

7 NETWORKING

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Structure



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Learning Objectives



After going through Unit 7, it is expected that you would be able to

- ❖ Define networking, its concept, need, features and components
- ❖ Conduct networking through ICT in adult literacy programmes
- ❖ Differentiate communities of practices (CoPs) versus electronic networks of practices (EnoPs) and knowledge sharing.

7.1 Introduction

Besides documentation and its dissemination, an adult educator can improve the facilities and services of the adult education set-up by networking. You

may ask, “What is meant by networking?” Unit 7 answers this question in detail and helps you to understand its significance for your profession.

7.2 What is a Network?

A network is a social structure made of nodes which are generally individuals or organizations. It indicates the ways in which they are connected through

various social familiarities ranging from casual acquaintance to close familial bonds. Networking is basically an inter-institutional arrangement intended to

break information isolation. The term was first coined by Barnes (1954). Networking involves a set of skills and activities relying heavily on effective **i n t e r p e r s o n a l** communication for gathering, processing, and moving information in organisation. Networking is a set of behaviors that take place within the context of organisations. However, networking has become a popular term in the day to day conversation and is often considered to be related to job seeking and personal advancement with an emphasis on self-promotion and trying to use others for ones' own ends.

None of us can survive in business or other profession without a strong network of information and referral sources. Every person has a network of old schoolmates, relatives, colleagues from former jobs or leisure activities, and friends. The critical factor is your

mindset towards networking-recognising networking as important, not a waste of time. Networking is valuable not simply because of the information you gather, but because of the sense of cooperation or goodwill that you create. Networking is often considered as the hidden side of organizational leadership.

The human network is the social structure composed of individuals, friends, collaborators or other organizations connected through technology using a variety of devices - personal computers, mobile phones, gaming consoles and PDAs. In many instances the term is described synonymously with the architecture of participation. It is the intersection of communications networks and social networks - a telecommunications network where people are the endpoints.

Activity 7.1

Build your network by following the steps given below.

- ❖ Find out who has the information and influence that you need.
- ❖ Develop well rounded relationships that are not all “business”. Develop and use your contacts.
- ❖ Try to go to meetings, even if the topic is not of direct relevance to you, to meet other people. Talk to everyone you know about opportunities.
- ❖ Find those friendly network spiders, those types of people who just seem to know everyone.
- ❖ Warm up long-cold contacts.
- ❖ Get into the habit of being talkative.

7.2.1 Definition and Concept of Networking

Networking is the building and maintaining of relationships with a wide range of individuals, groups, or institutions who share common interests, goals, or expertise. Networking implies that the relationships between people are the determining factor in programs.

Women face different challenges than men in the workplace. To meet these challenges successfully women need to network. Networking is about sharing information, ideas, resources, opportunities. Members of a network look to each other for advice, tips on jobs, careers and employment and create a support system for each other. These informal strategic alliances can benefit you greatly.

Networking is emerging as an important concept in the study of professional effectiveness and advancement, leadership, and organisations. It has been linked to studies of leadership power and influence skills, career-development and promotion tactics, organisational structure and communication processes. Networking has become popularised and is often considered to be related to job seeking and personal advancement, with an emphasis on self-promotion and trying to use others for one’s own ends (Stark 1985).

7.2.2 Need for Networking

In any organisation there are structured groups like different departments, or work groups and unstructured or informal groups. Individuals’

involvement in unstructured groups is important, because networking is becoming the best way to accomplish things in organization(See Box 7.1). Albrecht and Ropp have found that workers discussed new and innovative ideas in an unstructured group more freely than in a structured group or in a hierarchical role relationship.

7.2.3 Various Features of Networking

Networking is characterized by the following features:

- ❖ Ongoing, purposeful interaction
- ❖ Cooperation
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ People centeredness
- ❖ Complex and diverse interconnections
- ❖ Open ended and flexible progression

Box 7.1 Steps to More Effective Networking

- ❖ **Define your objective:** Focus on what you want to achieve and how people can help you. Think about what you can do for members of your network in exchange for information, contacts and support.
- ❖ **Be Visible and Approachable:** Go out of your way to be where people are. Be cheerful, confident and straightforward.
- ❖ **Make contact:** Select the best approach and initiate the conversation. Wait for a response. Mention common interests. Report news of interest.
- ❖ **Get the contact of the people you meet:** Not just their business card but other key information that can be stapled with their card.
- ❖ **Follow up** on information, advice or leads given to you.

