

12-22-2021

Improving Networking Supports for Women in the Workplace

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Citation of this paper:

Pennesi, Karen E.; Alvarez Vandeputte, Javier; Agoston, Zsofia; and Amsdr, Rawand, "Improving Networking Supports for Women in the Workplace" (2021). *Anthropology Publications*. 71.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/anthropub/71>

IMPROVING NETWORKING SUPPORTS FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

--Final Report--



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December 22, 2021

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Introduction

This report describes findings of our examination of networking involving women in executive, senior management, and C-suite positions in Canada. The background of this project can be found in different levels. Firstly, according to Catalyst (2020), women have been acquiring more jobs in various labour sectors in Canada, where about 47.4% of the workforce identify as female. Secondly, the Canadian Government implemented the 50/30 challenge to increase gender parity to 50% and to achieve 30% representation of women on Canadian boards and senior management positions (Government of Canada (ISE), 2021). Thirdly, the general aim of WXN is that a minimum of 30% of leadership and executive positions should be occupied by women in Corporate Canada (Women's Executive Network, 2020). Fourthly, the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic shifted workplace and networking dynamics greatly. Between February and March 2020, more than 1 million Canadians lost their jobs; 63% of them were women (CWF et. al., 2020). Finally, the study conducted in 2020 by Western Anthropology student researchers and WXN identified networking as a potential support and barrier for women who were excluded from work-related activities and mentorship opportunities (Afrin et al., 2020). Despite significant progress toward equitable representation of women in the workforce, women continue to face constraints in accessing C-suite, executive, senior management, and FP500 (the highest ranked Canadian companies according to revenue) positions.

Our research project sought to delve into the results of the study carried out in 2020 by Western Anthropology student researchers (Afrin et al., 2020) and contribute to the objectives of WXN focusing on the following goals:

1. Explore the general motivations for women to participate in networks, characterizing their participation in networks;
2. Identifying supports and barriers for networking;
3. Explore the relationship between participation in networks and trajectories of empowerment and professional success.

This report presents the results of our research regarding the goals mentioned above and provides concrete recommendations to WXN for the implementation of networking strategies going forward. The report is divided into the following sections: Methodology, Results,

Recommendations and Conclusion. In the Results section we describe participants' definitions of networking, women's motivations and strategies for networking, and the impact of Covid-19 on the supports and barriers influencing their networking.

The members of the research team who carried out this research are three graduate students from the Research Methods in Sociocultural Anthropology course at Western University (Rawand Amsdr, Javier Alvarez Vandeputte, and Zsofia Agoston) and the course instructor, Dr. Karen Pennesi. Garry Atkinson, the Research and Analytics Manager, was our main point of contact from WXN.

Methodology

This report is informed by data collected between October and December 2021. The research is based on a mixed methods approach, using semi-structured interviews, a survey, and LinkedIn observations. In total, we conducted six interviews, observed three LinkedIn social networking profiles, and received 85 complete responses to the survey. Participant recruitment began in the third week of October and continued until the end of November. We coordinated with Garry to send out the virtual invitation to WXN's network to participate in the interview and to answer the survey. We collected participants' personal and demographic information, such as age range, gender, professional sector, and job position.

Table 1. Interview participants

Pseudonym	Age	Industry and Sector	LinkedIn Profile Observation
Smiles	40-49	Non-profit Organization	Yes
Claudia	40-49	Music and Government	No
Shar	40-49	Non-profit Organization	No
Danielle	21-29	Business and Communications	Yes
Sam	30-39	Health	No
Presto	40-49	Financial Planning	Yes

In our first phase of research, we recorded the semi-structured interviews via Zoom and organized the LinkedIn observations. Overall, we asked questions regarding the types of industries, sectors, positions, and networking activities the women participated in. Furthermore, we explored the participants' accounts on the social media networking platform,

LinkedIn, as it is one of the most used online networking sites to date. According to Ilana Gershon (2017:157), “LinkedIn provides a new genre to the [job seeker’s] repertoire when no new genre has been added for decades.” LinkedIn, therefore, is a platform that contains a myriad of connections, resources, and interactions that were suitable for investigation in this study. In the second phase of research, we conducted the survey. The survey results help contextualize the interview and LinkedIn data to and deepen our understanding of how women participate in networks in terms of duration, frequency, intensity, and modes of participation.

Finally, throughout the research study, we attended 8 online events to provide us with contextual understanding and background information about WXN. We did participant observation of these events as a way to understand how networking events progress and to observe the women’s networking strategies in action.

Our work was approved by Western University’s Research Ethics Board. All participants provided oral consent prior to participating in this research and their identifying information was kept confidential. We use pseudonyms for all participants in this report. A presentation of all results is attached in the appendix of this report.

Results

What is Networking?

The way in which women do networking is related to the way they **define networks**. In the interviews, there are two recurring ideas about what networks are and what their purpose is. On the one hand, the participants indicated that networking means **building a community**; a space in which finding commonalities and mutual support are fundamental. On the other hand, women talked about networking as a of means **pursuing one’s own interests**, professional success, and marketing one’s own skills and attributes. These two ideas, which might seem contradictory, are intertwined in the way that participants talked about networking. For example, Claudia described networking in terms of creating and maintaining a “community of diverse interests.” Networks must be a space where different backgrounds and trajectories can be organically linked.

“To me networking is where you might link up over that common interest. It's always about making the most diverse representation within a common interest, so that when you're talking about things, you're getting the broadest perspectives or just even celebrating the differences between how everybody's doing the same kind of thing [...] What are common priorities, and then looking to see how people do things across the country, within the same kind of realm [...] sharing ideas and getting those broad perspectives [...] It's really about the broadest support and developing and not pigeonholing yourself...”
(Claudia, 40-49, Public Administration and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation)

“Networking, in the Canadian environment for sure is more built on commonalities rather than your skill set” (Sam, 30-39, Health)

While it is true that a tension seems to be expressed between what we can characterize as an *altruistic* definition of networking versus a *utilitarian* definition of networking, in most cases the definition always manages to express the harmonious inclusion of both.

“it's really just to let people know kind of what I do and, and see if there's an interest or if there's some synergy that we can work on or collaborate together on” (Shar, 40-49, Not for profit)

The definition of networking that best represents our data is the following:

Networking is the creation and maintenance of a community of diverse interests, through in-person and online engagements, that can be mobilized for the benefit of oneself or other members of one's network.

