilitator for every 15 attendees might be suitable, so one person can field for responses in the chat and start the poll and the other can lead the session.

**Is this session scalable? If, so how many participants could it be opened up to?**

Would be possible to scale the session because it is mostly giving information (in lecture format), but interactive parts mean scaling to 100+ would need more facilitators and use of breakout rooms/discussion groups. With one facilitator for every 15 attendees, could have multiple breakout rooms and do polls and discussion of thoughts on networking within each breakout room. Need to be aware of limits to numbers on virtual networking platforms such as Zoom/Teams.

**Session running time**

* Live running time 1 hr
* On-demand running time – 17 mins.

**Session overview**

Polls and whole group discussion to start the session. Polls quickly make the session interactive and gauge how familiar and comfortable the group is with networking. This helps for the facilitator to get an idea of general feelings and for the postdocs to see that their views are being listened to (networking does not come naturally to lots of people). The poll asks for their immediate thoughts (‘gut reaction’ towards networking).

This is followed up by asking them to delve deeper into these thoughts by asking for phrases/emotions/people/places that they associate with networking (done in the chat box, but can also be done in person or groups using sticky notes). The session then moves on to defining what networking is and gives examples of how you might have already been networking as a postdoc without realising (can get audience participation here too).

The session then moves on to look at the value of networking from a career development perspective, with discussion of some of the academic literature in this area. The audience is then introduced to some key concepts in networking from networking strategist Jeni Smith (Know-Like-Trust, network diversity, connection marketing and adding value to others). A slide then follows on networking for career development, touching upon reaching out to others (e.g. for informational interviews).

The session ends with two videos from Jeni Smith, one on building confidence and the other on establishing trust.

**Additional session tools/resources/links**

Confidence worksheet 1 (reflect on your accomplishments) and 2 (set yourself goals) PDFs.

Trust worksheet 1 PDF (finding your ‘why’)

Full script and slide deck

Useful links

### Books and articles

Covey, S. (2006) The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything. Simon and Schuster: New York.

Erikson, T. (2014) Surrounded by Idiots. St Martin’s Essentials: New York.

Fang, Y., Francis, B. and Hasan, I. (2018) ‘CEOs with Diverse Networks Create Higher Firm Value’, Harvard Business Review, April 10. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2018/04/research-ceos-with-diverse-networks-create-higher-firm-value>

Hari, J. (2018) Lost Connections: Why You’re Depressed and How to Find Hope. Bloomsbury: London.

Peterson, J.B. (2019) 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos. Penguin: London.

Turkle, S. (2015) Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age. Penguin: New York.

Heffernan (2021) Academic networks and career trajectory: ‘There’s no career in academia without networks’ High Educ Res & Dev, 40:5, 981-994

Franzen and Hangartner (2006) Social networks and labour market outcomes. European Sociological Review, 22:4, 353-36

Anderson-Gough et al (2006) Professionals, networking and the networked professional, Research in the Sociology of Organizations, 24, 231-256

Blackford (2018) Harnessing the power of communities: career networking strategies for Bioscience PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. FEMS Micro. Lett., 365(8)

Chakraverty. D. (2020). The impostor phenomenon among postdoctoral trainees in STEM: A US-based mixed-methods study. International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 15,329-352

### YouTube videos

[An example of connection marketing: Pretty Woman](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxcU4q6KLyA)

[An example of connection marketing: McDonalds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9mGgHeaEnw)

[Dr Jordan Peterson explains 12 rules for life in 12 minutes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApC0faRYabI)

[Simon Sinek Start with Why TED talk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-fdJzvpX60)

[A quick way to find your why](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1iQjFMiLuE)

**Detailed session running plan**

See Appendix for full script.

* Session outcomes: main learning objectives
* Poll to gauge ‘gut reaction’ towards networking
* Whole group discussion with thoughts in chat window – when I say ‘networking’ to you what words/phrases/people/places/emotions come to mind?
* Go through some dictionary definitions of networking, pulling together the main points
* Go through some examples of how, as postdocs, they might already have been engaging with networking. Ask for more suggestions in the chat.
* Go through some evidence for why networking is effective for career development
* Introduce Jeni Smith, networking strategist and founder of NetKno and her components of networking: Know-Like-Trust
* Go through the importance of diversifying your network
* Introduce the concept of connection marketing – building your brand by being nice
* Go through how networking is also about adding value to others and how you can do this
* Go through slide briefly discussing networking for career development (e.g. informational interviews) and how it can seem that you are being a burden on others, but why this is usually not the case
* Show the videos on how to build confidence ahead of a networking event and how to establish trust within your networks and relationships.

