Key Attributes of Successful Support Networks

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this report was to gain a better understanding of the value that support networks provide to participants in the networks and to organisations that set up these networks. Used correctly, this understanding could enhance the success rate of organizations. The researcher's objectives were to answer 4 research questions in order to determine the key attributes that render support networks effective.

The research was conducted in 2 parts. (1) Seven subject matter experts on support networks were selected from independent network service providers and from an organization that promotes support networks to its employees. (2) A structured questionnaire was distributed to selected support networks comprising of approximately 185 participants altogether. One hundred and sixty two participants in the support networks selected, responded by completing the questionnaire. Various techniques were used to collect and analyse the data.

The study found that there are key attributes that are necessary for a support network to achieve its purpose. It further found that the key attributes of a traditional family support network can exist in a corporate support network by allowing people to come together to discuss issues of common interest and challenges facing them as members of organisations.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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1. Definition of the Problem

1.1 Introduction

Organisations are continually being challenged by the rate of change to stay ahead of competitors, protect and nurture their core competencies and redefine themselves in order to ensure their relevance into the future (Beer and Nohria, 2000).

Philp (2008) highlights the work by Barrow who comments that in positioning themselves for the challenges of the future world of work, organisations find themselves looking to the very make-up of their organisation, their people, to assist them enhance their competitiveness. (Philp, 2008). By investing in their people, organisations have come to realise the value of their social capital and constantly attempt to harness this potential by engaging and providing them with mentorship programmes, support structures and upskilling programmes. (Philp, 2008)

The only sure way for companies to win and retain skilled staff is to "have them fall in love with you" (Philp, 2008, p3). Philp refers in his article to Simon Barrow's message to organisations which is to create an employer brand that appeals to the employees in the same way that consumer brands are trusted, and even loved by consumers. Simon Barrow, founder of the world's first employer brand consultancy, People in Business, says South African companies can fend off foreign bidders simply by becoming employees' heroes, with strategies as simple as creating a forum for employees to be heard. Barrow comments that "often, emotional or pride factors are an employee's bottom line, not money. So earn your people's respect by caring for them, and make them proud to work for you "(Philp, 2008, p.3)

This message is echoed by Drucker (2002) who emphasises that two extraordinary changes have crept up on the business world without most of us paying attention to them. First, a staggering number of people who work for organisations are no longer traditional employees of the organisation. Second, a growing number of businesses have outsourced employee relations. The attenuation of the relationship between people and the organisation they work for represents a grave danger to business. If organisations don't invest in their employees, they could jeopardise their competitive advantage. (Drucker, 2002)

Whether they are traditional employees or contract workers, today's knowledge workers are just not labour- they are capital. What differentiates outstanding companies is the productivity of their capital. (Drucker, 2002). The happier the employee, the more productive the employee, hence the more successful the organisation becomes (Drucker, 2002). Support networks therefore assist employers to constructively engage their employees aligning both parties to serving the best interests of the organisation and its people.

To compete in the new world economy, South African organisations need to access and develop talent from a range of backgrounds and experiences. In networks, one will find people of different disciplines, cultures, ages, cognitive abilities, race and gender. These elements that make up diverse teams also introduce a team dynamic that makes diversity management essential. While there are legal and ethical motivators for diversity, the strongest rationale is that developing and promoting a diverse workforce simply makes good business sense (Cox, 1993). Therefore organisations should prepare their people to embrace one another's diversity and this can be done by encouraging dialogue in support networks.

1.2 Interpersonal Communications

Within an organization, communication flows from individual to individual in face-to-face group settings. Such flows are termed interpersonal communications and can vary from direct orders to casual expressions. Interpersonal behaviour could not exist without interpersonal communication. Because of its very nature, interpersonal communication sometimes is difficult to measure (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1990).

1.3 Leading Effective Performance

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) state that leading involves the manager in close, day-to-day contact with individuals and groups. Thus, leading is uniquely personal and interpersonal. Even though planning and organizing provide guidelines and directives in the form of plans, job descriptions, organization charts, and policies, it is people who do the work. Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) further state that people frequently are unpredictable and have unique needs, aspirations, personalities, and attitudes. Thus, they each perceive the workplace and their jobs differently. Managers must take into account these unique perceptions and behaviours and somehow direct them toward common purposes (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1990).

Leading places the manager squarely in the arena of individual and group behaviour. To function in this arena, the manager must have knowledge of individual differences and motivation, group behaviour, power, and politics. In short, being a leader requires knowledge of ways to influence individuals and groups to accept and pursue organizational objectives, often at the expense of personal objectives (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1990).

Leading involves the day-to-day interactions between managers and their subordinates. In these interactions the full panorama of human behaviour is evident: individual work, play, communicate, compete, accept and reject others, join groups, leave groups, receive rewards, and cope with stress. Of all the

management functions, leading to the one most humanly oriented (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1990).

1.4   Improving Communication in Organizations

Managers striving to become better communicators have two separate tasks that they must accomplish. First, they must improve their messages – the information they wish to transmit.   Second, they must seek to improve their own understanding of what other people are trying to communicate to them. They must strive not only to be understood but also to understand (Ivancevich et al, 1990).

1.5   What are Support Networks?

According to Kildufff and Tsai (2003), support networks are a grouping of people that come together for a specific purpose. These networks can be formal (for example set up by an organisation to mentor a group of people) or informal (for example a family network that supports the members of the family in some way)

The Hawthorne studies (Ivancevich and Matteson, 2002) are a clear demonstration of what a support network is. This study by Elton Mayo proved that people are relational beings and have a need to belong to something that gives them a sense of purpose and validates them as human beings. Therefore when you pay attention to people, it impacts them positively thereby increasing their productivity levels (Ivancevich and Matteson, 2002).

Various researchers have identified and analysed the behaviour of "organizational networks", which are also collectives and groupings of employees which form in response to certain organizational characteristics, and which can also strongly influence the behaviour and performance of an enterprise (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993).

Networks exist not only as sets of cognitions inside the heads of individuals in organisations, but also as structures of constraint and opportunity negotiated and reinforced between interacting individuals (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

People tend to rely on others in their networks for help in making major decisions (Kilduff, 1990). Further employees not only tend to interact with group members who are similar on distinctive attributes such as ethnicity and gender (Ibarra, 1992), but the lower the relative proportion of such group members in the organisation, the higher the likelihood of within-group identification and friendship (Mehra et al., 1998)

1.7   Purpose and Motivation for the Research

This study argues that support networks improves that relations between employees and employers by providing employees with a forum whereby they can address issues they may have that impacts them negatively. The purpose of this research is therefore to determine the key attributes of a successful support network and to ascertain whether organisations are achieving the purpose of the networks set up to support their employees. This support is necessary to assist employees to address problems or specific needs they may have. By addressing these concerns, employees will feel cared for and can then focus on achieving their performance objectives, which in turn assists the organisation to achieve its strategic objectives, talent management and high employee satisfaction levels.

1.8   The Research Problem

This research aims at identifying the key attributes of successful support networks in organisations and further argues that the key attributes of a familial support network that renders it successful, can exist in organisational support

networks, thereby enabling the network participants to actively engage in the workplace without fear of reprisal.

If management theory is to provide meaningful guidance to organisations operating in this context, it needs to be developed on the back of research that can generate alternative transformative ways of seeing, understanding and engaging in the world. Research into the factors that determine successful supportive networks provide this well needed guidance (Limerick, Cunnington, and Crowther, 1998).

2.1 Background

Since the beginning of time, society has been characterized by groupings of people coming together for a specific reason and thereby forming networks that give them a distinct differentiating characteristic (De Soto, 1960).

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) notes that the network concept is one of the defining paradigms of the modern era. In fields as different as physics, biology, anthropology, sociology, etc, network ideas have been repeatedly invoked over the last 100 years. The network approach allows researchers to capture the interactions of any individual unit within the larger field of activity to which the unit belongs (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

The multiple origins of network approaches for the social sciences have greatly contributed to the current body of knowledge. Network ideas flowed into the social sciences from three main sources. First German researchers (such as Kurt Lewin, Fritz Heider and Jacob Moreno) influenced by developments in field theory in physics, transferred the network idea to the examination of social interaction. Maths and anthropology field work were the other two major contributors to network analysis (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

Roethlesberger and Dickson (1939) showed how and explained why some workers develop group norms which lead to extraordinary output in industrial settings. Kerr and Siegel (1954) showed how unionized workers in isolated industrial settings developed group norms which resulted in strikes and other forms of refusal to work, and Dalton (1959) analysed the development of informal groups among professional and managerial workers in business organizations and showed how such informal groups can contribute to the achievement of business goals and objectives. The fundamental message of this and related research is that networking approaches in the workplace reflect the actual

behaviour of real world organizations, and can strongly influence the performance of business organizations. (Dalton, 1959).

Along these lines but more recently, various researchers have identified and analysed the behaviour of "organizational networks", which are also collectives and groupings of employees which form in response to certain organizational characteristics, and which can also strongly influence the behaviour and performance of an enterprise (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993).

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) advises that this kind of research and analysis of informal groups, collectives, organizations and networks in business enterprises has largely been ignored in formal legislative attempts to bring about non-discriminatory employment practices.

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) noted that modern network analysis offers a potentially powerful tool for identifying contemporary communication, information exchange, and decision-making processes as they actually occur in business enterprises. To the extent that such human and organizational behaviour departs from the behaviour specified in formal organizational charts, diagrams and processes, macro-level legislation aimed at achieving the "fair" representation of women, racial minorities, the disabled and other protected groups as well as micro-level initiatives at diversity management, organizational restructuring and team-based work may be misdirected – especially if such initiatives are intended to enhance the outcomes or performance of business enterprises(Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

In this study, the researcher argues that the correct use of organisational support networks presents an opportunity to business leaders to focus on real world organisational behaviour, and to manage workforce diversity in order to deliver better organisational performance.

Figure 2: A flow model of organisational networks in the context of anti-discrimination legislation and organisational outcomes.

Environmental Forces	Organisational Processes	Organisational Outcomes

Anti-discrimination ⇨ Network analysis and identification ⇨ Performance
legislation   Measures
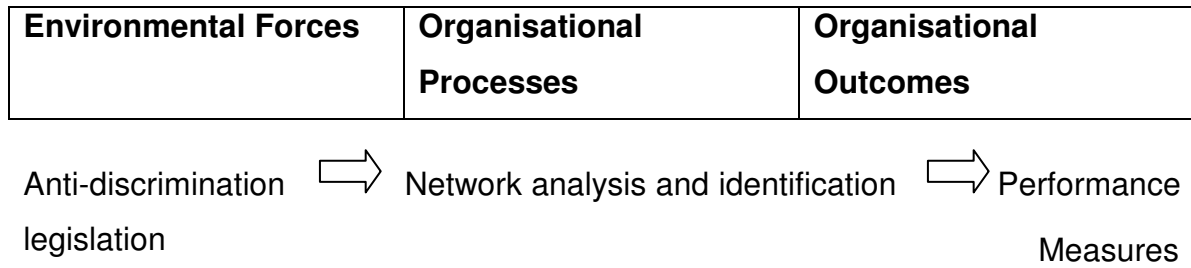
Source: Kilduff and Tsai (2003)

Figure 2 indicates that there is a link between organisations complying with regulatory obligations in promoting networks and the organisation's performance measures. In response to regulatory requirements, an organisation inculcates networking in the organisation, which in return increases its potential to achieve performance imperatives.

2.2 What are Networks?

Networks are relationships "typified by reciprocal patterns of communication and exchange" (Powell, Koput and Smith-Doerr, 1996, p.295). A seamless web of differential reciprocity through face-to-face and frequent interactions holds these relationships in place. Beneath the formal authority structures lies an intricate pattern of personal relationships. Messages and judgements course silently and unseen, connecting people and divisions within an organization (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996). These connections are informal and usually bypass the formal reporting procedures. This behaviour pattern can have widely varying results, for example, tasks may be accomplished efficiently and effectively, or an organization's careful plans may be sabotaged by fomenting opposition to change. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996)

In a recent study conducted on the role of social networks (Strever, 2006), the researcher quotes Flap's definition of a network as "a set of elements connected by relations" that can be differentiated by the number of elements in the set, the number of relations between the elements in the set and the patterns that the elements show" (Flap, 1998, p.2)

Mackay (1990) describes a network as an organized collection of personal contacts, as well as their own networks. Mackay (1990) believes that networking is being able to quickly find whom you need to get what you need, in any given situation and helping others do the same.

2.3 What is a Social Network?

A social network is viewed as a group of individuals who are members of diverse systems of enduring groups and categories, where there are as many networks as there are actors in the social system (Moore, 1998). Strever (2006) refers to Brown, Keast, Mandell and Woolcock (2004) who differentiate networks from network structures by stating that networks are rather loose linkages between people whereas people in network structures need to work closely in order to achieve certain goals.

2.3.1 Social Network Theory

Social Network theory implies that the integration of underrepresented group members into the organisation is needed and would be the focus of diversity efforts. This integration can be accomplished through mentoring and networking programs (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly, 2006). This theory is explored further in paragraphs 2.13 and 2.16 below.

2.4   Types of Networks

Expressive and Instrumental Networks

The network literature distinguishes between expressive networks, which involve friendship, mentorship, and social support (Thomas 1990), and instrumental networks which typically refer to the ability of someone to access material or job-related resources (Kanter, 1977). The distinction between instrumental and expressive networks is a theoretical one, utilized more for differentiating theoretical arguments than the practical exigencies of the workplace in which these qualities are typically merged. Both instrumental and expressive characteristics require the establishment of trust to catalyse action in networks (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996).

2.5 Characteristics of Social Networks

There are various characteristics that define social networks. Below is a discussion of these characteristics.

2.5.1. Degree of Connectedness

Degree of connectedness refers to the extent to which the actors (people in a network) are able to connect to each other through the network. If there is no path from one actor to another, then the two actors are disconnected. (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

Figure 3 (a) below illustrates a disconnected network where none of the nodes or actors have any relationship with the other.

FIGURE 3 (a)

Fully disconnected network
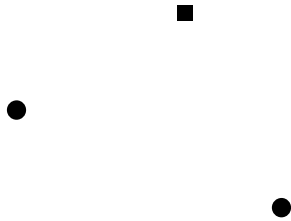
Figure 3 (a). Disconnected Graphs, Kilduff and Tsai, (2003), p, 39

Figure 3 (b)

(b) Fully Connected
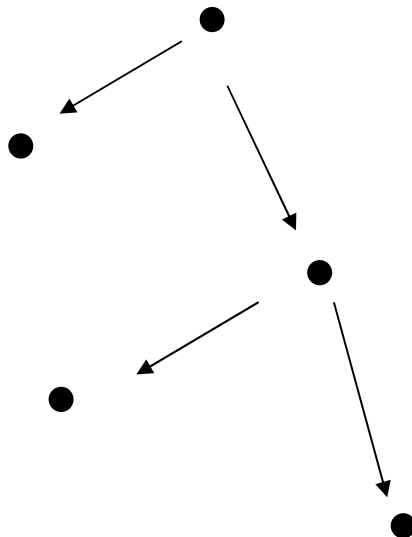
Figure 3. Disconnected and Connected Graphs, Kilduff and Tsai, (2003), p, 39

Figure 3 shows a social system can exhibit differing degrees of connectedness. (b) illustrates a system in which all actors can reach all other actors, whereas (a) illustrates a system in which no actor can reach any other actor. Disconnectedness indicates division in social systems. A severely disconnected communication network may impair the organisation's ability to engage its

members in cons... Similarly, increasing connectedness in an organisational system may signal increased resource-sharing and collaboration (Powell *et al*, 1996)

2.5.2 Graph Hierarchy

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) explain that graph hierarchy refers to the extent to which the informal organisation is hierarchical, with relations of authority proceeding in a single direction from those with more status to those with less. They maintain that the greater the hierarchy, the more the informal network resembles an organisational chart of a status conscious mechanistic organisation. Figure 3.b is fully hierarchical, with influence flowing from the top down. Research has shown that people expect influence relations to be hierarchical, and have difficulty learning social networks in which influence relations violate the kind of one-way direction of influence illustrated in Figure 3.b (De Soto,1960)

2.5.3. Graph Efficiency

Graph efficiency measures the degree to which the number of links in the network approaches the minimum necessary to prevent the network fragmenting into two separate parts. To the extent that efficiency is violated, the network has redundant links that "take time and resources to maintain" (Krackhardt, 99, 1994). Krackhardt speculates that there may be curvilinear relationship between graph efficiency and organisational effectiveness, with effectiveness first rising with increasing efficiency and then falling as the network becomes increasingly bare bones.

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) explain that Figure 3.b is perfectly efficient in the sense that the number of links between the actors is precisely one fewer than the number of actors and there are no redundant links. If one link is removed for any reason (one individual stops giving advice to another), then the organisational network becomes disconnected (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

2.5.4 Homophily

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) quote Degenne and Forse (1994, p.32) who commented that "birds of a feather flock together". McPherson, Lovin-Smith and Cook (2001, p.415) explain the principle of homophily as "similarity breeds connection" and that homophily is the contact between similar people occurring at a higher rate than among dissimilar people.

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) refer to Festinger (1954) who concurred with their view, adding that similar others are helpful in evaluating one's ideas and abilities, especially when important consequences are at stake.

McPherson *et al (*2001) state that the principle of homophily determines the structures of networks of all types including marriage, friendship, work, advice, support, information transfer, and exchange. They go on to explain that personal networks are homogenous regarding sociodemographic, behavioural and interpersonal characteristics and they believe that this limits peoples' social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive.

McPherson et al (2001) explain that homophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divide in our personal environment followed by age, religion, education, occupation and gender. Ties between dissimilar individuals dissolve at a higher rate than that between similar individuals (McPherson et al, 2001). This is an interesting observation that could be researched in broadening the scope of the current research.

2.6 What is a Support Network?

Support networks can exist in formal and informal forms (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003)

2.6.1 The family support network

This is the traditional informal network that has its basis in providing moral, emotional, financial and spiritual support to its members. This network has a basis upon which the members come together with a sense of solidarity, common identity and purpose. (Howell, 1998).

Howell (1998) refers to these networks as kin relationships that are created by birth and terminated by death and/or divorce and adds that kinship ties can also be disconnected through motives of mutual dislike or indifference.

Strever (2006) in his research on networks refers to Allen (2000) who highlighted in his work that families were consistently the most influential source of material social support apart from emotional support.

