

9 NETWORKING AND ADULT LEARNING

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Structure



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Learning Objectives



It is expected that after going through this lesson you will be able to

- ❖ Discuss the basics of professional networking
- ❖ Enumerate diverse types of networking
- ❖ Appreciate the relevance and importance of networking

9.1 Introduction

After reading in detail about networking and computer networks in Unit 7 and Unit 8 respectively, you come to Unit 9, which is about accessing and linking with resources available in the field of your profession. When you carry out this activity in an organized fashion, we call it the process of networking. The purpose of this lesson is to increase your

ability to network, so that you are able to network for a specific purpose. We will first briefly talk about networking in the context of adult learning and then in Unit 10 you will read about Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network (ALADIN), which is a global network of adult learning.

9.2 Networking

Before we can effectively discuss about ALADIN, let us understand what a network is and why we network. Since networking is a social activity, it is relatively simple and easy to apply its methods for building a professional network so that you are in know of

emerging themes in your profession, able to use consultation to organize your activities at work, ensure that you receive credit for your innovations and above all learn to engage professionally with active scholars from different disciplines and cultures. So in a nutshell

we are here concerned with the relationship between your professional network and your work. Both reflect the process of weaving yourself and your work into a set of professional links. You have already understood the nuts and bolts of networking and computer networking in Unit 7 and Unit 8, respectively and here we will discuss network building and concepts that underlie this process and try to follow a more advanced theory of networking that includes the process by which your work interests in adult learning become institutionalized. So here are the fundamentals of professional networking.

9.2.1 What is a Network?

Network refers to accessing the links from relevant people/ resources we know to people/ resources they know. We are here using the term “relevance”, in functional terms, that is, you know how your professional world operates and with whom you have a mutual interest in your profession. Your

network will in this sense comprise those with interests similar to your professional interests.

The process of accessing the links is established in an organized way, for a specific purpose. Networking involves establishing goals, analyzing the kinds of help you will need in achieving your goals, analyzing and developing your skills, building and cultivating your network accordingly, keeping in mind that people like to give advice, people like recognition, people like to be helpful. Furthermore, knowing about and accessing resources referred to by those who belong to one’s network has always helped in analyzing and developing one’s professional skills. In a network, one is always receiving help and at the same time one is also enriching the network by sharing knowledge and resources and by offering to enhance its size and quality of its database. In this sense networking is like a two-way street. It is not just asking for help, but agreeing to be helpful in return.

Activity 9.1

State at least two goals for which you would like to be part of a network and then write in 200 words the kind of skills you would like to develop in order both to give help and receive help.

9.2.2 Two Basic Principles of Professional Social Life

In considering the way to become a part of a professional network, you encounter two fundamental principles of professional social life. The first one pertains to articulation of commonalities. In other words, you develop relationships with people on the basis of shared values, shared goals, shared research interests, or anything else of a professional nature that you would share with others in your

profession. In order to articulate commonalities, you need to formulate a distinct language for establishing your professional relationships. Since the people who excel in the field of your profession (adult learning) often live in different parts of the world and hold worldviews quite different from your own, you will certainly need to learn to express yourself in a language that is understood by your professional colleagues at home and abroad.

Having understood one dimension of the

first fundamental principle of social life, let us discuss the other dimension of this principle which pertains to exploration of differences, disagreements, debates and other engines to promote clear and analytical thinking. It is no use to avoid conflict in your professional relationships. Rather you need to be able to assert your opinions in public at professional forums. Of course, disagreements are always conducted within the framework of articulated commonalities and therefore the principle of articulating commonalities is the secret of sustaining your membership of a professional network.

The second principle of professional life refers to what we sociologists like to call “structural holes”. You may like to read more about this concept in Ronald Burt’s book, *Structural Holes: the Social Structure of Competition*, published by Harvard University Press in 1995. A structural hole refers to a group of people who do not know each other but professionally speaking ought to know. Your professional interests define a

structural hole and you get a place in that hole because you have formed relationships with all those whose professional interests are linked to your professional interests in several different directions. The fact of different directions is indeed relevant because your professional relationships are mostly with those from different communities and regions. The more diverse people/ resources you form relationships with, the more unforeseen opportunities will arise for your own professional growth as well as for theirs. Being placed in a structural hole that contains professionals in several other communities, you need not fear the isolation of a limited world of relationships within your own professional colleagues. You enter a professional network through the Internet. In order to learn about using the Internet for this purpose, you need to refer to information about internet tools explained in any basic course on computer operations for beginners, if you do not already possess the relevant skills.

Activity 9.2

Identify common values, goals and research interests you share with fellow adult educators and list the number and nature of social relationships you have formed within India.

9.3 Diverse Types of Networking

As we all know networks can be very diverse. Krolak (2003) has mentioned the following types in a Handout on Networking.

- ❖ horizontal (same sector, same level), vertical (same sector, different level) or cross sectoral (different sectors, different level)
- ❖ informal, more formal (some form of co-ordination) or formal

(registration with legal and financial responsibilities)

- ❖ local, national or international
- ❖ unrestricted or restricted
- ❖ centralized or decentralized
- ❖ highly structured or unstructured

Activity 9.3

Try and access the following websites, which are in fact very useful ones for PALDIN learners and discover the type of networking each one belongs to. Please note that you may not find all the links functioning at the time you would try to open them. Often one link may not be functioning or may have been withdrawn or may have been in the process of its updating, so do not despair and keep trying to access. You may find some websites still operational and quite useful for you. On the part of those in-charge of PALDIN course material development, there will be efforts to update this list. All the same, it is better to approach this exercise with caution and not feel disappointed if you can not open some of the links listed below.

