

**HOW TRAINING CONSULTANTS PERCEIVE THEIR NETWORKING  
PRACTICES IN RELATION TO GENERATING BUSINESS.**

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## **Abstract**

**This thesis explores how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business. The literature recognises the importance of networking to gain business, yet contains little research. Existing material is either quantitative research or personal accounts not within a research context.**

**My qualitative research is based on interviews, informal conversations, personal construct psychology techniques, observation and reflection with 7 main contributors and through 45 other situations including my experiences as a training consultant. It draws on planned and spontaneous naturally occurring situations.**

**Some results contribute to knowledge by bringing together dispersed items in the literature and revealing ways in which they apply to training consultants. These include networking strategies (eg forming consortia, networking as a subject expert, targeting a sector and networking with everyone). Other results confirm the literature which, for example, stresses the importance of trust. My research reveals ways in which training consultants can develop or lose trust.**

**Other findings, not in the literature, make original contributions to knowledge, such as a strategy that involves networking with other providers. It emerged clearly that networking with another primary reason in mind such as self-development can be more effective in terms of gaining business. I found how training consultants can gain visibility, use the Internet to raise visibility, and that there is considerable backlash in the training world against consultants attending events to get to know potential clients. Some factors that lead to discomfort when training consultants network are identified such as dislike of cold calling, uncertainty over networking etiquette, problems with initially meeting people, reputation issues and lack of skill. I reveal the impact of congruency of behaviour, the way in which we look for similarity or difference and the way in which we maintain contact on building and maintaining rapport when networking to gain business.**



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## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Aim and objectives at the start of the thesis**

Since I started working as an independent training consultant over eleven years ago I have been aware that networking has enabled me to gain most of my business. My interest in networking caused me to question my understanding of the concept and process of networking and to want to explore how other training consultants perceive their own networking practices in relation to gaining business. This led to the development of the overall purpose and title of my thesis 'how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business'.

Networking can mean different things to different people and a detailed exploration of terms is given in Chapter 2. However, to provide a starting point for this thesis I present the following working definitions, appreciating that there are a number of issues to be explored:

Network: "a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship"  
(Mueller 1986, p 14)

Networking "interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts". (Pearsall 2001, p 958)

I also took as the starting point the premise that training consultants do in fact use networking as a means of generating business. This was based on my knowledge of the literature at the time, and my own experiences as a training consultant. In the detail of the thesis I develop the various themes found in the literature and my research data.

To achieve the purpose of exploring how training consultants perceive the networking processes in relation to generating business, I had some initial objectives. These were to explore literature on networking, locate my research paradigm and approach in relation to a range of theoretical paradigms used in research, to select a relevant research approach and set of data gathering methods, so establishing a theoretical context and basis of the work, undertake relevant field research, analyse the findings and consider implications for practitioners, share the findings and conclusions, and highlight further areas for research. Subsequently these fairly generic objectives developed in more detail which I have presented at the start of each chapter of my thesis.

The focus of the research was to gain an understanding rather than to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Robson 1993). Early on I recognised that I was very much in the research as a practising training consultant. I would be exploring and trying to understand my own perceptions in addition to those of others, capturing description and “people’s personal perspectives and experiences” (Patton 1990, p 40), allowing as much for difference as similarity in perceptions; allowing for multiple realities (Erlandson, Harris et al. 1993). This would help to achieve the purpose of exploring how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business by raising awareness of the processes involved. The presentation of my work is supported by extracts from practitioner and academic literature, as well as from interviews with data subjects and my own experiences and research diary, to give examples of points discussed.

During recent years there has been a significant expansion in the number of training consultants. They are often selling their own personal knowledge, personal ways of doing things, their own unique learning and development solutions. This individuality is rarely well expressed in conventional advertisements, nor does it translate well into a description of a product or service that is easily differentiated from what others are offering. As a practitioner I have noticed that it is often the interpersonal skills, the personality, and other personal qualities of the training consultant that are the unique selling point.

Many training consultants find that their products and services are bought as a result of personal recommendation by satisfied clients or others who know them well, or as a result of demonstrating their ability (eg through delivering conference sessions, or participation at professional institute meetings). How this networking process is perceived by training consultants themselves has been the focus of my exploration.

## **1.2 The growth of an idea for research**

The idea of researching networking as a means of gaining business by consultants first raised itself in my mind during summer 1997 as a result of a networking meeting with a colleague whom I have known for about 22 years. We were looking back over our lives and also dreaming of what the future might hold. He had achieved a very high level position in his organisation and was still looking for new challenges. I commented that I still hoped to get a PhD before I retired. On saying that I realised that I was in sufficient



control of my home and working life to be able to make the time and money, in addition to my existing interest, available to make that dream a reality. This was a stunning revelation. Fortunately my husband was with us and he readily agreed that it could happen. I felt his support and enthusiasm was a crucial factor.

I wanted a research topic that I could feel passionately about so that it would carry me through the ups and downs that I expected I might go through. I hoped my research would contribute to knowledge in a practical way. I preferred a topic that would expand my portfolio of expertise, but still enable me to benefit from my existing experience. My colleague reacted by explaining a problem that his accountancy organisation was facing.

He wanted to help his consultants to gain business and, based on his informal research, believed that networking was the key. He wanted to provide training but he didn't know exactly what they needed. He had found very little published material on networking and felt that anything that could put them ahead of their competitors would be very worthwhile. He felt I had much to bring to the subject from my own natural engagement in networking as I actively engaged in it for my own business as a consultant. It seemed an idea worth pursuing.

During the following months there followed a period of reflection and investigation. I wondered whether this really right for me. At this stage reflection and reflexivity in my research was happening in a very natural and intuitive way. I was not conscious of the literature on reflection and reflexivity in research at the start.

Given next are some of the many questions I asked myself to clarify my thoughts and to check out the practicalities. I considered whether the subject warranted investigation, whether I wanted to link with one organisation thereby losing some freedom and whether the drive to find a practical outcome would unduly affect the research. I explored the extent to which financial support from an organisation mattered and what constraints that might bring. I considered the impact on home and business life, and by how much would I need to reduce my own business as a training consultant to create the necessary time.

I was aware of the importance of an appropriate university and suitable research supervision and considered how I would find support for a multi-disciplinary research project. I use networking without realising at the time to check things out and contacted

several PhD research students at different universities. They advised me on literature about gaining a PhD (Phillips & Pugh 1994), what it entailed, potential pitfalls, and the supervisor's role. Others who worked for different universities (including some PhD supervisors) explained how different universities were perceived, types of research training and views on different research approaches. Through the Internet I contacted other experts who in turn referred me on.

Reflecting back a month or two later noted that I had made extensive use of networking to help me decide whether to pursue a PhD on networking. I found when speaking with colleagues or clients about networking that, far from being a 'party stopper', it opened up fascinating conversations with ease. I realised that at least 90% of my own business was gained through networking. These factors gave me confidence in my research topic.

I found Phillips and Pugh (1994) useful in the early stages. It clearly explained that I had to demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge and that I was a professional and trained researcher. Whilst pondering what this actually meant for me I approached the University of Hertfordshire. Initially I contacted a colleague, Steve Shelley, with whom I had worked before, to ask about possibilities and ways of proceeding. Steve was later to become my second research supervisor. From there, early meetings with my research supervisor Dorothea Noble gave me guidance and encouragement to enrol. Dorothea drew my attention to a number of helpful publications such as Boud and Griffin (1987) encouraging me to see the whole research process as potential personal growth as well as contribution to a field of expertise. My previous experience of research and publication (eg Williams (1987), Williams and Green (1994), and Williams and Green (1997)), had been different in length, depth, level of literature search. I didn't have to meet anyone's requirements other than own and my publishers (and ultimately customers). To fulfil academic research requirements was a new development for me.

By the time I had decided that it really felt right for me to pursue a PhD it was ironical that my colleague couldn't offer to support the research as his organisation was undergoing major change. This coincided with my own preference for freedom in my research. I had found also that there could be potential practical and ethical difficulties over ownership and confidentiality of data. This freedom from my colleague's organisation enabled me to reconsider the boundaries of my research.



### **1.3 The rationale for the research**

Networking is nothing new. Networking to gain business is just one of many forms of marketing. Yarnell and Peterson (1993, p 61) say “In fact, networking has existed in one form or another for centuries”. What is new, perhaps, is the explicitness with which it is being used, its overt application in more areas of business and life, the increasing legitimacy of its use, and the desire of many more people to be skilled in using it. Chapter 2.2 explores the history and development of networking showing where these notions are substantiated or challenged. My interest in networking has grown through recognising how it contributes to my own business and through recognising the growing interest in networking amongst consultants.

In my exploration I found it useful to restrict the research to 'training consultancy'. Very early on it became clear to me through my own experience, and from speaking to different consultants, that there are variations in the rationale for and processes of gaining business and networking in different areas of consultancy. I networked to gain an insight into potential approaches to networking and gaining business. For example, a colleague who operates as a consultant and broadcaster on the radio explained how he must attend the right parties to gain business. By contrast an accountancy consultant promotes his business by arranging local social events. I listened to consultants from other areas of Human Resources such as compensation and benefits and found that they seemed to gain business in ways quite different from those I knew training consultants to use.

Without extensive research I couldn't be sure of the extent of the difference in how consultants in different fields networked. There can be wide variations in how training consultants operate. They vary in their values, the type of service or products they offer, and the type of businesses to which they belong. Investigating the extent or not of any difference I saw as another potential research project. There was little in the literature to guide me on how other target groups networked. Italo (1996e) was one of the few to give specific guidelines on networking for lawyers in the USA. These came over to me as a planned, mechanical, conscious and structured way of doing things. I didn't identify with those guidelines in relation to how UK training consultants networked. That's not to say that it's a 'wrong' or 'bad' way of doing things but simply different. I felt I had gleaned sufficient information to want to specialise in my selection of target group.

I felt that if I were to open up the research to different areas of consultancy there was the danger that my research would be too superficial. I was interested in researching a specific target group that I knew well, and would therefore be able to contextualise findings. If findings were then applicable and transferable to other target groups, that would be a bonus.

The choice of training consultancy as opposed to other forms of consultancy was based on a number of other factors. I was internal to the research and could harness the benefits that it could bring (Heron & Reason 2001). I could capitalise on my experience as an integral part of the research, have good access to data subjects, draw on my in-depth understanding of training consultancy, and benefit from relationships developed over time.

From the outset I was aware of potential limitations of this approach. Being very close to the subject might make it difficult to stand back and review. I might miss out on potentially beneficial data from other categories of consultants who could be using other networking methods or see issues differently. This awareness has enabled me to capitalise on the strengths of the approaches and seek to minimise disadvantages. I set out, for example, to use others as a sounding board to widen my way of thinking.

Before going into further detail I feel it is important to place the field of training in context. It is usually, but not always, placed within the field of Human Resources (HR). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) is the main institute representing HR and HR consulting in the UK. The HR field, like many others, has undergone substantial changes in working practices including outsourcing of some activities and the use of external consultants. Interestingly, figures on issues such as changes in numbers of consultants both internal and external, and companies who are outsourcing training or HR are not available. Informal discussions with those who have a very good top level view of the HR field confirmed three trends. Firstly, training consultancy is different in a number of ways to other types of HR consultancy and other types of business consultancy. Secondly, there has been (and still is) an increase in outsourcing of training work, and thirdly, the move to more consultancy positions (both internal and external) is still increasing. In the early 1990's a number of publications on how to become an internal consultant, such as Cockman, Evans and Reynolds (1992) and Holdaway and Saunders (1992), emerged in response to the changing role of some internal



trainers. Holdaway and Saunder's book is part of Kogan Page's practical trainer series aimed at higher volume sales and so I take it to be indicative of sizeable interest.

The fact that figures are hard to obtain for the HR profession is confirmed in a report (Host Consultancy and Cranfield School of Management 1998). The Host Consultancy and Cranfield University report was commissioned by the Employment National Training Organisation (ENTO). The report states "given the range of research on the nature of the function, numerical data on those involved in personnel activities is extremely weak (p 14)." It says that even the 1991 Census of Population does not differentiate between personnel or health and safety consultants within the wide grouping of management consultants. Marchington and Wilkinson (2000) is a more recent publication and still the message is the same "Until twenty years ago there were very few consultants offering P&D (personnel and development) services to organisations, but since then it is assumed that there has been a rapid growth in their number. However, it is almost impossible to determine the precise number of consultants who operate in the P&D field" (p 406).

One of the key issues which The Host Consultancy and Cranfield University report identified is that "self employed practitioners and consultants are an increasingly important feature of both strategic and operational delivery in health and safety, personnel and training and development. Yet the available data provides very little evidence of the scale or nature of economic activity in this key delivery group (p 99)". My research sheds some light on one very specific aspect of the activities of consultants by exploring their networking practices. The number of training people who move into consultancy positions has increased and is still increasing, and my belief is that a greater understanding of the way in which networking is perceived may help consultants when networking for gaining business. It may help them to make choices about how and why they may choose to network.

The way in which I chose to tackle this project was as a piece of research that is descriptive and exploratory. It was intended to be wide in nature and more open ended, seeking to gain an understanding rather than to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Robson 1993). The open-ended approach allows for the results to reflect diversity in thinking as well as commonality of themes, allowing insights into networking to unfold so increasing our shared knowledge and understanding. Further information on my methodology is outlined in detail in Chapters 3 and 4 and Appendix 3.

## **1.4 An Outline of the Content of my Thesis**

In Chapter 2, I set the scene by summarising the literature on networking. At the outset it surprised me how little there was on how training consultants network. My account therefore develops into a wider investigation of the literature on related topics to inform my research. I have grouped the contributions of the literature into themes around the importance of networking, reasons to network, fears and potential disadvantages, different types and characteristics of networks, ways in which networking opportunities can emerge, quality of the process, use of power, gender and cultural issues, skills used by networkers, best practices, support and help for networkers, and networking through the Internet. The literature helped me recognise the potential to make a significant contribution to knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I relate my approach to different schools of research by drawing on relevant literature. This helped to locate my research within existing frameworks. I discuss the implications of following participatory research, in a complete membership role, and the impact of Personal Construct Psychology on my research process. In Chapter 4 explains the data gathering and analysis methods used during the research. These include well-established methods such as observation and interviewing, as well as lesser known methods such as self-characterisation and construct analysis.

Chapters 5 and 6 contain the main findings of my research, each starting with a summary of key findings. These contain significant contributions to knowledge and are the core of my work. Chapter 5 focuses on networking strategy and approach, while Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship side of networking. All findings are discussed in relation to how training consultants network to gain business, rather than as stand-alone subjects.

Chapter 7 contains my main conclusions from the research. I set all the elements of my research, my research process and findings, the main conclusions, draw out my contribution to knowledge, indicate possible areas of future research and end with a summary of how training consultants perceive networking for gaining business.



To support my thesis I have included extracts and quotations from academic literature, practitioner literature, traditional paper based materials and Internet based items, extracts from interview, observations and reflections. They have been used in a number of ways, but principally to illustrate a point, substantiate a point, or show application of a point to networking by training consultants. Supporting detail has also been given in the following appendices. Appendix 1 gives an overview of my main contributors. Appendix 2 is a short biography of George Kelly and his personal construct theory. In Appendix 3 I recount how I made sense of my research and my research process, including some trials and tribulations as well as joys and successes. I hope that it will benefit others who are undertaking qualitative research. Appendices 4 and 5 give details of two repertory grids that I conducted on myself. Appendix 6 gives a detailed account of the use and analysis of a repertory grid. Finally, in Appendix 7, I give an example of a mind map as these have been so helpful to me in my research.

This thesis is a significant original exploration of how training consultants perceive their networking practices to gain business. The detailed presentation of my research leading to my final conclusions begins in the next chapter with the main findings of my literature search in relation to networking. This took place over a long period of time and is still ongoing as I continue to keep my knowledge and interest in the subject up to date.

## **Chapter 2 The Contribution of the Literature on Networking**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter takes my initial objective of ‘exploring the literature on networking’ and develops it into a focused review. The purpose of this literature chapter is to summarise existing knowledge in relation to how training consultants perceive their networking practices to gain business, to explore the wider literature on networking and related subjects that may inform the research, identify the contribution of existing research on the subject, and show where existing research findings indicate areas for further research. In order to reflect the range of literature on the subject I will draw on academic publications as well as practitioner publications, literature in paper-based form and that on the Internet. In this chapter I will explore definitions of the terms ‘network’ and ‘networking and towards the end of the chapter I will draw together the main contributions of the literature and how it has informed my research.

Reading about analysis methods made me think about analysing and making sense of the range and type of literature that I was exploring. When I started my literature search, books which I consider now to be helpful such as Hart (1998) and Hart (2001) were not yet published. I did however find some items to guide me. “The literature review phase of research has fewer established methodology tools than most parts of the research process. Context analysis provides an additional method for helping appraise existing literature in a field and for helping with the strategic appraisal of projected new work” (Falkingham & Reeves 1997). Falkingham and Reeves assert “Context analysis enables quantifiable statements to be made about the whole body of the research activity in a particular field: for example, what types of people are doing the research, what methods are used, what paradigms are being followed and what types of output arise.” I felt that to follow these headings exactly with the aim of quantifying the literature in my field of research would be less helpful, mainly because there was so little of direct relevance to training consultants networking to gain business. It did however encourage me periodically check the balance of topics about which I was reading. I produced a database to prevent duplication and assess my search by topic, date, author etc, thereby identifying potential gaps.



I will start by summarising the contribution of the literature with an exploration of terms such as 'network' and 'networking' and the perceived use of networks and networking concepts through history to the current day.

## **2.2 Definitions and development of networking**

In exploring definitions of 'network' and 'networking', I was surprised by how many texts, both non-academic and academic, used the terms without any explanation (Smith 1989; Sonnenberg 1990; Yarnell & Peterson 1993; Curran, Jarvis et al. 1993). Dictionary definitions show the development of 'network' and 'networking' as terms in use. Up to the early 1970's, dictionaries such as Chambers or Oxford explain the term 'network' in relation to railways, canals and rivers. Other types of networks have been in existence for a considerable time although not necessarily known by that term. Wester (1995) argues that information networks have been around at least since the early days of the postal service. The 1959 Chambers dictionary entry is fairly typical of many dictionaries until the 1970's "Network: any structure in the form of a net: a system of lines eg railway lines, resembling a net" (Geddie 1959, p 719).

By 1976, definitions included people. For example, Sykes (1976, p 732-733) defines a 'network' as an "arrangement with intersecting lines and interstices recalling those of net, complex system of railway, rivers, canals, etc., chain of interconnected persons or operations or electrical conductors, group of broadcasting stations connected for simultaneous broadcast of same programme." These have in common the idea of connections in the form of a net in all directions, but are used in many differing contexts. The connections link points which can be people, places, equipment etc (Seed 1990). The concept of human networks is introduced.

By 1998, definitions included computer and telecommunications (Allen & Schwarz 1998) and the term networker is defined as "a person who develops business and professional contact through informal social meetings" (p 1087). I found this definition restricting as it did not allow for networking for social reasons, nor did it include formal situations.

I compared a recent dictionary definition with one in the networking literature. Firstly, "Network. An arrangement of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines" (Pearsall 2001, p

958). This has much in common with Castells (1996, p 470) definition “A network is a set of interconnected nodes.” Both are wide in scope but imply a rigid not flexible process.

Secondly, Pearsall defined networking as “Interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts” which reflected my initial understanding of people networking. I felt this definition had the advantage of allowing for formal and informal networking, for business and social reasons.

Thirdly, Pearsall (2001, p 958) defined a networker as “A person who operates from home or an external office via a computer network – a person who networks with others in a similar field”. This last definition I felt was not supportive of his definitions of network and networking and not so useful as it restricted the concept of networking. Developing ‘useful contacts’ may require contact with those in other fields. Castells (1996, p 244) adds to the debate of what a networker is by distinguishing between ‘networker’ and ‘networked’. ‘Networkers’ are those “who set up connections on their initiative” whereas the ‘networked’ are “workers who are on-line but without deciding when, how, why or with whom”.

When studying definitions I found that other researchers found them far from standardised (Mueller 1986). I concur with Mueller’s assertion that some social scientists add undue complication in explaining the term which in his opinion reflects “the very simple notion of a human network as a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship” (p 14). The focus in my research is on person-to-person connections by training consultants for the purpose of gaining business, which may take place through face-to-face interaction, letters, email, Internet discussion groups, telephone etc.

To summarise, I found these useful as working definitions for my research.

Network: “a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship”  
(Mueller 1986, p 14)

Networking “interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts”. (Pearsall 2001, p 958)

This ‘networking’ or interacting to exchange information and develop useful contacts can take place in any setting in which people are interacting, whether face-to-face or in writing. The definition does not restrict the setting. These definitions reflect the wide



potential differences in the nature of the relationship or person to person connections including exchanging information and developing useful contacts, talking with people and developing relationships. They allow for variety in the nature of the exchange, reasons for doing so and how useful contacts are developed. They give a common basis for starting an exploration of the way in which training consultants perceive networking, allowing for the fluid interactions of people networking in different settings and with different degrees of formality.

Authors claim that 'networks' and 'networking', as concepts, have been in existence for a very long time. Mueller (1986) asserts that networking that has gone on in families, tribes, schools and churches over centuries. In the Middle Ages, it assisted "learning how to move in the highest society" (Sim 1961, p XXIV) and strategic marriages added both wealth and access to new networks of local importance (Laborage 1986). It assisted the exchange of ideas, culture and patterns of government (Sim 1961). At a more everyday level, Bishop (1971) explains how men met in taverns and women met when they collected water from public water fountains, to socialise and exchange news and ideas.

Amongst nobility, public schools and long standing universities, Heald (1983) asserts that networking has long been an established way of doing business and is often referred to as the 'old boy network' (UK) or 'old school connections' (US). The French lycees and colleges provide much the same elite system of connections. Gathorne-Hardy (1979) and Barrell and Image (1993, p 13) consider networking "as alive and well in social life today as it was in seventeenth-century France". Authors such as Heald (1983) stand out in my mind for the way in which they show how long established networking is as a way of doing things. However, take into account that these authors are using current day terms for phenomena that have taken place years ago. In contrast other literature portrays networking as the 'new way' and the current era as that of the 'age of the network' (Lipnack & Stamps 1994; Castells 1996). This may be because networking is not just used broadly in society, it is being used more consciously in business and to describe contemporary ways of working (Handy 1991) through matrix management, cross functional groups and coalitions "of individuals voluntarily working together to achieve a common purpose or goal" (Wills 1994 p 19).

The literature on networking in society was fairly general and so I explored the contribution of more specific literature on inter-firm networking and strategic alliances.

These have been investigated by researchers such as Huggins (2000), Buono (1997) and Castells (1996). Castells (1996) considers two forms of networking used by small and medium sized businesses called 'multidirectional networking' and 'licensing-sub-contracting model of production' which involve inter-firm networking to exploit market niches and co-operative ventures. Castells also comments on the networking that goes on at a corporate or strategic level between large corporations leading to strategic alliances. To me, a very significant statement that Castells makes is "Networks are the fundamental stuff of which new organizations are and will be made" (p 168). My research is about exploring consultants' perceptions about what this 'fundamental stuff' is all about in relation to networking to gain business.

Lipnack and Stamps (1993) put forward their view of the current 'age of the network' and its development in organisations since the 1960's. In 1979 they started researching network organisations and found that "While leading-edge thinking pointed to the emerging organizational form of networks, little was known about what makes them work. Even less was known about how to manage them" (p xxvii). I agree that networking in organisations is very much in vogue today and have noted developments such as Silicon Valley in the US and Prato District in Italy as networks or environments which are harnessing networking in an active way (Nohria 1992). Networking processes and skills are also regarded by some as a key asset for different ways of working such as working in virtual teams, virtual organisations, and for people who might be working at any location and at any time (Cascio 1999; Sparrow & Daniels 1999; Marshall 1984).

The definitions and exploration of terms through history provided some context and understanding on which to base my research. It showed me areas of commonality and of difference, and how narrowly or broadly the terms can be interpreted. With this in mind I felt better placed to develop a summary overview of the available literature.

### **2.3 Summary of literature on networking in general**

I will next summarise the literature in relation to networking before going into detail in subsequent sections. Jarillo and Ricart (1987 p 82) say for example that, "Networking is a fashionable topic. It is receiving increasing attention in popular management publications as well as in specialised academic journals". In this account I will draw on both types of literature – practitioner and academic, indicating at times how each contributes.



There is a substantial amount on organisational behaviour and organisational networking (Robbins 1998; Thorelli 1986; Judkins, West et al. 1985). Williamson (1975) asserts that markets and hierarchies are two modes of organisational operation. Jarillo (1993) questions Williamson's assertion and proposes that strategic networks operate somewhere between hierarchies and markets. Nohria and Eccles (1992) in studying organisational networks explore the view that all organisations are in some respect social networks and so make the point that networks cannot simply be segmented for one purpose or another. Social networking, networking for personal development, promotion, new jobs and social relationships are all well documented and studied from many different perspectives (Paul 1985; Segerman-Peck 1991; Hadley & Sheldon 1995; Hargie 1997).

In focusing on how training consultants perceive networking I explored relevant terms such as business consultancy and training consultancy which are well discussed in the literature (Cockman, Evans et al. 1992; Garratt 1991). Garratt (1991 p 2) defines a 'consultant' as "someone other people ask for advice, and look to for guidance, instruction or information – someone external to the work group or organization". I find this definition useful because it encompasses the employed and self-employed, those internal and external to an organisation, and, if applied to training for example, goes beyond course delivery as the total service offered.

Literature on networking as a means of generating business is far more limited and includes, for example, Hayes (1996) and Italo (1996e). Networking for gaining business is a form of marketing, yet standard marketing textbooks such as Chartered Institute of Marketing (1999), Baker (1999) and Palmer (2000) have relatively little on it. P. J. Fraser (2000) who also searched the literature on networking noted "More recently, studies of organisations are increasingly addressing the importance of relationship marketing and personal networks in the successful start-up and development of an organisation. Despite this trend, the terms still receive relatively little mention in the mainstream subject textbooks" (p 76). From the more non-academic management literature Gattis (1995 p 119) describes networking as an advanced marketing tool - "the bottom line is people do business with those they know. The trick is to be known by a lot of people". I question this as too simplistic and suggest there needs to be more analysis regarding quantity versus quality. Palmer (2000 p 190) says, "Relationship marketing is essentially about extending and deepening the business which a company does with each of its customers."

Relationship marketing has become more recognised as form of marketing during the last decade. It is not new as it can be regarded as a renaming of what used to be called industrial marketing. However, it is perceived differently and is developing differently, though it is only part of what I call networking to gain business.

The Internet document by Italo (1996e) is one of the few detailed items to focus on networking as a means of gaining professional business. It is a piece of practitioner literature seemingly based on personal experiences, interviews, and observations, written in the style of 'top tips'. There is very little else on the subject of training consultants using networking to gain business. What exists is useful in terms of experiences and advice on the process of networking, for example Kirk (1994), rather than being formally research based.

#### **2.4 Different dimensions of networking**

No one piece of literature gave me a consolidated view of the different dimensions of networking so I set about creating my own list (presented below) from all the separate items. This helped me to become more conscious of the wide range of dimensions of networking.

<b>Theme in the literature</b>	<b>Examples of sources of literature</b>
Importance of networking	Perry (1996), Poirier and Houser (1992), Castells (1996), Zeffane (1995) and Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991)
Reasons for networking	Coviello and Munro (1995), Noble and Aram(1998), Curran et. al. (1993), Poirier and Houser (1992)
Fears and potential disadvantages of networking	Thorelli (1986), Yarnell and Peterson (1993), and Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991)
Different types of networks	Fraser (2000), Sims, Fineman and Gabriel (1993), Hill and McGowan (1996), Castells (1996), Kanter and Eccles (1992)



	and Huggins (2000)
Characteristics of networks	DiMaggio (1992), Krackhardt and Hanson (1993); Thorelli (1986), Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991), Curran et. al.(1993) and Ahrne (1994)
Ways in which networking opportunities can emerge	Zeffane (1995) and Krackhardt and Hanson(1993)
Quality of the process	Wills (1994), Perry (1996) and Hill and McGowan (1996)
Use of power	Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) and Pfeiffer (1991)
Gender and cultural issues	Rothstein and Davey (1995), Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997), Burke, Rothstein and Bristor (1995), and Ibarra (1992)
Skills used by networkers	Palmer (1996), Barrell and Image (1993) and Hill and McGowan (1996)
Best practice in the process of networking	Mead (1990), Fraser (2000), Italo (1996e), Mueller (1986), Huggins (2000) and Buono (1997)
Support and help for networkers	Hill and McGowan (1996) and Leads Club International (1997)
Networking through the Internet	Dochartaigh (2002) and Lee (2000)

This gave me a skeletal framework from which I could then expand my knowledge and investigation. In the following sub-sections I have expanded on these, starting with the importance of networking.

#### **2.4a Importance of networking**

In most publications on networking there is some comment on the importance attached to it. In many practitioner texts, readers are invited to consider why networking is important. I found the importance of networking and the growing interest in it was based on factors such as swiftness and flexibility to keep up with or get ahead of the competition (Wills 1994; Zeffane 1995), to assist continuous innovation and creativity (Business International

Limited 1992) and strengthen business across boundaries (Zeffane 1995). Networking is seen as making an important contribution by lowering costs and raising efficiency through outsourcing and building close collaborative alliances (Poirier & Houser 1992). Such demands on organisations have led to a growing interest in the value of relationships, especially informal ones, and hence a growing interest in networking ideas, especially to newer organisational forms (Castells 1996). Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991) argue that managers, and especially owner / managers, place importance on gathering business information and use networking as one means of doing so - "the more people an entrepreneur knows and the more frequently they interact the greater is his access to information and resources" (p 58). The assumption that quantity of contact is more beneficial needs substantiating. For example, very frequent contact might result in frustration through overuse of a particular contact.

The literature gives evidence of the importance of networking to organisations. For example, Perry's research demonstrated that 70% of the sample of one organisation and 62% of the sample of the other felt that business growth depended on networking through expanding personal contacts (Perry 1996). There was a perceived "need to deepen relationships with existing customers and to build relationships with new ones" (p 74). Note however, that these results indicate what businesses 'felt' rather than giving more specific results about the impact of networking. In contrast with Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991), the results do indicate the importance of quality in addition to quantity.

In the literature, networking is shown to have some correlation with levels of success. Houlder (1997b) outlines some research into the difference between average workers and star workers. In particular, Houlder describes some research that began at Bell Laboratories in 1986 (without giving the original source of the study) to pinpoint the difference between high performers and other less effective performers. Networking was the second highest factor in distinguishing high performers. Houlder goes on to corroborate these findings by describing a 1997 UK research project involving 218 knowledge workers in which there was broad agreement with the outcomes of the Bell Laboratories study. An explanation of exactly what was meant by networking would have made the findings more meaningful. However, these studies do confirm the trend of networking becoming recognised, at least in some circles, as important to achieving organisational success.



Many of the reports on the importance of networking also commented on reasons for networking and in the next section I go on to consider this facet of the literature.

#### **2.4b Reasons For Networking**

In the literature again I found no single consolidated list of reasons and so created my own summary (given below). The literature indicates that some people focus on one or two main reasons whereas others have a multitude of reasons – business, personal and/or domestic (Noble & Aram 1998) and this concurs with my own experience.

Loneliness	Houlder (1997a) and Paul (1985)
Instrumental v social use	Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997)
Need for an impartial sounding board	Houlder (1997a)
For feedback	Raye-Johnson (1990) and Welch (1980)
Encouragement	Raye-Johnson (1990)
Learning new skills and knowledge	Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997) and Paul (1985)
More and improved sources of information	Curran et. al. (1993) and Kirk (1994)
Keep abreast of current thinking	Thatcher (1996)
Peer support for friendship, relaxation and emotional support	Tomlinson (1987), Segerman-Peck (1991) and Ramsey (1997)
Role models	Tomlinson (1987)
Career management	Bloch (1994) and Alexander (1997)
Job search	OnTrack Media Corporation (1996) and Mann (1997)
Harness power within an organisation	Krackhardt and Hanson (1993)
As a management tool, competency, to aid relationships	Smith (1989)
Develop new markets	Coviello and Munro (1995) and Campbell (1998)
Greater exposure to raise the profile of your business	Kirk (1994)
Sense of value and self esteem	Welch (1980) and Stern (1981)
Reciprocal mutual benefit or 'mutual back-	Segerman-Peck (1991)

scratching'	
Gaining business contracts	Hart (1996), Sonnenberg (1990) and Campbell (1997)
Looking for suppliers	Cordani (1997) and Poirier and Houser (1992)
Aid a flexible response to changing market conditions	Zeffane (1995), Yarnell and Peterson (1993), Tighe (1997) and Hastings (1991)
Harness expertise in others outside your own part of the organisation or outside your own organisation	Kidd (1994) and Smith (1989)
Reduce risk by spreading over a variety of organisations	Yarnell and Peterson (1993)
Benchmarking (skills, products and services, practices etc)	Walters (1994)
To grow the business without increasing permanent staff or permanent structures	Yarnell and Peterson (1993)
Use networking to gain an endorsement that carries weight	Sonnenberg (1990)

I identify broadly with all these reasons but have more personal experience of some. For example, using people in a network as a sounding board (Houlder 1997a) benefited me when I was uncertain of how to word contractual letters and discussed this with a trusted colleague. Overcoming loneliness (Houlder 1997a; Paul 1985) and getting support and encouragement (Raye-Johnson 1990; Tomlinson 1987; Segerman-Peck 1991; Ramsey 1997) were significant reasons to me when I first became self-employed and home based. Colleagues have expressed this same view to me.

Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997) suggest that there is evidence that women may network more for social reasons and men for more 'instrumental' reasons eg for obtaining jobs. Studies do not make clear any reasons for these trends but it may be linked to what are seen as 'acceptable' responses from the genders.

Networking to keep up-to-date and having access to knowledge (Kirk 1994; Thatcher 1996) also feature strongly. Curran et al. (1993) found that small business owners made little use of experts such as accountants or of chambers of commerce, rotary, round table,



trade associations and the like. He found that they do not seem to make much use of those very organisations designed to help them with information and knowledge. The research indicated that small business owners make little time for networking. A disadvantage of the research was that the sample was cross-sector and focused on formal contacts rather than informal ones and so care is needed in drawing conclusions about the significance of the research for networking for information.

Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991) by contrast state how valuable personal networking is to entrepreneurs for gathering information. Their research differs from Curran's (1996) in that they found owner managers were less likely to network with other owner managers and more likely to draw on professionals in other fields.

To learn new skills and knowledge (Paul 1985), harness expertise in others outside your own organisation or part of it (Kidd 1994; Smith 1989) and to gain feedback (Raye-Johnson 1990; Welch 1980) are other reasons for networking given in the literature. These remind me of my search for specialist Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) training prior to my PhD to formalise my knowledge and skills. Networking through a PCP email discussion group proved successful after conventional catalogue searches had failed. Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997) identify training networks as a specific type of networking which may have a specific or more general focus. Loxham (1999) reports on research by WOLCE (World Open Learning for Business Conference and Exhibition) showing that networking to meet others facing similar challenges and performance pressures and to learn about best and worst practices is one of the major reasons people attend such events.

Harnessing power within an organisation is another reason for networking (Krackhardt & Hanson 1993). An example in training is when a consultant working for an organisation asks the current contact who else could be contacted within their organisation. There are many dimensions to power and networking and these are discussed more fully in section 2.4h.

Other reasons for networking identified in the literature include developing new markets (Coviello & Munro 1995; Campbell 1998) and increasing exposure to raise a business's profile (Kirk 1994). Networking is seen as one way of responding to changing market conditions flexibly (Zeffane 1995). Some organisations are experimenting with strategic

alliances and partnerships to cut costs. Networking or strategic partnerships have helped to outsource non-value added or non-core functions. Literature specifically about gaining business contracts includes Hart (1996), Sonnenberg (1990) and Campbell (1997). A number of training consultants raise their profile and win new contracts by presenting at conferences or professional institute meetings, networking with potential new and existing clients. The reverse is also true in that some network to find suppliers (Cordani 1997; Poirier & Houser 1992). I can identify with this as my accountant and financial adviser were found through networking when I started business in 1991.

Gattis (1995) lists “personal visibility and publicity” as one of the reasons to network and Kirk (1994) includes greater exposure as a benefit of networking. When it comes to being skilled at networking to raise visibility, Sonnenberg (1990 p 58) cautions networkers to “Become active in organizations; don’t just grace everyone with your presence. Be selective in choosing a group and then get involved.” Segerman-Peck (1991 p 51) has a sub-heading on “extra expertise and visibility” and says that taking an active part in activities “gives you public visibility and draws the attention of your current employers and potential future ones to your competence and ability.... The more you are seen to be competent and good to work with, the greater your chances of being known generally as someone worth watching and worth promoting.” Zeffane (1995 p 31) links networking and visibility by saying “Networking is, in effect, reaching out and creating visibility for oneself and one’s company in niche or target markets.” All this is in the general literature on networking. Italo, a US legal professional, is one of the few to explicitly write about visibility as a consultant (Italo 1996d).

Another reason for networking is to increase apparent size and capability when tendering for business. It can help grow the business without increasing permanent staff or permanent structures (Yarnell & Peterson 1993). Networking to gain an endorsement that carries weight (Sonnenberg 1990) is a common reason that I have found in the literature and my experience. Wills (1994 p 26) says that “Networkers who do not fully understand the nature of the processes involved will make two kinds of subtle mistake: first, the extension of networking beyond the limits of its capability and, second, the modification of its form in such a way as to modify its operating logic.” I recall a dilemma facing the members of one network of which I was a member in the early 1990’s. Some consultants simply wanted support whereas others wanted a consortium for overcoming the difficulties of being a ‘one-man band’. I feared they were trying to go beyond the



capabilities of this particular network (Wills 1994). I relate my research findings on consortia in Chapter 5.

There are many other reasons listed in the literature. These include networking to find role models (Tomlinson 1987), for career management (Bloch 1994; Alexander 1997), for finding a new job (OnTrack Media Corporation 1996; Mann 1997), to gain self esteem (Welch 1980; Stern 1981), for mutual benefit (Segerman-Peck 1991), to reduce risk by spreading over a variety of organisations (Yarnell & Peterson 1993), for benchmarking (skills, products, services) (Walters 1994), for stimulating innovation (Starkey 1996), and for executive networking (Mabey & Iles 1994). While these reasons are discussed in some detail, there is little acknowledgement of any links between these and gaining business. This may well be because there are few direct links. However, possible 'spin-offs' or indirect links with gaining business are rarely mentioned.

Much of the literature focuses on benefits of networking, sometimes simply stating that it is a good thing to do, but is relatively superficial in discussing disadvantages and the varying factors to take into account when considering reasons for networking.

The literature on reasons formed a starting point from which I could explore reasons for why I and other training consultants choose to network. This was in terms of the literature on networking to gain business and on literature on other reasons for consultants networking, and how these lie alongside each other. However, not everyone harnesses the advantages of networking because of certain fears that act as a deterrent. I explore the literature on these next.

#### **2.4c Fears and Potential Disadvantages of Networking**

Through my own thematic analysis of the literature I have summarised in this section a number of fears and concerns regarding networking to gain business. I noticed that the literature reported more fully on potential advantages than on potential fears or disadvantages.

One reported fear is that sharing information through networking might lead to loss of company secrets or technical knowledge (Dickson & Hadjimanolis 1998). Others feel that buying in expertise or services outside the organisation as a result of networking can be



costly to the organisation (Yarnell & Peterson 1993). Another concern is that networking can lead to informal co-operation of a non-contractual nature and that there would be no legal recourse if problems arise with these informal relationships (Yarnell & Peterson 1993).

Aside from technical and contractual issues, networking is about building relationships, often over a long period of time, requiring effort, commitment, time and money (Birley, Cromie et al. 1991). Some see these costs as a disadvantage whereas others, including myself, view it as strategic market investment (Thorelli 1986).

Another potential fear reported in the literature is based on uncertainty over networking etiquette as advice in the literature has changed over the years. It is also different in different publications of approximately the same date, and in publications from different countries. MacDonald (1999) asserts “Just a few years ago what was termed as being pushy was frowned upon. Now taking the initiative by making and maintaining useful personal contacts is expected.”

Welch (1980 p 31-32) discusses some of the “stumbling blocks” that “may not feel right” and which may be a source of discomfort. “First the prospect of *using* people.... creating relationships with them, not because we like and enjoy them but because they can be *useful* to us? Asking for help is hard enough for a lot of us, but asking someone we’ve consciously set up for the purpose”? This reinforces the potential instrumentality of networking already indicated in other sections. Hart (1996 p 36) actively promotes instrumentality saying “there is little point going to a gathering and eating peanuts around the fringes”.

Sheppard (2000) puts a slightly different spin on things. “Meeting someone new, distinguished networkers ask themselves ‘How useful is this person to my entire network?’ A poor networker asks ‘What can this person do for me?’ The interesting point is: good networkers not only build an admirable reputation, they benefit more than those who take the more self-centred approach.” This gives one way of dealing with the stumbling block that Welch mentions by having a broader approach. Many networkers may find it a more comfortable way of dealing with the issue. MacDonald (1999) says “People might be cynical about back scratching but that is what makes the world go round. The old adage about not mixing work and pleasure rarely applies these days.”

The process of gaining entry to a particular network and positioning oneself in relation to pre-existing members of the network can be a key barrier to some networkers (Thorelli 1986). Some networks are relatively fixed and formalised. Other are more fluid and constantly changing. I regard my own personal network as an example of the latter. Those with less confidence or skill sometimes fear gaining entry to networks and building relationships. Informal networks can be hard to penetrate as there may be no obvious entry point. There are frequent entries in practitioner literature (eg (Kirk 1994)) and consultants have often told me how difficult they find it to gain entry when networking. Edwards and Edwards (1994 p 412) acknowledge the discomfort some people feel about meeting others for the first time or in gaining entry and recommend stepping into the role of host to help overcome this. “Here are several tips for becoming a master networker. First, step into the role of host....successful networkers approach life as a ‘host’ instead of as a ‘guest’. Guests wait to be introduced. They feel ill at ease until someone makes them feel welcome. Hosts, on the other hand, assume responsibility for making sure everyone knows who everyone else is and for helping people feel welcome and at ease.” This indicates to me a proactive approach to networking

The literature gives other fears and concerns. One is that colleagues may ‘steal your leads or clients’. On this Kirk (1994 p 16) asserts, “Network colleagues may become competitors and actively solicit business from a client.” There is also the danger of damage to your own reputation if the associate turns out to disappoint your client (Kirk 1994). This issue is developed in Chapter 6.5c. Some are concerned that “You may pass business to others and get little in return” (Kirk 1994 p 16). This idea is built upon in Chapter 6.4a.

Finally, some fear that networking can become time consuming (Birley, Cromie et al. 1991) and costly, especially if hospitality events are part of the process. Some question whether it is worthwhile.

#### **2.4d Types of Networks**

In my research I focus mainly on ‘networking’, the verb, rather than on networks. P. J. Fraser (2000 p 71) says “It is essential to distinguish between the network itself, which is a construct; and networking, the activity which develops, maintains or uses the network.”



Kanter and Eccles (1992) also comment on the difference between networks and networking in that academics often speak about networks or network organizations, whereas managers more often speak about 'networking'. They assert that many academics are more interested in studying characteristics of networks or the consequences of networking (ie understanding the noun), whereas more managers are interested in using the verb. My focus is on 'networking' the verb, and on understanding the perceptions of practitioners. I have found that the underpinning knowledge about networks in both academic and practitioner literature helpful in giving context to aid understanding of networking.

There are many different types of networks (within the broad scope of 'people networks') mentioned in the literature. Walters (1994) provided me with a good starting point in raising the difference between inter-organisational and intra-organisational networks. Castells (1996) identifies five types of networks namely supplier, producer, customer, standard coalitions, and technology cooperation networks. "They take many names – "strategic alliances," "joint venture," "outsourcing partnerships," and "flexible business networks," to name a few" (Lipnack & Stamps 1994 p 16). Strategic organisational networks often occur at very senior levels or with influential decision-makers on behalf of an organisation (Jarillo & Ricart 1987; Jarillo 1993).

There are personal networks, functional networks, special purpose networks and corporate networks (Business International Limited 1992). Huggins (2000) typology of networks is based on learning, commercial and innovation networks. The increasing numbers of knowledge networks that aim to share knowledge through formal and informal networks within an organisation are an example of special purpose networks that assist learning. These are explored in some depth in Minto and Stephenson (1998). Shaw and Conway (2000) provide an alternative classification based on the nature of the transaction and refer to the advice network, the trust network and the communication network. This myriad of categorisations can make it seem that there are clearly defined types of networks. However, the differences are often less clear cut and the 'fuzziness' in types and characteristics of many networks is acknowledged by Mueller (1986).

In addition the literature contains definitions of allied terms such as 'network organization' which Jones, George et. al. (2000, p 488) for example define as "a flexible, sometimes temporary, relationship between manufactures, buyers, suppliers, even



customers.” The comment “even customers” implies to me that some organisations regard customers as totally external to their ‘organisation’ and some regard customers as an integral part. This may well depend on the nature of the business and the type of working partnership or joint collaborative projects in place.

Not all networks are formalised. Networks can be formal and tight or informal and loose. Informal networks “refer to the personal connections and communications instigated by people within and between organisations, and maintained to serve their interests” (Sims, Fineman et al. 1993 p 259). Many social support networks are more informal (Miller & Ray 1994) and can be defined as “the relationships or alliances, which the individual develops or, indeed, may seek to develop between themselves and others in their society” (Hill & McGowan 1996 p 149).

The literature made me conscious of the wide variety of networks and networking formality / approach on which I could build in my research. Detail on the characteristics of networks is added to this foundation next.

#### **2.4e Characteristics of Networks**

“A network is based on personal relations and thus recognition, but a network must not be confused with an organization. There may be networks within organizations or between different organizations.” (Ahme 1994 p 77)

In the literature there is considerable detail on the characteristics of networks within which people network. However, I have not come across similar studies on the process of networking. Understanding some characteristics of networking can be useful in planning how to develop networking processes. Mapping out a network is one such area that is well documented (Clutterbuck 1998; Krackhardt & Hanson 1993). The latter reports on a study about a leader who mapped out his network. Analysing his network maps helped him identify huge differences between those he had contact with and those he felt he could trust. The leader had not been aware of this and found it helped to explain certain managerial difficulties. It helped him to develop his networking practices to support his technical needs.

Krackhardt and Hanson’s research was on managers, and I find the principles and concept of networking mapping described relevant to other groups of employees and to training

consultants. For example, prior to my research I helped course members to map out networks as part of personal development training and to analyse to whom they might turn for emotional, practical help, job related or social support. They were nearly always surprised (and in some cases overwhelmed) by the size of their network. I helped them explore which areas of their network they might need to investigate further.