Our interview participants are involved in different types of networks. The elaboration of *definitions* of networks is related to networking *activities* precisely because in some cases it is not possible to think about the first in the absence of the second. Some of the women participate in formal networks, such as WXN, among other professional associations. Other informal networks refer to activities that take place in certain spaces, such as the workplace, and the relationships established with colleagues and superiors. It is possible to participate in certain networks without choosing to do so, such as family and school networks or religious ones. The networks that are built during undergraduate or graduate studies are significant. Other networks are international, virtual or online networks. Consider LinkedIn, which is a business-oriented social network. It is also possible to network on entertainment-oriented

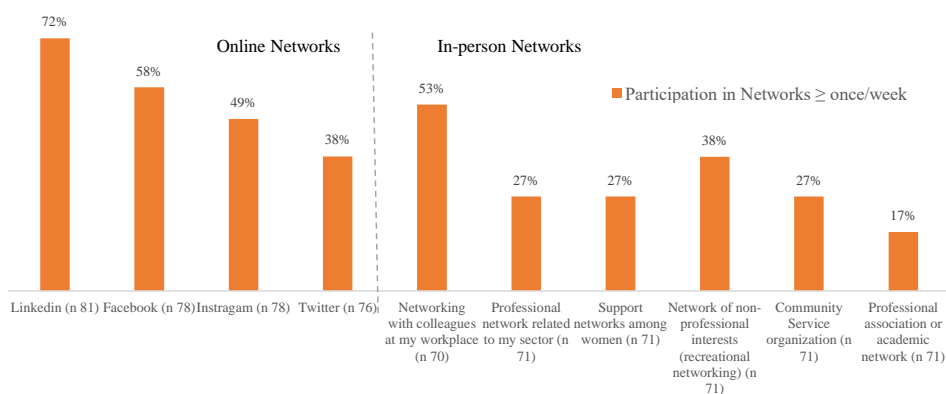
social networks, such as Facebook or Instagram. Other networks are exclusive, such as certain business networks or corporate boards. As Danielle points out in the following quote, networking is a dynamic and moving activity in which connections are established through participation in different social circles and places:

“I have a lot of different social circles right, because I’ve done a couple part time jobs, I had a couple co-op work terms in my undergrad. All throughout those I’m making connections and these...allow people to introduce me to people. It is allowing me to also look at future opportunities and get connected to different jobs that I could apply to.” (Danielle, 21-29, Business and Communications)

The survey collected data on specific forms of online and in-person network participation. These specific forms refer to a variety of networking activities.

Participants’ definitions point to a set of activities that can take place in one or several spaces, often simultaneously. The survey results complement this information. Primarily, most of the women who responded to the survey participate in multiple networks or networking activities. They do it with different frequencies while attributing different levels of importance to each. Figure 1 illustrates the participation in online and in-person networks. It shows the percentage of survey respondents who participate at least weekly in that network (this considers the categories “once a week”, “once a day” and “multiple times a day”).

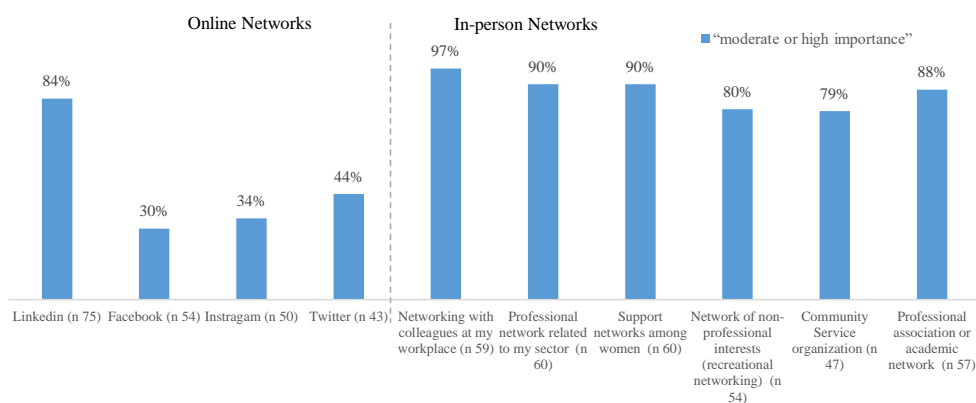
Figure 1. Participation in online and in-person networks



According to our survey respondents, LinkedIn is the most frequently used online networking platform. On the other side, networking with colleagues at the workplace is the most frequent mode of in-person networking. Interestingly, weekly participation in in-person networks tends to be lower than in online networks. In the case of these networks, participation tends to be less frequent, occurring mostly “once a month” and “a few times a year.”

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who indicate how important each network is for their careers. This percentage is made up of the options “very important” and “moderately important.”

Figure 2. Importance of participation in networks in the professional career



This graph shows an inverse situation to that observed in network participation (Figure 1). In the case of online networks, great importance is attributed to LinkedIn. However, the importance attributed to in-person networks tends to double that attributed to online networks. This data is very significant for the objectives of the research project. **The higher frequency of participation in some networks does not imply that they are more important in the trajectories of empowerment and professional success.** This is consistent with the results shown in the following sections, where the idea of “quality networking” is further explored.

The survey data also coincides with the definition of networking elaborated from the interview participants. Figures 3 and 4 show the different modes of network participation and networking. They show that the importance of altruistic (putting *others* at the center of

networking) and utilitarian (putting *oneself* at the center of networking activities) aspects are equally relevant for both online and in-person networks.

Figure 3. Modes of participation in online networks (% of respondents who agree with the following statements)

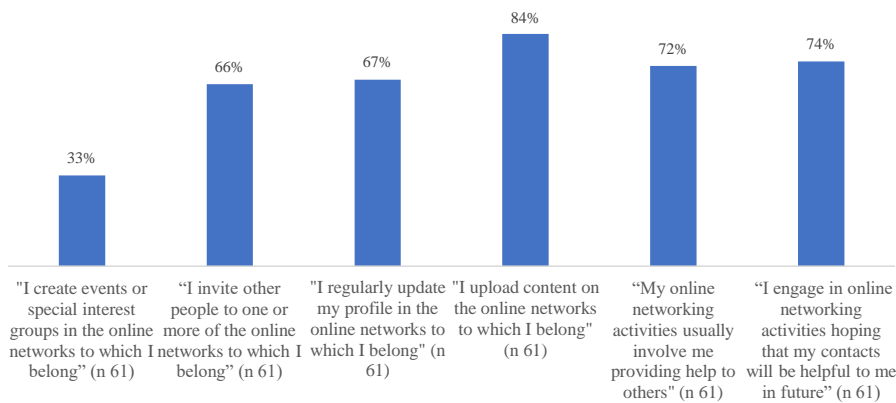


Figure 3 shows that in general most of the respondents participate in many diverse modes and strategies in networking. Seventy-two percent of respondents carry out these activities with the objective of helping others with the hope that the contacts will be helpful in the future. This is consistent with the way in which the interview participants define networks. As mentioned, this definition is characterized by the articulation between one's own interests and the interests of others participating in the network. Finally, the survey data show that the creation of events or interest groups has the lowest participation at 32%. The latter is reasonable if we consider that such an activity requires the dedication of more working hours.

Figure 4. Modes of participation in in-person networks (% of respondents who agree with the following statements)

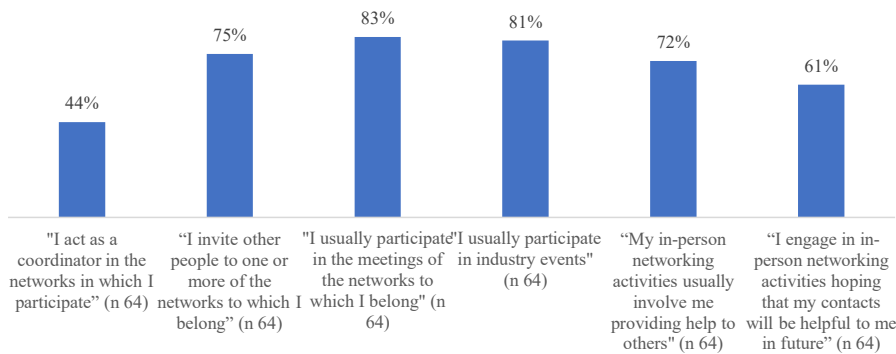


Figure 4 shows that the modes of participation in in-person networks have a similar distribution with respect to participation in online networks. Participation in activities requiring more working hours and network coordination is considerably lower at a 44% (act as a coordinator). Notably, both “altruistic” (defined as helping others) and “utilitarian” (long-term reciprocal contacts) participation are important to respondents.

