

Networks that work

Do networks really have the
potential to influence individual,
organisational and societal change?

January 2017

Supported by



WOMEN AHEAD



MOVING AHEAD

Welcome

At Women and Moving Ahead we are committed to the development of leaders in sport and business. Our mission is to drive a global diversity dialogue, and to design and deliver gender-intelligent and inclusive solutions. Large-scale research programmes, like this, enable us to better understand the correlations, traits and environments that underpin individual and organisational success. They also reveal the barriers and opportunities facing many leaders who are striving to be at their best.

Most organisations have employee networks that aim to improve and support diversity and inclusion, but we found there was limited current research into their effectiveness. Diversity is so much more than simply gender or any of the nine protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010 – it is about individual preferences, circumstances and our environment among many other elements. So, whilst the most prevalent form of networks are women's networks, this research spans all diversity network groups.

'Networks that work' aims to help networks perform better for their members by overlaying global qualitative research with a neuroscientific understanding of the workplace. This research identifies that the ability to network effectively is seen as an increasingly important skill for the successful professional, and also that effective networks can play a key role in shaping and creating an inclusive organisational culture. This represents significant opportunities for networks and their Chairs, and this report offers some simple tools and frameworks to use.

Our focus at Women and Moving Ahead is to not merely add to the debate, but to focus on practical action to create positive change. We have developed a range of initiatives and tools to support networks to maximise their impact.

We would like to make special thanks for the support of both PwC and HSBC who have enabled us to carry out this in-depth, challenging, and fascinating research programme.



Chair, Women Ahead and Moving Ahead



“ Our networks are recognised as an important contributor to creating our organisational culture. Our networks help to develop this at all levels and build our brand internally and externally. ”

Brandi Greene, Oliver Wyman

“ Networks are a great way to demonstrate inclusivity in process. ”

Uzma Hamid-Dizier, Slaughter and May

“ Ultimately the network is about engagement, having a space for employees and changing culture. It is hard to measure specific impact, but my view is that if we positively influence even three people, then we are achieving success. ”

Jonni Learoyd, Channel 4

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Foreword

Jane Booth

HEAD OF RESEARCH, WOMEN AHEAD AND MOVING AHEAD

My introduction to Women and Moving Ahead came when I met Rebecca Davies. We maintained a connection which translated, a year later, into my role as Head of Research at Women and Moving Ahead.

As a qualitative researcher who is fascinated by people and their stories, it has been a privilege to speak with such an array of phenomenal people who openly shared their insights and experiences into networks. Equally, as someone who has a strong desire to create and support cultural change around inclusion at an individual, organisational and societal level, I have relished the opportunity to combine my research experience and personal interests through this research. My PhD on leadership and the management of change have helped position this work within the wider context for change, and frame the recommendations so that this research can create meaningful and practical change for individuals and organisations.

The report, which is supported by a detailed white paper, will take you through our findings and recommendations. Adopting a 'theory meets practice' approach has given this work a solid foundation in existing academic literature and then moved this forward through the detailed stories of reality that were brought to life through the research conversations.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this research; your time and insights have been invaluable.



Sarah Churchman

HUMAN CAPITAL DIRECTOR, HEAD OF TALENT,
INCLUSION AND WELLBEING AT PWC

When PwC was approached by Women Ahead to support this new research, we jumped at the chance.

Always proud to be described as 'pioneers' when it comes to workplace inclusion and diversity, we certainly feel that the role of networks today is vastly different compared to, for example, 2003 when our first formal network, PwC Women, was established. Yet the way in which networks and their value are often perceived has not necessarily changed to reflect this evolution. It seems that the assumptions and associations surrounding networks are as stubborn to change as assumptions about women and leadership!

At PwC we have thirteen thriving people networks, each sponsored by an Executive Board member and covering different roles (parents, carers), experiences (cultural heritage), backgrounds or characteristics (LGBT+, disability, faith/belief). Each is organised as professionally as any other PwC forum with a Chair, Steering Group, annual strategy and plan and stated goals, all aligned with the firm's strategy and goals. They are no longer a 'nice to have' but are an essential part of how we do business, how we build relationships (internally and externally) and how we run our firm.

This new research provides fresh insights that will help to dispel some of the outdated assumptions and myths surrounding networks which risk stymying the real value they can bring to your organisation.



Birgit Neu

GLOBAL HEAD OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT HSBC

At HSBC we saw engaging with this research as an excellent opportunity to better understand the landscape for professional networks within our sector and beyond.

As the numbers of organisational and cross-company networks are ever increasing, it is critical to understand and appreciate how professional diversity networks operate to better support their growth and contribution. There is a perception around what networks deliver, locally and globally, and how they positively contribute to the broader D&I strategy of an organisation, but to date there has been limited data supporting how organisations should best leverage their networks for positive change – and vice versa.

HSBC engaged in this research with Women Ahead to help develop a clearer picture of the current landscape for networks in the UK and beyond and to provide more guidance for organisations and individuals setting up and sustaining networks. We are delighted to be a part of this innovative research and look forward to seeing how the practical insights presented support the development of effective networks for the future.