The literature shows that networks go through changes and life cycles. The term 'life cycle' refers to the length of time a network remains valued and people participate in it. People's interest in a network can increase or decrease over time. Thorelli (1986) says that a network would go into decline unless there is conscious effort to maintain it. Networks form, strengthen and then either dissipate or undergo very substantial change at some point, which concurs with my own personal experiences. For example, I chaired a local group of a professional institute that merged with another. When this happened many people who actively contributed in the old network no longer did so. My networking pattern within this network went through a radical change. The implication of life cycles for me is that I can't rely on networking in the same way within any one network as the network itself may change over time.

Another characteristic given in the literature is the one or two-way flow of information through a network. Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) report on a study of the communication networks of 24 branches of a bank saying: "*More* communication did not distinguish the most profitable branches; the *quality* of communication determined their success" (p 109). They found that two-way communication patterns in the networks correlated with increased profitability. I have built upon issues of two-way communication patterns and reciprocity in Chapter 5.4a.

In terms of other aspects of networking characteristics there already exists a number of quantitative studies on the size and density of networking (Birley, Cromie et al. 1991; DiMaggio 1992). In a study of interpersonal networks of managerial and professional people (Burke, Rothstein et al. 1995), the authors summarise the findings of a number of studies, and have collected quantitative data about the number of people in a person's network and gender differences in network characteristics. They conclude by saying "Future research and analysis must move beyond description to consider the processes underlying the development and utilization of interpersonal networks..... What accounts for some individuals being successful while others are not?.... Qualitative research would



make a useful start to our understanding of these processes” (p 27). Curran et al. (1993) explain that much research on networking has focused on quantitative analysis of characteristics (eg frequency of contact). There is less on the nature of relationships with “very little attention to the character or significance of the relationships for those involved” (p 13). They put forward the view that “if networks and networking are primarily a cultural phenomena, then a more qualitative approach will be required than has previously been used” (p 14). This need expressed in the literature to consider the underlying processes using a qualitative approach was a significant factor in helping me select my research methodology.

The literature on the characteristics of networks led me to consider the different networking opportunities that exist and the ways in which they emerge.

#### **2.4f Ways in Which Networking Opportunities Can Emerge**

In the literature I noticed that a wide variety of networking opportunities were mentioned. The non-academic literature tends to be stronger on practical lists of potential networking opportunities. Raye-Johnson (1990 p 3) lists “mentor/protégé programs, coalitions, special interest groups, quality circles, sensitivity trainings, power breakfasts and lunches, ex-employee alumni groups, forums, retreats and computerized network groups”. Summers (1993) gives an example of a special interest group called the Pepperell Network launched by the Industrial Society for senior professional women. In addition, Alexander (1997) also mentions exhibitions, courses and seminars, business support groups such as Training and Enterprise Councils, Chambers of Commerce (Dfee 1997). Any one type of opportunity may be used by different people in different ways.

Opportunities can arise from formal and informal situations. Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) and Zeffane (1995) promote the benefits and importance of networking informal situations. There is also the use of business breakfasts and lunches (Cordani 1997), clubs and professional associations (Segerman-Peck 1991; Kirk 1994), routine and specially made telephone calls (Career Development Centre 1997), specialist meetings and forums (Bloch 1994; Thatcher 1996), lunch or other meetings with old school or college friends (Barrell & Image 1993). “Formal business organisations, social clubs, and kinship groups have all been perceived to be important” (Dodd 1997 p 80). Tullier (1998) includes the

Internet. The range of formal and informal situations is supportive of my chosen working definition of networking.

Having a good range of networking opportunities is one thing. Making the most of them is another. This leads on to considering the quality of the networking process.

#### **2.4g Quality of the Networking Process**

I noticed the literature indicated that quality of the networking process is very important and can be influenced by many factors including the consciousness / unconsciousness of the process of networking, cultural factors, planning, trust and use of power. Quality or 'effective networking' is hard to define but in my terms it includes whether networking does what you want it to do in the way that you want. This may be different for each person.

Hill and McGowen (1996) explore the use of networks as a tool for small firm entrepreneurs as a means of marketing. Their key messages include the need for the entrepreneur to build quality into the network; to network consciously and proactively. They propose both formal and informal means, recommending a managed, rational and planned approach rather than totally intuitive. They list factors that affect the strength and quality of a network and include geographical location, psychological issues, cultural factors, regularity of use, level of maturity, degree of trust, and past experiences.

In relation to this list trust in particular stands out in my mind as it is reiterated in many items of literature on networking as being important to the quality and success of the networking strength and process (Arkin 2001). Zeffane (1995) and Hausler and Lutz (1994) show through their research and investigation that trust is essential for inter-firm collaboration. Wills (1994 p 26) says "Fairness, openness and trust... must be upheld and be seen to be upheld". To develop the trust needed Perry (1996 p 78) suggests "smaller, more personal groupings may be more effective than large open forums."

Strong links and quality relationships take time to build. Hadley and Sheldon (1995 p 21) is one of a number of publications supporting the idea that "networking requires a long-term outlook ..... Networking is not a quick-fix, short-term solution to a shortage of clients, the loss of a job or efforts to land a promotion. It requires a long-term commitment but promises a lifetime harvest of valuable support, connections and



friendships.” I have found that this can take months and years. For example, one client who met me when I was presenting at a networking evening in the mid 1980’s reconnected with me some five years later for a contract. It took occasional meetings over another 3 years before we had built a very strong bond.

The general literature on trust is extensive. Gerck (1998) asserts for example, that “The concept of trust dates back to history beginnings. It is recognized by many to be cardinal to security, security policies, accountability, reliability, corporate management models, business relationships, interpersonal relationships etc.” The general literature on trust has formed the basis for developing how trust relates to networking in my research. This key theme is developed in Chapter 6.6.

Shaw (1997) outlines three aspects of what is meant by trust namely acting with integrity, respecting the well being of others, and achieving results by following through in a business context. O’Brien (2001 p 21) supports this saying “Trust can be defined as confidence in the outcome of a situation.... Trust is an expectation about the positive actions of other people”. These definitions tied together the main themes that I found in other items of literature (Fox 1974; Kramer & Tyler 1996), namely the anticipatory nature of trust, respect, integrity and achievement of outcomes. I found that some literature expressed trust as being synonymous with integrity (Pearson 1995). Others asserted that trust is derived from integrity (Shaw 1997 p 61), implying that integrity is something different, such as “adherence to a code of ethics or set of values”, which has long been my own understanding of the term. Integrity in itself does not necessarily lead to trust however. If the values are not respected by others then trust may not develop.

Trust often grows with time but can be swiftly destroyed with even a single violation of trust (O’Brien 2001). Trust between individuals and between organisations is also reported on (Lane & Bachman 1998). Lewicki and Bunker (1996) explain how trust evolves as relationships develop. It can be based on different factors and researchers such as Sheppard (1996) and Lewicki and Bunker (1996) give three bases for trust ie deterrence, knowledge and identification based trust. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) relate these to professional relationships in a business context and I find all three bases very relevant to training consultants using networking to gain business.

Whilst the literature on trust as such is extensive, there is little depth on trust in networking. I find it disappointing that there is even less in relation to networking by training consultants. There are only relatively short references to trust eg “The strength of the link in any network depends on the geographical, psychological and cultural distances between the two actors involved, the regularity of the use of the relationship, its level of maturity, the degree of trust and the nature of past experiences between the two actors” (Hill & McGowan 1996 p 151). Aldrich (1996) sums up the issue saying “Trust: a crucial component of business dealings” but says little more about it. Creed and Miles (1996 p 26) make occasional reference to networking issues and say “There is little question that within the network form trust requirements are high and the consequences of failing to meet them severe”.

There is guidance in the literature on what leads to trust or distrust in general (Shaw 1997; Fox 1974; O'Brien 2001; Kramer & Tyler 1996). These authors give a range of factors that influence the level of trust such as whether people reciprocate, how much we trust ourselves and others in general, level of discretion required, the degree of risk involved, the amount of investment made in the relationship, support and recognition, openness and fairness in dealing with others, the culture (eg whether there is a ‘blame’ culture or not), politics and the degree of formal controls and sanctions in place.

Rommel et. al. (1995) emphasise the importance of building trusting relationships for successful manufacturer and supplier relationships saying (p 68-69), “The apparent truism that co-operation must be based on trust cannot be taken seriously enough”. Allen (2002) develops Rommel’s notion of trust in relationships; “We can build our relationships on fear, obligation, or trust. However, only a foundation of trust results in the collaboration and goodwill necessary to achieve our peak performance”. The importance of trust in team relationships is outlined in Jarvenpaa and Leidner (2002) and the importance of trust in networking relationships is recognised in literature such as Zeffane (1995 p 31) who says “It is widely understood and accepted that trust is a fundamental prerequisite to any successful networking arrangement.” Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) explore the value of mapping trust and advice networks within an organisation to understand some managerial problems.

In newer ways of working, O'Brien (2001) found that “the increased use of e-mail can influence trust positively, but it will not create trust where there is none” pg xxi. From the



Internet I noted some training consultants feature trust a marketing feature. For example, MPA Inc (2002) say “Trust is the foundation on which all successful work relationships are built and is essential to achieve excellent organizational performance. Everything we do is designed to create and reinforce interpersonal and organizational trust”.

Kirk (1994 p 16) acknowledges the potential damage to a consultant’s reputation of an ineffective referral by saying “Your reputation may be harmed by an associate disappointing a client.” Krackhardt and Stern (1988 p 126) define a trusting relationship by saying “In a trusting relationship, one imputes “honorable” motives to another. That is, if person A trusts person B, by implication A expects that B will not intentionally use information or engage in behavior at A’s expense. To violate this expectation is to violate trust. Once trust is violated, cooperation is diminished greatly; cooperation without initial trust is very difficult to implement.” Whilst what constitutes ‘honourable motives’ is subjective, there is a very strong point in this quotation about the importance of ethical congruency.

From the literature I noticed the quality of some networks and networking processes is linked to use of power and influence that some seek to have over others. In the next section I comment on the literature relating to this.

#### **2.4h Use of Power**

Links between power and networking came to my attention through the general literature which cited harnessing power within an organisation as one reason for networking (Krackhardt & Hanson 1993). I found little detail in the literature with specific reference to networking and power. Greiner and Schein are one of the few who specifically discuss power in relation to networking (Pfeiffer 1991). They identify power strategies used by those who wish to influence others, asserting that the use of social networks is one method by which people can influence others successfully and consists of:

“Forming alliances and coalitions,  
Dealing directly with key stakeholders and decision makers, and  
Using internal and external contacts for information” (p 157)

Hargie (1997 p 352) gives another specific reference to power and networking: “the basic commodities of organisational power are the abilities to build relationships based on the

exchange of information, resources and support.... Networking serves two functions: that of collecting organisational intelligence and that of building commitments to particular lines of action". A common theme is networking for information as a power source. The legitimacy of using networking as a tool is questioned by some because of the way in which it can be perceived to be linked to power and politics (Smith 1989). This implies that it benefits the powerful; but those without voice could gain power via networking too.

Despite the lack of many items of literature on networking and power, these items led me to believe that power is very relevant and very important to networking. The ways in which the parties in a networking interaction allow each other to contribute are often related to different forms of power. Given the paucity of material on networking and power I explored the wider literature on power to see how this might inform my research (Clegg 1989; Barnes 1988; Lukes 1986). Disappointingly Barnes (1988) excluded the relationship of power to specialized knowledge and the "trust and credibility accorded to different forms of expertise" (p x) on the grounds that they were of immense interest and best dealt with elsewhere. The relationship of power and expertise is very relevant to the subject of networking to gain business as expertise is what training consultants offer.

On exploring definitions of power I found some useful starting points (Wrong 1979; Lukes 1986). There are some similarities in the different definitions of power but also some striking differences. Wrong (1979 p 2) discusses definitions from Hobbs, Russell and others before adopting this modified version of Russell's' definition of power: "Power is the capacity of some person to produce intended and foreseen effects on others". I compared this with Lukes (1986 p19) who asserts that "power may be defined as the production of intended effects". These definitions have in common intentionality of effect. These are very orthodox views of power. Feminist views, for example, might talk more of distributed power. Tsoukas (1996) discusses intentionality of effect in an applied way in relation to the firm as a distributed knowledge system.

Networking is about interacting with other people. Each of those parties may seek to produce an intended effect. Where training consultants seek to use networking to gain business we could therefore say those who network to gain business seek to use their power to influence their own chances of gaining business through others. Wrong's inclusion of the concept of foreseen effects raises the issue of whether networking might also result in some unforeseen effects, which is a likely possibility.



In my research I did not specifically explore power nor did it arise as an explicit theme at first. I wondered why. On re-reading the literature I noticed that I had associated more strongly with some sources of power than with others. I was filtering out information on power because I saw 'power' being synonymous with 'force'. However, there are a number of typologies of power which include sources other than force. Wrong (1979) for example, identifies several sources in addition to force which includes manipulation, persuasion, and authority. The latter was subdivided into coercive, induced, legitimate, competent and personal sources of power. This opened up new insights into the relevance of power issues in networking and caused me to reassess my data (Chapter 6.7b).

Wrong (1979 p 3) drew my attention to the fact that all social interaction could be considered a power game. "People exercise mutual influence and control over one another's conduct in all social situations... It is essential, therefore, to distinguish between the exercise of power and social control in general – otherwise there would be no point in employing power as a separate concept or in identifying power relations as a distinct kind of social relation." In employing power as a separate concept Weber (1968 p 926) suggests "In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or a number of men to realise their own will in a social action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action." The gendered nature of power comes over strongly in this definition. Wrong asserts that coercion to achieve goals is only one form of power. However I now recognise that this was my awareness and understanding of power at first.

Also very relevant to networking are some concepts from Stacey (1996) where he considers that it takes time to build relationships between individuals and groups and that power flows from these relationships. Stacey has produced a different typology to Wrong and suggests that the main sources of power lie in the ability to reward or punish another (ie use of sanctions), the ability to control resources, have access to information, and the ability to use personal skills and expertise. Access to information is a key reason for networking identified in section 2.4b.

#### **2.4i Gender and Cultural Issues**

There are a number of publications on the subject, some specifically addressing issues for women, as many traditional and influential networking forums have tended to be male.

These publications cover the reasons for networking, differences in male and female approaches to networking, and the issues around single sex networks. For example, Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997 p 62) say, "A key rationale for a study of women's networking is mainly due to the fact that Bass (1984, 1985) found that women were not well integrated into male networks and vice versa."

Ibarra (1992) explored network patterns in an advertising firm. She found that "men were more likely to form homophilous ties across multiple networks and to have stronger homophilous ties, while women evidenced a differentiated network pattern in which they obtained social support and friendship from women and instrumental access through network ties to men...men appeared to reap greater network returns from similar individual and positional resources, as well as from homophilous relationships" (p 422).

The 'old boy network' is so called because it is traditionally male, based on ties through old schools and colleges. Its strength is well known and well described in the book by Heald (1983). The exclusion of women from numerous networks over the years has led to some key differences in business. If women are excluded from these networks they may be excluded from certain types of support, advice, knowledge, decisions, resources, power, allies, mentors etc.

In a study of 57 women and 55 men, researchers found differences between male and female network characteristics (Burke, Rothstein et al. 1995). Results showed that "Women had more women in their network than men did, and conversely men had more men in their networks than did women. On all other measures there were no differences that reached statistical significance" (p 25). These findings are corroborated by Rothstein and Davey (1995). Findings by Birley, Cromie and Myers (1991) show that women are more likely to have males in their network. They comment that as men are more likely to hold senior positions this bias is understandable. Given that in many areas of business (including training and development) more men hold senior positions, Burke raises the issue of whether women need to network with more men in order to influence and succeed in organisations. The authors go on to appeal for more research to "move beyond description to consider the processes underlying the development and utilization of interpersonal networks" (p 27).



Travers, Pemberton and Stevens (1997) and Vinnicombe (1995) have identified three types of formal women's networks:

- Professional and occupational networks to help with professional activities and information about their profession
- In-company networks, either on a formal or informal basis within an organisation
- Training networks which act as support groups for development purposes

Marshall (1995) gives examples of women managers who use different networks and networking strategies to help them meet the challenges of managerial life. Her description of the explicit and planned nature of some women's networking to help them overcome isolation, to gain support and to handle politics I feel has much relevance to the needs of many training consultants.

Hadley and Sheldon (1995 p 8) make a sweeping statement that "The good news is that women are naturals. The average man may be reluctant to ask for help, but most women feel comfortable seeking other people out for support, information and resources". I considered a number of factors in relation to this statement. The authors make no reference to any research supporting this claim, the book is clearly written about networking in the USA and so there may be cultural differences, and there also may be quite a difference in networking for personal and domestic reasons as opposed to gaining business. Alexander (1997 p 120) also discusses some of the differences between how men and women network stating "networking is a natural activity for most women. They relate and touch-base more often than men do...Men tend to communicate for a specific purpose while women communicate for more personal reasons." The focus of her book is Career Networking. In terms of networking to gain business I feel that based on Burke's comments in the previous paragraphs, there is also the issue that while more women may intuitively find networking a natural activity, there is the possibility that they may not choose to or be able to network with the 'right' people to climb organisational hierarchies or to gain business in certain sectors.

Some research has been carried out on women, culture and networking. One study (Travers, Pemberton et al. 1997) explores differences in attitudes to networking between a sample of women from the UK, Spain and the USA. The results of their research has led the researchers to categorise American women as 'instrumentalists', placing greater emphasis on active learning and using networking for self projection. UK women were categorised as 'developers', who saw networking as an opportunity to develop rather than

for doing business. Spanish women were categorised as 'socialites', where there was a substantially higher emphasis on social aspects of networking.

Rothstein and Davey (1995) report that females believed that networks were more important than males, and that networks seem more important to younger, less established women. They also reported that women in an academic faculty were not disadvantaged, by large number of male members which is contrary to business organizational findings.

#### **2.4j Skills Used by Networkers**

The literature shows that there is no single skill for effective networking. It is a complex set of interrelating interpersonal skills and knowledge that forms an individual's unique way of doing it. Networkers often wonder what to say when they approach people. "This is one of the most common questions, but unfortunately there is no simple answer. The main reason is that every person is different" (Marler & Mattia 1997 p 61).

Hill and McGowan (1996) identify the need for entrepreneurs using networking for marketing purposes to be able to self-assess their skills in networking and to acknowledge areas for self-development. Core competencies identified by Hill are analytical skills, communication, experience, knowledge, information gathering, judgement, and vision. This list is based on empirical and academic work by others including Carson and McGowan (1994). I found that competencies such as 'communication skills' to be too wide to be useful to most practitioners.

Lists and detail of skills are found more readily and fully in many items of non-academic networking literature. They show the range of skills to be wide and included targeting who you want to network with (Italo 1996e), building rapport (Italo 1996a), gaining entry (Heald 1983; Fripp 2000), empathy (Barrell & Image 1993), repositioning yourself in relation to others eg when leaving an organisation (Catt & Scudamore 1999), building trust (Alexander 1997; Cotter, Bagshaw et al. 2000; Michelli 2000), acting co-operatively and gaining co-operation, collaboration (Palmer 1996), giving and receiving feedback (Alexander 1997), listening and questioning skills (Barrell & Image 1993; Raye-Johnson 1990; Sutton 2000), presentation of self, ideas, information, skills and knowledge (Alexander 1997), showing respect, openness, honesty, courtesy (Cotter, Bagshaw et al. 2000; Michelli 2000), demonstrating reciprocal behaviour when appropriate (Sonnenberg



1990; Welch 1980; Marler & Mattia 1997) building visibility (Italo 1996c; Stern 1981; Fisher & Vilas 2000), follow through and follow up (Italo 1996b), using the networking process appropriately and respectfully (Catt & Scudamore 1999), asking others for help in an appropriate way (Sonnenberg 1990), appearing an interesting, approachable, or up-to-date person (Catt & Scudamore 1999), acting assertively (Raye-Johnson 1990), showing a genuine interest in others (Raye-Johnson 1990; Edwards & Edwards 1994), being viewed as having something to offer others (eg knowledge or skill) (Raye-Johnson 1990; Alexander 1997), self-awareness of the image you portray, the style you use, the impact that has, and how you might need to handle those implications (Raye-Johnson 1990; Kramer 1997).

These formed the basis for exploring my research findings and I expand on the implications of 'appearing interesting, approachable, or up-to-date' in relation to congruent behaviour. The term 'appearing approachable' I find significant as it can be off putting if not done sincerely. I develop this theme more in my research findings on rapport and gaining visibility.

Consideration of the skills used by networkers led me on to summarise the contribution of the literature on best practice in the process of networking which I will cover next.

#### **2.4k Best Practice in the Process of Networking**

There are a number of publications which give guidance on setting up and managing networks (Mueller 1986; Jarillo 1993; Business International Limited 1992; Boyle 1994). When it comes to advice on how to network there are many practitioner publications but fewer academic or research-based publications. Mueller (1986 p 115-116) advises that "networks are a normal part of human existence so the task is to learn how to develop and identify a corporate culture for positive networking. Networking will happen. How to empower it in a constructive way is the issue". In relating these broad ideas to other ideas on best practice I will start with one piece of practitioner guidance that is solely about networking to gain business.

Italo, a USA attorney and legal consultant, developed ideas on Leveraged Networking as a result of his work with attorneys on strategic planning in business development. He advises, "Networking is your most valuable marketing tool. Your income is largely

dependent on the quality and size of your network. It requires consistent effort to maintain and expand it” (Italo 1996). He advises in the initial meeting to “Get on a personal level, learn about their practice / career, tell them about your practice, share war stories, ask for a new contact, ask for a business card and send a follow up letter” (Italo 1996d).

His advice is formulated into theory and practical actions that he believes attorneys should take. I question whether his ideas are transferable to networking by training consultants. Firstly the work of attorneys is of a very different nature to that of training consultants. Secondly, his work is based in the USA whereas mine is based on consultants who are based and who mainly work in the UK. This raises issues about cultural differences in networking as a concept and networking ‘etiquette’. For example, the speed with which it is acceptable to ‘get on a personal level’ and ask for new contacts varies in different cultures.

Other practical tips are given by Cordani (1997). This article explores networking to gain business (not specifically HR related) and the Business Network operates. It says that people in this particular network find it helps to be more direct in style when saying that you would like to do business together, to only allow decision makers to attend, and to seat people next to those with whom there is the potential to do business rather than next to a competitor. “Each diner is given three to four minutes to make his pitch, saying what their company is and what it does.” This is an example of a planned and instrumental networking approach.

Another article by Becket (1998 p 27) suggests that it is good practice to network discretely rather than overtly. “People who are really good at this technique (networking) do not seem to be networking at all – and many of them will even bridle at the suggestion that is what they are doing. They are merely being sociable and trying to keep meeting interesting people.” Some key guidelines mentioned include inviting useful people to parties and dinners, ringing them up to offer useful information and contacts, reciprocating without having to be asked, keeping track of who does what and where, and attending a constant round of social events.

Another recurring theme in the literature was the use of business cards. Edwards and Edwards (1994), P. J. Fraser (2000), and Fisher and Vilas (2000) gave general advice proposing having them ready and advocating the value of exchanging them. Broader non-



training specific literature on networking such as Hart (1996 p 35) recommends getting “the contact details of the people you meet” and Gattis (1995) further specifies “make a point of collecting five business cards from people you don’t know.” Much of the general literature on networking emphasises collecting business cards.

By contrast Tullier (1998 p 4) asserts that “networking is not just about collecting contacts like trophies; it’s about quality connections and meaningful relationships”. In one of the few pieces of literature specifically on networking in the training profession, Sonnenberg (1990) is critical of networking approaches that are based on quantity of business cards. Sonnenberg comments “Some people, however, treat networking as a game of business bumper cars – they show up two minutes before a meeting starts, they never make a contribution, and they do not expend the time needed to get to know people on a personal level. Instead, they measure their networking performance by the number of business cards they manage to exchange at the end of a function (p 55)”. In networking to gain business the emphasis is on turning those contacts into potential business clients. Collecting cards is not enough. The literature does not tend to differentiate between the different reasons for networking and hence the different reasons why cards might be collected.

By way of other tips Sonnenberg advises caution at the outset and says networkers should establish a relationship through something other than a request. Be prepared to make the first move and to help others. Tips include finding the right approach, considering how you will make and phrase it. He advises against using pressure and to use other people’s time wisely. Also, he stresses the importance of evaluating the reasonableness of your request and of being specific about what you need.

Making the first move is reiterated in Edwards and Edwards (1994) who suggest stepping into the role of host, telling everyone you meet who you are, what you’re doing and what you want to do, making yourself and what you are seeking clear, being interested in other people, giving to others in the way that you would like others to give to you and planning a follow up meeting with people you become acquainted with.

Sonnenburg goes on to recommend never using someone’s name as a referral without first getting their permission. Be active and involved in organisations and not to wait until you need a network as they are not developed overnight. Just collecting business cards is not

enough as you need to attend meetings, group sessions and conferences. Maintain your network and continually nurture the relationships. He asserts that networking is not a haphazard affair and that rules of etiquette apply. For example, don't expect a favour because you've given one. Keeping 'score' will make things harder and, if you do a favour, "don't make a big deal out of it. Either do it because you want to help or don't do it at all" (p 60). Don't push too much help on others or smother them, don't show off, deliver your promises or don't make them, call at a convenient time, don't take advantage of someone, don't rely on just one person, be considerate in your requests, keep confidential information confidential, be sensitive in how you react to other people's requests so that they don't feel foolish, and be ethical in your requests. These themes of helping others and being considerate are repeated in numerous items of literature.

I noted another area of discrepancy in the literature on the subject of writing on the back of business cards. Edwards and Edwards (1994) and Fisher and Vilas (2000) for example, recommend this practice. Note that their publications are from the USA where this practice may be acceptable for a significant number of people. The literature in publications on cross-cultural communications such as Mead (1990) however warns against writing on business cards in multi-cultural situations. My personal business experience with multi-culture groups has also shown that people from some cultures regard writing on the back of their card as offensive. For me this is an example of how we need to take care in how we use the advice given in the literature on networking and that we need to be culturally sensitive in what we are doing.

Exactly what you have printed on your business card is yet another dimension for consideration. Some research work has been done on the subject of business cards amongst the self-employed (Fraser 2000, p 39). One issue which caught my attention about a consultant in Fraser's research was "he deliberately hadn't used the term 'consultant', which he thought in his particular business was a 'killer' term and one to be avoided."

Some key themes emerging from the tips on good networking practices are the need for respect, reciprocation, offers without direct expectation of return help, choice of contacts, continuous maintenance, an awareness of who might be a useful contact, and not leaving things to chance (Tullier 1998; Fisher & Vilas 2000). There are differing views however about the approach, whether networking to gain business should be the primary focus of



the meeting, and how direct a networker's communication style should be. There is consensus on the importance of paying attention to the rules of networking etiquette but there are differing views on exactly what the appropriate etiquette is. Shaw (2002) warns of the dangers of following pre-set 'rules' in conversations that may turn out to be unhelpful in dealing with the chaotic, dynamic and changing nature of an interaction. The significance of 'rules' and etiquette gave a basis from which to develop some of my research findings (Chapter 6.5d).

Another large area emerging from the literature relevant to networking is that of rapport. This term is commonly found in literature on interviewing and counselling with only small mention in networking literature. General definitions of rapport show some common themes.

**"It is a quality, a mutual understanding, a respect, and a sustained interest that should be communicated from the first through the last contact."**

**(Shertzer & Stone 1974 p 265).**

**"Rapport is a felt relationship based upon mutual trust, respect and shared satisfaction or interest that partially precedes the development of an active working relationship."**

**(Peplau 1963 p 391)**

**"... *establishing rapport*. You must build some common ground of acquaintance and trust between yourself and the other party."**

**(Hopper & Whitehead 1979 p 238)**

They have in common reference to mutuality, trust and respect. There is a substantial body of literature on rapport in fields such as communication skills, interviewing, meeting skills, and neurolinguistic programming (Bodenhamer & Hall 1997; Shertzer & Stone 1974; Peplau 1963; Hopper & Whitehead 1979; Giddens 1997; Kostere & Malatesta 1989). It is seen as a key skill in making contact with people and in developing relationships (Fisher & Vilas 2000).

Practitioner literature on networking acknowledges the importance of building rapport but give little depth of information. Others such as Catt and Scudamore (1999) and Barber and Waymon (2000) focus on making connections but omit rapport. Where it is covered, it is most frequently found in sections on establishing contact. Building rapport however,

is different from just establishing contact or making an initial connection. There can be contact with little or no rapport.

There are particular facets of rapport that help give greater understanding of the process. For example, congruency or congruity is mentioned in literature on communications, counselling, neurolinguistic programming, and change management (Harrow 1995; Patrick & Daniel 2001; Kitaoka 2000; Bodenhamer & Hall 1997). Bodenhamer and Hall (1997 p 143) explain congruency by saying “To *congruently* respond means to feel in accordance with something. A congruent response to a serene nature scene, seen as a quiet place of green grass and bubbling brook, would consist of feeling relaxed and calm. The response fits the nature and quality of the internal state representations.” I find the example in Bodenhamer and Hall’s explanation of incongruent behaviour helpful in understanding congruency: “Conversely, to respond incongruently involves thinking and feeling one way while responding another” (p 143). Kitaoka (2000) gives this definition: “‘congruity’, meaning alignment or co-ordination among different parts of a given system. It is easily understandable that any system can function at its highest performance level when all its parts are congruent, namely, aligned with each other.” Kitaoka supports the definition with an example: “typical examples of incongruity in a person can be observed for instance when he or she says “Yes, I totally agree with you”, while shaking his or her head from side to side, or when he or she says “I am very confident” in a nearly inaudible voice. People who encounter such an incongruity in another person typically either feel confused or begin to decide (consciously and/or unconsciously) not to trust him or her.” I found these concepts useful when analysing my research data.

Looking for similarity or difference in other people’s behaviour is yet another facet of rapport found in the literature (Hinde 1997; Bodenhamer & Hall 1997; Knight 1995; Bee & Bee 1998). For example, when we network with someone, do we search for and speak about things we have in common, or ways in which we differ? Neither is right or wrong, but simply a difference in the way we think and act. It can however affect the success of our approach when we are trying to build a relationship when networking. Bodenhamer and Hall (1997 p 61) assert that “we generally have one of two basic ways of mentally operating in *how we work with and compare data* when we first confront new information. We can either look for what **matches** what we already know.... or we can look for what **differs** or mis-matches our knowledge.”



From more formal research sources we can also gain other ideas on best practice. Huggins (2000) for example, has researched inter-firm networks and one of his recommendations is that although formal networks may be the best way of ongoing co-operation, informal structures may be better in the early stages and when there is a mix of economic and non-economic purposes. From Buono's research (Buono 1997) comes some factors that contributed to success in the forming and management of alliances including seeking out a mutual agenda, involvement and information sharing, cultural fit, physical proximity, interpersonal relationships, role clarity, problem solving, performance review, trust, reciprocity and celebration of success. This research related to strategic alliances through more formal partnerships and the advice is given in that context. Factors such as trust and reciprocity are strong themes and the literature helped me when examining these themes in my research material.

Once networkers become aware of the process of networking they sometimes become interested in becoming more effective and seek out help and support in doing so. In the next section I comment on items in the literature in relation to support and help for networkers.

#### **2.41 Support and Help for Networkers**

One way in which networkers can get help and support is through certain people whom Clutterbuck calls 'network facilitators'. Clutterbuck (1998) explains that the role of network facilitator goes beyond being an expert networker. It involves facilitating other people in relation to networking, especially where networking is pursued for learning purposes, helping them to network and encouraging them to develop their networking skills. This may be done by helping them to get in touch with appropriate others or giving them a range of relevant options.

Hill and McGowan (1996) assert the importance of networking as a generic management competence, suggesting that self-development which includes an exploration of strengths and weaknesses in respect to networking can enhance marketing performance. Attending a course on networking is one way of attaining this development and I have noticed an increase in seminars and courses. The effectiveness of training and developing people in networking is confirmed by findings of the research at Bell Labs described earlier (Houlder 1997b). They monitored the progress of those managers who took part in the

training which included topics such as initiative, networking, self-management, teamwork and organisational diplomacy. Eight months later they compared the results of managers who had participated with those in the control group. Those who had undergone the training had more than doubled their productivity compared with non-participants.

Despite results such as these, training courses on networking are not yet so established that they appear on commonly used web sites that catalogue key training areas (The Biz 2002). There is still little help and support for people on networking skills apart from books (Marler & Mattia 1997; Catt & Scudamore 1999). Probably training consultants rely on fairly well developed 'people skills' that they are likely to have already. 'People skills' are their technical expertise. Consultants in other fields may not have such well developed 'people skills' and they may find development of their networking skills of more critical importance.

#### **2.4m Networking through the Internet**

In addition to more traditional types of literature, CD Roms and the University on-line catalogues have been of assistance. A substantial amount of information directly relevant has also been gained through the Internet via search engines and a whole host of ad hoc web based leads and networking through the Internet.

Some very pertinent items have been in the form of Internet articles, newspaper articles, emails and discussion group postings. I questioned the extent to which they were a reliable useful source of support and help. In traditional theses, 'recognised' and 'acceptable' literature sources have included books written by qualified researchers, journal articles appearing in journals with formal refereeing processes, professionally researched studies and research papers from universities. Note that some Internet based literature does come from traditional academic sources and that the medium of delivery is the only difference (Herriot-Watt University 2000; Wyatt 2001). Some online journals are subject to formal refereeing.

I have found that the less formal and less regulated sources on the Internet are worthy of consideration for two main reasons. Firstly they give a broader insight into different views on networking. So long as the information is treated as such and not as soundly researched facts or established theories then there is value in looking at these especially in



a piece of qualitative research that seeks to uncover a broader understanding on a subject (Altschul 1999; Fraser 2000). Secondly, there is so little published either formally or informally directly on the subject that I felt it was important to reflect all possible sources. For example, the articles by Art Italo such as Italo (1996d) are directly relevant and have arisen from in-depth personal experience and experimentation, although in the field of law, not training.

Lastly, the Internet is a key means of networking and finding out information that I use enormously in my work and domestic life. To not reflect findings from this source would unnaturally cut out a major part of life that influences my thoughts, evolution of ideas and way of working. The Internet has existed since the 1960's, however it was only when user-friendly browsers became available in 1993/4 that there was a rapid growth in its use. I soon realised what an important medium it was likely to be. By 1996 I was connected and spent considerable time developing myself so as to benefit from this medium and the available literature. This was based on trial and error and I wish that books such as Dochartaigh (2002) had been available. This is a text that I would recommend to current researchers who are inexperienced with using the Internet as it deals with many frustrating aspects such as what to do "when 'back' doesn't work" (p 127). It explores the merits of different sources. Dochartaigh suggests "Rather than writing off the Internet as a serious research source, it is necessary to develop a new set of research skills which address the challenges which the Internet presents" (p 6). It is this concept of new research skills which I have applied to my use of the Internet.

Publications on using the Internet, like many others on different research tools and methods, vary in the advice on what constitutes good practice. For example, in the early years of my Internet usage I used single search engines such as Yahoo. To get reasonable coverage I would put in the same search enquiry into half a dozen search engines, one at a time, and then start all over again with a new or adapted search enquiry. Meta search engines such as Debriefing.com searched multiple search engines, saving considerable time. Some publications encourage the researcher to use meta search engines (Lee 2000) whereas others (Dochartaigh 2002) distinctly warn against. I have found that it depends on what you are looking for. All this can serve to put the new researcher off or give them information overload exactly as the textbooks warn, but I feel that it is worth persevering. The Internet has provided many different types of help, not just an alternative to textbook information. It has given me access to subject experts from all over the world, library

holdings of many universities, completed theses from individuals, archives for journals and discussion groups.

I was using the Internet for some considerable time prior to enrolling for my PhD and have developed considerable skill in sorting out 'the wheat from the chaff'. Some clients ask me to surf the Internet to produce papers and listings of addresses that contain useful and high quality information for themselves or their customers. They use them as 'added value products' that are well regarded. This has given me valuable feedback over the years and I have developed a personal approach, albeit relatively subconsciously, on what sources to trust and which to recognise as being poorer quality or less trustworthy. I have naturally applied this to my PhD but with increased caution to acknowledge my perceived expectations of the audience for which I am writing the thesis.

## **2.5 Conclusion to the Contribution of the Literature on Networking**

The purpose of this literature section was to summarise existing knowledge in relation to how training consultants perceive their networking practices to gain business, explore the wider literature on networking and related subjects that may inform the research, identify the contribution of existing research on the subject, and show where existing research findings indicate areas for further research. I have drawn upon the range of literature available on the subject including both academic publications as well as practitioner publications, literature in paper based form and that on the Internet.

This chapter on networking contributes to my thesis in many of ways. The various definitions of 'network' and 'networking' highlight the diversity in meaning given to the terms as well as areas of similarity. The terms have been applied to people situations as well as electronic, engineering, transport and postal settings. Mueller (1986) and Pearsall's (2001) definitions represented for me the two main strands of the nature of networking. There is the physical process to consider as well as relationship or person to person connection aspects.

Network: "a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship"  
(Mueller 1986, p 14)

Networking "interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts". (Pearsall 2001, p 958)



These two strands formed the basis for understanding my research data on networking and gave me a framework within which to analyse my findings.

These working definitions formed the basis for discussing the planned and spontaneous nature of networking, the conscious and intuitive aspects, the variety of media through which networking can take place, both formal and informal approaches, for a multitude of networking reasons, all within the context of 'people networking'.

The exploration of the literature showed that some regard the concepts of networking to have been practised for centuries. Lipnack (1994) and Castells (1996) however, stand out in my mind as authors who emphasise the current era as being the 'age of the network'. Today, networking is more actively and consciously proposed and practised in support of many contemporary ways of working such as matrix management, coalitions, strategic alliances, and inter-firm networking (Huggins 2000; Castells 1996; Buono 1997). Castells (1996 p 66) assertion that "Networks are the fundamental stuff of which new organizations are and will be made" summarises for me the essence of the nature of this research and forms the basis of what my research is about. It is about exploring that "fundamental stuff" and training consultants' perceptions of it in relation to gaining business.

This literature review has contributed by showing the extensiveness of the wider literature that relates to networking. Fields such as marketing, power, trust, strategic alliances, networking for career development and new jobs, organisational behaviour and social relationships have provided relevant insights. It has also revealed the relative paucity of literature on networking to gain business. There is even less specifically on how training consultants network to gain business.

Of the different dimensions of networking that arose from the literature some have been written about more extensively than others. Types and characteristics of networks have, for example, been studied in some depth by academic researchers. Networking skills and best practice have been commented on in more depth in practitioner publications (Catt & Scudamore 1999; Italo 1996e). No single practitioner author makes an impression on me as items have been reported on in a similar way.

The perceived importance of networking has been established in this chapter. Authors whom I feel have made significant contributions with regard to this are Castells (1996), Wills(1994), Zeffane (1995) and Birley (1991). Potential fears and concerns about networking have received relatively few comments, perhaps because of the focus on networking being regarded as a 'good thing to do', especially in practitioner circles. The literature does give some useful ideas on the potential dangers of sharing information, the cost in terms of time, effort and money, difficulties with gaining entry and building relationships and reputation issues. These have been useful starting points from which to build during my research.

Another dimension discussed is that of types and characteristics of networks and it is clear from the literature that there are a great many. The diversity of thinking on the subject is explored in some detail (Hill & McGowan 1996; Huggins 1998; Huffman 1999; Castells 1996; Lester 1992). Networking may be formal or informal, strategic or day to day, for learning, commercial use or innovation. There may be supplier networks, producer networks, customer networks, technology co-operation networks, personal networks, functional networks, special purpose networks or corporate networks. Networks may exist within one organisation or across organisational boundaries. This literature gave me background context and formed the basis for exploring different types of networking situations that arise within the networking that training consultants practise.

Literature on the quality of the networking process opened up issues such as the consciousness of the process, whether or not it was planned, the length of time for relationships to develop and issues of trust, and provided me with a basis from which to search for presence or absence of them in my research data. Similarly when I reread literature on power and gender it made me more conscious of some of the filters that I had been applying to my research data and it caused me to re-evaluate my approach.

This chapter explains where the literature has recommended further research. The few studies that have been done are mainly quantitative, exploring issues such as the mapping process, number of contacts and frequency of contacts (Birley, Cromie et al. 1991; Burke, Rothstein et al. 1995). There is little evidence of qualitative research to gain a better understanding of the subject despite recommendations from previous quantitative studies for further qualitative research. The literature has given some starting points for my research by showing where existing research has already been conducted. The fact that



something remains unresearched does not in my mind necessarily provide a reason for doing so. However, in the case of networking to gain business, its importance seems paramount both from the few studies reported in the literature for example Perry (1996) and Houlder (1997b) and from my own previous experiences.

The literature has helped me to gain an overview of many key topics and issues and enabled me to construct my own thematic analysis, outlining some key facets of the subject. This thematic analysis also shares with the reader a way of categorising, gaining an overview, and giving context to the subject.

This chapter on the literature contributes some practical guidance on issues to consider when reading about what constitutes best practice in networking. It shows where I have found some substantial differences in recommendations regarding best practice. This is of significance to networkers wishing to develop or improve. The most striking of these are that some publications recommend you network with lots of people at a networking event, making contact with as many as possible. Other publications suggest that you spend longer with a few people so that you can get past polite, but maybe superficial comments, and really build rapport.

Another very significant difference on best practice in the literature is in the issue of writing on the back of business cards. Publications that take account of cultural diversity recommend that you don't write on the back (Mead 1990), and publications, usually from the USA recommend that you do (Edwards & Edwards 1994; Fisher & Vilas 2000).

In studying the literature I have found considerable consistency regarding the need for respect, reciprocation, offers without direct expectation of return help, choice of contacts, continuous maintenance, an awareness of who might be a useful contact, and not leaving things to chance. There are more widely differing views about the approach, networking to gain business being the primary focus of the meeting, and how direct you are in your communication style. Birley (1991), Burke(1995), Rothstein (1995) and Travers(1997) made an impression on me because they all found significant differences between networking patterns by men and women.

Finally, it is clear that those who wish to develop their knowledge and skills in networking will find an increasing range of sources of help. There is an increase in publications,

information on the Internet, seminars and courses on the subject, and many professional institutes are including opportunities for networking as a regular part of their events.

So, the literature has contributed to my research by establishing working definitions to provide common basis of understanding. It has established many themes and dimensions of networking from which to further our understanding of the nature of networking. Areas of similarity and differences in the literature have been put forward and form the basis for further exploration and discussion in later chapters. Finally, existing relevant research and their contributions have been identified together with researchers' recommendations for more qualitative research to better understand the nature of networking.

My exploration of the literature did not of course stop at looking at items on networking. My research journey took me through literature on different schools of thought about research methodology, data gathering methods, on analysis and interpretation of research data and many other areas. In the next section I will go on to report on the research methodology behind this research project and will include items relevant from the literature, from my field research, my own reflections and from observations on my own practices.



## **Chapter 3 The Research Process**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Chapters 3 and 4 explain the research methodology behind this research project. They address my initial objectives of 'locating my research paradigm and approach in relation to a range of theoretical paradigms used in research, to select a relevant research approach and set of data gathering methods'. Chapter 3 covers many questions and issues that influenced the approach and rationale, the opportunities that were recognised and the 'schools of thought' with which I can identify. Chapter 4 covers the range of data gathering methods used. It also develops from my initial objectives by setting out relevant methods of analysis. By the end of that chapter I have shown the integral way in which my beliefs, values and experiences all interconnected to result in the chosen methodology.

My approach to the research was an evolving one that developed as a result of reading, experimentation, reflection, advice from tutors and colleagues, and also as a direct result of the evolving nature of the research and its findings. My previous encounters with research had been informal, conducted independently without formal support or guidance. Finding acknowledged terms for the schools of thought that explained my past approaches enabled me to develop a vocabulary to explain my thoughts and methods. This helped me to compare and contrast the merits of different approaches, and consider the appropriateness of different approaches for my research on networking.

This part of my thesis aims to locate my research approach in relation to the range of theoretical frameworks and paradigms used in research. The value in being explicit about this became clear to me through the early part of my development as a researcher. For example, during the generic training sessions at the University I found that other qualified researchers positioned their research standpoint either explicitly (by stating their research paradigm) or implicitly through the way in which they expressed their views, opinions, methods and outcomes (eg being only interested in 'scientific' approaches). I found texts such as Richardson (1996), Hertz (1997), Marshall and Rossman (1995) and Mason (1996) very valuable in how they linked the research paradigm with the research question to give a consolidated approach to the piece of research. I felt that it made sense that I too

should be explicit in the way in which I matched my research question with my research paradigm and approach.

### **3.2 Initial Analysis of my Approach**

In order to clarify my research position I started by listing descriptive words and sentences that I felt reflected my research beliefs. This I did 'from the heart' without referring consciously to any reference books. I made sure that I captured my ideas in writing as I realised that I may want to review my position as I developed as a researcher. This list capturing my early ideas is given below.

There is no 'beginning' and 'ending' (to networking) as it's ongoing. I'm already in the research and will probably continue to be after the PhD.

Belief in multiple realities. There's no one 'truth'. There isn't a scientific answer to social and interpersonal issues.

My involvement in the research is both as a researcher and as a data subject.

I'm actively engaging with my data subjects and with the topic not doing research 'on' them. I engage with my data subjects as best suits the individual, the situation, the relationship, etc.

At times I can gain understanding by letting them talk with minimal prompts or direction.

At times I can gain understanding by using personal construct methods to gain an insight into their world and minimising my own points of reference.

At times I can gain understanding by putting forward a point of view, being enthusiastic about something, sharing something of myself, and noticing not only their reaction but also my own.

My role may change from observer, to participant even within any one event or



happening, and may be both simultaneously.

There is no striving for 'systematic' gathering so that I can make statistical comparisons or analysis.

There is no striving for specially contrived data-gathering opportunities just for the purposes of my research. I do strive to make the most of naturally occurring opportunities.

I don't know what I expect to find out before I start except that I anticipate a better understanding of networking in relation to gaining business for training consultants. I have no predefined hypothesis or theory to check out. I have no 'problem' that needs a solution and so I'm not pushing towards a specific end. I can afford to let the data speak for itself.

I am attempting to be aware of my own experience, thoughts and feelings and to articulate these in my research.

The naturally occurring data to which I am exposed is primarily with unstructured data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories.

This was the first time that I had expressed and shared my research beliefs. It came about through a number of ways including discussions with my supervisors, informal discussion with other researchers, and from developing my role as a training consultant. From my previous research projects in business I was vaguely aware that I had a clear position in relation to a number of issues but nobody else was particularly interested in it. There had been no reason to find words to express it. Others were interested in the practical outcomes and showed little interest in how I got there, so long as everything seemed consistent with my normal standard of work. During the course of my PhD research I have gradually better understood approach, including my use of reflection and reflexivity which has deepened substantially.