**What does running the session ‘live’ add?**

It helps to run the session live so that they can see that other postdocs have similar concerns and to allay some of their fears surrounding networking. If you are doing it live in-person or even virtually, you can reference the fact that they are networking right now.

**Example copy to use to advertise the session on Eventbrite**

Event title (max. 75 characters) – Introduction to networking

Details>Description>

Summary (max 140 characters) – An overview of what networking is, evidence for its value in career development and some key concepts.

Description – Come along to find out more about networking and why it is worth your while to do it. We will explore your thoughts on networking, go into detail about what it is, how you might have done it as a postdoc, some academic evidence for why it is worth prioritising and take a brief look at some key concepts; network diversity, connection marketing and adding value to others. The session concludes with some advice on how to build confidence ahead of networking events and how to establish trust within your professional network.

**Frequently asked questions/pain points for this session**

After running the session a few times with the Prosper pilot cohorts, the polls that we have conducted indicate that the majority of postdocs are either averse to networking or fear it. You should bear this in mind during this session and subsequent networking sessions. Even though the session aims to demonstrate the value that they can gain from engaging in networking, people have different personalities and so it may not come as easy to some people as others. It can help them if you address this and say that it is not easy and requires some practice, patience and it might be uncomfortable sometimes.

**Time and resource input level**

1. **Basic/Minimum/Lightest** – Signpost postdocs to on-demand video of the session and associated resources for building confidence and establishing trust.
2. **Intermediate** – (all of basic plus some of the following…) Run a similar session live with the interactive elements (polls and discussion groups) to get postdoc thoughts on networking and for them to interact with each other. Field some questions or ask what more they would like to know – it could inform any commissioned sessions you’d like to put on.
3. **Premium/Most intensive** (all of basic and intermediate plus any of the following…) Tailor the resource to your institution, with signposting to internal networking opportunities and perhaps put on some in-person networking events specifically for postdocs so they can practice in a friendly environment. Commission an external professional supplier to deliver an in-person networking event to demonstrate principles and take more Q&A.

**Appendix 1. Live script for session**

Slide 1+2 – Hello and welcome to this session on an introduction to networking. I’m Eamon Dubaissi, a Research Staff Developer with Prosper.

Slide 3 - We shall start by exploring different definitions of networking, pulling out some core principles. We will then look at why networking is so effective as a career development strategy. Then we’ll look more closely at the power of networking, exploring a few key concepts with the help of networking strategist, Jeni Smith. Finally, we will watch a couple of videos, where Jeni discusses how you can build confidence ahead of networking events and establish trust in the relationships you develop.

Slide 4 – But first I’d like to get your immediate thoughts on networking – do you like it, loathe it or tolerate it for the greater good?

Slide 5 – So let’s do a quick straw poll <Zoom, other polling site or in-person> to answer the question ‘what are your immediate thoughts (or gut reaction) towards networking? I’ll give you a few minutes to answer with the following options (I love it, I don’t mind it – can do it if necessary, I hate it, it terrifies me or I don’t really know what it is).

<share results with group and make comments>

Slide 6 – So let’s dig into those thoughts a little bit, when I say ‘networking’ to you, what words/phrases/people/places/emotions immediately come to mind? Please put your thoughts in the chat. I’ll give you a few minutes.

< if in-person session, can use sticky notes or flip-charts or just field answers instead>

<read out comments in the chat>

Thank you for those comments, it will help us in the rest of the session.

Slide 7 – The next question then is, what exactly is networking?

Slide 8 – Here, I’ve taken three definitions to compare and contrast. When you Google it, the definition is ‘The action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts’. Merriam-Webster says networking is ‘The exchange of information or services among individuals, groups or institutions *specifically*: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business’. Finally, Dictionary.com describes it as ‘A supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest’

If we take these definitions as a whole, some key points emerge. Networking requires someone to be proactive – to do something (words such as action and interactive). It involves information transfer (exchange, share) between people (so it involves relationships and social contact) and it is usually related to a professional arena (employment or business)

Slide 9 – So with those definitions in mind, let’s have a think about how you, as a postdoc, might have already been networking during your career. Feel free to post your thoughts in the chat or raise your hand to comment, but these are some of my ideas.

Slide 10 – You may regularly network within your team – for example, in team meetings or when mentoring or showing someone how to do something. You may network with collaborators, in person, on calls or working together on a project. Perhaps, you have the opportunity to network with people in departmental seminars/workshops. Public engagement events are other places where you might network. An obvious one that might come to mind are at conferences (during talks, poster presentations and social events). Perhaps you are part of a local postdoc network or society. Maybe you network on social media or have other interest groups. The point is to get you thinking that networking is probably something you are doing anyway without realising. It is bringing awareness to it that can help you tp make the most of opportunities.