This section detailed the research participant’s definitions of networking. This definition can be summarized in the idea of creating and maintaining a **community of diverse interests**. This definition is related to different ways of understanding networks, both as formal spaces and as specific activities (networking). An important distinction lies in online and in-person networks; specifically, women participate more frequently in online networks. However, the importance attributed to in-person networks with respect to participants’ career development is greater than in online networks. The survey indicated that in both modalities (in-person and online) networking activities that require more work (such as being a sponsor or creating interest groups) are the least frequent. Finally, consistent with interview data, giving and receiving help is important in both modalities.

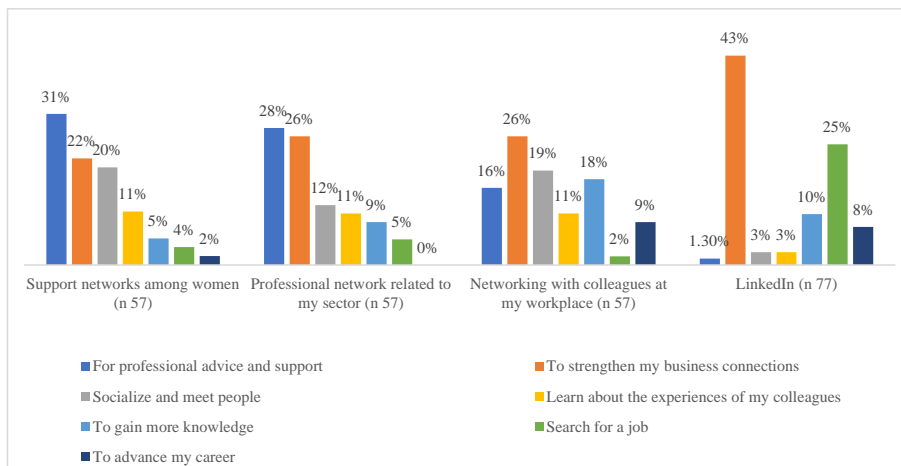
The next section explores the mediations between network definitions and network participation (and network activities). This covers the participant’s motivations to participate in networking strategies and how they effectively use them.

Motivations and Strategies for Networking

In this section we briefly explore the main **motivations for joining a network** or engaging in networking activities. Then we analyze the main **strategies** that the participants develop to make **effective use** of these networks. The analysis suggests that there is a high level of consistency between the elaboration of definitions, motivations, and networking strategies.

The data collected in the survey conveys the main motivation for joining networks. Figure 5 shows the four networks that are considered “important” (see the section What is Networking?) and the coloured bars indicate the percentage of respondents reporting a particular motivation for engaging in that network.

Figure 5. Main motivations for joining networks (option “other” excluded)



Regarding LinkedIn, 43% of respondents use LinkedIn to strengthen business connections and another 25% use it when job-searching. It is the only network driven by looking for work. Participants also network with colleagues at their workplace to strengthen business connections (26%). However, in this type of networking “socializing to meet people” is also a relevant motivation (19%). This characteristic intersects with support networks among women, in which socializing is the third most important motivation (20%). In these types of networks, survey respondents indicate that their main motivation is for professional advice and

support (31%) and to strengthen business connections (22%). A similar distribution is maintained in professional networks related to their sector.

The motivations for joining different networks intersect with the strategies that are developed to participate in them. The analysis of the interviews shows that participants elaborate models, steps, or schemes for effective networking. The key for the strategic use of networking is to differentiate between effective and ineffective strategies. A recurring model is the idea of networks and networking depending on “diversified connections.” This means in more specific terms cross-industry network diversification.

These diverse connections are a measure of women’s success in networking, and their current career position. Diversity in networking is an effective strategy because it enables women to “keep their prospects open.” Networking strategies thereby act as a security measure. Actively maintaining these connections indicates that participants are at the forefront of people’s minds. They established their professional identity, and they have an ‘in’ in these work environments, as illustrated in the following quote from Danielle.

“I feel like I have a lot of different circles, two different social circles right with like, I’ve been to different schools different churches different friend groups, different extracurriculars and all that stuff. And so, in different work environments because I’ve done a couple part time jobs I had a couple Co-op work terms in my undergrad. And so, like all throughout those I’m making connections and these are allowing me to have people introduce me to people.” (Danielle, 21-29, Business and Communications)

Conversely, a lack of these diverse connections makes it more difficult to navigate through the workforce or change industries if a woman is unsatisfied in her current environment. We conclude that maintaining diverse personal connections intersects with women’s motivations to achieve success in any way they define it.

Building diversified connections does not necessarily mean achieving as many connections, links, followers and social networks as possible. In this distinction, there is a second strategy that is repeated in the interviews. This strategy is based on the recognition that times have changed. Effective networking used to be understood as participating intensively in as many events as possible and meeting as many people as possible. A metaphor to express that old idea was **“come back with as many business cards as you can collect.”** This idea is now rejected because it does not distinguish between “network connections” and “potential

clients.” Having many connections does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes. Contrarily, strategic networking is about connecting with diverse people, located in different areas, without the need for formal business relationships. This means that sometimes women need to be more intensive than extensive with connections. They aim to increase network connections that are not only based on common elements, but often what is different between two people.

“Networking has changed over the years to some degree, it used to be back in the day the idea of networking was to meet as many people as you possibly could. Make sure that you got your business card into as many different hands as possible. But over the years that's now morphed a bit and the idea of networking is now at least in my mind to at least attempt to build a relationship with people. So, I would rather go to an event and make one good connection with one person that would have the potential to work with me in some fashion either as a colleague or as client, then you know hand out 50 business cards.” (Presto, 40-49, Financial Planning)

This strategy is understood with another metaphor that is repeated in the interviews: **“nothing replaces a cup of coffee.”** This idea refers to the fact that effective networking requires establishing authentic and genuine relationships with people. Conversation is required, often on topics far removed from work while listening to the other, their ideas, and their history. “Having a coffee” involves exchanging points of view and maintaining the relationship at a level that is neither a friendship nor a formal work relationship. It is something in between. This coffee metaphor that is repeated in the interviews indicates that effective networking implies establishing qualitative, authentic, organic and genuine relationships when connecting with someone and forming a network, as Smiles explains below.

“But what can you say to the women that are starting now... in that area and with the new technologies, how they then they should approach to this to this question particular, the way I would develop a strategy, like some sort of strategy, and I'd be like, but it needs to be organic and authentic. And I would say nothing replaces a coffee. Yeah, yeah, right. When you get down to you sit down and you get to hear somebody's story. I connect on that story.” (Smiles, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

These two strategies, **identifying networking with solely collecting business cards** and **nothing replaces a cup of coffee**, are types of networking that mix altruistic and utilitarian attitudes at the same time.

This strategic use of networking allows opportunities to be created. These opportunities emerge from diversified connections from which women establish “real and meaningful relationships.” A participant used the term “synergy” to refer to these opportunities:

“I had said that if there’s some synergy, then maybe we can work on something together but for me it’s not about getting something back from you. It’s about having the conversations.” (Shar, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

The women who participated in the interviews perceive a relationship between strategic networking and professional success. Understanding how these different factors are related is beyond the scope of this study. What we can point out, however, is that how participants perceive the relationship between networking and career success is due to the strategic use of networking activities to achieve these goals.