If you only read one page...

Through a combination of academic research and 39 in-depth structured interviews we conclude that effective networks:



Improve diversity & inclusion

within an organisation

in addition to opening up **crucial two-way communication channels** between an organisation and its minority groups.



Enable career success & progression.

Interestingly, very few networks stated this as a core aim of the network and are not aligning activity to this or measuring the impact of network activity on career progression.



Align employees to the culture & vision of an organisation

by **enhancing the two-way communication** between an organisation and its people and significantly contributing to the development of a more inclusive culture.

Develop individual networking skills and

EXPAND

personal networks

which is a critical skill and activity that increases creativity, confidence and internal and external connections. There is an opportunity for networks to better support their members to learn and practice these networking skills and create meaningful conversations rather than many surface level connections.

However, organisations need to:

Better support



the leadership and coordinating roles for networks.

In order to ensure **sustainability and momentum** of networks, there needs to be **better recognition and reward** for those in the leadership or coordinating roles of the network (for example embedding this in annual objectives).

INVEST

into the organisational setup, development and delivery of networks



RECOGNISE THE ROLE

that network coordinators and leaders play.

This will create **more sustainable networks** that don't rely on passionate individuals running networks 'off the side of a desk'.

However, organisations need to:

Engage in a
W I D E R
 audience than the target group at all levels.

This inclusion creates increased retention, creativity, innovation and performance.

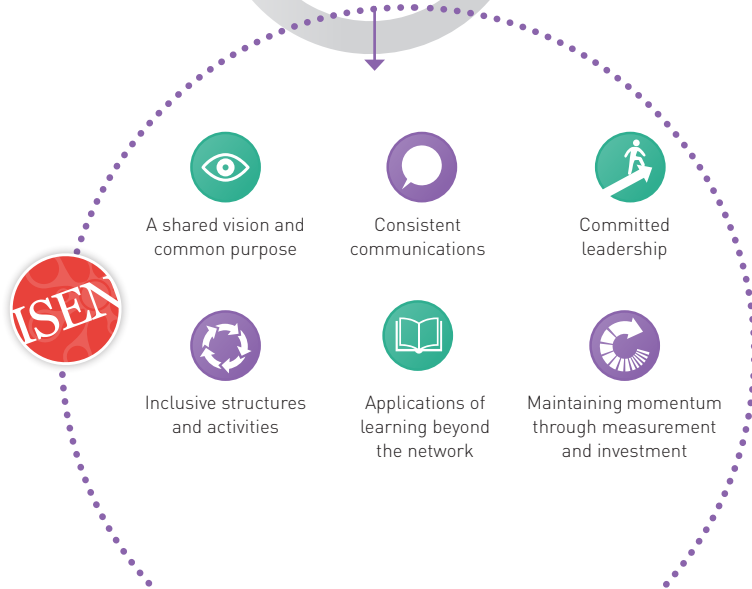
Create platforms for
MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS.

Remove the pressure that applauds the **number of contacts over quality of conversations.**

Align approach and activities to the
INTERNATIONAL STANDARD FOR EFFECTIVE NETWORKS

UPDATE
 networking events and activities that are often structured in an outdated format.

Networking events can be updated to recognise and reflect the diverse behaviours and styles of the groups they are seeking to support.



Watch out for...

1. Sustainability and succession planning

What happens when the current Chair/co-Chair moves on or has to focus more on the 'day job'?

2. Diversity and inclusion

How can networks collaborate to genuinely create inclusion?

3. Growing scale and scope

How can networks maintain a shared sense of purpose across a global network, whilst still retaining a connection with local issues?

4. Measuring real 'impact'

How can networks measure their impact on behavioural change (as opposed to just membership numbers and events)? Recognise the role that network coordinators and leaders play.

Some suggested practical next steps:

1. Align your networks to the **International Standards for Effective Networks** (page 32).



2. Implement an **evaluation framework for assessing the ROI of networks** (page 34).



3. Review and accelerate the maturity of your network by reviewing **the Networking Life cycle Model** (page 36).



Our approach and research scope

This research was carried out using a 'theory meets practice' approach that combines academic research with the practicalities of 'real world' insight. Adopting a qualitative approach, we conducted more than 39 in-depth structured interviews with organisations from different industry sectors and with varying degrees of experience in developing networks.

Research scope



And when specifically considering women's networks, this study covered...