2.6.2 The Organisational Support Network

The organisational support network is a network formed by a group of people who have relations with one another in order to achieve a common purpose (Cox, 1993).

Krackhardt & Hanson (1993) describe three types of relationship networks.

- Advice networks consist of people whom others depend on to solve problems.

- The trust network consists of individuals that can share politically sensitive information and who can rely on each other in a crisis situation.

- The communication network consists of individuals that talk about work related matters on a regular basis.

Krackhardt & Hanson (1993) states further that network types can be differentiated by the number of elements in the set, the number of relations between the elements in the set and the patterns that the elements show. In other

words what is the need for the network, how many people feature and what specific characteristics emerge.

A support network therefore is a web of relationships one has with a group of people. These relationships could be social or professional in nature, i.e. formal (for example, set up by organisations as a developmental initiative) or informal (for example a familial social group). (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003, p.1)

Support networking refers to activities by individuals attempting to develop and maintain relationships with those with, or perceived to have, the potential to assist them in their work or career (Singh, Vinnicombe and Kumra, 2006). Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve and Tsai (2004, p.795) define networking as "a set of nodes and the set of ties representing some relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes", and suggest that internal network ties, especially those between leaders, have a positive and significant impact on unit and organisational performance outcomes.

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) comment that the network of relationships within which we are embedded may have important consequences for the success or failure of our projects. They state that evidence suggests that the type of network we form around ourselves affect everything from our health, to our career success, to our very identities. They even go on to highlight a study that revealed that maintaining a diverse network "reduced susceptibility to the common cold." (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003, p2). Maintaining network ties to different groups of people in organizations has been associated with higher performance ratings (Mehra, A., Kilduff, M. and Brass., 2001) and faster promotions (Burt, 1992)

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) advise that the development of networks for diverse group members is an important dimension of organisational development initiatives designed to support and manage diversity. The widespread existence of a "desire for sameness" (Kanter, 1977, p.7) suggests that majority groups may display a range of defensive behaviours which can obstruct the participation or performance of those in the minority. This also suggests that minority/diverse

groups will be less likely themselves to engage in concerted efforts to challenge existing stereotypes at work. If those to whom definitions of diversity apply most strongly, are not inspired by people they perceive to be similar to themselves, it appears that it will be less likely that they will feel psychologically or practically equipped to achieve certain goals, to occupy certain positions, or to play certain roles at work (Morrison, White and van Velsor, 1992).

2.7 Previous Research
a) The importance of networking

Successful networking can positively influence career outcomes such as increased job opportunities, job performance, income, promotions and career satisfaction, providing access to information, gaining visibility, career advice, social support, business leads, resources, collaboration, strategy making, and professional support. (Green, 1982). Luthans, Hodgetts, and Rosenkrantz (1998) found that a manager's ability to network was the strongest predictor of managerial success, ahead of their ability to undertake traditional management activities, routine communication and human resource management.

Michael and Yukl (1993) examined the networking behaviour of 247 managers, finding that both internal and external networking were related to managers' rate of advancement in their organisation, confirming the findings of the Luthans *et al* (1998) study.

Hence networking is an important part of managerial behaviour and career success (Singh *et al*, 2006). Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) noted that different types of networks have evolved and that some are professional and occupational, such as those for women in engineering or finance. More recently, internal corporate networks have emerged, sometimes started as informal gatherings of women, but developing into more formal networks supported by the employer. (Singh *et al* , 2006)

b) Gender and networking behaviour

The research literature on individual networking and personal network configurations emphasises the gendered nature of networking and networks in the corporate world (Singh *et al*, 2006). In the USA, Ibarra (1992) found gender differences in the networks of managers and the ways in which they were used. Men's networks were characterised by more high status individuals, and by more male members than those of women with similar levels of education and experience. Singh et al (2006) noted that women tended to use their networks for social support, whilst men were more instrumentally active to promote their careers. They further comment that recently women may have become more aware of the importance of networking to their careers and single/ unattached women appear now to engage in these behaviors to a similar extent as males. The implication is that women with family responsibilities may remain at a serious disadvantage, should out-of-hours socialising result in important work-related outcomes (e.g. receiving critical information or important job assignments) (Forret and Dougherty, 2001).

Pemberton, Stevens and Travers (1996) surveyed 328 European Women's Management Development network members who reported joining networks to help develop their personal skills, meet others who could help their careers, and make social contacts, rating psychosocial benefits above career support. The paradox is that although research suggests that women may place greater importance on the socializing aspects of networking, they are often excluded from social events and workplace interactions in which men engage (McCarthy, 2004). Travers, Stevens and Pemberton (1997) found that UK women sought and reportedly gained more career support from colleagues and senior managers within their networks than did their counterparts in Europe and the USA. UK women also seemed more interested in the self-development activities, and were noticeably different in the greater emphasis placed on the use of networks as an arena for developing self-confidence and networking skills. They preferred to engage in networks outside their organization. At that time, there were few

corporate women's networks for UK women and it appears that their networks were seen by members as a place to learn rather that as a place to do business. More recently, research by Linehan (2001) into European women and their networks reported that male managers spent more time networking after work hours, which was difficult for women with family responsibilities. Although keen to take part in networks with women, Linehan's interviewees believed that there were higher benefits from networking in the established male-dominated networks, with closer access to power and resources.

(c) Women in formal networks

Raggins, Townsend, and Mattis (1998) comment that as lack of access to organisational networks is increasingly seen as a barrier for women to reach the top, many companies are starting to support corporate networks for women. Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) define networking as the banding together of like-minded people for the purposes of contact, friendship and support. They describe such activities as women's attempts to create for themselves the support generated for men by their informal same-sex grouping. However there is little research about the nature of corporate women's networks, or the motivation of the women involved in organising or using them. (Singh et al., 2006) A key feature of women's corporate networks is that they are usually managed by and for women volunteers (Singh et al., 2006)

(d)   Formal Corporate networks for women

Catalyst (1999), a US-based research and campaigning organisation conducted a study of women's corporate networks in the USA, finding that women's networks were formed to address three main problem areas:

(1) organizational environments were often more challenging for women than men;

(2) company social structures were often designed in such a way that they excluded and isolated women; and

(3) established career paths sometimes excluded women, who did not have the benefit of female role models.

By networking with each other, women could share career development experiences and strategies, and learn from one another. This is the only previous study identified which investigated corporate networks for women. Further research is needed to investigate the phenomenon now that corporate networks are emerging as a popular tool for change adopted by large companies across the world. McCarthy (2004) examined the history of women's networks and undertook a practitioner study in UK public sector organizations, but Singh *et al* (2006) found no academic research that investigated women's corporate networking behaviour.

(e) Motivation for women's participation in formal networks

As women and their employers set up corporate networks, the question arises as to their motivation. The Catalyst study above identified the rationales for the introduction of networks, but did not consider theoretical motives for such an investment. Following Singh's *et al* (2006) report on best practice for companies and for women interested in starting or running women's corporate networks (Vinnicombe) et al (2003), Singh *et al* (2006) undertook further analysis of their data for evidence of the women's individual motivations for such behaviour. From the literature on volunteering and altruism, Singh *et al* (2006) identified that the construct of OCB (organisational citizenship behaviour) might provide useful theoretical insights into this phenomenon.

OCB is defined as "contributions to the maintenance and enhancement of the social and psychological context that supports task performance". (Organ,1997, p.99). OCB components fall into 7 types according to a review of OCB-related studies (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine and Bachrach, 2000):

- Helping behaviour involves voluntarily helping others, with altruism as an antecedent.
- Sportsmanship means maintaining positive attitudes and being willing to sacrifice own interests for the organisation.
- Organisational loyalty means promoting a positive image to outsiders and maintaining loyalty.
- Organisational compliance implies obeying company rules and procedures, being a good employee and steward.
- Individual initiative relates to acting and encouraging others to improve work outcomes.
- Civic virtue means taking part in the political membership of the organisation, engaging in policy issues and monitoring on behalf of the community.
  - Self-development means the voluntary activities undertaken to improve oneself in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities to expand the contribution to the organisation.

According to Brief and Motowidlo (1986), the acts of helping, sharing, giving, cooperating and volunteering are also part of the overlapping construct of prosocial organisational behaviour directed by an organisational member towards the welfare of an individual, group or organisation, in addition to carrying out the normal role duties. Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely for the benefit of others or for a cause, and "is part of a cluster of helping behaviours entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends", according to Wilson (2000, p. 215)

Strever (2006) refers to the work of Mackay (1990) where he highlights other benefits of networking :

- A network replaces the weakness of the individual with the strength of the group
- The network allows one to get feedback on business proposals, presentations and important business related issues.

- Other people's networks can assist a person to expand their network
- Networks are a source of new experience and knowledge
- Networks can help you help others
- A network can expand your financial reach indefinitely.

The benefits and value of networks are explored further in the research interviews and surveys referred to in Chapters 5 and 6 of the study.

2.8 Social Capital

Kilduff and Tsai (2003) opine that social capital is the potential resource inherent in an individual's set of social ties. In one of the first uses of the term in the network literature, social capital was described as "personal investments" that could be used for economic advantage by the activation of "particular links in a social network" (Mitchell, 1974, p.286). Kilduff and Tsai go on to state that used in this sense of a personal investment, social capital can be traded for other types of capital such as money or cultural capital. To use social capital, it is necessary to draw upon the co operation of another participant by, for example, asking for advice or help at work (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

OH, Chung and Labianca (2004) views social capital as a pattern of connections between people and groups of people that create a network of interdependent exchanges where certain people can be trusted to be called upon for resources and support.

Strever (2006) states in his research that networks help improve business perforamce and play a key role in personal and business success. He goes on to refer to Barker (2000) who believes that people who build and use social capital get better jobs, better pay and faster promotions, are more influential and effective compared to people who are unable or unwilling to utilise the power of social capital. He also refers to the work by Luo, Griffith, Liu and Shi (2004) who

comment that succes~~sful firms actively aim to create a~~nd leverage social capital within their network in order to remain globally competitive.

2.9 Benefits of networks

The presence of a broad range of network relationships has several implications for human resource management:

1. It can provide greater access to "instrumental" resources for enhancing individual human capital, in particular, access to education, experience or power (Ibarra, 1992).

2. A broad range of network relationships implies an accumulation of contacts and interpersonal exchanges such that members of an individual's cohort become aware of one's capabilities and talents, or "social capital" (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

3. A manager may require the competence, knowledge and social capital of both hierarchy and network in order to leverage human resources for business objectives. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996)

2.10 Power of Networks

Stephenson and Lewin (1996) propose that central to an organisation's repertoire of diversity management skills should be a competence for managing and analysing organisational networks. They argue that a failure to understand the power of informal networks may lead to misguided attempts at diversity training and development. Unless participants in diversity training programmes can develop a robust understanding of how informal networks operate within their work contexts, they will be less able to influence and enhance such important processes as communication, information exchange and decision making processes.

Effective network analysis can help to explain why some individuals play more central roles and are able to contribute more to organisational outcomes than others. Skills based diversity training should not only enhance the development of important integrating competencies but also create an arena in which individuals can themselves diagnose and analyse the extent to which different communication and networking approaches are relevant in different circumstances (Limerick, 1999).

The development of group monitoring skills and observation skills can enable individuals to be more sensitive to the effects of different contexts on diversity tolerance and diverse group performance (Maddock and Parkin, 1994).

2.11 Attributes that determine the Effectiveness of Support Networks

In order for a support network to be successful, certain elements need to exist that defines the support network's ability to function effectively. Internal organisational networks represent a sample of the organisation that comes together to achieve a goal.

1. Clear and common purpose

Support networks can be formal or informal and are convened with a specific purpose. This purpose is designed around specific needs of the members of the support network (Cox, 1993).

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) state that leading involves the manager in close, day-to-day contact with individuals and groups. Thus, leading is uniquely personal and interpersonal. Even though planning and organizing provide guidelines and directives in the form of plans, job descriptions, organization charts, and policies, it is people who do the work. Ivancevich and Matteson

(1990) further state that people frequently are unpredictable and have unique needs, aspirations, personalities, and attitudes. Thus, they each perceive the workplace and their jobs differently. Managers must take into account these unique perceptions and behaviours and somehow direct them toward common purposes (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1990).

2. Commitment

In order to achieve the objective of the support network, the members of the network must engage actively in the activities of the network with commitment towards achieving the objective of the network (Cox, 1993)

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) comment that commitment to an organisation involves three attitudes: (1) a sense of identification with the organisation's goals, (2) a feeling of involvement in organisational duties, and (3) a feeling of loyalty for the organisation. Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) state that research evidence (they refer to the work by Mowday, Porter and Steers (1982)) indicates that the absence of commitment can reduce organisational effectiveness and that people who are committed are less likely to quit and accept other jobs.

Ivancevich and Matteson (1990) state that a committed employee perceives the value and importance of integrating individual and organisational goals. The employee thinks of his or her goals and the organisational goals in personal terms.

3. Trust

Trust-based, these relationships are the ties that bind people together. Trust is typically conceived of as a "warm and fuzzy" form of social capital. However, it is also highly coercive and used to groom and maintain contacts for monopolizing resources. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996)

Stephen *et al* (1996, maintains that trust-based relationships are initiated by seeking similarity in others, that is, an attribute (education, experience, events) that at least two people may share or have in common. While trust may begin by seeking relationships with similar others, it can result in exclusionary groups. Closely held relationships based on trust are powerful in two senses: they concentrate power by galvanizing a group; and they focus vulnerability because that power is so concentrated in the group and its relationships. For example, because of the similarity on which these types of relationship are based, failed relationships are not "firings" but betrayals. Unlike its counterpart in hierarchies, betrayed relationships in networks are rarely reconstituted and the network will strain against competing loyalties as the offending member is stigmatized and expelled from the group. Thus networks, while flexible, have a fragile quality about them, however if properly leveraged, trust amongst support network members is vital to it achieving its objective. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996).

Cross and Parker (2004) highlight two types of trust that play a role in how effectively people learn from one another. Competency-based trust is a person's development of trust due to another persons capabilities. Benevolence –based trust is when a person trusts another person's benevolence. Cross and Parker (2004, p.26) elaborate by saying that "trusting someone's benevolence allows us to expose our lack of knowledge and ask the questions we need answered". This implies that if participants in support network display benevolence, it could improve their chances of creating trust within the network (Strever, 2006, p.21) highlights that "It would seem that trust will play a key role in the dynamics of developing a person's network in a sustainable manner." Strever (2006) refers to Cross and Parker's (2006) list of actions necessary to build trust : Acting with discretion, matching words with deeds, communicate often and well, establish a shared vision; give away something of value (reciprocity); make decisions fair and transparent; help people refine unclear ideas; and hold people accountable for trust worthy behaviour.

Networks exist not only as sets of cognitions inside the heads of individuals in organisations, but also as structures of constraint and opportunity negotiated and reinforced between interacting individuals (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

People tend to rely on others in their networks for help in making major decisions (Kilduff, 1990). Further employees not only tend to interact with group members who are similar on distinctive attributes such as ethnicity and gender (Ibarra, 1992), but the lower the relative proportion of such group members in the organisation, the higher the likelihood of within-group identification and friendship (Mehra et al., 1998)

Given the existence of allied groups or blocks of business units within the multi-unit firm, research is needed concerning how individual units compete for resources such as knowledge and personnel. (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003)

As Kilduff and Tsai (2003, p.11) maintains, "debate and controversy are good for social science in that they encourage a more rapid development of theory and research." Social and support network research has the potential to contribute far beyond the range of issues that currently preoccupies the field. The researcher therefore comments that further research in the field with particular focus on the advantages of support networks for organisations is much needed in order to guide organisations with their social capital strategic planning.

Kilduff and Tsai (2003, p.14) in their book, referred to Kapferer (1972) who used social network data to predict strike activity by workers. This suggests that the observations of the interaction and content of support networks proves valuable to organisations who want to connect to the hearts and minds of their employees.

By providing empirical evidence, the theory demonstrates that network factors hinder or facilitate participation by diverse groups and that these factors can be "proactively" managed by business leaders to produce expected outcomes.

In increasingly globalized markets, organizations have adopted cross-functional teaming as one way to reduce internal costs and increase organizational flexibility (Boynton *et al.*, 1993). Decisions regarding the constitution of team membership may prove paradoxical for managers. For instance, diversity in professional and cultural backgrounds may enable innovation. Yet when managers implement their decision to form a team, they often expedite team formation by choosing members based on the criteria of who shares a "common view of the world". Choices predicated on a common view of the world may, though not always, arise from similar cultural or professional backgrounds. This may result in an unintended lack of diversity among a team of workers in a business organization. Diversity also has political and legal ramifications making team formation a managerial dilemma not easily resolved.

Ibarra (1992, p.14) advises organisations to "consider the generalized form of the diversity dilemma. Opposition to diversity takes the familiar form: You don't look like me, you don't dress like me and you don't think like me; therefore I don't want to know or understand you. Such opposition may simply reflect a human preference for the familiar, as indicated in the expressions "like seeking like", "birds of feather flock together" or, more formally, "homophily" (Ibarra, 1992, p.14). Put differently, interpersonal similarity increases ease of communication, improves predictability of behaviour, and fosters trust and reciprocity in relationships (Kanter, 1977).

2.13 Further Examples of Support Networks

There is a global trend where organisations set up supportive networks as part of a human resource management initiative, to have employees talk about issues top of mind. For example, Ford Motor Company employees who share common

interests or backgrounds choose to join corporate sponsored ERGs. ERGs provide support networks and fellowship, identify barriers, contribute to employees' professional development and organize activities for employees of diverse backgrounds. Ford Motor Company prides itself on its values on embracing diversity and encouraging internal support networks. A perusal of their website highlighted the following support networks that play a key role in assisting their employees to manage their diversity and to obtain support with regard to a specific need. (Ford Motor Company website, accessed 12 May 2008)

The Ford African-Ancestry Network (FAAN)

The Ford African-Ancestry Network (FAAN) champions workplace diversity at Ford by making a positive impact on the African-American community. FAAN promotes leadership development through seminars, mentoring, counselling and Dialogues on diversity with senior management. (Ford Motor Company website, accessed 12 May 2008)

Ford Asian Indian Association (FAIA)

FAIA's three-part vision is to promote the Ford family of brands as the "Brand of Choice" for Asian Indian consumers, make Ford the "Employer of Choice" for Asian Indian professionals and develop the business and technical skills of Asian Indian employees to ensure a competitive advantage for Ford. FAIA also works to enhance cultural awareness and understanding of Asian Indian culture among all employees (Ford Motor Company website, accessed 12 May 2008)

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Ford Chinese Association (FCA)

One of the oldest employee resource groups at Ford, FCA represents a highly motivated group of dedicated professionals who are eager to bring diversity to the workplace. FCA members actively engage in events and activities that assist in

Ford's growing operations in China and Ford's marketing and design efforts in North America. FCA organizes activities throughout the year to promote cultural diversity, improve community relationships and enhance the worklife balance at Ford. FCA also makes efforts to help its members with their professional growth by organizing seminars, workshops and one-on-one sessions with senior management. FCA reaches out to outside communities by organizing fun activities and participating in community service events. For its achievements, FCA has been recognized by Ford with three Diversity Summit Awards (http://www.ford.com/our-values/diversity/diversity-ford/employee-resource-groups/ergs-442p, accessed 11 November 2008).