“The way this specific job came up was actually through my network which is very appropriate to what we're talking about [...] after weeks of deliberation, I decided to still take the job even though there wasn't a raise. Career movement is not always supported, [specifically] in the corporate level where everyone wants to grow in their career. It can come down to your leader and if they are aligned with your growth. My leader knew I was looking for new opportunities and they were really supportive.” (Sam, 30-39, Health)

The definition of networking strategy that best represents our data is the following:

The strategic use of networks aims to obtain "diversified connections" between industries, jobs and sectors. Then, the interaction with these connections should aim at establishing real and organic relationships. This strategy prioritizes the quality of relationships (trust and reciprocity) over the quantity and speed of connections (connections as distinct from business cards).

To explore the relationship between strategic use of networks and professional success, we can observe the importance that the participants give to networks in relation to the way they got their current jobs. Table 2 summarizes the main steps that led them to get their jobs.

Table 2. Strategic networking used by interview participants

Participants	Networking strategies used to find current job
Sam	Worked with hiring manager at previous position within the company. She has stayed in the same company for over 15 years, where she successfully climbed the ladder to her current position. These moves, however, included lateral role progression. She stayed in contact with her previous manager who connected her to the position that would be open in the future. Sam successfully obtained this role and continues in the company until today.
Claudia	Music: She set out to systematize her knowledge of a specific music scene (in which she participates making music) to connect different actors according to their abilities, talents, needs and requirements. For this she uses in-person networking intensively (being at events and concerts) as well as promoting her social networks online (Facebook, Instagram). Government: Formal networks (youth, women, Canada government jobs site, etc.) were used to advance through positions in public administration. She also created her own network of contacts at different levels of the public administration. This network is made up of former colleagues, former superiors, friends and acquaintances. These colleagues are always available to certify Claudia's skills, knowledge and experience in applying for new jobs.
Smiles	She owns her own business (not for profit). She developed this business from her previous experience and the high-level connections she made. Family networks are also important in this story. Her connection with board directors allowed her to launch her organization at a high visibility event.
Presto	Used work connections in previous job and knowledge about the industry to connect with a colleague and created a business. She created it from her work experience in a specific sector and from the business relationships she built there. She is a partner with a former client. In her business it is important to use LinkedIn to search for new clients.
Shar	From her previous job she knew people in important positions in the not-for-profit sector. Then through an online search (LinkedIn) she found an organization that was hiring. She applied and she was hired.
Danielle	Her family networks put her in contact with a volunteer job where she met a person who required free-lance services from the career she studied. This person then contacted her through her current company where she now works full time.

These experiences show different elements of what we previously presented as the "strategic use" of networks. Elements associated with people of different interests, industries and jobs are noted. We can also see the importance of cultivating quality relationships. Some of the jobs obtained by the study participants are the results of work relationships that turn into

friendship or come from long business relationships. The importance of family networks is also observed. Finally, the importance of social networks appears, such as LinkedIn.

In the following section, we will cover how participants use LinkedIn as part of their networking strategies, motivations, and trajectories for success.

Strategic Use of LinkedIn

The participant's LinkedIn profiles supported the information we learned from the interviews. Women use LinkedIn in a variety of ways, for different purposes related to their industry and career, and to support their own motivations. Participants in the 21-29 age range related to the platform as another medium of presenting their resume, as a visualization of their professional career and accomplishments for potential connections and employers. Conversely, participants in the 30-39 and 40-49 demographic used the platform to maintain existing business connections, build a brand or certain image of themselves, and as a marketing tool for their association. LinkedIn certainly didn't replace the essential "cup of coffee", but it did displace the many business cards that previously characterized successful networking. Indeed, LinkedIn acts as a virtual business card. Women are careful as to whom they connect with on the platform indicating that LinkedIn is characterized by numbers, when they signify real and desired long-term connections.

LinkedIn also characterizes a woman's industry and workplace environment. It is a display of both who they are, what they value based on what they like, share, comment on, and highlight. To a greater degree, it details a woman's current workplace, her industry, and her networking values. Women who are a part of an organization that values networking participate in the network in a way that promotes and reflects their company. LinkedIn is more than the profile, but the profile indicates a woman's strategies and motivations for networking activities.

Essentially, LinkedIn acts as a medium whereby a woman's motivations and strategies intersect. Women who follow a "**self as brand**" philosophy, use LinkedIn as a tool to connect with potential clients that could grow their business (Gershon, 2017:210). LinkedIn equates a woman with her business: her profile is a display of herself and values, and by extension her business. Conversely, for women who are encouraged by their workplace to use the platform, LinkedIn exemplifies the motivations to grow their business connections and advance within

their company or industry. Women who are at the center of a multitude of connections rely on the platform to continuously re-establish their relationships while expanding their network. Therefore, the platform is paradoxical in that it is an online medium, but a reflection of real-world motivations, values, and strategies that women draw upon to achieve their success.

“It's kind of a marketing tool, in a sense, so I use it to post to make posts about my business and my work and you know come, come be my client I'm awesome, that sort of thing.” (Referring to LinkedIn) (Presto, 40-49, Financial Planning)

LinkedIn is a significant tool in inter-platform online networking as it connects with virtual video conferencing software at online networking events. Our observations of WXN's online networking events and interviews indicated that women are inclined to use the time in between speakers or events to connect on LinkedIn but are either short on time to speak to one another or are unsure of what to do during this time. By including LinkedIn features on virtual platforms, organizations and corporations can use this equalized space to encourage and promote networking at their events.

This section detailed the motivations and strategies used by research participants to make effective use of networks and networking. The survey data shows that the main motivations are to obtain “professional advice and support” and “to strengthen business connections.” “Search for a job” only appears as a relevant motivation in the case of LinkedIn. This is consistent with the data on strategies obtained from the interviews. The main strategy is to get “diversified connections” across industries and sectors. This is a medium to long-term strategy in the sense that it aspires to go beyond getting a specific job or collecting business cards. It is about developing “quality, real and organic” connections that are expressed in the metaphor of “having a cup of coffee.” This metaphor indicates that strategic networking is one in which you invest real time, are willing to listen and talk about topics that may not be directly related to work. Strategic networking is often focused on helping others, where these types of connections can be useful in the future. For example, several participants used this type of strategic networking to help them obtain their current role or form their companies. This is the case for LinkedIn, where participants used the platform in relation to their own networking strategy and motivations.

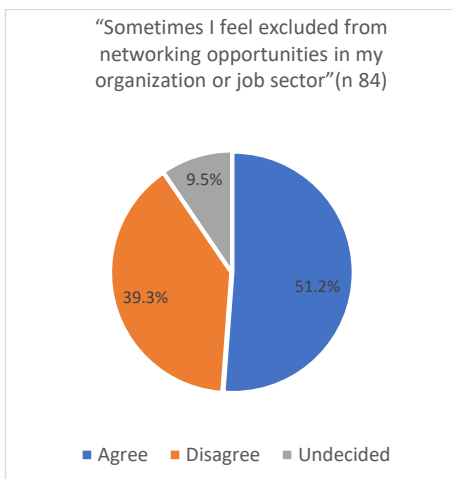
In the following section, we outline the impacts of Covid-19 on the supports and barriers in networking. We cover how the social categories of age and gender are some of the main supports and barriers outlined.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Supports and Barriers in Networking

This section will outline how **Covid-19** is impacting the **supports and barriers in networking strategies** for executive women. In our research, the supports and barriers intersect with each other and function differently for each woman. We further examined how Covid-19 intersected with social categories of age, gender, race, and other categories, such as family commitments.