7.2.4 Networking Components

It is essential to approach networking systematically. In order to develop a good network you should be able to answer the following types of questions:

- ❖ In which organisations / events do you need to be visible?
- ❖ What kinds of referral sources do you need, and where / how can you meet them?
- ❖ Who can influence potential people to choose you, and how can you meet them?

- ❖ Who are already your advocates and can introduce you to others?

Different people have different attitudes to networking. All persons are not natural net workers. Some can develop strong networking skills with a little help, and others are really not comfortable meeting strangers especially in new cultures. You would find different attitudes towards networking among different types of net worker as you can make out below.

The Passive Net worker: They have little interest in meeting new people. Instead, they will gravitate to people they already know, wasting the chance to expand their contacts(See Box7.2).

The Inquisitive Net worker: This type of people takes initiative but behaves like a detective interrogating suspects. They draw out other people and may learn a lot, but sooner or later the fact that they do not share any information will make others stop trusting them.

Social Net worker: This type takes appropriate initiative in meeting new people but keeps the conversation on a social level. They may be very popular and receive many social invitations - and so can be very valuable in your networking strategy. However, they need to understand how to engage in commercial information exchanges as well.

Dedicated Net worker: They initiate appropriately and are constantly looking

for ways to be helpful to others. In return, the latter often share with them valuable market information and intelligence. These staff members are the heart of your networking team and should receive your active support and are rewarded for their efforts.

Even some of those who have strongly supported the view that effectiveness of networking centres around, the objective to further ones' own interest have started seeing the limited scope of this self serving framework. They say that knowing how to network is practically knowing how to be helpful to the people with whom we work and ask for help in return. In reality, interdependence not independence is the key to getting somewhere in the work world. Such attitude expresses what is best about networking ability to create an effective support system for yourself that also works to the advantage of others.

Box 7.2 Tips on How to be Visible while Networking

- ❖ Ask a question at a conference.
- ❖ Make a point in a meeting.
- ❖ Discuss a book with an industry leader.
- ❖ Make people laugh.
- ❖ Have an opinion on everything.
- ❖ Send cards at Christmas or New Year to remind your contact that you exist.

Networking is now becoming as emerging style of functioning within the organization. People are increasingly learning from one another horizontally; everyone is becoming a resource for everyone else; and each person is receiving professional support and assistance from many directions. In this scenario, one can identify the following as strategies for successful networking (McHale 1987)

- ❖ Finding the right track to multiple sources of information related to a

- project;
- ❖ Bridging the information flow between functions such as finance and marketing;
- ❖ Communicating by both formal and informal means to accomplish projects;
- ❖ Doing things and/or gathering information without overpowering others;
- ❖ Managing the give and take of information flow within an organization or between

organizations, often outside formal organization lines and;

- ❖ Facilitating the interchange among individuals who serve as resources to obtain a specific goal.

It has been found that networking can be a decisive factor in the working of a successful organisation. Research has proved that workers are more likely to talk about new ideas with those colleagues with whom they also discussed work and personal matters. Tacit knowledge is shared relatively easily between individuals within the

community, often without ever being made explicit.

And those who are well integrated into networks of social relationship at work are more likely to participate in decision making. They can see clearly how they contribute to group performance and share in the rewards of group performance. It has also been found that highest number of innovation has taken place in those organisations where collaboration, free flow of information and coalitions built of supporters are the dominant characteristics.

Activity 7.1

Imagine a younger colleague comes to you and asks help in writing a short essay on 'Networking'. The colleague asks the following basic questions. In order to help your colleague you need to read the above sections from 7.2.1 to 7.2.4 carefully and answer the questions asked. The colleague requests you to put your answers in writing for future reference. Write down your answers and oblige the colleague.

- ❖ What does one actually do while 'networking'?
- ❖ Why has networking now become so important?
- ❖ What are the key features of networking?
- ❖ Do you ever utilize any of the steps of effective networking within your organisation? If yes, give details of the steps. If no, give reasons for not doing so.
- ❖ How can a passive net-worker be turned into a dedicated net-worker?
- ❖ Mention any three tips on how to be visible without really trying while networking.

7.3 Networking through Information and Communication Technology

Now a days, organisations are investing in ICT that create intra-organisational electronic network. The purpose is to have "bridging ties" between geographically dispersed organisational members. The main objective is to provide a platform to communication through which individuals working on similar problems may quickly ask each other for help on task related problem(See Box 7.3).