Locating my beliefs in theoretical research paradigms proved an interesting experience. I was aware that I was fascinated by personal construct psychology and that a part of my

approach was deeply influenced by theory and ideas put forward by George Kelly. What appealed to me was the adaptability and flexibility of the theory, the compatibility of it with other qualitative (and quantitative) research approaches, the way the tools helped me to gain an insight into how others viewed a topic with a minimum of researcher bias or presupposition. For example, it gave me ways of encouraging interviewees to speak without leading them on topic headings. It offered a good way of understanding and exploring some of the complexity of situations and people. Personal construct psychology is explored in more detail later (Chapters 3.6, 4.3c). I wondered what else was relevant and how my research question and research paradigm would match up.

By delving into literature on research paradigms and methodologies I found that another starting point was to consider issues of epistemology. I had never before consciously considered that there might be different beliefs or assumptions about knowledge (Richardson 1996; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). The University of Hertfordshire's session on Epistemology helped me to capture the essentials of three different types of knowledge. In the box below are some excerpts from my notes made during the session.

**1) Rationalist**

Truth is provable. It is either true or false. Plato is attributed with having developed this view in order to help us to move away from what our senses are telling us. Our senses may be misleading us according to him. It made me think of a mirage by way of an example. According to this school of thought it is very difficult to attach truth in a rationalist way where values are involved. To my mind values are involved in many aspects of social research.

**2) Empiricist**

Knowledge is dependent on people /society. Knowledge is socially constructed, it changes and importantly it is shared. The example given was of our number system that is a socially constructed system. One of the reasons that is usually given for acceptance of socially constructed knowledge is that it is useful to us.

**3) Personal knowledge**

Is internal, private to a group or individual, can be changing or fixed. It is not common to others or widely shared. It is subjective knowledge.



It seemed to me that my research was clearly not seeking to establish a rationalist approach to knowledge. I did not believe that there was some provable and incontrovertible 'truth' about networking that I would uncover. I did aim to explore personal knowledge, especially in relation to my internal knowledge of networking, that of individuals and that of groups of training consultants who use networking to gain business. Some aspects of the research also related to the sharing of knowledge about networking.

My search to position my research took me through a wide variety of approaches. I have commented briefly on personal construct psychology and will do so in more detail later, but next I will comment on Denzin and Lincoln's moments of research that I found early on in my literature search.

### **3.3 Moments of Research**

On reading Denzin and Lincoln (1994 p 7-11) I tried to locate my research in relation to their 'five moments of qualitative research'. The first they call the traditional period where qualitative researchers wrote about 'objective' field experiences and where they attempted to fall within the scope of a positivist scientific paradigm. Next is the modernist phase where "social realism, naturalism and slice-of-life ethnographies are still valued" (p 8). The third moment is called the 'blurred genes'. Qualitative research was gaining ground, theories were wide ranging, diverse methods for collecting and analysing data were available and many new approaches were emerging.

The fourth moment Denzin and Lincoln say occurred in the mid-1980's. They describe the search for new models of truth and method, that validity, reliability and objectivity become the focus of attention again.

In the fifth moment (the present) Denzin and Lincoln say that the "aloof researcher has been abandoned". This is very much in line with the approach taken by Adler and Adler (1997) and Reason and Heron (1996). For example, in this next extract from my personal notes you can see how I was debating whether or not what I was experiencing could be called networking. It shows how I am following the approach of being 'in my research' and not aloof from it.

**“March 2000**

**As the day went on, in-between doing the training, we kept revisiting the subject, sharing ideas, expertise, and generally getting to know each other. We found we had many similar values, complementary skills and knowledge, and it seemed as though our meeting up was meant to be. It was also fascinating that she had spoken to nobody else about the idea.**

**So we’ve agreed to meet during the week of 20<sup>th</sup> March as I’m in London all week staying in a hotel. We’ve a lot to talk about.**

**So is this networking? In some ways, no, as we were thrown together to work on a module. In some ways yes as we talked about ourselves to each other and networked within the confines of the job. We needn’t have done so. If we had been thrown together at a decision making meeting for example, and instead of just focusing on the business in hand, we talked of other things in the breaks, it would be called networking.”**

**At the time this was a spontaneous response to an interesting situation. With hindsight, it’s a good example of where my actions might be called networking. Literature on networking identifies and classifies spontaneous human activities and processes such as this giving them the label ‘networking’. By doing so, writers on networking formalise and instrumentalise such processes as purposeful activity for furthering business goals.**

**My research also attempts to explore specific issues of networking by training consultants (for gaining business), rather than something much broader such as ‘networking’. I follow Denzin and Lincoln’s description of their fifth moment of research in that “the search for grand narratives will be replaced by more local, small scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000 p 17). They also say (p 23) “We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works, will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis and intertextual representation.” I feel I can identify with this statement as even in writing this section on locating my research paradigms my reflective notes have been integrated.**

### **3.4 Participatory Research**

**The idea of doing research with people and not on them or about them is central in my approach. It links with my earlier statement that says “I’m actively engaging with my data**



subjects and with the topic not doing research ‘on’ them”. By way of example I have included part of a research interview transcript with Heather. In all my interactions with Heather I was in a ‘complete member’ role (term described in the next section). The extract below shows one of the times when we had branched out from talking about networking and were chatting as two colleagues might do.

Heather: No, exactly and you get yourself, I think you dig yourself into a much bigger hole and you’re actually, you’re not, you’re not being creative in that situation, particularly designing stuff. I think you got to be hot off the press. Like the phone calls I’ve got to make today. I’ve been for a run this morning and I deal with my stress, I guess, I run, I jog and I’ve you know it gets the endorphins rolling and things and that for me is actually essential. I said to A last night I’m feeling really sluggish at the moment, the reason I’m feeling sluggish is when we had that icy weather.

Teresa: Oh yes.

Heather: So I couldn’t go running because, and the second thing was I had a bad cold.

Teresa: Right and that will slow you down.

This has quite a different feel from a formal interview with set research questions.

The next example from one of my research interviews shows how Heather and I were both contributing to the conversation and developing meaning about our experiences.

Heather: They said, it sounds, it sounds as though you’re working all the time and I thought to myself, but I am.

Teresa: That’s the way it’s got to be.

Heather: That’s the way I think.

Teresa: I think particularly in the training field.

Heather: Yes.

Teresa: Because you can only usually talk to other trainers outside the normal hours by definition. Where as in some other business that wouldn’t be the case.

Heather: Yes, maybe that’s it, yes. Because I find I get, you know, I can sit here 9 to 5 if you want, beavering away on the computer preparing something. The phone doesn’t ring.

Teresa: No

Heather: When does the phone ring, just at the time when everything else is happening to you and all the rest of it. You can’t, you, no matter how much you plan your working life that’s the way it goes.

Teresa: And if you’re not available too often then people give up don’t they.

Heather: Yea they do. That’s right, they’ll only phone so many times.

- Teresa: Or they'll go to the next one on the list. If there's something, they'll say this is urgent, I want to track somebody down now. I'll start with the most preferred.
- Heather: I know.
- Teresa: And then go on.
- Heather: Exactly, I've done it myself in a work environment, you know, where I've been under pressure. You've got somebody else saying to you, have you done anything about so and so yet? But at the end of the day if you've got a list there you're not going to hang on to Joe Bloggs who you can't get hold of, whose never there, blar, blar, you go to the next person. Yes they may not be as good, but you, you're trying to satisfy somebody else in you.
- Teresa: As long as it's adequate.

Whyte (1991 p 20) says "PAR (Participatory Action Research) contrasts sharply with the conventional model of pure research, in which members of organizations and communities are treated as passive subjects, with some of them participating only to the extent of authorizing the project, being its subjects, and receiving the results". My research moves away from some traditional approaches that seek to separate the role of the researcher from that of the research subjects. It allows for the interaction and participation of the researcher and the research subjects in gathering data, understanding and interpretation of the data and giving meaning to the results. Within participatory research the different levels of involvement and membership are explored. One particularly relevant level of membership and involvement is the complete participant or complete membership role (Adler & Adler 1997; Mason 1996; Heron & Reason 2001). This I make substantial use of in my research and comment on in more detail next.

### **3.5 Complete Participant or Complete Membership Role**

In my research I am primarily in a complete membership role. This follows Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) fifth moment of research. I have networked and continue to network to gain business irrespective of my research interests. There's no doubt in my mind that my research has made me more conscious of the process and has added value. But, unlike some researchers who seek to develop the complete membership role for their research, my research has not caused me to develop that role. It already existed. There are relatively few publications that report on the researcher in a complete membership role, where that role is pre-existing, and would exist whether or not the research is taking place.



In most research work where a complete membership role is undertaken the researcher has to gain entry and has to become a complete member.

Heron and Reason (2001) usefully distinguish between researchers who are internal to the research topic and those who are external to it. I am very much internal to my research. As an example of a researcher who is internal to the research Heron and Reason describe a researcher who initiated a co-operative inquiry type of research. This researcher was a black woman living and working in the UK who was fully engaged in a research project on how black women thrive and survive in British organisations. Similarly they describe how some research into how youth workers learn was led by a youth worker.

As a 'complete participant' I identify with Toren's (1996) statement about participant observation where she says "my second point is that participant observation is not so much a method as a particularly intense way of living, a day-to-day experience in which you are simultaneously caught up and distant: at once a participant and a questioning observer of your own and others' participation" (p 103). I may only be networking on some days, and maybe for only a small part of that day, but when I am networking or reflecting on networking it is a totally absorbing activity. There's a certain intensity to it.

When it comes to the subject of potential disadvantages or potential pitfalls of participant observation there is plenty in the literature. For example, Boeree (1998) gives a clear summary of the main issues. One particular issue that caught my attention was highlighted by Robson (1993 p 196) who says that "the complete participant role involves the observer concealing that she is an observer, acting as naturally as possible and seeking to become a full member of the group". Robson also says of the complete participant role that "there is always the risk that your true purpose will be discovered" (p 196). My situation differs from this in that I am already a full member of the group, and there's no need to conceal my research interest in networking. Attending an event to network, where there is an implicit or explicit agenda item about networking and having a research interest in the subject of networking is all fairly congruent and causes no surprises. Unusually in research projects, perhaps because of the type of people I am dealing with, my research interest appears not to be a particular threat or issue for them. In fact the reverse is true. In other research writings I have read about difficulty in gaining entry if they know of your research, of fear of what will happen to the information, or exclusion from the group. With the people I am dealing with they aren't going to stop networking or do it in a

different way because of my research. Their minds are too focused on their own agendas. The only real difference I have noticed is a positive one in that they show interest in my research subject and volunteer networking examples without prompting. This seems out of an intrinsic interest in the subject, a desire to talk about themselves and sometimes out of a desire to help with my research.

Adler and Adler (1997) is one of the relatively few current and readily accessible pieces of published literature that reports in depth on the complete membership role where the researcher is already placed in the setting. For example, they see as advantages the fact that as parents they can readily gain entry to do research in relation to children through their own children, that the relationship is natural to the children, they can research in a variety of settings (home, school, recreation etc), at all times of the day and night, and usually with little or no need to 'gain entry'. They identified a number of different sub-roles such as parent-as-researcher, parents-in-schools, parents-in-the-community each of which brought a different perspective and richness to the research. In my opinion there is a cost to this diversity and richness in that there is the potential danger of confusion over which role the researcher is in and which priorities to follow.

This idea of having different roles and of considering role implications has been important to my research process. There is, for example, my role of networker as researcher, networker as training consultant maintaining a business, and networker as consultant carrying out client business. In my research diary my comments come from any one or more of these positions at particular time. To explain this further I give some excerpts below showing how I encouraged people to trust me from different standpoints. On the left are the extracts, sentence by sentence, and on the right is my analysis of which standpoint was predominant in my mind.

<p>For this reason I have usually changed people's names so that it helps with their anonymity.</p>	<p>Teresa as researcher with the data subject's best interests at heart, wanting them to feel comfortable to disclose their information in a safe and ethical environment.</p>
<p>I have also benefited because people have spoken to me on either personal or</p>	<p>Teresa as colleague, co-trainer, friend, wishing to maintain that trusting</p>



<p>client business in the past and know that they can trust me to be confidential – it isn't an issue for them.</p>	<p>relationship</p>
<p>This has sometimes presented me with dilemmas and if in doubt I have erred on the side of caution in my reporting. My life and business life is based on people trusting me and I can't afford to do anything to damage that.</p>	<p>Teresa as a business person with future interests to protect.</p>

The issue of being in more than one role at any one time caused me to consider potential conflicts of interest. For example, I was hosting an evening meal for some course delegates when one started speaking about networking. I would have loved to have become involved with the conversation but at that point I had a sick delegate to look after. In my mind there was no doubt about where my priorities lay and that was with the sick delegate (the client was paying me to look after delegates, not to conduct research). This particular example probably comes over as being quite a clear cut decision but it is only so as a result of drawing on previous training dilemmas (where I have taken longer to decide on the best way forward). Having debated consciously in my own mind and with my husband, who is also my business partner, we have over the years reconciled some of the potential conflicts and ethical dilemmas that we are faced with on a regular basis. It's only too easy to get caught up with the excitement of some new situation at the expense of other things.

Adler and Adler (1997) also explore the advantages and potential problems of the dual research-membership role. For example, they found that their commitment to their parental membership role was stronger than that of researcher and if there was a conflict of interests between the research role and parent role then the parent role was a stronger priority. They acknowledge that this is more likely to be a problem where there is a dual role.

Also arising from a dual research-membership role is the potential for role confusions (Adler & Adler 1997). This is where there is confusion over which role the researcher is currently in (eg parent or researcher). It was sometimes a critical issue for them. I find things usually more clear. I start by asking myself who is paying for my time and this has

helped me to decide on my approach, although it doesn't necessarily make it easy. It's only when I am in a networking situation not related to earning money that I need to make decisions in a different way as I feel that there are often many legitimate and ethical options with which I would feel comfortable. For example, when I attend a Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development member's event I need to consider what role I am in. Am I networker as researcher, or networker as training consultant maintaining a business, or simply Teresa having a nice evening out with colleagues with no particular prearranged agenda? I have been conscious about sometimes not even wanting to consciously decide as it can take some of the spontaneity out of the event for me.

Sometimes I am aware of changing roles in order to capitalise on what is happening. Each time I attend events it now goes through my mind to consider what role I am in for my research purposes and for my networking purposes. It makes a difference to how I might contribute and participate, including how I might make my entry. For example, if I'm just out to have a nice evening out networking with colleagues I might start by talking with them and by sitting alongside them. If I'm there to widen my circle contacts and to get different ideas and perspectives I might set out to speak with people I don't know and sit alongside people I don't know. At times I go between these two or other approaches.

So having considered the participatory nature of my research approach and issues about my role, there was next the issue of how I would actually gain an insight into other people's perspectives and views on networking. Past experience in research had taken me at times down a personal construct psychology approach to assist with the issue of understanding other people's thinking on a topic. I felt it had considerable relevance to my research. In the next part of this thesis I go on to explain more about a personal construct psychology approach and how it relates to my research.

### **3.6 Personal Construct Psychology**

Personal construct psychology (PCP) was founded by George Kelly. His biography is well reported in a number of publications including Neimeyer (1985), Denicolo and Pope (1997) and Gaines (1995) and a short biographical account is given in Appendix 2. Kelly made an important contribution to clinical psychology and to research processes as he thought in a major new way about how people make sense of the world in which they live.



He challenged conventional personality theory and was critical of the existing models that he said denied the extent of the importance of the personal meanings that people gave to events and experiences. Kelly's basic philosophy stems from his "fundamental postulate:" that "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events." (Kelly 1955 vol 1 p 32). Any given event can be construed in a number of different ways – it is open to many different interpretations. It's the way in which we individually construe that event that gives rise to the way in which we give it the significance that affects our own activities.

His key standpoint was based on 'man the scientist' in that a person anticipates events and in so doing builds up a unique system of personal constructs. Each person attempts to understand the world so as to guide them in future actions. We each have our own view and our expectations. He called his approach or philosophy 'constructive alternativism'.

Fransella and Dalton (1990 p 3) explain this by saying "it basically means that we have 'alternatives' available to use with which we try to make sense of (construe) each other, ourselves and the world swirling around us". They further explain that "in Kelly's theory *all* our behaviour is seen as testing out our construing. Most of the time we do not consciously think 'I am now going to walk on that surface which I construe as a *floor*.' Implicitly, however, whenever we do walk on a *floor* we predict that it will be solid and immovable and will stand our weight. We also predict what it will not be: for instance, that it will not prove to be alive, nor make a loud noise" (p 5).

To clarify what is meant by a construct we can look at Kelly's definition. "A construct is a way in which some things are construed as being alike and yet different from others." (Kelly 1955 p 74). A good development of the nature of constructs is given in Fransella and Bannister (1977) and Bannister and Fransella (1986). Constructs are bi-polar and Kelly wrote a considerable amount on the issue of dichotomous constructs. "One of the most important aspects of seeing all human construing as oppositional is that, when we predict something will be or will happen, we also predict that certain other things will *not* be or will *not* happen" (Fransella & Dalton 1990 p 9).

PCP is about how we construe the world that we are experiencing. "Kelly equated learning with experience. Learning takes place as we successively reconstrue events. We learn – we successively reconstrue – we experience" (Fransella & Dalton 1990 p 10).

Kelly developed 11 corollaries (Kelly 1955) which expand and further explain his theory and the ideas on which it is based. A discussion of these corollaries and discussion about the meaning and application of each is given in Bannister and Fransella (1986).

In terms of networking to gain business I feel we can get considerable insight into how consultants perceive networking and the process of networking by exploring their construct systems. As Stewart, Stewart and Fonda (1981 p 8) summarise:

- “1) Perceptions influence expectations, and expectations influence perceptions.
- 2) The medium through which this happens is known as the construct system.
- 3) Construct systems are unique to the individual and develop throughout life”.

My understanding of how consultants use networking to gain business has been furthered by understanding their constructs on this subject. My own construct system is also of interest in this participatory enquiry as I come to better understand my own perceptions and interpretation of networking as a training consultant. I also explore the constructs given in literature on networking.

Kelly's ideas have been developed in many different fields in relation to the application of PCP generally and the methods for eliciting constructs. One of the main tools employed, certainly in business and organisational applications, is that of repertory grid technique – a structured way of eliciting a person's construct system. This technique is comprehensively covered in publications including Fransella and Bannister (1977) and Stewart (1997) which focus on business applications. More recent publications such as Denicolo and Pope (1997) list a number of studies that have developed variations on conducting and analysing the grid.

There are a number of potential criticisms or disadvantages of PCP. Using tools such as repertory grid or self-characterisation without understanding the theory and rationale on which they are based can lead to a distortion of their use that takes away their very strength. For example, I was watching an inexperienced trainer conduct a repertory grid in relation to analysing time management and at the end of the process the trainer proceeded to give his own interpretation of the constructs without listening to the individual's interpretation. The outcome was said to be a waste of time as it didn't help or give any new information. This didn't surprise me as the very person who might have been able to



add value to the process (the interviewee) had not been asked. Another disadvantage is that some practitioners are very keen to process all the information via computer software packages sometimes in an attempt to make it seem 'objective' and 'high quality' without first stopping to make their own sense of the data. In so doing I have seen the obvious become lost in spurious correlations. I feel that if we keep focused on checking out the data, asking individuals if the outcomes make sense, involving the person in the interpretation, and look for supporting data or evidence, then PCP tools can provide very useful insights.

Other PCP tools include construct elicitation through self-characterisation and through structured and unstructured interviewing. The technique of self-characterisation is well documented by Kelly (1955) and Jackson (1988) in relation to clinical psychotherapy. I go into more detail on these in Chapter 4.3c.

One of my belief statements at the start of this chapter on research methodology was 'At times I can gain understanding by letting them talk with minimal prompts or direction'. Both repertory grid and self-characterisation are methods of doing this. They help me to minimise my own points of reference and in so doing help me gain a clearer understanding of consultant's views on networking. PCP is very supportive and compatible with the other research approaches that I have followed. It too recognises that the participation of the researcher will influence outcomes. The very act of helping someone explore how they see things will lead to change, if only that the person may be more aware of how they do see something. Repertory grid technique specifically encourages the researcher to involve the person in the interpretation of their grid and constructs in order to make sense of things. In line with Denzin and Lincoln's later moments of research PCP allows for the researcher to be part of the research process and not aloof from it. It also recognises the complexity and messiness of data that Denzin and Lincoln (2000) refer to.

### **3.7 Overall Framework**

Having outlined the values and beliefs relevant to my research process I wished to relate them to one or more existing frameworks for research that would draw as many strands together as possible. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contrast positivist and naturalistic paradigms and I saw that my approach could be substantially located within the

naturalistic paradigm. This included the belief in multiple realities, the interaction of the 'inquirer' and the 'object' of the inquiry, the importance of first hand investigation of the subject, and that the inquiry is 'value bound' rather than 'value free'. Patton (1990 p 39-40) states "qualitative designs are naturalistic in that the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the research setting... the point is to understand naturally occurring phenomena in their naturally occurring states". I have taken many different naturally occurring situations as subject matter for my research and although my presence as a networker (and complete participant) has an impact on the naturally occurring situations, that is different from me attempting to manipulate the situation as a researcher.

Naturalistic inquiry requires sufficient immersion in the field under study. Guba and Lincoln (1981) cite ethnographical approaches as typical and that naturalistic inquiry often focuses on differences as much as similarities, presenting 'slice of life' cases representing perceptions, feelings, concerns and beliefs. They defend any potential loss of rigor against the "enormous gain the flexibility" offered. Because of the nature of the naturalistic paradigm there is substantial tendency towards qualitative methods and interviewing and observation feature strongly

I also looked at other frameworks. Burrell and Morgan (1979) set out various ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints and present four paradigms for the analysis of social theory namely the radical humanist, interpretive, radical structuralist and functionalist. Within this framework, my research can be best located within the interpretive paradigm. Burrell and Morgan describe this paradigm as nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic. My research beliefs fit closely with these positions. I seek to understand the world (of networking) within the participant's frame of reference (of which I am one), and "from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied" (p 5). This follows Burrell and Morgan's assertions that "one has to understand from the inside rather than the outside" (p 5).

### **3.8 Concluding My Research Approach**

This chapter has served to explain my research approach to the reader to give context for my choice of data gathering methods and data interpretation that will be described in the



next chapters. It shows I have located my research approach in relation to the range of theoretical paradigms used in research. I am operating in a climate of exploration, where I am very much part of the research process, and not aloof from it. I am already a complete member in terms of using networking prior to the research, continuing to network during the research, and I anticipate that I will continue to do so after the research. There are no sharp beginnings and endings. There was no one 'truth' that I was seeking to discover.

This chapter also shows how my research paradigm is supportive of a complex and dynamic area. It supports the desire to research in an exploratory way, mapping out at least some of the complex aspects of how training consultants perceive networking to gain business. I consider that my research is based on respected and well-documented approaches such as participatory research and personal construct psychology. An integral part of my research process is reflexiveness and reflectivity which is in tune with a PCP approach, with Denzin and Lincoln's fifth moment of research (Denzin & Lincoln 2000), with Adler and Adler's (1997) approach to qualitative research and others such as Heron and Reason (2001).

In learning about my research paradigms, processes and approaches and in trying to explain them to others through this thesis, I have gained an increased awareness of the different roles that I might be in at any one time and this is something that will stay with me. This is something that may also be of value to other readers in other contexts and settings. It has had an impact on other areas of my work as I am now more explicit about roles and encourage others to be so too, so that there is less room for misunderstanding. In some cases I have encouraged clients to be more specific on what role they might wish to take in certain situations in their organisations and this has helped them to better prepare for those situations.

My explanation of my research process is, however, only part way through. In the next chapter, I will go on to discuss the range of data gathering methods that I have used in this research and how these fit with my research paradigm.

## **Chapter 4 Data Gathering and Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

My reading and research especially through the first year of my PhD studies opened my eyes to the wide range of methods of data gathering and analysis potentially available to me. One of my personal goals in doing a PhD had been to expand the range of methods that I was conversant with and competent in using. It became clear to me that my choice of methods must support my research approach effectively. I will focus mainly on data gathering methods in the early part of this chapter and mainly on analysis issues in the latter part.

I considered the range of typical data gathering methods used by qualitative researchers such as participation in the setting, direct observation, interviews, and documents (Marshall & Rossman 1999). These formed my core methods for gathering data in my research, supporting my broadly naturalistic approach.

My data gathering methods were applied in a planned way at times and in a spontaneous way at other others, making the most of naturally occurring situations. This also reflects the nature of my networking which is sometimes planned and sometimes spontaneous. As I go through the detail of different data gathering methods I indicate the contribution of each approach and where they were use spontaneously or in a planned way where relevant.

I start the detail of the chapter by describing my choice of main contributors next.

### **4.2 My Choice of Main Contributors or ‘Research Subjects’**

Gaining access to research data and research subjects and the many problems that researchers often face in relation to gaining access are well documented in research handbooks such as Flick (1998). I was fortunate in having a well-established network myself and so I found little difficulty in finding willing contributors to my research. So I



bore in mind the key points from the literature and in the early stages of my research I identified a number of training consultants who I felt would be suitable contributors to expressly take part in my research. There are a number of issues here over what constituted 'suitable' and what I meant by 'expressly'. To deal with the term 'expressly' first, I recognised that because networking was a normal part of my business life, everyone with whom I networked, whether formally or informally, consciously or unconsciously, would influence my thoughts, awareness and ideas on the subject. My own reflections on any particular networking occasion would be relevant whether or not it was about someone who had given their express consent to take part in the research. So on such occasions I might well write about it from my perspective if not from theirs. The very fact that I had been invited (or invited someone) to a networking event or other event at which networking was taking place gave me the 'right' to be there and to be networking and noticing business issues. Many events that I attend have 'networking' as an explicit or implicit part of the agenda.

I recognised that there would be other occasions where I would wish to gain their consent and include their views and comments in my research. This would be when I wished to record a chat or interview with them, take notes on what they said for my research, or when they were sharing with me some aspect of networking specially for my research.

I will go on to explain what I meant by 'suitable' and also to give some background to each main data subject that I interviewed so that the reader can better identify with the contribution they make to the research. I had a number of different factors to take into account when planning whom my subjects would be. First, I didn't want to abuse my position of trust and authority. For example, I helped one client to look after a team of about a dozen consultants in a coaching and advisory role. Had I asked any or all of the consultants to take part it is quite possible that most, if not all would have said 'yes' for any one or more of a number of reasons. Some may have been concerned about appearing 'unco-operative, some would not have wanted to 'disappoint' me, some may have perceived my role to be influential in how much business the client placed with them. Whether this was true or not, was not the issue. I perceived a potential conflict of interest. Another factor is that I had co-interviewed many of them on behalf of the client and recommended the client to accept them and so there would naturally be an element of like-minded points of view. This would have given me a fairly narrow spread of consultants for my research. I also realised that in asking them to tell me about networking they

would by default tell me much about their business methods, clients, current problems etc which could cause me conflict of interest. So to prevent undue intrusiveness into any one team I chose only one training consultant initially, whom we can call Keith, an MD of a small training consultancy company. He was very supportive and encouraged me to do a trial recorded interview on him. Keith lived in a different part of the country to me and had a different client circle. I felt he would tell me the truth as he saw it and not what I wanted to hear, and he was able to express his views and give feedback in a very constructive way. Having contact with Keith was convenient as we occasionally trained together.

In reaching my decision I considered other data gathering methods such as an anonymous questionnaire. However, this would not have enabled me to probe, and I would have had to set the agenda through questions decided on in advance. I wanted the exploration to be free of such boundaries and did not want to predetermine the agenda.

Kvale (1996) is one of many researchers who advocate the use of trial or pilot interviews. I was very used to interviewing in many different settings but audio-recording interviews was new. Piloting one with Keith helped me gain confidence in the practicalities of recording, especially on positioning the microphone. Keith reassured me that my interviewing skills did transfer well into research settings.

Another consultant called Heather had been one of my clients whom I had helped in an advisory capacity. Later she became self-employed sole trader and specialised in health care training and again I felt that there was no potential conflict of business interests. Although Heather was very busy, meeting with her would actually happen as she lived close by. Heather willingly agreed to be a data subject. She seemed keen to contribute as a result of curiosity, enjoyment of time given specially to her, and a desire to help me as a colleague as I had helped her in the past. Heather was also a member of a networking consortium group that I will call P's group, to which some six local consultants including myself belonged. I refer to this consortium group in Chapters 5. Because of the nature of this group and because of our existing relationship, trust, confidentiality, openness and honesty were already established.

Martin was the next consultant that I invited to contribute to my research. He is a director of a small training company but in reality works as a sole trader. We came to know each



other through having the same publisher and grew closer when the publisher went into liquidation. We keep in touch occasionally, conferring when it comes to chasing our royalties from the company that bought out our publications. Martin introduced me to a client of his who needed more associates, but beyond that we had little in common in terms of clients and had no social contact. For these reasons I felt that Martin might provide different perspectives to the research. He was very happy to take part and easy to contact as he lived only a short drive away.

Paul has operated in many different roles over the years that I have known him - as a training consultant for a company in Denmark, a training consultant for a large charity, a sole trader and as a partner in small business. I had worked for him in Denmark. He came to mind as someone who would provide different views. In 1998 he was moving into consultancy as a sole trader having returned from abroad after some years. Paul lives in the south of the country, working in London frequently. We like to keep in touch and exchange news anyway. He working towards his Masters at Kingston and was very empathetic with my research needs. We have little in common in terms of business circles, areas of training consultancy, or business approach, but much in common in terms of business values, ethics, and we both have a keen eye for business opportunities. Paul's empathy with my need for research contributors and our existing networking relationship led him to be a willing contributor.

Another consultant called Janey, who operates as a sole trader, volunteered unexpectedly. We are both associate trainers for an organisation and were paired up to run a programme. Janey and I had met each other before in different settings and she was very happy to do an interview for me one evening during our leisure time at a hotel during a residential course. In line with my naturalistic approach I seized the opportunity to network with Janey. Our paths simply don't normally cross and so I hoped it would provide me with research material from a source outside my normal mindset.

Another consultant belonging to the same training circle as Keith was called Irene. She is a partner in a training consultancy and became involved with my research through her express offer. During our work meetings she kept offering information about how she networks saying 'that might be useful for your research' or 'you can jot that down if you like'. The opportunity to benefit from her contributions was too good to miss, so we

formalised her contribution and she too signed a specific consent form for taking part in my research.

Rob and I came to know each other through a common interest in Personal Construct Psychology as we both belonged to the same interest group based at Reading University. Rob was attempting to make the transition to becoming a self-employed consultant as a sole trader in the learning and development field. After my self-introduction at my first meeting at Reading Rob approached me and asked me to help him with his networking. In return he was happy to help in any way with my research. Rob added a different dimension as he was from an academic background.

So to summarise my choice of data subjects (Appendix 1), I took into account their businesses, possible conflicts of interests, different business circles, a mixture of male and female consultants, some who were established and others who were new, different parts of the country, those with whom I would wish to co-run business events and those with whom I was unlikely to. I was realistic in taking account of their availability, willingness to be forthcoming, and chose people who I considered would tell me things as they perceived them and not what they thought I wanted to hear. In return I reassured them that I would keep personal, business or client details confidential, and that our relationships were two way in that I would give them support, information and encouragement in the way that a normal networking occasion would provide for. Because of the trust that I had already established with each they knew I would take care of the information they were sharing with me in an ethical way.

This is a suitable point at which to clarify my sampling strategy as my choice of contributors was in line with my chosen sampling strategy. I explored a number of sampling strategies such as those given in Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1990). These made a useful starting point but they can make the process of choosing a sampling strategy appear to be clear cut, when in fact there can be many complex issues to take into account. I considered whether to choose some form of random sampling or purposive sampling. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Patton (1990) recommend that random sampling can be appropriate for producing generalisations from larger populations. With small sample sizes in qualitative research a way forward was to look for typical cases and to maximise variations in the cases selected. In addition to these I also considered how to sample in a way that was relevant to my research question, that would allow networking to



be explored, that would produce believable descriptions and explanations, that would be feasible and ethical (Miles & Huberman 1994).

My sampling strategy relevant to my core contributors was based on the purpose of my research. It was important that they had experience and views on networking as a training consultant and were responsible for gaining business in order to help me gain an insight into their perceptions on networking. I selected judgement (or purposive) sampling (Bernard 2000). One acknowledged potential disadvantage of judgement and opportunistic sampling is that you have no way of knowing how representative the information it provides is (Honigmann 1982). To counter this potential disadvantage Honigmann (1982 p 80) advises that “Judgement sampling... is most likely to be successful when it is informed by expert knowledge” and I felt that I had expert knowledge of the field and of sufficient number of data subjects to benefit from that. Snowball sampling could have been very relevant to gaining access to data subjects. However, my existing knowledge of the field and of a wide range of training consultants meant that I did not have to draw on snowball sampling to obtain a range of data subjects. In addition to my own sources, other organisations offered me access to their members, but as they were either not training consultants or not responsible for gaining business I felt that they would be less appropriate.

“In judgement sampling you decide the purpose you want informants (or communities) to serve, and you go out and find some” (Bernard 2000 p 176). I was looking for information rich cases or situations. With that idea in mind I approached Heather, Martin, Keith and Paul. I was on the lookout for more data subjects and found Rob, Irene and Janey. My approach to selecting them could be described as opportunistic as I made the most of opportunities such as when they presented themselves as willing contributors, but this was within a purposive framework as I was actively looking for these opportunities.

Within that overall strategy there are a number of sub-strategies which are clearly identifiable. I looked for variation of ‘typical’ training consultants. By this I mean that I chose what I (and my data subjects) considered to be mainstream training consultants who dealt with mainly generic areas of training and not extremely specialist or fringe areas. I chose people who I considered were not necessarily very similar to myself, looked for a spread of geographical location, gender, subject specialisms, ways of working, and people within and outside the network of people with whom I would be likely to co-train. The

other 45 situations on which I drew for my research were naturally occurring and opportunistic networking situations that occurred in the course of my life as a training consultant. I achieved variation by including many different typical and information rich situations and media including meetings, lunches, conferences, email, Internet discussion group etc. None of these 45 situations were specially set up for the purposes of my research. This gave a broad base, included people who I wouldn't have planned to approach and also reflected the nature of my networking. For example, at the very time that I was going through an early draft of this section I had a phone call from a colleague with whom I was about to co-train. After exchanging news he asked how my PhD was progressing. I mentioned some findings on networking strategies and he replied by commenting on his networking practices, identifying with my findings and giving me examples for my research from his own experience. Some of my networking is planned and much of it for me is spontaneous and opportunistic. My research approach therefore reflects this.

Sampling relates not just to who or what but how many times. With my core contributors I did one recorded session with them (except for Rob where the settings did not allow for this). With each I then had follow up contact in a way that reflected our normal networking or work patterns much of which would fall within the most informal type of interviewing.

These people formed the main starting point for my research and my data gathering methods evolved around getting the most from each of them in a way that suited each best. For example, Rob was really into Personal Construct Psychology. He was keen to look at his perceptions of networking by using Personal Construct Psychology tools, principally the Repertory Grid, details of which are explained later in this section. With Heather we started by doing a recorded informal interview but found that subsequent meetings were best done over a cup of tea and an informal chat. To have continued with recorded conversations would have intruded on our relationship and networking pattern. With Paul it felt comfortable to have lunch in central London and a focused exchange of business news. Ongoing analysis of my research material helped me to recognise these issues.

Whilst the contribution from my core set of people forms a substantial part of my research, I also drew substantially on a wide range of other sources. Part way through my first year of research I realised I had a wealth of other sources of information on networking that



were very relevant. As a result I have drawn upon attendance at clients' days for associate trainers, emails, Internet discussion groups for trainers and for Personal Construct Psychology, my own attendance at courses as a course member, as a trainer, as a co-trainer, as a quality assurance observer and as a coach to the trainer, as a member of two consortia, client meetings, conferences (HRD Week by the CIPD, NLP conference, Learning Technology Conference, trainer days run by Initial Style Conference Centres), Personal Construct Psychology group meetings, and a wide range of other miscellaneous contacts. It felt appropriate to use observation and natural participation as my data gathering methods during these.

So my plan continued in terms of meeting up with the core contributors but I also became more skilled at noting other networking occasions as they happened, making greater use of naturally occurring situations (Silverman 1985). After a few months of planned research interviews with my chosen subjects, I lived life more or less in the normal way that it would have happened anyway, but captured a range of networking research data in the process.

Deciding on my main contributors was one important step. Another was to clarify the range of data gathering methods that I selected.

### **4.3 Data Gathering Methods**

The range of data gathering methods that I used included observation, interviews, personal construct psychology (PCP) methods, diary recording along with reflection and reflexivity. These may at first appear to be wide ranging, however PCP methods used fall within the scope of the interview. Fransella and Bannister (1977 p 4) advise "the grid is perhaps best looked on as a particular form of interview". PCP methods other than the repertory grid that were used as an integral part of the interview can be likened to probing questions. Layder (1993) acknowledges that multiple methods of observation, interviewing and diaries can provide valuable information and all help achieve the purpose of gaining meaning about the subject in question. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) too note that "there are distinct advantages in combining participant observation with interviews" (p 131) and add "nor need ethnographers restrict themselves to a single mode of questioning" (p 152). Fielding and Fielding (1986) and Darlington and Scott (2002)

acknowledge that mixing methods can make good sense in real world questions which by their nature tend to be complex and therefore need a range of approaches. Potential pitfalls raised by Darlington and others include not being clear about what each method brings, not being skilled in the range of methods, and hoping that by using a range the 'complete picture' will be revealed when in fact a partial picture may be all that is possible.

I will next go through each of the data gathering methods used starting with observation, giving examples of why I felt each was appropriate, the advantages, potential difficulties and how I maximised the potential of the different situations. For each I draw on literature that guided me in making choices. I kept in mind the advice from Wainright (1997) who said that "the aim of the qualitative researcher is ... to deepen his or her understanding of a social phenomenon by conducting an in-depth and sensitive analysis of the articulated consciousness of actors involved in that phenomenon".

### **4.3a Observation**

Observation was a natural method for me to use in my research as that was exactly what I was doing when attending networking events anyway. Most of my observations are from the period of my research, 1998 to early 2002, although some predate that where they stand out in my mind and add a useful dimension. I recorded more than 45 situations, writing my notes up as soon as I was able. In my research I collected observations from attending courses in a variety of roles (from trainer to quality control observer), participating in conferences such as the CIPD Human Resource Development week, NLP annual conference, Learning Technology Exhibition and Conference and Initial Style Trainer Days. Additional opportunities for observation have come from attending professional institute meetings such as the Institute of IT Training and CIPD. I have also drawn upon observations at client meetings, consortium events and the progress of Internet discussion groups.

Before going further it is useful to distinguish between different types of observation. I found a lot of information on general issues in participatory research via the Internet (Stoecker 1996) as well as more traditional sources. Gold (1958) developed a typology of participant roles during research which I found very useful. The four roles that he describes are the complete participant, the participant as observer, the observer as



participant and the complete observer. In my research I observed from the position of complete participant which meant observing whilst being a complete member of the observed group.

Maximising the use of observing naturally occurring data through a naturally occurring method seemed a useful option to me. A typical example of a naturally occurring situation that gave some useful research material was at a trainers' event run by Initial Style that I had attended in January 2000 because I had wanted to hear the content and approach of a particular speaker for my own personal development. Even though I was there for development purposes, networking research material was never far from my mind and I noted my thoughts:

“Back into session two on time management. I really thought this speaker did well. The lady sitting next to me thought so too. Her objective of the day was to assess two of the speakers as she was thinking of getting them in to deliver training for her organisation. Afterwards she said she was going to talk to the speaker to get her card and discuss how they could meet up. I thought this was a lovely example of the speaker choosing to speak for free at this event to put their skills on display and let buyers come to them. (At these events speakers are not allowed to do sales pitches).”

The use of naturally occurring situations is becoming steadily more used in some types of qualitative research and Silverman (1985 p 15) comments on the “great expansion of work focusing upon naturally-occurring situations – the encounters that people have in the normal course of events”. Many of the advantages of observation as a research data gathering technique stated by qualitative research writers seemed relevant to my research situation. For example, Robson (1993 p 191) says “A major advantage of observation as a technique is its directness..... This directness contrasts with, and can often usefully complement, information obtained by virtually any other technique... Observation also seems to be pre-eminently the appropriate technique for getting at ‘real life’ in the ‘real world’... direct observation in the field permits a lack of artificiality which is all too rare with other techniques.”

To not capture at least some of what I was seeing would, in my opinion, have been a missed opportunity. Fielding (1993 p 161) comments on this issue saying “The production of field notes is the observer’s *raison d’être*: if you do not record what happens you might as well not be in the setting.” In any case, whether intentionally or not, my

observations would influence my thinking on the subject of networking and I felt it important to capture that as an integral part of my research. In doing the research I noticed that my consciousness of my observations was raised and I became more questioning of what I was noticing and of my reactions. I certainly committed far more to notes that I would have done otherwise. Reflecting on these notes gave me a clearer insight into my internal dialogue about my own networking and that of others networking.

These research notes also helped analyse my research findings by drawing on and making sense of multiple viewpoints. To some extent they helped me to establish a form of 'triangulation of findings' as I could see where my own and others' experiences were similar or different. I could see where the same theme emerged on different occasions.

Observation appears as a fundamental research method in most text books on qualitative methods. Angrosino and de Perez (2000 p 673) cite Adler and Adler (1994) in identifying it as being "the fundamental base of all research methods in the social and behavioral sciences". In some research approaches the aim has been to make the observations as objective as possible and free from observer bias. Angrosino and de Perez (2000 p 676) write in a section called 'Observation: The Classic Tradition' that ethnographers can develop ways of carrying out observations that can "maximise observational efficiency, minimize investigator bias, and allow for replication and/or verification to check out the degree to which these procedures have enabled the investigator to produce valid, reliable data that, when incorporated into his or her published report, will be regarded by peers as objective findings".

I feel that my use of observation as a data gathering research method differs from some 'classic traditions'. Observation and the recording of my observations is a part of the dialogue, the natural conversation that is going inside me both as a researcher and as a networker. The situations will never be replicable because the very nature of the interactions that have taken place will change how things are. My own interaction with those with whom I network never stands still as each time we meet our relationship will have developed or changed in some way as a result of previous meetings or events. Another networker is unlikely to see the events in exactly the same way as myself as we will have different business objectives, different personalities, different personal and business needs, different motivational factors, and simply different likes and dislikes.



These will all act as different filters on how we see the same interaction or respond to a networking situation.

Reflecting back my observations to others, especially those who have contributed directly or indirectly to the research is a useful way for them to be able to consolidate their own thoughts on some of the differences and similarities with their own networking approach. Gathering data, reflection, analysis and drawing conclusions have been interrelated processes. Sometimes this reflection has been with core contributors such as Heather and Paul, sometimes with others during courses or meetings where the subject of networking has arisen. As my research unfolds and my findings become available to others, networkers will have the opportunity to see for themselves which aspects they identify with. They can make judgements on which issues or examples relate to the way in which they do business and might be useful or insightful to their own way of thinking. These observations are not easy to come by and sharing the data helps develop interpretation and meaning. There is little material of this nature for training consultants to reflect and draw on.

There are many ways in which observation can be used in a research study. Robson (1993) refers to observation in the exploratory phase that is typically unstructured, observation as a supportive or supplementary technique and observation within experimental research. My use of observation follows this approach as an unstructured exploratory tool to help gain an insight into the field.

Robson describes when he considers that participant observation might be useful. He suggests that it can be appropriate with small groups where you can get to know the people involved. This is relevant to many of the networking situations I find myself in. Often I already know many, if not all the people there. Occasionally everyone is new to me. Robson suggests that participant observation can be suitable for events and processes that take a reasonably short time unless you are able to devote a large part of your life to the study. Again this is relevant to my research as many of my events are relatively short lasting typically from an hour to a day. He also indicates that participant observation can be useful when “your prime motivation is to find out what is going on” (p 205) and my research purpose follows this approach.

Angrosino and de Perez (2000 p 677) also say “Ethnographers trained in sociology are nowadays more inclined than were their predecessors to accept participation as a legitimate base from which to conduct observation..... In other words, the older assumption that ‘participation’ ..... seriously compromises the validity of observational data has given way to the realities of contemporary research, which is often conducted with a greater degree of researcher immersion”. Angrosino and de Perez (2000) comment on the complete participant or ‘complete-member researchers’ as they call them, who are researchers already fully immersed and full members of the setting under study. They raise the question of how much complete member researchers seek to continue to fully participate or seek to minimise the way in which they might alter the natural flow of events. In my own research there are some occasions where I have deliberately chosen either to make or not to make a particular networking intervention but this has been based on my needs as a networker and not my needs as a researcher. Any participation or abstinence from it for research reasons would not meet my ethical standards unless that was explicitly set out to those involved and their informed consent gained at the outset.

Angrosino and de Perez also raise the issue of the unsystematic nature of observational methods when membership as a base for observation is used. In my research my goal is to expose as many perceptions on how training consultants network to gain business as possible. It is an exploratory piece of research and so I feel it is more important that I capture different facets of networking rather than constrain my observations to any system of predefined headings, events or method that may or may not lend itself to the situation as presented.

One of the quoted disadvantages of participant observation includes the time it can take. This was much less of an issue for me as I was observing events that I would have chosen to attend anyway for business purposes. The main difficulty was creating the time to note down my observations as soon after the event as possible. There has been varying degrees of success with this. For example, some events occur during the evening and it can be quite late at night by the time I return home. If I have a contract the next day that involves a very early start I am bound to do all I can to be fresh for the contract and so getting to bed as soon as I arrive home becomes a priority over doing research notes. I would feel that I was operating unethically if I knowingly let myself be more tired than need be when clients are paying for me to be on best form. If the following morning I manage for example to get a seat on the train to London then it becomes easier to make notes before



the events of the new day cloud my mind too much, but if not then my note making gets puts back to the following evening. Not an ideal situation but a reality of life.

In this account on observation I have made reference to internal dialogue within myself and the fact that I have also used a range of other data gathering methods. It seems appropriate then to go on to outline the external dialogue methods that I have used, starting with the use of the interview.

#### **4.3b Interviews**

Over the period of my research 1998 to 2002 I interviewed 7 training consultants (Irene, Keith, Rob, Martin, Paul, Janey and Heather) in some depth to find out more about networking as perceived by other networkers. With the exception of Janey I had contact with them on numerous occasions, ranging from short telephone conversations to lengthy recorded interviews, with opportunity for reflection and analysis in between. I recorded one interview with Keith, Martin, Paul, Janey and Heather. I noted many subsequent contacts with all. This averaged five to six meetings and telephone calls, with additional email exchanges per person.

Kvale (1996 p 105) states that “it should not be forgotten that interviews are particularly suited for studying people’s understanding of the meanings in their lived world.” I was confident that interviewing would provide insights into their understanding of networking in a way that would blend well with my other data gathering methods (Spradley 1979). Personal experience and observation would give other viewpoints on networking. The combination would help to give more of a picture (Seidman 1998). Interviewing had the potential to offer rich and illuminating information, in a flexible and sensitive way, with the opportunity to question and probe (Robson 1993).