The List of Useful Links for PALDIN Learners

Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) <http://www.bellanet.org/adultlearning/inde10.cfm> a comprehensive site with documents and an extensive bibliography of publications on adult education and learning. It includes information, list of participants and on-line archives of contribution to the ABLE online forum that took place in May and June 2002.

Andragogy Net <http://www.andragogy.net/> It includes information on upcoming adult education conferences and international and national organizations and institutions.

Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) <http://www.aspbae.org> ASPBAE'S fundamental purpose is to defend and advance the rights of adults throughout the Asia-Pacific Region to learn throughout their lives in order to gain control of their destiny.

Commonwealth of Learning <http://www.col.org/> (ALADIN Member) A comprehensive site with information, electronic resources, and knowledge services on distance education and learning.

Educational Resource Information Center <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> Access to ERIC's databases, all clearinghouses, publications, ERIC's digests, information services and updates from the system.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education (ERIC/ACVE) <http://www.ericacve.org/> (ALADIN Member) A comprehensive site with a variety of information resources including access to ERIC's databases and information services, database of ERIC/ACVE publications, In-process abstracts, links to a variety of information services and resources, listings of electronic journals, and access to a variety of relevant sites.

European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) <http://www.eaea.org/> (ALADIN Member) Website includes information on the activities of EAEA and its member organizations, directory of members, news and events on adult education and documents on adult and lifelong education policy in Europe.

Informal Education <http://www.infed.org/> Provides access to the online encyclopedia of informal education and to e-archives of informal education documents and publications.

International Bureau of Education (IBE) <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/Links/linkhome.htm> (ALADIN Member) A comprehensive collection of links to education-related resources, documents, organizations, conferences, data and other information sources.

International Council for Adult Education <http://www.web.net/icae> (ALADIN Member) Maintained by the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) this site includes information on ICAE activities, projects and publications, directory of regional and national member organizations, and current news and events related to adult education and learning.

UNESCO Education Sector <http://www.unesco.org/education> (ALADIN Member) Includes news and information on UNESCO's programmes, activities and publications in the education sector. Access to Education Today magazine. Provides addresses and links to

UNESCO offices, institutes and networks. The Virtual Library contains references to educational materials published by UNESCO. Some full-text materials for downloading are included.

UNESCO Information Sources <http://www.unesco.org/unesdi/> Central access point to UNESCO's bibliographic, referral (directories, projects, etc.) and full text databases produced by UNESCO; access to libraries, information services, full texts of UNESCO documents, photo bank, worldwide translation database and other materials.

9.4 Why Network?

It has been found that calling someone after a referral generates 80 per cent more results than a cold call without a referral, 75 per cent of people get their jobs through networking. Have you heard about the Law of 250? It refers to a chain of contacts. Every person knows at least 250 other people, each of your contacts knows at least 250 people, so that comes to 62,500 people at your 2nd level of contacts. Each of your 2nd level contacts knows 250 people - and that is over 15,000,000 contacts. Without going into enormous figures

cited above, you can safely say that through your contacts at the first and second levels, you can more reasonably expect to obtain information and other assistance for achieving your goals than you would if you had no contacts at all to tap. In this sense a network is like a tap that you can shut or open as per your needs. You need to of course consciously keep your presence in it alive if you wish to continue to enjoying its benefits. The more you contribute to maintaining it, the better it will serve you.

9.5 Conclusion

After reading the basics of networking in the context of adult learning as described in Unit 9, you will find that in the next unit (unit 10) the account of a network, where diverse interests have come together under one umbrella, will open up for you resources from different regions of the world. Only a network of many networks or a meta-network can link diverse constituent elements into a coherent whole. ALADIN, the Adult Learning Documentation and Information Network, is an excellent example of a meta-network and for

adult educators it is a mine of knowledge and information on adult learning resources. As PALDIN learners you will discover in ALADIN a welcoming platform to receive a vast database and in return it would welcome accounts of your experiences in the area of adult learning, documentation and information.

This is why we have said on the cover page of PALDIN books that PALDIN is the product of an ALADIN-INDIA initiative. Let us learn in detail in Unit 10 about ALADIN.

9.6 Apply What You Have Learnt

Describe in 500 words the nature of networking that you have developed

during your career as adult educator and work out the benefits you have enjoyed

from it. In order to articulate the benefits that you may have accrued from your networking, you may read many benefits of networking given in Box 9.1.

Box 9.1 Benefits of Networking

Krolak (2003) has mentioned in her handout on networking the following of many benefits to networking.

- ❖ Facilitating the exchange of (professional) information, ideas, skills, knowledge, experiences, expertise and materials
- ❖ Linking people of different levels, disciplines, organizations and backgrounds
- ❖ Restricted access to communication tools such as e-mail
- ❖ Providing the critical mass needed for advocacy, action and policy change
- ❖ Providing members with a source of peer support, status, encouragement, motivation and professional recognition.
- ❖ Organizational strengthening
- ❖ Offering capacity building opportunities such as workshop, conferences and exchange programs
- ❖ Providing interpersonal or intercultural relations and communication skills
- ❖ Offering opportunities to access e.g. funds, training, scholarships
- ❖ Recommending or referring individuals or organizations
- ❖ Offering marketing opportunities to a wider audience
- ❖ Creating awareness of similar and shared concerns and common objectives
- ❖ Making best use of (limited) resources and pooling them centrally
- ❖ Joint cataloguing / union catalogue
- ❖ Fighting the feeling of isolation
- ❖ Developing new leadership and improving competence and capabilities
- ❖ Learning from each other
- ❖ Supporting co-operative group work and team building
- ❖ Less duplication of work and effort
- ❖ Working as a group gives a better chance to solve common problems more quickly and effectively