Educators and policy makers need to

stay alert to the need for programs that maintain the principle of providing a positive, useful, and quality service.

i) Professional Development: New Technologies, while helpful in certain key ways, also create new problems, the foremost of which is training individuals (learners and teachers) how to implement them in a cost-effective manner. Sometimes the training process becomes very expensive, and nearly counterproductive (when in the midst

of repaid platform and software changes). The Internet promises, in some respects to be relatively easy to train on and with.

ii) Technological Lifelong Learning: Using Online networking technology and the Internet not only provides adult learners with new opportunities for literacy and basic skills instruction but the use of these technologies themselves provide new technological literacy skills that adult learners can utilize in the work place, for personal reasons, and in the future for additional lifelong learning at higher levels.

In sum, Internet-based network technology is one of the most promising areas for literacy work in the world. The benefits of this technology seem well matched with the following

problems in the literacy field:

- (a) The dispersed and diverse population of adult learners,
- (b) The limited and thinly distributed expertise in learning diagnosis, and
- (c) The need to connect learners and instructions interactively in an asynchronous manner that takes advantages of learners needs for independence along with their unavailability for formal classroom instruction.

The uses of technology for adult literacy and adult education have been growing exponentially in recent years, from computer-assisted instruction to the information highway and to the simple improvements engendered by the use of personal computers in management and information systems.

Box 7.3 Follow-up Strategies

Networking does not stop with meeting people. An information management process is critical to your success. Some ideas to help you build and maintain a strong network:

- ❖ Note the function, date and key issues on the business cards you collect as soon as possible (but not in the presence of the card giver).
- ❖ Have a standard follow-up letter ready to send out when you return to the office. Remember that you are likely to be very busy at that time, so being prepared in advance is helpful.
- ❖ Set up a mailing database to track information and make correspondence easy.
- ❖ Find reasons to keep in touch. Send the person copies of papers you have written, news clippings they might be interested in, anything to keep your capabilities in their minds.

Activity 7.2

Prepare a database of adult education functionaries of your area and build up a network to share success stories of adult learning known to you and innovations in adult learning that have been carried out by you.

7.3.1 Technology, the Internet and Adult Literacy

One can argue that in theory, electronic-based technologies are a source of exponential growth in the field of adult

literacy. All things being equal, that is, inexpensive access to broadband width of internet facility, uninterrupted supply of power and clear link between literacy and poverty alleviation, it is possible to

effectively work on the interface between technology, the Internet and adult literacy.

i) Electronic Technologies

Computers, wireless communications, videotapes, and the like - are now being incorporated into elementary, secondary, business, and college level education. Adult literacy programs, in contrast, still lag far behind in using these newer technologies for instruction. Studies show that many adult literacy programs have a foothold in technology, but this is mainly in the use of microcomputers for administrative purposes, not instructional ones.

Economic considerations clearly are a major impediment to technology implementation in adult literacy programs.

ii) Need of Network in Adult Literacy

These technologies hold enormous promise for the future because they can:

- ❖ Reduce the isolation that many adult literacy providers and students experience,
- ❖ Facilitate communication among staff and students within and between programs
- ❖ Increase access to high quality materials and emerging research,
- ❖ Streamline administrative and reporting processes, and
- ❖ Help to provide the delivery vehicle for innovative instructional and staff development approaches.

However, we need to keep in mind that across these new technologies, there is also inadequate staff training and lack of information on effective implementation and specialised uses.

7.3.2 Advantages of Networking and Internet Technology

There are some clear advantages of networking and Internet technology both for adult learners and for adult literacy programs.

For learners, this would include

- ❖ reaching learners outside of the classroom,
- ❖ using learning time more efficiently,
- ❖ sustaining motivation
- ❖ individualizing instruction and
- ❖ providing access to information tools.

For adult literacy programs, this would include

- ❖ improved recruiting and training of learners,
- ❖ improving curriculum
- ❖ meeting staff development needs
- ❖ enhancing assessment and curriculum, and
- ❖ streamlining coordination, management and administration.

7.3.3 Internet Services

The Internet allows each of us to share information and resources such as government documents, electronic publications, online books, media publishing, human anatomical images, computer software, bibliographic and full-text databases, speeches, live concerts, animal sounds, and motion videos. The Internet's dynamic nature is delivered from world citizens contributing their time, resources and energies to each other.

Users consult electronic resources at libraries; download computer shareware and software upgrades. A few usages of the Internet can be listed.

- ❖ To trade with people or other organizations
- ❖ To access information on Internet, you need a browser-software. Examples of the browser can be Netscape, Internet Explorer etc.

The World Wide Web (WWW) can be defined as a hypertext, multimedia, distributed information system that

provides links to hypertext documents, as well as too many other Internet tools and databases. There are several features that are unique to the Web that make it the most advanced information system to appear on the Internet to date. See Box 7.4 for information on Search Engine and Network-based Information Services.