Our data show that the women participating in the survey are affected by a number of barriers. Figure 6 shows the percentage of women who feel excluded from networking opportunities and Figure 7 shows the reasons for it.

Figure 6. Perception of being excluded from networks opportunities



From the survey results seen in Figure 6, 51% of women felt excluded from networking opportunities in the organization or job sector. Based on Figure 7, age is a significant factor in

the networking strategies and activities for women in leadership positions and was described as both a support and barrier.

Figure 7. Factors that explain the perception of being excluded from networking opportunities.

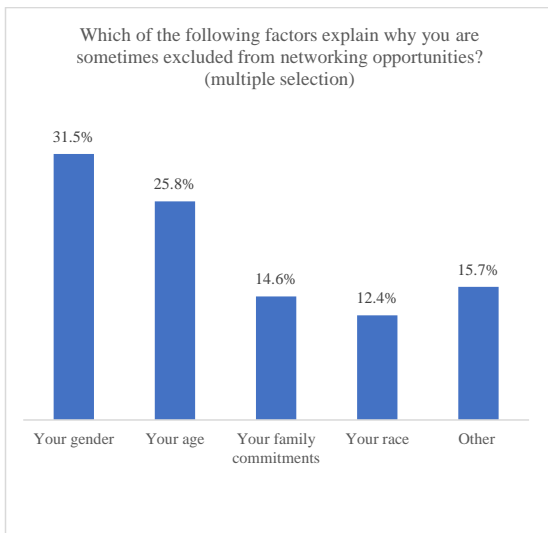


Figure 7 shows that 26% of survey respondents stated that age played a role in their exclusion from networking opportunities. Women who are more solidified in their roles, for example CEOs or Founders, mentioned how age intersected with the ways they engaged in networking activities. For example, Smiles compared her experiences networking as a junior versus a senior employee. She stated that the more solidified in her career she became, the more important networking activities and strategies became in her career development. As a CEO, she now uses her network to support others, particularly women and young men in their career trajectories. She finds this level of support for junior employees to be an essential responsibility in her career development and motivations for professional success. Smiles recalls how conversations surrounding age and gender-related experiences have changed in the last two decades:

“It’s easy for me to talk about it now, but let me tell you 20 years ago, there were lots of tears in the bathroom stalls. And every once in a while, I think, I cannot believe we’re having this conversation. We did not have this conversation 20 years ago. And I think my motivation to have these types of

gender related conversations is for that next generation. The door should be wide open for that next generation. I feel such a responsibility. You know I feel a responsibility to towards women but I also towards young men too.”
(Smiles, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

For Danielle, age is not only a barrier but a support in relation to younger generations that use technology more frequently in everyday activities. Comparably, Danielle mentioned how networking as a junior in her career differs compared to her senior colleagues due to growing technological barriers. Given her background in communications and business, technology can be a barrier for different generational groups. Danielle outlines how technology is mobilized differently across age groups:

“Older people are more reluctant to use technology and think that, like, it's not the way to do it and that it's not going to be as good. People slightly younger than me are all digital and more enraptured in that sense.”
(Danielle, 21-29, Business and Communications)

Danielle further states that networking is a natural process for her to take part in due to her understanding of different communication styles in in-person networking versus online networking. For example, Danielle explains that networking over LinkedIn involves different communications styles compared to networking at in-person conference events. Networking over LinkedIn, for Danielle, is essentially a digital resume of highlighting relevant previous work and volunteer experiences and expanding network connections for career mobilization. Compared to Smiles, networking over LinkedIn involves representing her brand as a business and branding the content to match this brand tone. Both Smiles and Danielle believe that their network activities, online and in-person, have provided them with increased growth opportunities in their industry (non-profit and business and communications, respectively).

In relation to the topic of age, it is important to conduct more research in this area. Age could be both a support and barrier. Based on the research above, age is a dynamic category that is a support and barrier for those that are older and younger, and it changes depending on the intersections of technology and work environment among other possible factors. Future research on the intersections of age and networking experiences for women would be important to understand how age functions as a barrier and support individually and in which contexts.

In relation to gender, nearly 32% of survey respondents chose it as the most exclusionary factor for women in their networking opportunities. Based on previous research with WXN, gender correlated and affected the professional development and mobilization for women in various workforces (Afrin et al., 2020). Several women highlighted how online networking has improved their level of quality networking, particularly in their reflection of networking as junior employees. Presto works in the field of financial planning where she reflects on a comment made early on in her career:

"When I very first started out, there was a manager who told me flat out I don't think a woman should be doing this job." (Presto, 40-49, Financial Planning)

Now with decades of experience, Presto mentions how she rarely receives the kind of treatment she received early on in her career and credits this to the level of confidence she has developed about her career success. However, among several participants it is noted that networking was more difficult in the early years of their career due to sexist comments, which can affect their level of confidence advancing to other roles. This point relates with the previous point about age. In terms of networking opportunities, the intersection of being a woman and younger in age seems to be a barrier in some contexts. The impact of this barrier could be reduced as they develop in their career.

Sam mentions how networking within her company has allowed her to remain in the same company for more than 15 years, while still climbing the ladder to her desired professional success. She highlights how the opportunities that she has worked to get have resulted from effective networking with managers and leadership across the company, while being championed as a woman in all her roles:

"These are people who champion women, but also champion people. They are impeccable leaders." (In reference to her managers) (Sam, 30-39, Health)

As a woman of colour, Sam believes that race has had a bigger impact on her career development compared to her gender. She recalls that most of her managers and senior leadership have also been people of colour, which she believes is an important element in her career success. For Sam, fostering work relationships that are reflective of different and similar lived experience can help women in their trajectories for career success.

A common theme to appear in our analysis is the impact of Covid-19 in structuring networking strategies and activities. It further intersected with the underlying definitions of networking, motivations, networking strategies, and the supports and barriers of networking. This restructuring occurs in terms of the distinction between in-person networks and online networks. The interviews show that the **study participants believe that online networking reduces the effect of barriers associated with age and gender.**

Based on the data, the generalized opinion is that online networking created opportunities for improved forms of networking such as increased accessibility. Online networking over video-conferencing platforms created opportunities to network across geographical locations, accommodated more personality types and levels of physical comfort. For example, Zoom removes forms of hierarchal barriers: the participants are the same size on the screen, there is the option to mute/unmute, turn on/off the camera, and exit the room. This form of accommodation is more difficult to achieve in in-person networking activities. A few women have mentioned how this allowed them to have more power in how they navigate and respond to comments in online networking versus in-person networking, for example, sexist remarks about clothing or physical attributes. Several participants mentioned how online networking, specifically through Zoom, have improved their conversations with other colleagues. They are able to wear different types of clothing (e.g., comfortable pants and shoes), which allows them to stay engaged in conversation longer. Presto recalls a time where in-person networking became very strenuous on her health. She mentions that in-person networking is different for women compared to men, specifically in terms of apparel and external attributes that may inhibit the experience for women. Presto states:

