Session 11

Building Effective, Diverse Networks

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Session 11: Building Effective, Diverse Networks

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Define the three main types of networks (operational, personal, and strategic)

- Discuss how gender affects the networks and networking behaviors of women and men

- Reflect on the strengths and gaps in their own networks

- Discuss strategies to strengthen their networks moving forward

Time

1 hour 30 minutes

Materials Needed

- Chairs organized in a semicircle

- Flipchart paper

- Flipchart stand

- Projector for video

- Laptop

- Pens

- Notepaper

- **Participant Handout: Building Effective, Diverse Networks**

- **Participant Handout: Knowledge and Perceived Comfort/Competency Check Pre-/Post-Test**

- **Annex: Answer Log for Knowledge and Perceptions of Comfort/Competency Questions**

Advanced Preparation

1. Print a copy of the **Participant Handout: Building Effective, Diverse Networks** for each participant.

Steps

Introduction (2 minutes)

1. Start by stating that a network is a set of relationships that you depend on to get things done. Networks are vital to our success; they enable us to offer more and have a greater impact. In this session, participants will explore the importance of networks, debunk common misconceptions about networks, and learn about strategies for building effective networks.

2. Networks are particularly important to consider with regard to gender because, as we discussed in earlier sessions, there are fewer women leaders, which means that there are fewer women to draw

on as network members. Additionally, this session will review key differences in the literature around the composition and formation of men's and women's networks.

3. Distribute the **Participant Handout: Knowledge and Perceived Comfort/Competency Pre/Post-Test,** asking participants to record their answers on the **Answer Log for Knowledge and Perceptions of Comfort/Competency Questions**.

Video and Reflection (30 minutes)

1. Tell participants the group will watch a 15-minute video in which Herminia Ibarra, professor of organizational behavior at INSEAD Business School, highlights the power of strategic networks, which are critical for career advancement. Among the strategies discussed, some are especially relevant to women, including developing the value they bring to their network and, when facing time constraints, how to prioritize and invest in a few activities to enhance their networks.

2. Play the video available at this link: https://womensleadership.stanford.edu/building-effective-networks.

3. Facilitate a 15-minute discussion around the following questions:

   - In the video, we learned that building an effective network can be particularly challenging for women. Can you recall why?

   - How does information presented in this video relate to challenges you have faced at work?

> **Facilitator note:** Possible answers may include: 1) In settings where men hold most positions of power, women have a smaller pool of high-status, same-gender contacts on which to draw and fewer ties to high-status powerful men. 2) Compared to men's networks, research shows that women's personal and work networks tend to overlap less. This becomes more pronounced over time and particularly for women as they become parents. This matters as managers tend to trust and put forward the people they know best when they know them personally. Also, networking is more efficient and less time-consuming when your work and personal networks overlap. 3) Networking can feel more inauthentic or calculating to women than to men, and therefore women may be less likely to focus on developing networks.

   - What strategies have you used to overcome these challenges?

   - How can individual men play a role in supporting women to build effective networks? How can organizations support women to build effective networks?

   - Do you have networking events in your facility/office/context? What does networking look like for you?

   - When do people have the opportunity to build networks?

Individual Network Reflections (55 minutes)

1. Next, distribute the **Participant Handout: Building Effective, Diverse Networks**, pens, and paper and ask participants to take 15 minutes to reflect on their own networks by answering the following questions:

   - Make a list of your operational, personal, and strategic networks. Where do you have the most contacts? Where do you have gaps in your networks? Does your network have intersecting

circles, like a Venn diagram, or are they separate? How does social media play into your consideration of networks and contacts? For example, are there contacts you interact with only virtually?

- Do you have mostly "just like me" convenience networks?

- Do you have valuable "weak ties" in your networks?

- What challenges do you face when cultivating your networks? How may you address those challenges?

2. Now ask participants to pair up. Instruct them to share their reflections to these questions with their partner. After 5 minutes, switch and let partners share.

3. Invite participants back to plenary and ask a few volunteers to discuss the results of their network reflections. Note any differences in responses between women and men who volunteer answers. Facilitate a 15-minute discussion around the following questions:

- What is one key discovery or reflection that resonated with you (or not) based on your experiences?

- What are the strengths of your current networks? How can your networks enable you to learn about opportunities for career advancement?

- What challenges are you facing in relation to forming networks? What, if anything, holds you back from forming the kinds of networks you would like to have?

- What are some strategies that could help you navigate these challenges?

4. Next, ask participants to meet with their partners one more time and each identify one to three relationships they would like to advance based on the gaps they have discovered. Tell participants to role-play with their partners how they might approach the people they have identified as wanting to add to their network. Who would introduce you? What value do you bring to each of these relationships?