(for the 18 that were able to report this figure)

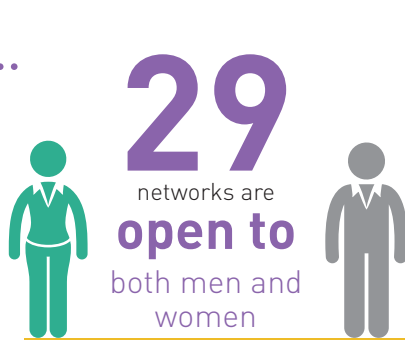
2 networks too new to report membership

5 networks do not actively track informal membership

9 networks did not provide their membership numbers



networks identify **personal development** as a core purpose





The myths,
realities and
reflections

Myth 01

“ Networks improve diversity and inclusion within an organisation ”



The literature foundations of this myth

- Minority groups need to have **a distinct 'voice'** to develop organisational awareness of their often hidden issues.
- Having a voice **engages the broader organisation in essential and diverse conversations** that help to create understanding, recognition and a culture of inclusion.
- Having a network is a statement that visibly demonstrates **organisational commitment to diversity and inclusion.**

“ ...Networks have become the latest 'must have' accessory in the campaign to get women past the glass ceiling and into more leadership roles. ”

Perriton, 2006

“ Women's networks are by far the most frequent form of employee networks. ”

Hucke and Kepinski, 2016





Our research reality... supports this myth

- Networks provide a **'safe space'** for critical diversity and inclusion conversations.
- Thriving networks help to retain talent as **individuals feel better connected to the organisation** and to people 'like them'.
- More than **75%** of networks were **set up by employees** and grew organically as organisations began to see the value of supporting specific employee groups.
- Networks enable minority groups to **raise challenging issues** in a positive environment.
- Employee-driven networks provide an **effective mechanism for two-way communication** between an organisation and its people.

“ Networks are becoming a real business imperative; our shareholders are asking questions about how we are addressing the diversity and inclusion agenda and networks provide a visible way of demonstrating our commitment to change.”

Anonymous

“ We need networks to help us support our minority groups, create a sense of community and ensure that everyone has a voice.”

Karina Govindji, Vodafone

“ I have heard one member of our network leadership team say “The reason I still work for this organisation is because of the network”.”

Joanna Santinon, EY



Our reflections

- Networks are having an impact on the **broader inclusive culture** within organisations.
- It is difficult to quantify the link between network activities and an organisation's diversity and inclusion.
- No organisations were able to **quantify the true impact** of networks on their organisational diversity and inclusion.
- **A renewed approach to evaluating** the impact of networks on diversity and inclusion is needed. This approach must consider the broader context in which networks operate and recognise the active contribution that effective networks can have on the wider challenge of embedding an inclusive culture.



Practical recommendations

- Develop your network vision and purpose and measure against these. Refer to ISEN on page 32.
- A renewed approach to evaluating the impact of networks is needed.
- Incorporate measures beyond participation.

Myth 02

“Internal networks help align employees to the culture and vision of an organisation”

“Networking is thought to facilitate the development of personal and professional opportunities and contribute to organisational functioning by supporting greater organisational communication and access to resources.”

Gibson et al, 2014



The literature foundations of this myth

- Internal networks enable **improved collaboration within an organisation** which in turn fosters a culture of enhanced innovation and productivity.
- Individuals involved in networks **feel more confident and competent in their role and therefore contribute more** proactively to the desired outcomes of the organisation.





Our research reality... supports this myth



- Most networks are **linked in some way to organisational strategy**. The level of connection and interaction between networks and their organisation varies greatly.
- A small number are fully aligned to business strategy.
- Many networks have an **informal reporting line** within the organisation.
- Networks in receipt of budget are formally accountable to the organisation.
- **Newly-formed networks are more 'inwardly' focused**, with stronger attention on developing the skills of network members (for example, effectiveness and confidence).
- **More mature networks evolve a more 'outward' facing approach** and become more of a visible voice for their members.
- **More mature networks** are also able to **support organisational policy** by activating objectives through network activity.

“ We need to sell the power of networks to the doubters...they can help to create major cultural change if managed and communicated in the right way. ”

Debra Lang, DCMS

“ We see our networks as the front end of our D&I work. They are critical in bringing our D&I strategy to life. ”

Vinay Kapoor, BNP Paribas



Our reflections

- More 'mature' networks significantly contribute to the development of a **more inclusive organisational culture** by motivating their members to bring organisational objectives to life.
- Networks **help employees better understand** how the organisation wants its people to carry out their daily business.
- Effective networks **enhance the two-way communication between an organisation and its people**, with organisations listening to the voices of their networks and then acting in tandem with the networks to take appropriate action.
- The maturity of a network affects its ability to **align employees to the culture and vision** of an organisation. The relative maturity of a network is influenced by a number of common characteristics (see Networks life cycle – a model for evolution on page 36).



Practical recommendations

- **Enable and encourage** two-way communication channels between the network and organisation.
- **Refer to the Networks life cycle** – a model for evolution on page 36 to accelerate this.

Myth 03

“ Professional networking can also be used as a means to continuously support professionals’ life-long learning in practice. ”

Johnson, 2008

“ Involvement in a network develops networking skills and expands an individual’s network ”



The literature foundations of this myth

- Involvement in a professional network provides individuals with a **wide range of opportunities for personal and professional development.**
- Relationships developed through a network give individuals access to **relevant and timely personal support.**
- Networks offer an environment where individuals can have **open and meaningful conversations.**
- Actively engaging in a variety of networks provides opportunities for individuals to **develop broader networking skills** for future career progression.