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Ford Employees Dealing with disAbilities (FEDA)

Founded in 2002, FEDA helps ensure the company's ongoing commitment to employees with disabilities and provides a first-stop resource for information and networking tools for employees dealing with disabilities of their own or of others. FEDA works in concert with efforts in the United States and Europe to help Ford vehicles become the mobility vehicles of choice for customers dealing with disabilities (http://www.ford.com/our-values/diversity/diversity-ford/employee-resource-groups/ergs-442p, accessed 11 November 2008).

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Ford Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender Employees (GLOBE)

Ford GLOBE strongly supports the company's Equal Employment Opportunity policy. GLOBE has chapters in Great Britain, Germany and the United States, providing worldwide networking and confidential employee support. Members actively champion diversity education, recruiting and marketing. They hold monthly membership meetings, lunches and socials and support many

community events (ht~~p://www.ford.com/our-values/diver~~sity/diversity-
ford/employee-resource-groups/ergs-442p, accessed 11 November 2008).

Ford Hispanic Network Group (FHNG)

Through service and support, FHNG strives to be a positive force in the Hispanic community. The group's vision is to assist the corporate effort to employ, develop and retain Hispanics in the workforce. Programs include hosting professional development events and sponsoring speakers on diversity initiatives (http://www.ford.com/our-values/diversity/diversity-ford/employee-resource-groups/ergs-442p, accessed 11 November 2008).

Ford Interfaith Network (FIN)

Founded in 2001, the Ford Interfaith Network (FIN) aims to assist the company in becoming a worldwide corporate leader in promoting religious tolerance and understanding, corporate integrity and human dignity. FIN has worked to enable employees of all religions to come together and express their faith in appropriate and meaningful ways in the workplace and to build bridges to the community (http://www.ford.com/our-values/diversity/diversity-ford/employee-resource-groups/ergs-442p, accessed 11 November 2008).

Ford Parenting Network (FPN)

FPN's primary mission is to further Ford's effort to create a balanced work life environment, an environment where maximum contribution at work is balanced with the employee's fulfilment of personal and family responsibilities. Members work to promote family-friendly work life policies and decisions at Ford. Members sponsor ongoing parenting classes and outstanding parenting seminars and offer networking opportunities for Ford parents. (Ford Motor Company website, accessed 12 May 2008)

Professional Women's Network (PWN)

PWN focuses on professional development for women, promoting an environment that attracts, develops and retains women employees and customers for the Ford team. PWN sponsors motivational speakers, mentoring programs, leadership initiatives and community projects. A number of affiliate groups are aligned under PWN, within areas such as Finance, Ford Credit, IT, Manufacturing, Marketing, Sales and Service, Product Development and Racing (Ford Motor Company website, accessed 12 May 2008)

The study was unable to access or source the empirical evidence behind each network and recommends that further research be conducted into the internal support networks set up by organisations like Ford, to engage and care for their people.

2.14 Support Networks and Diversity Practices

Support networks are made up of different people (race, age, cognitive styles, careers) who converge for a specific purpose shared by the group (Cox,1993). Therefore in order to achieve the network's purpose, the group needs to be able to manage the diversity within the network and not allow it to impact negatively on the network's objective (Cox, 1993).

2.14.1 What is Diversity?

Cox (1993) comments that a commonly held view is that diversity is limited to issues of race, colour, creed and gender. Cox (1993) argues that diversity is a much broader concept than that. It is a commitment to recognizing and appreciating the variety of attributes that make individuals unique. Examples of these characteristics are: age; cognitive style; culture; disability (mental, learning, physical); economic background; education; ethnicity; gender; geographic

background; language(s), opinion, marital partnered status; physical appearance; political affiliation; race; religious beliefs and sexual orientation. (Cox, 1993)

A culture of embracing diversity aims at transcending conventional associations to create an environment that is inclusive of all groups, maximising the potential of all employees, and valuing the variety of perspectives all employees bring to the workplace. (Limerick, 1998).

Companies that uphold the principle that a level playing field is the foundation upon which to build a diverse and inclusive work environment are often employers of choice. (Best Company to Work for, Deloittes Annual Survey, 2007)

There's a perception that diversity is just a new term for equal opportunities. But these are two quite different concepts. Equal opportunity is about treating people the same. Diversity is about producing better results by harnessing the differences in people. It recognises that people from different backgrounds can bring fresh ideas which can make the way work is done more efficient and products and services better. (Cox, 1993)

2.14.2 Diversity Management

Organisations strive to tap into new markets in order to ensure their relevance in the future (Beer and Nohria, 2000). No doubt they want a recruitment strategy that will work not just tomorrow, but for years to come. They are therefore keen to reflect their customer base and represent the communities they operate within whilst creating value for shareholders. According to Cox, J (1993), diversity management is therefore everyone's responsibility and it presents a compelling business case in that it helps organisations to:

- Understand their customers better, offer better services and develop more relevant products.

- Move into new markets and reach a wider range of new customers.

- Break into off-shore markets.

- Become more creative and innovative.

- Find and retain a skilled, versatile workforce which is more responsive to their business needs.

- Create a more inclusive working environment, motivate staff and boost productivity.

- Win larger public and private sector contracts, which are increasingly being awarded on the basis of non-financial criteria such as diversity.

- Significantly lower staff turnover and the associated costs of recruiting new staff

Therefore the role support networks can play in aligning diverse teams to advance business imperatives cannot be under estimated. Diversity endows the workplace with a multitude of perspectives from different backgrounds. All perspectives are equally important and differences are not only welcomed, but are actively sought in the pursuit of business excellence and innovation. (Cox, 1993)

Today's business environment is characterised by marked and growing levels of diversity amongst workplace participants and rapid and discontinuous organisational change (Limerick et al, 1998).

Diversity helps us reflect our customer population and enables companies to recognise new business opportunities and adapt in a fast-changing environment. Diverse teams also typically make better decisions, partly because members with differing outlooks and experiences help challenge the team to think more rigorously (Moore, 1999).

The development of networks for diverse group members is an important dimension of organisational development initiatives designed to support and manage diversity. The widespread existence of a desire for sameness (Kanter, 1977) suggests that majority groups may display a range of defensive behaviours

which can obstruct th̶e̶ ̶p̶a̶r̶t̶i̶c̶i̶p̶a̶t̶i̶o̶n̶ ̶o̶r̶ ̶p̶e̶r̶f̶o̶r̶m̶a̶n̶c̶e̶ ̶o̶f̶ those in the minority. This also suggests that minority / diverse groups will be less likely themselves to engage in concerted efforts to challenge existing stereotypes at work. If those to whom definitions of diversity apply most strongly, are not inspired by people they perceive to be similar to themselves, it appears that it will be less likely that they will feel equipped to achieve certain goals, to occupy certain positions (Morrison *et al*, 1992)

2.15 Thomas' Diversity Paradigm Theory

Diversity refers to the "collective mixture of differences and similarities along a given dimension" (Thomas, 1996, p.7). In his action-oriented theory of diversity management, Thomas provides eight options for managers to consider when managing diversity. In his Diversity Paradigm, Thomas seeks to answer the question: "How do I create an environment in which all employees and team members, with their diverse backgrounds….can contribute to their full potential?" (Thomas, 1996, p.13). This question and Thomas' response has implications for weathering change. (Raffanti, 2006)

Thomas' Diversity Paradigm Theory (1996) outlines the following responses by organisations when dealing with diversity:

1. *Include/Exclude*: inclusion of underrepresented groups in the organisation as opposed to exclusion which minimizes diversity and complexity by, for example, only hiring individuals with homogenous work philosophies or educational backgrounds.
2. *Deny* : denial minimises the diversity mixture by explaining it away, pretending that differences do not exist or do not matter
3. *Assimilate*: Assimilation has been the prevailing means of managing diversity; organisations insist that minority components conform to dominant norms.

4. *Suppress*: Suppression is an attempt to minimise the diversity mixture by encouraging people to downplay differences and accentuate similarities.

5. *Isolate*: Isolation allows inclusion differences into the wider system, but then relegates those with differences from the dominant sector off to the side, such as in pilot project or other ancillary subsystem.

6. *Tolerate*: Toleration addresses diversity by projecting a "live-and-let-live" attitude, without truly embracing differences. Toleration is not true collaboration or connection; it's mere co-existence;

7. *Build relationships*: Through relationship building, organisations address diversity by fostering quality relationships- characterised by acceptance and understanding. The focus is on similarities, the hope is to avoid challenges associated with differences.

8. *Foster mutual adaptation*: When organisations foster mutual adaptation, they accept and understand diversity and differences, and recognise that full accommodation of the diversity mixture requires every entity to adapt.

Thomas argues that option 8 is the only diversity paradigm option that "unequivocally endorses diversity". (Thomas, 2006, p.29)

2.16 Diversity Practices and Network Theory

Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly (2006) argue that many diversity practices can be categorised to three broad conceptual traditions:

1. Institutional Theory

   This theory suggests that to be effective, diversity practices should use organisational structures or processes to establish responsibilities. Examples include the creation of an affirmative action plan (AAP) , a diversity staff, and a diversity council.

2. Social Network Analysis

   This theory implies that integration of underrepresented group members into the organisation is needed and would be the focus of diversity efforts.

This integration can be accomplished through mentoring and networking programs.

3. Social Psychological Theory

This theory suggests the use of practices such as diversity training and evaluation (feedback), designed to educate managers about the psychological bases of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination

Kalev et al (2006) examines the effects of seven common diversity programs—affirmative action plans, diversity committees and taskforces, diversity managers, diversity training, diversity evaluations for managers, networking programs, and mentoring programs—on the representation of white men, white women, black women, and black men in the management ranks of private sector firms. Each of these programs may well increase diversity. To date, there has been little evidence one way or the other (Kalev, 2006). Kalev and her colleagues (2006) finds this surprising given the popularity and cost of the programs. Their contribution was to bring to bear rich new data, to theoretically distinguish three types of diversity programs, and to show that organizational structures allocating responsibility for change may be more effective than programs targeting either managerial bias or the social isolation of disadvantaged groups.

Cox (1993) comments that previous empirical studies of antidiscrimination and diversity programs have been limited by data constraints and that the little studies that have been done indicate that some programs may be effective.

Singh *et al* (2006) observes that gender and racial segregation has declined remarkably since the 1970s, when employers first adopted antidiscrimination programs but there is no hard evidence that these programs played a role. Singh *et al* (2006) stress that previous research indicate that women and people of colour are crowded in the lowest ranks of management. Even as women moved into management in the 1980s and 1990s, women managers continued to trail their male counterparts in both earnings and authority (Singh *et al*, 2006).

Kalev *et al* (2006) highlights that programs that target managerial stereotyping through education and feedback (diversity training and diversity evaluations) are not followed by increases in diversity. Programs that address social isolation among women and minorities (networking and mentoring programs) are followed by modest changes. The effects of these initiatives vary across groups, with white women benefiting most, followed by black women. Black men benefit least. They also find that responsibility structures make training, performance evaluations, networking, and mentoring programs more effective. Regulatory requirements, which typically lead to assignment of responsibility for compliance, also catalyse certain programs (Kalev *et al*, 2006).

Cultural diversity refers to the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance (Cox, 1993). Workforces across the world are becoming increasingly more diverse along such dimensions as gender, race and nationality (Kalev *et al*, 2006). Kalev goes on to note that organisations are realising and emphasising the importance of cross-functional teams in creating a basis for competitive advantage. Since different work functions and departments in organisations can have different cultures, this trend adds a strong element of cultural diversity to today's workgroups in many organisations (Raudsepp, 1988). Therefore understanding the effects of culture on human behaviour is crucial to the business success of multinational companies.

2.17 The Hawthorne Studies

Ivancevich and Matteson (2002) explains the Hawthorne Studies as follows. From 1900 to 1930 Taylor's concept of scientific management dominated thought about management. His approach focused on maximizing worker output. However, Taylor's emphasis on output and efficiency didn't address employee's needs. Trade unions rebelled against Taylor's focus on scientific management principles.

Mary Parker Follet was opposed to Taylor's lack of specific attention to human needs and relationships in the workplace. She was one of the first management theorists to promote participatory decision making and decentralization. Her view emphasized individual and group needs. The human element was the focus of Follet's view about how to manage. However, she failed to produce empirical evidence to support her views. Industry leaders wanted concrete evidence that focusing on human resources would result in higher productivity. Some concrete evidence became available from data collected in the Hawthorne Studies (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

A team of Harvard University researchers was asked to study the activities of work groups at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant outside of Chicago (Cierco Illinois) Before the team arrived, an initial study at the plant examined the effects of illumination on worker output. It was proposed that illumination would affect the work group's output. One group of female workers completed its job tasks in a test room where the illumination level remained constant. The other study group was placed in a test room where the amount of illumination was changed (increased and decreased) (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

In the test room where illumination was varied, worker output increased when illumination increased. This, of course, was an expected result. However, output also increased when illumination was decreased. In addition, productivity increased in the control group test room, even though illumination remained constant throughout the study (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

The Harvard team was called in to solve the mystery. The team concluded that something more than pay incentives was improving worker output within the work groups. The researchers conducted additional studies on the impact of rest pauses, shorter working days, incentives, and type of supervision on output. They also uncovered what is referred to as "Hawthorne Effect" operating within the study groups. That is, the workers felt important because someone was

observing and studyi.... ...., ...y produced more because of being observed and studied (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

Elton Mayo, Fritz Roethlisberger, and William Dickson were the leaders of the Harvard study team. They continued their work at the Hawthorne plant from 1924 to 1932. Eight years of study included over 20,000 Western Electric employees. The Harvard researchers found that individual behaviours were modified within and by work groups. In a study referred to as the "bank wiring room" the Harvard researchers were again faced with some perplexing results. They study group only completed two terminals per worker daily. This was considered to be low level output.

The bank wiring room workers appeared to be restricting output. The work group members were friendly, got along well on and off the job, and helped each other. There appeared to be a practice of protecting the slower workers. The fast producers did not want to outperform the slowest producers. The slow producers were part of the team and fast workers were instructed to "slow it down". The group formed an informal production norm of only two completed boards per day.

The Harvard researchers learned that economic rewards did not totally explain worker behaviour. Workers were observant, compiled with norms, and respected the informal social structure of their group. It was also learned that social pressures could restrict output.

Interviews conducted years after the Hawthorne Studies with a small number of actual study participants and a reanalysis of data clearly raised some doubts about a number of the original conclusions. The conclusion that supportive managers helped boost productivity is considered incorrect by critics. Instead, the fear of job loss during the Great Depression and managerial discipline, not the practices of supportive managers, are considered responsible for the higher rate of productivity in the relay assembly test room experiments, The Hawthorne Studies, however, are still considered the major impetus behind the emphasis on

understanding and dealing with human resources (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

The Hawthorne studies are perhaps the most-cited research in the applied behavioural science area but they are not referred to as the most rigorous series of studies. Nonetheless, the Hawthorne studies did point out that workers are more complex than economic theories of the time proposed, Workers respond to group norms, social pressures, and observation. In 1924 to 1932, these were important revelations that changed the way management viewed workers (Ivancevich and Matteson (2002)).

2.18   Evaluation of the theory base

A wide and extensive theory base exists on networks and social networks. Limited precise literature on support networks was found.

Three key attributes that underpin the success of support networks were identified from the research conducted by Cox (1993) and Stephenson & Lewin (1996). These attributes are common purpose, commitment and trust. The ability to manage diversity in these networks has also been highlighted as a factor that impacts on the success of the network (Cox, 1993).

An effective understanding of the behaviour of diverse groups in context requires exposure to and interaction with such groups. Therefore developing "off the shelf" initiatives to address issues of diversity may not be totally well-judged. From the theory espoused on support networks, the researcher understands a support network to be a medium that enables people to come together with a common purpose, share thoughts and experiences and build relationships. The researcher is wary that the theory base does reflect on the possibility that such networks could fuel barriers of dissociation, leading to dysfunctional interpersonal conflict, miscommunication, and higher levels of stress, slower decision-making and

problems with group ~~consciousness~~. The desire to associate with similar groups could also fuel feelings of resentment towards other groups that are different to these groups.

Therefore, in order for organisations to harness the power of support networks for workplace improvement and for individuals to have a positive impact within support networks, they need to facilitate and have a real understanding and appreciation of actual differences between people. Most firms bring women and minorities into the organisation but are not succeeding in moving them up into higher tiers of the organisation. As a result, the major movement or flow of women and people of colour in organisations is "in and out" (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996). The researcher is of the view that the proper hosting of support networks, with a theme on diversity, will assist both the organisation and the individual to understand each others needs and to find common ground. In this way, organisations will become more sensitive to the specific needs of women and people of colour and will factor these needs into their organisational design and development.

Equal opportunity legislation is focused on organizational entry and as such can legislate access to employment opportunities by "targeting" underrepresented groups. Wrongful termination legislation is focused on organizational exit. However, while inside the organization, there is little law can do to ensure continued equitable access to career and professional opportunities. Limited legislation creates another problem: frequent voluntary turnover of "targeted" groups. This result in the high indirect costs associated with the recruitment, training and development of replacements. Once again, the conversations that take place within the support networks help both the organisation and individuals to find amicable solutions.

Targeted groups are recruited, but are excluded from key aspects of organizational life, become frustrated and leave (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996).