5. After 15 minutes invite participants back to plenary and ask for one or two volunteers to describe or demonstrate their strategies for engaging with these new contacts.

Closing (3 minutes)

1. End the session by summarizing the following key points:

- Networks are crucial to career success. They allow us to generate new ideas, expand our influence, and develop ourselves.

- Most people understand that networks are important but say that their own networks are rarely as strong as they would like them to be.

- "Just like me" convenience networks are not the most effective. We need a diversity of ideas, inputs, information, and resources.

- Strategies for building effective networks include: 1) engaging in activities both inside and outside your organization, 2) connecting through people you already know, 3) focusing on and developing the value you bring to your network, and 4) prioritizing and investing in a few activities—favor active over passive networking.

2. Ask participants to complete the Participant Handout: Knowledge and Perceived Comfort/Competency Pre-/Post-Test, recording their answers on the Answer Log for Knowledge and Perceptions of Comfort/Competency Questions.

> **Facilitator note:** Participants should complete this action planning/brainstorm at the end of every session. The facilitator should acknowledge that participants are free to choose their own key messages and next steps. That being said, the facilitator should encourage participants to choose some action steps that they can act on as individuals. Although organizational/institutional change is extremely important, not all participants may feel safe of comfortable advocating for change at this level.

3. Ask participants to spend a few minutes thinking about what they have learned. What were some key messages, and what do they want to take forward with them in their work? What is their action plan for implementing what they have learned? Encourage participants to use the **Action Planning** handout to document their ideas. Explain each column:

   - Column 1: Identify a problem to be addressed, area for improvement, or unmet need.

   - Column 2: Identify potential solutions, action steps, or ways forward.

   - Column 3: Identify who needs to take the next steps forward.

Acknowledgments

Ely R, Ibarra H, Kolb D. 2011. Taking gender into account: Theory and design for Women's Leadership Programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, vol. 10, no. 3, 474–483.

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Participant Handout: Building Effective Networks

Building Effective Networks
Key Take-Aways

Networks enable you to offer more and have more impact.
A network is a set of relationships that you depend on to get things done to get ahead in your career and to develop professionally.

"Just Like Me" convenience networks are not the most effective — we need a diversity of ideas, inputs, information, and resources.

There is strength in "weak ties" — in our relationships with people that we don't know that well or that we don't see very often.

THERE ARE THREE KINDS OF NETWORKS:
- **Operational** — relationships with people at work that allow you to get today's work done
- **Personal** — relationships of your choosing, people you like to hang out with informally
- **Strategic** — (most important network for career advancement) relationships that help you envision your future, sell your ideas, and get the information and resources you need

GREAT STRATEGIC NETWORKS ARE:
- **Broad** — connected to a diverse range of people
- **Connective** — linked or bridged across people and groups that would not otherwise connect
- **Dynamic** — responsive and adaptive, growing as you grow

Building a strong strategic network is challenging for anybody but it can be particularly challenging for women, especially in male-dominated organizations and fields

STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING EFFECTIVE NETWORKS
- **Engage** in activities both inside and outside your organization
- **Connect** through people you already know
- **Focus** on and develop the value you bring to your network
- **Prioritize** and invest in a few activities — favor active over passive networking

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Voice & Influence Program

Source: Ibarria H. 2019. Building Effective Networks. Stanford VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab.
https://womensleadership.stanford.edu/building-effective-networks

Participant Handout: Knowledge and Perceived Comfort/Competency Check Pre-/Post-Test

Knowledge Check Questions: Circle One Response

Question 1: Which of the following statements about networks is true?

    A. Networks allow us to develop new ideas and expand our influence.

    B. It is best to have "just like me" networks, comprised of people with thoughts and ideas that are very similar to yours.

    C. It is better to passively invest in a large number of connections and activities than to actively prioritize and invest in a few.

Question 2: The following definition applies to which type of network.
"_____ networks are relationships that help you envision your future, sell your ideas, and get the information and resources you need."

    A. Operational

    B. Personal

    C. Strategic

Question 3: The following definition applies to which type of network.
"_____ networks are relationships with people at work that allow you to get today's work done."

    A. Operational

    B. Personal

    C. Strategic

Perceived Comfort/Competency Questions: Circle One Response

Question 1: I feel comfortable "networking" to make new professional connections with people who are not like me.

    A. Strongly disagree   D. Agree

    B. Disagree   E. Strongly agree

    C. Neither agree nor disagree

Question 2: I understand the value I bring to my professional networks.

    A. Strongly disagree   D. Agree

    B. Disagree   E. Strongly agree

    C. Neither agree nor disagree

Question 3: I have the knowledge and skills I need to build my professional network.

    A. Strongly disagree   D. Agree

    B. Disagree   E. Strongly agree

    C. Neither agree nor disagree