“ From the organisation’s perspective, networking and networks are vital in innovation and crucial in linking to new trusted partners when dealing with changing business priorities. ”

Rajagopal et al, 2012





Our research reality... supports this myth

- Networks are seen as an **important part of organisational life**.
- Networks provide a space for individuals to **learn and develop alongside other colleagues**.
- More than **90%** of organisations identified personal development of employees as a core purpose or priority for their networks.
- Internal networks are increasingly being used to **enhance intra-company working**, and foster better working relationships between individuals within departments.
- Involvement in an external network is an effective means of **growing a client base** or promoting the work of the business to a wider audience.
- The main purpose of external networks is for individuals to **develop new connections**, meet new people and expand personal contacts lists.

“ Sometimes organisations look at networks solely as a resource to troubleshoot or to be good PR for the firm – which they do very well – but they are so much more important than that. They are about influencing how we all behave as inclusive leaders, how we can think differently about inclusion and give us the real stories and experiences that compel leaders and colleagues to act. ”

Ashley Thomas, KPMG

“ One of the major benefits of a network is that they bring together a diverse range of people from across different areas of the business to talk about common and shared issues. ”

Rachel Callaghan, Centrica



Our recommendations

- Networks provide spaces in which employees, partners and stakeholders can **build their own confidence and competencies**.
- Networks allow individuals to **develop meaningful, effective relationships** with people within and outside an organisation.
- These relationships can **enhance innovation and productivity** within an organisation and with clients.
- Networks are becoming less about places to grow your ‘little black book’ and more about **nurturing and leveraging connections for mutual benefit**.
- People are more likely to do business with individuals or organisations with **whom they develop a connection or empathy**. It is important for networks to provide environments where these connections can be developed. Networks also need to support their members to learn and practice the networking skills they require for the future.
- This has an impact on how networks are created and the environment in which they thrive; it also **requires a shift in how ‘success’ is defined in terms of network activity**.

Practical recommendations



- Provide opportunities to learn and practice networking skills through provision of masterclasses.

Myth 04

“Active involvement in a network is a key enabler of career success and progression”



The literature foundations of this myth

- **The ability to network effectively is an increasingly important skill** and is often a determining factor in the career progression of any individual.
- Effective networking can **help women to avoid the sticky floor and break through the glass ceiling.**
- Networking is often one of **the most feared activities** that aspiring leaders must address.

“Engaging in networking behaviours, by attempting to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to provide work or career assistance, is considered to be an important career management strategy.”

Forret and Dougherty, 2004

“Networking in a professional capacity is increasingly being seen as a crucial skill associated with career success.”

Travers et al, 1997

“Networking is considered to be one of the most crucial parts of a manager’s life.”

Van Emmerik et al., 2006



Our research reality... partly supports this myth

- Less than half of the organisations made reference to 'career advancement' in their network aims.
- However, it was inferred that network involvement does **help to raise visibility in the organisation and create new connections.**
- Whilst one or two organisations could anecdotally point to examples of how networks have supported career progression, **none were able to provide any tangible evidence to support** this theory.

“ Networks offer individuals the opportunity to try/apply their skills in a new way across the business. ”

Anonymous

“ We need to better understand the collective power of networks and join up our activities through improved collaboration. ”

Lynne Chambers,
London Stock Exchange Group

“ We have to be better at demonstrating impact. If we cannot show people what differences we are making, then we will lose important internal and external support. ”

Anonymous

Our reflections

- It was **difficult to establish a direct correlation between active network involvement and career progression** because formal success measures do not currently evaluate network success against these aims.
- For some individuals, involvement in a network and the connections that they made have led to further career opportunities.
- This reality represents **significant future opportunities for networks.** Literature research tells us that networking is an important skill however we found that networks rarely incorporate this into their aims and as a result activities do not focus on developing this proven critical skill. Networks are not currently measuring the impact of network activity on career progression.

Practical recommendations



- Consider incorporating networking skills into the network vision and purpose.

Myth 05

“Active involvement in a women’s network is detrimental to career progression”



The literature foundations of this myth

- Our research found some strands of literature argued against the benefit of participation in a women’s network for individuals seeking to progress their career.
- There is a perspective which suggests that **active engagement in a women’s network is actually detrimental to career progression.**
- There are **inherent risks for women** in terms of being **associated with any women-only initiatives.**

“...most commonly, these risks entail being labelled variously as ‘girly groups’; ‘mothers’ meetings’; ‘knitting circles’; or, perhaps most offensively, ‘the witches’ coven’.”

McCarthy, 2004

“...for a variety of reasons, involvement in women’s networks can actually be a barrier to female advancement.”

Hucke and Kepinski, 2016





Our research reality... does not support this myth, (but with a note of caution)

- Our research reality consistently suggests that **participation in a network**, as a member, leader or coordinator of it, **is positive on a personal and professional basis**.

Note of caution:

- For individuals in leadership or coordinating roles, networks are consistently organised and run 'off the side of the desk' and not formally recognised.
- Some more senior men and particularly women choose not to engage in a women's network for a variety of reasons, including a perception that it amplifies people as different, 'pigeonholes' them as in need of additional support, and spending time away from business-focused activity.