In terms of describing my interviewing technique most researchers would probably classify it as ‘unstructured’ if on a structured – unstructured scale (Trochim 2001). However I believe that this could be misleading as “even the apparently most ‘unstructured’ interview is structured in a number of subtle ways” (Collins 1998). I certainly took the lead in ensuring that we had a meeting place and clarified a time. Interviewees looked to me to start off, particularly when I had a tape recorder. There were times when I steered topics to be covered, decided when to probe, expressed interest to

indicate where the interviewee might expand, made decisions about when to draw the interviewee back from digressions and ultimately closed the session if it didn't close naturally. Although much of this was done through mutual agreement, I maintained a controlling position when I chose, although often this might have been at a very subtle level, trying to be considerate of their needs and mine (Flick 1998). What is true to say is that the interviews weren't standardised, nor were they pre-planned in terms of format or questions.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) distinguish between 'question and answer' type interviews and narrative interviews where the agenda is far more open to development and change. The content and sequence is more dependent on the narrator and the primary role of the researcher is as listener. I took note of the freedom that narrative interviews offered and left my interviewees freedom to relate stories and anecdotes.

Robson (1993 p 229) says "the interview is a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out....To make use of this flexibility calls for considerable skill and experience." I was fortunate in that I already knew the people that I was going to interview and what approach they were most likely to respond well to and worked flexibly to harness this. My training experience had equipped me with some useful advanced communication and interviewing skills. I refined these using checklists and texts (eg. Kvale (1996) and College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (2000) as well as through feedback from colleagues. I took note to mitigate against potential disadvantages of using different interviewing methods. These included making comparisons or tracking of similarities in responses more complex (Robson 1993), being skilled in more than one method, being very clear about my purpose and keeping a constant check on how my interviewing approach helped me to achieve my research goal.

The interviews ranged from informal chats in people's homes, lunchtime meetings, to evening discussions in hotels after working together. There are many different types of interview and I took advantage of this variety to choose methods that suited the needs of the individuals and situation (Punch 1998). Some were taped, during others I took notes, and sometimes I simply took part and noted what I could afterwards. This flexible approach enabled me to continue the rapport that I already had with people, and to encourage them to open up on the subject as they were comfortable with the setting, the time and the method. On one occasion for example, I took some carrot cake which I



shared with Heather and her small child which gave a great deal of pleasure all round and set the scene well for a very relaxed session. As a result of building rapport you can see from the next example the empathy between us where we recognise we are both talking about unique selling points and share the phrase between us.

Heather: Whereas 99% of those other training providers probably are trainers.

Teresa: Yes, yes.

Heather: Very good trainers, but they haven't got the healthcare background.

Teresa: You've got that unique

Heather: selling point or what you call it, isn't it. You understand me.

During interviews I also varied the level of focus on networking. Sometimes we spoke exclusively about networking. In other meetings I allowed the conversation to drift in and out, follow sidetracks and go off at tangents, in the way that a conversation between two friends or colleagues might often do. This I felt was important for some people because whilst they were helping me with my research we were also having a 'get together' as we did from time to time and talking about other issues was a natural part of that. I didn't necessarily want it to feel like an interview or like hard work. It was often out of these meandering chats that their deeper views on networking emerged. They would return to issues having had time to reflect. This was apparent because they would say things like "I hadn't realised that" or "that's the first time I've been conscious of that". For some consultants the sessions had a therapeutic business effect where they felt they had had a really good personal development session for their business as a result of talking about networking. For others the session resulted in practical actions, whereas some simply enjoyed having a glass of wine together and it was the social aspect of the session which was appreciated.

"Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first... Yet interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana & Frey 2000 p 645). "When carrying out an enquiry involving humans, why not take advantage of the fact that they can tell you things about themselves?" (Robson 1993 p 227). There are many ways of asking questions and encouraging people to tell you about themselves and in my interviews I tried to encourage them to speak openly. Where I felt it was useful I directed a particular question but generally I wanted them to take the subject from whatever angle they wished

as this was what would help me to explore mindsets or approaches other than my own that I might not otherwise consider.

For all the interviews I did have ready prepared a few trigger questions that I could ask if I felt the conversation needed some prompting such as “what sort of networker do you see yourself as”, “so when I talk about networking what springs into your mind” or “how would you describe yourself as a networker”. I did not want to have a highly pre-planned and highly structured interview process that I would apply to each interviewee. The topic was at the stage of being opened up and I felt it needed space and opportunity. To have predicted in advance what is relevant and meaningful would have set the boundaries of my research within my own understanding of networking and would have given little opportunity for others to contribute to setting those boundaries.

Once people started talking I often found it useful to use probes to get them to explain further (Patton 1990; Spradley 1979). This might be to give examples, expand on a point or clarify it. In the next example I show how I encouraged Janey to explain further.

Janey: And I would approach them  
Teresa: Yeah  
Janey: Yeah, and have a conversation with them.  
Teresa: Yeah  
Janey: Yeah  
Teresa: And then would you tend to stay with the one person, or what would be your strategy for like going wider than that?

Another example given below is where I wanted Paul to expand on what seemed an interesting and key point as a number of people had said to me that they felt they should do more networking.

Paul: I think I'm very aware that I need to do more. I'm quite sure of that.  
Teresa: Hm  
Paul: I mean I sense that all the time.  
Teresa: What gets in the way of doing more?  
Paul: Good question actually.... I think it's just sheer inertia.....

From time to time I might summarise my understanding of what had been said as a way of checking understanding and helping the conversation to develop. In addition often all that



was needed was supportive body language and a 'hmm' or 'yes' to help my interviewee to continue. For example:

**Martin:** That's right. Mm, I had an example about a year ago, where, I ran a couple of modules for a company and there are other consultants that run other modules.

**Teresa:** mm .

**Martin:** And at the time those modules were.....

During the interviews I also helped my interviewees to go beyond description of what happened by encouraging them to speak about their thoughts and feelings. For example:

**Paul:** ...but when I found the people I wanted to speak to, then I was conscious that I would very quickly move around, did a clear introduction and if I hadn't met them before made sure they understood who I was and what I was interested in talking about.

**Teresa:** How did they feel about you talking to them in that setting in that way?

**Paul:** I think the majority of them expected it and were polite enough to listen and give some information in exchange. There was only one person who....

During my interviewing sessions I felt it was important that the meeting was be a two-way conversation, not just me asking questions and my interviewee replying. For example:

**Teresa:** I must admit, I find I often find myself it's ever so easy not to network. I don't know, to be too busy, or too lazy, or whatever. In fact one of the amusing things about this whole subject, the PhD, is that it constantly reminds me of the need to, and the motivation to, is like double-edged. Do you know what I mean? And I can't sort of push the subject to the back of my head for another day.

**Paul:** Yeah yeah

**Teresa:** I suppose even like us getting together today. The last time we did that would have probably, that would have happened anyway... but whether we would have bothered today? So it might have been another year before we met.

**Paul:** No that's right. That's precisely it. I tend, not in any methodical way, but I tend to go through my contacts....

Fontana and Frey (2000) comment on more recent trends in interviewing and on the fact that "Researchers are not invisible, neutral entities; rather, they are part of the interactions they seek to study and influence those interactions" (p 663). About the involvement of the interviewer and interviewee Fontana and Frey say "Interviewers are increasingly seen as

active participants in interactions with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they take place.” (p 663). In my research this two-way participation was important in encouraging my interviewee during the session. I shared stories and examples to help with developing rapport and empathy. These sometimes triggered other lines of enquiry and helped my interviewee to explore the subject. Often the two-way conversation helped me to recall ideas and examples that I might otherwise have forgotten about.

The importance of the sharing of experience between interviewer and interviewee is supported by Ellis, Keisinger and Tillmann-Healy (1997 p 121) who say, “Similarly, we view interviewing as a collaborative communication process occurring between researchers and respondents... For us, interactive interviewing involves the sharing of personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers... We also view researchers’ disclosures as more than tactics to encourage respondents to open up. The feelings, insight and stories that researchers bring to the interactive encounter are as important as those of respondents”. Ellis, Keisinger and Tillmann-Healy’s term ‘interactive interviewing’ I found to be a useful approach to interviewing. This is because my research approach is a person-centred inquiry “which does research with people not on them or about them” (Heron 1996 p 19).

At the beginning of my section of research methodology I described the process by which I chose my interviewees. Reading Hammersley and Atkinson (1995 p 45) reminded me that “selecting cases for investigation is not the only form of sampling involved in social research. Equally important often is sampling within cases... There are 3 major dimensions along which sampling within cases occurs: time, people and context”. On reflection it became clear to me that every time I chose to probe an item I was in a sense making a sampling choice. However, my style of interviewing principally left the choice of which issues, examples, or situations that would be discussed up to the individuals concerned. The choice of what to select and what to share with me or not, rested with them. This has its advantages and disadvantages as do all choices. By leaving the choice mainly to them it provided me with views that were important to them and that were potentially outside my own mind set or way of thinking which I believed was important to a piece of exploratory research. The key disadvantage was that there were no easy comparisons to be made and no easy correlations of answers to similar issues.



In doing my interviews there was the issue of whether or not to tape record them. Pre-coded response sheets can be appropriate for highly structured interviews. For my more open-ended interviews I considered tape recording, video recording and note taking (Kvale 1996). Stroh (2000) makes the case for tape recording as being a more reliable record and in the early days I did tape record and transcribe the interviews. Kvale (1996) acknowledges video recording as an alternative but I agree with his conclusion that it can be very cumbersome and would have been impractical for me. Punch (1998) advises that in the field, recording may simply not be possible and that note taking needs to be developed. I certainly found this was often the case. Seidman (1998) summarises the literature on tape recording in-depth interviews showing that the literature reflects varying opinions on the potential benefits and disadvantages. It is clear however that a recording enables the researcher to go back to details that might not have been noted down.

I found recording some in-depth interviews very useful in reflecting on my interview style and technique and in getting some detailed starting information on the subject. From the interviewees' point of view there was an element of fun and novelty in helping me in that way, but it would have been a considerable distraction to our relationship to have continued recording all our future get-togethers. The sincerity of our networking and friendly relationship would have become subsidiary to my research interests and I did not want this to happen. So it felt more appropriate to continue the conversations in as natural a way as possible, making notes soon after to capture the key information.

Kvale (1996) says that the researchers selective filter that leads to some points being lost can also act positively to retain the very points that are relevant to the purpose of the research. My intention was to harness this potential benefit. I was aware that notes would be an incomplete record, and that they would represent my selection of what to note as a complete script of the conversation would have stilted progress. It would also not contain tone of voice, pause, body language, visual cues etc. However, in relation to the subject and nature of my investigation I felt that note taking of networking sessions would be the best compromise.

In the course of this account I have implied a number of factors which might influence what my interviews might say. Whyte (1982) outlines a range of factors such as current emotional state, values, attitudes and emotional reaction to the subject under discussion,

any ulterior motives, a desire to please, and a range of other idiosyncratic factors including anything from an individual's mood on the day to domestic influences. What an interviewee says is also affected by whether information recalled is first hand or second hand. I tried to initiate an atmosphere in which the interviewee could trust me (Punch 1998; Kvale 1996), where rapport has been built and a clear scene set given, including confidentiality and informed consent (Stroh 2000; Seidman 1998), where I interacted with the interviewee to help interviewees to open up and explore issues (Ellis, Keisinger et al. 1997), through consideration of note taking versus recording (Seidman 1998) and through ensuring that my "research was with people and not *on* them or *about* them" (Heron 1996 p 19). By carefully choosing my interviewees I overcame potential conflicts of interest.

In this section I have explained my use of interviewing. I would now like to go onto some other methods I have used to encourage people to tell me about themselves and their ideas in relation to networking. These methods are based on personal construct psychology that I will introduce next.

#### **4.3c Development of the Personal Construct Psychology Approach (PCP)**

As PCP tends to be less well known I will give some more background on the approach and then how it was applied to my research. PCP techniques helped me to get an insight into how consultants perceive networking. I used Repertory Grid on myself in June 1998 and January 2000 and with Rob in July 1999, and self-characterisation in the interviews with Heather, Keith and Paul during 1998 and 1999. I carried out construct analysis on the main literature items on networking for gaining business. A version of snakes was used as a probing technique in conversations and interviews. I will explain each of these techniques and their contribution in this section.

In order to better understand Kelly's ideas I will first explore his Fundamental Postulate and the implications of some of his corollaries (Kelly 1955) as these are central to this methodological approach.

"Fundamental postulate: A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (p 32). This implies that a networker's behaviour at a networking event and the way in which the networker understands that networking



experience will be a result of the way in which the networker anticipates that networking event.

**“Individuality Corollary: persons differ from each other in their construction of events” (p 38). Networkers at the same event will differ in how they construe the same event.**

**“Commonality Corollary: to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person” (p 63). The extent to which two or more networkers see the same event in the same way will depend on the extent to which they enjoy similar constructs. The extent to which a networker can appreciate another’s construct system, either consciously or intuitively, might be quite significant to the rapport, empathy and trust which they build.**

**“Experience Corollary: a person’s construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events” (p 50). Networkers can develop or change the way in which they network or the way in which they understand their networking experiences. A person’s construct system does not have to remain the same. They are not static. At every moment of our lives we are likely to be confirming or challenging our construct system. We may learn that our construct systems do not serve us well (through reflection, training or experimentation for example). We may find that we do not like our current construct system and may wish to change. We may find that by understanding our current construct system more consciously we can better harness the potential of networking opportunities in a way that suits us each best.**

**“Fragmentation Corollary: a person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other” (p 58). In relation to networking this means that consultants may well have some internal inconsistencies in their construct systems. In fact many people have some degree of inconsistency. When conducting the research I should bear this in mind and be conscious of the level to which I delve as it could be quite disturbing for a consultant to be made aware of any inconsistencies. They may have successfully managed this inconsistency for years. Mine is a research role and not a counselling or psychotherapy one.**

There are many ways of eliciting people's constructs and I have made a list of those methods that I have come across especially as a result of attending PCP meetings of the Southern Interest Group at the University of Reading. Constructs can be elicited from life history accounts, critical incident descriptions, autobiography, narratives, self-characterisation sketches, repertory grid, snakes, concept mapping, questionnaire, interview, observation and documents.

It seems that there are constructs 'lying around for us to pick up' if we just look. In many cases we may have masses of data for our research without having to go specifically to data subjects to get 'research data'. This idea resounded with me and I became conscious that I had much research data from my everyday work life waiting to be analysed.

Many of the techniques in the list I have given such as interviewing are well known and well reported in many textbooks on research techniques. I will say a little about those that are less well known, starting with 'snakes'. Snakes were devised by Pam Denicolo, PhD, Reader, Department of Community Studies, University of Reading and Professor and Maureen Pope, PhD, Dean of Department of Education and Community Studies, University of Reading (Sexton & Denicolo 1997). When using this technique they asked people to identify over a particular period, to identify incidents which for them have been important. They didn't specify when to start the snake nor how long the period should be, leaving this up to the individual. The descriptions of the snakes were then analysed. The PCP group that meets at Reading persuaded them to use the term 'winding river' instead of 'snake' as these incidents may be good or positive and not necessarily bad ones as the term 'snake' may imply. When developing the technique they did a study of snakes on 150 people and found it a way of gathering illuminating and rich data that gave a good insight into people's construct system. Some people started right back in early childhood, others later in life. They then asked people to talk through their snake. They were surprised by the length of time people talked, with no more than the odd non-verbal encouragement often up to one or two hours. The use of 'snakes' appeared in my research interviews in a very informal way by asking people to develop examples as they came to light. For example:

Keith: I remember using networking to help find my accountant, so it works both ways too

Teresa: Can you tell me a bit more about that?



**This is another example of how PCP has influenced my research techniques in a subtle but important way, lending itself to blend with other more well known ways of interviewing. Another term which covers a research technique that has many similarities is that of ‘illuminative incidents’ where you ask people to think about a particular issue or situation (eg what it means to be a research student).**

**Another of the main tools employed in a PCP approach that I will expand on is repertory grid. It is one of the main PCP tools employed, certainly in business and organisational applications and is a structured way of eliciting a person’s construct system. This technique is comprehensively covered in a number of publications including Fransella and Bannister (1977) and Stewart (1997) which particularly focuses on a range of business applications. Denicolo and Pope (1997) list a number of studies which have developed variations on how the grid can be conducted and analysed.**

**In business applications such as market research it is held in high esteem by many. For example Goffin (1994 p 1) says, “Although repertory grid testing was developed for use in psychology, it is also a highly regarded tool for market research. Frost and Braine (1967), in a review of grid testing in market research, went as far as to say, ‘ In our view, Repertory Grid represents an approach of such fundamental importance that we regard it as having as much potential in market research as any technique since the invention of the questionnaire’ ”.**

**At the outset of my research I was very familiar with repertory grid technique, having successfully used it in a number of business related applications (Williams 1987). I had come to value the contribution of repertory grid analysis and I therefore fully expected to employ it at least on myself, if not with others, in conjunction with other qualitative methods. Pope and Keen (1981 p 38) summarise different appropriate uses of Repertory Grid as:**

- “A conversation with one’s self**
- Gathering of information about an individual’s views on a particular topic**
- A comparison of the viewpoints of two people....**
- An exploration of the nature and sharing of construing within a group**
- A monitoring of changes in perspectives.”**

**During June 1998 I had some time while working away from home. This provided me with an opportunity to experiment with the repertory grid process on myself. I followed a fairly standard methodology along the lines indicated in Stewart, Stewart and Fonda (1981) Chapter 5.**

- 1) I identified 7 different events / interactions where I was conscious of the potential for networking to gain business (some in a very obvious way, some where it was a secondary issue). These became the elements that I used.**
- 2) Then I followed the triad method of eliciting constructs where I asked myself what two items have in common which makes them different from the third in relation to the nature of the interaction / event in terms of them as an event for gaining business.**
- 3) Produced the constructs as a result of looking at different combinations of items**
- 4) Rated the constructs on a 1 to 5 scale, scored each element and produced totals.**
- 5) Reversed the scoring and produced totals**
- 6) Added in a final pair of constructs  
productive in terms of business ----- no or little value as at today**
- 7) Scored this last pair of constructs and compared with other pairs of constructs to see if there was a correlation.**

**The outcome of doing the grid gave me a new insight into my networking process that was really quite unexpected as I had never consciously thought about networking in this way before. Refer to Appendix 4 for a copy of the grid. Some key constructs emerged as being particularly significant to me. There was a high correlation between success in networking (ie gaining business), when I was free to attend, taking place out of core working hours, where there was high risk from my point of view (eg maybe I had to chair it or speak at it), when there were some 'politics' (eg some complex interpersonal issues) to handle, and when I had to put a lot of my own effort into the event.**

**What it particularly enabled me to realise was that the degree of risk and personal preparation that went into a networking meeting was a key issue. I had certainly never confronted myself with such a clear snapshot of how networking was for me. As a result, one immediate thought in relation to my own business is that perhaps I currently don't do enough of the 'high risk' and 'high preparation' type meetings. If this is key for me then it might mean that I am not currently sowing enough seeds for future business.**



I did the first grid on myself in June 1998 and in January 2000 (Appendix 5) I repeated the process to see if there were any differences. The significant constructs that correlate with networking that results in gaining business in my second grid are shown below.

<b>Expected business possibilities</b>
<b>I see the potential for leads in advance</b>
<b>Harnesses new technology (eg Internet)</b>
<b>Where I can influence the context and conversation (ie not directed or chaired by another)</b>

My interpretation of this is that my networking has become more conscious, more finely tuned and more directive. I'm also looking at new ways of networking which takes into account my awareness that ways that I've used in the past such as speaking at professional institute meetings or chairing sessions rarely now result in business mainly I think because so many other consultants are doing the same.

Repertory Grid is quite a time consuming method, but very rich in material. In the past I have found that one and a half to two hours is not unusual to explore and produce some initial analysis of, for example, a trainee's construct system in relation to time management, or of their constructs in relation to effective learning. If someone is able to articulate clearly and easily the main points or ideas in a normal interview, then there is no point in spending the time doing a repertory grid. Its value is when the individual is not so aware of their thoughts. In the study by Goffin (1994) at Cranfield University, the researcher carried out 65 interviews using repertory grid technique. However, rather than continuing the interview until all or most constructs had been elicited, he said that "typically ten constructs were elicited" (p 7). This would have made their research process considerably quicker and more manageable. Indeed in his briefing to interviewees the report explains that the interview would last approximately one hour. He also explained that he wished to record the interview. He chose the interview because of the complexity of the topic. He chose a repertory grid based interview as he regarded it as a way to collect unbiased data where the topic or issue in question was not necessarily well understood by the subjects.

I read with interest an Internet document (Cromwell 1994) which discusses two strands of personal construct sessions 'the rep grid and the narrative'. The document outlines the need to look at both aspects to get a complete picture. When I use repertory grid, I too want to conduct repertory grids in as full a way as possible. I find the richness of the data increases with the full grid interview and my experience shows that the conversation after completing the grid is just as crucial and informative as the grid itself in enabling analysis and understanding.

So my early thoughts on construct elicitation focused heavily around the use of the repertory grid. I had originally expected to carry out more grids. This came to change as a result of further literature review. In the end I conducted only one other repertory grid and that was with Rob, mainly because grids were something very close to his heart. As my research developed I learned from the literature that there are ways of eliciting constructs other than grids. These methods seem to be more natural and blended in better with the other data gathering methods that I was using, didn't need to be high profile activities in themselves, and built on well established research tools such as the interview and analysing narrative.

The literature showed me that the development of methods of construct analysis other than repertory grid, have been slower to follow, especially outside the area of psychotherapy, counselling and health. This was confirmed from meetings with the Southern Interest Group for PCP and through talking with others over the Internet via the PCP discussion group. The research and publications on organisational and business applications is growing but is still relatively small and limited in range. One recent paper by Burr and Butt (1997 p 99) on Interview Methodology states "Although PCP has now been used extensively in a variety of organisational settings, it is primarily the repertory grid that has been employed". They describe their success in evaluating a supervisory training programme and how a PCP structured interview can be helpful "in picking up issues that were not visible by other means. .... organisations wishing to take a PCP approach to the psychology of work may find it useful to realise that PCP has more to offer than the repertory grid" (p 104). They go on to say, "In the PCP literature, there is plenty written about the psychotherapy interview, but little on the interview as a research tool..." (p 105). Even when unstructured methods are discussed there is little guidance about how PCP might inform the interview process.



Kelly (1955) outlined another method for exploring constructs and the way in which people construe which he called 'self-characterisation'. There is relatively little in the literature on it compared with the repertory grid technique. Vincy (1987), for example, mentions self-characterisation briefly as a data collection tool. In a paper at the Conference in York, Fromm (1992 p 115) says "The first impression is that questioning people about their personal constructs normally follow some kind of a grid format... while alternative possibilities eg self-characterisation (Kelly, 1955) are scarcely mentioned". Since 1992 recent publications include more about non-grid techniques, but proportionately Fromm's comments still apply.

In explaining how to use self-characterisation Kelly (1955 vol 1 p 242) describes a counselling session the client, Harry Brown, is asked to describe himself. "I want you to write a character sketch of Harry Brown just as if he were the principal character in a play. Write it as it might be written by a friend who knew him very *intimately* and very *sympathetically*, perhaps better than anyone ever really could know him. Be sure to write it in the third person. For example, start by saying 'Harry Brown is....'". Jackson (1988) shows how constructs can be extracted from self-characterisations but also warns about what else might be missing (Kelly's range corollary). Winter (1992) summarises self-characterisation and gives examples of applications in clinical psychology research, together with an example transcript. Winter indicates his belief that self-characterisation can lend itself to both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The concept of self-characterisation seemed to me worth exploring in relation to understanding networking by consultants. It would give a very different way of exploring the issues from anything reported in previous publications and held the promise of rich qualitative data in that it would enable me to see how consultants construe networking in context. Further more, it would require little prompting by myself and held the possibility of allowing the consultant maximum scope with minimal construing on my own part at that point. This use of PCP through self-characterisation I feel is particularly significant. It sits beneath my use of other methods in a supportive and compatible way. It isn't something that has high profile. Someone wouldn't suddenly think I'm using self-characterisation in the way that they might recognise that I'm using an interview to gather data. It simply influences how I phrase a question or lead into an area for exploration. Burr and Butt (1992 p 125) state "The self characterisation offers no simple scoring methods, but it can give a rich picture of the way someone construes both themselves and

their world.” An example of one of the ways in which I introduced self-characterisation in an informal way is given below.

**Teresa:** So what I’ve been doing with or planning to do with these interviews is to, I’ll tackle it from all sorts of different angles. The first one is if you have to describe yourself as a networker. Imagine you’re writing an article or giving a talk about yourself as a networker, it’s like how would you describe yourself? That was what I was thinking of.

**Heather:** Right.

**Teresa:** One of the starting points.

**Heather:** As a networker?

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Heather:** I think I’m good, (laughter).

**Teresa:** Fine, yea, go on.

**Heather:** I don’t normally, I’m a person I’m pretty, I’m pretty, erh, self-critical.

**Teresa:** Mm,

**Heather:** But when it comes to networking. What I didn’t realise, what I’ve learned from experience. I think it’s such a powerful thing, but I think I’m pretty good at it because I’m a sociable person. I like talking to people, but I like listening to people as well.

**Teresa:** Yes.

**Heather:** So I’m a good communicator and I think that’s a key thing about networking. Is actually listening to what people say to you.

You can see from this extract that Heather soon started talking about quite personal aspects of networking in a considered way. The speed with which this happened I attribute to the use of self-characterisation. With Paul I used this approach part way through to take him further into the subject. I adapted the way in which I phrased it to appeal to his experience in broadcasting.

**Teresa:** One of the questions that I’ve found has been quite interesting at these research meetings, is that if you have to, like, imagine, in your case it wouldn’t be difficult, imagine you were doing a TV documentary or a newspaper report, or something like that, and you had to describe yourself as a networker. What sort of pen picture of how you might describe yourself?

**Paul:** Oh gosh yes, that’s a good question. I think as cautious, too cautious actually for my own benefit. Determined.....

In this example Paul started to speak more about himself as a networker and was evaluating his skills. We moved away from general examples about networking and into



issues that were very significant to him. I found that self-characterisation opened up the conversation without my pre-determining the content area.

The next application of personal construct psychology was in relation to exploring constructs in the literature on networking. This was of increasing interest to me as I had never attempted this before. I was eager to discover the potential of this method. I had found nothing specific in the literature to help me but informal discussions at the Reading PCP Group made me feel it was worth doing. I started with all the documents on networking to gain business that I had collected so far and analysed them to see what could be extracted. By reading through the texts I identified some sets of constructs as given below (for example: 'long term strategy – not overnight', lay on one continuum).

Sonnenberg (1990)

Long term strategy	Not overnight
Two way	One way

Baker (1994)

Targeted networking	Chance networking
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Kirk (1994)

Arrangements based on trust	Potentially litigious situations
Actively making contacts	Passive
Informal	Formal

One thing soon became clear to me was that whilst one pole could be extracted, more often than not the other pole wasn't stated. Kelly asserts that as constructs are bi-polar we need both poles to understand what was meant (refer to section 3.6). The emergent pole is the pole that is described in the first instance and the submerged pole is the pole that has to be specifically asked for – the opposite of the emergent pole. The following text gives some examples to clarify this. Assume it is part of an interview transcript.

<p>“So when I go to the networking meeting I value flexibility in the style of the meeting. There is no real reason for this except that I see networking events as very stimulating occasions, certainly not boring.”</p>
--

Analysis of this extract shows ‘flexibility in style’ as an emergent pole. From the extract we do not know what the other pole (submergent) is. On asking the interviewee at a later date we might find that the opposite of ‘flexibility in style’ means ‘very rigid agenda’.

Also from analysing this extract we can find a pair of dichotomous poles – ‘very stimulating’ and the opposite that is ‘boring’.

I have given below some examples of emergent poles from my analysis of the literature where the submergent pole is not evident, hence the right hand column is blank.

Sonnenberg (1990)

Rules of etiquette apply	
Be specific	

Lambert (1997)

Reciprocation	
Long term personal association	

This raised a number of questions in my mind. Did I need both poles to understand how the authors construed? Could I guess from the context of the research material? Would my guess be the same as that which the author intended or which others would have made?

To answer some of these questions I decided to experiment with an interview transcript on networking with my colleague Keith whom I knew well for a number of years as we had worked closely together. We both felt we had a number of values in common and had close agreement on our schools of thought when working as co-trainers. I went through a transcript of his interview to extract the emergent poles, together with the submerged pole where apparent. Where the submerged pole was not apparent I recorded what I guessed it to be. This done I rang Keith and asked him for the submerged poles. Where the submerged poles were explicit in the transcript this concurred with what he told me, but where they were not, my guesses were often substantially different. This concurred with all I had previously experienced and read about PCP in terms of the individuality corollary (see section 3.6 for definition). You do need to ask the person themselves in order to understand how they construe a subject.



I considered the possible ways forward at this point if I wanted to complete my understanding of the submerged poles. The options that I came up with (thanks to help from Reading PCP colleagues) included.

- 1) Contacting a range of authors and asking for the submerged poles to gain a better understanding of how they see networking
- 2) Taking the emergent poles and seeing how a range of people express the submerged poles
- 3) Working only with emergent poles and submerged poles where both are expressly clearly.

At this point I had not found anything specific in the literature to guide me. For example, I had not found any references that debated the issues around retrospectively asking authors about the submerged poles nor around taking constructs from the literature and relating them to consultants' own experiences. I was aware of the issue about timeliness of asking for the submerged poles. A person's construing is not 'cast in stone'. In fact the very opposite is more likely to be true, (Experience corollary: A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events.) and so even if I did ask the authors I might get a very different answer from that which was intended at the time they wrote the material.

Working only with the emergent poles is limiting because we construe things differently and that it is the dichotomous descriptions that help give meaning. The idea of taking the emergent poles and seeing how a range of people relate to them could make a useful contribution to knowledge if there is the opportunity in the future.

There also is relatively little in the literature on eliciting constructs in groups. My own experience has been that construing is different for each individual and that group work would therefore dilute or change the outcome. When conducting repertory grids I find that people need help on a one-to-one basis to guide them through the process in order to get anything more than a superficial or immediate level of constructs. Of course, for some types of research this may be what is needed but I wanted to go beyond that for the qualitative research that I felt was appropriate to my subject. Techniques such as laddering, which is a means of probing for next level constructs, lose their sophistication unless done on a one-to-one basis in my opinion. However, gathering constructs in a

group setting would be convenient and speedy. Now that my mind is opened to non-grid techniques this area is worthy of further exploration. Looking at how others construe the submergent poles in relation to emergent poles gathered from the literature is something that I feel would lend itself to groups if the possibility arose.

Personal construct psychology and the data gathering methods that arise from this approach were very relevant for my research. A substantial part of making sense of the data that arises from PCP is through reflection and reflexivity and supports my whole research approach. But, they were just one of a number of methods as has already been discussed. One common thread winding through my whole research process and which helped to draw the research together and make sense of it was the use of my own diary recordings. I will comment next on the process of making and reviewing the recordings.

#### **4.3d Diary Recordings**

My observations, interviews, and PCP tools gave me much food for thought. As an ongoing aspect of my research I was also trying to capture my own thoughts and feelings especially where these were not already captured by another method. I had already started making notes in December 1997 in readiness for starting with the University. Within a couple of months of starting my research I started keeping more regular notes of thoughts, processes, ideas, difficulties, questions and themes they occurred to me. I ended up with some 140 more substantial notes of anywhere between 200 words and 1300 words, as well as many small jottings that I wrote when travelling.

There were times when ideas would occur to me, where networking situations would be recalled, where my own research process would undergo some rethinking or where patterns and themes became apparent. I knew I needed to capture these various aspects of my research as I went along but wondered how. Recording the research process and reflective observations was a new area for me.

Early on after guidance and encouragement from my University supervisor Dorothea, I bought a notebook and dutifully sat down to write in it at regular intervals. In all honesty at the start I hadn't a clue what to write. Reading the literature on the subject helped to some extent. For example, Edwards and Talbot (1994 p 57) emphasise the importance of keeping a research diary as "information kept in a diary can be a legitimate source of data



when discussing the evolution of a research study. The claim to legitimacy of data is even stronger for reflective diaries.” Edwards and Talbot (p 58) go on to suggest that one way of using a research diary is as a “conversation with yourself” and may include what you intended to do, perceptions of what actually happened, reflections and feelings. I also found Strauss’s ideas on writing memo’s very useful. Strauss (1987) gives some guidance which he quotes from Barney Glaser. Two pieces of advice particularly struck a chord with me namely “interrupt coding or data recording to write a memo when an idea occurs, so the idea is not lost”, and “always be flexible with memoing techniques” (p 127 – 128).

More recently I have found examples on the Internet together with checklists on how to keep a reflective diary (Billeter 2000; Griggs 1999; Hughes 2000). Had I found these or something similar at the outset I wonder what impact it might have had. It would certainly have given me comfort and confidence in starting a diary, but I suspect it would also have constrained my thinking. In any event I managed without such examples. I had a go at recording and after a while I reviewed and analysed what I had written. Some entries felt mechanical and really quite uninspiring. For example:

“6<sup>th</sup> December 1997

Searched the Internet for information on qualitative research techniques.  
Downloaded a lot of files to read later on”.

I really didn’t see how that might help my research. I looked further at the literature to see if I could glean anything that might help me. Corti (1993) helped by saying “diaries can provide a reliable alternative to the traditional interview method for events that are difficult to recall accurately or that are easily forgotten”. As I was one of my own data subjects in terms of networking this aspect made sense and I happily took to writing up any networking experiences that happened to me or around me. Writing these in a paper based diary didn’t appeal but I found entering them on the computer suited me better. I could read my own writing more easily and my recordings were portable on my laptop which facilitated working in hotels whilst away on business. I also found that I didn’t lose things. My notes on these events were richer, less mechanical and I could see their value. For example:

“Reflections on my own networking 3 August 1999

Whilst in the van driving back from the library I had a good bit of reflection time with my husband as a sounding board. I like talking

things through - it's a way that suits me. I updated him on a number of recent comments and thoughts. Irene had said how she had let her membership of AMED lapse, and didn't bother with IPD events because they are so swamped with consultants trying to network for business. A course delegate said how it really drives her mad when she goes to events to learn and is plagued by consultants trying to 'get to know her'. I feel less comfortable at these events myself because I can see people's behaviour and don't want to be a part of it."

On reflection I could see my thoughts and feelings emerging as well as the data on what took place.

I wondered whether to adopt a more structured approach with headings such as place, time, who was present, what happened, my feelings, and next steps. Corti's guidance on this was "diaries may be open format, allowing respondents to record activities and events in their own words, or they can be highly structured where all activities are pre-categorised. An obvious advantage of the free format is that it allows for greater opportunity to recode and analyse the data." (Corti 1993). I tried diary recording using a list of headings in an attempt to make my recording more thorough. I soon abandoned it as found it was turning into a mechanical record rather than a recording of my thoughts. The free flowing unstructured approach might seem more haphazard but the very messiness reflected the complexity of the subject. I found myself free to jump around and in so doing not lose ideas as they came to me. In the next excerpt you can see how I freely jump from why I attended the event, to personal preferences, to other people's expectations. I can move around different aspects of the subject without hindrance.

**"February 1998**

Another large client whom I work for has associate days two or three times a year. We all work on a range of pre-designed courses delivering in different parts of the country, either solo, or in two's. I attended this one because I was particularly interested in how a recent government policy was going to affect this client – and the potential effect it might have on business.

Also I like to go to these client days as it is one of the few ways of maintaining visibility. We all work at non-client venues eg hotels and training centres away from those who hire us. I see it as important to attend, to make some suitable contributions that would be remembered and respected to maintain visibility. I could go a stage further and volunteer to lead an activity or discussion group, but often this seems like too much hard work and it's nice to have a lazier day sometimes where you can reflect and 'be done to'.



Others seem to use it as an opportunity to raise awkward questions, pursue why our fees aren't higher, and expect the client to tell us about future workload (this doesn't get a very positive response from the client)."

At other times, however, I recorded a succinct punchy entry focused on one aspect. For example:

**"December 1997**

A course member tells me over dinner that he is thinking of going out on his own as a training consultant. His ideas are at a very early stage he explains. He has been advised by colleagues to 'network' but he says he isn't quite sure what that means.

We're over dinner with a group of 11 others to host. I'm tired and he can be an overly demanding delegate. My potential research comes to mind but this doesn't seem like the time or place to pursue it. I feel as though I will be furthering my own personal goals at the expense of what the client is paying me to do.

I say something like – 'it does seem to be important to network. Different people have different interpretations of what that means. Do try and meet a range of people before you make the decision to go freelance'. A joke is shared on another subject and I let the conversation drift deliberately onto other things."

After analysing my early diary recordings I realised I had a major gap. I was recording my contact with others, my feelings and observations at networking events and my own approach to networking. Journal writing or narrative recordings were a powerful way of me accessing myself as a data subject (Clandinin & Connely 1998), but I wasn't recording anything about the actual research process itself apart from what I was doing. A list of dates and activities didn't have the same depth. For example, one entry said "more background reading on qualitative research. Popped into the Institute of Education library while in London" and didn't seem to add value. However I noticed that one of my recordings on the research process was quite different. An excerpt is given below.

**"Transcribing recorded interviews Feb 98**

Oh what a time consuming job. Wasn't sure just how much to transcribe. Some of the text books say to include everything such as sighs, er's, etc. But I'm not into language analysis (at least I don't think I am), and I'll have the original recordings if I change my mind. So I'm going to settle for capturing as much as was said by whom as possible

without going into a great amount of detail on the paralinguistics. I think I'm just going to have to try something and experiment.

Did the first 10 to 15 minutes of the recording and discovered it took ages. Had to question whether this was a good use of my time. Having made the decision about the level of detail, layout of the transcription etc I felt it much better to pass that job on to my husband (one of his roles in our business is to act in a secretarial capacity) and to just check over the recording against his transcription and make any changes at the end. This freed me up to do other jobs which I had to do myself.”

This diary recording had more substance. I could see the potential value that it might have. I decided to make this something of a role model that I could bear in mind for future entries.

Incidentally, what I had learned about the value of diary recordings and the benefits they offered, inspired me to use them to solve other problems in my life. My husband started to have bad asthma attacks and I kept a diary which we then analysed together. Within a month we identified 4 main triggers. From this information he is now able to avoid some of the severe sudden attacks. A year later when I became diagnosed as diabetic I had to learn what I could eat and in what quantities, at what time of day and the effect of activity, inactivity, stress etc on my sugar levels. The diary method proved helpful as it gave me back control over my life, quickly got me to desired readings and helped me to uncover unexpected issues that might affect things. Although I no longer need to keep a diary on a daily basis I go back to it to learn how to cope in new situations such travel to new places. The key to the diary was that I not only recorded factual information about what I ate or did, but I included information about how I felt, things I suspected that needed checking out, and anything unusual or unaccountable. This level of recording had been influenced by what I had learned about observation, reflection and reflexivity.

#### **4.3c Reflection and Reflexivity**

As I progressed through my research and learned about research methods I came to understand better the different aspects of reflection and reflexivity that have been so invaluable in helping me to make sense of my research. I looked at frameworks about reflection and reflexivity and found Ghaye (1996) distinguished different types of 'reflection-on-practice' and applied these concepts to health care professionals and these different types can be seen in my research. I have included personal and descriptive



account of events, perceptive reflection in that I make links to my personal feelings, receptive reflection on practice in that at times I reflect and position my knowledge within a wider arena, and at times I have asked critical questions to expose assumptions and contradictions. Ghaye's framework is geared to helping professionals reflect on their practices to aid learning and improved practice in the future. The primary goal of my reflection in relation to my research has been to aid and inform the research process.

My different research methods, including those based on Personal Construct Psychology have all been compatible in terms of the use of reflection and reflexivity. In fact Bannister (1981 p 194) states "Reflexivity is at the heart of personal construct theory". There have been times when I have observed and reflected on stark facts and an example of such an entry in my research journal that says,

**"23 April 2002**

**...came across 26 business cards and sorted them into piles to see who included the term 'consultancy' on their card".**

**In this example I was taking things at their face value.**

**At the next level down I have noticed myself reflecting on my own thoughts and feelings as I was observing something. For example**

**"8<sup>th</sup> June**

**Attended a course. One of the stated benefits was to have an opportunity for networking in addition to the main subject. I could see few opportunities for people to actually do this. They had time to chat at the start for 15 minutes or so. Break times got taken up with long queues for the loos. Lunch was difficult because of the long wide tables so people could only talk with one or two others near them. When they did have the opportunity they were still in the 'forming' stage in Belbin terms and so conversation was very polite and superficial. It's often occurred to me that events where there is a structure for networking seem to be more effective in this area. I would like to try and incorporate that when I can."**

**Here I am noticing and recording my own thoughts and feelings about what is going on. This reflection is taking place whilst I am in the situation as I was taking these notes during the day it was happening. As well as being reflective it also contains a degree of**

reflexiveness in that it goes on to contain my own thoughts and sense-making process about what I had seen and experienced.

Sometimes in making sense of experiences I positioned thoughts within a wider arena, relating to the practices of others. The following is an extract from my own diary:

**“February 1998**

**Also I like to go to these client days as it is one of the few ways of maintaining visibility.... Others seem to use it as an opportunity to raise awkward questions.”**

**In relation to critical reflection reflect for example, on why power issues did not at first become evident in my research findings”.**

Sometimes reflection has been valuable very soon after the event and sometimes weeks later. For example:

**“March 2002 (some 3 weeks after the event)**

**Managed to find some time to think about my last meeting with Ann. She came over as much less confident than I had been led to believe. I wonder whether to take a firmer line about our proposed business plan”**

Here there is very little about what actually happened but more about my thoughts as a result. This type of reflection is termed ‘reflexive’ to indicate that the focus is about participants’ experience of what happened rather than about the event itself.

These differences in reflection and reflexivity were well explained in a University seminar given by Dorothea Noble on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2001. I found the supporting references very useful for example, (Steier 1991b), Johnson and Duberley (2000) and Aram and Noble (1999). They helped to clarify the different types of reflexivity that I had been experiencing and to put them into perspective. Dorothea also mentioned that Johnson and Duberley identified two different forms of reflexivity. She said that they found reflexivity in relation to the methods being used and reflexivity in relation to the researcher seeking to “relate his/her research findings to the researcher’s own beliefs”. With this too I can identify. For example, in an earlier section I was writing about the validity of using Internet articles as a source of literature and quoted from my diary.



**“Lastly, the Internet is a key means of networking and finding out information that I use enormously in both my work and domestic life. To not reflect my findings from this source would be to unnaturally cut out a major part of life that influences my thoughts and evolution of ideas and way of working.”**

**In this example I acknowledge how my research links to my own beliefs and way of doing things.**

**In considering the subject of reflection and reflexivity I wrote up my thoughts on how I had made sense of my whole research process. These thoughts are attached as Appendix 3. Some aspects in this Appendix overlap with other parts of my thesis but I thought it useful to include as a coherent summary to help the reader with understanding some of the background to my research and how I arrived at the end product. I also hope it will be useful to other researchers who are seeking to understand their own reflections and reflexive process.**

**From my interviews and diary recordings I have collected a considerable amount of narrative to use as the basis for reflection and analysis. By narrative I mean “the various kinds of life histories, long interviews, journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies” (Schwandt 1997 p 98). Coffey (1996) acknowledges the very wide range of definitions of the term ‘narrative’ and I find the working definition about “doing research with first-person accounts of experience” (p 54) useful in that it allows plenty of scope to draw on all kinds of accounts. It formed a relevant basis from which I could work in my research. The use of narrative in qualitative research is well covered in a number of more recent texts such as Flick (1998), Lawler (2002) and Denzin and Lincoln (2000). Creswell (1998) acknowledges the use of new forms of narrative data such as text from emails. These narratives are not just stories that relate facts about different situations but have helped in the interpretation of how consultants use networking to gain business.**

**As a result of my reflexive approach I chose to write up my thesis predominantly in the first person, reinforcing that I am ‘in the research’ and following the practice in other reflexive research writing such as Reinharz (1997). Steier (1991a) gives particular advice on the benefits of writing in the first person when taking a reflexive approach.**

#### **4.4 Issues of Validity and Reliability**

In commenting on these issues in relation to my research I would first like to start by referring to a traditional definition of validity from Hammersley (1990 p 57) “by validity, I mean truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers.” The concept of validity is taken by some to imply a firm boundary between what is truth and what is not (Kvale 2002). Kvale’s (2002) definition of validity is about whether the study actually investigates whatever was intended to be investigated. It is far broader and relevant to naturalistic inquiry. My naturalistic based research takes account of my belief in multiple realities, and that there is no single truth. In such naturalist inquiry Erlandson et al (1993) present as pertinent the issue of credibility. They assert that data should ‘ring true’ with data subjects, and that interpreting the constructed realities can be assisted by prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checks with data subjects, stepping outside the research context from time to time for peer debriefing, and to collect information about different events and relationships from different points of view. I have followed these methods in my research as a means of contributing to this ‘ring of truth’ generated not only with my subjects but also with my readers.

In naturalistic research (Patton 1990) there is no claim that knowledge gained will be relevant in another context or time. Transferability may or may not occur. Naturalistic inquiry differs from traditional studies in that “in a traditional study it is the obligation of the researcher to ensure that the findings are generalized to the population; in a naturalistic study the obligation for demonstrating transferability belongs to those who would apply it to the receiving context” (Guba & Lincoln 1989 p 241). However, to facilitate transferability, thick descriptions which give enough detail to bring the reader into the context being described and purposive sampling can be used to search for data that will be rich and which will help seek out both typical and atypical data. From this standpoint I have therefore included detailed descriptions of my data subjects, descriptive accounts and narratives and extracts from interviews and other data sources based on purposive sampling.

Hammersley (1992 p 67) defines reliability as “the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions whereas Schwandt (1997 p 137) gives a broader definition “an



account is judged to be reliable if it is capable of being replicated by another inquirer". However, I have found that there are differing opinions in qualitative research over the relevance of reliability in judging field work. Silverman (2000) proposes checks through using more than one observer or transcriber for example. Lincoln (1985) propose instead the importance of dependability by explaining how the data and interpretation was arrived at. Sanjek (1990 p 394) however presents the view that "we cannot expect and do not hope that another investigator will repeat the fieldwork". He argues that inquiry should be principally concerned with validity and that there is no need to establish the replication of an inquiry to establish that. In my research I feel that Sanjek's view is helpful and I have followed this approach. I feel it is an appropriate basis for my research. The very nature of holding an interview on networking makes my data subjects aware of their networking and therefore that interview cannot be replicated as things will never be the same for that person. Also the other networking opportunities that have been reported on were naturally occurring and cannot be replicated for a repeat study.

Having focused mainly on methods of data gathering I will now comment on my approach to analysis in the next sections.