Preserving the thin ~~white line of management~~ requires that corporations continuously recruit in "designated" categories, and yet such recruiting is costly to the shareholder. Not only is this vicious cycle a waste of money and resources, it perpetuates at least two false stereotypes:

(1) Women and minorities not being able to "cut it" in organizations (e.g. women, people of colour, the disabled, and other minorities are "in" but not "of" the corporation (Kanter, 1977).

(2) The golden rule is made by and for white males. In the USA, this is reflected in the glass ceilings in organizational hierarchies, in which senior white males adjudicate promotions (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996).

For instance, while targeted groups comprise 65 per cent of the total workforce, women occupy only 3 per cent of the top corporate jobs and minorities hold about 2 per cent. A typical rationale used to explain these low percentages is historical artefact. The conciliatory promise is that the targeted groups are "in the pipeline" for promotion. Research in informal groups using network analysis is unravelling this myth. Women and minorities have been in the corporate pipeline for some time and they still are not getting promoted because of exclusionary networks which block access to resources, most notably, that of social capital (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996).

The study will show that much is to be learnt from the conversations that occur within support networks. These conversations feeds the organisational culture and if there are issues that require management attention, if not addressed, could negatively impact on the corporate culture of the organisation. Therefore the study suggests that human resource practices can be improved by encouraging management to foster and engage in support networks. The researcher agrees with Kalev *et al* (2006) that human resource practitioners should adopt network analysis as a managerial tool. In so doing, they can measure what they manage and better manage what they measure. The adoption of network management enables organizational learning and more effectively leverages the human resource output.

The study also agrees with Vandevick and Matteson (2002) regarding the value to organisations when understanding human behaviour and Strever (2006) who suggests that access to new sources of knowledge is one of the most important benefits of social capital. Therefore there seems to be a close link between social capital and an effective support network, in that social capital is the securing of benefits by and for the participants of the support network.

Support networks that seek to tackle negative attitudes towards diversity, may also run the risk of becoming naïve and simplistic in its approach. Such intervention may develop unrealistic views about the role that diversity plays within any workplace and leave more problematic diversity issues unmentioned and unmanaged. Further research could be conducted to determine and / or obtain evidence of the existence of such a possibility.

The literature investigates the objectives and advantages of social networks extensively however do not provide empirical evidence of the critical success factors of specifically support networks. Therefore the researcher is of the opinion that further research in this area is imperative, given the challenges faced by organisations to sustain their operations, to retain key staff and manage diversity in an ever changing world of work.

Chapter Three

Research Questions

This study seeks to determine the key attributes of effective support networks.

The study sets out to show that there are specific attributes that need to exist in order for a support network to be rendered effective. This is achieved by support networks by equipping employees to handle personal and work-related challenges that impacts their productivity and organisations benefit from the increased productivity of their employees. In order for these support networks to be successful, there are key attributes that need to be present. It is proposed that these factors render the support network an effective platform.

Welman & Kruger (2001) recommend that after the research areas have been identified, they should be delineated to identify one or more research questions. The following questions were identified as being relevant to the research problem.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1
What motivates people to join supportive networks?

Research Question 2
What motivates organisations to promote support networks?

Research Question 3
Do support networks contribute towards the effectiveness of individuals in their jobs?

Research Question 4:

What attributes of support networks determine its success?

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study. The research process was conducted as follows:

- Literature review to identify key concepts to be considered in the study.
- Construction of a subject matter expert (SME) interview guide.
- Interviews with SMEs to obtain views on the research study and guidance in order to construct the questionnaire used to survey respondents of the support networks.
- Construction of the questionnaire.
- Pre-testing of the questionnaire.
- Population determination.
- Sampling and data collection.
- Data analysis.

4.2　Literature Review

A review of the literature was conducted to determine the relevant issues to be considered in the study. The information was used to determine the themes and concepts to be considered for effective support networks.

4.3　Construction of the Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was developed as the research tool for the collection of the data (Appendix C). The questionnaire was designed to take approximately 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire was constructed in English only, as this was seen as the most appropriate

language for the target population. Notwithstanding this, if there were any language preferences, the services of a translator would have been engaged in order to accommodate any request. When exploring issues of diversity, it's important that respondents be allowed the opportunity to use their own language to articulate their experiences and opinions.

The questions in the survey reflect the themes raised in the theory base relating to support networks. The input from the literature review and the SME interviews were used to develop the questionnaire. The questions deliberately provided options in order to clarify the intent behind the questions asked and to guide the respondent to precise answers. The SMEs guided the questions asked in the questionnaire.

4.4 Pre-testing of the Questionnaire for Reliability and Validity

Low reliability can feature when respondents misunderstand the questions posed or the motivation behind the questions (Zikmund, 1997).

Since a diverse sample of respondents completed the questionnaires, for the purposes of improving the clarity of the questionnaire and to determine level of understanding of the questions, a pre-test was conducted. A sample of 10 people of different age, race, gender and language groups and levels of education was randomly selected and asked to test the questionnaire. The pre-test helped to establish:

1. whether any of the instructions are confusing, ambiguous;
2. The appropriateness of the wording used;
3. The nature of the vocabulary : simple or complex,
4. The relevance of statements;
5. Whether the length of the questionnaire is well received.

Constructive feedback was provided that led to the reviewing of some of the questions. The pre-test exercise contributed towards the reliability and relevance of the data gathered.

4.5 Sample and Research Design

Zikmund (2003) states that the research design defines how the necessary information will be obtained and how it will be analysed in an attempt to answer the applicable research questions. The necessary information can be gathered through surveys, experiments, secondary data studies or observation techniques (Zikmund, 2003).

Since the study intended to determine the attributes necessary for support networks to be effective, the nature of the research was qualitative and exploratory. The research process therefore conducted in 2 parts:

1. Face-to-face and/or telephonic interviews with subject matter experts in the field of support networks. An interview guide attached as Appendix B, was used to guide the conversation with the SMEs.

2. Survey of participant in support networks, using a structured questionnaire.

4.5.1 Population

Population can be defined as individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events, and the conditions to which that population is exposed (Welman and Kruger, 2005). Since the research problem wished to determine the key attributes of successful support networks, the relevant population were participants in support networks irrespective of race and gender.

The population therefore consisted of individuals, male and female, of varying age and race, who are currently members of support networks in South Africa.

Respondents were drawn from support networks that convene in the Gauteng area. Guidance was obtained from the SMEs interviewed with regards to convenience sampling of support networks that were easily accessible.

Given the nature of this study, a sample size of five to twenty interviewees is considered adequate (Zikmund, 2003). The subject matter experts included the network owner or custodian and/ or the facilitator of such networks. An hour long interview of the subject matter experts was conducted using an interview sheet. The purposive sampling was based entirely on the judgment of the researcher. Snowballing sampling was also used to increase the number of subject matter experts as was required for purposes of this study. In the snowball sampling, a few possible subject matter experts were approached from the selected organisations to identify further relevant subject matter experts.

 With the assistance of the subject matter experts, the researcher identified a sample of 185 participants in support networks (primary target) and had them complete a manual, structured questionnaire. Access to these networks proved troublesome therefore the researcher chose a convenience sample whose information was provided by the facilitators of the support networks in question.

4.5.3 Unit of Analysis

The **unit of analysis** was a support network participant and a support network subject matter expert respectively. Support networks are made up of participants from various diverse backgrounds and these networks can be found within organisations or hosted by independent entities, for example universities and other learning institutions. The researcher identified 2 such organisations and/or learning institutions (primary and secondary populations) that conduct support network programmes aimed at achieving diversity and leadership   related

imperatives and interviewed 4 subject matter experts (secondary target) involved in the process as part of a purpose sampling strategy.

4.5.4 Data Collection
4.5.4.1 Primary Data

In this exploratory qualitative research, a series of in-depth interviews (face to face and telephonic) conducted with acknowledged experts in the field included support network facilitators. This was followed by the researcher attending 5 different support network programmes comprising of a total of approximately 185 participants at two selected organisations. The researcher personally handed out the questionnaires and waited until the end of each network programme to collect the completed questionnaires. A response rate of 89.50% was achieved.

The choice of an appropriate data collection method is dependent on (i) the volume and variety of the data required (ii) the objectivity and reliability of data required and (iii) the cost and duration of the study (Martins et al 2002).

The data from the face-to-face interviews was captured on the interview sheet (See Appendix B) during the interviews. The data from the telephonic interviews was captured directly into an electronic template as the interview was being conducted. The research topic and the objective of the research were explained at the beginning of the interview.

Welman & Kruger (2005) highlight the disadvantages and advantages of using the face-to-face interview method to collect data.
The disadvantages are:
- High preparation, travelling and interview costs
- Interviewees may give responses that they think the interviewer wants to hear.

The advantages are:

- The interviewer is in control of the interview process, so any misunderstandings or vague responses can be cleared up. Therefore the responses obtained are of a high quality

- The response rate is very good, often better than telephonic interviews and postal surveys.

The in-depth face to face expert interviews enabled the researcher to probe, observe respondent's reactions to questions and the ease with which answers were given (Saludadez *et al*, 2001). The expert interviews helped to provide valuable insights into the subject matter of support networks and the motivation of organisation to host them. Interviews of a sum total of seven subject matter experts at four different organisations that participate in supportive networks were conducted. Since the nature of the study is rather sensitive, the researcher allocated to each subject matter expert, a code to ensure their anonymity while allowing identification of their organisational characteristics and sector context (See Appendix E) .

4.5.4.2 Secondary Data

The researcher set out to establish what key attributes make support networks successful. A search on secondary data was conducted on support networks and some relevant theories were found on social networks and diversity practices. Previous research conducted on social networks also provided a framework in presenting the research arguments.

4.6 Data analysis on Qualitative Research

According to Zikmund (2003, p.73) data analysis 'is the application of reasoning to understand and interpret the data that have been collected'. The interpretation

and application of reasoning in qualitative research is highly subjective and intuitive, making it very difficult to identify the source of an insight (Zikmund 2003). The qualitative research method of analysis is not a perfect science (Zikmund, 2003). Therefore the content of the questionnaires was analysed to determine whether any specific themes emerged.

Once the data was collected, it was captured in an excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was imported into the statistical software called SAS Software.

The data from the interviews and survey was analysed to determine:

- Key themes that would indicate the existence of key attributes of successful support networks.
- The difference between those attributes necessary for family support networks and organisational support networks.

4.7 Potential research limitations

4.7.1 Budgetary and Time Constraints

Due to budgetary constraints and the fact that the researcher resides in Gauteng, the researcher limited the scope of the research to the availability of subject matter experts and support network participants in Gauteng only. Further, due to time and access constraints, the researcher only sourced the views of employees and not that of employers.

4.7.2 Expertise/Knowledge Constraints

Given the sensitivity of the subject matter and the fact that concerns around issues of race and gender were raised by the participants surveyed and the fact that the researcher is an Indian female, the researcher has endeavoured to conduct herself professionally and not allow any biasness impact the findings of the research.

4.7.3 Representivity

Since the surveys were conducted only in Gauteng, representivity cannot be assumed. The sample is not fully representative of the population and therefore one might not be able to generalise from the sampling in question.

Chapter 5
Research Results

5.1 Introduction

The field work undertaken in the research was conducted over a period of three months. The research was conducted in two parts:

1. Subject matter experts (hereinafter referred to as SMEs) on support networks were identified and key questions were posed to them to determine the key attributes of support networks.
2. The participants of support networks were surveyed using a structured questionnaire

The identity of the SMEs and the support networks has been rendered anonymous in order to maintain levels of confidentiality.

The following types of support networks were surveyed:
1. Diversity Forums (1)
2. Women Empowerment Forums (2)
3. Leadership support and development networks (3)

5.2 Profile of the Support Networks surveyed

5.2.1 Support Network 1

5.2.1.1 Objective of the network

One of the business imperatives in Organisation 2 is to ensure transformation at all levels of the organisation. Support Network 1 was a platform created four years ago to aid this process. The forum envisions an organisational climate in

which all stakeholders can celebrate and embrace their own and each others' diversity. The purpose of the forum was therefore to:

- contribute to the realisation of **valuing our people and treating them with fairness** through support, influence, education and challenge;
- drive diversity initiatives that will assist the organisation to achieve its business goals; and
- provide a voice where issues are too sensitive to voice individually.
- Create and promote diversity **awareness**.
- Influence and attain management and staff **commitment** in supporting diversity imperatives.
- Facilitate the **spirit** of valuing diversity in the organisation's culture in support of business objectives.
- Initiate and sustain **projects** that will promote diversity teamwork, e.g. CSI. (Organisation 2's Diversity Plan, 2008)

The support network invites members to join voluntarily and to discuss concerns around diversity management both at a personal and organisational level.

5.2.2 Support Network 2

5.2.2.1 Objective of the network

This network is a leadership development initiative and serves as a network in response to the socio-economic and political challenges in South Africa - where change and possibility are common features. The organisation (Organisation 1) hosting the network believes there is a need to make a contribution to the development of leadership talent amongst high-potential young South Africans spanning a range of institutions.

It is a network of younger (mainly 28 to 36 year old) leaders with the primary purpose of building the longer-term leadership of South Africa. The network brings together a diverse and selected group of performance-driven leaders per

programme to discuss, debate and share knowledge and ideas related to building an informed leadership core across sectors and industries. It provides opportunities to learn, network, and build relationships.

5.2.3 Support Network 3

5.2.3.1 Objective of the network

Organisation 2 has recognised the need to create a platform where women issues are addressed. Subject matter expert on support networks, SME R, was instrumental in developing the concept and she chairs the forum. Membership at the forum is voluntary and anyone can join the forum. Many diversity practices at the organisation have been informed by the conversations that have occurred at this network.

5.2.4 Support Network 4

5.2.4.1 Objective of the Network

This is a women empowerment network that aims at:
  • honing the managerial and business skills of women
  • providing men and women with opportunities to engage critically with
  illustrative situations that they could face in their careers
  • providing a mentoring opportunity for high potential women
  • building a network that can support and develop women.

The network's programme has the following components.

a. Case-study panel discussions
Sessions are scheduled during the year at which case-studies are discussed and analysed. These case-studies offer illustrative examples of workplace dilemmas.

While these situations are of particular relevance to women, they have specifically been chosen to be of interest to managers generally.

b. Small group mentoring discussions
Small group mentoring discussions are held with the network's members. Together with the mentors allocated to their group, delegates have an opportunity to discuss issues raised in the session in greater detail, as well as to raise matters of concern to them generally.

5.2.5 Support Network 5

5.2.5.1 Objective of network

The support network was established over 10 years ago as the primary initiatives to build the leadership pipeline in Organisation 2. However the initiative has grown a strong support network that continues to exist well after the 3 year programme is over. The research is part of this network and has developed through the top of mind conversations at the network, triggered by work and social challenges.

Although the investment in both time and money has been considerable there is no doubt that the programmes are paying dividends as alumni increasingly taking up senior positions within the organisation and the organisation continues to experience the growth within individuals who have participated on the programme, hence, its sustainability remains a priority.

5.3 Presentation of Research Results

One hundred and eighty five questionnaires were handed face to face to participants in support networks at the commencement of the respective network programmes. A total of 181 questionnaires were collected at the conclusion of the programmes run at the respective networks. A sum of 19 questionnaires was rejected as they were not adequately completed and/or not completed at all, which could not be considered in the analysis process as the missing data was substantial. The remaining 162 questionnaires were completed adequately by the participants. The resultant sample size was therefore deemed acceptable. The data was captured in Excel format.

This chapter of the paper provides a holistic overview of the responses to the questionnaire, first by giving a demographic overview of the participants who completed the questionnaire, followed by an overview of the responses received per question posed to the participants of the support networks. The last section of the chapter includes statistical analyses performed on the data by using SAS software.

5.4 Demographic Overview

1. Gender vs Age

The following graph summarizes the gender vs age group distribution. Of the 162 participants, 126 were females and 36 males with the majority between the ages of 30 – 35 years, followed by the age group 35 – 40 years.

Figure 4: Gender vs Age Distribution

Gender vs Age Distribution

	18-24	25-30	30-35	35-40	>40
■ Male	1	3	10	15	7
■ Female	2	18	63	33	10

Age Category
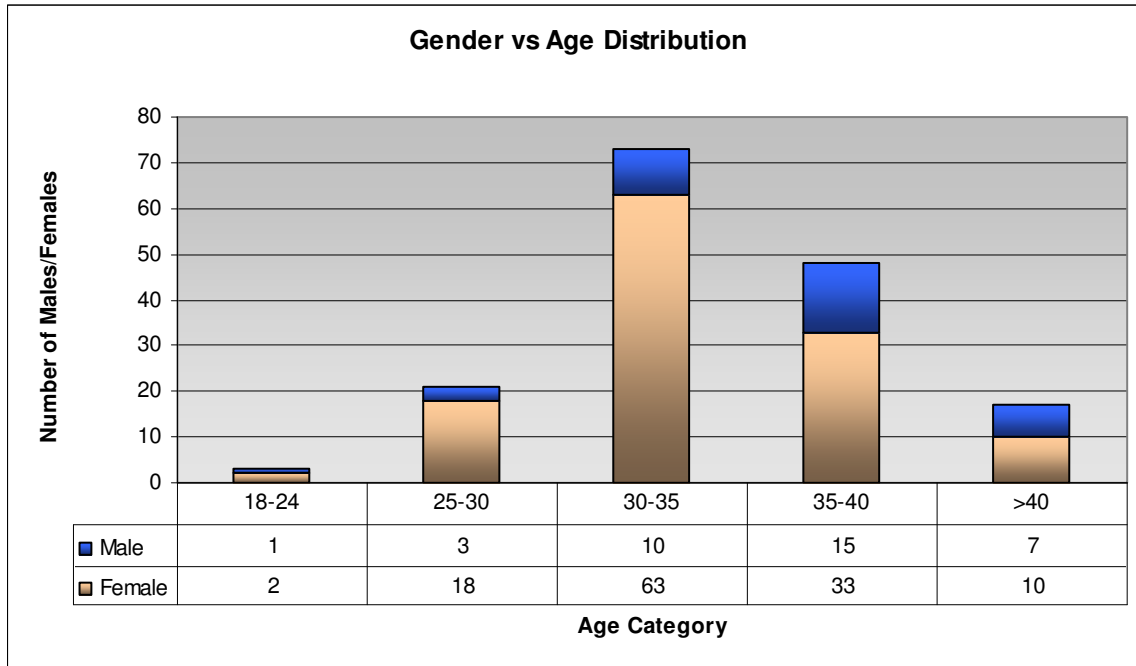
The age spread was as follows:

- 18-24 years   -   2%
- 25-30 years   -   13%
- 30-35 years   -   45%
- 35-40 years   -   30%
- 40 years and more- 10%

Of the total of 162 participants, 86% of the participants between the age of 30-35 years were female. The total population consisted of 78% female and 22% male.