Box 7.4 Search Engine

There are several tools to find information on Internet. Search engines are one of their examples of search engines can be Google (www.google.com), HotBot (www.hotbot.com), dogpile (www.dogpile.com) etc.

Network-based Information Services

- ❖ Resource Sharing, Virtual Libraries, Computer Mediated Communication, Web Publishing, Other Services
- ❖ Infrastructure Requirements Hardware, Software, Human ware, Technologies for Networking, Network architecture etc
- ❖ Organization of Information

Resources Digital resources, Non-print media, Content creation, Metadata tools, Research networks, Institution networks etc

- ❖ Network Policy and Governance Participation in INFLIBNET, Legal and Copyright issues, Economics of centralised database services Institutional policies etc.

Activity 7.3

Your younger colleagues has come to you once again asking for help in applying the ideas about networking to adult learning. In order to help her, you first read the paragraphs in sub-section 7.3.1 to sub-section 7.3.3 and then write down for her the answers of the following questions.

- ❖ What are the specific needs of networking in adult literacy?
- ❖ How can Networking and Internet Technology be of advantage for adult learners?
- ❖ How does Internet allow us to share information?
- ❖ What are the network-based Information Services?

7.3.4 Electronic Networks of Practice (EnoPs)

In an effort to replicate traditional social networks electronically, organisations are now investing in computer-mediated communication technologies to facilitate knowledge sharing regardless of time and space constraints. These emergent virtual communities are referred as

electronic networks of practice (EnoPs).

Needles to say, communication within this network of practice occurs primarily through computer-based communication technologies such as bulletin board, listservs etc.

One of the main characteristics of ENoPs is that the participants in the network interact with one another to help each other solve problems. By posting a message, individuals seeking help can reach out others who can provide valuable knowledge and insight in response. The posting of messages and responses is recorded like a conversation between participants. This shows active mutual engagement in problem solving; and the characteristic of mutual engagement distinguishes it from more static form of electronic knowledge exchange, such as document repositories and other types of database.

Another characteristic of an ENoP is the fact that the technology supports any number of participants. As a result knowledge seekers are not limited to asking only experts whom they personally know or able to identify, thus increasing the possibility of connecting with someone willing and able to help. In addition, knowledge in an ENoP is typically archived and available to all participants in the network. This ultimately creates an online repository of questions and answers that can be

referred to later by any individual regardless of the fact whether he or she had participated in the original discussion. The value of an ENoP increases dramatically as the number of participants rises.

Moreover, in an ENoP, participation is open to anyone with a desire to interact. The electronic links created by the Internet and related technologies that enable individuals to communicate are practically ubiquitous, thus membership is open to anyone with a desire whether they want to participate as well as how often they participate. They have the choice to determine what they want to contribute, choosing what knowledge they are willing to disclose as well as the length of the message they contribute influencing the quality and helpfulness of the knowledge exchanged. The characteristic of discretionary choices regarding participation and knowledge sharing differentiates an ENoP from other form of virtual work, such as virtual teams in which the members of participants are expected to coordinate efforts to deliver a specific outcome (see box 7.5).

Box 7.5 Example

An example of online participatory networking is *ohmy News*, a sort of online newspaper. It is an example of 'citizen journalism' in action. The website of this South Korean newspaper gets an average of 700,000 visitors and two million page views a day, which puts it in the same league as a large newspaper. But *ohmy News* has no reporters on its staff at all. Instead, it relies on amateurs or citizens to contribute the articles. The newspaper is a 'playground' for South Korean hobbyists. The articles are of good quality as South Korea has a good educated 'people power'. *Ohmy News* has a build-in-feedback and rating systems so that the best articles rise to the top.

One of the biggest innovations of this newspaper is economic. The site has 'tip-jar' system that invites readers to reward good work with small donations. All they have to do is click a little tip-jar button to have their mobile phone or credit-card account debited. The system is working well. In addition, advertising and syndication revenue helps it to run smoothly. The success of *Ohmy News* has wide ramifications in South Korea's media industry. Many newspaper sites now have feedback and conversation passes at bottom of online articles and are trying to interact more with readers (*Economist: A Survey of New Media*, April 22, 2006).p.7.

In addition to these, participants in an ENoP are strangers. Knowledge exchange in an ENoP occurs between people regardless of personal acquaintance, familiarity or location. Since participation is voluntary, knowledge seekers have no control over

who responds to their questions. On the contrary, in a traditional social network, people typically know one another and interact overtime creating expectations of obligations and reciprocity that are enforced through social sanctions.