#### **4.5 Frameworks for analysis**

In my research I have based my analysis process on guidance given in well recognised analysis strategies such as those given by Creswell (1998), Marshall (1999) and Huberman (1994). This included writing notes against my field notes, writing memo's and reflective comments to myself as I noticed things, summarising data such as constructs emerging from the literature or key themes emerging from interview transcripts. For example, on reading one transcript I noted:

"Is this just semantics? Are they really saying the same ideas but in different words? Is there a difference? Was it my analysis? Let's revisit the selected literature."

I displayed my data through tables and lists and used mind maps to note patterns and themes (Buzan & Buzan 1993). At times I involved others in the interpretation and analysis phase. This involved reflecting back key themes or issues to data subjects to seek their explanation of the data. I also used specific PCP analysis techniques (Kelly 1955;

Fransella & Bannister 1977; Denicolo & Pope 1997). The analysis process was an integrated one not “a separate set of procedures applied to an inert body of data” (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, p 11). It was “a progression, not a stage; an ongoing process, not a one-time event” (Erlandson, Harris et al. 1993, p 111). For example, after analysing networking strategies through mind mapping from my data I noted:

“There seems to be a range of strategies emerging that is more than what’s in the literature - double check.”

Tesch (1990) gives a typology of 26 analysis approaches summarised under four groups, namely characteristics of language, discovery of regularities, comprehending meaning of text or action, and reflection. The latter three have been particularly relevant to my research. Robson (1993, p 377) gives some basic rules for dealing with qualitative data which I applied to my research. He advises that there is no prescriptive formula for analysing data. His basic rules included starting analysis as soon as data is collected, indexing, generating themes, categories and codes, reflecting on the data, using memos to help, having a good filing system, ‘playing with the data’, and remembering the purpose throughout, all of which I have found invaluable. For example, I ‘played with the data by asking myself lots of questions as they occurred to me:

“As a networker / researcher what constructs do I see in the literature data? What constructs do I see in the interviews and in my observations? What differences are there?”

An aspect of ‘playing with the data’ included using different analysis tools which sometimes elicited different meanings from the same set of data and analysing the same set of data from different angles and with different perspectives (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). I found that each time I analysed Heather’s interview transcript I found something different. First I noticed networking strategy, then areas of fear / confidence, then how networking for business was low key and other reasons were the primary active ones which led to business. There were many times when analysis was an interactive process with myself as both researcher and networker / training consultant, with some of my data subjects or with other networkers / training consultants. I followed a naturalistic inquiry style where the data collection and data analysis processes are often interactive and interrelated (Erlandson, Harris et al. 1993).



In Chapter 1, I stated that the purpose was to further our understanding and knowledge capturing description and “people’s personal perspectives and experiences” (Patton 1990, p 40) allowing as much for difference as similarity in perceptions, and allowing for multiple realities (Erlandson, Harris et al. 1993). These perceptions might arise from a particular individual’s perception or from perceptions shared by more than one. To achieve that goal I analysed my data in a way that allowed for difference as well as similarity. I allowed for multiple realities, and didn’t simply search for aspects which could be generalised or supported from multiple data sources. If my analysis identified only one data source for a finding then I have presented that. If my analysis identified more than one data source for a finding then my writing reflects that. I followed advice in the literature about keeping the whole in mind when analysing qualitative data and that we may have many sources on which to draw including our memories, notes and subsequent meetings (Hollway & Jefferson 2000).

#### **4.6 Specific types of analysis carried out**

I will next provide more detail of the specific types of analysis that I carried out. The very simple method of reading the data many times to get a general sense of what was there (and what was not) was very important. This enabled me to identify the range of different strategies that training consultants used. Content and thematic analysis of research data (Ryle 1975; Richardson 1996; Flick 1998; Aronson 1994) was carried out on all interview transcripts, diary recordings, repertory grids, data gathered from emails and web based discussion group data. This led to themes such as trust, building rapport, reasons for networking and time frame involved. Detail of the specific method used to analyse repertory grid data are given in Appendix 6. Repertory grid helped to uncover issues of discomfort and lack of control in networking.

A particular method of content analysis that I applied (Stewart, Stewart et al. 1981) was to look at the data, write each different idea on a small piece of paper/card or Post-It<sup>®</sup>, and then sort them into piles based on my perception of the themes or groupings that they could fall into. By ‘ideas’ I mean constructs that I found in the data. I followed Stewart et. al.’s advice “the best way is to clear a big table and just sort your cards into piles until you have a sensible-looking, relatively homogenous piles” (p 50). Strauss (1987) also gives advice on coding and developing core categories. I found it beneficial to read

different accounts on coding when formulating my own analysis approach. Any qualms I may have had about using simple methods were eased when I read this account. “I remembered one of my professors recalling the pile of napkins that had helped him with his dissertation research. The napkins contained scribbled notes from lunch meetings with his faculty chair” (Cole 1994).

To identify possible key themes in my research used the card sorting method to help analyse the literature on using networking to gain business. I then repeated the process looking for key themes in the transcripts of my seven core contributors and all my other sources of data including repertory grids and noted any similarities and differences.

The table below summarises the key themes and whether information was found in the literature or in my other data sources. It is not intended to be a totally comprehensive list but indicates how different data sources link with the themes.

Key theme	Found in the literature	Information also arose from these sources
Risk	Yes	My own repertory grid
Formality / informality	Yes	
Commonality eg shared norms and values, common purpose, matching behaviours	Yes (very sparse)	Recorded interviews with Martin, Keith, Internet based discussion group, chat with Irene
Commitment to client's business	Yes	
Etiquette, rules of how to network	Yes	Recorded interviews with Keith, Paul, Martin, Heather, meeting with Rob, Rob's repertory grid
Strategies for networking	Yes	Recorded interviews with Martin, Heather, noted consultant activity at conferences, other client-consultant meetings, own personal experiences and reflections
Trust and respect	Yes	Recorded interviews with Keith, Martin, Heather, own personal experiences and reflections, CIPD conference



Reciprocal behaviour	Yes	Recorded interviews with Keith, Martin
Comfort and discomfort	No	Recorded interviews with Keith, Paul and Heather, email from Chris, my own experiences and reflections
Long term relationship	Yes	Recorded interviews with Heather, Keith
Maintaining relationships, follow up	Yes	Recorded interviews with Keith, Martin, Paul, Heather
Initial contact issues – card, getting to know you	Yes	Transcript of a TV interview, own personal experiences and reflection, attendees at an IPD meeting, recorded interview with Irene, Irvin – a consultant at a trainer’s meeting, NLP conference speakers, noted comments at an Initial Style conference day
Developing contacts and building rapport,	Yes	Recorded interviews with Paul, Keith, Heather, Martin and Janey, chat with Peter, own personal experiences and reflection, discussions with Irene
Reasons to network	Yes	Recorded interview with Martin, informal chat with Heather, own personal experiences and reflection, an unknown consultant at a conference
Gaining and maintaining visibility	Yes (very sparse)	Own personal experiences and reflection, Internet discussion group, recorded interview with Martin, Paul

Whilst this was how some of the main themes emerged it wasn’t the clear-cut process it might appear to be. It was a messy, evolving one, over a long period of time, combining discussion, reflection, physical analysis, making lists and notes. When it came to understanding and shaping each main section I found mind mapping proved to be a useful tool. An example is given in Appendix 7.

Another very useful part of Cole’s article suggested that one way of ‘finding a path through the research maze’ of data is to consider four different aspects of the data (Cole 1994). These are central tendencies or common themes that emerge, the range of difference within those themes or categories, the expected or things that tally with items in

the literature or with the researcher's assumptions, and the unexpected. In my findings I comment on where common themes, consistency or the unexpected have arisen.

I ended up with a number of key themes and findings and searched for a way of presenting them coherently. I revisited my working definitions of 'network' and 'networking' and returned to my Post-it<sup>®</sup> method of analysis to understand my findings at a more global or macro level. I clustered the findings in different ways and at the same time looked for any relationships between the literature, including the definition and my findings. I found two key strands in the working definitions provided a basis for understanding and collating my findings. One strand was the strategy and approach to networking, and the other was about the nature of the person to person connections or relationships in networking. These two strands have formed the basis for presenting my findings in Chapters 5 and 6.

#### **4.7 Drawing Together – my Research Process**

This chapter contributes to my thesis by explaining my choice of data gathering and analysis tools and how they have helped my research. These were observation and interviewing, with some use of repertory grid, self-characterisation and snakes. The tools were applied in a planned way at times and in a spontaneous way at other times, making the most of situations as they arose.

The interviews were carried out in depth with seven contributors, and there were shorter ad hoc conversations with many others. I capitalised on existing relationships that I had with contributors which meant that I had their trust, and they mine. This together with taking care to make them as comfortable as possible when in a research capacity encouraged them to speak out and share their ideas and thoughts with me. Speaking with them on more than one occasion and getting views from many different people and situations helped me to 'triangulate' the themes and concepts that were emerging.

The range of methods gave me plenty of scope to adapt to the person, the situation, the time available, and their preferred methods of conversation or analysis. These factors were the principal ones that guided my choice. The range allowed me to reduce researcher influence over content through PCP methodologies when I felt that was important and the



range gave me the opportunity to probe and pursue particular lines of enquiry if I felt that was beneficial through targeted interview questions, probes and by asking for examples.

Some tape recorded sessions gave me data that I could revisit many times from different perspectives, looking at the words that were actually used rather than how I remembered them. By contrast many of my other diary recordings and research notes were based on what I could remember of certain situations or conversations. This gave me a chance to include and explore data where taking formal recordings were likely to have been unacceptable to the other parties as it would have interfered with the business in hand. These options widened the scope of the source data available for my research.

A most significant data gathering method has also been to search my own memory and experiences of networking as a rich source of data for content on networking practices as well as for making sense of the research process. I selected observations of how I saw others network, my own methods, approaches and feelings about how I network with others, what actually took place at events and the impact it had on me and others. I noted questions and issues raised in my mind at the time, as well as comments from others.

One of the key things that has emerged in this section has been the development of my interviewing approach by incorporating some PCP ideas such as 'snakes' or 'illuminative incidents' and self-characterisation to help the interviewee to open up quickly and to expand on points, whilst at the same time minimising the effect of my preconceptions. At other times I deliberately employed traditional probing techniques to ask interviewees about specific issues which I would like to know more about.

My research approach has been flexible and responsive. This supports my paradigm and suits exploratory research. I have been fully involved, not aloof from it, and have taken account of the messy and uncertain nature of the information that is uncovered.

By experimenting with methods on myself, such as carrying out my own repertory grids on networking first, I have learned a lot about my own approach to networking for developing my business. Others may well find that if they analyse their own networking practices in the same way then they too may gain some helpful insights.

The star area for me from the methodology is learning more about observation and diary recording. Learning more about reflection and reflexivity, and raising my whole conscious awareness of what is going on has been a totally new experience of benefit to my personal life as well as my research. This alone has made it worth studying for a PhD.

In the next two chapters I go on to explain the key findings from the data that I gathered and analysed during my research.



## **Chapter 5 Key Findings Relating to Networking Strategy and Approach**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In the next two chapters I consider the implications of my research data and share the findings and conclusions that have emerged. In this chapter I will focus on findings in relation to networking strategy and approach and in the next on findings about networking relationships. They are based on examples from transcript data, events or incidents noted from my seven core contributors, and observations or comments from 45 other situations. Numerous personal experiences and reflections are interwoven to support or expand upon various themes.

### **5.2 Summary of key results on networking strategy and approach**

In this summary I concisely present my key findings on networking strategy and approach. These are discussed in detail with examples in subsequent subsections, including any implications for practitioners.

My research shows that there is little specific literature on why training consultants might use networking. There are, however, many reasons in the more general literature on networking and my findings broadly support these. Networking for self-development, for a sounding board, for future proofing and for client information are most prominent in my research data as reasons why training consultants might use networking. Detail and discussion of these is given in section 6.3.

The material in the literature on networking strategies was limited in range. My research has provided a greater range of strategies used by training consultants and is more specific regarding application. Details are given in section 6.4. These strategies included networking with other providers, targeting specific sectors, using consortia, networking as a subject expert and networking with everyone possible. Some used one as their primary strategy whereas others combined two or more. My research data identified these different strategies but relationships between the strategies did not emerge.

There were other similarities and differences between the literature and my research data regarding strategies. For example, I noticed that degree of formality and commitment to client's business appeared in the literature but was not expressed in my research data. I found mention of formal and informal hospitality and entertainment in the networking literature but found examples of informal events only in my research data.

The literature indicated gaining visibility to be important and my research adds to knowledge by showing ways in which training consultants do so to gain business. Despite the fact that training consultants considered networking as being key to gaining business, business reasons were often not the primary or active reason for any particular networking interaction. In fact having another purpose as the active reason, such as self-development often better furthered the goal of gaining business than having that as the active reason. This significant issue is not focused on in the literature. My research also shows how the Internet is used as a medium for raising visibility by training consultants. Issues of visibility are presented in section 6.5.

From analysing definitions and reasons for networking I realised that networking for self-development for example, may not always require development of useful contacts. So my original working definition of

Networking "interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts". (Pearsall 2001, p 958)

can be simplified and shortened, and in so doing better reflect the wide nature of networking. I present my definition now as:

Networking "interacting with others to exchange information"

In the following sections I will go through findings in relation to the main thematic areas that arose from analysing my research data.

### **5.3 Reasons to Network**

In Chapter 3, I stated the reasons for networking that were given in the literature. These broadly concur with my own findings about why people network. In this section I expand



on the reasons found in my research from those consultants who use networking for gaining business. These reasons have emerged from the data from my seven core contributors, additional comments from other consultants, my own reflections on my own reasons for networking, and my observations of others. The reasons are for self-development, socialising and support, future proofing, gaining client information to learn about an organisation or gathering information and practicalities regarding a potential client or piece of work. I will explain what is meant by each in the subsequent subsections and the links with networking for gaining business.

Networking for self-development was one key reason that emerged and an example from my previous experience will illustrate this. Many years ago, when I was an employed trainer, I wanted to learn about other ways of training, other training environments and the way in which different groups responded to training. This led to me start networking in a training related business setting. I was keen to get other people's views and it wasn't long before networking for development reasons led to being offered freelance work. From there it became a self-perpetuating circle. I networked to learn, the people I met asked me to take on training work, which led to referrals and invites to other training events and so on. My starting point and one of my continued reasons for networking was self-development.

Other consultants have said this to be the case for them too. Heather told in an interview of attending a course for self-development reasons which led to a business inquiry. The example below describes how attending a local Saturday class for self-development led to a business lead.

Heather. I've been going to an NLP course at R.....

Teresa: Oh yes.

Heather: Alternative therapy place, on a Saturday morning. And just, a course member. I'd been on the course with, I didn't say anything to him, but he just came over and said to me, he said, well they'd picked up that I was a trainer.....He just came to me can I have your, you know, could you let me know what you do and things I'd be interested in you doing some training for us.

This same approach also came from discussions with Isobel and numerous experiences of my own. For example, I found that co-training with an expert to develop my facilitation skills led to a contract offer from the company for whom the expert worked.

Rob and I met within a self-development environment and resulted in him asking for assistance on a particular contract. Links between taking part in self-development networking interactions and gaining business is not isolated to rare occasions. In my research it appeared as a regular phenomenon.

### **5.3a Networking for Social and Support Reasons**

Tomlinson (1987) and Segerman-Peck (1991) suggest one of the main reasons for networking was for peer support, friendship, relaxation and emotional support. To demonstrate the general point of how it can be used, I give an example from an informal social chat and exchange of news during my research. One Saturday night when I met with my colleague Heather there were no thoughts of networking for business purposes as part of the agenda. Neither of us like crowded, smoky places so we opted for a night in with a bottle of wine and a log fire. We spent a very enjoyable evening wandering from topic to topic, keen and eager to share news and stories about what had been happening in our lives. And yet, once we had talked about holidays and family we both naturally moved in and out of business topics. Heather commented on how much she valued this and I know from reflection how important I find it too.

Houlder (1997a) indicates the value of using networking when an impartial sounding board is needed. That evening we used each other as a sounding board discussing the basis on which we take business and what to do with clients whom we perceive to be a lot of hassle. Our enjoyment of each other's company and the trust and respect that has built up between us enables us to ask each other things like 'I had this client who... what else is there that I can do?' Heather and I commented on how useful this type of conversation is in clarifying thinking processes. We feel very comfortable in each other's company, both professionally and socially and this comfort enables us to use each other as a sounding board.

As our relationship has grown and as my husband and I have come to trust her and her family, we have been asking them to feed our cat while we are on holiday on a business basis instead on sending the cat to a cattery. Whilst this may seem a long way from gaining training business it's interesting to follow our thought processes for how this might develop. It shows how networking for other reasons, such as social and support can turn into business, albeit administrative.



The cat minding went very well and a bonus is that Heather also places the post on the table. It occurred to me that for long holidays when the post needs checking we could offer additional payment for dealing with urgent items. That's not such a big step from also asking her to check the answer phone and deal with emails and clients. At the moment my sister-in-law does this but it is becoming less convenient for her. Heather stays in my mind as an alternative.

The literature states that networking can be used for social and support reasons and my research shows how that can develop into business opportunities. The example from my research shows how, over time, relationships grow and business opportunities present themselves, albeit small ones. But, the point is that these opportunities often arise as a result of another reason for networking. In this case it was social contact in a semi-business relationship. However, this is not the only occasion where I have noted social and support networking interactions leading to business opportunities. Within P's group, members also grew to trust one another within a supportive social setting and over time provided some work for each other.

One evening Heather commented about the changing nature of some of her client's businesses and the need to keep up-to-date. The literature mentions the need to keep up-to-date and this made me think back to where the primary motivation for networking was for what I call 'future proofing'.

### **5.3b Networking for 'Future Proofing'**

I came to understand that I regarded networking for 'future proofing' to be an important aspect related to gaining business mainly from reflective analysis of my own approach to networking. By 'future proofing' I mean an attempt to keep my products and services desirable in the years to come. I try to do this by looking at what's changing in the field, trying to predict which future issues will be important to me, keeping up-to-date with technology and methods, and searching out where potential future demand may lie. To help me to do this I network through a variety of different events. Some might be seen as 'leading edge' such as the Learning Technology Exhibition in London, and some as more everyday such as a local professional institute meeting on Continuous Professional Development.

The closest I found in the networking literature to future proofing were discussions on 'keeping abreast of current thinking' (Thatcher 1996), developing new markets (Coviello & Munro 1995) and 'aiding a flexible response to changing market conditions' (Yarnell & Peterson 1993). Networking to keep abreast of current thinking is part of what I feel is behind future proofing but it is not the full story. Future proofing goes beyond being conversant in mainstream current thinking. To me it means attempting to be established in the thinking that will be required in the future, so that when that time is right, I already have the expertise ready for clients. This aspect is not readily discussed in the literature. I find that it helps to network to sense what type of flexibility is needed to respond to changing market conditions. In the wider literature, that on business strategy considers the issues of managing long term survival of a business (Harvard Business School 1998) and ways of minimising the effects of risk and uncertainty (Morden 1993). There are some similarities with my definition of future proofing in terms of the end outcome. What is different is that my research specifically indicates the role of networking in achieving the outcome whereas the literature focuses on longer-term survival through other business mechanisms.

To illustrate networking for future proofing I recall during the period of my research, networking with one group of training consultants with whom I work occasionally. This example shows networking to establish where potential future demands may lie (one aspect of future proofing). Some time ago we were associate trainers for a particular client organisation. Our work ceased when our client changed the tendering procedure and consortia formed to bid for future business. In the very early stages I found myself doing a substantial amount of networking to form my opinion on which consortium to join. Having chosen I then used networking to help develop ways of working together.

I consider this a form of future proofing for these reasons. At the time of tendering we believed that the contract was for several years. The client was likely to continue funding this work because of long-term government commitments and so the chances of the work not being required were regarded as very slim. To have a regular share of work over that length of time comes into my definition of 'future proofing'. Networking had helped me seek out potential future demand.



### **5.3c 'Networking for Information'**

In the literature, 'networking for gaining information' was another generalised reason cited, eg 'using networking for more and improved sources of information' Kirk (1994), and is very wide in scope. This reason for networking directly parallels my working definition of networking. In this section I share particular ways in which it relates to the practices of training consultants.

From my research data I have noted that networking for gaining information includes learning about organisational politics in relation to gaining business, identifying replacement contacts when a client leaves an organisation, identifying the decision makers in an organisation, identifying budget holders and when the financial year ends, seeking out technical / profession information to help reach a decision. I will illustrate these with some examples from my data and will then go on to draw out key emerging issues.

Networking for gaining information about the politics of an organisation with which a training consultant is trying to gain business has emerged many times. For example, I noted from attending an Initial Style Trainers Day in December 1997 how one training consultant used the networking event. I wasn't able to catch his name, but his comments stood out in my mind as these were quite proactive and instrumental.

**"Over coffee I (Teresa) was talking to a training consultant from a large well known firm of consultants. I asked how he saw the event and how it helped him. His answer was threefold. Firstly, to see other presenters and add them to his network if he liked them. Secondly, where he has some difficulty in getting into an organisation he will seek out someone from that organisation if possible and ask them who he should contact and what the best way of making contact is. Thirdly, he finds that people will take the initiative to network with him in the hope of getting associate or occasional work as a trainer."**

Another example comes from one organisation for which I had worked for a couple of years where I found that both the training manager and deputy training manager left within about four months of each other. For some months the organisation was without anyone overseeing the training process. As most of the training was outsourced, continuity with suppliers like myself was lost. I networked with the ex-training manager partly to exchange ideas on training in different countries and partly to find out if she had any inside information on the current politics of her old organisation or who the new training

manager was. Very often people who leave keep in touch with their old place of work and can be very informative. In the past I have had people refer me on to the new person who has taken over their job. In my experience this often has a far greater chance of being successful than 'cold calling' to introduce yourself to the new person.

The next examples show how Martin uses networking for information about who the decision-makers are.

Martin: what I usually do with, with clients when I'm with them and is, one of the important things is to find out who are the decision makers

Martin: With clients as well is to, erh, I nearly always say, maybe, I've done this particular work with you. Erh, what else might be coming up in? Are you aware of what I can offer mm? Erh, is there anybody else that you would suggest that I need to speak to mm in terms of the kind of work that I do?

Martin: And what I might say to them is okay who is your opposite number in the other division? Erh, because I don't know them and they don't know me erh, and what I'd like to do is contact them.

This shows how Martin uses networking to find out who else might be interested in his services with an existing client organisation.

From my research data I have found that consultants ask via networking who training budget holders are, and when the financial year ends in organisations. They ask about new systems being put into place for which training will be needed, and whether clients are satisfied with their current suppliers (because if not, a timely contact may enable them to tender for the work). They might want to know if training budget holders can carry forward unspent budget or whether a timely call offering services when the budget has to be used up is appropriate.

Networking to check out practicalities before deciding whether to accept or reject an assignment is also a fairly common occurrence amongst the consultants that I have spoken with during the course of my research and prior to it. Learning about practical details about what is expected or involved can be critical. Recently a colleague who took a contract in Bermuda told me that he wished he had spoken with others he knew who had previously worked for the organisation there. He would have found greater detail on working hours and other issues helpful.



Networking to gather information can also help a consultant decide whether they have the expertise for a contract. I would rather turn down a job that is outside my area of expertise than risk doing a poor job. I have experienced numerous occasions where the client has respected this reason for saying 'no'. My reputation remains intact and the client has said they will be more likely to offer other work in the future, knowing that I will turn the work down if it is beyond my capability. Sometimes it is difficult to make this decision and networking to gather information on which to base a decision helps. This may involve contacting other training colleagues who know the same client or who work in the same specialist area to seek their opinion. To demonstrate this point I give an extract from my research notes:

**“March 2000**

**Hi Teresa**

**I'm been offered a contract with XXX in relation to their training evaluation requirements and Investors in People. Not sure whether to go for it as I've not got public sector experience. I know you've been doing some work there. When you've been training there how much do they value public sector examples (as I haven't got many) or are commercial examples OK? If you can get back to me by 7pm tonight would be a great help”**

In my research diary I noted three other emails and one phone call asking for information of this sort from colleagues so I take it to be a recurring phenomenon.

These examples show that the issue of networking to gain information is extensive and can be important to gaining business. There are a number of issues that emerge. It strikes me that the high degree of trust and confidence in the networking relationship is needed to be able to discuss these issues. Networking for gaining information may involve risk through revealing a lack of skill or knowledge, showing fear and anxiety over a particular situation, or through making others aware of a potential business opportunity by discussing it with them. Getting a speedy response from networking contacts may also be important. In three out of the other four occasions I noted, speed was of the essence as there was just hours in which to network and make a decision.

What also struck me was the degree of trust that enabled the communication to take place by email. Given that many training consultants live very mobile lives, working long and unsocial hours, it's not easy to quickly reach other consultants during 'office hours' by

phone, and even more unlikely face-to-face. Strong relationships built up over time help networkers to feel safe enough to discuss such issues in writing (by email).

In discussing the possible reasons for why training consultants network we have started to touch on the opportunities and strategies for networking and making contact with others. In the next section I will expand on my research findings in this area.

## **5.4 Networking Strategies**

My research has shown up some very specific types of networking strategies which are not presented in the literature on how training consultants network. These are networking with other providers of training, forming a consortium, networking as subject expert, targeting a specific sector, networking with everyone, and networking through entertaining. Each of these strategies comes from a training consultant who has been in business for some years, and has, on the whole, gained the level of business that has suited them. The purpose of this section is to show the range that has been uncovered in my research. Other strategies may well be in use by other consultants not in my sample.

### **5.4a Networking with Other Providers of Training**

The first type of networking strategy that I would like to outline is that of networking with other providers of training. There is little mention of this in the literature and I have found no discussion of implications and issues. Some consultants use it as part of their approach, others use it as their main or predominant approach. It involves networking with other training consultants in their own or closely allied fields and gaining business from them. This might take the form of doing the excess work, working in loose partnerships where their field of expertise is required, working as an associate, or following up leads which the originator is unable to do because of time pressures. This is all within ethically agreed boundaries rather than poaching clients. Where this approach is followed by a consultant as a predominant approach I explored where the new work comes from. It comes from following clients when they move companies, expanding into other parts of the same company, and of course there is the fact that not every training consultant follows this as an exclusive approach.



The extract below comes from an informal chat that I had with Martin. Historically Martin has followed an approach of mainly getting work through networking with other providers of training. He explains an example of how this might work.

Martin: "I would say to them look, this is, this is in terms of development, mm, we'd need to spend a day together to go through it, erh, and the client will pay mm, for a day of your time for that and this would be the rate. Erh., if that person then subsequently, erh, if there is additional work from that client which for whatever reason maybe I can't do, maybe I'm not available so they would do it on their own, erh and if that occasionally might develop into that client then erh phoning me and saying look can I have this person because you're not available then I'll really say to that person, OK, you know what the fee is, you know what they pay you because that's what I've paid you, mm, you're on your own now. You've, you need to deal with them direct, you know what the fee is, you know what the mileage is and everything else because its exactly the same. And therefore, then maybe then, and there is then, what I would like to feel, is that then that person, because of the work that I've obtained for them that they will in due course reciprocate in some way to me.

Teresa: Yea, yea

Martin: And will look for an opportunity when one comes up, if there's an opportunity to work with somebody on one of their contracts, maybe I'll be the first person that they call

Teresa: Yea, so that's the way in which it'll

Martin: So that's the way, over a period of several years that's usually the way it works out. This particular person I've got in mind, helped me significantly about 5 years ago. You know in a time when we were in recession I really needed some work and, erh, they were working on a major contract and brought me in on that and it was a tremendous help to me at the time.

Teresa: mm

Martin: Now it was 2 or 3 years later before I was able to really reciprocate, erh, but now I'm in a situation probably where I've, mm. I would say I've, if you like I've paid them back

Teresa: Yes, yes

Martin: now and mm, they're now in a situation they're keeping their eyes open for more work for me. So it works very very well

Analysis of the interview transcript showed that Martin's understanding of networking with other providers involves reciprocity. If he gives business to a colleague he hopes that in the future the colleague will give him business. My own view on reciprocity in networking is much wider. I may give business to one consultant, and gain business from another. The circle within which business is exchanged is much wider. This personal reflection shows that some consultants may take a narrow view on reciprocity and some a much wider view.

There is also the issue that although I felt I knew Martin fairly well I did not know his views on this until we discussed it for my research. It is not a subject that is normally spoken about. Martin was the only consultant in my formal sample to comment on this narrower view on reciprocity but since then I have informally discovered two others who use networking with other providers as their main approach. Neither of them indicated whether they take a wider or narrower view on exchanging business. I personally use networking with other providers as only part of my strategy for gaining business. However, awareness that wider and narrower views of reciprocity exist is useful practical information for consultants developing this use of networking. These represent two different views on life and networking. Martin's transcript shows that different views on reciprocity can lead to frustration, disappointment and maybe resentment at times in networking. So from studying networking strategies it has emerged that some consultants successfully used networking with other providers, that views on reciprocity vary, and remain as largely undiscussed topics, potentially leading to frustration and disappointment.

#### **5.4b Networking to Form a Consortium**

The literature recognises the use of networking to increase apparent size and capability (Campbell 1998; Zeffane 1995) and the second type of networking opportunity that has emerged from my research is that of networking with other training providers to form a consortium to bid for work. I have noted that many self-employed trainers feel being a very small organisation to be disadvantageous for tenders. In an attempt to raise their image, profile and weight in the market place they network and band together. Consortia may be informal or developed into a company formed for such purposes.

To illustrate the issues I recall some of my first hand experiences and discussions with others on developing consortia and note that reactions are mixed. My core contributors did not mention consortia. Based on this and on my additional knowledge of them I conclude that perhaps consortia do not feature significantly in their networking approach. So, my research data comes from my own experiences and that of other consultants. The first example is of a consortium formed in recessionary years in the early 1990's where it was hoped that by joining together they could compete with large well-known consultancies. I joined this group in about 1992 and I have noted some reflections on it:



**“P’s Consultants Group. This was started some four or five years ago and consisted of a group of consultants from a variety of HR backgrounds. The idea was that we would be able to help each other to gain business by being part of a larger organisation. There was to be no duplication in relation to membership which meant that there would be only one person from each specialism. This was to help maintain confidentiality and also to make sure that there was less risk that we would be treading on each other's patches.”**

**I was less happy with some of the early rules that were developed by the groups. For example if somebody missed two consecutive meetings they could be excluded from the group. There was also some discussion around whether to formalise the way in which consultants would work on contracts together.**

**For me the advantages of belonging to the group included the opportunity for mutual support, sharing ideas, being able to discuss sensitive items like a pricing strategy, and having a sense of belonging.”**

**I found it a very effective forum for networking reasons such as sharing business concerns and for giving mutual support, but limited in terms of networking to do business together as we were very independent in what we wanted to do and how we wanted to work. Two other consortium members recognised and commented on this at one of our meetings. Its potential for presenting a larger image soon faded into the background, especially once the recession receded. I suspect this was also due to the support aspect of the network being more highly valued. Some years later, one member of this group formed a consortium with other colleagues with the intention of going for large well paid contracts. This consortium soon disbanded without success despite lots of initial enthusiasm. Neither of these consortia benefited from increased image or size in the way indicated in the literature.**

**One consortium I know of in the Midlands, which does seem to be successful, looked very carefully at business strategy. They considered the potential disadvantage of overlapping areas of expertise. This would reduce the work they could each gain and therefore decided that someone could belong only if they contributed a different area of expertise. In so doing they avoided conflict in contracting for the same jobs. They felt that this type of network had a far greater chance of success. Time will tell as to whether it will remain successful. By contrast another successful consortium set up in the late 1990’s and reported in People Management (Stubberfield 2001), claims that two keys to success have been that “members have similar needs and that they have devised effective ways of**

working together within a formal framework.” All members were personnel and training consultants based in Devon and Cornwall. They started off informally discussing the problems of breaking into particular markets but later formalised their network into a legal entity so as to bid for larger scale work. I have avoided becoming part of another legal entity and wish to maintain my own separate business. This potential disadvantage is commented on in the article. “I think one area of concern is the ethical cut-off between where I get my business from and where the PDC (consortium) gets its business from.... Although we have thrashed out, in theory, an ethical way of handling it, I have not seen that work in practice yet.” Some members saw the fact that at some point in the future the network may well subsume their own individual businesses as a disadvantage.

I was interested in the extensiveness of consortia within training consultancy and analysed my recollections as well as data gathered for my research. I was aware of nearly every consultant having belonged to a consortium at some point or having actively discussed not doing so, but few examples of satisfaction with the process, especially in terms of gaining business. Few remained active members for long.

Those who have experienced networking through consortia suggest that things are considered carefully from various angles, both short and longer term. Working with others in a consortium is likely to involve parting with some independence and freedom of action. These are factors that I, as well as many other consultants that I know, treasure as important. Informal ground rules and legalities both need sorting out. This contrasts with many other networking situations where informality works well.

Consortia remain as one approach to networking and in terms of gaining business have varying degrees of success. Using consortia to benefit from support and advice seems to be more consistently successful. Another approach however to networking for gaining business that works more consistently well is networking as a subject expert. This is especially useful for consultants with particular specialism.

#### **5.4c Networking as a Subject Expert**

This third approach used by training consultants is one that appears in the general literature on networking. For example Hart (1996 p 85) suggests “Become the person everyone talks about and asks for an opinion. Become the Kissinger of your industry.



How do you do it if you don't have years in the industry? Write articles in the industry magazine... Prepare a research report on a subject of great interest and send it out free to decision makers." It is about becoming an expert and advertising your expertise in a variety of ways through networking.

Some training consultants have the foresight to spot a developing subject and have the potential to become one of the founding experts. By creating enough visibility and interest clients find the 'expert'. From my own experience I have seen the following methods of creating visibility used by training consultants and these still seem to be recognised and 'respectable' ways of doing things. Way of raising visibility are to focus on a clearly identified subject, be involved with the original research or with the development of the practical implications of the original research, sell the benefits to clients in a way that they can identify with (and in a way that fits with their organisational plans so that they are more inclined to part with their money), raise the profile of the subject by giving seminars or conference sessions, write articles for journals or web sites, contribute to TV and radio programmes, represent the subject by sitting on panels or be part of a leading edge working party. Becoming associated with a leading university or business school can help and being one of the first (but not necessarily the first) with high profile publications on the subject is often beneficial. All of this takes time, maybe two or three years. Some consultants without the flair for developing new areas have done well by networking with those who have and by becoming a part of their team.

More than one consultant that I know of has used this expert approach to their advantage. For example, one who is a director of a training consultancy employing several training consultants, has become well known for her work in the field of emotional intelligence. She has raised her profile and become known as an expert. At a networking day run by a client for whom I do associate work she gave a seminar to a large number of training consultants on the subject of emotional intelligence. She consciously chooses which forums she wishes to speak at.

Although the majority of us who attended were not likely to be 'cheque holders for new business' we were very likely to be in a position to recommend her (or not) depending on how we experienced the session. When she set up her web site she took the opportunity to email many of us, myself included, to inform us of the changes in her business, the free articles on the web site, and her research activities. I experienced the same approach from

a Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) practitioner who was developing a new profiling method. She fruitfully shared her research findings at the NLP annual conference in London, promoted her expertise and networked after the session with many interested people through follow-on contact. This was an intentional and planned business strategy using networking.

Of other training consultants who use this approach, one leading expert in the field of e-learning promotes his expertise through writing regular professional journal articles and supporting professional institute events. Another keeps her expertise on PCP high profile through publications and supporting non-profit making web-based discussion forums on human resource PCP related topics. Having spoken with both of these in the course of business I know that they both view this type of networking as an investment for gaining future business.

From my research I note the extensiveness of this approach, its success for those with the drive and effort to promote themselves in this way and but underlying it is belief that networking is an important tool in gaining business.

#### **5.4d Networking Targeting a Specific Sector**

A fourth approach that other training consultants followed is a highly targeted networking strategy within a sector that they knew well over many years. Heather, for example, told me of a training consultant who knew all the key players in the local area, went to the local events, dinners, product launches, supported research in the field, spoke at open days, assisted new recruits and gave careers advice. As a result when a client in the sector needed a consultant, this person's name came to mind. This resulted in plenty of fee-earning work but also plenty of non-fee earning work because those who thought of this consultant often forgot that she was not salaried and that extras were done for free. Books and articles on networking such as Hart (1996) and Tullier (1998) suggest many varied activities such as attending dinners, supporting charity association events, or taking in voluntary committee roles, but rarely warn of the amount of work that can be entailed. I personally do not know of other training consultants who follow this approach, but I do know of consultants in other fields who do.



## **5.4e Networking with Everyone**

The fifth main approach used by training consultants emerging from my research is to network with anyone and everyone through any and every opportunity. Heather believes in this approach and to a considerable extent I also fit into this category. In the general literature on networking, especially for jobs and careers, there are many instances where networking with everyone is recommended. For example, Gattis (1995) suggests that you “Talk to everyone. A job hunter once met an employer with a job opening while waiting in the movie line.” There is however a lack of published information on networking with everyone in relation to training consultants gaining business although the principle given in the general literature would seem to be applicable.

Those training consultants who have adopted this strategy of networking have found it worthwhile. Their approach involves plenty of lunches, breakfast meetings, attending social gatherings, and virtually anything that involves spending time with others. It is particularly successful for many when they concentrate on the subject of the meeting or gathering and forget that they’re networking. People value them for who they are, weighing up their ethics and approach, forming opinions about their skills and knowledge, and as a result they either refer them on or not. Another example of being aware of networking at every opportunity and networking for some other reason is given below.

**Heather:** So erm, yea, I think networking is hugely powerful but I think it’s not something you switch on and switch off. It’s around you all of the time, you’re doing it all of the time, I think and I think everybody is, but I know in the back of my mind, I’m doing it with the business hat on 99% of the time even in my social situations.

The fact that you might be ‘networking’, even if you keep things low profile, is given in this account from Heather when attending a course for her own personal development.

**Heather:** Alternative therapy place, on a Saturday morning. A course member I’d been on the course with, I didn’t say anything to him, but he just came over and said to me .....can I have your, you know, could you let me know what you do and things, I’d be interested in you doing some training for us.

**Teresa:** Oh, now that’s a lovely example of networking isn’t it?

**Heather:** Yea, but I have said nothing to him. He picked up from my interactions with the group just going along on a Saturday that I obviously, I think he did know, actually he’s overheard a

conversation between me and the guy whose running it. And the guy was saying what do you exactly do and I said oh I've got a leaflet thing I'll bring it along to you, and this other chap said the following week, can I have one of your leaflets.

Teresa: Ah yes.

Heather: So it's really interesting.

Teresa: So being yourself and putting your skills on display, that sells itself.

Heather: That was, I'm there as a participant, I'm nothing to do with the facilitation of it, I'm there to join in. I try to keep my skills very low key because I was aware that I was going along to this with, if you want, you know, added extra's in terms of, I do training people. So, I try to keep all that very low key, but I didn't manage quite as well as obviously people do pick up the fact that you've done this before. You do it all the time don't you. And mm, so, what I did in group work is to let everybody else go first and I'll make sure I waited to last and things like that. So I like to think I was very considerate in that situation. I thought of other needs before my own. Mm and I think I must be fairly successful otherwise he wouldn't be asking me.

There are some key issues that emerge for me from this research data that are not readily discussed. A consultant's skills and knowledge are on display all the time in any interaction with others. Although these others may not directly be in a position to offer business, they may talk to others who are. Some consultants realise that this is happening, but do nothing special as they are happy with how they portray themselves to others from business and social perspectives, at least most of the time. Yet others prefer to have time in which they consciously network and choose to employ particular behaviours for that time to support the achievement of their business goals. They recognise that they may lose potential business at other times but prefer the separation of work and non-work time and behaviours.

#### **5.4f Networking Through Entertaining**

Entertaining clients or prospective clients is another type of networking strategy that is used traditionally in many business circles as part of the strategy of networking to win business. In Everett (1997 p 57) it says "Networking: Time-consuming; Costs can be high, especially if you wine and dine prospective clients." It is interesting in my research that wining and dining clients as an issue has not been explicitly discussed and I wondered to what extent it is used by training consultants. As only informal entertainment between training consultants had emerged in my research data, I explored this a little further by



looking back through my career as a trainer both as an internal company trainer contracting external consultants and as a training consultant to consider other examples.

The first experience that came to mind was back in the mid-1980's when a manager I knew hosted a meal for a training consultant that he wanted to use. The manager provided the entertainment. I was also aware of this consultant doing his delivery of whisky or brandy at Christmas. But that was in the mid-1980's. My own experience since then has been of existing clients paying for hospitality for me, not the other way round, at least until we have become 'friends' rather than client / customer. Where I network with other consultants things tend to be done on the basis of sharing the costs, either taking it in turns to pay, paying half each or taking it in turns to cater at home. I know this to be in direct contrast to other fields. My brother-in-law worked in the motor trade for many years. Receptions, hospitality at shows, meals, holidays, sports events, are used with great effect and feature highly in their approach to gaining business. Larger companies may be expected to project a larger presence and maybe a corporate sports event or bank lunch may be the equivalent of my 'glass of wine by the fire'.

So although the general literature proposes networking through entertaining clients, my research data does not support this as an extensively used tool by training consultants at the current time. Informal entertainment between training consultants is in regular use, but not as a sole means of networking.

In this section I have discussed a number of networking strategies for gaining business. Implied in them are ways of gaining and maintaining visibility. In the next section I will explore some of the more detailed and specific issues in relation to this.

## **5.5 Gaining and Maintaining Visibility**

So far in this chapter I have discussed aspects of making yourself known to others such as 'getting to know you', meeting as many people as possible, giving out business cards and networking strategies. In this part I would like to build on these ideas in terms of gaining and maintaining visibility as a training consultant. There is relatively little in the literature on this subject, and it is particularly sparse in relation to training consultants. This section is based on research data from my own personal experiences and reflection, information

from an Internet discussion group, conversations with Irene and Heather, and recorded interviews with Martin and Paul.

### **5.5a Business Reasons not the Primary Reason to Network**

In the general literature on networking, Bruce (1988 p 27) asserts that “many networks were not set up for the primary purpose of generating business deals”. One issue that comes out strongly for me from my research is that a number of consultants, including myself, use networking to raise visibility and generate business but don’t necessarily engage in any one networking interaction with that as the primary motivation. This builds on and supports findings in the literature. Consultants network for many other reasons such as personal development, enjoyment, or friendship but in so doing maintain or raise visibility. It can be either advantageous or disadvantageous depending on the image portrayed. This came out explicitly in conversations with Irene and Heather, and in my own reflections. I have also noticed many passing comments at events to that effect. For example, at a number of courses where some delegates have been training consultants, they have made comments along the lines of “I’m primarily here to learn about XYZ as I need that for my job, but it will also be nice to network with others and exchange views and ideas.”

To illustrate this paradox between networking to gain business and yet networking with other reasons as the active or primary motivation I give the following example from my previous experience. Some time ago I was a committee member for the Institute of Personnel Management (now CIPD) Hertfordshire Branch. Whilst I was aware of the need to network to gain business and raise my profile, I took part because I enjoyed it. The contact with colleagues on a regular basis helped with the social contact that can be difficult to get when working self-employed. Any business benefits were pushed to the back of my mind. I was just myself and did the best I could on committee work for the intrinsic interest and without any attempt at a ‘special performance’ as I might do when giving a formal business presentation. I found that taking part in the committee work maintained my profile as my skills, values, ethics etc were on display. It raised my visibility in a significant way over a long period of time. As a result of seeing me in action another committee member asked me to do some work for her organisation. I have come to realise that by throwing myself wholeheartedly into a networking event with reasons other than gaining business in mind, networking for gaining business has a better



chance of succeeding for me. I have a better chance of raising and maintaining visibility. However, this takes time, as with so many aspects of networking, and I've found that it's not a short term or quick fix solution to gaining business. Another training consultant with whom I was at a meeting recently, showed me his local CIPD branch programme, and from discussion with him I realised that he is now networking in the way that I did with his local CIPD committee for similar reasons.

Another example comes from attending a client associate day in the Midlands in 1998 where the client updated some 70 of us on events and future business developments. This took place approximately twice a year. I regarded this as a self-development day as they often had good speakers or worthwhile facilitated group work. I would not have attended unless I felt I was going to benefit in some way other than gaining business, as that may or may not have been an achievable objective. It felt more fulfilling to have another objective that was achievable, and if business opportunity arose then that was a bonus. In my mind I had two main reasons for going. Firstly I wanted to maintain visibility by attending and showing interest and support to the client so influencing the chance of gaining future business. Secondly, I wanted to meet with colleagues, enjoy lunch and chat, and maintain my own continuous professional development. I find that I can't really predict how events like this may or may not benefit in terms of gaining business longer term. On the other hand I know that if I don't attend then I am less likely to give myself the chance of exploring potential future furthering business.

Analysing my research data made me aware of another dimension to raising visibility. Up to this point I had been focused more on attending client days with a view to maintaining my visibility with the client. However, I noticed that networking at these events also served to raise visibility with other training consultants attending. This has similarities and links with the networking strategies with other providers, mentioned in the section 5.4a. To illustrate the effect of visibility with other consultants I have extracted this example from my notes of a client day.

“One trainer (Fran) who I've really enjoyed working with and who I think is really good at her job, approached me with an idea she had. She had spotted a business opportunity – a need that she felt this client had – and wondered if I would join her on developing it. I said it sounded interesting and we agreed to correspond by fax to develop a proposal. She was happy to lead but needed a sounding board.”

My intention in attending this event was to learn and maintain visibility with the client. What it had done was keep me visible to my colleagues also. Had I not been there I suspect she might have looked around the room and chosen someone else to help her. After all, there were over 70 of us present and so there were plenty of consultants to choose from. What emerges from analysing this material is that maintaining visibility with colleagues can be just as important as maintaining visibility with the immediate client and that there are ample opportunities for doing so when networking for reasons other than gaining business. It was probably something that I was aware of at a sub-conscious rather than conscious level and other networkers may find conscious awareness of this issue also useful.

### **5.5b Networking Through the Internet to Raise Visibility**

In my literature section I outlined ways in which networking through the Internet can assist the research process. My research extends this body of knowledge to include the ways in which training consultants network through the Internet to raise visibility with a view to gaining business. During my research I became more aware of the extent to which networking had worked for me and of new opportunities in relation to networking. I wanted to explore Internet based networking opportunities and analysed networking through Internet discussion groups. For example, I belong to two active groups, one for PCP and one for trainers (Fenman UKHRD). Fenman is a producer of training films and resources and runs the network for free as a promotional opportunity. I found the analysis of these groups interesting in terms of content and process.

One obvious issue is use of advertisements or requests for consultancy through the forum. There is the opportunity to both give business and win business. This was substantiated at a lunchtime client meeting with some training consultants in February 2001 where two of the four present said that the UKHRD network had been a source of business. I too have obtained contracts as a result of following up UKHRD network leads.

Training content discussed in the forum helps to keep me up-to-date with training issues and trends. However by contributing to discussions or replying to questions, these forums can also be used to raise your profile by demonstrating knowledge and expertise. Some forum members monitor responses and as a result contact individuals or organisations with business propositions.