2. Gender vs Race

Figure 5 summarises the gender vs race distribution. Of the 162 participants, the majority were Black females (52); followed by Indian females (33) and then White females (30). A number of 13 White males responded followed by 10 Black males.

Figure 5: Gender vs Race Distribution

Gender vs Race Distribution

	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
■ Male	10	3	9	13
■ Female	52	10	33	30
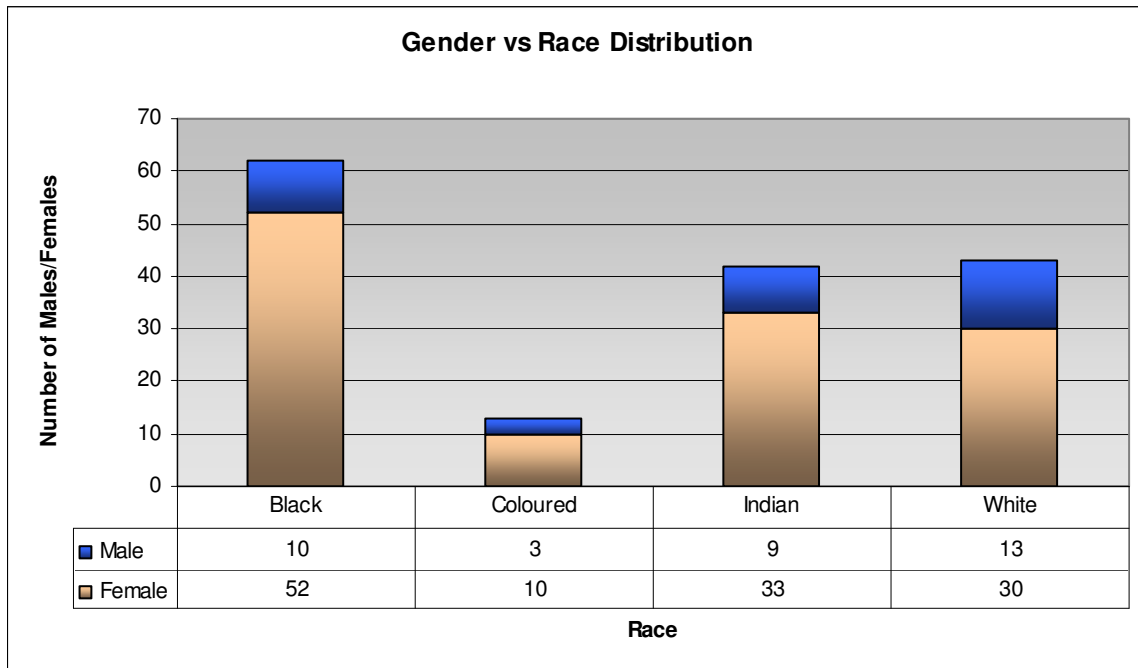
The race spread was as follows:

- Black - 38.27%
- Coloured- 8.02%
- Indian - 25.92%
- White - 26.54%

3. Qualifications

The distribution of the participants' highest qualifications is presented in the following graph. Of the participants, 37.97% have a Basic/First degree; 32.91% an Honours degree; 18.35% a Masters degree and 10.13% a Post Matric Certificate/Diploma.

Figure 6: Highest Qualifications

Qualifications

0.63%   10.13%

18.35%

37.97%

32.91%

☐ Matric   ■ Post Matric Certificate/Diploma   ☐ Basic/First Degree   ■ Honours Degree   ■ Masters Degree
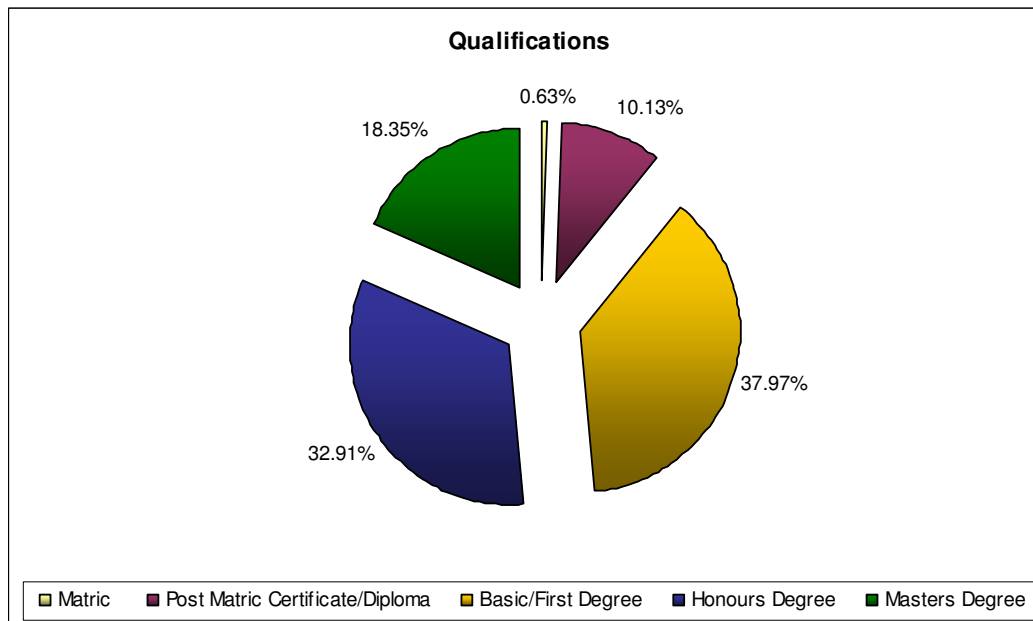
4. Years Working

Eighteen of the participants did not complete this field and therefore the data was missing. One-hundred and one (70.14%) of the 144 participants who provided feedback has been working for more than 10 years ; 31.25% between 10 – 15 years and 29.86% between 15 – 20 years and 9.03% more than 10 years.

Figure 7: Years Working

Years Working

- 9.03%
- 6.94%
- 22.92%
- 29.86%
- 31.25%

Legend: ☐ 1-5yrs ■ 5-10yrs ☐ 10-15yrs ■ 15-20yrs ■ +20yrs
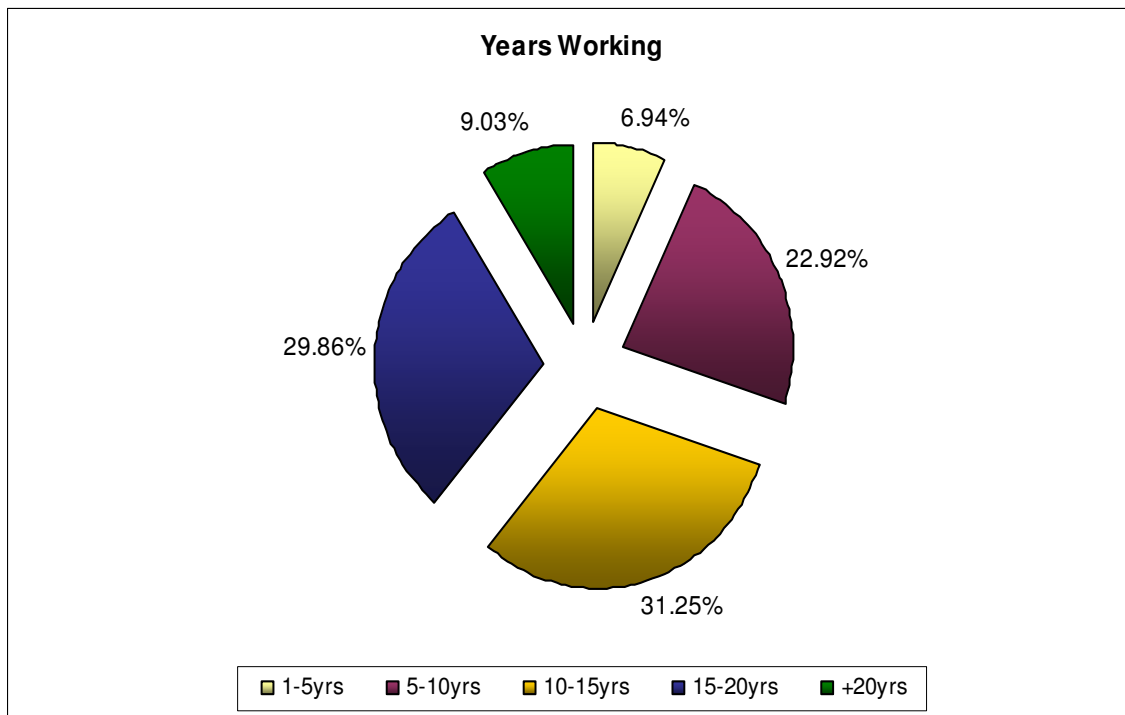
1. Job Level

The job level of the participants was mainly Middle management (46.43%) followed by 31.25% Senior management; 10.71% Junior management and 11.61% Technical/specialist job levels.

Figure 8: Job Level

Job Level

- 11.61%
- 10.71%
- 31.25%
- 46.43%

☐ Senior management ☐ Middle management ☐ Junior management ☐ Technical/specialist
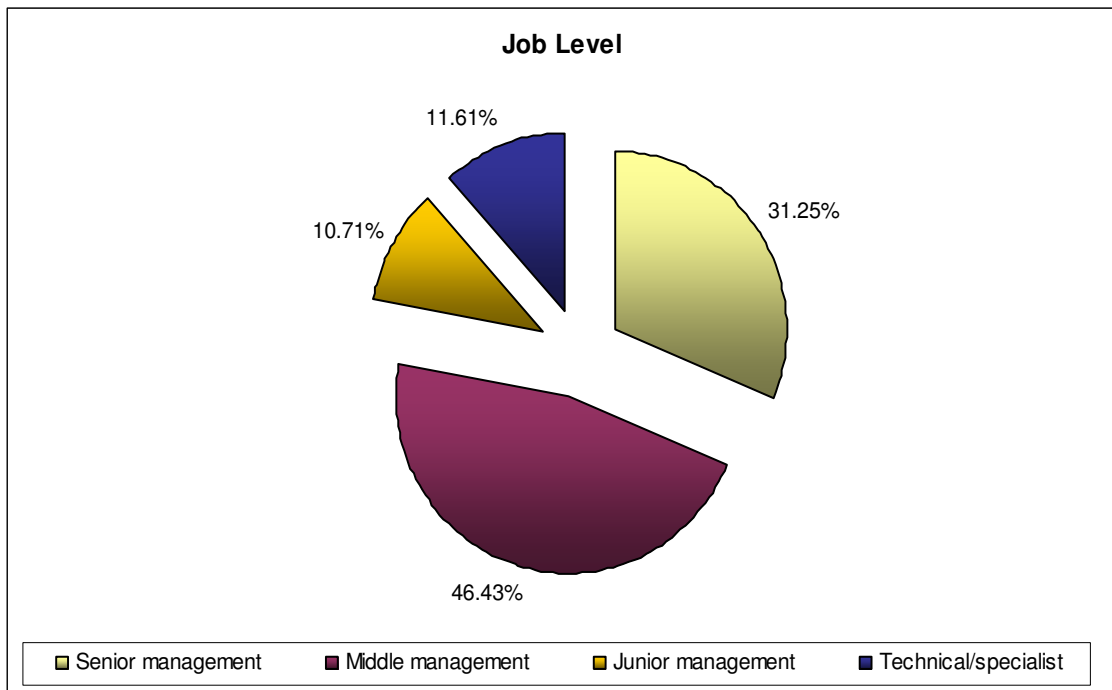
6. Support Network Overview

All participants indicated that they were members of a support network. One-hundred and thirty-six (83.95%) of the participants indicated that they were members of more than one support network and the remaining 26 (16.05%) indicated that they were members of only the current support network.

Of those participants who provided the name of the network, the following were the spread across the networks surveyed:

- Support Network 3 - 37 (27.61%)
- Support Network 5 - 33 (24.63%)
- Support Network 1 - 32 (23.88%)
- Support Network 4 - 24 (19.18%)
- Support Network 2 - 6 (4.48%).

- One participant indicated that one is part of "several networks" and another participant is part of a support network set up by ABASA: Association for Advancement of Black Accountants in Southern Africa.

Figure 9: Names of Support Networks

Support Networks
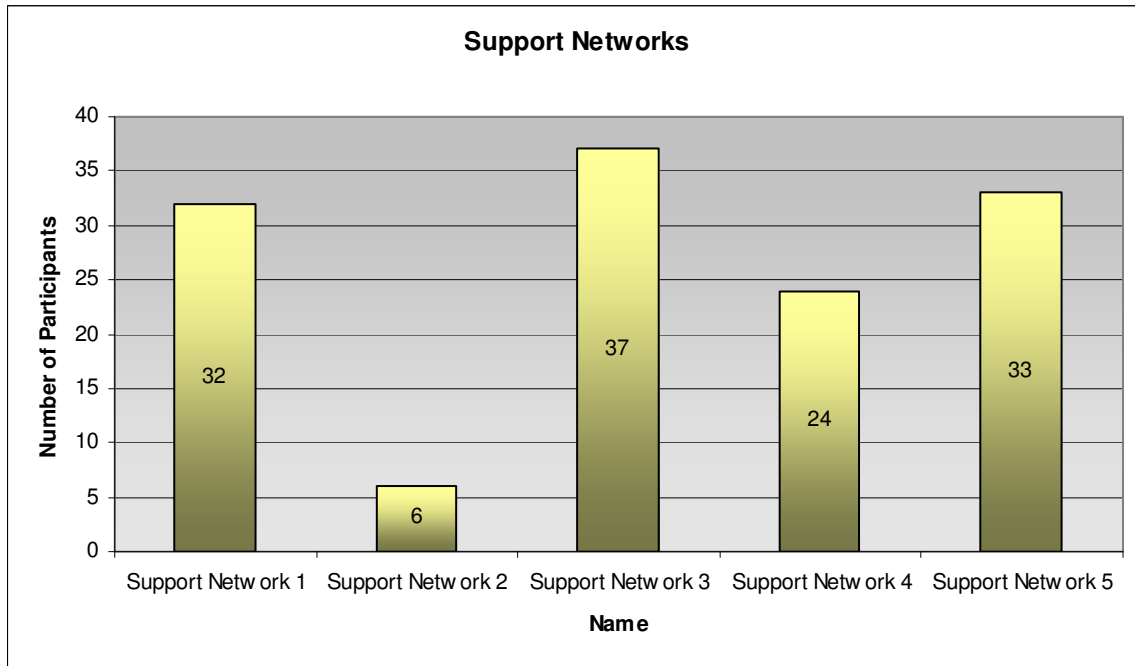
Responses to the questions posed to the participants.

Question 3: Why have you joined the network?

According to the table below; 69 of the participants indicated that they joined out of own interest. Forty-five (45) was nominated by their company to join and 13 indicated it was a requirement by their company.

Table 1: Why have you joined the network?

Why Joined?	Required by the company I work for	Joined out of own interest	Nominated by my company to join
Required by the company I work for	13	4	0
Joined out of own interest	0	69	2
Nominated by my company to join	0	0	45

Other reasons provided were:

- Nominated and inspired by co-workers (16) ;
- To play a role in transformation of their company (19).

Question 5: How long have you been attending the network?

Majority of the participants (45.04%) have been attending the network less than a year; 34.35% between 1 and 2 years; followed by 20.61% attending for 2 – 5 years.
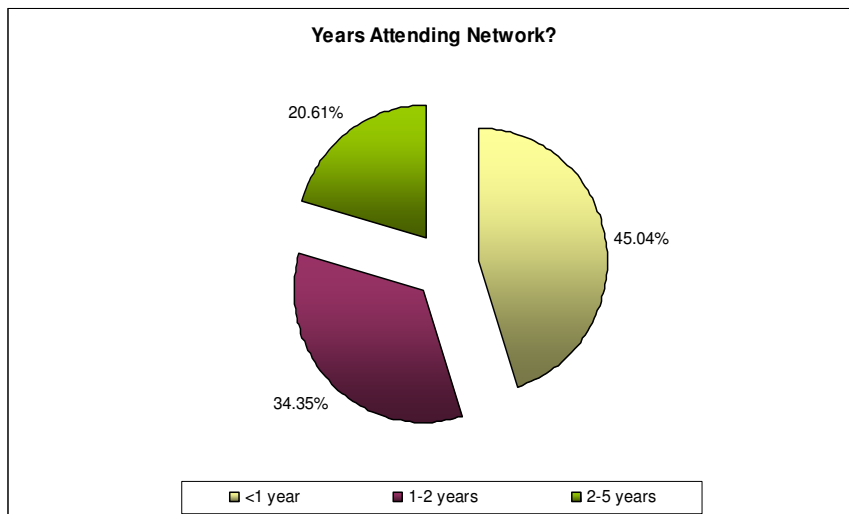
Question 6: What is the purpose of the network?

The following table summarises the feedback provided on the purpose compared to each network. A significant majority of Support Network 1, 3 and 5 indicated that all 3 options are equally relevant, i.e. to foster personal growth, teach soft skills and personal grooming.

A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Table 2: Purpose of Network vs Type of Network

Purpose	Support Network 1	Support Network 2	Support Network 3	Support Network 4	Support Network 5
A	7.14%	50.00%	2.70%	36.36%	16.13%
AB	0.00%	0.00%	2.70%	0.00%	0.00%
ABC	85.71%	0.00%	83.78%	9.09%	61.29%
AC	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
B	0.00%	25.00%	2.70%	36.36%	6.45%
C	7.14%	0.00%	8.11%	18.18%	16.13%

A: To foster personal growth

B: To teach "soft" skill (people skills)

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C: Personal groor......g to become better leaders

Question 7: Has the support network benefited you in any way? If yes, how has your participation in the network benefited you?

The following table compares the benefits to each network. All participants indicated that the support network benefited them. The majority of Support Networks 1, 3 and 5 indicated that all 4 of these options are equally relevant, i.e. acquired better social skills, able to self-reflect and embrace own diversity, better equipped to lead diverse teams and to deal with people that are different than me.