Slide 11 – But why network at all? What is the evidence that employing networking as a career development strategy is effective?

Slide 12 – Well, there are actually quite a lot of studies that have looked at the power of networking, but I’ll draw your attention to just a few examples here. Taking academia in isolation, a recent study of over 100 working academics found that most participated in some form of networking and considered it beneficial for their career. If you see the title of this paper, it uses a quote ‘There’s no career in academia without networks’. Another study showed that graduates who received jobs through social contacts tended to get jobs that fitted them better in terms of their educational attainment and these jobs offered better career prospects. Taking a longitudinal study from elsewhere, namely two major accountancy firms, it was found that networking is a form of knowledge sharing that helps individuals to manage and develop their careers. The authors of this article came up with the concept of the ‘networked professional’ – a type of identity which benefited those displaying this behaviour in terms of opportunities received.

Slide 13 – there have also been some publications on the value of networking for postdoc specifically. In this quote from Sarah Blackford, ‘Networking is sometimes viewed cynically as ‘using people’ or dismissed as the ‘old boy network’…….but it can be more valuable than other job-related skills’

However, another study of postdocs identifying as having imposter syndrome, many said they had difficulty networking, with the thought of networking being draining, inducing anxiety, feelings of incompetence and a sense of not belonging’. So, we recognise that it can be difficult for postdocs to engage in networking activities, which is why Prosper is spending time exploring it further, offering tips and strategies to help.

Slide 14 – So now I want to take the opportunity to explore a few key concepts of networking. These have come from Jeni Smith, a networking strategist and founder of NetKno, who also appears later in the presentation with videos on how to build confidence ahead of networking and establish trust within your network.

Slide 15 – Jeni describe the components of networking as being Know, Like and Trust. People first need to know that you exist and what you do/offer. They then need to like you (or your product/service) and finally they need to trust you and what you represent. It is networking that provides the opportunities to create and establish these components.

Slide 16 – The next concept is network diversity. Jeni advocates for diversifying your network. In simple terms, if people don’t have conversations across boundaries then they don’t stimulate new ideas and innovations. This is represented here with academia, where you may know lots of people within the boundaries of academia, but less people in other areas, and these other circles could represent companies, government or the technology sector, to give a few examples.

Slide 17 – The same applies to career development and career exploration. If you don’t have the conversations with a diverse group of people, how do you really know what your options are and how do you build a picture of where you are heading – what roles are out there that would suit you. The image represents you allowing others in, in order to share information.

Slide 18 – The next concept is connection marketing and Jeni describes this as the promotion of yourself and your work through effective relationship management and match-making. A nice line is - to build your brand by being nice, where you can showcase your qualities in even very small interactions, and this helps to build rapport.

Networking is not a one-way street, you can create opportunities, share information and add significant value to those who know you.

Slide 19 – This notion of adding value to others is evident in small gestures. For example, giving introductions for opportunities, sharing knowledge and being reliable (which builds trust). And also providing ongoing support to nurture relationships. For example, simply liking and sharing on social media, calling the person or larger gestures, such as hosting events.

Slide 20 – so at this point, I just want to divert to discuss one strategy that we strongly encourage for career development and that is to conduct informational interviews.

Slide 21 - Before embarking on these networking interactions, you might feel that you are taking up a person’s time or being a burden, without adding too much value to them in return. However, you should zoom out to see the bigger picture. First of all, most people want to help others and if they don’t reply to you, it is more likely that they are extremely busy rather than being actively hostile, so don’t be put off. This is because it is rewarding to help others – what would your reaction be to someone coming to you for careers advice? It’s almost guaranteed that they have been helped before in the past and if they realise the value of networking, they’ll also know that your paths might cross again (taking us back to connection marketing).

Slide 22 – to end this talk, I now want to hand over to Jeni Smith who has recorded two videos on how to build confidence ahead of networking and how to establish trust with the connections you make. She also refers to some worksheets in the videos, which are available on the Prosper portal.

Slide 23 – here’s Jeni telling us about how to put yourself in a confident state to network. <Go to time points (see presentation) in on-demand video>.

Slide 24 – In this next video, Jeni gives some tips on establishing trust within your networks and relationships. <Go to time points (see presentation) in on-demand video>

Slide 25 – Thank you for taking the time to listen to this introduction to networking talk – I hope you have been inspired to go out and network and be a bit more conscious of what you are doing and what benefits it has. Good luck