I found I soon began recognising regular contributors on the network, forming an impression of them; how up-to-date they are, how clearly they express a point, how sensitive they are to other people etc. After a time I feel as though I 'know' some of them. They have raised their profile and maintained visibility by regularly contributing to current questions and debates. I have included some extracts from postings showing some networkers' views on maintaining visibility through networking via the forum. For example,

(Pratt 1999) "The Network should be for individuals to seek help and advice and for other individuals to give the advice requested or to simply express views and opinions to open up a debate. "

In follow on discussion from Pratt's comment about networking using UKHRD one member wrote:

(Blake 2000) "I'm sorry to be a dissenting voice, but to me, belonging to a network is not only about gaining support and insight, important though that is; it is also about furthering business. I can't remember the last time I saw a posting which began, "Further to Fred's posting, I can do you a wonderful course on..."; These e-mails are generally sent directly to the list member so as not to clog up the network, or are rejected by the moderator. However, part of the reason that I (and most other contributors) post responses to queries is to raise our profiles and potentially gain business as a result. I apologise if this disturbs any sensitive souls to whom the word "business" may be offensive, but for many of us that's how we feed, house and clothe our families."

Blake was one of a number of members who are extremely conscious of using the network to raise their profile and maintain visibility with a view to furthering business. There is also a degree of realism from many members over the effect of soft selling through networking as opposed to hard or blatant selling. For example,

(Taylor 1999) "Let's face it, the honest answer is that I would love to generate sales through advertising! However, you have to balance that very selfish view with the cost of that advertising and I do not mean the financial cost. If this network becomes saturated with advertising then it will no longer have any appeal to my potential clients who, judging by the nature of the discussion are much more interested in the 'editorial content'. Therefore blatant advertising may have short term benefit but certainly has no long term benefit. I will continue to gently plug my organisation through the use of more subtle advertising such as the contribution you have hopefully just read ;-)"

After some time I found that I started to form opinions about whom I might regard as a reliable source of information, and whom I might disregard because of the manner of their contribution. It seems that others do this too and that the effect can work in reverse ie it can help you decide who not to refer or purchase from as well. To support this assertion I have included this extract from a posting.

(Taylor 2000) “While I agree that this is not a forum for blatant “hard selling”, I have found it useful as a purchaser and commissioner of training to note the types of attitudes from company representatives on this group. I now am aware of certain organisations who I would not recommend purchasing services from, because I do not feel their commitment to anti-discriminatory practice is good enough.”

This shows how the reverse effect can take place through the type of questions asked. It's not just about selling your service, it's also about ensuring that you don't turn potential customers off through the way in which you network. More than once I've seen a consultant ask a very basic question which makes me concerned about their level of competence. I would be unlikely to refer that consultant to others. The following extract shows that others have noticed this too.

(Pressage 1999) “Advertising can work in reverse too! Think of some of the questions posed on the network, that you consider to be very simple and have very simple common answers, i.e. that a competent trainer should be able to address with ease. Then you note the position quoted by the questioner...”

Many of the people who contribute to the Fenman trainer's network are aware of the advertising potential it carries to a targeted audience. This is seen through the ground rules that are set up, and in occasional debates on what is or is not allowed in terms of explicit or implicit advertising. These ground rules have developed and changed over the years and as a result of a series of postings Fenman revisited their policy on advertising.

(Murray 2000a) “The policy is now as follows:  
Messages. Messages may not be unabashed advertising. You are more than welcome to plug your goods or services provided you contribute useful information. So, “I am the best consultant on xyz. Call me” will be rejected, provided we spot it. “I have found, as a consultant on xyz, that the three most important principles are a, b and c” is absolutely fine and you are more than welcome to plug yourselves in this way. This is unchanged from previous policy.



**Paid advertising: We are now happy to take paid advertising. The rates are available on the UKHRD website. We will also accept advertising on the web site itself, including in the activities archive and the message archive. We intend to maintain a balance such that the adverts are never more than occasional plums in the general pudding of exchanges. We will also identify paid advertisements as such. We will put these in the body of the digest so that they will be seen. I don't want people to be able to avoid them. It would defeat the whole object. Would ITV put all their ads at the end of the day's broadcasting?**

**Why the change? UKHRD started as a bit of fun. It has grown to be a major force in the world of training and it costs us around £20,000 per year, increasing. In return for this, we get nothing at all under the previous arrangement. Our two choices are therefore to charge for membership, which I don't believe would work, or to take advertising.”**

**This acknowledges and deals with some of the more blatant aspects of using the network, leaving contributors to consider the message they are giving when they participate in the network.**

**Since the Fenman Network started I have become very aware of the potential advantages and disadvantages of taking part (or not taking part actively). Others might scrutinise the type of question asked, your level of competence or your motives for being interested in it, your inability to find the answer elsewhere, your values, the language used, the content, how up-to-date the information is or the helpfulness of the response. I have tended to take a fairly cautious approach contributing only occasionally and with factual information rather than opinion. Others, presumably in an attempt to maintain visibility, ensure they comment on most key issues. Some members look to see if particular members are contributing, and comment or joke if they have been absent from a debate, devaluing their contribution. I did not want my contribution to be devalued.**

**Interestingly enough my participation in the PCP internet group is different. In this field I am not an expert and I have no business interests. I am participate purely for learning purposes and am happy to ask a basic or advanced level question without concern for what others think. This difference in the nature of Internet discussion groups and the potential impact on business is not commented on in the literature.**

About the same time that I was starting to explore Internet based networking, I became aware of the potential of writing book reviews for Amazon.com as a way of networking and raising my profile. Potential clients sometimes read these reviews and I saw this as a good way of maintaining visibility through networking and could differentiate me in the marketplace. It would also say to others that I was keeping up-to-date. It was important to take extreme care over exactly what I wrote in the review as I might be seen to be endorsing the publication. A disadvantage to this approach is one of time. It takes more time to read a new book and decide what to write for a review than to read it for my own benefit. My current success with this method has been limited to about four reviews, but I plan to do more. At the moment this method of networking has not been saturated by other consultants.

So through networking you can maintain visibility with a larger group of people by means such as Internet discussion groups and doing web-based reviews. At face-to-face meetings, such as professional institute meetings, you can maintain visibility on an ongoing basis through active committee membership and playing a live role at events (such as chairing the opening and closing) on a regular basis. When it comes to maintaining visibility on a one-to-one basis some networkers recommend doing a follow up phone call or a follow up meeting. In the next section I explore findings relating to raising visibility through follow up.

### **5.5c Raising Visibility Through Follow Up**

One of the few writers on networking to gain business as a consultant, Italo (1996b) states that "Follow up is the key to success in business. Most people don't follow up very well. A call to a contact for no reason other than to see how he/she is doing reinforces the perception of a continuing relationship. Continued contact and meetings help a contact grow into a friend. With each step the probability of getting business improves." Also in the practitioner literature, Edwards and Edwards (1994 p 413) recommend "Finally, plan a follow-up meeting with people you become acquainted with." In this section I build on these points in the literature showing ways in which training consultants apply this concept. I will start with an extract from one of my research interviews with Martin.

**Martin:** I've picked up some business in the last year, from somebody who had left a major company. I didn't know them that well, to be perfectly honest. But suddenly I had a phone call out of



the blue, saying they'd now moved to this company and they wanted some work done and I started getting some work. Other people I've followed, err, I've deliberately made a point of getting their phone number.

Teresa: Mm.

Martin: And then followed up with a phone call. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Martin's example shows one of the most common ways in which training consultants follow up. I like to have a sincere reason for keeping in touch with others, other than simply asking for business. Clients have told me that they appreciate this as it has not been their experience of how some consultants work. This can be viewed as a form of manipulation (identified in the literature on power) but I like to operate within a 'win/win' framework whereby I win a contact and they gain something useful in return. One way of doing so in an implicit rather than blatant sales way is to give them something with 'no strings attached' such as information they are looking for. This is method also emerged from one of my research conversations with Paul.

Paul: I tend, not in any methodical way, but I tend to go through my contacts, I suppose, every three months, say, oh, I haven't heard from or spoken to. I think one of the other things that I do, if I see something in the newspaper or a magazine which I think would appeal to somebody

Teresa: Hm

Paul: Then I always cut that out and photocopy it and send it to them with a note. I mean I suppose that's one of my little tricks, I suppose.

Teresa: Hm

Paul: I sort of, you know, and I might do that sort of once a week, you know.

Teresa: Right. Yes, because it's a way of making contact, of saying 'I thought about you'".

Paul: I met a couple of friends off the course yesterday. We were talking about things and I said, "Oh, I've seen a very good article about that. I'll send it to you".

Paul's example also shows that there can be a methodical basis on which to plan follow up. It continues the theme of planned and unplanned, conscious and unconscious aspects of networking that recur through this research.

Teresa: What about the frequency I'm interested in that. How frequent is enough?

Keith: I suppose, hm, you've made me think. I haven't got a formula for following up each individual. I do have a diary note to

actually contact most people every 3 months, it's a reminder for me. I don't always choose to act on that reminder because I might think it's inappropriate or because of another reason. The people with whom I spend more time than I would probably give them a call, and indeed telephone more. I'll give them a call 6-8 weeks and equally I'm on the receiving end of telephone calls from them. So it isn't just from me, it's a 2-way thing.

This research interview with Keith shows that while he does have a basic plan, he is more intuitive and less conscious of what he does in terms of networking follow up. Three month time scales occurred in both Keith's and Paul's interviews and could be indicative of the follow up interval regarded to be useful for those with whom we are not in regular contact.

Very practical ways of following up and maintaining contact such as these are relatively absent from the literature on networking for gaining business. I find them complementary to the networking strategies discussed in Section 5.4.

In summary, this section on raising and maintaining visibility shows practical ways of being in the forefront of a client's mind and helping gain competitive advantage. It also demonstrates the importance of maintaining visibility in a way that works for you, not against you. All interactions with others may have an impact on image and visibility. Some consultants choose to take a wider stance viewing networking with everyone as a potential business lead, while others take a narrower and more focused view. In the next chapter I will go on to develop the nature of the networking relationship, sharing my findings, giving detail of what contributes to the 'person to person connection'.



## **Chapter 6 Key Findings Relating to the ‘Person-to-Person Connection’ or Relationships in Networking**

### **6.1 Introduction**

While no one set of guidelines has emerged on the best way of developing and managing the person-to-person connection or relationship a number of strong themes have arisen. My working definition of a network helped me to see that a number of my findings related to the ‘person-to-person connection’ or networking relationship.

Network: “a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship”  
(Mueller 1986, p 14)

As my research (Chapter 5) revealed that this relationship could be through any medium, I have developed my working definition to reflect this.

Network: “a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship through any medium”

In this chapter I will first summarise the key results in relation to the person-to-person connection and then discuss each in more detail, supporting my assertions with extracts from my research data. I will include some implications for practitioners.

### **6.2 Summary of key results on the ‘Person-to-Person Connection’ or Relationships in Networking**

There are a number of key results in relation to the person-to-person connection or relationships in networking. Making contact with others is essential and my research shows there are differences over how it should be done. There is disparity in the literature, some of which advises collecting large quantities of business cards, some of which focuses on fewer but quality relationships.

The literature reports the importance of giving out business cards in quite a high profile way. New consultants tend to operate follow this approach. More experienced

consultants use business cards in a lower profile and supporting mode. Writing on the back of business cards is advised in the networking literature but not in that on cross-cultural communication.

Methods of getting to know potential clients have come under scrutiny and my research data presents a backlash against traditional approaches through attending events. The shift towards more self-employed training consultants has exacerbated this problem. This shift has also led to networking events being saturated by training consultants looking for work.

Detailed findings on congruency, looking for similarity/difference, and re-establishing and maintaining rapport give deeper insights into networking processes than hitherto put forward. Identifying sources of discomfort and comfort in the networking process including cold calling, networking etiquette, meeting others for the first time, reputation when passing on business, and lack of skill and control are significant contributions to understanding training consultants' perceptions of networking to gain business.

Trust emerges as an important theme running through the thesis. It underpins many aspects of networking relationships. I have outlined links with reputation implications, that a long time frame is usually needed, the speed with which news of distrust can spread, and with issues of integrity. There is also an insight into new ways of working which may contradict views on the need for long time scales.

Gender and culture proved to be less prominent in my research. A number power issues were identified and linked with previous themes of intentionality, instrumentality, ethics and values. These included the implications of power in rapport building, gaining access, giving and not giving business and have not to my knowledge been previously discussed in the literature on how training consultants network.

### **6.3 Making Initial Contact with Others**

Making contact with others is an essential part of the networking process. In my literature chapter I outlined the contributions of Raye-Johnson (1990), Cordani (1997) and Heald (1983) amongst others regarding making contact. In my research, two aspects of making initial contact came over as significant mainly because of the disparity between the advice



in some of the general literature and actual practices and beliefs held by training consultants. These aspects are using business cards and 'getting to know you'.

### **6.3a Role of Business Cards in Networking**

This section covers the use of business cards when making initial contact with others. My research data has arisen from a recorded interview with Irene, a TV programme, conferences and my own personal experiences.

My literature review established quantity of business cards and quality of connection as two contrasting approaches. In analysing my research data, I noticed this extract from a networking interview on networking practices which recommended a focus on quality connections (Nicolson & Rulke 1999).

#### **Networking Interview**

**Breakfast News 21<sup>st</sup> April 1999 BBC1 Television**

**Interviewer: John Nicolson**  
**Interviewee: Dr Diane Rulke**

**John:** ..... and lecturer in organisational behaviour at Cranfield University. But first, let's take a look at how the experts do it.....

**Diane:** Absolutely and effective networking is about, mm, building relationships again that comes back to paying attention, relating to people rather than collecting people, collecting business cards.

In analysing my data I found the subject of business cards to be very low profile. By this I mean that cards are seen as useful but have not been raised as a particular issue. New consultants with whom I have spoken have devoted considerable effort to getting cards printed, preparing and printing advertising material, doing mail shots and giving out cards at meetings. However, a continued theme has been about how ineffective these practices are. More experienced consultants have cards available which are kept back until a specific reason for sharing them emerges. It may well be that giving out cards and advertising leaflets as a primary means of marketing is effective for other types of products and services and in different business contexts. In the world of training

consultancy, I have noticed that business cards are used by experienced consultants to support other methods.

My analysis process led me to be curious about how training consultants described themselves on their cards even though this subject had not been raised by contributors to my research. I found I had some 26 business cards from people I knew that operated as training consultants in addition to my own. On mine I present myself as a training consultant. On the other cards, 4 have positioned themselves as directors or managing directors, 5 as consultants, 5 use the term consultancy on the card but not as a job title, 3 as associates, and 9 with no reference to consultancy, just their name. The wide variety of descriptions intrigued me. Another insight as I looked through my box of cards was that I rarely added new cards to the box. New contact details are entered on my computer address book where I rarely add the job title to the entry. I'm more interested in recording their phone numbers, web sites, email addresses and activities so I can contact them. So, any care they have taken in presenting their role on their cards is somewhat lost on me, but I have no knowledge as to whether that is true for others and on the impact it has on networking.

All this demonstrates that there is far more than the general literature portrays on the subject of how business cards are used and valued in the networking process. There is more to it than giving and receiving cards. The way in which cards support other methods, how they are given and collected, and what is portrayed on them, are all relevant issues worthy of consideration.

### **6.3b 'Getting to Know You'**

The literature indicated that a number of authors emphasised the importance of finding out about others and getting to know them. In the world of training it seems that, in the UK at least, there is something of a backlash against the 'getting to know you' approach as used by some consultants seeking to gain business. From my recorded interview with Irene, my own experiences and observations of consultants' behaviour at conferences I am able to expand on this issue and show the implications for training consultants who are networking to gain business. The term 'getting to know you' has many meanings. For some, such as Gattis (1995) it includes "Find areas of common interest and definitely obtain a clear idea of his/her line of work." Edwards and Edwards (1994) suggest that



'getting to know you' includes being interested in other people. Along with many other authors of general literature on networking they suggest "The more you listen to what others are saying and ask questions about their lives and their work, the better you will know how you could be valuable contacts for one another (p 413)".

Another interpretation of 'getting to know you' comes from an IPD meeting of a broad range of Human Resource professionals in July 1998 where networking was an agenda topic. Those present were a mixture of self-employed, employed, junior and more experienced people. The Chair explained my research interest in networking and I gathered some useful anecdotes and ideas from those present. One comment related to 'getting to know you' and I noted the phrase "finding out who to talk to so that when you need to you can call on the right person." It was interesting that at this meeting members had expressed wide-ranging reasons for their interest in networking. These included 'mutual exchange of ideas and information in the HR sphere, learning from other people's experiences, mutual assistance, benchmarking, help for the next job / career move, and getting business' which is an extension of my working definition of networking.

My research made me aware of some interesting reactions to consultants attempting to 'get to know others at events'. To start with I will quote the training consultant called Irene who told me:

"I've given up my membership of one of the many training related organisations that I have belonged to. This is because I wanted to go to events to enjoy them, to learn something and to relax. Instead I found that the evening meetings were being taken up with people 'trying to get to know me and my needs'. These training consultants were networking in a not very subtle way, selling their services in a way that I found irritating.... 'but now, because of the large numbers of self employed trainers, it (evening meetings) seems to be a focus on networking to gain business, and not networking to share ideas and learning. The balance has shifted in an unacceptable way for me."

The shift in percentage of self-employed consultants is not just a perception, it is borne out by research carried out by Association for Management Education and Development (AMED). This is a professional association for those in the training and development field. It has a membership of 1200 (July 2000). In the July 2000 newsletter the Chair, Clive Morton reported:

**“Today, the majority (over sixty per cent) of members are self-employed consultants; ten years ago the majority would have been in full-time positions in training and development within organisations... . AMED’s strength has always been as a member-led networking organisation.” (Seel 2000 p 1)**

**The impact of the shift towards more self-employed consultants is illustrated through a comment from someone I will call Irvin who I met at another trainer’s meeting day in early 1998. I heard Irvin say to the colleague next to him**

**“that he didn’t like going to IPD branch meetings as it was full of self employed people touting for business which really put him off.”**

**‘Getting to know you’ can have a much broader focus when networking is practised for a variety of reasons. However, when it is practised with a particular view of getting business, the term can mean ‘getting to know your organisation’s needs so that I can try to win some business’. It is this specific aspect of ‘getting to know you’ that Irene and Irvin were reacting against. Their reactions are not isolated occurrences as I have noted many other similar reactions since being alerted to this interpretation.**

**A different angle on ‘getting to know you’ is where you attend an event for the purpose of seeking out experts to whom you can give business. For example, when I was helping a client to find associates with considerable NLP expertise, I attended the NLP annual conference with a view to ‘getting to know’ some of the leading professionals in the field. I did this by weighing up their ability to deliver a workshop session and by noting audience reaction. This is quite different from ‘getting to know’ delegates with a view to selling them business.**

**Irene’s comments, AMED research findings and the other consultants’ comments caused me to reflect on my own attendance at evening events. I looked back over recent years to consider my attendance patterns and rationale and noticed a drop in attendance since 1997. In the case of local CIPD events I found that topics of interest rarely coincided with available dates. However, availability of dates has always been a problem and previously I might have attended events elsewhere to coincide with my availability.**

**On reflection I’ve come to the conclusion that previous types of networking and business development won’t necessarily serve me well in the future and so I’m less committed to**



them. In previous years when I was part of our local IPD branch committee I was one of only two consultants. Now the committee is composed predominantly of consultants. Similarly, when I started publishing there wasn't much training material available. My work sold well and differentiated me in the market place. Now the market is swamped with published training materials. As a result I have turned to new methods of networking that will enable others to 'get to know me' such as writing for training discussion groups and newsletters on the Internet, or writing book reviews for Internet based companies such as Amazon. Other practitioners may also wish to consider new methods as a result of reflecting on this issue.

Analysis of my research material yielded other insights into the subject of 'getting to know you'. My reflective notes reminded me of my participation in a CIPD group in November 1999.

"When I got there (the local CIPD meeting) I was given a lovely welcome by a colleague whom I've not seen for some time. We used to work together on the old IPM Branch committee many years ago. She is still a committee member. She introduced me to current committee members and I had really felt welcomed.

People stood around chatting for 20 minutes or so. One was being made redundant and was looking for work. Another colleague was saying he was looking for staff. But it struck me that chat was very polite and superficial on the whole. It was only with those that I knew before that I had any depth of conversation. It does take time to build relationships....

On the way home I debated with my husband over whether I should take a more active role on one of the CIPD groups or branches again. Being on the committee is the only way I feel to really get to know others. The subject of organising and discussing issues provides a meaningful forum for really getting to know people."

This reflection draws out a number of points. It is the welcome by people that I know well that makes me want to participate in networking type events. This type of welcome results from working together closely over a long period of time when we focused on a genuine 'job to be done' (eg an evening event to arrange, rather than just 'trying to get to know people'). This type of relationship built up as a result of freely giving time and effort with no thought of gaining business. However, it allowed people the opportunity of considering my skills and approach without pressure and in so doing enabled them to think of me in relation to business. I found this point interesting as it has been significant in

enabling me to win business. Another consultant with whom I am currently working is following this approach for similar reasons. He told me in a recent phone call how he has started taking an active role in his local CIPD branch committee and Chamber of Commerce committee.

Another issue that has emerged for me is the shift in the balance of self-employed consultants versus employed members on committees and at events. Self-employed active members far outweigh the number of employed active members. This was a point that Irene raised when saying that she had given up her membership of a training organisation. It is a significant shift in terms of a consultant's exposure to those who might wish to offer contracts. There are no longer so many potential clients subconsciously or consciously weighing consultants up at events. But on the other hand, with an increase in outsourcing, I am finding that many sole trading consultants might wish to form partnerships to help them handle large projects and this is one way in which they can get to know other suitable consultants.

This shift in balance is also an issue for training managers working within organisations. I attended a networking day with trainers from many different companies run by Style Initial, a conference venue organisation. We were divided randomly into groups for a discussion. I noted the following:

**“January 2000**

**We introduced each other. One of the trainers who was employed by a large company groaned and said she felt cheated. She had wanted to mix with other employed trainers and not with other training consultants who might treat her as a potential client.”**

The issue of using professional evening events to ‘get to know potential clients’ is one that many training consultants who are inexperienced at business networking consider seriously. During a brief informal chat Jim, a self employed trainer who gets 95% of his business through replying to advertisements and tenders, said he was satisfied with his level of business but felt he was missing out by not using networking more. He thought that networking might help him to change the balance in the type of work he did. However, he saw networking as being more time consuming than his current approach. I asked him if he were to do more active networking how would he set about it. He replied that he would go along to evening meetings to try to get to know more local company



trainers and their needs by attending different events for trainers. Other consultants that I spoke to who were planning to go self-employed also said that they would try to network to gain business by attending trainers' events.

This is an example of where those who don't currently network and who wish to for the purposes of gaining business, have in mind the very methods and opportunities for 'getting to know' others which have been reported to turn off those they are hoping to influence. This is important knowledge that I am able to share with networkers through this thesis.

So far I have reported on findings in relation to the general concept of getting to know others through networking. One specific aspect is developing rapport and it is this that I will address in the next section.

## **6.4 Developing Rapport**

The wider literature on rapport as well as that specifically on networking established the importance of rapport in building relationships. However, the way in which building rapport and networking to gain business takes place is not specifically discussed in any detail. I have built upon the literature on rapport building by uncovering how it applies to networking situations, especially in relation to gaining business.

In this section I specifically discuss the finding on rapport relating to congruency and looking for similarities or differences. I will go onto explore issues of re-establishing and maintaining rapport.

### **6.4a Congruency**

The first aspect of rapport that I would like to comment on based on my research is that of congruency which was defined in my literature section. Training consultants and their colleagues and clients tend to have a high level of interpersonal skills and so any incongruent behaviour tends to be at a deeper or less obvious level. However, as those in the field have this higher level of interpersonal skills they are also able to pick up quite subtle levels of incongruent behaviour that might otherwise go unnoticed. My experience leads me to believe that discussions about congruent and incongruent behaviour rarely

take place outside the arena of training courses on subjects related to communications. It did not arise in research conversations with my data subjects nor with any of the numerous networking interactions that took place during the period of my research.

Clients have however raised the issue when discussing their strategy for employing consultants or when discussing the difference between excellent and mediocre performance by consultants. Therefore, in this section I draw mainly on my own observations and experiences. Whilst this has the disadvantage of being limited in source, it still helps to build knowledge and awareness of a subject that is fundamental to networking. It gives practical implications for practitioners.

Over the last few years I have noticed that I look for the degree to which another training consultant's behaviour is congruent with their espoused theories and verbal responses. This idea occurred to me after reading books on NLP (Bodenhamer & Hall 1997) where congruency of behaviour is discussed in a general way. It's especially important when I am considering placing business with them, when at a networking event, a customer meeting or formal interview. I find it is an important issue when selecting them because course members, especially at experienced or senior level training events, usually sense where behaviour is 'out of sync'. From following up feedback from course delegates this is usually at a subconscious level. A more obvious example is if a trainer explains to the group that it is important to have positive body language when making a presentation on a presentation skills course and then doesn't model that behaviour most, if not all of the time, then course members pick that up. When networking I am always on the look out for other consultants that I might wish to work with or recommend and congruency of behaviour is something that has become high on my agenda.

Similarly, in my experience, congruent or incongruent behaviour shows through when building rapport at networking events. Earlier I described a situation at a self-development day when the speaker was giving a presentation to a number of training consultants who were potentially new clients (or people who could refer him on to other clients). The session was given and included a demonstration of some equipment which turned out to be rigged. At the time everything 'worked' but a number of people in the room commented to me and the client that they weren't impressed and weren't sure why. I had this sense the speaker was 'playing games' with us but I couldn't substantiate my



feelings. My conclusion was that although we were unable to say what the problem was at the time, we did pick up the incongruity of behaviour.

From my research it seems that if you or they are incongruous in terms of behaviour then it can be particularly difficult to build rapport. When I experience incongruous behaviour I have this sense of not really knowing where I am with them, not being able to trust them, and even (when I'm in the position of offering work or being offered work) to question whether I want to bother building a relationship with them. Where someone is congruent in their behaviour I have this sense of being far more likely to 'know where I am with them'. I feel better able to make decisions about how to approach things, and can attempt to match to their needs as I may have a sense of what those needs might be. Networking is often about building long-term relationships and any disparity in behaviour is more likely to show over time.

#### **6.4b Looking for Similarities or Differences**

Another very relevant aspect of rapport is linked to the way in which we either look for similarities or differences in other people's behaviour. The literature establishes this as one of the many filters used in communications and interactions.

Going through my research notes led me to some very interesting insights and illustrations of these two modes within a context of networking for gaining business. For example, I am aware that when networking I am only likely to recommend a colleague to others if I perceive their values and ethics as broadly similar to my own. There can be some differences but I tend to look at whether some of their core values are in line with mine (as far as I can tell). An example in terms of networking with training consultants comes from one of my meetings with a consultant called Keith who also looked for similarities. Keith was keen to develop a training business that aspired to be leading edge or at the forefront of his field. My research notes recorded that his approach was to network with those who were also leading edge:

**“He (Keith) told me much about the current state of his business. His main approach has been to network with a number of specialists..... The thread running through (which I checked out with him) was that he saw these people as state-of-the-art, go-ahead in their field. This was how he wanted his business to be. He wanted to mix with this sort of person so that something would rub off on him.”**

Later on I've written about my own feelings about my meeting with Keith.

**“It's interesting because I see it as important to be at the forefront of my field, following up new ways, leading new ways. I liked to be with Keith because of his similar attitudes and approaches.”**

Another example of looking for similarities when networking came from Irene. She is a training consultant who was interested in learning more about repertory grid as a research technique. We spent a day together and in return for me teaching about the process she commented on her views on networking for my research. One of the significant constructs that emerged was that she placed great importance on the extent to which her values aligned with those of others with whom she is networking. She likes to look for similarity of values.

Some people have a preference for exploring difference. People with this way of thinking can really value change and in extreme can be excited by “change for change sake”. It can be advantageous in developing new ideas and bringing about quite revolutionary change. However if it is used to an extreme then people with this way of thinking may only (or predominantly) notice differences, problems and mis-matches to the exclusion of similarities and matches. In terms of building rapport and developing effective communication Bodenhamer and Hall (1997 p 62-63) consider the implications and say “we often find those who mismatch difficult to deal with..... When we present an idea, suggestion, belief etc they will swish their brain to a mismatch representation and come back with a list of ‘*Yes, buts...*’ ”. This can be very frustrating to many people, including those networking, as it has implications for building rapport. On this point a colleague once commented that if you really want someone with a preference for difference to agree with you then consider the ruse of presenting an idea in reverse. This will have the effect of getting the mis-matcher to comment on it from the point that you actually wish them to consider. Of course the ethics of this are another issue.

I spotted a good example of how someone might follow a ‘mismatching’ mode of behaviour during networking on an Internet based forum for trainers of which I am a member. The forum leader had arranged a face-to-face gathering for members, many of whom are training consultants or who work in a consultancy role. This excerpt is taken from the forum leader's own write up of the event (Murray 2000b).



**“The fascinating thing was that so many of us ‘knew’ each other, even though we had never met! There were constant cries of ‘so YOU’RE Fred/Freda Bloggs’ from around the room and, no doubt, lots of stifled exclamation of ‘but I thought you were dark/tall/Asian/a woman etc’”.**

**When reading his write up I noticed that he was pointing out differences not similarities.**

**Later on his write up says:**

**“I gave a short talk.... on how we see the network developing. The main improvement we want to introduce...”**

**This is another example about how he is choosing to communicate difference and change. He didn’t comment, for example, on the existing features that will be maintained because they are so successful or valued.**

**It occurs to me that as we all have an approach – it could be sameness or difference or switching between the two depending on the circumstances – some consultants may find it useful to be more conscious of their own natural style when building rapport during networking opportunities. We could listen and recognise which way of thinking others have when we network with them. We could make choices therefore about the extent to which we might want to intentionally promote similarity or difference to help the thinking and communication process during networking. Not every client or colleague wants us to ‘match’. They may be looking for difference, change, or ways of breaking out of existing ways of doing things. They may be excited by someone who challenges or points out difference. Other clients want to feel comfortable by knowing that we have something in common with them, that we identify with them through similarities, that we ‘speak the same language’. Sensing which way to go can give us the advantage in networking to win business.**

**It is noticeable that I could find many examples of matching for similarity but few for difference. Whether this is a reflection of my own stated preference for similarity or whether it is indicative of effective networking practices remains inconclusive. The field of NLP indicates that both approaches can be useful in communications. What remains unexplained is whether there is a more predominately successful approach in terms of networking to gain business, bearing in mind that these are not used alone but in combination with other networking strategies.**

#### **6.4c Re-establishing and Maintaining Rapport**

Re-establishing and maintaining rapport builds on the previous two sections and also on Chapter 5.5c on raising visibility through follow up. The latter focused on the strategy of following up contacts, looking at methods, duration and frequency. This section is about the relationship side and ways of nurturing that relationship. My research has uncovered examples of re-establishing and maintaining rapport I feel are illustrative of the principles.

As a training consultant I find that time spent re-establishing and maintaining rapport is fundamental in networking and very worthwhile. Existing contacts already know what I can do. If they are happy to reconnect or to stay in touch and the feeling is mutual, the relationship stands more chance of blossoming in my experience. In the training world in which I work, people give me business either by having personally experienced how I work or by a referral from someone who has experienced my work. This is true of many of the consultancy networks and clients with which I work or have heard about. A consultant's training consultancy style or their design and delivery style is something that is unique and personal to them and can't be readily recognised by reading an advert or CV. Therefore old and existing contacts are so important because they already have this personal information. For me the key in maintaining and re-establishing contact is doing so in a mutually acceptable way that the other person doesn't feel is touting for business.

This next example from my experience during my research shows how contact can be re-established. A colleague at a university for whom I did some work invited me in his Christmas card to meet up sometime soon for lunch. That was all it said. I had no idea whether it simply was a lunch invitation or whether there was some potential work he wanted to discuss. It seemed to me an opportunity not to be missed. It had a number of benefits. I enjoyed meeting with him, we kept each other up to date, and it wouldn't cost me much except a little time as I could fit it in with another meeting in the area. There was the potential that I might want to do lecturing work at the university in years to come and I wanted to keep an avenue open.



It turned out to be no more than a lovely chat over lunch catching up on changes in the education field and in our personal lives. It has served to keep up the rapport and relationship that we have built up over the years. I was quite satisfied with that as working as an independent consultant can be lonely if you don't have meetings of this sort with colleagues that you respect and whose company you enjoy. The importance of this meeting in terms of business was to bear fruit only four months later when another colleague approached me with a business venture that needed university accreditation to make it work. My university contact with whom I had had lunch was the very person to approach. I had no need to start approaching universities to find someone who might listen. The rapport was already there between us and I had only to pick up the phone. In terms of direct effect on business it has resulted in an application for a grant to develop the work.

In contrast I will relate a quite different experience. Unexpectedly I had a call from someone whom I had worked with many years ago. I will call the person HN. The call was about asking me to sign a form for membership of an association. I said I was willing to do so but would need to talk with them first as it was so many years since we had seen each other. In the course of our chat on the phone it emerged that HN was going to become a self-employed training consultant and was trying to build up business. We arranged an evening to meet up. The evening came and HN didn't turn up. There was no message. A few days later a card came saying 'tried to ring that morning and couldn't get through'. Why not send an email, or ring the next day? In my opinion this had been typical of HN's behaviour many years ago and it didn't seem to have changed. HN's behaviour meant that I did not offer her some work which might have been suitable for her.

These are just two examples of re-establishing and maintaining rapport that serve to illustrate the general process and its practical value in terms of gaining (or losing business). The factors that I have discussed in this section have not differentiated between re-establishing and maintaining rapport as I feel they may be applicable to both situations. The section shows that in addition to considering networking strategy (Chapter 5), the relationship side of follow-up is also important in networking.

## **6.5 Aspects of Discomfort and Comfort**

There are many different interpretations of what is meant by comfort or being comfortable. From the dictionary, relevant definitions include ‘at ease’, ‘free from hardship, pain and trouble’, ‘conscious well-being’. For me, comfort is not synonymous with ‘good’ and discomfort with ‘bad’. This is because there may be challenges that discomfort me but that are very ‘good’ in terms of broadening my horizons or making a break through.

In this section I will discuss issues of discomfort and comfort in networking that have been highlighted as a result of recorded interviews with Keith, Paul and Heather, email contact with a consultant called Chris, and my own experiences and reflections. Consultants have often said that they do or don’t like a particular method or circumstance regarding networking because of the comfort or discomfort caused. This made the theme of comfort and discomfort in networking come across strongly, especially as it impacted on action that training consultants were or were not able to subsequently take.

Strong themes that emerged were comfort and discomfort for the consultants as a result of cold calling, networking etiquette, meeting others for the first time, reputation implications for passing on work, lack of a particular skill and being in control. I also cover briefly comfort and discomfort for the client.

Aspects of comfort and discomfort within networking are briefly referred to in the literature rather than being treated as a topic in any detail with the exception of gender and cross-cultural issues (referred to in Chapter 2). There was even less that explored this as a key theme in relation to networking by training consultants.

The link between the literature relating to discomfort and my research data arose during a reflective period in my research, triggered by an email about an article I had written on networking in a journal (Williams 2000). The email said:

“I have just read with interest your article titled "Networking as a way of gaining business for training consultants". I just wanted to ask whether your research had an international angle, or whether it was restricted to one country.



We are a training company based in Budapest and this whole issue of networking is one that we are grappling with right now. It is encouraging for us that many of the 'alternative' strategies you outline are ones we have also determined as being good ones for us. We are particularly anxious to work out ways of linking with peer companies and training consultants in Western Europe....” (Chris 2001)

I was delighted to find that the article had been of interest; but it was the use of words such as ‘good ones’ and ‘anxious’ that triggered the subject of comfort and discomfort. Subsequent emails confirmed they were uncertain about how to network and networking etiquette in the UK. My lateral thinking caused me to search my research data for other strands of discomfort and comfort and identified contacting others for the first time, networking etiquette, reputation implications and lack of skill or control to be recurring themes for consultants. Issues of discomfort that clients might experience when networking with consultants also arose.

### **6.5a Contacting Others for the First Time**

In this section I deal with discomfort that arose from contracting others for the first time. There are two main themes namely cold calling and making first contact at face-to-face networking events. To illustrate the significance of cold calling and the use of other networking interactions to avoid it, I will recount the following personal experience.

I have known someone, who I’ll call Trudy, for a number of years. I used to run some train the trainer courses for her previous organisation. Over the years I have come to know her quite well and so when she changed jobs she encouraged me to keep in contact with her. After she had been in the job for about four months I rang her and we arranged to meet up for a drink. My notes after our meeting record the following:

“I find Trudy a very interesting person to talk to.... .

After a tour round her organisation we adjourned to a nearby café where we exchanged news over some drinks. It was interesting that Trudy spoke very little about the previous organisation for which she had worked many years. Where she did comment it was more by way of inference rather than direct chat. For example she said how much less red tape there was in her new job. She found it much easier to get things done because you decided on it and got on with it yourself in this organisation.

I had wondered whether Trudy would comment on the work that I had been doing for her old organisation. There seems to have been no continuity or handing over to her replacement. I wondered whether she would suggest my contacting anyone or pursuing work there. As I dislike cold calling an inside recommendation would have been useful and more comfortable for me.”

My discomfort at the thought of making the call was very evident to me. Actually making the call was no problem, it was the thought of it that was the difficulty. In this example I used networking with someone I knew to attempt to avoid cold calling.

I am not implying from this single example that all training consultants dislike cold calling, merely showing the significant impact my discomfort had on the potential to gain business and the use of different forms of networking to help overcome potential discomfort.

Discomfort with contacting others for the first time also emerged in my research in relation to face-to-face interaction at networking events. To illustrate this I recall an example of a colleague who commented that he wished he was better at going up to people he didn't know when networking as he believed it would help him develop his business. A solution that had been suggested to him and which he was considering taking up was the use of someone who introduces him to people at events. This would get him over his shyness and discomfort of going up to someone cold.

There is an apparent paradox in that training consultants, by nature of the job that they do, tend to be competent at meeting trainees and building rapport with them in the training setting, even though they may not have met them before. Yet contacting or meeting others in networking situations can still be daunting to some. I explored this concept further to see if my research data could yield any further insights.

### **6.5b Lack of Skill or Control**

In investigating sources of discomfort in networking I found that lack of skill or control in was another contributory factor for some. In this section I illustrate the point with research material from Rob, Heather, Paul and myself. I will start by sharing my notes introducing Rob and how he indicated the issue of discomfort.



**“I met Rob at the Personal Construct Psychology PCP meeting. At the time he struck me as being someone with good facilitation skills and very ably led the workshop on laddering. We exchanged names and addresses as we found that we were both consultants and had some things in common. Rob expressed an interest in the subject of my PhD as he thought that it was relevant to him and his work. He didn't really enlarge on it at the time but said that he would ring me up when he got the chance.**

**Out of the blue he called me yesterday and asked if he could spend some time talking about how he could develop his contacts now that he was a self-employed consultant. He said that he had been self-employed since November 98 and that he had set a lot of things in motion but that none had come to fruition as yet. He asked me if I had any help that I could give him in how to network in order to gain business.**

**The first step was for me to establish what area of consultancy he was interested and also any areas that he definitely didn't want to consider. He told me that he didn't want to do training and that he didn't like it, but that he did want to be involved with consultancy. The topics that he was interested in include stress, disciplinary and grievance areas, team working and team development. His ideal job was one where he could be a researcher and where he could investigate and analyse issues and feedback the results to people so that they could plan a way forward.”**

**This issue about not liking training was a fascinating one for me. Many of the projects he described I would have expected to contain an element of training in addition to other skills. He had also volunteered to run the training session on laddering and did it very well. On the phone we discussed these issues further.**

**“He realised that this was a chicken and egg situation. How could he gain the experience and how could he gain entry to organisations until he was experienced?**

**One of the issues that we discussed was how Rob could get his skills displayed in front of those who would be likely to recommend him. We talked about him giving free seminars for sessions and inviting an audience to participate in the sessions.”**

**Yet Rob's discomfort in delivering training sessions came over clearly later in the conversation.**

**“I explained to him that the turn around time for gaining business can be quite considerable. On some leads you can be talking about two to four months and on the other leads it might be two to five years before it comes to fruition. He said that he was discovering this for himself. A number of his colleagues and friends had also told him not to be too**

despondent just now and that it was still early days for his business. The difficulty for him is that he had to pay the bills in the meantime.

We discussed the concept of bread and butter work while he was waiting for his main leads to develop. This led on to the subject of training. I tried to probe to see why Rob didn't like training. We discovered that it was because he didn't like to run structured sessions where he was driving the learning. Rob seemed to prefer a facilitation role. I suggested that much 'training' can be conducted in a facilitation role.

Rob asked me what I thought about a training the session that he gave. I said that I thought that it came across very well. I asked him how he felt about it. He said that he felt fairly uncomfortable about giving the session because it was something that was new to him. My main comment to Rob was that the session went very well and that the main thing was for him to have confidence in what he was doing."

Rob's main area of discomfort was in not having the skill and confidence in all aspects of the role that he wanted to take. He had the confidence in facilitation and research but not in the structured sessions that could be expected of him by clients at times.

Rob and I have a common interest in PCP and using PCP in research and so we thought it could be useful to probe his thought on networking further by using PCP techniques. Rob completed a repertory grid on himself which he then sent to me for analysis and discussion (Appendix 6). Repertory grid helped to understand the way in which Rob construed the subject of networking.

By studying the correlation of different constructs and by discussing these with Rob some clear patterns emerged for him (detailed explanation given of the analysis process given in Appendix 6). He felt in control when he felt very confident. When he was aware of being in competition with others, his confidence went down substantially. In these situations he felt more uncomfortable and self-conscious and perceived his approach to be less well received by clients.

Repertory grid helped me to understand Rob's sources of discomfort and I found other aspects of discomfort mentioned in some of my other research interviews.

Discomfort arose in an interview with Paul and given below is an excerpt from an interview with him. In this interview I use self-characterisation and adapted the way in which the concept of self-characterisation is introduced so that Paul would identify with it from his media background.



Teresa: One of the questions that I've found has been quite interesting at these research meetings is that - in your case it would be difficult - imagine you were doing a TV documentary or a newspaper report or something like that, and you had to describe yourself as a networker. How might you describe yourself?

Paul: Of gosh yes that's a good question. I think as cautious, too cautious actually for my own benefit. Determined.

Teresa: Hm

Paul: Reasonably well skilled at it once you get going, but you know, slow to start. That's the problem.

In this example I found that Paul readily talked about quite sensitive personal issues and immediately talked about issues which were important to him and there was some discomfort leading to his cautious approach. I found that self-characterisation encouraged this opening up of personal issues each time I tried it.

More aspects of comfort and discomfort arose in an interview with Heather. I started by asking using self-characterisation as a way of asking Heather to describe herself as a networker.

Teresa: ....planning to do with these interviews is to approach it from all sorts of different angles. The first one is if you have to describe yourself as a networker. Imagine you're writing an article or giving a talk about yourself as a networker. It's like how would you describe yourself. That was what I was thinking of.

Heather: Right.

Teresa: One of the starting points.

Heather: As a networker?

Teresa: Yes.

Heather: I think I'm good, (laughter).

Teresa: Fine, yea, go on.

Heather: I don't normally, I'm a person I'm pretty, I'm pretty, erh, self-critical.

Teresa: Mm,

Heather: But when it comes to networking. What I didn't realise, what I've learned from experience. I think it's such a powerful thing, but I think I'm pretty good at it because I'm a sociable person. I like talking to people, but I like listening to people as well.

Teresa: Yes.

Heather: So I'm a good communicator and I think that's a key thing about networking. Is actually listening to what people say to you.

Heather started off with a very positive view on her strengths as a networker. Her comfort with her general communication skills comes over very clearly. Before long however she moved on to an area that caused her severe discomfort. My thoughts are that self-characterisation has helped her to move swiftly from relatively superficial and 'safe' areas to quite personal and sensitive areas. She went on to speak of a colleague who was offering her some training work on the topic of selling skills for a computer company.

Heather: Now I don't understand. I don't claim, I never would claim to understand. Now his argument was, it doesn't matter what sort of background you come from. Selling is selling and you can, you can work with anyone and it doesn't matter whether it's computers from engineering. Now I totally disagree with him on this, I, I did a couple of, if you want, shadowing courses with him where he was the course facilitator and I shadowed him. And I found it really I was so uncomfortable. Now going back to this question as well. Couldn't think of an example, but now I have. Have you ever felt uncomfortable in a situation where, yea, in fact, I was out of my depth there?

Teresa: Right.

Heather: You could argue, you know, I could have networked in that situation and got other work from it. I was so petrified about the fact that I didn't understand about computers or the first thing about them. One of the role-plays I was so worried about the content of it, despite the fact that he's telling me it was process, follow the process it doesn't matter about the content. But there were people asking me questions that I couldn't answer because I didn't understand what the hell they were talking about.

Teresa: Yea, I can identify with that, yea in that setting.

Heather: So I have to feel, I personally have to feel comfortable in the environment I'm in and erm, although I can talk to people at all levels as I said earlier. I have to feel comfortable that I know enough about the business.

Teresa: Right, yes.

Heather: Because otherwise it makes you feel very insecure.

Teresa: Right.

Heather: Which goes back to control possibly because I am a person who likes to cont..., I like to control situations otherwise it makes me feel vulnerable.

Teresa: Yes.

Heather: Then when I feel vulnerable things start to go wrong (laughter).

Teresa: So in terms of the sectors that you deal with, would you see yourself staying with the health sector or would you see yourself beginning to grow and move outside of that.

Heather: I'd like to say, I see myself as growing, but at the moment I'm very, very comfortable with sticking with the healthcare bit, because it's the bit I feel I'm good at and the bit that I know. And in terms of, you know, the stage of my business I'm at it's very appropriate for me.



Teresa: Right.

Heather: And that's not to say that in the future that I might, but I think I'd only do it with a huge support around me.

Heather indicates that she is comfortable when working with people in a sector that she has come to know well. This helps her to feel in control and comfortable. It's interesting that the issue of control has emerged again. For Rob control was linked to the presence of competitors. For Heather control is linked with knowing the background to the business sector.

### **6.5c Reputation Implications**

Another area of discomfort that I recorded in my research notes was regarding reputation when passing on some work to another. This next example illustrates some of the dilemmas and issues involved. A client asked me to do some work at a time when I was already fully loaded. However, I really wanted to help her client meet her needs. I knew a consultant called Mark in a social / semi-business setting and I was reasonably certain he could do the job but I wasn't totally sure as I hadn't witnessed his skills at work myself nor had I met any of his clients. My research notes record the following.

“I was debating things like ‘How well will he do the job?’ ‘Will my client be pleased with the referral or will it backfire on me?’ ‘Is there something in it for me as well?’ ‘How should I handle it ie sub-contract or just pass it on?’”