Each response to Question 7 was given a label, i.e. "A" for "I have acquired better social skills"; "B" for "I've been able to self-reflect and embrace my own diversity"; "C" for "I am better equipped to lead diverse teams" and "D" for "I now am better equipped to deal with people that are different than me". A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Table 3: Network benefits vs Type of Network

Benefit	Support Network 1	Support Network 2	Support Network 3	Support Network 4	Support Network 5
A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	13.64%	6.25%
AB	6.25%	0.00%	13.89%	0.00%	0.00%
ABC	9.38%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	3.13%
ABCD	59.38%	25.00%	41.67%	9.09%	46.88%
ABD	3.13%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%
B	0.00%	25.00%	11.11%	27.27%	15.63%
D	3.13%	50.00%	0.00%	40.91%	15.63%

Note: Only significant combinations summarised

A: I have acquired better social skills

B: I've been able to self reflect and embrace my own diversity

C: I am better equipped to lead diverse teams

D: I now am better equipped to deal with people that are different than me

Further benefits noted under "other" were that they were able to better focus on their job and issues were escalated for management attention quicker through the support network.

Question 8: What challenges do you face in your organisation?

The following table summarises the challenges compared to each race group. The majority of the Black, Coloured and Indian groups indicated that they are both not readily accepted by colleagues and face discrimination. The White group indicated that they too are faced with discrimination on a regular basis.

Table 4: Challenges vs Race Group

Challenges	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
A	8.93%	7.69%	7.89%	19.23%
AB	60.71%	69.23%	68.42%	7.69%
AC	1.79%	0.00%	0.00%	11.54%
B	21.43%	15.38%	18.42%	46.15%
BC	0.00%	7.69%	0.00%	0.00%
C	7.14%	0.00%	5.26%	15.38%

A: Not readily accepted by colleagues in the majority

B: Face discrimination on a regular basis

C: Find difficulty in engaging people of diverse backgrounds

Question 9: Does the network assist you in addressing these challenges you face? If yes, how?

The following table compares the "how" to each race group. A significant majority of all groups indicated that they embrace the person and his/her diversity.

Each response to Question 9 was given a label, i.e. "A" for "Now understand why people don't readily engage diversity"; "B" for "Choose to see the person instead of for the element of diversity" and "C" for "Embrace the person and his/her diversity". A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Table 5: How the Network assists vs Race Group

Assist	Black	Coloured	Indian	White
A	3.92%	0.00%	5.88%	12.50%
AB	0.00%	0.00%	2.94%	0.00%
AC	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	8.33%
B	5.88%	0.00%	8.82%	12.50%
C	90.20%	91.67%	82.35%	66.67%

A: Now understand why people don't readily engage diversity

B: Choose to see the person instead of the element of diversity

C: Embrace the person and his/her diversity

Question 10: What are the diversity themes that feature in your work space that impact on you?

The majority of participants indicated the first 3 diversity themes features equally, i.e. Racial and Gender discrimination, and the company feels compelled to embrace diversity.

Each response to Question 10 was given a label, i.e. "A" for "Racial discrimination"; "B" for "Gender based discrimination"; "C" for "Company feels compelled to embrace diversity" and "D" for "Open culture that embraces diversity voluntarily & wholeheartedly". A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Table 6: Diversity Themes

Diversity Themes	Frequency	%
A	4	2.99
AB	9	6.72
ABC	70	52.24
ABD	1	0.75
AC	13	9.7
ACD	1	0.75
B	6	4.48
BC	5	3.73
C	17	12.69
D	8	5.97

A: Racial discrimination

B: Gender based discrimination

C: Company feels compelled to embrace diversity

D: Open culture that embraces diversity voluntarily & wholeheartedly

Question 11: If you have a family support network, which features define it?
Question 15: Can the success factors of your familial support network easily exist in you organisational support network?

The participants clearly indicated that the features that define a family support network are both a family network that is based on trust and love (A); and that is non-judgemental support and understanding (B). Majority of the participants

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(95%) feel the key su~~~~ ~~~~~~ ~~ ~~~~ ~~~~~~ ~~~~~~t network can easily exist in their organisational support network.

Each response to Question 11 was given a label, i.e. "A" for "Family network based on trust and love"; "B" for "Non-judgemental support and understanding"; "C" for "Don't have a family support network" and "D" for "Don't get support and guidance from family network". A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Figure 11: Features of Family Support Network
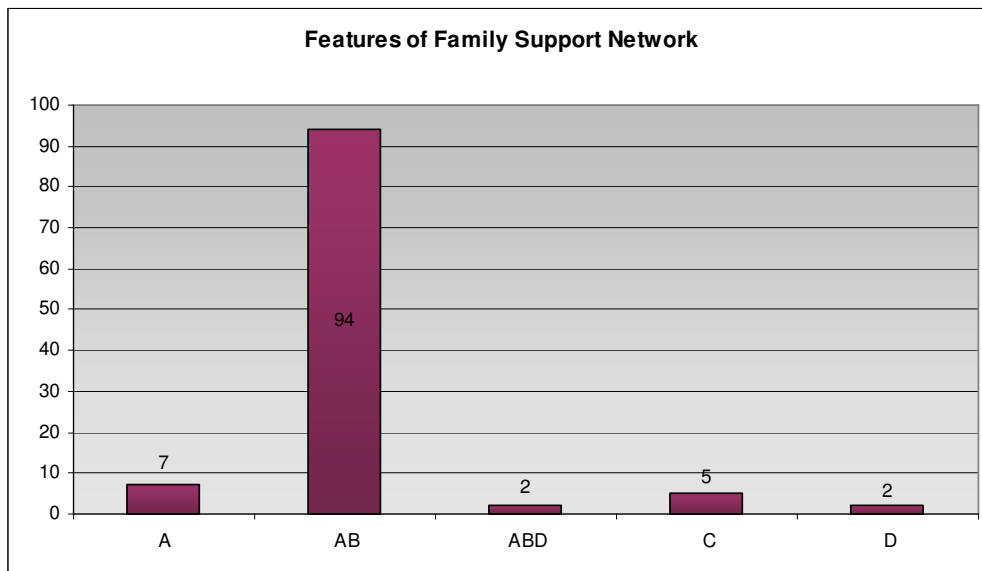
A: Family network based on trust and love

B: Non-judgemental support and understanding

C: Don't have a family support network

D: Don't get support and guidance from family network

Figure 12: Family Success Factors exist in Organisation Support Network?

Can Family Success Factors exist in Support Network?

5.00%

95.00%

| ☐ No | ☐ Yes |
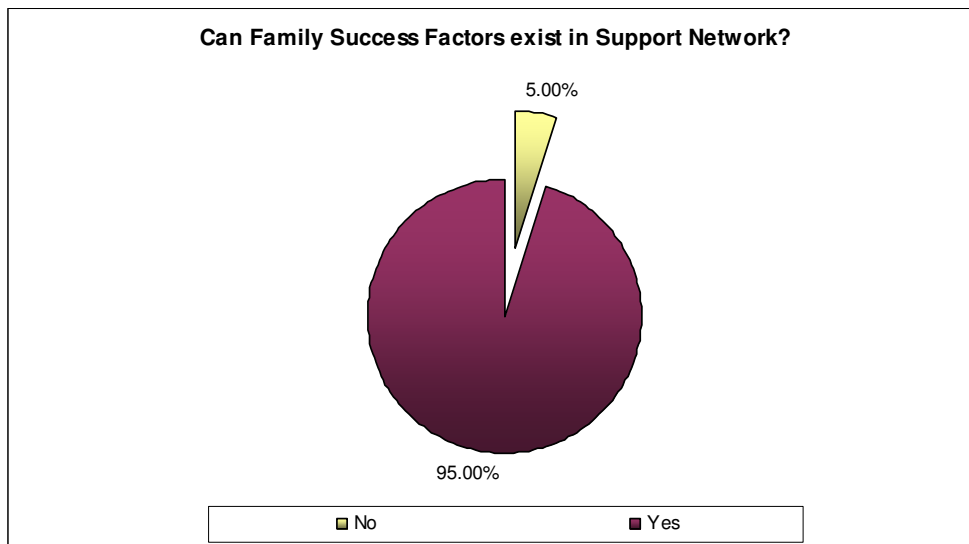
Question 12: What factors make the support network you attend successful?

There is a significant indication (90.00%) that all 4 factors are equally relevant to make the support network successful, i.e.

- to feel save within the network,
- free to speak my mind,
- trust my fellow network members and
- to be respected and not judged for my feelings and opinions.

Each response to Question 12 was given a label, i.e. "A" for "Feel safe within the network circle"; "B" for "Free to speak my mind"; "C" for "Trust my fellow network members" and "D" for Respected and not judged for my feelings and opinions". A participant could select more than one response and the following table therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses.

Table 7: Success Factors for an Effective Support Network

Success Factors	Frequency	%
A	2	2.00%
AB	1	1.00%
ABC	2	2.00%
ABCDE	90	90.00%
ABD	1	1.00%
AC	1	1.00%
AD	1	1.00%
C	1	1.00%
CD	1	1.00%

A: Feel safe within the network circle

B: Free to speak my mind

C: Trust my fellow network members

D: Respected and not judged for my feelings and opinions

Other success factors that were mentioned are:

Table 8: Other Success Factors

Success Factor	Frequency	%
Clear Objective	21	33.87%
Guidance	17	27.42%
Motivation	11	17.74%
Encouragement	9	14.52%
Address Soft Issues	3	4.84%
Total, unconditional acceptance of differences/diversity	1	1.61%
Total	62	100%

Question 13: How ~~many contacts have you made~~ **as a result of your participation in the network?**

Question 14: Do you interact frequently with the contacts you have made?

Seventy-seven (73.33%) said they made between 5 and 10 contacts as a result of their participation in the network and 21 (20.00%) made more than 10 contacts. Ninety-eight percent (98%) indicated that they still interact frequently with these contacts.

Figure 13: Number of Contacts

Number of Contacts made due to Participation in Network?
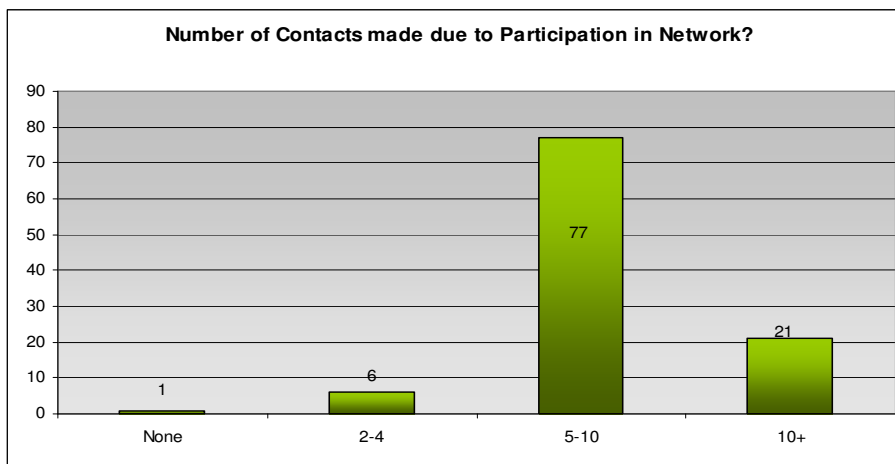
16. Why, in your view does your organisation promote support networks?

This was an open ended question to which 82% responded that their organisations host support networks to provide a specific form of support to their workforce in order to address a particular need they may have. Eighteen percent of the respondents stated that their organisations host the network because they are obliged to do so in terms of legislative requirements.

Question 17: What is your view regarding your organisation's response in managing diversity challenges?

Each response to Questions 17 & 18 was given a label, i.e.

A:	Include/Exclude	E:	Isolate
B:	Deny	F:	Tolerate
C:	Assimilate	G:	Build relationships
D:	Suppress	H:	Foster mutual adaptation

A participant could select more than one response and the following tables therefore, summarises all possible combinations of responses. Please also refer to Appendix C: Questionnaire for definitions.

Table 9: Organisation's Response

Organisational Response	Frequency	%
C	47	31.13
BCD	28	18.54
CD	16	10.6
F	9	5.96
A	5	3.31
AG	4	2.65
AGH	4	2.65
D	4	2.65
DF	3	1.99
FG	3	1.99
G	3	1.99

Note: Only significant frequencies summarised

Question 18: What would you prefer as your organisation's response to manage diversity?

Table 10: Organisation's Response Preferred

Preferred Response	Frequency	%
GH	77	52.03
H	36	24.32
AGH	13	8.78
G	7	4.73
AFGH	3	2.03
C	3	2.03
ACFGH	2	1.35
ACGH	2	1.35
A	1	0.68
ACG	1	0.68
AG	1	0.68
CH	1	0.68
F	1	0.68

Both above mentioned tables refer to the following descriptions. Please refer to Appendix C: Questionnaire for definitions.

A: Include/Exclude   **G:** Build relationships

B: Deny   **H:** Foster mutual adaptation

C: Assimilate

D: Suppress

E: Isolate

F: Tolerate

Findings of the Subject Matter Expert (SME) Interviews

The following key questions were posed to the SMEs :

1. What is the purpose of support networks? How do they differ from social networks?
2. What pieces of legislation in South Africa supports support network formation?
3. Why do people attend support networks?
4. Why do organisations host support networks?
5. What are the critical success factors for support networks
6. What factors characterise family based support networks?
7. Can these characteristics (family based) feature in organisational support networks?
8. Should organisations invest in support networks? If so, why?

All SMEs indicated that:

- Support networks in the form of workplace forums are required in terms of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998.
- Support networks are more structured than social networks and are convened to meet a specific need shared by a group of people
- People attend support networks in order to meet a specific need
- Organisations host networks in order to assist employees to meet this need. Their motivation could also be underpinned by a need to comply with legislation.
- A support network is a valuable forum for both organisations and employees.

A matrix containing the comprehensive feedback from the SMEs at the interviews is contained in Appendix F.

Each SME was provided with a code in order to maintain agreed levels of confidentiality. The codes provided are contained in Appendix E. The SME interviews provided valuable insight into the objectives and value that support networks provide to both individuals that participate in them and to organisations that host them.

See Appendix F for the detailed response received from each SME on these questions.

Chapter Six

Analysis of Results

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study aims to ascertain the relevance of the data collected to the principles of support networks identified in the literary review. In so doing the study uses the data collected and the literature expounded in chapter 2 to answer the following key research questions.

6.2 Research Questions

Research Question 1

What motivates people to attend supportive networks?

SME Y comments that people attend support networks to gain insights into particulars problems or challenges they may be facing. They would also be motivated to attend the network should it present an opportunity to learn a new skill or to obtain guidance on how to overcome a problem experienced.

SME R emphasises that no one works and lives in total isolation from others. When faced with a dilemma or a problem, a natural tendency would be to talk to another person about the problem in order to gain insights into the various ways the problem can be resolved or dealt with. This speaks to the social side to human nature. Therefore people are motivated by the potential of assistance they can achieve from participating in a support network that has a particular objective that appeals to the person. The person is also motivated by the value that can be gained from leveraging off the experiences of one another in the network.

SME X states that people join support networks because they are eager to learn and enhance their capacity. The participant also has a specific need that he aims to have fulfilled by the support network.

SME B maintains that people understand that they need other people to help them make decisions. The network serves as a sounding board to assist in making informed decisions around personal or work-related challenges.

SME S comments that people join support networks in order to obtain assistance with a personal problem or to learn a new skill.

SME M comments that people are motivated by the opportunities presented by support networks to grow, learn, and obtain insights, guidance and support to solving specific problems, to share information, compare and leverage experiences.

SME D mentions that support networks help people to know that they are not alone with what they are experiencing. They feel validated in the network. They often feel they are not heard in the workplace. The network gives them a platform to be heard. It also provides an opportunity to learn from others. SME D stated rather articulately that it helps people "to leverage the collective wisdom of the group. "

Strever (2006) refers to the work of Mackay (1990) where he highlights other benefits of networking:

- A network replaces the weakness of the individual with the strength of the group
- The network allows one to get feedback on business proposals, presentations and important business related issues.
- Other peoples networks can assist a person to expand their network
- Networks are a source of new experience and knowledge
- Networks can help you help others

- A network can expand your financial reach indefinitely.

According to Singh *et al* (2006), support networking refers to activities by individuals attempting to develop and maintain relationships with those with, or perceived to have, the potential to assist them in their work or career.

It can provide greater access to "instrumental" resources for enhancing individual human capital, in particular, access to education, experience or power (Ibarra, 1992). A broad range of network relationships implies an accumulation of contacts and interpersonal exchanges such that members of an individual's cohort become aware of one's capabilities and talents, or "social capital". (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

Vinnicombe and Colwill (1995) comments that networking is a banding together of like-minded people for the purposes of contact, friendship and support.

Singh et al. (2006) notes that women tended to use their networks for social support, whilst men are more instrumentally active to promote their careers in such networks. They further comment that recently women may have become more aware of the importance of networking to their careers

Pemberton, Stevens and Travers (1996) surveyed 328 European Women's Management Development network members who reported joining networks to help develop their personal skills, meet others who could help their careers, and make social contacts, rating psychosocial benefits above career support. The paradox is that although research suggests that women may place greater importance on the socializing aspects of networking, they are often excluded from social events and workplace interactions in which men engage (McCarthy, 2004).

The data in Table 1 in Chapter 5 indicates that 92% of the participants had joined the network voluntarily, with 46.29% indicating that they joined out of their own interest in the objectives of the support network.

The study therefore concludes that the objectives of the support network appeals to the person in terms of fulfilling a specific need he or she may have, which therefore motivates him or her to join the network.

Research Question 2

What motivates organisations to host support networks?

SME Y states that organisations host support networks in order to assist their employees to acquire a skill and/or address personal and/or work related issues that may be impacting them negatively. If a solution in the form of a network is provided by the organisation, it helps their employees to collectively find solutions and work around the problem quicker so that the problems do not impact on their performance

SME R states that organisations host support networks in order to foster learning and personal growth of their workforce. The networks assist people to get through negative events quicker and mitigate the impact these events may have on the individual's performance and development contract. It also aims to encourage productivity and growth at an individual and organisational level by supporting any specific need the individuals may have.

SME X   highlights that organisations host support networks in order to create additional support for employees at all levels. The networks assist organisations to enhance the resilience, knowledge, capabilities, experience of its employees and to present them with opportunities.

SME B maintains that organisations understand that they depend on their people to produce,   in order to be successful. If their people are preoccupied with personal and workplace issues that are not properly addressed by the organisation, this can impact negatively on the organisation's performance objectives.