“It's shoes, networking events are mostly stand-up affairs so if you're standing in a trade show or something like that and you're wearing three-inch heels for the entire day, you're in a lot of pain by the end of the event and the guys just do not experience that. COVID I think was a big bear; it kind of forced everyone to go online right and restructure how things played out within your sector.” (Presto, 40-49, Financial Planning)

Danielle remarks about networking during Covid-19 and the benefits of Zoom:

“Covid networking removed hierarchical barriers. We're all equal size boxes. With post-Covid networking, it allows people from a different country, province, or state to be able to make those connections without actually meeting in person. We could have great connections over zoom or

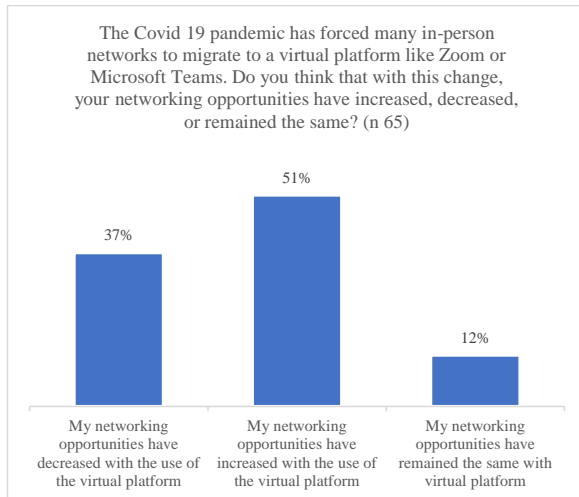
other video conferencing systems.” (Danielle, 21-29, Business and Communications)

On the other hand, 15% of survey respondents stated that family commitments are a barrier in relation to networking experiences. This is consistent with Shar, as she states that Covid-19 has opened opportunities for her to network with different groups and events online. As a single parent with several family commitments, she prefers the online events that either are free or available at different times throughout the day. This level of flexibility in networking is important for Shar as she navigates the difficulties Covid-19 imposed on family and at-home day-to-day activities:

“It is available to a lot of women, but there are also, I guess you could say, financial limitations for being part of certain events or certain groups. I looked at the WXN mentorship program right before COVID hit, I think. And because I'm a single parent. You know I have obligations as well with my family that I decided to look for some other things. With Covid-19, in a way it's helped because some people doing free things.” (Shar, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

Overall, Covid-19 impacts the networking experiences of women in leadership positions across different industries in Canada. Based on the research, several women agree that online networking has its limitations and advantages compared to in-person networking. However, not everyone agrees that it is possible to develop authentic and organic relationships through online networking. The survey shows that online networking opportunities are accepted by most survey respondents. It also shows that the reasons for this opinion are consistent with the interviews in terms that online platforms reduce some gender barriers and offer greater convenience to access networking activities. Figure 8 shows that the opinion that the online format offers fewer networking opportunities is highly significant (37%). And it approximately equals positive reviews if we include the group that indicates their chances have stayed the same (12%).

Figure 8. Covid 19, online networks and networking opportunities



This tension is also expressed in the interviews and is related to the strategy of building networks with quality relationships. For some interview participants, it is difficult to build this kind of relationship through online platforms. It is difficult to reconstruct the experience of "having a cup of coffee" and what is experienced in the context of virtual platforms.

"So, all the amount of time on social media could not replace one coffee a week." (Smiles, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

Again, networking benefits women's professional development, whereby the quality of connections matters more than the of quantity of connections. This follows the idea that a good conversation between two people (over coffee) is more important (and strategically more effective) than meeting many people in a short period of time.

"I would say, with Covid right now it's a little bit different, so you're on, even though you're online and you may be listening to people in there could be opportunities where you can have discussions or breakout groups and things like that. It's not like going for coffee with someone for half an hour that you don't know. It's a barrier, a little bit of a barrier to get those connections, like in person right now." (Shar, 40-49 years old, Non-profit Organization)

There is a recognition of the opportunities that come with the use of digital platforms for networking. However, the data on effective networking in the survey suggests that there may be some inflation of expectations regarding online networking opportunities for women to advance their careers. As shown in the section What is Networking, in-person networking is most important for career development.

"I do believe you can make a proper one on one connection through zoom camera, it's different. It's not the same as real one on one networking, but you know in some ways I prefer this, it works better for me." (Presto, 40-49, Financial Planning)

While online networking has mitigated various aspects of the limitations of in-person networking, for many women it seems to be an uncomfortable modality, in which quality relationships cannot be established and therefore fewer opportunities are available. What is clear is that due to Covid 19, we are in a period of accelerating technological change. This type of period brings new opportunities, but also generates anxieties (when those opportunities do not seem to be found). On the other hand, it is possible to estimate that online networking will not totally replace in-person networking. Both the survey and the interview verify this idea. However, it is possible to visualize that in the future, hybrid modes of networking will become more and more frequent (mixture of online and in-person). The next step would be to anticipate the ways to maximize opportunities for women in this hybrid type of networking.

This section outlined how Covid-19 impacted the supports and barriers for networking experiences. The survey data shows that the main barriers are related to age and gender, where family commitments and race are the next highest. This data further correlates to the interview results, where age and gender intersects with technology and in-person networking barriers.

Future research on the intersections of age and networking experiences for women will be important to understand how age functions as a barrier and support individually, and in which contexts. For several participants, their career development has been successful due to the support of leadership in helping them along the way. While Covid-19 impacted the structures for online and in-person networking, it is not clear whether online or in-person networking is better. There are strengths and limitations to both options, specifically in the intersection of age and gender. Several women have noted the added benefits to online networking, specifically in terms of networking across geographical locations, improving accessibility, accommodating for different personality types and adjusting for level of physical

comfort. In the long-term, it is important to investigate hybrid models of networking for planned meetings and events.

In the following section, we make recommendations for WXN, for organizations and corporations, for women in leadership positions, and for all women.

Recommendations

Based on the research and analysis conducted among several women of different sectors, age ranges and positions, we have compiled nine recommendations for WXN, other organizations, and individuals that offer concrete ways to improve the growth of women's success. We acknowledge that our recommendations are not the only way of supporting women's networking success and cannot remove all the barriers women face in networking. Nonetheless we encourage WXN to reflect on the research and mobilize our recommendations to create a meaningful impact on the women of WXN and their network engagement.

Recommendations for WXN

- 1. Increase the number of WXN events in late afternoons, evenings, and weekends to encourage participation of career juniors.**

For current and aspiring executive women, their ladder to success is not as simple as participating in networking activities and working hard in their positions to achieve personal and career success. In fact, achieving a position with more flexibility and control of their calendar exponentially increases the networking opportunities that are more personally interesting and satisfying to them. That is, in terms of career advancement, it is often the "juniors" who struggle most with networking and achieving success through their networks. While WXN certainly hosts and promotes networking events, their challenge lies in the timing of the events. WXN's networking events accommodate women who can take control of their schedule or even have the time during their lunch breaks to attend such events. Our research has shown that the women who take advantage of such opportunities are not those who depend on network participation to achieve success. The research team therefore recommends WXN to host some networking events at later times of the day during the work week and extend their

breadth to weekends to encourage, accommodate, and include more women in their networking events who are bound by daytime work schedules that they do not control. We recommend WXN open more events beyond just executive women, to those at various stages in their career. By reaching a broader demographic of women in the workforce, WXN can support more women and exceed their goal of women occupying 30% of leadership and executive positions in Corporate Canada.