“ Our network is run completely 'off the side of the desk', which is really challenging when you also have your day job. There is some recognition for the additional commitment, but if this recognition goes, then the network loses traction as people have to prioritise their day job. ”

Rachel Callaghan, Centrica

“ One of our biggest challenges is finding people to take ownership of the networks at a local level to drive things forward, rather than it being driven from a top-down approach. ”

Lynne Chambers,
London Stock Exchange Group

“ We all have a role to play in creating an inclusive culture that values diversity, supports individuals to develop their skills, enables everyone to uncover their potential, and ensures that the best people achieve the right role. If you feel that engaging in a network is detrimental to your career (or to those in your team), then there is still much work to be done. ”

Anonymous



Our reflections

- This myth focuses on women's networks but could resonate with other types of networks.
- **Appropriate and active engagement in a network is a positive investment in time.**
- This reality highlights two significant areas for network development:
 - 1) In order to ensure sustainability and momentum of networks, there needs to be **better recognition and reward for those in the leadership or coordinating roles of the network** (for example embedding this in annual objectives).
 - 2) The **challenge for networks is how to communicate a clear purpose and vision** of networks so that the value of participating is understood and recognised.

Practical recommendations



- Recognise and support the role that network coordinators and leaders play.
- Communicate consistently the network purpose and vision to all stakeholders at all levels. Refer to ISEN on page 32.

Myth 06

“Successful networks must engage a wider audience than the target group”



The literature foundations of this myth

- Achievement of genuine inclusion requires the **whole workforce to appreciate and understand the value of diversity.**
- Networks allow minority groups to **‘have a voice’ and become visible.**
- For example, women-only networks play an important part in initiating conversations about gender equality and highlighting the work needed to create and sustain a genuinely inclusive environment.
- Networks **play a critical role in the quest for greater diversity** and inclusion at all levels.

“...most white men have never walked into a room and questioned whether he should be there. White men have a sense of entitlement. They’re given the benefit of the doubt and the fact that they are leadership material is unquestioned.”

Gordon, 2012

“By embracing a positive change agenda that takes in the whole organisational culture, networks can instead become a force for greater transparency, legitimacy, and, ultimately, greater equality between men and women.”

McCarthy, 2004



Our research reality... supports this myth

- There is increasing recognition that to create a genuinely inclusive culture it is **essential for both an organisation and its people to value the full diversity** of the workforce.
- To value full diversity, an organisation and its people has to be aware of the **diverse needs of their workforce, colleagues and friends** and proactively work together to create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.
- Successful networks actively engage a broader range of people at all levels to help advocate and communicate the **importance and relevance of networks and their activities and work**.
- As networks grow and mature, there is recognition of the increasing need for **diversity issues to become more 'mainstream'** and, for example, for gender parity not just to be seen as a 'women's issue'.

“ There is still a lack of realisation from men that gender equality is actually an issue. For some men it does not enter their head that inequality is a real challenge until they really begin to understand the issues and see the challenges first hand. This is why gender parity is a shared issue between men and women and it is not just about 'fixing women'.”

Joanna Santinon, EY



Our reflections

- The biggest shift we noticed is the **drive to actively include individuals not obviously within the identified network demographic** as networks evolve and mature.
- This shift is an important response to research that shows that a **culture of inclusion creates significant benefits** such as increased retention, creativity, innovation and performance.
- Networks need to be **agile and flexible** as they mature in parallel with overall shifts in organisational culture.
- The name of networks often changes to reflect the inclusivity of individuals outside the target group e.g. a 'women's network' evolving to be called a 'gender balance network'.
- **Two-way communication between an organisation and its networks is critical.** The words 'advocate' and 'sponsor' are frequently used to describe individuals who engage in networks outside their own demographic, and this engagement is being recognised as crucial to effective two-way communication.



Practical recommendations

- Include individuals not obviously within the identified network demographic as networks evolve and mature.
- Consider the name of your networks in view of including a broader demographic.



Myth 07

“Men prefer larger, more superficial networks (clubs) and women prefer smaller, deeper, personal connections”



The literature foundations of this myth

- **Men and women form relationships and networks in different ways.**
- The academic literature is clear; men tend to have much larger, more superficial networks, whereas women form smaller, deeper and more personal connections.
- There is a **difference in the way men and women create and sustain relationships**. So, there will be a difference in the way men and women approach and sustain their own networks.

“...females invest more heavily in a few, high quality and time-consuming friendships, while males prefer groups with less investment per member, and higher group cohesion.”

David-Barrett et al, 2015

“...female entrepreneurs were more likely to use smaller, more personal networks than their male colleagues, and they were likely to draw their close network of personal contacts from their own sex.”