SME S comments that organisations host support networks in order to provide a workplace based forum that assists employees to deal with the concerns/ issues they may have. Some organisations will do so voluntarily, others do so because legislation requires them to have workplace forums of such a nature

SME M states that organisations are motivated to host support networks in order to explore ideas of diversity in problem-solving. The networks help them to obtain best of breed in terms of solution, from a collective of opinions. It also helps to achieve a focussed workforce that is imperative in delivering on the organisational objectives with regard to productivity.

SME D states that without support networks, the structure of the organisation will not stand. Support networks inform the culture of an organisation and allow information to flow. It also helps organisations to achieve certain production levels. Support networks increases an organisation's ability to deliver a task that is linked to a production goal of the organisation

Networks exist not only as sets of cognitions inside the heads of individuals in organisations, but also as structures of constraint and opportunity negotiated and reinforced between interacting individuals (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

People tend to rely on others in their networks for help in making major decisions (Kilduff, 1990). Further employees not only tend to interact with group members who are similar on distinctive attributes such as ethnicity and gender (Ibarra, 1992), but the lower the relative proportion of such group members in the organisation, the higher the likelihood of within-group identification and friendship (Mehra et al., 1998)

The study therefore concludes that organisations host support networks in order to assist their people to align their actions with the key objectives of the organisation.

Do support networks contribute towards the effectiveness of individuals in their jobs?

All SMEs agree that support networks are an enabling platform that assists individuals to be and achieve their best. In so doing, they improve the individual's level of confidence in him or herself, which assists the individual to deal with problems faced and to then focus on his key performance objectives. SME R stated that the guidance and support the individual receives from the network also reassures him or her that they are not alone with their challenges and that the organisation is willing to listen and help address the challenges faced. SME D added that this in turns increase the employee's morale who then strives to achieve his best and act in the best interests of the organisation

All participants surveyed indicated that their participation in the support network have benefited them.

The following table compares the benefits to each network. The majority of the participants of Support Networks 1,3,and 5 indicated that all 4 of these options are equally relevant, i.e. acquired better social skills, able to self-reflect and embrace own diversity, better equipped to lead diverse teams and to deal with people that are different than me.

Table 3: Network Benefits To Type of Network

Benefit	Diversity Forum	Nexus	Women's Forum	Imbokodo	ADI
A	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	13.64%	6.25%
AB	6.25%	0.00%	13.89%	0.00%	0.00%
ABC	9.38%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	3.13%
ABCD	59.38%	25.00%	41.67%	9.09%	46.88%
ABD	3.13%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	0.00%
B	0.00%	25.00%	11.11%	27.27%	15.63%
D	3.13%	50.00%	0.00%	40.91%	15.63%

Note: Only significant combinations summarised

A: I have acquired better social skills

B: I've been able to self-reflect and embrace my own diversity

C: I am better equipped to lead diverse teams

D: I now am better equipped to deal with people that are different than me

According to the theory base, the presence of a broad range of network relationships has several implications for human resource management:

- It can provide greater access to "instrumental" resources for enhancing individual human capital, in particular, access to education, experience or power (Ibarra, 1992).

- A broad range of network relationships implies an accumulation of contacts and interpersonal exchanges such that members of an individual's cohort become aware of one's capabilities and talents, or "social capital". (Kilduff and Tsai, 2003).

- A manager may require the competence, knowledge and social capital of both hierarchy and network in order to leverage human resources for business objectives. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996)

Stephenson and Lewin (1996) propose that central to an organisation's repertoire of diversity management skills should be a competence for managing and analysing organisational networks. They argue that a failure to understand the power of networks may lead to misguided attempts at diversity training and development. Unless participants in diversity training programmes can develop a robust understanding of how informal networks, for example, operate within their work contexts, they will be less able to influence and enhance such important processes as communication, information exchange and decision making processes.

Effective network analysis can help to explain why some individuals play more central roles and are able to contribute more to organisational outcomes than others. Skills based diversity training should not only enhance the development of important integrating competencies but also create an arena in which individuals can themselves diagnose and analyse the extent to which different communication and networking approaches are relevant in different circumstances. (Limerick, 1999)

The development of group monitoring skills and observation skills can enable individuals to be more sensitive to the effects of different contexts on diversity tolerance and diverse group performance (Maddock and Parkin, 1994).

Opportunities to network and share experiences

An empirical case study conducted by Chesterman (2006), which revealed that women interviewed in institutions hosting support networks described how having contact numbers of women had enabled them to form valuable networks. The concept of networks has been identified with the notion of the "old boy" network; males effectively use such networks to foster relationships that enable them to enhance and build their careers. When viewed from such a perspective, women

have traditionally bee.......... men at networking. Since women have not been brought into informal male networks, they have been prevented from gaining the experience critical for leadership positions, the information necessary to identify and access important "gateways" and the visibility that would enable their contribution and achievements to be recognised. The women welcomed the opportunities to network with colleagues in other states and in other areas of university activity" and "to have access to information, support and advice" (Chesterman, 2006).

Philp (2008) highlights that its imperative that organisations ensure that their people are continuously aligned to deliver on the organisations' performance objectives. By investing in their people, organisations have come to realise the value of their social capital and constantly attempt to harness this potential by engaging and providing them with mentorship programmes, support structures and upskilling programmes. (Philp, 2008)

The only sure way for companies to win and retain skilled staff is to "have them fall in love with you" (Philp, 3, 2008). Barrow's message to organisations is to create an employer brand that appeals to the employees in the same way that consumer brands are trusted, and even loved by consumers. Simon Barrow, founder of the world's first employer brand consultancy, People in Business, says South African companies can fend off foreign bidders simply by becoming employees' heroes, with strategies as simple as creating a forum for employees to be heard.

This message is echoed by Drucker (2002) who emphasises that if organisations don't invest in their employees, they could jeopardise their competitive advantage. (Drucker, 2002)

Drucker (2000) stresses that what differentiates outstanding companies is the productivity of their capital. (Drucker, 2002). The happier the employee, the more

productive the employee, hence the more successful the organisation becomes (Drucker, 2002)

Organisations need to become adept at rallying the hearts and minds of their people in order to retain them (Campanaro, 2008). He adds that businesses need an employee value proposition (EVP) that taps into the desires and needs of potential and current employees. A unique and compelling EVP helps businesses to attract and retain the best suited talented individuals. An EVP is influenced by emotional insight therefore the emotional aspects of a company form the core of an EVP. Campanaro (16, 2008) highlights that "these emotional aspects include the unique culture that differentiates each business and the emotional connectivity that makes people tick- the often untold story of why your employees show up each day."

Based on the findings of the survey, the views of the SMEs and the advice by the academics, this study concludes that support networks assist individuals to become more effective in their jobs

Research Question 4

What attributes of support networks determine its success?

SME Y   highlights that there needs to be a common objective by all persons participating in the network in order for there to be focus towards achieving its imperatives. The ability to work together to achieve their objective is just as important- this means trust, comfort to speak freely, commitment by all to resolve the issues at hand must exist in order for the network to succeed.

SME R concurs that there needs to be a common objective, commitment, trust and focus. SME R added that dedicated time and resources, endorsed with

support from the highest level in the organisation also assists the network to achieve its objectives.

SME X maintains that there must be willingness of members to be part of the support network, reliability and availability of members, coupled with respect and commitment to an enabling environment. For support networks to work, clarity in roles and responsibilities is crucial. The network must have a clear purpose. Organisationally created networks are beneficial, but they need to be cautious that form does not rule over content. Form must not dilute the content needed to achieve the networks objectives.

SME B comments that a common objective and commitment from all participants, is required for a support network to be effective. SME B adds that it is important that members can talk openly and freely without criticism and can receive constructive feedback from fellow participants.

SME S advises that a common purpose needs to be shared by the people involved in the network. These persons must be motivated to work together to achieve the objective of the group.

SME M advises that ground or engagement rules must be agreed upon by all members of the network who must be committed to achieving the objective of the network. There should not be any in groups or out groups. Non-judgemental participation, listening, respect, guidance, care for each other, encouragement also contributes to the success of the network.

SME D concurs that clearly agreed objectives as to the existence of the network, commitment from every individual in the network to deliver on the agreed objectives, ability to be free and authentic in this group, ability to trust fellow members in the group with information and experiences shared contributes to the success of the network.

Characteristics of the support networks surveyed

Each support network surveyed displayed the following characteristics:

- The network had a defined purpose.
- The network was structured in that it met at a certain frequency and had specific agenda points to discuss.
- The networks were well attended. Out of an aggregate population of 210 members of the sum of the selected networks, the researcher managed to hand out questionnaires to 185 members of the networks, present on the day of a network programme.
- The members were committed to the objectives of the support network. An analysis of Table1 indicates that 92% of the participants had joined the network voluntarily and therefore could resign from the network anytime they deemed fit.
- The networks were successful as all participants highlighted key features of their particular network that assisted them to achieve their objectives.

Key Attributes of the networks surveyed

The participants in the survey highlighted the following elements as being critical to the success of a support network:

- Ability to feel safe in the network
- Ability to feel free to express one's thoughts
- Trust
- Respect
- Ability not to be judged by fellow support network members

The participants also highlighted that in addition to the above elements, is the need for the following elements:

- A clear objective
- Guidance
- Motivation
- Encouragement

According to the English Thesaurus dictionary, "motivation" means disposition or drive or encouragement therefore the researcher comments that motivation and encouragement can be used synonymously and therefore the 2 factors can be collapsed into one factor "motivation".

(**http://thesaurus.reference.com/browse/motivation**)

This implies that "motivation "was identified by 32.26% of the participants as an additional factor.

Providing a solution or providing guidance to the members was also identified as important attributes.

Key attributes of family based support networks

SME Y states that there also needs to be a common objective by all persons participating in the family based network. Ability to work together to achieve their objective- this means trust, comfort to speak freely, commitment by all to resolve the issues at hand.

The remaining SME's shared SME Y's comment on the attributes that makes a family based support network effective. SME D added that there are unwritten rules in a family that connects each of their objectives to one another and allows them "to do life together".

A total of 94 % of the participants surveyed in the support networks indicated that:
- Love
- Trust

- Non-judgemental support
- Understanding

are critical success factors for a family based support network.

Further 95% of the participants indicated that these elements could easily exist within an organisationally based support network. It is interesting to note that the remaining 5% had indicated that they did not have a family support network. This insinuates that had these participants (that comprised the latter 5%) a family support network; they would have concurred with the majority.

The theory base highlights the following attributes of support networks necessary for it to be effective:

1. Clear and common purpose

Support networks can be formal or informal and are convened with a specific purpose. This purpose is designed around specific needs of the members of the support network (Cox, 1993).

2. Commitment

In order to achieve the objective of the support network, the members of the network must engage actively in the activities of the network with commitment towards achieving the objective of the network (Cox, 1993)

3. Trust

Trust-based, these relationships are the ties that bind people together. Trust is typically conceived of as a "warm and fuzzy" form of social capital. However, it is also highly coercive and used to groom and maintain contacts for monopolizing resources. (Stephenson & Lewin, 1996)

Stephen *et al* (1996, maintains that trust-based relationships are initiated by seeking similarity in others, that is, an attribute (education, experience, events) that at least two people may share or have in common.

Strever (2006, p21) highlights that "It would seem that trust will play a key role in the dynamics of developing a person's network in a sustainable manner." Strever (2006) refers to Cross and Parker's (2006) list of actions necessary to build trust : Acting with discretion, matching words with deeds, communicate often and well, establish a shared vision; give away something of value (reciprocity); make decisions fair and transparent; help people refine unclear ideas; and hold people accountable for trust worthy behaviour.

The study therefore concurs with the theory base and concludes that trust, commitment and common objective are critical success factors for a support network. In addition, the study shows that respect and motivation are further attributes of a network critical to its success. It also further shows that the key attributes of a family based support network can exist in an organisational support network.

Conclusion

7.1   Future Research Ideas

Many interesting angles to the research surfaced whilst the data was being collected. For example:

- Participants in support networks were surveyed in order to determine their experience and understanding of the key attributes that determine the effectiveness of the networks they participate in. It would be interesting to also survey the relevant organisations that host the support networks in order to obtain data that could serve as constructive feedback for both parties, i.e individuals and organisations

- An exploration of the concept of an employee value proposition with a sample of organisations that participate in support network would have proven valuable.

- There is also an opportunity to determine the relationship between retention ratio and the sentiment/ loyalty levels of support network participants

- McPherson et al (2001) explain that homophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divide in our personal environment followed by age, religion, education, occupation and gender. Ties between dissimilar individuals dissolve at a higher rate than that between similar individuals (McPherson et al, 2001). This is an interesting observation that could be researched in broadening the scope of the current research.

- Further research on support networks would assist to build a comprehensive network model on the value to organisational performance

Key Insights

The data collected, supplemented by the literary review, informs the researcher's view that support networks provide employees and employers alike with an opportunity to increase their performance potential by really engaging one another in dialogue. Support networks provide a platform to hear employees. This allows organisations to treat their employees like they would treat their customers. Like employee satisfaction surveys, support networks help employers measure and understand their employees' attitude, opinions, motivation, and satisfaction. Therefore Campanaro's (2008) concept of EVP becomes relevant. Campanaro (2008) advises that the following are key elements to consider when developing a unique and compelling EVP:

- It has to be authentic and credible
- A business cannot claim to be something it is not
- A business must look at its brand and culture, and make sure the EVP is aligned with and reinforces the connection between the customer and the employee
- A business must believe in the power of ideas to change the world of work
- Creative communication and human experiences do change the way people think and behave
- A business needs to recognise the need to include a certain degree of aspiration into its EVP to ensure its longevity and allow growth
- A business should consider a 10% to 30% stretch in the EVP, aligned with the business growth targets and expectations.

Proper implementation of an EVP can save an organisation millions of rands, ensure a vibrant company culture and delivers consistently on its brand promise to the world. Failure to recognise, leverage or market EVPs could cost businesses more than they realise.

The relational nature of human beings (Ivancevich and Matteson, 2002) creates a compelling argument for the need to create platforms where employees can

freely engage one another with the objective of assisting the network achieve a certain common goal.

A proposed support network model

This study proposes that the data collected and supported by the literature studied, ideally leads to the configuring of the following support network model.

Figure 14: A proposed Key Attribute Model for Support Networks
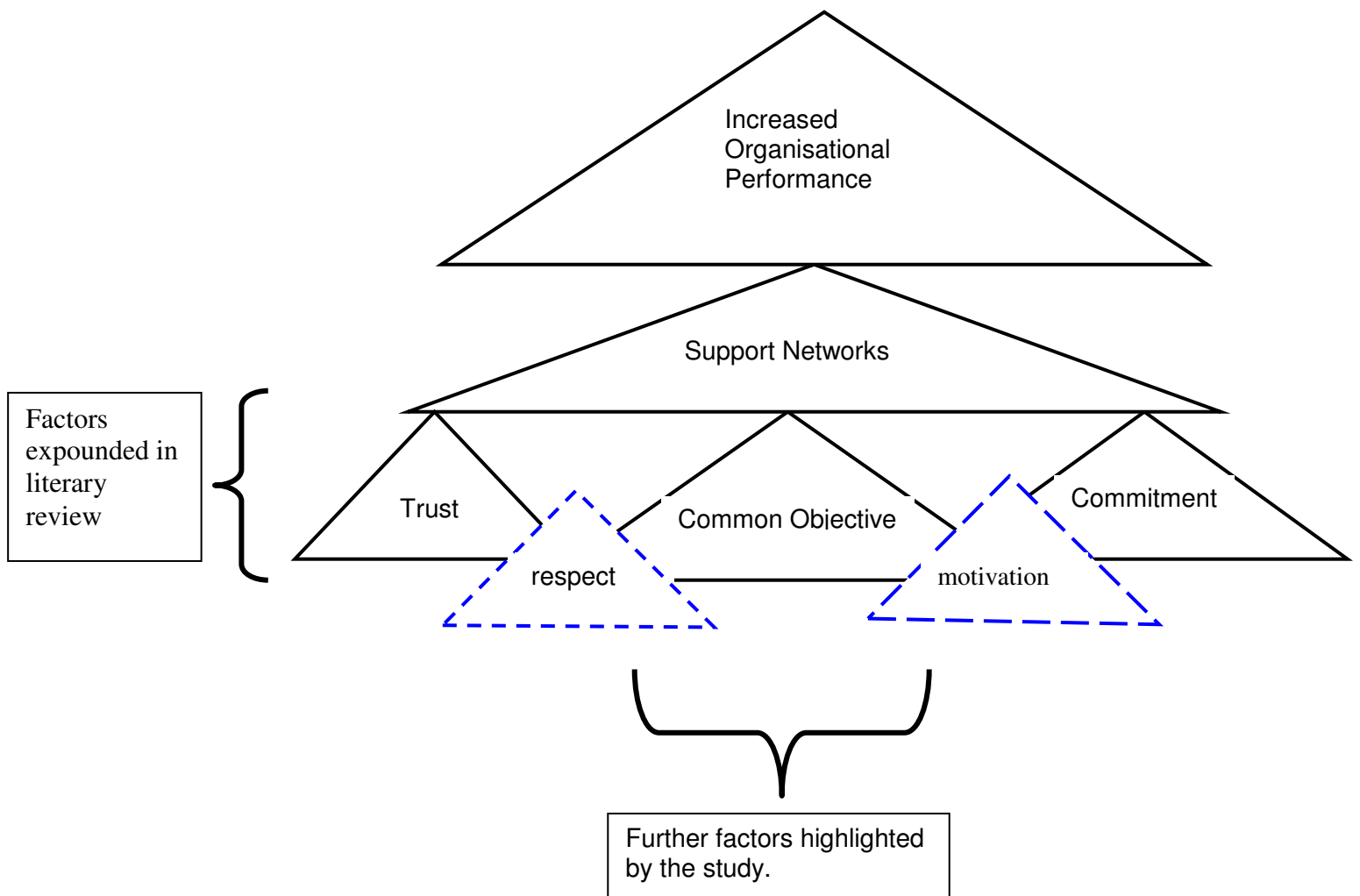
SME R highlighted that there is definitely a link between employee engagement and financial performance and her day to day engagement with members in support networks are increasingly providing a growing body of compelling evidence. SME X comments that a happy workforce is one of the most fundamental drivers of financial performance.