2. Recognize and accommodate for different networking strategies

WXN can also improve their support of women by recognizing and accommodating different networking strategies. Our research indicated that women network in a myriad of settings and ways that defy assumptions of what networking is and how it is done. Covid-19 has certainly compelled networking to be done virtually through platforms such as Zoom and Remo. Consequently, while some women have adapted, our data indicates that there remains a feeling that something is missing or lost in virtual networking, and there remains a desire for in-person networking events. That said, women of different, social, cultural, and economic backgrounds network differently regardless of events in person or online. While some women prefer to make as many quick connections as possible, others prefer to take more time to build relationships in different settings. WXN should accommodate time and spaces for women to network in ways that they are comfortable and in spaces where they are supported. We recommend WXN create or support different social media groups for women to meet and network in person. Additionally, during virtual networking spaces WXN should allow more time for people to feel comfortable and confident enough to participate in networking activities and practice their own networking strategies. For example at the gala, a “networking session” should be at least 20 minutes rather than just 5 minutes between speaker panels. By recognizing different network participation preferences and strategies, WXN can also identify both other systemic supports and barriers, and different meanings of women’s success.

Recommendations for Organizations and Corporations

3. Cluster Hires

While companies continue to make progress in promoting women to higher level positions, there remains a large discrepancy between men and women in power. Our research noted that in corporate board rooms, women have found themselves to be the ‘diversity hire.’ That is, regardless of demographic factors, they were the only woman in a male dominated environment. This is significant as it means that even when they achieve powerful positions, women still face barriers in having their contributions recognized and supported. The research team recommends that corporations and organizations participate in ‘cluster hires,’ that is, jointly appointing two or three women simultaneously onto corporate boards. Our research supports this hiring process as it encourages corporations to enact significant and meaningful changes to workplace environments, while also benefiting from multiple perspectives in the board room. In this way, women are more encouraged to apply for executive positions knowing there is potential and space for them. Once in the position, the women can potentially support each other rather than feeling alone.

“You got to start somewhere. I really feel like when we onboard people, we need to do it in twos and threes. Like just don't throw one woman on a board. Nobody wants to be the only newbie around the table right it's like being a new kid in town.” (Smiles, 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

4. Don't wait for employees to ask for opportunities and promotions. Actively mentor women and develop leaders so they will be ready and visible for future advancement.

The research team recommends that corporations reach out to build spaces and opportunities for women. The dominant narrative of women's participation in networks and its relationship with their career success suggests that it is each individual's responsibility to participate in networking events, create connections, and climb their way up the career ladder. However, shifting responsibility away from systemic issues – such as a lack of space for women on corporate boards– excuses corporations from building safe and equitable workplace environments for women. To create spaces for women's success is to offer them mentorship opportunities or workshops to develop their leadership skills. These spaces can

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accommodate women of different backgrounds, experiences, and strengths. Another recommendation is to create opportunities for women to act in a new role for a limited term where they can develop new skills and make new network connections.

There is no 'standard' method to networking or building opportunities to network, and by recognizing the multiplicity of women in different ways, organizations become spaces for constant growth. Our research reveals that it is in positive and supportive workplace environments that women develop essential leadership skills. However, corporations must acknowledge that success begins at the highest levels, beginning with managers supporting women and developing roles for them. Organizations and corporations should consider setting tangible and attainable quotas for a gender equitable presence on boards, or for C-suite and leadership positions. Further, individual board members must take the initiative by recommending 2-3 women for upcoming positions, to support female recruitment on all levels. We emphasize that recruitment of women is just one step in empowering them, and guidance through mentorship or collegial support is essential in truly creating gender equitable places and achieving diversity goals.

5. Continuously and actively support diverse women's perspectives and contributions

Promoting diverse women contributes to an organization's success as they contribute valuable knowledge and perspectives to a workplace. Importantly, corporations must recognize and respect women for their contributions rather than tokenize them for their diverse characteristics. To reiterate, creating a supportive environment where women can feel part of a community further encourages success. The research team recommends organizations create and support a multitude of professional networks where women are welcome to participate in networks of intersecting social positions. Women are valued and supported in "equity spaces" where they are a part of a community they can relate to. In these networks, women can network and create meaningful connections with others and accordingly align themselves with leaders. We stress the importance of leaders and organizations to create and support diverse professional associations for women to network and achieve success.

Recommendations for Leading Women

6. Create spaces and groups based on commonalities

Our data suggests that networking extends beyond career positions and workplace environments. The research participants described engaging in networks in which they can create meaningful connections, and where they feel included. Networking occurs in groups where people share a common interest or identity whether it be a similar racial or ethnic identity, age, gender, heritage, religion, or musical interest. These groups motivate, encourage and support women to create their own unique networks. Being a part of groups outside the work environment where connections are still formed is important in including different women who may not attend traditional networking events. These groups also act as spaces to build confidence. We recommend that women in leadership positions create such spaces, actively involve other women in such groups and uplift each other. Our recommendation is based on the testimonial of the types of networks women join and their general motivations. Women who feel comfortable and supported by other women they can connect with have a space and community that promotes their success.

7. Diversify your network, *not just those who can benefit you, but those you can help*

Our research and analysis indicated the importance for women to diversify their network. Successful networking is beyond networking solely for contacts that can advance an interest or goal. The women we interviewed noted it is their “people curiosity” and their desire to form connections with others that motivates their networking activities and strategies. Therefore, successful networking is not just about the value someone can bring, but a mutually beneficial value to both parties in a connection. This value is not necessarily professional; instead, our participants characterize their networking relationships as “meaningful connections,” “synergies,” and “friendships.” Moreover, these relationships that are created and maintained through networking symbolize a cross-industry networking strategy that women participate in to enrich their professional and personal lives. The research team recommends that women diversify their network to include women beyond their job sector or industry. Our research supports this networking strategy to enrich the supports of women and

promote their success in any way they define it. One participant makes explicit her strategy for involving more people in her network who may benefit from her support.

“Give one hour away a week to meet with somebody that can never do anything for you.” (Smiles 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

“How can I add value to this person’s life?” (Smiles 40-49, Non-profit Organization)

8. “Leave the door open” for the women following behind. Be helpful to others.

Creating an equitable workplace environment across industries also depends on building supports for women across seniority levels. Women who create professional, non-professional, online, and offline networks to uplift each other on all levels of success are integral to breaking down many barriers that others can face as they strive for executive and leadership positions. Therefore, it is integral that when women reach seniority levels, they continue to foster important connections and support their networks. Again, we emphasize the importance of networking as an act of finding and creating supports that uplift one another, while striving to overcome barriers. Borrowing an expression from one of this year’s Top 100 women, the research team recommends leading women to “leave the door open” for others by fostering equitable workplace environments starting from seniority positions to entry level ones. Women who have power in their industry can set targets for increasing the presence of female leadership, and actively reach out to other women. We note that it is just as important for women to recruit others into their network as it is to seek out applications for certain positions. Women can also “leave the door open” by creating workplace incentives to increase gender parity and extend mentorship opportunities to foster a leadership environment.

