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Introduction

Before you can start exploring the job market professionally, it is important that you are aware of your personal qualities, skills, the kind of work you would like to do and the kind of working environment you are looking for. What you don't necessarily need to know yet is which job you are looking for in which particular organisation.

What's typical of networking is that you take the initiative to find internal and external employers and markets. This takes time and energy. Getting a job is a job in itself. When you are networking it is important to inform everyone you know. This goes on 24/7. It may feel strange at first but networking can be fun!

Advantages of networking

- If you know which kind of business or field you would like to work in, but you don't know exactly which particular job yet, or if you know which job you are interested in but not in which organisation or field yet, you can use networking conversations to gather information to pinpoint either a specific job or a specific organisation or field.
- A large part of all vacancies is never advertised (60 to 80 %). These positions remain hidden and are filled via informal channels. Through networking, these vacancies come within your reach. By networking you can actually reach this so-called hidden part of the job market.
- You will increase your chances of getting a job in very popular or rare positions because the employer already knows you. They know what you have to offer.
- You will get the opportunity to practise having conversations about work to improve the quality of these meetings. This will increase your chances of success at job interviews. This is because you will have become better at presenting yourself and convincing other people of your qualities. In short, you will be better at selling yourself.
- During a networking conversation you will have the opportunity to present yourself so that the employer gets to meet the person behind the CV without only knowing the facts such as age.
- Networking is useful for everyone, but it is particularly recommended to those who have trouble getting invited for job interviews in their particular field.
- You will receive valuable information, tips and advice to improve your next job application.

Disadvantages of networking

- Networking takes time and energy. Generally, you will have to have a number of conversations to be successful. Don't expect that you will be offered a job after one conversation. Apart from the time you need for the actual meeting itself, you also need time and energy for preparation, travel and evaluation. Networking will take you at least one day a week. However, your chances of success in getting the job you want will increase substantially because there is less competition. Networking creates extra opportunities.
- When you are applying for a specific job you will know within a reasonable amount of time whether you are turned down or not. Networking is different. It is investing in the future. With networking it is difficult to predict when it will render positive results.

General and specific networking conversations

The aim of networking is twofold. First of all, you can use it to gather advice and information to decide which jobs or organisations you are interested in. This takes place in the so-called *general networking conversations*. And secondly, you can use the information you gather to approach organisations about a particular job. These are called *specific networking conversations*.

Networking will improve your position on the job market. You will make valuable contacts, you will gather useful information and you will make it clear that you are available for a new job. Any networking contact might recommend you for a job. After all, the idea is to stumble across that one suitable vacancy which is not being advertised (yet).

General networking conversations are aimed at exploring one or more sectors. You should look for someone who is actively involved in or familiar with the sector/job you are interested in. You can ask this person for information about the sector or job and you can present your ideas and plans. What you need to do on the basis of this information is decide for yourself if this particular sector or job does indeed suit you and what your opportunities are on the job market. You need to match this new information and advice with your own existing ideas and images. This will make the field, the organisation and the job you are interested in more concrete. Examples of questions you can ask during this kind of meeting are, "How does your organisation work? What kind of jobs are there? Where do I, with what I have to offer, fit in best?"

Once you have a clearer and more concrete idea of the employers and jobs that you're interested in, you are ready for specific networking conversations. You are now specifically looking for a job. You need to present yourself on the job market, find out about possible job vacancies and leave your CV after the meeting. At the end of these meetings you should ask if there are any vacancies now or in the near future. You should, however, always begin with questions aimed at information and advice. If you ask about vacancies straightaway you will usually be told that there aren't any. What's more, your network contact will be less likely to continue talking to you.

Preparation

Network inventory

The first step in networking is getting a clear picture of all your business and personal contacts: your network inventory. A network inventory is an overview of everyone who can give you information about a job, the job description, the organisation, the branch you are interested in (see the form on page 9). Practically everyone you know can help you out with this. It takes time to create a good list of contacts. A tool you can use for this is distinguishing between 'warm' and 'cold' network contacts. Start by approaching people you know well: your warm contacts, to practise. After that you can contact acquaintances and finally people you don't know (cold contacts). You shouldn't start with the network contacts that are most important to you. Make sure you gain experience in networking first.

Warm contacts

You should start close to home. The best start is to make an inventory of warm network contacts: the first circle of family members, current and former colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, lecturers and former teachers, fellow students and former fellow students, customers, competitors, people you know through student associations and your administrative experience. These are people you know well, making it easier to contact them than strangers. Approach them orally (either in person or by phone) asking them whether they can tell you something about a company, job or sector you are interested in. If they can't, you can ask them whether they know someone who can give you the information you need. After all, you never know what contacts your acquaintances may have. They may well know people who you are particularly interested in.