SME R comments further that in order to leverage the excellence of support networks and to make it work for organisations, the latter must create an inspiring strategy that mobilises employees into action. This must happen in conjunction with clear and visible leadership and commitment from the top team, which is then adopted by every manager. Further regular, two-way communication between managers and their staff is essential for the sustainability of the momentum created as a result of the dialogue.

This view is echoed by the findings of a Towers Perrin survey of 664,000 employees at 50 global companies where Towers Perrin-ISR compared the financial performance of companies with varying levels of employee engagement over a 12-month period (Towers Perrin's, 2008). It found that three financial indicators — operating income, net income and earnings per share (EPS) — rose when engagement was high and fell when engagement was low. The Towers Perrin (2008) report highlighted that were the business to focus on being open and honest in communication with its staff and showing an interest in issues that mattered to them, the business could expect to see engagement — and financial performance — increase.

Towers Perrin-ISR isn't alone in its pursuit of a link between engagement and financial performance. Towers Perrin (2008) refers to Gallup, a research company that says it has found a way to link employee engagement and EPS. In a 2006 study of 4.5m respondents at 332 companies, researchers found that the EPS growth rate of top-quartile organisations (those with the most highly engaged employees) was 2.6 times that of organisations with engagement levels in the third and fourth quartiles.

So what does this mean in practice? Towers Perrin-ISR says engaged employees display three types of behaviour — rational, emotional and motivational. At a rational level, employees believe in the goals of the company, they support the company's values and they understand how their own department contributes to the success of the company. At an emotional level, employees will, for example, recommend the company to a friend as a good place to work or believe the company inspires them to do their best work. At a motivational level, employees might work beyond what is normally expected to help both themselves and the company succeed.

In 2006, DAV Professional Placement Group was the winner of the Deloitte "Best Company to Work for "award based on a survey conducted annually (Maroun, 2007). DAV believes that their people matter most. The company believes in nurturing the dignity and worth of every person, "because we know putting our people first makes our people put their clients' needs first" says Ingrid Kast, CEO of DAV Professional Placements Group (Maroun, 28, 2007)

The research topic selected is highly topical in the South African diverse context where there is a real need for more research on the value of support networks . The research outcomes of this research project will be useful, in that it will expand on the current limited theory base in providing empirical evidence on the key attributes of successful support networks. This research will therefore also serve an academic purpose.

In conclusion, SME D's comments ring true to the argument made by Towers Perrin (2008) regarding employee engagement. SME D stresses that the current world of work is a "network revolution. We find community in networks, not groups." This comment is in line with Freeman's (1992) comment that although people often view the world in terms of groups, they function in networks. SME D maintains that in networked societies, "boundaries are permeable, interactions are immense." The key attributes (common objective, trust, commitment, motivation, respect) that determines the success of a network will become the

terms upon which the network members will contract with each other upfront before the network's journey begins.

Barrow comments that "Often, emotional or pride factors are an employee's bottom line, not money. So earn your people's respect by caring for them, and make them proud to work for you. "(Philp, 3, 2008)

The study therefore concludes that trust, commitment and common objective are key attributes of a support network. In addition, the study shows that respect and motivation are further attributes of a network necessary to ensure its success. The study finally concludes that, if properly leveraged, the key attributes of a family support network can be extended to exist in an organisational support network.

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GORDON INSTITUTE
OF BUSINESS SCIENCE

University of Pretoria

Date

Interview Consent Letter

Introduction

The aim of this interview is to ascertain the key attributes of support networks. This research is required as part of the 2 year MBA programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria.

The interview will take no more than 60 minutes of your time. All the responses and records provided will be treated with full confidentiality and not disclosed to any other party. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Interview Process

An interview schedule has been designed to determine the key attributes of support networks. Please provide honest feedback and your personal view. The interview will be conducted with yourself as a subject matter expert on support networks.

Request to review records

Any organizational documentation referring to the role of or observations on support networks will assist in this study. Please supply me with a copy of this information if possible. The researcher understands the sensitivity around this topic and will ensure confidentiality is maintained.

If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below.

Thank you for making yourself available for the interview. If you would like to receive a copy of the final research, kindly tick the box below and provide the email address where it can be mailed.

Researcher's details:	Research Supervisor details:
Sohana Maharaj	Dr Mandla Adonisi
Email: sohana.maharaj@brokers.absa.co.za	Email: ndonisim@gibs.co.za
Phone: 082 821 3755	Phone: 083 294 0316

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Please forward a copy of the final research report:	
e-mail or postal address:	

Interview Guide

1. Ascertain the SME's qualifications and experience.
2. Ascertain the SME's experience with support networks.
3. Ascertain the SME's understanding and definition of support networks?
4. What is the purpose of support networks? How do they differ from social networks?
5. What pieces of legislation in South Africa supports support network formation?
6. Why do people attend support networks?
7. Why do organisations host support networks?
8. What are the critical success factors for support networks
9. What factors characterise family based support networks?
10. Can these characteristics (family based) feature in organisational support networks?
11. Should organisations invest in support networks? If so, why?

Appendix C

Network Questionnaire

Demographics

a. Please tick the category that best describes your age

18-24		25-30		30-35		35-40		+ 40	

b. Gender

Female		Male	

c. Race

Black		Coloured		Indian		White	

d. How many years have you been working for?

1-5yrs		5-10yrs		10-15yrs		15-20yrs		+20yrs	

e. What is your highest qualification?

Matric	
Post Matric Certificate / Diploma	
Basic/ First Degree	
Honours Degree	
Masters Degree	
Other : Please specify :	

1. **Are you a member of a support network?** YES_____ NO _____
2. **What is the name of the network?**_____
3. **Why have you joined the network?**

Required by the company I work for	
Joined out of own interest	
Nominated by my company to join	
Other : Please specify :	

4. **What is your job level?**

Senior management	
Middle management	
Junior management	
Technical/ specialist	
Other : Please specify :	

5. **How long have you been attending the network?**

Less than a year	
1-2 years	
2-5 years	
Other : Please specify :	

6. **What is the purpose of the network?** (you may select more than one option)

To foster personal growth	
To teach "soft" skills (people skills)	
Personal grooming to become better leaders	
Other : Please specify :	

7. **Has the network benefited you? _____. If yes, how has your participation in the network benefited you?** (you may select more than one option)

I have acquired better social skills	
I've been able to self-reflect and embrace my own diversity	
I am better equipped to lead diverse teams	
I now am better equipped to deal with people that are different than me	
Other : Please specify :	

8. **What challenges do you face in your organisation?** (you may select more than one option)

I am not readily accepted by colleagues in the majority	

I face discrimination on a regular basis	
I find difficulty in engaging people of diverse backgrounds	
Other : Please specify :	

9. **Does the support network assist you in addressing diversity challenges you may face in the workplace? If yes, how?** (you may select more than one option)

I now understand why people don't readily engage diversity	
I choose to see the person instead of the element of diversity	
I embrace the person and his/her diversity	
Other : Please specify :	

10. **What are the diversity themes that feature in your work space that impact on you?** (you may select more than one option)

Racial discrimination	
Gender based discrimination	
Company feels compelled to embrace diversity	
Open culture that embraces diversity voluntarily & wholeheartedly	
Other : Please specify :	

11. **If you have a family support network, which features define it?** (you may select more than one option)

Family Network based on trust and love	
Non-judgemental support and understanding	
Don't have a family support network	
Don't get support and guidance from family network	
Other : Please specify :	

12. **What factors make the support network you attend successful** (you may select more than one option)

I feel safe within the network circle	

I am free to speak my	
I trust my fellow network members	
I am respected and not judged for my feelings and opinions	
Other : Please specify :	

13. How many contacts have you made as a result of your participation in the network?

None		1		2-4		5-10		10+	

14. Do you interact frequently with the contacts you have made?

   YES _____NO_____

15. Can the success factors of your familial support network easily exist in your organisational support network? YES__NO _____

16. Why does your organisation host / promote the support network?

17. **What is your organisation's response in managing diversity challenges?(**Refer to the definitions of each response below entitled "Thomas' Diversity Paradigm model")

Response to Diversity Issues	Please tick the appropriate box
1. Include / Exclude	
2. Deny	
3. Assimilate	
4. Suppress	
5. Isolate	
6.Tolerate	
7. Build Relationships	
8. Foster Mutual	

Adaptation	

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18. What would you prefer as your organisations response to managing diversity?

Response to Diversity Issues	Please tick the appropriate box
1. Include / Exclude	
2. Deny	
3. Assimilate	
4. Suppress	
5. Isolate	
6.Tolerate	
7. Build Relationships	
8. Foster Mutual Adaptation	

Thomas' Diversity Paradigm Theory (1996) outlines the following responses by organisations when dealing with diversity:

1. *Include/Exclude*: inclusion of underrepresented groups in the organisation as opposed to exclusion which minimizes diversity and complexity by, for example, only hiring individuals with homogenous work philosophies or educational backgrounds.

2. *Deny* : denial minimises the diversity mixture by explaining it away, pretending that differences do not exist or do not matter

3. *Assimilate*: Assimilation has been the prevailing means of managing diversity; organisations insist that minority components conform to dominant norms.

4. *Suppress*: Suppression is an attempt to minimise the diversity mixture by encouraging people to downplay differences and accentuate similarities.

5. *Isolate*: Isolation allows inclusion differences into the wider system, but then relegates those with differences from the dominant sector off to the side, such as in pilot project or other ancillary subsystem.

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6. *Tolerate*: Toleration addresses diversity by projecting a "live-and-let-live" attitude, without truly embracing differences. Toleration is not true collaboration or connection; it's mere co-existence;

7. *Build relationships*: Through relationship building, organisations address diversity by fostering quality relationships- characterised by acceptance and understanding. The focus is on similarities, the hope is to avoid challenges associated with differences.

8. *Foster mutual adaptation*: When organisations foster mutual adaptation, they accept and understand diversity and differences, and recognise that full accommodation of the diversity mixture requires every entity to adapt.

September 2008

Dear Sir / Madam

Re. Research Participation

I am currently completing my MBA research project with the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. My topic is: The Key Attributes of Successful Support Networks. The study requires me to survey participants in support networks and to determine whether the networks assist the participant to address concerns/ challenges faced in society and/or the workplace.

Support networks in the research will focus on surveying the participants in support networks. It can even include a family support network.

You have been identified as such a participant. As a member of a support network (formal or informal), I would appreciate your assistance in having the attached questionnaire completed. The questionnaire will take no more than 5 minutes of your time. All the responses and records provided will be treated with full confidentiality and not disclosed to any other party. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Sohana Maharaj
Sohana.maharaj@brokers.absa.co.za
Cell: 082 821 3755

SME and Organisation Code

Subject Matter Experts interviewed to determine the Key Attributes of Support Networks

Subject Matter Expert Code	Title	Sector
Y	Director	Consultancy
R	Director	Financial Industry
X	Director	Tertiary / Financial
B	Senior Lecturer of a Business School	Tertiary
S	Network Programme Manager	Tertiary
D	Director	Consultancy
M	Head of Transformation	Financial

Organisation 1 - Tertiary Sector

Organisation 2 – Financial Sector

SME Code	1. Qualifications and Experience	2. Define Support Networks	3. What is the purpose of support networks? How do they differ from social networks?	4. Why do people attend support networks?	5. Why do organisations host support networks?	6. What are the key attributes of successful support networks	7. What factors characterise family based support networks?	8. Can these charactieristics (family based) feature in organisational support networks?	9. Should organisations?
Y	Masters in Management: Public & Development Management Transformation and Diversity management Expert. He has worked in the field of Change and Transformation for 14 years. Consults to organisations that want to set up organisational structures to address transformational goals	Nodal points or people(contacts) that would actively support and contribute to the success of an individual who might not be familiar with the different aspects of the organisation or may need support in one form or the other.	To provide support to an individual or groups of individuals in respect to specific needs. This can occur in a formal or informal setting. Social Networks are informal and do not have a specific objective to achieve. Each person joins the social network with their own agendas and this is usually formed informally.	to gain insights into particulars problems or challenges they may face. Learn a skill	To assist their employees to acquire a skill and/or address personal/work related issues that may be impacting them. If a solution in the form of a network is provided by the organisation, it helps their employees to collectively find solutions and work around the problem quicker so that the problems do not impact on their performance	a common objective by all persons participating in the network. Ability to work together to achieve their objective- this means trust, comfort to speak freely, commitment by all to resolve the issues at hand.	trust, respect, commitment	Yes, both networks are made up of human relationships. If it works in family networks, it can work in organisations if there is total buy-in from the leadership of the organisation and they are seen to be champions in advocating support networks in the organisation	Yes, assists in enhancing **invest in support networks? If so, why** productivity of the organisation's workforce.
R	Studied extensively overseas and is a graduate of the Harvard University Senior Executive Programme as well as the Nelson Mandela Professional Development Programme (New York). She holds a number of international qualifications from	group of people with common interest. One of their objectives is to be available and support one another.	To provide support and focus on growing people as individuals. It has an individual focus in a collective setting and aims at investing in people to enrich their lives.	No one works and lives in total isolation and there is much value to be gained from leveraging off the experiences of one another.	To foster learning. To get people through negative events quicker and mitigate the impact these events may have on the individual's performance and development contract. It also aims to encourage	Common objective, commitment, trust, focus, dedicated time and resources, endorsed with support from the highest level,	commitment, understanding, communication, empathy, common objectives	Yes	Yes

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	MIT, Insead, IMD and Wits. Transformation and Diversity management Expert. In the field of Change and Transformation for 12 years. Facilitates networks involving women and children respectively.					productivity and growth at an individual and organisational level. To support any specific need the individuals may have.				
X	BCom degree. 20 years experience in transformation management	Support networks include individuals and groups of people, who through a mutually beneficial structured or unstructured relationship enable you to function and operate more effectively, whether at home or at work.	Support Networks play an active and defined or undefined role that functions to supplement individual capacity. Social networks are completely different and relate primarily to the lifestyle of the social networker and can also play a support role. Support networks are more structured and forms with a specific purpose in mind.	To learn, enhance one's capacity. The participant has a specific need that he aims to have fulfilled by the support network.	To create additional support for employees at all levels. To enhance the resilience, knowledge, capabilities, experience of its employees and to present them with opportunities.	Willingness of members to be part of the support network, reliability and availability of members, respect and commitment to an enabling environment. For support networks to work, clarity in roles and responsibility is crucial. The network must have a clear purpose. Organisationally created networks are beneficial/ valuable, but need to watch for form over content. Form must not dilute content.	trust, reliability, mutual benefit, expansion of capacity, relief of pressure from e.g a caregiver.	Yes, if the organisation inculcates sufficient trust and commonality of purpose and objectives.	Yes, it they want to retain staff, need to create platforms where employees can explore top of mind issues and concerns. A supportive culture is very important for any organisation and support networks only aim to strengthen this culture.

B	Bachelor of Arts Degree, Honours and Master of Arts Degree , MBA , PhD in International HR Strategy. 15 years experience working in Human Resource related networks. Author of published works in the Human Resource field.	any connection that provides one with help to get closer to a specific goal	support networks have a specific agenda and the members of the network have a shared ambition.	People understand that they need people to make decisions. The network serves as a sounding board to assist in making informed decisions	Organisations understand that they depend on their people to produce in order to be successful. If their people are preoccupied with personal and workplace issues that are not properly addressed by the organisation, this can impact on the organisation's objectives negatively	commitment, common objective shared by all members, important that members can talk openly and freely without criticism but constructive feedback.	trust, mutual respect, care, commitment. Love, eagerness to assist, common reality	Yes, care and nurturing can be replicated in an organisation and the culture needs to befit this. Support Networks help people stay and build relationships across groups and value bases and they rise above their hurdles in the work space. Cultural factors that unite are greater than those that don't.	Yes
S	Masters in Education 8 years experience in education			to obtain assistance with a personal problem or to learn a new skill .	to provide a workplace based forum that assists employees to deal with the concerns/ issues they may have	common purpose that needs to be shared by the people involved in the network. These persons must be motivated to work together to achieve the objective of the group	trust, care, ability to listen and advise without passing judgement on the member of the family.	absolutely. It provides a basic framework to organisations to tap into. Every organisation should create a culture where their employees regard the organisation as a home away from home	Yes, both organisations and employees have much to gain from a platform where dialogue is encouraged
M	B.Com and B.Com (Hons), MBA, an Global Executive Development Programme, exposure to the Strategic Leader Programme of the Californian State University through the Graduate Institute for	group of people that convenes to obtain support (technical, soft skills). Networks that support are about finding better ways of working, benchmarking and learning from each other.	a support network has specific objectives to achieve and provides direction to the group as to how those objectives can be achieved. Social networks are general in nature and unstructured	to grow, learn, obtain insights, guidance and support to solving specific problems, to share information, compare and leverage	To explore ideas of diversity in problem-solving. To obtain best of breed in terms of solution, from a collective of opinions . To help to achieve a focussed workforce that is imperative in	ground rules/ engagement rules, buy in to the rules by all participants, no in-groups and out groups, non-judgemental participation, listening, respect, guidance , care, encouragement.	talk at ease about issues, listening empathy, guidance, non-judgemental	Yes	Yes- its an imperative if organisations want to sharpen their competitive edge, especially in the South African context where managing a diverse workforce effectively will determine the

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	Management Technology. 16 years of experience in a human resource related position		with just about anything is discussed socially.	experiences .	delivering on the organisational objectives with regard to productivity.				success of organisations.
D	Masters in Practical Theology, specialising in Pastoral Theory. Honours in Psychology 7 years experience in social sciences. Plays a role in leading various support networks.	Group of people who play a functional role for a purpose linked to a goal that a member of the network has.	It exists for a collective need that also addresses needs on an individual basis.	It helps them to know that they are not alone with what they are experiencing. They feel validated in the network. They often feel they are not heard. The network gives them a platform to be heard. It also provides an opportunity to learn from others- to leverage the collective wisdom of the group	Without support networks, the structure of the organisation will not stand. Support networks inform the culture of an organisation and allow information to flow. It also helps organisations to achieve certain production levels. Support Networks increases an organisation's ability to deliver a task that is linked to a production goal of the organisation	clearly agreed objective as to the existence of the network, commitment from every individual in the network to deliver on the agreed objectives, ability to be free and authentic in this group, ability to trust fellow members in the group with information and experiences shared	acceptance, commitment, understanding, unwritten rules that assists people to "do life together"	Definitely. People who journey together or who create value together build sustainable relationships. This can exist both in the family and organisational setting.	Yes