Activity 7.4

Your younger colleague is much baffled by acronym ENoP and its meanings. Please write down the full form of the acronym and explain its meaning and help her to find answer of the following questions:

- ❖ What does ENoP stand for and what is its meaning?
- ❖ Why is it better to share knowledge through ENoPs?
- ❖ How can Internet help you to build a network of Adult educators?
- ❖ How can you get a feel of 'best practices' in your field through an ENoP?
- ❖ In what way an ENoP is different from a conventional social network?

7.4 Why of Networking

Electronic Networks of Practice is an excellent means of improving one's own level of technical competence. Additionally it helps to keep current with technical developments as well as to know who was actively working in different areas. Technically or otherwise people gain competitiveness.

There seem to be a variety of reasons why people help each other. As the saying goes, nothing comes free, in order to receive help from the network, individuals feel obligated to help others in return, a strong sense of reciprocity.

In some organisations, like knowledge management companies, helping others is a part of their job. Through their participation they are able to improve level of technical competence of network as a whole and ultimately enhance organisation's competitiveness in the market.

The participants of ENoP gain exposure to critical new ideas. They get help and advice not available locally.

Studies indicate that individuals participate in ENoPs outperform their colleagues who primarily rely on their colleagues for knowledge and advice.

A database of all the postings / questions can be made. This shall help individuals to find previously discussed topics as well as a means to educate people on how to use email or list serve technology give here examples of Adult education / community participation questions.

7.4.1 Problems Associated with Networking

In case of List serve mailing lists, even though mail is received in the mail box, yet there is much unsolicited mail. The receiver has to go through that. It wastes his much time which otherwise could be utilised in some productive work.

In a discussion form, the participants are required to enter forum actively otherwise he/she gets no postings of the network.

An online CoP may be ephemeral and the knowledge created may be lost, unless proper infrastructure is in place that can sustain what may be learned.

7.4.2 EnoP and Participation and Helping Others

Higher levels of participation and tenure in the EnoP are associated with both acquisition of knowledge from participation in the network and contributing knowledge to others. In addition, both knowledge acquisition from and knowledge contribution to the network are positively related to individual performance. Level of participation in the network is more important for supporting positive knowledge outcomes than the length of time an individual has participated. This implies that newcomers to the network can reap the same benefits of participation as long as standing participants.

EnoPs are a type of collective in which the knowledge exchanged and created is the collective's public good. Mutual engagement in an EnoP is open and voluntary. Participation typically results in the creation of a knowledge repository of archived messages that is available to all individuals regardless of their original participation.

7.4.3 Knowledge Sharing and Electronic Networks

Tacit knowledge is shared relatively

easily between individuals within the community, often without ever being made explicit. Furthermore, these tightly knit social structures facilitate the creation of a shared identity through the development of a common language and social capital (such as norms of behaviour, trust, and obligation), resulting in strong social ties between individuals. These characteristics have been argued as essential for the continuous incremental improvements in the community's practice and the reason why CoPs are centres for learning and innovation within organisations.

In contrast, as mentioned above, interactions in an EnoP are limited text based, asynchronous, computer-mediated communication. As a result, the ability of members to develop a shared identity and common language through narration, collaboration and social construction is hampered. However, EnoPs have a greater reach than CoPs and support the creation of weak electronic "bridging ties" between unlimited numbers of like minded others from across the globe. Due to the extensive reach of these networks, individuals benefit from EnoPs since they gain access to new information, expertise, and ideas that are often not available locally.

7.5 Conclusion

In a nutshell, Unit 7 has explained that networking is an important activity in the field of adult education. The 21st century is witnessing explosion in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and we need to explore ways and means to use the newly

available ICT facilities to establish effective communication through networking for sharing ideas and infrastructures. This would in turn create an atmosphere conducive for spreading education and knowledge to adult population. Survival without

networking is quite impossible now-a-days. Knowingly and unknowingly, we all network in our social circles and in the organisational level. In adult learning set-up it is important to network to facilitate teaching-learning process, to know and implement new innovations in the field, to implement plans,

programmes and policies and to streamline coordination, management and administration. Increasingly, knowledge sharing and resource building in adult education centres is catching up with time. Hence, for every adult educator networking is an area which can not be overlooked.

7.6 Apply What You Have Learnt

Have you formed an Adult Learners Association (ALA) in your region? If yes, make efforts for Adult Learners Association (ALA) to create a “Social Network Site” on which knowledge can be shared by way of placing

- ❖ Relevant articles - information on web and

- ❖ Events of particular institutions.

If no, as an adult educator, make efforts to initiate the process so that an ALA may be formed and it can then move in the direction of creating a ‘Social Network Site’.