In order to create a good network, we recommend that you ask all your contacts who you have a networking conversation with for at least 1 or 2 names of people they know for your next meetings. This is the only way to create a real NET-work.

If you find networking conversations scary, then you should start with very warm network contacts, such as a family member or a close friend. This is an excellent way to practise presenting yourself.

Moreover, these contacts will usually know you privately but do they also know what your qualities are at work and what you are like in a professional situation? If you would like them to help you, to keep their ears and eyes open for you, they need to know about that. That is why this kind of networking conversations is useful in two ways.

In principle, it is easier to make an appointment for a networking conversation if someone has referred you, but that may not always be possible. This is particularly the case with specific networking conversations where you are hoping to have a networking conversation at a specific organisation. These are your so-called cold contacts, but they are highly important contacts for you. These are the contacts that could actually land you with the job you want. Making contact with these people may well be a lot harder if you don't have someone referring you to them.

Cold contacts

If you are initially only interested in getting a clear picture of the companies in your branch, where they are based etc, then it is sufficient to explore the market using books such as the internet. You can also visit open days of companies or visit fairs where companies and organisations present themselves, recruitment days, make a move etc.

Professional magazines are another important source: job advertisements provide you with an insight in the current demand, you will also get a clear idea of the companies in your field. The articles provide you with information about trends and developments in the sector. Newspapers are useful for a wider exploratory view. They offer a wide range of job advertisements. Don't be too critical and explore the complete demand. This will allow you to get a clear overview of what is currently required in the job market. Read the economics and financial pages. They will tell you about developments within companies and sectors: which of them are growing and which of them are not doing so well, what is the government investing in and where is it pulling out? You will also read about companies merging and relocating. All this information can help you to get a clear picture of your job market.

Once you have found one or more companies that you would like to approach specifically, here's what you need to do. Before you contact these companies you need to carefully prepare yourself. You will need to read plenty about the company you want to approach. You will find this information on the internet. You can also ask the company for a copy of its annual report and for specific information about products and services. You can usually phone the receptionist to ask for this brochure. You should either ring up and simply ask for a catalogue or you could mention that you are exploring the job market and that you would like to receive some information about the company (e.g. an annual report), to establish whether the company is interesting to you. The Chamber of Commerce is another option for you where you pay to have a look at company information.

As you read through the material, you will get a clearer picture of the company. Questions will also arise in your mind about products, methods, markets, mission, developments, future developments and issues. You will combine what you read with what you already know about a particular company or sector from what you have read in the newspapers or professional magazines. You will also have questions about whether you are suited to the company, what requirements they have for people with your background and whether there will be a need for people like you in the light of future developments. You will also develop a feeling regarding working for that particular company. Does the company become attractive to you as a potentially new employer or not?

If you find that the company appeals to you and if you would like to have a conversation there, you should contact them. The best way to approach your networking contact is orally (either by telephone or personally). You could write to them but it has less effect and it takes more time. Keep it short. Explain who you are and briefly say something about your background, the reason why you are calling (you are exploring the job market, the company appeals to you because ...) and ask for an appointment. Be careful to make it clear that you only want to gather information or that you are only exploring the job market at this stage. You are not primarily interested in a job at the moment.

If you fail to get an appointment, keep a few specific questions in mind to at least gather some more information (for example to decide whether it is useful for you to try and arrange an appointment with this company via another way or whether you are better off concentrating on another company).

Who are suitable network contacts?

For a general conversation you should contact someone who is active in the particular job or organisation you are interested in. If, for example, you would like to find out more about the position of environmental policy advisor or product manager, you should ask the receptionist to put you through to this person. You can also ask to be put through to the department where you think you can find this person. The more precisely you can be the better.

During specific networking conversations you ideally want to talk to the 'decision maker'. This is the person who would hire you if it ever comes to that, e.g. the head of a department. At this stage you will have studied this company in great detail and you will probably know the name of the person you would like to meet with. If you don't know the name you should ask the receptionist for it (for example the head of the Research Department or the Head of the Marketing Department). After that you should ask to be put through to this person. You could also ring back the next day and ask to be put through the head of the department who you now know by name, without explaining anything. At this stage you should not contact the Personnel Department or the most senior director. They may not always be aware of any upcoming vacancies.

How do I prepare myself for a networking conversation?

First you should gather information about your networking contact and organisation. This will allow you to ask relevant questions and be interesting to talk to. Next you should prepare the subject matter for the conversation. Think about the topics you would like to discuss and practise the conversation with someone before you go to the meeting.

The conversation

You should start the conversation with a good introduction, stating the aim of the meeting and emphasising why you are talking to this particular person. You could suggest an agenda for the meeting and make sure that you both agree to it. Make sure you stay in control of the conversation.