Cromie and Burley, 1992



Our research reality... skews this myth



We found that **men and women might benefit from a shift in perception about 'what networking really is'.**

- The reality of organisational life is that the overarching culture has been shaped by white, middle-class men as they have been the dominant demographic for a long time.
- The **'way we do business' is based on the way men traditionally prefer to operate.** This is reflected in how organisations develop networks and client relationships i.e. big network events with large numbers of people.
- Our research reveals that **women have a strong unease and dislike for 'networking' and are frequently fearful** at the thought of walking into a room of people that they don't know, and feeling like there is an expectation to 'go forth and connect'.
- This **'network fear'** appears to be **just as relevant**, but perhaps not as openly articulated, **for men.**
- So whilst there is clearly a recognition that women (and other specific groups) need something different from the current 'norm'; the **opportunities provided are still often based on the 'traditional' networking format.**
- Networks for women were often set up because of the perception that men attended external network events more regularly, and women were missing out on important messages and opportunities as a result.



Our reflections

- The challenge for organisations is to ensure that networks and their aims **recognise and reflect the diverse behaviours and styles of the groups they are seeking to support.**
- A simple first step might be to shift network activities from placing value on developing many surface connections at an event, to one which **appreciates that meaningful conversations that will be followed up is beneficial.**
- Fewer, more meaningful relationships will potentially shift organisational cultures and **deliver a return on investment more quickly than the a traditional approach.**
- Cross-company networks are becoming less about the 'business card swap' and more about **learning and sharing for personal and organisational benefit.**
- By designing network activities that reflect different styles and preferences, **more diverse membership can be attracted and retained.**



Practical recommendations

- Design networking events and activities that recognise diverse behaviours, styles and preferences (e.g. networking for introverts).
- Create platforms for meaningful connections.

Myth 08

“ There is a link between the nature and quality of inter-personal networks within organisations (and) various indicators of individual attainment. ”

Srivastava, 2015

“ Smaller is better in terms of individual and organisational networks ”



The literature foundations of this myth

- There is a **natural limit** to the number of quality connections that individuals are able to **effectively nurture and sustain**.
- Equally, **higher quality networks will yield better outcomes** – both individually and organisationally.
- Identifying a small group of six to 12 people and thinking about the different roles they play in supporting individuals has become a **foundation of developing an effective network**.

“ ...there are constraints both on the absolute number of individuals that ego can maintain in the network, and also on the emotional intensity of the relationships that ego can maintain with those individuals. ”

Roberts et al, 2009



“ Effective networking is more about quality engagement not quantity. It has to be less about the traditional business card swap and more about relationships if we are to be truly effective. ”

Anonymous

Our reflections

- Organisations and individuals **often evaluate the effectiveness of their networks in terms of size and reach** – albeit this evaluation being subjective and not usually recorded or measured.
- But ‘bigger’ does not always equal ‘more meaningful’.
- There is **not an ideal number for the size of a personal network** – the size, scale and scope of any network will depend on individual circumstance, need and drive.
- It is worth considering whether online only connections are simply names on a profile, or whether having a virtual connection makes it possible to make a personal connection at a later date.
- The cultural challenge for leaders, organisations and cross-company networks, is to **redefine the characteristics of an effective network**.
- There is also a need to review how network activities and events are delivered so that they reflect the ‘smaller is better’ angle.
- By recognising that fewer, more meaningful connections potentially deliver a greater return on investment (be that personally or organisationally), we can **tailor networking activities to remove the pressure that applauds size over quality**.
- Finding new, innovative ways that allow people to create meaningful networks will be of increasing value to both individuals and organisations.

Our research reality... partly supports the myth

- There is increasing recognition that successful networks, and networking, **should not simply be measured in terms of size and volume**.
- There is acceptance of a need for **networking relationships to be ‘meaningful’, built on authenticity** and developed over time.
- **It appears that a traditional view of ‘bigger is better’ for network size still pervades** – for example, measuring success in terms of numbers of attendees at network events.
- Particularly in the traditional sectors, **pressure remains for individuals to grow large networks** for the benefit of the organisation.
- We increasingly see this pressure for large networks when looking at the growth in social media and business networking sites.

“ We as a firm are not pushing the networks to exist, they do so at a grassroots level in a holistic way, which is a good indicator of change. ”

Uzma Hamid-Dizier, Slaughter and May

Practical recommendations



- Consider how to enable meaningful conversations and relationship formations for members when attending large scale events.

Myth 09

“Organisations are investing into the setup, development and delivery of networks”



The literature foundations of this myth

There is an absence of current literature on this myth, so we made the following assumptions:

- Organisations are making **significant investment into the setup, development and delivery of networks** to ensure their continued and successful contribution to diversity and inclusion-related targets and commitments.
- There is a **combination of both cash and resource investment**.
- There is a **positive correlation between the level of investment** (both cash and resource) **and the effectiveness of the network**.