In the end I decided to pass it straight on as I didn't want the hassle of sub-contracting it. After all, the whole problem was that I was very short on time. I was honest with the client in saying that I didn't know personally what his delivery skills were like but I knew of his values and ethics etc and had heard second hand of his successes. That was the easy bit. I found it far more difficult to work out exactly what to say to Mark as I hadn't much experience of passing on work in this way and neither wanted to be taken advantage of nor be seen as mean. It was an uncomfortable conversation for me and I let myself follow my instinct on which way to go rather than working with any predefined plan. I was pleased with the end result in that we have a good ongoing relationship and my client was happy with the work done.

In trying to unpick the source of the discomfort and what would have made me more comfortable I chatted through the event with my husband. This helped me to form some

conclusions. It seems that there were several things at stake. First I felt that my future reputation was dependent on my colleague completing the contract successfully. Once I had passed the work on to him it was out of my control and I would not be able to influence the achievement of success. If I kept it as a sub-contract job I had more opportunity to intervene if I felt it necessary but the reality was that I didn't have the time to supervise it. In any case, I think he would have resented any supervision and that in itself might have caused him to reject the work offer which would not have helped my client. Secondly, I knew of his ability and success second hand and not firsthand. I've learnt over the years that standards vary and what constitutes a good piece of work in one context or organisation might be very inappropriate or a very low standard in another. I was basing my decision to give the work to him on other colleagues' opinions of him. Up to now I had always passed on work to someone that I had formed a conclusion based on first hand knowledge of their ability. Thirdly, my comfort would have been helped if there had been a precedent or guidance to follow. Although this was familiar territory for some other consultants (who regularly passed on work to colleagues) it was the first time that I was in this particular position of passing on work to someone I hadn't worked with before. I have learned from this and now ask people to give me an opportunity to see them in action before I recommend them.

When I experienced this situation it was the first time for me. However, over the years I have been in similar situations and have since discussed the issues with other consultants. There is a substantial amount of consistency in opinion over the issues of passing on work to someone in your training network. However, these issues are not spelled out in the literature for training consultants. Like myself, other consultants have learned through trial and error, some with fortunate endings and some not so fortunate.

#### **6.5d Networking Etiquette**

The term 'etiquette' has been used by some consultants to describe the behaviours and unwritten 'rules' around how to network. One aspect of comfort and discomfort stems from the extent to which consultants are aware of and follow 'etiquette' in relation to networking. At one meeting of consultants I asked them for their understanding of the term networking and in the follow up discussion there were many comments on the need to understand networking etiquette and having some ground rules to follow.



Different parts of the world and different sectors also seem to have different ideas on what is suitable social etiquette with respect to networking. Some of my UK colleagues working in the US describe how that their experience of networking in the US to be very different and more, in their words, “in your face”. Another colleague in one sector of the entertainment field says how important it is to go to parties if he wants work. By contrast a number of solicitors I know make sure that they feature in the local Citizen’s Advice Bureau, the Rotary and Lion’s Clubs activities to keep their profile high. Sheppard (2000) gives an example of what he considers to be a breach of etiquette “At a party I was approached by a man whose opening words were “What would your wife live on if you were to die suddenly?” There are no prizes for guessing which industry he worked in! People like him give ‘networking’ a bad name.”

There is a good example of issues surrounding etiquette in one of my research interviews with Paul in which he describes two interesting phenomena. He said that people he mixes with don’t tend to discuss networking and implies a discomfort about normally discussing it. He also speaks about the ‘rules of networking’ or etiquette.

Paul: Yes I mean, it's a bit like one of these, you know, like the politicians, you know, how to work a crowd or how to work a room. I think there are clear skills involved in that. And I think at the sort of meeting, particularly the meetings where you're all from the same business area

Teresa: Hm

Paul: Then it's very difficult to identify who might be a buyer of your services, or who might be a potential client, without some sort of assistance or guidance. I mean, often, you know, meetings don't give much detail about people in terms of where they're working or what they do, so you have to sort of find that out for yourselves, and you can waste a lot of time inappropriate people.

Teresa: Yes. Do other people that you know find events sort of hard as well?

Paul: I honestly don't know.

Teresa: Hm

Paul: I honestly don't know. I don't think it's actually something that we discuss. I mean, I think, I think, you know. I can probably only think of one or two people that I would discuss networking with in detail.

Teresa: Right, yes, that's interesting.

Paul: I think it's a little bit of sort of. We don't consciously want to admit we're doing it.

Teresa: Right

Paul: But I think whilst, you know, people have meetings, (say?) there's, you know, an opportunity for networking, I think

people always are a bit, maybe sort of, treat it slightly as well, just a social.

Teresa: Hm

Paul: Cocktail sort of event. They don't take it in business terms particularly seriously. They look a bit shy of doing it.

Paul: Yes, absolutely, yes. I think, I certainly feel, I mean, we don't seem to have any rules for it.

Teresa: Hm hm

Paul: I think the American sort of attitude and approach is, they're much more up front about it.

Teresa: ?

Paul: No, exactly, yes, that's right, yes. I think we're, I certainly feel that the etiquette gets in the way.

Teresa: Hm. So, of the ways in which you network, that you feel comfortable with, and you find work, what's the typical experience?

Paul: Well, a typical one actually yesterday, although it's probably a bit more than networking, a colleague that I used to work with quite closely, sort of on and off

Teresa: Hm hm

Paul: for several years. He and I are talking about doing some joint projects together. And I mean, we basically sort of took the decision we would try and improve the sort of business that we do by sort of raising the game, going into higher quality work, lower volume if you like.

Teresa: Right

Paul: And to do that we've consciously tried to take one another to people that we know

Awareness of networking etiquette emerged in other research interviews. Keith, for example, showed his consciousness of taking etiquette into account by saying:

“I don't think they would react too well if you try to turn a social meeting into a business generation meeting.”

Emerging from this section is the felt need by training consultants to understand appropriate networking etiquette. Lack of awareness of etiquette can inhibit networking interaction. The importance of etiquette is recognised in the literature. What my research adds is that guidance on networking etiquette can be misleading as it may be culturally inappropriate.

So far I've focused on myself and my experience of comfort and discomfort together with the experiences of training consultants. Another dimension of this subject that has emerged in the research is the issue of how comfortable consultants allow their clients to be.



## **6.5e Discomfort and the Client**

The issue of helping the client to feel comfortable is just as important as feeling comfortable as a consultant when networking. This conclusion has arisen from observations of networking events, my own interactions with clients, and from other consultants. For example, a number of clients that I have worked for in the past have a team of external consultants working for them. In order to help make us feel part of the organisation and to keep us up to date with organisational issues one organisation arranged bi-annual meetings for us all to attend. By just watching and listening I picked up a number of different agendas that consultants brought to these meetings, some of which caused distinct discomfort for the client. My notes record my thoughts on one of these client meetings.

“I like to go to this client’s day as it is one of the few ways of maintaining visibility.....”.

Others seem to use it as an opportunity to raise awkward questions, pursue why our fees aren’t higher, and expect the client to tell us about future workload (this doesn’t get a very positive response from the client).”

My sense that these consultants caused discomfort for the client in a way that didn’t help move anything forward was confirmed at a later meeting with the client where we were discussing work on a one-to-one basis. I noted my client’s reactions to that day which were along the following lines:

“Don’t they realise that the more difficult and uncomfortable they make it for me, the less I am likely to give them business. There are plenty of others who are easier and more pleasant for me to deal with.”

Some might feel less concerned about the discomfort they cause as they wish to capitalise on negotiating fees in a group setting. However, given that contracts are negotiated individually based on contribution, experience, subject matter expertise etc myself and some others felt it naïve to raise such issues in the bi-annual meetings where it was likely to antagonise the client. I was sitting at a table some distance from those who were attempting to negotiate fees and in the interval we had a short discussion about what had happened. The others at my table expressed the conclusion that the client is less likely to

give business to a consultant who causes them discomfort, unless there the consultants has expertise is an areas that is in short supply.

The future workload issue was another interesting subject at these client meetings. The organisation likes to use external people to help with either internal skills shortages or unexpected surges in demand and so the very idea of being able to predict workload several months in advance is not possible. The problem was that some of the consultants had gone from employed positions to this type of contract work and hadn't seemed to come to terms with the fact that self-employed work doesn't carry with it the relative security of employed work. There is no requirement for the client to provide us with regular work nor is there any requirement for the client to give us much notice of demand for work. Some consultants' discomfort with the lack of security of work may lead them to make demands on the client that may be inappropriate to the type of contract on offer. This mismatch of expectations can lead to friction in the working relationship and discomfort on both sides.

Developing appropriate relationships and building rapport leads onto another main section in my research. In the next part I will share the findings that emerged from my research into issues relating to training consultants building rapport and relationships when networking.

## **6.6 Trust**

A recurring theme through the literature on networking and through my research data has been that of trust. It has arisen in relation to networking to gather information, network through email, passing on business and building rapport. Its importance in networking is firmly established in the literature but what leads to trust or distrust in networking relationships especially for training consultants gaining business is lacking. In this section I build upon existing literature on trust by sharing examples from my research to highlight how trust can play a significant part in the way in which business networking takes place.

One afternoon, after a phone call from our financial advisor who has served us so well over the years, I was thinking about the implications of his impending retirement as our financial advisor. He had been recommended by our accountant with whom he has



worked for a long time. My husband and I commented on how we trusted both these people. Our trust in both has been well placed and now we were prepared to trust (at least initially) the person to whom our financial advisor was planning to hand over his business. It struck me that the way in which trust played such a significant part in the way in which business was passed from one to another had a lot in common with many of the comments on trust in my research on training consultants and networking. This triggered me to revisit the literature on trust together with my research data and led to this section on trust. I have drawn upon recorded interviews with Keith, Martin, Heather, my own experiences and reflections and a CIPD conference session on networking.

In the next section I develop the theme of trust, ethics and values in passing on business.

### **6.6a Trust, Ethics and Values in Passing on Business**

One aspect of trust in networking is the trust that is placed in another when passing on business to them. This was very much an issue for me when passing on some work to a colleague. There is no doubt in my mind that I did so on the basis of trust. What's more, I trusted him 'as a person' rather than on the basis of his technical ability. This links with the literature on knowledge based trust and identification based trust (Sheppard & Tuchinsky 1996; Lewicki & Bunker 1996). I felt that I knew my colleague's behaviour sufficiently well to expect it to be predictable and that it was based on a mutual understanding of each other's needs. What I mean by 'as a person' was that although I did not have first hand knowledge of his ability I did have first hand knowledge of his ethics, values and beliefs. Of these I had developed an opinion over a number of years. The other aspect of trust that came into play was that I chose to pass work to him based also on the opinions that others held of him. These 'others' were people whom I trusted. This trust had again been based on ethics, values and beliefs that I had noticed over a number of years. This area was very important to me because I feel that you can't know everything about someone. However, I may be prepared to trust their technical ability if their ethics, values and beliefs are those that I can respect. Based on these I would, for example, expect that they would say if they don't have the skills to do something rather than bluff their way through. One of my research notes indicates the importance to me of ethics, values and beliefs in networking:

**“So through networking he got the work. There is no other way in which I would have passed on the business. Knowing him as a person, his values, beliefs and ethics were an essential ingredient.”**

The general literature lists a number of factors that affect trust such as risk, level of discretion and openness, (Shaw 1997; Fox 1974; O'Brien 2001; Kramer & Tyler 1996). The above example illustrates application of these factors (ie, the high degree of risk for me, and the high level of discretion and openness needed) and is consistent with the literature.

### **6.6b Long Time Frame for Developing Trust**

The idea of a long time frame being important is referred to in O'Brien (2001) and in Sonnenberg (1990 p 59) where he says “Don't wait until you desperately need a network to begin developing one. Networks are based on trust, respect and personal chemistry; they are not developed overnight.” My last example illustrated this networking practice. The link between trust, respect and personal chemistry I think is quite significant. It encapsulates what I was meaning earlier by saying that ‘I knew him as a person’.

Stubberfield (2001) concurs with the use of longer time frame in which to develop trust asserting “Two keys to the PDC's (Personnel and Development Consortium) success are that members have similar needs and that they have devised effective ways of working together within a formal framework. Because members all have their own businesses and have not been solely reliant on income from the network, they have had time to learn to trust each other and develop openness.” Long time frames for developing trust was reiterated expressly in research interviews with Heather, Keith and Paul and implied through the stories and examples given in conversations with Irene and Martin, showing the consistency of thought on long time frames being significant.

Trust built over time is recognised as important when networking for business in other professions too. In speaking about how to network in the legal profession Italo (1996f) says “Trust can be influenced by the initial presentation, but it is mostly built over time. The better a person feels they know you, the more they will tend to trust you.” While trust can take quite some time to be developed it can be destroyed very rapidly and it often becomes apparent ‘what a small world it is’. The example from my research given in the next section demonstrates this point.



### **6.6c 'It's a Small World'**

This section focuses on how news of loss of trust in another can spread very quickly through networking. This is illustrated by an experience I had with a client who works for a relatively small business. This client sub-contracts a lot of work to training consultant associates. One of the newer associates did a particular job well in relation to the task itself, but the client considered some aspects of behaviour as seriously undesirable. For reasons of confidentiality I won't expand further on the nature of this undesirable behaviour. The contract was terminated immediately. One of the consequences was that the client was asking 'who recommended this person in the first place?' The client wasn't absolutely sure but possibilities were narrowed down to one particular associate who had in fact withdrawn from doing work for this client because of changing family circumstances.

The net effect is that the client no longer trusts anyone recommended by this dismissed associate. Anyone else who is closely linked up with the person is now also under scrutiny and is not fully trusted. News spread fast through networking. From my experience and research I know this is not an isolated case. It has happened in other client groups with which I have worked.

The literature mentions deterrence based trust (Wrong 1979) where people expect that you will do what you say you will do, and inconsistency of behaviour is 'punished' by for example the withdrawal of future business. My example is illustrative of this general point and builds on it. It shows that in networking for training consultants, it's such a 'small world'. Networking can spread bad news very quickly and can act as a deterrent against abusing trust. Networkers may wish to be aware of the extent to which they work 'in a small world' and how quickly any mistrust in them might be spread through their network. The opposite is also true. I can recall occasions where a proposition has been made that I considered to be unethical and have said that I wouldn't wish to be involved as my whole business is based on trust. A colleague who was with me repeated this to another, and networking soon spread that I stood up for my principles.

So, understanding the trust that others have in those with whom you are involved can have a profound effect on the trust they place in you when considering whether or not to place

business with you. Abusing the trust placed in you can have an enormously damaging effect. Networking can spread that news quickly. The literature comments on how swiftly trust can be destroyed (O'Brien 2001) and an example from my research illustrates this point. I was attending a personal development event with a number of other trainers on the subject of technology and training. We were delighted to have a well-known leading edge speaker. He had spoken widely on the conference platform. As part of his session he took us through a 'live Internet based link up'.

We discovered later that the pictures and sound had been filmed on a previous occasion. A pre-filmed link would have probably been acceptable had he said openly that he didn't want to risk technological problems on the day. What disturbed us was his pretence to be doing things live. Could we trust the rest of what he said? I recorded these comments immediately after the event.

"The main speaker paid no attention to the published agenda or to who his audience was. To me it was patronising, deceitful in that he pretended to give a live Internet demo that was in fact pre-filmed. He didn't answer people's questions. I was not alone in how I saw his session."

In terms of networking he had abused our trust in him. Based on this experience it was likely that not only would others not recommend him, but they might actively report in a negative way on what they had seen and experienced. Bearing in mind that most of the people in the room were potential clients, it struck me at the time as being rather naïve to have taken such a risk. That one episode destroyed any trust that had been built up and I noted what the event organiser later said to me:

"I could never trust him with running future events"

The literature indicated the significance of trust. The examples in this section have shown exactly how it applies in terms of how quickly trust or mistrust can be spread through networking and impact on potential business for training consultants.

#### **6.6d Trust and Integrity**

An interesting link in the literature was that between trust and personal integrity. I recalled that Shaw's definition of trust specifically mentioned integrity (Shaw 1997). This



link also emerged in practitioner research at the HRD 2000 Conference (Michelli 2000) where the relationship between trust, integrity and networking was emphasised. Michelli spoke of a number of issues relevant to trust in networking. These included that networkers honour their commitments, display behaviour that is consistent with commitments, that authenticity shows through, standards and expectations are met, that networkers are honest in developing relationships, and that personal integrity generates trust. These would encourage others to develop trust in you as a networker but that is not to say that these behaviours aren't also relevant to other relationships.

Consistent with the networking literature is this example from Paul that is typical of many that I have heard. It makes explicit the need for trust and integrity in the networking relationship.

“if you built a relationship with your immediate contact, then it needs to be sound enough that you can trust the advice you've been given and it needs to be confidential advice that you can perhaps explain what help or advice you are looking for in order for that person to give you the best advice or recommendation.”

In this section I give other examples to illustrate the impact of personal integrity on trust. This adds to the body of knowledge by expanding on the concept within a networking context as perceived by training consultants.

In the first example, an acquaintance who I have known for some years gave me serious cause for concern in relation to trust. I confidentially told her of a job that I was applying for. At interview I discovered by chance that she had applied for it as well. I also discovered that this application was made after I had told her about it. What hurt was that she hadn't told me she had also decided to apply for the job. There have been other similar incidents that I have seen in her relationships with others over the years. I enjoy meeting with her so we do keep in touch from time to time but this abuse of confidential information has caused me to be cautious of revealing any deep issues or sensitive issues that could be used to my disadvantage. Since then she has gone freelance but I haven't passed on leads to her as I felt I couldn't trust her with my clients. This issue of betraying confidences is discussed in the literature (Sonnenberg 1990). My example shows the impact of this on gaining business. Networking relationships require a certain amount of investment (O'Brien 2001) and this might take the form of support, loyalty or good

intentions towards another (Clark & Payne 1995). In the above example from my research, these expectations were not fulfilled leading to mistrust.

In the training world there is always the danger of business or people being poached. This becomes far more of an issue in many organisations where much of the training work is done on an associate basis, whether through formal contractual relationships or informal working partnerships. Training consultancies find that it's a good way of reducing overheads as you only need to contract the person when required. Tapping into an informal or formal network when needed can be very effective. However, as associates may have their own businesses to take care of there is always the danger of them poaching clients.

Many training consultancies that use a network of associates have contracts with a clause stating how many years must lapse before the client can be contracted directly. One of the implications of poaching is that a training consultancy is more likely to contract the associate they can trust – the one they can trust not to poach the client but who will bring future business back to the consultancy for all to share. This has a big impact on who gets the repeat business.

In another example during my research, a training manager was telling me that he regards associates who indulge in poaching as people who go for short-term success. Once poaching is discovered the training world becomes a very small one as news of someone with that type of behaviour spreads very rapidly on the grapevine. Long term it can really damage a training consultant's image and ability to gain business. There is an opposite to poaching clients and that is clients poaching associates. Kirk (1994 p 16) writes "clients may bypass you and go straight to an associate ..... The 'poaching' problem can be overcome contractually, as can issues of quality etc, but I find contracts unnecessary. Arrangements based on trust are much more satisfactory than potentially litigious situations. If an associate breaks that trust either by poaching or by poor performance, he/she is unlikely to be used by myself or any one else in the network in future, or to have access to others in the network. They are therefore likely to lose business in the long run by being unable to satisfy clients or attract new ones. Short term gain equals long term loss!" In analysing integrity and poaching I noticed that long term/short term issue arose again.



## **6.6e Building Trust and New Ways of Working**

At the end of the year 2000 I had quite a new experience in terms of networking to gain business as it was through the Internet. The use of the Internet for networking is beginning to appear in some of the books on networking. As yet guidelines and information on how to do so are quite basic (Kramer 1997; Fisher & Vilas 2000; Marler & Mattia 1997). My experience and observation during the period of my research bring to bear more detail and insight into this aspect of networking. I will recount an example which really highlights what it means to me.

A client advertised on the Internet for writers of web-based training materials for a new venture that they were developing. I felt I knew something about the organisation from the way in which they networked on UKHRD. I saw the advertisement one morning, replied before lunch and had a telephone interview in the afternoon. By the next day I had signed a contract and by the evening I had been commissioned for my first piece of work for this client. The speed with which the whole thing had happened was a completely new experience for me. Up till now I have known that one of my strengths has been in developing a strong and trusting relationship through a face-to-face meeting and that if I could do that then I would probably gain a contract. With this client because of the Internet based way of working, all the relationship and trust building phases that I normally went through simply hadn't happened in the usual way. I was curious to see how things would work out. After all, perhaps new ways of working lend themselves to new ways of networking and gaining business.

I thought I would do one small piece of work for my new client to see what happened. If the time that I spent on it didn't yield results then I could regard it as a 'marketing cost' at the very worst. Experimenting with new markets and ways of finding business I feel is important, especially in terms of keeping up to date with new technological approaches. Within a week the first piece of work went through and three or four days after that the cheque was on my doormat. This company had done amazingly well in developing my trust in them by stating clearly what they were about and by operating to those standards. They had certainly demonstrated some of the behaviours indicated as important in the HRD Week conference mentioned earlier where the speakers said how important it was to honour your commitments and display behaviour that is consistent with commitments.

Taking work from an Internet-based trainers' network is a relatively new and growing medium.

I felt this single example worth sharing as it provoked such a strong reaction in me. In contrast to the traditional approach of developing long-term relationships through networking, this example was about developing a relationship in an incredibly short time frame. Ways of building rapport traditionally focused on face-to-face interaction at least at times, was superseded by email and telephone contact only. It will be interesting to see how things develop and how other training consultants and clients build trusting and effective relationships with the Internet as a starting point.

### **6.6f Trust Provokes Strong Views**

Looking back over my research notes one theme that has come over clearly to me is that some training consultants have quite strong views on trust and trust building. This section enhances the knowledge on trust in the literature by showing the strength of feeling that training consultants have on the topic. My first example illustrated how strongly Heather feels about her ability to build trust.

Heather: And picking up on the little things that matter. Not the necessarily the, necessarily the subjects of a conversation but, or the topic you're talking about, but the little things that are very pertinent to them. If you remember those things and you go back to them at a subsequent date and you pick up on those things. That's hugely powerful in terms of them interacting with you.

Teresa: Yea.

Heather: And building trust and rapport. And I do it at all levels with all people. That's the other thing I'm pretty good at. Is, it doesn't matter who it is, the dinner lady at school, the mum in the playground, a chief executive of a health authority, I've no problem. To me, everybody has got something to give, everybody's got something to contribute, and if you listen you'll get that from people.

What struck me was her emphasis on her skill in recognising that everyone has something to contribute. Her link with rapport also reinforces earlier connections between trust and rapport. It made me recall the HRD week conference speaker's earlier comments on the importance of being honest in developing relationships and that authenticity shows



through. Heather's authenticity in believing that everyone has something to contribute probably helps to build rapport and hence trust. To support this idea she goes on to say.

**Heather:** If you actually put the whole emphasis on the other person, you actually find out what their needs are, and what would benefit them. So, you can only do that by listening and once you, you establish where they're at and so on, you're actually tuned in where they're coming from. I think that you, that's what networking's about and if you do that, you build their trust, you build rapport and they'll want to do business with you or what so ever, If you take it on a business level.

I can recall the strength of voice with which she made these comments.

In doing this research I was aware that I would benefit from my research contributors trusting me. An adaptation of self-characterisation helped this process. This extract comes from practically the start of our conversation when I ask Martin to describe himself. What is interesting is that it is the subject of trust that he launches into and has very strong views about. In the following excerpt I show my use of self-characterisation and Martin's response.

**Teresa:** So one of things, one of the tools that's around is this thing called self-characterisation where you look at yourself as a networker, and if you describe yourself, you know, as if you were writing a description, or talking it through someone...

**Martin:** Mmm

**Teresa:** I've never experimented with this, it'll be a first one on this to see how it works in relation to networking umm. So, does that give you enough of a lead to start? It's you describing yourself as a networker. What sort of a networker would you see yourself as?

**Martin:** Right, so we're talking about networking, mmm

**Teresa:** For gaining business

**Martin:** For gaining business

**Teresa:** That's it

**Martin:** With other consultants and so on. Err, I would say I'm mm very open and mm honest and up-front with people and I have a, suppose a natural inclination to trust people unless I've got proof that I can't trust them. Because one of the most important things with networking is trust. Err, I quite like to work with, I mean most of the people I work with in networking are people I know and I know that I can trust.

Martin also opened up a completely different aspect of trust in networking. He recognised that he has a naturally trusting nature and speaks fervently about the impact this has when

it comes to networking. Martin expressed this view with strength and conviction unlike some other aspects of the research interview where he might have spoken more hesitantly while he was developing his line of thought. The subject of trust provoked strong views from him.

Martin links trust to the likelihood of gaining further business on a reciprocal basis. In order to get the context of this example I have included in the excerpt the preliminary description of the event about which he's speaking.

Martin: And at the time those modules were being put together the company for whom we were doing these, these things laid down a certain number of guidelines, in terms of the standards if you like, that consultants needed to adopt and one was that the processes that are used and, mm erh, there should be maybe overlaps between the programmes so that delegates see some consistent themes coming through on all the programmes. Now they laid down some of those themes but because of that overriding message the programme I was running which was the Continuous Improvement Tools and Techniques, erh, I was going to do in that programme, just a very very short session no more than an hour, on putting a case forward in terms of presenting, when you come to the end of a project you need to present to management your findings. So, there wasn't a presentation skills session, it was. So it was, it wasn't a presentation of skills session, it was, it was, there was some of the basic elements of that were in it. How do you present a case and persuade a group of managers you know that you've, how do you put that together and what are some of the basics of them presenting it. Mm this other consultant was running a module where there was a major element of it was presentation skills. So, I contacted him and said look, you know, the company that we're both working for wants some common themes through this.

Teresa: Mm

Martin: Erh, in putting that session together that I'm running on presentation skills I don't want to put across totally different messages that your putting across on your programme. Mm. Are there any steps in terms of presentation skills or is there a process which you are recommending on your programme because then what I can do is use that maybe just that outline on mine so that if people did do both, can see there is or we're talking from the same hymn sheet. Mm, and the reaction was, erh, well I don't see the relevance of that and erh, if you could send me what you plan to do, then I'll make sure its in line with what I'm doing.

Teresa: mm

Martin: Erh and erh, so this is somebody who is not willing to trust somebody else. He obviously is questioning my motives.



Teresa: Not on the same wavelength.

Martin: Of wanting to know what his material is. And erh, I response back to him was that my session is only 3/4 to an hour that it was far more sensible, in my view for me to fall in line with him. Because his is the major session, the major programme on that subject. I should fall in line with him rather than him fall in line with me. Mm and erh what I still did was I gave him an outline and the steps I would go through in presenting a case. Erm, I didn't even have an acknowledgement from him.

Teresa: Really

Martin So

Teresa: Not exactly asking for a good relationship

Martin: That kind of person, there is no way I would work with someone like that because they're not willing to share, its for to be a two way thing its got to be give and take and erh erh and erh suppose it does take a period of time, but over a period of time you know you build up that trust and you know that that person is not going to like talk and give nothing back.

This demonstrates another very strong view about the impact of trust on the networking relationship, the time that it takes and reciprocity all being linked. Trust percolates into so many aspects of networking.

In the last section on findings in relation to the person-to-person connection I expand on other issues in networking that have arisen. First I will comment on gender and culture, and then on power.

## **6.7 Other Issues**

### **6.7a Gender and Culture**

My literature section commented on some of the studies that had been carried out in relation to gender, culture and networking and also commented on some of the other texts on these subjects. Gender and cultural issues came through strongly in the literature. Looking back to personal development training that I have carried out in organisations for male and female managers, and for more junior ethnic minority employees, I can recall gender and cultural issues in networking being raised by course members as a significant issue. In my research however, although I did not specifically ask questions around these subjects, I was curious to note that they were not raised as issues. In choosing my sample

I had taken care to include both men and women, and to include people from a wide range of backgrounds.

The literature indicated trends that women tended to network more with women and men more with men (Travers, Pemberton et al. 1997; Burke, Rothstein et al. 1995). In my research interview notes and observations however, I could find nothing to support the application of this trend to training consultants. I considered the contacts in my own network and found a balance of men and women.

During the period of my research one of the few specific references to culture and networking came from a course delegate who was employed in a general HR role. Delegates had been sharing best practices and one had raised the subject of networking. I noted his response:

“Course member comment July 1998

He said he felt inhibited from networking because of his cultural upbringing. This was in manual jobs, and none of his family or friends were in a ‘professional’ job. So because he hadn’t got used to networking professionally with family and friends he wasn’t used to it.”

Another link with culture that did emerge was in relation to networking etiquette (Chapter 6.5d) where ‘rules about how we do things’ was commented on. This can be seen as one aspect of the culture(s) in which we network.

### **6.7b Power**

When exploring the literature on networking I became aware of the relevance of power. At first I started off by associating power over others with a ‘win/lose’ potential outcome. Win for the person exerting power that may or may not lead to a win for the other party. Some salespeople for example, maybe sell products the customer doesn’t really want or need and this could be viewed as a win/lose situation. I have come to realise that because my values regarding selling training revolved around a win/win approach based on meeting identified needs I had forgotten that power could be relevant when analysing networking.



As my knowledge of the literature on power became more extensive I could see other power issues in my research findings. For example, the extent to which a training consultant deliberately chooses to use matching or mismatching behaviours to build rapport (to then go on to win business), can be said to be exerting power under Wrong's definition of "power is the capacity of some person to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (Wrong 1979 p 2). My goal when rapport building is to understand the other person's needs and wants, and not about exerting power to get them to do something they might not want to do. As a result, I hadn't previously recognised that choosing matching or mismatching behaviours was a way of exerting power, even if I only did so in what I believed to be the best interest of my client.

I reviewed my interview transcripts and found that Martin spoke about power issues in terms of access to 'gatekeepers' or those who have access to information, people, resources which Stacey (1996) refers to in his list of sources of power.

Martin explained how he seeks out others in a position of power within organisations so that he can gain access to the 'right' people.

Martin: And what I might say to them is okay who is your opposite number in the other division. Erh, because I don't know them and they don't know me. Erh, and what I'd like to do is contact them.

In an interview with Heather she refers to personal power (Wrong 1979). Stacey (1996) also refers to this type of power and that it can increase with the personal skills and expertise of an individual. Heather explained how she felt at ease with a wide range of people and how she believes her Masters qualification helped her to achieve this. It gives an insight into what gives Heather more power in networking situations than she believed she had previously.

Heather: I pride myself on the fact that I can communicate with anyone, at any level. So I have no fear of who that person is....

Heather: I think my Master's degree contributed towards that hugely though.

In numerous networking situations to gain business being able to give or not give business to another can be regarded as a form of power. I regard it as a form of 'legitimate' power

in so much as a training manager in an organisation for example, has the right to choose whether or not to give some business to an external training consultant. Alternatively, one training consultant can choose whether or not they wish to pass on business to another training consultant. However this is a different interpretation of the term 'legitimate' to Wrong's definition: "legitimate power is a power relation in which the power holder possesses an acknowledged right to command and the power subject an acknowledged obligation to obey" (Wrong 1979 p 49). In training consultancy, where the training consultant is seeking to gain business the consultant has the right to consider whether or not to take on the work ie there is no requirement to 'obey'

I recorded this observation in my research diary.

"I recall the time when I was offered some work from company X. At the time I had too much work to do to take on any more. I had worked with this client before and wanted to help her out. A colleague L, a member of P's Group had skills in this area. I considered whether to put him forward. I was debating things like:  
How well will he do the job?  
Will my client be pleased with the referral or will it backfire on me?  
Is there something in it for me as well?  
How should I handle it ie sub-contract or just pass it on?"

This example shows how I considered whether to hold on to power or risk letting it go and the impact that might have on the relationship (and power) with my client. It represents an example of loss / gain of power for different stakeholders.

Stacey (1996 p 157) asserts that "Power can take the form of authority when it is exercised and consented to because of hierarchical position and because of the rules and regulations of the organization. Or power can take the form of influence where it is based on interdependence between people and the contributions they make to common endeavours." My example illustrates the relevance of this in current networking practices. I had the power to offer the contract to another. If I did so, my choice would impact on my future relations with the organisation. Whoever I put forward had the power to affect my relationship with the organisation depending on how they performed the contract. So whilst at first issues of power appeared not to be present in my research, I discovered that many of the themes I had so far identified as being significant in my research, did in fact have a link. I now feel it can be valuable for networkers to consider



sources of power and the way in which they use power in seeking to improve the effectiveness of networking interactions.

## **Chapter 7 Concluding my Research**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business. In this final chapter I address the last of my initial objectives in achieving this purpose, namely, sharing the findings and conclusions, and highlighting further areas for research. My interest in researching this subject stemmed from my own use of networking over many years, a specific request to research networking practice, a realisation of how little literature focuses on how training consultants network, and a desire to offer help other training consultants who use networking to better understand it. In this concluding chapter my comments cover conclusions about my personal learning journey, conclusions relating to the theoretical context and basis of the research, the development of my definition of networking, my contributions to knowledge on networking, areas for further research and a summary of how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to gaining business.

### **7.2 Conclusions about My Own Personal Learning Journey**

My research has taken place over many years; formally since my registration in January 1998. In an informal sense it's an extension of an interest in research during the last 21 years. In this research, as with others, I have learned about myself as a person and as a researcher, about the varying needs and interests of those interested in the research outcomes, about meeting and dealing with research contributors and putting the outcomes together in a way that meets the needs of all those involved.

This piece of research has been particularly exciting as it has helped me to explore aspects of qualitative research that I probably would not have done without expert research supervision. It has shown me how research can raise awareness of processes that are ongoing, mostly at a subconscious level, in both the researcher and others who are contributing to the research. This has emerged through comments from myself and other



training consultants when discussing networking practices such as “I hadn’t realised” or “I never thought of it like that before”. Some spoke of how it benefited them, for example:

Heather: Now we’ve talked about it, I didn’t really realise it, and this has benefit to me. I see it’s not a short term thing to me it’s a medium, long term, now whether that’s right or wrong I don’t know because I’m sure you can achieve equally as much if you perceive networking to be a short term thing as well, possibly.

And later on in the conversation

Heather: I just can’t believe it, what we’ve covered. Because I’ve sort of, I don’t know, I suddenly thought I wondered what you’re going to ask me and whether I’d be, erh. No, it’s amazing how, er, I mean, I think I’ve benefited from this hugely because you’ve actually made me think, it’s been like a review.

Teresa: Yes.

Heather: ....you spend all day here by yourself and even in phone calls and things you don’t have this depth of conversation. It’s been incredibly useful to, to get me to focus on where am I now and what’s happening, and to realise in a way how embryonic I think my business still is.

This arose, not through an expert imparting networking knowledge, but from individuals talking about their experiences and in so doing gaining useful insights and understandings about the process. One of the many personally satisfying aspects of the research has been the feeling that it has already helped training consultants, including myself, with the process of networking to gain business. It has already contributed to their knowledge and made accessible information previously unavailable.

### **7.3 Conclusions in Relation to the Theoretical Context and Basis of the Research**

In this section I will give my conclusions under two main headings: the contribution of the literature and the contribution of my research methodology section.

#### **7.3a Contribution of the Literature**

The literature has helped to provide a theoretical basis for the research thus achieving one of my original objectives. It has indicated what is already known about the subject and

where gaps in understanding may lie. It is clear that there is a substantial amount published on networking in general, on organisational networking, career networking and setting up networks. There is very little on how training consultants network in relation to gaining business. In fact, there is very little for those in any specialist profession using networking to gain business.

The literature has contributed by explaining the contexts in which networking takes place, various definitions which are used, the history and ways in which its use is developing in society. It helped me to develop a framework to assimilate and present many of the dimensions of networking. It sets out many reasons for networking including the importance of networking to gain business, which was a key premise on which the research was based.

The literature specifically on networking by training consultants was very limited. However general literature on networking and related subjects contributed by providing relevant insights and frameworks from which I could explore and build during my research (Castells 1996; Huggins 2000). For example, networking literature (Fisher & Vilas 2000) recommended writing notes on business cards whereas cross-cultural communication literature (Mead 1990) advised that this practice can offend in some cultures. There was guidance in the general literature on power which I found transferable to networking, enabling me to recognise implications which I might otherwise have overlooked.

The literature on networking also provided a basis for my research approach. Previous quantitative research on general networking recommended qualitative research to understand more about the process of networking. Authors recommended further research to focus on underlying processes, going beyond quantifying network processes and characteristics (Burke, Rothstein et al. 1995; Birley, Cromie et al. 1991). I have done just this in my research.

One curious issue emerged which I first considered incidental. After rereading the literature on network mapping I realised that I have not mapped out my own network recently, despite reading about the value of doing so and regularly advising others to do this. This raised the question of why I haven't done so. Lack of time is a possibility, but it could also be a reluctance to explore my own network map. In hindsight I consider



reluctance to consciously address aspects of networking something more fundamental and not incidental. There could be a link with my observation that consultants don't tend to talk about their networking processes. It may be one of the reasons why there is so little either in writing or orally about how training consultants network.

### **7.3b Contribution of My Research Methodology Section**

Chapters 3 and 4 set out the research methodology and contribute to the theoretical context and basis for my work, fulfilling my objectives on methodology. These helped me to consider relevant data gathering methods that would inform my research in a coherent way. They contributed to better understanding my own research beliefs, recognising the multi-dimensional nature of the topic, the convergence and divergence of views that could emerge, and the complexity and messiness of data that reflected multiple realities. Issues about potential role conflict, consciousness and unconsciousness of approaches, planned and spontaneous aspects of research and networking, the benefits of reflection and reflexivity all useful emerged through setting out my research methodology. It provided a basis for research that supported the complex and dynamic nature of networking.

Some key conclusions emerged for me. Being 'in the research' can lead to potential role conflict confusion (Adler & Adler 1997). Recognition of any potential role conflicts when conducting research is essential and needs careful management. Sometimes roles can be made more explicit at the outset of an interaction or piece of research but in other cases decisions might need to be taken in situ, taking account of the ethics and impact of different ways forward. I have found that multiple data gathering methods can be used to good effect (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995 226). Within the scope of the 'interview' alone, there is a fairly wide range of methodology including PCP tools can be used in a complementary way to enable the researcher to access to different facets of a topic, to draw out different interviewees in a way that suits them best, and to respond to the complexity of real world research questions.

In particular, one very useful aspect to have emerged from my research methodology has been the development of my interviewing approach by incorporating 'snakes' or 'illuminative incidents' and self-characterisation. These PCP methods are relatively simple to employ and yet have the potential to expand on data that can be uncovered. These methods are less well known and is an area where I have contributed to knowledge.

Literature and applications mainly exist within the fields of clinical psychology, psychotherapy and education. I have taken the ideas and developed them into free flowing conversational probes in a business related context. It encouraged rich responses very quickly in my interviews and conversations with others about networking. This informal approach to 'snakes' and self-characterisation has proved very worthwhile.

Networking is an ongoing and real activity for me, not something that I have engaged in only for my research. It takes place in numerous forms, in many different situations and for many different reasons and in different contexts. My research process has reflected that variety and diversity. I have shown how the different research methods have been used. PCP, complete participant and participant observation methods, interviews, diary recordings, all fit together, with reflection and reflexivity as a common underpinning theme. They are all consistent with a piece of research that is exploratory in nature. There are few pieces of research outside the fields of clinical psychology, therapy, education and health that use this combination and so this thesis makes a contribution to methodology by showing how they can be usefully used in combination in other social contexts.

#### **7.4 Development of my working definition**

In drawing conclusions I reflected on my working definitions.

Network: "a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship"  
(Mueller 1986, p 14)

Networking "interacting with others to exchange information and develop useful contacts". (Pearsall 2001, p 958)

The concept of 'person-to-person connection' usefully describes the networking relationship that has emerged from this research. What has developed is that while some may principally see that connection as being face-to-face, via telephone or paper documents, new ways of networking mean that the person-to-person connection can also take place through the Internet. So, I would add clarity to the definition by saying "through any medium".

The concept of interacting to exchange information encompasses the broad range of reasons for networking emerging from the research. Information may be facts on new products, feelings and opinions when acting as a sounding board, ideas, or for example,



holiday and family news when interacting on a social level. More significantly the exchange has been shown to occur within a narrow networking circle (ie on a reciprocal basis between two people) or within a wider networking circle. The main way in which I would develop the definition would be to omit 'develop useful contacts'. Whilst the long term of goal of networking to gain business might infer the development of useful contacts, any single networking interaction may or may not be for the purpose of developing useful contacts, at least in the short term. It could, for example, be for self-development reasons. And so my final definitions of networking, within the context of networking to gain business, are:

**Network:** a person-to-person connection, affinity, or relationship through any medium

**Networking:** interacting with others to exchange information

## **7.5 Contributions to knowledge**

My research makes original contributions to knowledge in relation to how training consultants perceive networking for the purposes of gaining business. For ease of understanding I have grouped findings under two main headings: firstly those relevant to strategy and approach, and secondly, those relevant to the person-to-person connection or relationships in networking. However, the topic is a complex one and the contributions under these two headings should be read in a complementary way. Before going into detail I give in the next two paragraphs a summary list of my main contribution to knowledge arise from the research findings.

These are my contributions to knowledge about networking strategy and approach. I found that networking for reasons other than gaining business is important in seeking to gain business. The appropriateness of a direct or indirect networking approach may depend on the reason for networking. Networking can be a key way of enabling products and services to be desirable in the future. Detail of how it can contribute to longer term business survival is not expanded on in the literature. Networking strategies include networking with other training providers, forming consortia, becoming an expert and promoting that niche area, targeting and networking within a specific sector, and networking with everyone. Some training consultants use one as a principal method

whereas others use a combination. New ways of networking such as using Internet discussion groups have opened up.

These are my contributions to knowledge in relation to the person-to-person connection or relationships in networking. I have found disparity in the literature over whether to collect quantity of contacts or fewer quality connections. Cross-cultural communication literature advises against writing notes on business cards in some cultures, contrary to advice given in many networking books. The need to show respect, reciprocal behaviour, trust and to maintain contacts appears consistently in the literature and in my research data.

Traditional approaches to getting to know potential clients at self-development events, for example, is proving less acceptable to those potential clients. Many new training consultants are unaware of this and it does not appear in the literature. Congruency of behaviour and handling similarity or difference in communications is significant in networking and has previously been unexplored in the networking literature. Discomfort in networking can arise from dislike of cold calling, lack of understanding of networking etiquette, fear of meeting people for the first time, and lack of skill or control.

Understanding an individual networker's source of discomfort can enable them to plan a way of dealing with any negative effects. Trust has emerged as one of the most key factors in networking in line with the literature.

### **7.5a Contributions relevant to networking strategy and approach**

Networking for reasons other than gaining business as the primary motivation for doing so came over as being critical to its effectiveness in many cases during my research. This is in direct contrast to the general literature on networking which often suggests setting about networking to gain business in a very upfront and planned way. One of my key original contributions to knowledge is that if networkers are too upfront in how they network for gaining business in the training field it may well work against them in today's environment, unless that is the explicit reason or agenda item for the networking event. This is not reported in the literature.

Another point that emerges from the data and not from the literature is about the directness or indirectness of networking to achieve a particular end. For example, networking for information often takes place in a direct way, focused on the need to gain information. Networking with the hope of gaining business through self-development and social events



often operates in a less direct way. In these situations it is participation in the self-development or social aspects which feature strongly, not gaining business. The goal of gaining business is pursued in a very low key way, although no less important.

That networking can meet some social and support needs is well reported in the literature. What has emerged from my research which is not so clearly reported in the literature is the way in which networking for social and support reasons can develop into business. My research also develops a reason for networking that is not specifically addressed in the literature – that of ‘future proofing’. By this I mean networking to gain ideas on ‘how to keep products and services desirable in the years to come’. Wider literature focuses on this need for longer term survival but has little to say on how networking can contribute. This research has expanded our knowledge of reasons for networking and the way in which it links with long term business strategy. It is an area that is probably widely applicable to many other professions especially where consultants wish to be at the leading edge of their field.

Some clear strategies on networking emerged which have not been expressed in previous literature for training consultants. Some consultants had success by networking principally with other providers of training. That was their main way of gaining business. Networking with other training providers is an addition to that in the literature. Some chose networking to form consortia to put in bids for work. Others took the approach of becoming an expert in a niche area and raise their visibility by carrying out and publishing original material, giving conference sessions, writing articles and generally gaining a high profile. Some went for a highly targeted approach within a specific sector where they could become well known. The last approach involved networking with any and everyone possible through as many different opportunities as possible.

The key point to note from my research was that each of these methods was successful as the predominant method for different consultants. Success for them was achieving the level of business that they wished to achieve. Most employed a mix of methods, but some consultants used one as their principal one. They felt comfortable with it and it worked for them. Whilst many of these strategies can be found buried in the literature in general terms, they are not tailored or explained in relation to training consultants, nor is the variety of methods and their combining made clear. This tailored presentation of options

contributes to knowledge. I hope other consultants in addition to those working in the training field will also find the detailed discussion of range of options illuminative.

Training consultants may wish to review the ways in which they gain and maintain visibility and methods that have been suitable in the past may no longer be so. New ways of doing so have been opened up by the Internet for example. In this research I contribute to knowledge by showing how that might be done, some of the potential issues and pitfalls, and how others view networking through the internet. Examples of how Internet contributions to discussion groups can impact on the image presented and the effect on potential contracts is not presented elsewhere in the literature. The findings on how people form an opinion about others based on how they contribute to a discussion group is something that I feel is relevant to many other fields of consultancy and professions.

### **7.5b Contributions Relevant to the Person-to-Person Connection or Relationship in Networking**

In terms of making initial contact, some publications recommend networkers to meet many people at events whereas others suggest meeting fewer people for longer. Some publications recommend making notes on the back of business cards, others on cross-cultural diversity recommend not. There are widely differing views on how to approach others, how direct an approach may be, and how much a networker should say to begin with. On the other hand there has been considerable consistency in the literature on the importance of respect, reciprocation, careful choice of contact, network maintenance, and not leaving everything to chance. This thesis brings together this accumulated advice and knowledge in a way that has not been done before. Attention is paid to both practitioner and academic research. Situations and experiences are explored that bring aspects of the literature to life, reveal the interdependence of themes and thereby reframe knowledge of the subject/

The use of business cards and the way in which consultants portray themselves is significant to consultants wishing to establish contact with others. Based on the small sample of cards that I had collected over the years I found that there was wide variation in approach. Cross-cultural communication books point out that writing on someone's card can be deemed inappropriate in some cultures. Networking books overlook this multi-



cultural aspect. This information is of practical value to consultants and makes a contribution to knowledge.

Ways of making initial contact and 'getting to know others' given in the general literature is not in line with actual practice. I have shown that there is a backlash in the training world against consultants attending events to try to get to know potential clients. New and existing consultants do not all seem to be aware of this and this information is not reported in the literature.