Do not make small talk for too long. You should ask clear, specific, open¹ questions and listen carefully. Networking is a two-way system. Allow your networking contact room to acquire information from you too. Make notes to carefully record the information you receive and maybe verify the information later on in the conversation. You may want to let your networking contact know what you intend to do with the acquired information.

During the networking conversation you will talk about yourself and your plans. Give your networking contact the opportunity to respond to this. Ask for information and advice during the conversation. Benefit from the expertise, knowledge, understanding and experience of the person you are talking to but **NEVER ASK FOR A JOB**.

You should always ask your contact for one or two new names, and whether you may give him or her as a reference. You can also ask for tips and advice on your presentation and / or your CV. During specific networking conversations you should enquire about any current or future vacancies (at the end of the meeting) and whether you could leave your CV with them. You should also ask if this person is willing to keep their eyes and ears open for you and contact you if they hear of something that may be of interest to you. After all, your networking contact now knows who you are and what you are looking for. Try to stay in touch with this person by letting them know what you are doing (for example by sending them a new, updated CV). Don't forget to thank your networking contact for their time and effort.

After the meeting

As you will have several networking conversations it makes sense to evaluate them afterwards. You could do this by answering a number of evaluation questions that you have selected for yourself. We also recommend that you discuss this meeting with your career adviser to find out what went well and what you could do better next time. Within a few days after the meeting you should send a

¹ Open [questions start with who, what, where, why or how](#)

thank-you note in which you could state the result or a summary of the meeting.

Tips

- You should keep a record of your network contacts (see the form on page10).
- You should always take a copy of your CV with you, also to general networking conversations. If the conversation is going well, you may want to ask whether it might be useful to leave your CV.
- In your CV, you should include a short description of the responsibilities / working environment that you are looking for, and any personal characteristics and skills (profile). This will make your CV more suitable for being passed on by network contacts.
- You should prepare the conversation as if you were preparing for a job interview. You should dress appropriately and arrive on time.
- If you expect that your network contact is very busy, you should ask for 20 minutes of their time.
- Mention the expertise and experience of your network contact as the reason for arranging this meeting.
- Try to manage the conversation in a way that the other person can help you with something.
- Ask deeper, more detailed questions.
- Practise!

Before the meeting

Questions regarding LOOKING for network contacts

- What would you like to know and why?
- Why do you think this is the right person for you?
- When do you need the information?

Questions regarding the PREPARATION of a networking conversation

- What is your question and what do you already know?
- What materials have you read already?
- What materials do you have available?
- Who have you already spoken to to gather information?

During the meeting

Questions regarding INFORMATION GATHERING

- What is your background? How did you become a (job title, e.g. product manager)?
- What do and don't you like about this job? What do you find particularly fascinating?
- What skills, knowledge, experience and education do you need to have to be good at your job and how can any shortcomings be compensated for?
- How is your company organised? What is the structure of your organisation?
- What kind of positions does your organisation have?
- What are the responsibilities of position X? What kind of educational background is required for that position?
- What kind of people work for your organisation?
- What are the challenges or issues that your company or department is facing? What kind of people are you looking for to deal with these problems?
- What are the current trends and developments in your sector and what does this mean for the future?

- What future developments do you expect and what are their implications?
- What qualities are you looking for in new employees? What does your organisation find valuable?
- What is your view of leadership and management?
- What are the strategic plans for next year?
- How does your organisation recruit new staff members?
- Are you expecting any vacancies now or in the near future?
- What is the general employment situation in your sector?
- Do you know of any vacancies elsewhere in this sector, for example with companies that are planning to expand?
- Could you let me know if you hear of anything?
- May I give you a copy of my CV?

Questions regarding ADVICE

- When you read my CV, what do you recommend for me to get the job that I would like? Are my goals realistic?
- What do you think of my CV? Should I present the information in a different way or should I change things?
- What impression do I make?
- Is there a match between what I have to offer and the field I am interested in? In what ways?
- Could you give me the names of a few people you know who could give me more information to help me along? May I mention your name when I contact these people?
- Do you have any suggestions for me?

After the meeting

Questions regarding the EVALUATION of the networking conversation

- Who did you speak to, and where? What was the position of the person you spoke to?
- What was the atmosphere before, during and after the conversation?
- What was the company and department culture like?
- What services do they provide?
- What is their view on work you discussed?
- What levels of positions are there within the organisation?
- What are the options of developing within the position and within the organisation?
- What would you do if you were offered a job there?
- What tips and / or names did you get?
- How did your presentation go?
- What did the network contact gain in return?

How to approach your network

NETWORK	HOW TO APPROACH THEM
People you know:	
People you would like to get to know:	
Organisations you would like to get to know:	

Network contacts

Name / address / telephone number	Organisation / Job title	Via	Date of meeting	Relevant information	Follow-up action	Date of follow-up action