“ [Networking can be defined as] the process of contacting and being contacted by people in our social network and maintaining these linkages and relationships. ”

Burke 1993





Our research reality... disagrees with this myth

- Organisations are increasingly recognising networks as a **valuable contributor** to their diversity and inclusion strategy, but there is **very little formal investment** (both financial and human) into the overall setup, delivery and development of networks.
- There is **limited investment into roles that support and coordinate networks**, despite an obvious value being placed on networks.
- Organisations are increasingly allowing, enabling and encouraging staff to **dedicate time to network activity**. Some are finding ways to recognise and reward this investment of additional time and effort.
- Many networks are accountable to their individual network members as opposed to accountability to their organisation.
- Networks that reported a loose connection with formal business strategy or structures **valued the perceived freedom that this brings**, and are better positioned to influence organisational culture and strategy.
- Networks are **most effective when they grow organically** and are **led by employees without the constraints of a 'top down' approach**.

“...a network relies on some form of connection between people which may consist of both content (type of connection, e.g. information exchange or simply friendship ties) and form (strength of the connection).”

Travers et al 1997



Our reflections

- Despite the evidence of a positive correlation between the level of investment and effectiveness of a network, **organisations are not consistently supporting the setup, development and delivery of networks**.
- This is both in terms of financial and human resource.
- The vibrancy of a network often relies on **the passion of one or two people**. This presents a significant risk for networks if supporting investment is not made.
- Some organisations are **finding innovative ways to recognise and reward individuals who take an active role in coordinating or managing a network**.
- Investment decisions are usually made based on a business case that demonstrates a clear return on investment.
- There is **currently not a robust framework that evaluates the broader impact of networks**, which results in limited investment being made.
- Implementing a robust framework for evaluating the impact of networks is an essential next step for organisations.

Practical recommendations



- Align network design and activity to the ISEN on page 32 and invest resource accordingly.
- Measure network impact using the Evaluation framework on page 35.

The 9 myths Summary



Myth

- 01 Networks improve diversity and inclusion within an organisation.
- 02 Internal networks help align employees to the culture and vision of an organisation.
- 03 Involvement in a network develops networking skills and expands an individual's network.
- 04 Active involvement in a network is a key enabler of career success and progression.
- 05 Active involvement in a women's network is detrimental to career progression.
- 06 Successful networks must engage a wider audience than the target group.
- 07 Men prefer larger, more superficial networks (clubs) and women prefer smaller, deeper, personal connections.
- 08 Smaller is better in terms of individual and organisational networks.
- 09 Organisations are investing into the setup, development and delivery of networks.



Research reality



Practical recommendations



Supports this myth.

- Develop your network vision and purpose and measure against these. Refer to ISEN on p32.
- A renewed approach to evaluating the impact of networks is needed.
- Incorporate measures beyond participation.



Supports this myth.

- Enable and encourage two-way communication channels between the network and organisation.
- Refer to the Networks life cycle – a model for evolution on page 36 to accelerate this.



Supports this myth.

- Provide opportunities to learn and practice networking skills through provision of masterclasses.



Partly supports this myth.

- Consider incorporating networking skills into the network vision and purpose.



Does not support this myth, (but with a note of caution).

- Recognise and support the role that network coordinators and leaders play.
- Communicate consistently the network purpose and vision to all stakeholders at all levels. Refer to ISEN on page 32.



Supports this myth.

- Include individuals not obviously within the identified network demographic as networks evolve and mature.
- Consider the name of your networks in view of including a broader demographic.



Skews this myth.

- Design networking events and activities that recognise diverse behaviours, styles and preferences (e.g. networking for introverts).
- Create platforms for meaningful connections.



Partly supports this myth.

- Consider how to enable meaningful conversations and relationship formations for members when attending large scale events.



Disagrees with this myth.

- Align network design and activity to the ISEN on page 32 and invest resource accordingly.
- Measure network impact using the Evaluation framework on page 35.

Making your network work

Tools and frameworks

The following pages outline some useful tools and frameworks to support networks to maximise their effectiveness.

To learn more contact liz@women-ahead.org.

International Standards for Effective Networks

Based on this research and the broader context for managing change, we present the following International Standards for Effective Networks.

Successful networks have...



A shared vision and common purpose

- A clear vision that has been collaboratively shaped and collectively agreed.
- Long-term goals and outcomes that are translated into short-term objectives.
- Clarity about why the network exists, what it seeks to achieve and how it links into, or connects with, the broader organisational vision, strategy and culture.



Consistent communications

- All stakeholders understand the vision and purpose of the network.
- Effective two-way channels of communication between the network and the organisation.
- A mechanism to communicate important messages relating to key issues arising from the network.

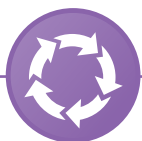


Committed leadership

- Committed and visible leaders responsible for organising and coordinating network activities (for example, a network Chair).
- Members are ambassadors for the network and feel empowered to influence and drive the future of the network.
- Executive level support to raise the profile and amplify messages from the network.
- A culture where everyone shares responsibility for diversity and inclusion.



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD FOR
EFFECTIVE NETWORKS



Inclusive structures and activities

- Activities that have been designed in consideration of diverse styles and preferences.
- Appropriately engaged with individuals outside of the target demographic.