Another important area presented in this thesis is on aspects that affect rapport building in networking. I have found that the impact of congruency of behaviour, the way in which we look for similarity or difference and the way in which we maintain contact has on building and maintaining rapport is significant in networking. Modelling espoused values and practices when networking is essential in achieving congruency of behaviour. This is another major contribution to understanding how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business.

The subject of comfort and discomfort emerged as significant in terms of the person-to-person connection. It is not tackled in the literature on networking in any detail. Through the use of repertory grid, construct analysis and interviewing I have explained some of the factors that can lead to discomfort which include dislike of cold calling, networking etiquette, problems with meeting people for the first time, reputation issues, and lack of skill or control. These may well resonate with the reader as being social difficulties relevant to many people, but they are not discussed in the networking literature for training consultants. I have found that comfort is not synonymous with effective or 'good' networking and that some quite uncomfortable situations may be so because they are challenging rather than because they are 'bad' in some way. For some consultants their discomfort can prevent them from engaging in networking, or in some types of networking. I feel it useful for consultants to explore exactly what causes the discomfort and to explore ways of handling these, or to look for different ways of networking that may help them go forward. Awareness of the 'etiquette' that may exist in different networking circles can help consultants to network in a way that they and their recipients find acceptable and comfortable. What constitutes acceptability depends on the profession, culture and other factors. My presentation of discomfort and comfort in

networking is original in its approach and findings and in showing its impact on gaining business.

Trust emerged as a huge issue, in line with the general literature on networking and is a recurring theme underpinning networking. What is new in the research is the application of the concepts to the way in which training consultants perceive networking practices. It makes explicit the link between trust and networking. Examples showed 'how small a world' they are working and networking in. Loss of trust in networking situations can impact on ability to maintain current business and gain new business. I have found the general literature on trust which presented trust based on deterrence, knowledge and identification not referred to in the networking literature. This is very relevant to training consultants who can now more easily access this knowledge to assist their networking interactions.

So while no one set of guidelines on the best way to network emerges, some strong themes have come to the forefront. Trust, comfort, building rapport, gaining and maintaining visibility, selecting an appropriate strategy that suits a particular networker, and managing the directness of networking within what is acceptable in any particular networking circle, are of critical importance.

Training consultants that I have spoken with over the years have been and still seem to be most interested in the examples, anecdotes and stories surrounding networking. I have found little interest from them for quantitative data on the subject. There has been no expectation of research providing them with the 'right way to do it'. They realise that each will have their own way of doing things. They are looking however, for options, issues, shared experiences and examples with which they can identify and so build their own unique way of going forward. But, up till now there has been very little published information on which they can base their thought processes. This research is thus a first step to providing training consultants with some written material with which they can take stock of their perceptions of networking, and review and develop their networking approach and practices.



## **7.6 Future Areas for Research**

**A number of areas for future research agendas have arisen during the course of my work. In this section I present these areas and how they might contribute to further knowledge.**

**An important finding is that few training consultants spend time discussing the subject of networking and I have found nothing in the literature that explains or reflects on why this may be so. This means that not only is the subject not represented strongly in writing, it is not so orally. The reason(s) for this did not emerge in my research and I feel it is of such significance that further research would help our understanding of this complex subject.**

**My research established some networking strategies used by training consultants but did not establish these as the only possibilities. A different or wider sample in future research may reveal other strategies to be appropriate in other situations so expanding our knowledge. Another possibility is to compare strategies used by training consultants with that used by others to search for similarities and differences. More work could be done on how different strategies are combined.**

**My research touched on the ways in which training consultants portray and introduced themselves, especially in relation to the use of business cards, and indicated wide variation in practices. A further area for research on networking for training consultants would be to explore more fully what forms of introduction and terminology is felt to be suitable and the variations that are in place. It would be interesting to find out the thinking behind the wide variation in how training consultants portray themselves on business cards in further research. This could usefully link with and expand on knowledge of how contact is made and rapport established.**

**I indicated in my findings that if consultants are too upfront in network for gaining business in the training field it may well work against them in today's environment, unless that is the explicit reason or agenda item for the networking event. This is not reported in the literature. While it may be particular to some professions such as training it may not be the case for other professions and further research would be able to explore the extent of this.**

Building rapport is a huge area and I am aware that I have just touched the tip of an iceberg in relation to the subject. However, rapport is just one aspect of training consultants' communication patterns and more work on communication patterns could also be of practical value. I would be interested, for example, in more detail about reciprocity works and in identifying other dimensions of rapport building that are significant to networking. This information would have many practical applications in networking, and not just by training consultants, but by anyone networking for whatever reason.

Further research areas emerged in relation to research methodology particularly with regard to PCP. For example, there is more research that could be done on how to explore constructs that are found within a body of literature on a topic, elicit the emergent poles and how to explore the submergent poles that are not documented. Going back to authors of the literature may be of limited value if they do not fit the target research group. Working only with the emergent poles seems limiting because we construe things differently and that it is the dichotomous descriptions that help give meaning. The idea of taking the emergent poles and seeing how a range of people relate to them could be a fruitful way forward for future research. This has the potential for rich material to help our understanding of the area being researched. There is scope also to see whether the exploration of submergent poles in relation to the literature could be done in groups, which could offer considerable time saving.

The specific method of self-characterisation has been reported on in this thesis in relation to networking research. It can be relatively straightforward for a skilled interviewer to employ and some more research on its use in different settings and application in informal interviewing would add to our knowledge of ways of interviewing and gathering data.

## **7.7 Conclusions on how training consultants view networking**

This is a summary on what has emerged from the research in terms of how training consultants perceive their networking practices in relation to generating business including views on what works and what doesn't, areas of common perceptions and areas of disparity.



Most training consultants perceived networking as a key component in generating business. They could attribute gaining particular pieces of business to networking. Those who choose not to use it (or who weren't aware of using it) were a very small minority. There was wide disparity in the level of consciousness, planning and instrumentality that consultants brought to bear on networking. Some networked intuitively and more unconsciously in relation to gaining business. Others had a conscious plan. Neither mode came through as predominant. Even those who were more aware of their networking practices said during the research interviews that the interview had helped raise their awareness usefully.

Consultants varied in their level of perception of the impact of any networking interaction on potential business. Whilst some were very conscious of impact during formal networking interactions with clients, many were less conscious in other modes such as networking through Internet based discussion groups. Satisfaction with effectiveness in networking was indicated by a number of factors including comfort, ability to build rapport, networking with the 'right' people (right meant different things to different consultants depending on their strategy and approach), and actually achieving a desired level of business.

I found that consultants had little perception of the range of different networking strategies available to them. Of those who expressed perceptions on strategy, either explicitly or implicitly, they only described the strategy they personally used. There was no expressed perception of alternatives. In terms of reasons for networking, the most commonly held views were around networking for gaining information, for support and social reasons, and for self-development. Although many used networking for gaining business, they perceived having another reason or reasons for participating in networking to be more effective in terms of gaining business than to have business as the main or explicit purpose.

There were expectations that networking through consortia would result in business but actual practice showed few successful experiences. Most perceptions of networking revolved around traditional methods such as attending courses or professional institute meetings, informal sessions with colleagues and clients. Use of newer or more unusual methods such as Internet discussion groups was fairly limited.

Perceptions on the networking relationship and its impact on gaining business were even less well developed than perceptions on strategy and approach. Consultants were less conscious or explicit about the elements that impacted in developing networking relations and gaining business. Common perceptions to emerge were the long time frame needed usually to develop relationships that might lead to business, the importance of trust and integrity and a reciprocal view on giving and receiving business. What differed was whether this reciprocity took place within a very narrow or large circle of network contacts. Trust and respect recurred as significant themes in many aspects of networking. More tangible aspects such as the use of business cards and how cards were used to portray consultants was far more explicit. However there was no commonality on approach.

I found that ways of building rapport and how that rapport was built and maintained to be a topic on which consultants didn't express their views. That rapport building was important was expressed, but what constituted elements of rapport building had to be evolved through analysing the research material more closely. By contrast, the need to maintain contact and follow up was very clearly expressed, even down to perceptions by some that a three month interval might be suitable if contact had not been naturally made before that time.

Consultants generally recognised that they experienced discomfort at some time when networking and were aware of the impact of that discomfort on gaining potential business. They were not always so conscious on the cause of that discomfort however, and this only emerged through discussion and analysis. In some cases discomfort was synonymous with 'bad' in terms of gaining business, but not necessarily so. There were a wide range of factors causing discomfort which seemed to be very personal to the individual consultant. What was common was awareness of discomfort and in most cases, its inhibiting effect on business. Once aware of the source, most sought a way to deal with it.

In summary, the most striking aspects of consultants perceptions of their networking practices in relation to gaining business are that trust, respect, longer time scales for building relationships, rapport and reciprocity are essential. Handling individual areas of discomfort and adopting a suitable networking strategy are vital in effective networking.



## Appendix 1 Table of Contributors

The names of people in my research have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.

Item	General description	Research material	Future
Rob	Have known Rob since Autumn 1998. Met him at PCP meetings at Reading University where we have a common interest. Have got to know him in some depth. He is making the transition to being a consultant as a sole trader.	Taken notes from our meetings. Rob has completed a repertory grid on his perceptions of networking. Results followed up by phone.	As Rob develops as a consultant I have followed the development of his business and his networking.
Heather	Have known for since the mid 1990's, first as a client, then as a networking colleague. In 1998 she was establishing her training consultancy business as a sole trader. Since then she has also set up a nursery business alongside her training business.	One recording of an unstructured meeting incorporating self-characterisation to open up the conversation. This has been transcribed. Further informal unstructured chats with Heather have taken place three to six times a year, mostly in a social or semi social setting.	Have maintained contact with Heather as her business has gone through growth, decline, and growth again.

Martin	Have known Martin professionally since 1992 but have never trained together. He is an established training consultant of a limited company. We meet or phone each other from time to time to exchange client news, maybe once or twice a year.	One recording of a semi-structured informal meeting. This has been transcribed. Notes from other business meetings and business telephone calls.	Maintained contact when the business required it rather than for social or research purposes.
Keith	Knew Keith for a number of years. He had a thriving business and managed a limited company and used networking significantly. We have trained together a number of times.	Notes of an unstructured informal meeting. One recording of an unstructured meeting. This has been transcribed. Notes from follow up calls and from working together.	Maintained contact with Keith until he died in 1999.
Paul	Have known Paul for a number of years, originally as a client. Now an established training consultant. He has worked as a sole trader, partner and as an employed consultant.	One recording of an unstructured meeting. This has been transcribed. Notes from follow up calls. Email contact	Contact with Paul is sporadic. Minimum of once a year, more often when something particular crops up.
Irene	Have known Irene, an established training consultant, for many years. She is a partner in a training consultancy. We work together from time to time.	Notes of informal chats during business meetings. One day spent in exchange – I updated her on rep grids, she gave me her thoughts on	We still maintain regular contact several times a year for business purposes.



		networking	
<b>Self</b>	Have been using networking in my own business for some 12 years. Is the main way in which I gain business.	Reflections of own approach through diary recordings. Repertory grid on own perceptions in 1998 and 2000.	Ongoing.
<b>Events</b>	Attended a variety of business meetings, courses, professional events, networking meetings at which networking is an integral part including CIPD HRD week, NLP annual conference, Learning Technology Exhibition and Conference, two Initial Style Trainer Days, professional institute meetings, PCP group events at Reading University, client meetings, consortium events and Internet discussion groups.	Noted my thoughts on 45 of these events as a complete participant.	Ongoing.
<b>Other named contributors</b>	<p>Irvin: A course delegate, who was a training manager.</p> <p>Mark: A long established training consultant, working as a sole trader, who I came to know via P's Group.</p> <p>Jim: A sole trader training consultant who replies to formal advertisements for work.</p>	<p>Natural observation during a course.</p> <p>Met with him in the course of business during 1997.</p> <p>Met with him and chatted informally for a few minutes during lunch at a consultants meeting.</p>	<p>No further contact.</p> <p>No further contact.</p> <p>Unlikely to have further contact.</p>

<p><b>Peter:</b> A colleague at the University of London who heads up a small section at the University and does some occasional consultancy.</p>	<p>Met Peter when working at Birkbeck prior to my PhD.</p>	<p>Meet up for a drink and a chat once every year or two.</p>
<p><b>Chris:</b> A consultant who works for a developing training organisation in Budapest. He contact me as a result of my journal article on networking.</p>	<p>We exchanged a few emails</p>	<p>No further contact expected.</p>
<p><b>Harold:</b> Managing Director of a small training consultancy. Have known and worked with him over a period of 4 or 5 years. Well established as a consultant.</p>	<p>Contact occurs as and when business requires it. No social contact.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p>
<p><b>Dave:</b> A consultant and lecturer in PCP who has worked for different universities.</p>	<p>Contact via the Internet.</p>	<p>Future contact only if I have a specific question to ask him.</p>
<p><b>HN:</b> An employed consultant who then went self employed. Newly established. Have known for 8 to 9 years off and on.</p>	<p>Contact initiated by HN during the period of my research.</p>	<p>No further contact planned.</p>
<p><b>Pauline:</b> An employed consultant for many years, self employed consultant for about 4 years. We meet in passing usually at CIPD members events.</p>	<p>Occasional contact.</p>	<p>Future contact possible at CIPD members' events.</p>
<p><b>Fran:</b> A partner in a small</p>	<p>Very occasional</p>	<p>Future contact</p>



	training consultancy who was one of a team of associate trainers for a large organisation. A well established training consultant. Met Fran when at client meetings occasionally.	contact at client meetings.	possible but unlikely at client meetings.
Networking groups	Belong to one particular group which I have called P's group. This started in the early 1990's. Heather was a member for some time, I have been a member since it was founded. We still meet as a group about twice a year.	Have made notes from meetings or about cancelled meetings as a complete participant.	Ongoing.
Other	TV interview about networking, CIPD conference recording on networking.	Have transcribed the notes from these.	

## **Appendix 2 Short Biography of George Kelly**

**George Kelly was born in 1905 in Kansas, USA. He gained a Bachelor's degree in physics and mathematics and completed a Masters degree for which his thesis was on the study of leisure time activities of workers in Kansas City. He went on to start teaching in a variety of situations including University positions. In 1931 he was awarded a PhD for research on common factors on speech and reading disabilities.**

**With the advent of World War II he worked in aviation psychology. In 1945 he became Associate Professor at the University of Maryland and in 1946 Professor and Director of Clinical Psychology at the Ohio State University. It was during his period at Ohio State University that he developed his contributions on personal construct psychology for which he has become so well known.**

**In 1955 he published *The Psychology of Personal Constructs* (Kelly 1955), a two-volume work which was recognised as a major contribution containing some unique approaches to the study of personality. As a result he soon became an established figure on the lecture circuit and became widely recognised for his views on clinical psychology.**

**Since then there has been an ever growing body of research which has developed the implications and applications of his theoretical concepts into a wide variety of areas. He died in March 1967. His biography is well reported in a number of publications including Neimeyer (1985), Denicolo and Pope (1997), and Gaines (1995).**



### **Appendix 3 Making sense of my research process – a reflexive account**

This reflexive account recounts the way in which I made sense of my research process and drew out the key themes and meanings at a personal level, in terms of my research process and in terms of the actual content on networking.

At regular intervals I found myself sitting back and wondering where I had got to and where I was going to next in my research. Strauss (1987 p 10) summarises this issue by saying “The basic question facing us is how to capture the complexity of reality (phenomena) we study, and how to make convincing sense of it.” At times I found this an exciting process, maybe because a new idea had occurred to me or because I had made some links or connections between different parts of my research. A typical example of this was early on when I had completed the transcripts of my first few interviews and noticed some themes emerging in terms of the different strategies and approaches that consultants were taking. In my research notes the following extract is a typical example.

#### **“Conversations and Reflections**

**June 26 1998**

I’m looking back over the last few months wondering quite where I have got to and where I am going. This morning whilst lying in bed (which is when most of my significant reflecting and idea generation takes place) the way of writing up and documenting my research came to mind. This is probably a result of a combination of factors - background reading, exchanging ideas with my tutor, looking at other research papers of different types, listening to other students and their successes and failures, and a need to express myself in my own way. I could see myself writing up my thoughts and so I’ve been fortunate in being able to dedicate my day to doing just that while it is fresh in my mind.

What has been gradually evolving is that three separate strands of research are becoming clear. There is the material obtainable from literature, that from active research involving others (eg interviews, observations, repertory grid etc), and there are my own experiences and thought processes, particularly as networking for the purposes of gaining business is how I run my own business. Comparing and contrasting the different types of information and findings will give different perspectives.”

In hindsight, these insights appear quite obvious and ordinary, but at the time they were a major step forward for me. At other times I found the process of making sense of my research a daunting one, such as when I had to restart after a long gap in my studies due to

difficult family circumstances. What helped me through times like these was drawing on methods that had helped me over difficulties in the past. Methods such as mind mapping, brainstorming, using my husband as a sounding board, and chatting things through with colleagues were invaluable. Explaining to both myself and my University research supervisors where my difficulties lay helped to acknowledge what the problems were and what might be needed to deal with them.

Through my job as a training consultant I was used to having to assimilate large amounts of data and having to make sense of them. Looking for emerging themes in both qualitative and quantitative data was something that I did regularly when carrying out training needs analysis or an evaluation of a training and development initiative. I had a number of ways of approaching the job that had traditionally worked for me. One of the reasons for doing a PhD was that I wanted to benchmark my existing research skills against current 'good practice'. One of the early and reassuring things that I picked up was that there was no one prescriptive formula that was recognised as being the 'right' way of doing things when it came to analysing and making sense of the research data and process. In fact a comment made both by my University research supervisors, Dorothea and Steve, and which I also found in research texts helped me to face the complexity of the research "Research is a messy, complex, on-going process. If you seek certainty, finality, and completeness, prepare to deal with frustration" (Pearce & Walters 1996 p 5). Exploring the literature for my PhD enabled me to add to my existing 'toolkit' on ways of making sense of data and the research process.

To help me with how to explore the literature and to make sure that I wasn't missing out on a major source I found a briefing by the University of Hertfordshire Hertford Campus librarian useful (I had started at a non-standard time of the year), and I regularly looked at Internet pages such as University of Sheffield (2000) to keep me up-to-date.

Encouraged by this, I took the time to explore many of the different methods that I found in the literature for example, Strauss (1987), Carney, Joiner and Tragou (1997), Marshall and Rossman (1995), Mason (1996), Bailey (1996), Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Fielding (1993) and at meetings, courses and conferences such as Thinking Bigger and Thinking Smaller: Learning about Qualitative Research ASC Conference April 1998, and the Generic Training for Students Session February 2000 at the University of Hertfordshire.



As I read more of the literature I came to understand that data analysis is an ongoing process in many types of research such as that which involves the complete participant, participant observer, or action research. Content and thematic analysis of research data (Ryan & Bernard 2000; Richardson 1996; Flick 1998; Aronson 1994; Robson 1993), informal discussions, my own observations, use of memos (Partington 1998), diary recordings, and reflection on attendance at events have all proved useful methods of making sense of information. At the University of Reading (September 2000) where the majority of the group are doctoral students we discussed different aspects of content analysis at a PCP Group Meeting. One useful suggestion was

“When doing content analysis take note of repeats. It’s clearly important to them.”

I found putting key themes or ideas on separate cards and sorting these into groups a very useful method of content analysis. The sorting process can be repeated several times if different types of groupings come to mind. Someone else can be asked to sort them into piles to see how they group the data, not with the purpose of ‘checking whether you have done it correctly’ but to see whether any new insights come to light. This is particularly helpful in research such as mine that is exploratory in nature.

For example, I took each construct from my interview transcripts, eg “dangers of just flitting around – spending longer time with people at events”, and clustered similar ideas. When they were clustered I then looked for a phrase or heading that best described the theme, using words from my research subjects wherever possible. One idea or theme that emerged was ‘depth of conversation’. I then transcribed this into a table with the originator of the construct so that I could look back for the context if I needed to.

The headings that emerged were the nature of the meeting, comfort and chemistry, who you are dealing with, reluctance, depth of conversation, formality/structure, medium of communications, etiquette or rules, maintaining the network, reciprocal behaviour, viewing the situation, long term relationship, trust and building rapport.

### Comfort and chemistry

Keith	Right chemistry	Strong sense you're culturally not the person for them	
Heather	Must feel comfortable about their business sector – know it well	Felt petrified – didn't know their business sector	
Heather	Like to control situation	Feel vulnerable	

### Who you're dealing with

Paul	Easy to identify who's a potential buyer	Difficult to identify who's a potential buyer	
Keith	Growing new contracts through existing contacts	Growing new contacts and referrals by starting from fresh	
Janey	Networking through existing colleagues	Networking through others at events	

### Reluctance

Paul	Reluctance to dive into cold water at events	Positive enthusiasm for the unexpected chance	
Paul	Feel the need for guidance and assistance in networking at events		
Paul	Don't consciously want to admit we're doing it (networking)		



### Depth of conversation

Janey	Dangers of just flitting around	Spending longer time with people at events	
Heather	Talking to 1 or 2 people at an event in depth	Talking to lots of people	

### Formality / structure

Paul	Structured	Less structured	
Paul	Less formal	More formal	

### Medium

Keith	Medium of contact		
Janey	Networking synonymous with face-to-face	Hadn't considered phone	

### Wavelength

Martin	Both talking from same hymn sheet		
Martin	Same wavelength		

### Etiquette / rules

Keith	Stepping over the mark	Expected behaviour	
Paul	Etiquette	Don't have any rules for it	
Martin	Breaking the rules – ways of behaving		
Paul	Well understand the rules and roles		

### Maintaining network

Keith	Maintain friendship with people I come across		
Martin	Maintaining links if I've not heard from somebody		
Paul	Keep regular contact	Never hear from one year to next	
Keith	Frequency of contact		
Heather	Need to be accessible to people		

### Reciprocal behaviour

Keith	Giving and taking	One way only	
Martin	Sharing		
Martin	Relationship not just about exchanging work but also ideas and materials		
Martin	Expected behaviour of other providers		

### Viewing the situation

Paul	Treat an event socially	Treat an event seriously in terms of business	
Heather	Never underestimate any situation or anybody		
Heather	Every situation has potential for networking		



Keith	Clear sense of purpose at an event	Enjoyment / socialising	
Heather	Gaining business is on my mind but not the main focus		
Heather	Putting your skills on display and letting that do the selling itself		
Keith	Not too aggressive in trying to turn a contact into business		

### Long term relationship

Heather	Networking is not a one off thing		
Keith	Long term relationship	Task related shorter term	
Heather	Longer term relationship	Short term relationship	

### Trust

Keith	Trust the advice	Ignore it	
Martin	Build up trust over a period of time		
Heather	Building trust		
Martin	Natural inclination to trust people	Unless proof I can't trust them	

## Building rapport

Heather	Building rapport		
Heather	Building rapport – getting to know someone well		
Keith	Build a relationship		
Heather	Picking up little things that are pertinent to them		
Heather	Ask them things		
Heather	Finding out what their needs are		
Heather	Establish where they're at – tune into where they're coming from		
Heather	Put whole emphasis on other person		
Keith	Not really interested in the person at the moment as don't need their business		
Martin	Listening to them		
Martin	Openness		
Heather	Talking	Listening	

Discussing these themes with my research supervisors helped me to realise the significance of them and as a result I developed the themes into significant sections of my thesis.

In Chapter 2 I explained how networking helped with my literature search, especially through the Internet. I also used networking to help make sense of the research process. To start with I used networking in a very natural and unconscious way to help me to decide whether or not to embark on this PhD. I talked to people in my network about which universities they recommended, their experiences of the process, any surprises or



tips that would be useful to know about right from the start. In respect of this the key tip that came through most clearly was that it was very important to have an appropriate supervisor with whom I could identify. I can certainly endorse that advice.

When it came to the literature search I again used my network to establish which universities had the best specialist libraries on certain areas such as PCP, how to gain access to those collections, how they had done their literature search and whether there were any tips they could give me. I had set up my own recording system using Microsoft Excel and Access but I was soon shown a range of specialist bibliographical software packages that did the job even better. Being given a demonstration of how to use one (Endnote) by other students I found very helpful and saved me an enormous amount of time in learning how to do so.

I was surprised at not finding many publications on how to analyse the literature collected. There were many publications advising on catalogues and collections of literature, but few on how to check the quality and balance of a collection. Some of the most relevant items were Falkingham and Reeves (1997) and Hart (1998). I wondered whether I was missing something in my search and spoke to my colleague Steve at Oxford University who had been through the process recently. His sources too confirmed the lack of literature on analysing a literature search. This type of networking, especially with people whom I knew to be respected in their field, gave me confidence and support. It also meant that I was benefiting from views from a wide variety of sources. Incidentally, since I started my literature search in 1998 I have noticed that more books have been published on how to do a literature search such as Hart (2001).

In searching for specialist knowledge on PCP and courses on the subject I turned to the Internet based network group. For a sounding board on my PCP research data I found expert help in the PCP group based at Reading University. For help on reflection and reflexivity I discovered a colleague in my network who had taken a reflexive approach for her Masters and who gave me some good reading matter. Talking with her helped me to become familiar and comfortable with the words and concepts.

Uncovering suitable people to interview again benefited from networking. I had no need or desire to put out advertisements asking for suitable subjects. Rarely did I need to specifically initiate the request. As people started to hear that I was doing a PhD on

networking they started volunteering their contributions. In fact I could have suffered from overload and had to be firm, turning down some offers where the contributors would not have fitted my desired target group ie were not training consultants but other self employed people. Networking went on percolating into just about every aspect of my research including borrowing books, asking people to read through sections, gathering examples, exchanging news, being sent newspaper cuttings, being asked to write for publications, and being asked for my help by others who then wished to embark on a PhD.

I didn't have a formal way of doing this networking. I didn't follow a methodology on how to network to assist me in my PhD. It was spontaneous and natural in the same way that I would use networking for any other aspect of personal or work life.

At one networking meeting of trainers and training consultants, they invited me to do an impromptu session on an aspect of my research as the speaker was unable to be there. I took the opportunity to explore the range of constructs which they had on networking, but doing so in pairs and then as a group. I gave them a brief explanation of the first part of how to do a repertory grid so that they could enable each other to produce some ideas (constructs) on networking. They then transferred each construct onto a separate piece of paper. We then spread out all the pieces on the floor and, as a whole group, discussed the clusters and possible grouping of the constructs. Some very clear themes emerged of networking for business outcomes and financial issues, personal reasons for networking, issues to do with targeting who to network with, building rapport and connecting, time to give to it, and then nature of the experience. Getting other trainers' and consultants' time for activities such as this is very difficult but they found it an interesting and rewarding process and felt that they went away with having learned something new (one of the purposes of the evening meeting was for reasons of Continuous Professional Development as well as networking). Most of these issues recurred from other research methods that I used with the exception of time to give to it. When I looked back at the heading 'nature of the experience' it turned out to be on rapport building issues.

An alternative to spreading out pieces of paper is to mind map (Buzan & Buzan 1993) or create integrative diagrams (Strauss 1987) of the items as they emerge. Mind mapping has similar advantages to using cards or Post-Its<sup>®</sup> enabling jumping around with note making and not being restricted to pre-defined list headings. In fact developing what the list headings might be is often the very purpose. I found that diagrams and mind mapping are



physically easier to do when, for example, working in hotel rooms, where cleaners sometimes get over enthusiastic and vacuum up the work left on the floor. I first learned Tony Buzan's mind mapping through attending a course that included video taped sessions of Tony Buzan explaining his concepts first hand in the mid 1980's and have, since then, developed versions that work well for me. Books such as Lawlor and Handley (1996) and Rose and Nicholl (1997) have helped me to develop my ideas and I find the use of colour very helpful. In applying this to the analysis process in my research one way in which mind mapping helps is by taking a theme as it emerges, (for example comfort and discomfort), going through all my research, both the work that I have committed to paper in some form, and that which is just in my mind, and creating a summary mind map.

Mind mapping has been useful time and time again in gaining a shape of what is emerging, how my research examples fit in, what literature supports it, where the gaps might be, how I might sequence the items etc. As a one-page overview it serves me well without being restrictive. In fact it helps me to change my mind. On one occasion, for example, having done a mind map I decided to abandon the section altogether because I spotted that there was too much overlap with other sections and that what remained was lacking in substance.

Mind mapping and content analysis through clustering ideas on pieces of paper are two very practical and relatively active methods of understanding and making sense of my research. Something much less systematic but of enormous value has been having other people as sounding boards. My husband comes to the forefront of my mind in this respect. Our business is a partnership and my husband Steve fulfils a support role. He deals with the finance and administration, proof checking, driving, and anything else that needs doing, especially when I am away working. When I am developing client proposals, designs for training events, doing research and writing for publication, he is and has been for the last 20 years my sounding board. I am fortunate in that he has an inquiring mind, and understanding of the training and development field, as well as sound business knowledge and is well able to challenge me and question my thinking. We have both studied and used Gerard Egan's counselling model and find parts of it very beneficial to me thinking through my research (Egan 1986). The first part of his model is about allowing the person to 'tell the story', then about encouraging them to focus if relevant, and, when they are ready, to explore any new perspectives that may help. This is done through questioning, empathy, reflecting, listening rather than through telling the other

person what to do. They have to make sense of things and find the way forward for themselves under this school of thought.

We have consciously drawn on Steve's skills in this area when doing development work in our business and we naturally extended this to my PhD work as for both him and myself we saw no difference in the support that I would need. In fact it would be have been very strange and unnatural to cut him out of such an important part of my life. The way in which this has helped me to make sense of the research has happened at a number of levels. For example, after an evening networking meeting he is likely to collect me and drive me home. On the way he knows that talking about what has happened isn't just a luxury nor is it 'talking shop' instead of 'switching off', but we both know that it is an important part of reflecting on what I have noticed, how I feel and making sense of it. It also helps him to keep up to date as he is then able to remind me later about things that I might have commented on and so help me make comparisons. It helps me to make connections with varied strands of data.

Another way in which Steve's help has been beneficial is that I have someone, in a fully confidential position, with whom I can share my thoughts. He knows most, if not all of the people in my research. He knows their background and context. What's more, the consultants with whom I network mostly know him and his role and expect him to be familiar with my work. The way in which this has helped me to make sense of the data is mainly through his questioning, such as "haven't you come across this before last year when....?" or through a reflective statement such as "you seem to be going round in circles at the moment". I have also found his friendship and ability to keep me company invaluable. For example, I wanted to go to Reading University to learn to use the Personal Construct Psychology software for analysing repertory grids and construct analysis (Fransella & Bannister 1977; Smith 1986). I had attended a one day course at the Cranfield School of Management in December 1999 run by Dr Keith Goffin on Repertory Grid Technique and one of my follow up actions was to become fully conversant with what computer assisted analysis of grids had to offer. Bearing in mind his advice on analysis "Don't get carried away with intense computer analysis" and "It's up to you the way in which you do your analysis, there's no textbook method, you will have to make your own choices and explain them".



At the time I didn't really know anyone at the University of Reading well and it would have been a lonely day on my own. I'm not really sure that I would have drummed up sufficient motivation to go there by myself on the train. I also find that when learning to use new software (often with very inadequate instructions) two heads are better than one. However, Steve's willingness to sit with me and help me to learn how to use the software, to help input my raw data, and to listen to me going through and discussing the findings was again a great help. In talking to someone else I found it easier to come to my conclusions. I found that whilst the software was very good for some types of repertory grid analysis it wasn't suitable for my research as I wasn't carrying numerous grids for quantitative analysis, I was more interested in the content and range of constructs. But I had to find that out for myself.

Many others have acted as sounding boards for me each bringing a different perspective or type of support that has helped me to make sense of things. My research supervisors at the University of Hertfordshire have provided challenging questions, feedback, reflections, and they have shared their thoughts on things that might be puzzling them. For example, they drew me gradually in to seeing how I could develop the reflective and reflexive aspects of my research. Colleagues working on PhDs at other Universities have shared references or thoughts on aspects where I might be feeling 'stuck'. Sometimes just knowing that others also had difficulty at times in making sense of the data gave me the courage to continue to try to make sense of mine. I found it far more reassuring and compelling to hear about problems and ways forward from colleagues than just reading about them in the literature.

One most unexpected way in which I found myself developing my skills of analysis was through application in other aspects of my work. I found myself talking about methods with great conviction when delivering training courses that included the analysis and interpretation of data. I found myself applying the methods, albeit in a simple way, to data that I had always analysed using a particular procedure. Whilst doing these things my mind was flitting backwards and forwards to my research data and research process making parallels and connections and giving me the confidence to look at aspects of my research in new ways. In living the analysis process in other low risk settings it gave me more incubation time and helped me to 'step out of the box'. I could then come back fresh to my research.

Diary recordings had their advantages too in helping me to make sense of the data. Edwards and Talbot (1994 p 59) say “The reflective diary is therefore both a data source and a structure which supports reflection on practice”. Some of my diary recordings were factual in nature about what I saw, heard or felt. Others were about making connections, reflecting and noting themes that seemed to be emerging. Sometimes that happened during networking meetings with other consultants. The making sense process (analysis and interpretation) and data gathering were often inextricably entwined. One triggered the other. At one meeting with my research supervisor Dorothea Noble (October 1998), I noted one piece of guidance that she gave me which really helped.

“Don’t lose emerging outcomes – find some ways of capturing them”

Memos to myself and diary recordings helped me to do just that (Corti 1993; Strauss 1987). Doing a repertory grid on myself and reflecting on the results through a memo was another way of making sense of my research. For example, in a memo to myself I wrote

“7 June 98 grid on myself

I’m realising that this research is at many levels. I’m gathering insights from other training consultants on networking, I’ve my own observations when taking part in networking sessions, there is my own introspective work eg doing a grid on myself and realising more consciously what my own networking issues are. Then there’s how I’m feeling about my research and how I’m engaging with it, my beliefs on research ethics and techniques and how that’s shaping what I’m doing.”

In the early days I hand wrote most of these memos and diary recordings but I soon found it off putting as I find it difficult to read my hand writing. It also didn’t suit my mobile lifestyle and in a number of ways it hindered me making sense of my research data and research process. As a result I put virtually everything except mind maps and original documents onto the computer and that really worked for me. Wherever I was in the country working, if ideas occurred to me, I could look back at my notes and make the links and connections that I wanted. I found that if I left it until I came back home the moment had passed because I had forgotten the context and meaning of the idea or question.

Sometimes the most simple of methods was useful. For example, I intuitively had the feeling that trust was an important issue and that other training consultants saw it as such,



so I simply counted how many times trust was mentioned in the literature and how many times it occurred in my research data. In February 1999 I looked through 22 items of literature that were very relevant to networking for gaining business and trust was mentioned in 14 of these. The process of counting wasn't done to produce a quantitative result but more to check out the relative emphasis of an issue in the literature.

Making sense of the data and of the research process has probably been one of the biggest and most significant areas of learning for me. It is only when writing up this section and taking a 'helicopter view' of all that I have been through so far that I can see the journey that I have been through. I feel that I have discovered a substantial amount about the role of the researcher in the research process. In previous pieces of research I was very much 'in the research' but didn't know that I was. Previously I hadn't tried to be distant or 'objective' or deny my own views and experiences but I had no words or concepts to realise why I had taken an integrated and participatory role and how that helped. If anything I might have played down that aspect intentionally as 'not being quite conventional or correct'. I doubt that I would have become aware of this contribution of reflection and reflexivity, of participation and the way in which I take on different roles at different times without this PhD.

**Appendix 4 Teresa's repertory grid information 7<sup>th</sup> June 1998.**

I took 7 different networking events / interactions where I was conscious of some potential for networking to gain business (some more obviously so than others).

Following the repertory grid method described in Chapter 3 I elicited some constructs around how I saw networking for gaining business. These constructs are listed in pairs (emergent pole on the left).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Lot of people around								One/few people
Superficial chat								In depth
Free								Paid for it myself
Prime time								Out of core hours
Little preparation								Lots of prep
Low risk (for me)								High risk
No spotlight (on me)								Spotlight on me
Learnt a lot else								Learned little else
Straight								'Politics' to handle
Little effort								Lot of (my) effort into the event
Little display								Displayed my skills to others



I then scored the grid in relation to how productive or valuable in terms of gaining business I perceived each to be, and then scored up the rest of the constructs. For any event, if the construct on the left best described it then it scored 5, if the right then 1.

5	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1
Lot of people around	4	5	3	4	5	1	4	One/few people
Superficial chat	5	2	1	5	5	1	5	In depth
Free	4	1	5	5	1	2	2	Paid for it myself
Prime time	5	1	1	1	5	1	4	Out of core hours
Little preparation	4	5	3	2	5	1	1	Lots of prep
Low risk (for me)	5	5	3	1	5	5	5	High risk
No spotlight (on me)	3	5	2	1	5	2	5	Spotlight on me
Learnt a lot else	1	5	3	1	4	3	4	Learned little else
Straight	2	5	1	5	5	5	5	'Politics' to handle
Little effort	3	5	2	1	5	3	5	Lot of (my) effort into the event
Little display	4	4	1	1	5	3	5	Displayed my skills to others
Productive in terms of gaining business	1	3	5	4	1	1	1	No / little value as yet in terms of business

I then checked all the correlations, taking reversal of scores into account as the choice of 5 for the left and 1 for the right had been arbitrary, and put the scores down the far left and right hand columns.

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
14	Lot of people around								One/few people	12
18	Superficial chat								In depth	8
8	Free								Paid for it myself	20
20	Prime time								Out of core hours	8
14	Little preparation								Lots of prep	14
21	Low risk (for me)								High risk	3
15	No spotlight (on me)								Spotlight on me	9
15	Learnt a lot else								Learned little else	13
18	Straight								'Politics' to handle	6
20	Little effort								Lot of (my) effort into the event	8
22	Little display								Displayed my skills to others	5

The very fact that I have produced the constructs make them all significant. However, those with the low scores are particularly so.

Free
Out of core hours
High risk
'Politics' to handle
Lot of (my) effort into the event
Displayed my skills to others

This was a snapshot of what correlated for me with a networking event that was valuable in terms of gaining business



## **Appendix 5 Teresa's repertory grid information 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2000**

Following the same process as in Appendix 4, the outcome of my second repertory grid on myself is given below. These are the factors that correlate with effective networking for gaining business for me.

<b>Expected business possibilities</b>
<b>I see the potential for leads</b>
<b>Harnesses new technology (eg Internet)</b>
<b>Where I can influence the context and conversation (ie not directed or chaired by another)</b>

## **Appendix 6 Rob's repertory grid information**

Rob conducted a repertory grid on himself following the methodology indicated in Stewart, Stewart and Fonda (1981). This involved selecting 9 different networking occurrences representing a wide range of networking events. When telling me about the method he used, Rob explained that the elements are all quite different in terms of the environment within which they took place, some over the phone, some where he knew people well, some where he knew no-one or very few people. The elements were given a number at random from one to nine. Each event was written in short hand on a piece of small card. Using the repertory grid triadic method he took three of the cards and asked himself "what did two have in common which made them different from the third in terms of networking to gain business?" His first response for example, was that he "had a clear idea of what I do", whereas the third was different in that he "was vaguely seeking work". He wrote the response to the pair in the left-hand column and the response to the single card that is the opposite or contrast in the right-hand column. This produced a pair of descriptions called constructs.

After completing the grid Rob said "Have completed the grid.... Don't know what I learnt from it but would be very interested to see how the grid turns out on RepGrid2 – possibly you could send me a print out."

Rob's grid raised a number of interesting issues. The first was that up to now I have always analysed grids manually. Rob referred to RepGrid2 which is a software package for analysing repertory grids. I had never before had access to a computerised package, but now, through the PCP Group at the University of Reading, I had access to RepGrid2 and took the opportunity to learn how to use it. Dr Pam Denicolo at the Faculty of Education and Community Studies at the University kindly helped me in getting started with the package and I found that it enabled me to speedily highlight correlations in the data. I found that it was helpful that I had previously done this process manually as I felt that I really understood what the program was doing. Otherwise there might have been the danger that I had some computer-produced results but no idea how they had been produced nor on what basis or assumptions.

Given below is the grid that Rob sent me. The letters a, b, c etc across the top refer to the nine different networking situations. The code c1 to c12 down the left hand side are



reference labels for each set of descriptive words or constructs eg c1 is the label for 'had a clear ideas of what I do ... vaguely seeking work. In the top header row the number 1 is the header for the left-hand descriptions (the description of the pair) and 5 is the header for the right-hand descriptions (the opposite or contrasting description of the third card).

	1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	5
c1	had a clear idea of what I do	1	5	1	2	4	5	3	3	3	vaguely seeking work
c2	using current contacts	3	5	2	1	1	5	3	2	4	cold calling
c3	feeling isolated	2	4	5	5	4	4	1	3	5	feeling welcome
c4	a leap into the unknown	1	1	4	5	5	1	2	3	1	familiar environment
c5	able to peddle my wares	1	4	1	4	1	2	5	5	4	almost no opportunity to peddle my wares
c6	really felt I was selling myself	2	2	1	3	3	3	5	4	3	didn't sell myself very well
c7	in competition with others	1	2	5	5	5	5	1	2	2	clear pitch
c8	feeling very confident	3	2	1	1	3	2	5	4	3	feeling very self conscious
c9	in control	4	4	1	1	2	2	5	5	3	not being in the ascendancy
c10	there to sell	1	4	2	5	2	1	2	4	3	not there to sell - opportunistic
c11	obtained useful leads	2	4	1	1	3	2	5	4	2	seemed like a waste of time
c12	approach well received	4	4	1	1	1	1	5	5	4	nobody really interested

The numbers in the centre of the grid denote to what extent each situation Rob feels is best described by each set of constructs. If the left-hand description best matches he gives it a 1. If the right hand description best matches he gives it a 5. For example, situation 'a' is best described by 'in competition with others' as he has marked it with a 1. Situation 'c' is best described by 'clear pitch' as he has marked it with a 5.

	1	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	5
c7	in competition with others	1	2	5	5	5	5	1	2	2	clear pitch

All the data was entered into the software package RepGrid2 and the following correlations were highlighted.

Constructs C8 and C9 had the highest correlation. You can from looking at the previous table by eye that the scoring pattern for the two are practically identical. I asked Rob about the correlation. He said that when he felt in control he felt very confident.

c8	feeling very confident	3	2	1	1	3	2	5	4	3	feeling very self conscious
c9	in control	4	4	1	1	2	2	5	5	3	not being in the ascendancy

Another very high correlation was C7 and C8. Rob said that when he was aware of being in competition with others his confidence went down substantially and he felt more uncomfortable and self-conscious.

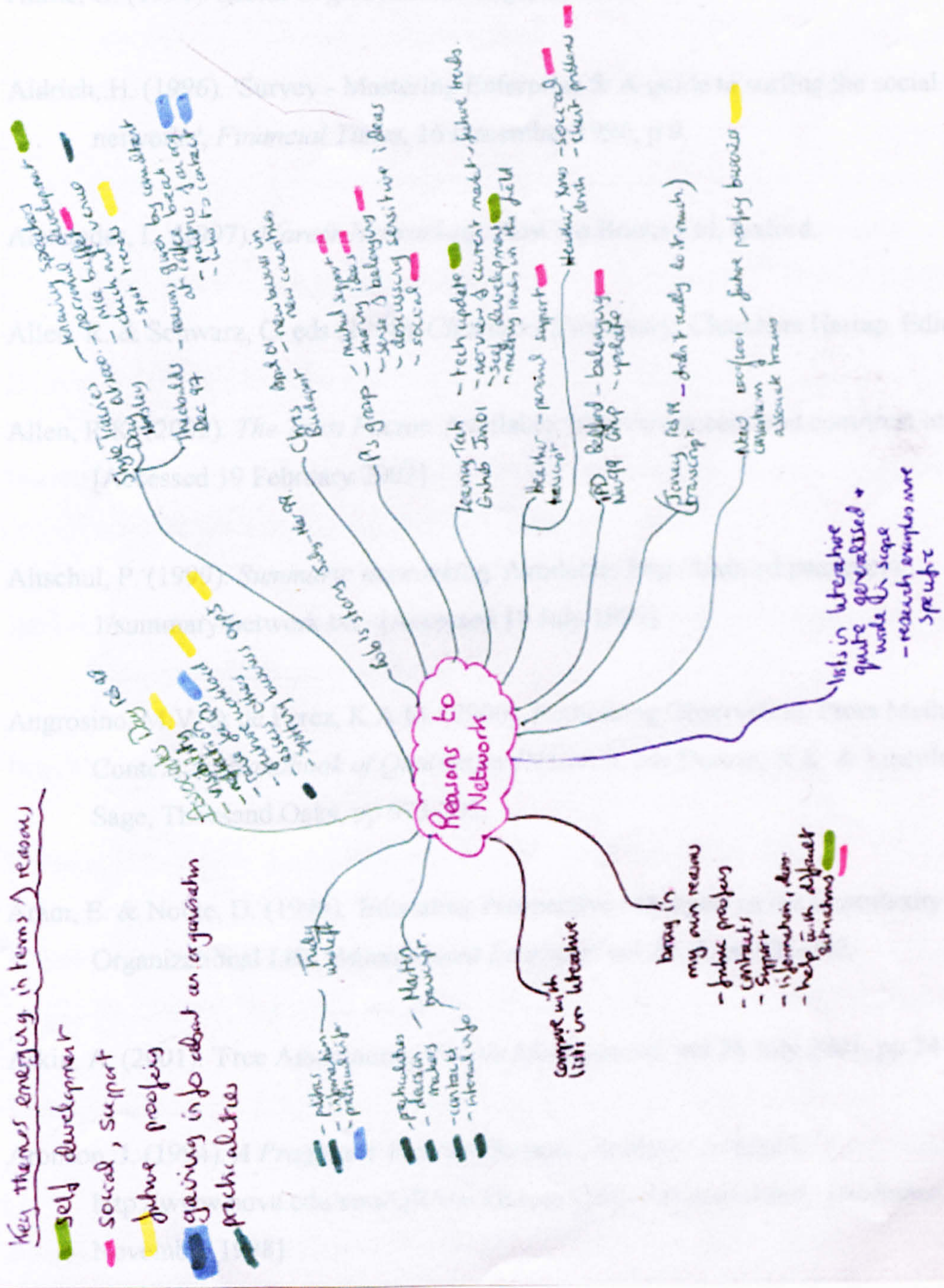
c7	in competition with others	1	2	5	5	5	5	1	2	2	clear pitch
c8	feeling very confident	3	2	1	1	3	2	5	4	3	feeling very self conscious

The issue about competition also reappears in when comparing constructs C7 and C12. His scores and comments indicate that when in competition he feels his approach is less well received. When looking at the data by eye it may not be apparent that there is a high correlation on this set of data. What you have to take into account is that the original scoring system with the 1 being for the left hand description and the 5 for the right was an arbitrary decision. We need also to check for the scoring being in reverse. RepGrid2 does this automatically making the analysis process easier.

c7	in competition with others	1	2	5	5	5	5	1	2	2	clear pitch
c12	approach well received	4	4	1	1	1	1	5	5	4	nobody really interested



# Appendix 7 Mind map Example





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