Applications of learning beyond the network

- Network members that embody the values of the network in their everyday behaviour.
- Members and supporters that translate ideas into action at every level and within every aspect of their job.
- Role models that champion inclusive behaviour and are prepared to appropriately challenge exclusive behaviour.



Maintaining momentum through measurement and investment

- Appropriate investment (financial and/or human) to sustain the activities of the network.
- Evaluation framework that measures the impact of network activity.
- Formal processes for recognising the commitment of network leaders.

Evaluation framework for assessing the ROI of networks






Measuring impact is essential for any organisation or sector to effectively evaluate the success of their network activities, plans and strategies. Network activity, growth and influence will potentially be developed over a significant period of time and therefore true success will not be fully visible or understood for several years. In response to one of the key challenges identified within this report, we recommend the following evaluation framework for measuring success and sustainable impact on a longer-term basis.

“ There is definitely a connection between our networks and culture... we just can't specifically evidence that yet. ”
Anonymous

“ The jury is out on whether our networks are actually making an impact as we are uncertain as to the value that they are adding. ”
Anonymous

“ We find measuring real impact difficult as this needs a qualitative approach and our business is fundamentally built around quantitative, logical thinking. This is what we know best and so inevitably we look to measure numbers rather than qualitative impact. ”
Anonymous

We recommend that this framework is used in conjunction with the International Standards for Effective Networks.

	Headline	Defining statement	Measurables
	Goals	We aim to...	A set of clearly defined, specific and measurable goals/targets that articulate what the network ultimately wishes to achieve and by when.
	Inputs	We will invest...	Identification of the investment that will be made into the network in terms of time, money and expertise. Include short and long-term investment and demonstrate a commitment to sustained investment over a period of time.
	Activities	We will do this by...	A detailed action plan that clearly states the planned network activities in the immediate term (e.g. next 12 to 18 months). Include clear deliverables (for example number of events, number of network members). Be realistic in terms of what can be implemented, and demonstrate why each action is important to the network.
	Outcomes	As a result we will see...	<p>This step requires networks to consider the changes or benefits that will result from the network activities and should link to the purpose of the network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What step change does the network want to create? • What are the shifts in behaviour that will result from the network activities? • How will the organisation see network learning translating into everyday workplace action?
	Impact	Impact in 2020 will be...	<p>This step is about long term organisational impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how the collective efforts will create and embed the overall vision for inclusion and diversity. • What ultimate change will be achieved if the network is truly effective? • What does this look and/or feel like within the wider organisation?

Networking life cycle

A model for evolution

Phase 01.

Raising awareness

At this early phase of development, networks form as a way of:

- **Highlighting** the existence of a specific issue(s).
- **Establishing** a voice and bringing certain challenges to the forefront of individual and organisational minds.
- **Starting conversations** and providing a 'safe space' for individuals to have meaningful conversations.
- **Creating collaboration** based on the energy and passion of a few individuals.

Ensure to:

- Create a clear visions and purpose.

Phase 02.

Focus attention

The emphasis will now be on delivering network activities. During this phase networks will:

- **Create momentum** and focussing collectively on the particular issues that have been raised by this group.
- Become more **formal**.
- **Engender support** from senior and executive levels.
- Become recognised more widely as something that is open to all.
- Remain predominantly focussed on their network demographic.

Ensure to:

- Create consistent communications that share network messages.
- Engage with leaders outside of the target network demographic to create advocates and sponsorship.

Phase **01**
RAISE
AWARENESS

Phase **02**
FOCUS
ATTENTION

FOUR PHASES OF

RELATIVE MATURITY

By applying neuroscience to large-scale qualitative research findings, we have created a model that can help a networks progression

Phase **03**
DELIBERATE PRACTICE

Phase **04**
THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

OF NETWORK

Phase 03.
Deliberate practice

At this phase networks are expanding:

- Activities and events will be supplemented by **additional interventions** such as mentoring and leadership support.
- Executive sponsors or ambassadors will play an increasingly important role in **raising the profile** of the network (and what it stands for) within and cross organisations.
- **A link is established** between network activity and the wider organisational inclusion strategy.
- **Networks embrace the wider population** and actively encourage allies and supporters from all demographics and levels.

Ensure to:

- Check, challenge and measure impact against network vision and purpose.
- Deliver opportunities for personal growth and development through targeted activities.

Phase 04.
Therapeutic Support

At this phase networks are:

- **Demonstrating** how their activities are impacting on the broader culture of the organisation or sector.
- Are viewed as an **integral part** of the inclusion and diversity strategy.
- **Creating change** at micro level through individuals as the activities of the network are influencing everyday actions.
- **Taking collective responsibility** for making change happen. Implementing interventions such as mentoring and learning initiatives that are visible in the workplace at every level; inclusive leadership is evident and people are supporting each other as a matter of course.

Ensure to:

- Continue to review network activity against strategic objectives.
- Consider internal and external network collaborations as a way to maximise impact.
- Remain flexible to the changing needs of your network as it develops over time.

Thank you

to our participating organisations



SLAUGHTER AND MAY



With special thanks to Perfect Storm for the design of this report.



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