Recommendations for All Women

9. Don’t try to do it all alone, get others in place to support you

To all women who are working towards their version of success, we recommend finding supports among the community, such as family, friends, workplace colleagues, mentors, or a myriad of support systems. Our research with executive women indicated that networking is tool for creating supportive connections. They attributed their success to their credentials and their ability to reach out and ask for help, support, or opportunities. We emphasize that career success is achieved by having fulfilling supports within each individual network. Our research indicates that though there remain barriers in women's climb to success and in networking, there is a growing number of supports available to many women. A total of 33% of survey respondents partook in networking to gain more knowledge and for professional advice and support. Joining professional networks related to an organization, or a non-professional network as a place to enjoy personal interests are ways for women to strengthen and enrich their professional and personal lives. Our participants repeatedly emphasized that being an active member of their network is to be there for others and a desire for reciprocal support. Fulfilling networks and success are intrinsically connected, therefore, we encourage women to ask for help or support if needed.

"I'm here to make sure people are as aware as they can be, that they're being heard and if support is needed" (Claudia, 40-49, Music and Government)

Conclusion & Future Research

This report outlined networking definitions, motivations and strategies of a group of executive women leaders in Canada. We analyzed how these three factors have changed with the impacts of Covid-19, and how this has affected the supports and barriers women face in networking.

In section 1, we defined networking as creating and maintaining a community of diverse interests through online and in-person activities that can be mobilized for mutual benefit. Survey data shows that respondents are more frequently involved in online networking, yet they view in-person networking as more important to their careers. In section 2, we explained that network definitions are related to the elaboration of strategies. There are two main strategies for effective networking, where the participants mention the importance of diversified connections and building quality relationships. In section 3, we explored how gender and age can function as a barrier and support in the search

for networking opportunities. We also illustrated how Covid-19 is producing a mass movement to online networking, which reduced some of these barriers but also creates further limitations.

The report also presents partial findings that require further investigation. Considering the strategies and motivations for networking, it is important to differentiate between online and in-person networks and understand how these networks intersect with various networking activities. In the long-term because of Covid-19, hybrid models of networking (both online and in-person) will be important to evaluate for various types of events and work-place environments. This could maximize opportunities for those who prefer one or the other type of networking. Moreover, beyond the scope of this project, an important area for future research would be to investigate the systemic and structural barriers that affect women's trajectories of success in networking experiences. Our research merely revealed some of the supports and barriers that affect women's networking experiences. We contend there are systemic factors that must be further investigated to truly understand women's trajectories towards success. Furthermore, we recommend examining how personality characteristics differ in online versus in-person networks. Cultural and racial barriers may influence the way networking is done in certain environments and will enrich the discovered dynamic between what "comes naturally" and what is a "buildable skill." Further, since our research was conducted online, we did not get a chance to observe in-person networks equally. We acknowledge that the myriad complexities of networking cannot fully be understood through research solely in an online setting. In the future, it is important to examine in-person networking and the limitations/strengths to build on the data collected throughout our research process.

This research project presents possible ways in which networking for executive women in Canada may be improved and expanded upon by examining the motivations, strategies, and supports and barriers. Executive women continue to face constraints in their efforts to network for professional empowerment and success. We hope these recommendations can help in creating actionable outcomes for women in executive positions across Canada.

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Appendix: Survey Questions

By responding to this survey, you agree to participate in this study.

- I agree to participate in this study

Do you identify as female executive leader, and/or hold a leadership position in your organization?

- Yes
- No

Are you a member of and/or a part of the WXN Network?

- Yes
- No

Is the company you work for located in Canada?

- Yes
- No

What sector do you work in?

- Accommodation and food services
- Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation
- Construction
- Educational services
- Finance and insurance
- Health care and social assistance
- Information and cultural industries
- Management of companies and enterprises
- Manufacturing
- Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction
- Other services (except public administration)
- Professional, scientific and technical services
- Public administration
- Real estate and rental and leasing
- Retail trade
- Transportation and warehousing
- Utilities
- Wholesale trade

- Other [Specify] _____

In relation to your experiences with networks, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

“I enjoy networking”

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

“Networking is a necessary burden”

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

“Sometimes I feel excluded from networking opportunities in my organization or job sector”

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

Which of the following factors explain why you are sometimes excluded from networking opportunities? [Select all that apply]

- Your race
- Your gender
- Your age
- Your religion
- Your family commitments
- Other [Specify] _____

Who do you go to when seeking networking opportunities? [Select all that apply]

- A colleague at the same level
- A colleague in a position higher than me
- A colleague in a position lower than me
- A friend, relative or social contact
- By my own initiative
- A counsellor, coach, or other advisor

There are different types of networks that you can participate in. Some are online. Of the following online networks, How often do you participate in them?

	Multiple times a day	Once a day	Once a week	Once a Month	A few times a year	Only when I am searching for a job	Never
LinkedIn	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Facebook	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Instagram	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Twitter	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Other online network?	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

How important has it been in your professional career to participate in the following types of networks?

	Not important	Moderately important	Very important
LinkedIn	•	•	•
Facebook	•	•	•
Instagram	•	•	•
Twitter	•	•	•
Other online network	•	•	•

What was the main motivation for joining LinkedIn? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- _____ Search for a job
- _____ For professional advice and support
- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections
- _____ Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining Facebook? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- _____ Search for a job
- _____ For professional advice and support
- _____ Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections

_____ Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining Instagram? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- _____ Search for a job
- _____ For professional advice and support
- _____ Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections
- _____ Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining Twitter? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- _____ Search for a job
- _____ For professional advice and support
- _____ Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections
- _____ Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining (the other network)? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- _____ Search for a job
- _____ For professional advice and support
- _____ Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections
- _____ Other [Please Specify] _____

In relation to the way you participate in online networks, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

"I invite other people to one or more of the online networks to which I belong"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I regularly update my profile in the online networks to which I belong"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I upload content on the online networks to which I belong"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"My online networking activities usually involve me providing help to others"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I engage in online networking activities hoping that my contacts will be helpful to me in future"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

There are different types of networks that you can participate in. Some are In-person. How often do you participate in the following in-person networks?

	Multiple times a day	Once a day	Once a week	Once a Month	A few times a year	Only when I am searching for a job	Never
Networking with colleagues at my workplace	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Professional network related to my sector	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Support networks among women	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Network of non-professional interests	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Community Service organization	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Professional association or academic network	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Other in-person network? [Please specify]

•	•	•	•	•	•	•
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How important has it been in your professional career to participate in the following types of networks?

	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not important
Networking with colleagues at my workplace	•	•	•
Professional network related to my sector	•	•	•
Support networks among women	•	•	•
Network of non-professional interests (recreational networking)	•	•	•
Community Service organization	•	•	•
Professional association or academic network	•	•	•
Other network	•	•	•

What was the main motivation to do Networking with colleagues at my workplace? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation to joining a Professional network related to my sector? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining support networks among women? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation to joining a network of non-professional interests (recreational networking)? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining a community Service organization? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation for joining a professional association or academic network? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues
- Socialize and meet people
- To advance my career
- To gain more knowledge
- To strengthen my business connections
- Other [Specify] _____

What was the main motivation to joining {other network}? Please rank the following reasons (1 being the most important)

- Search for a job
- For professional advice and support
- Learn about the experiences of my colleagues

- _____ Socialize and meet people
- _____ To advance my career
- _____ To gain more knowledge
- _____ To strengthen my business connections
- _____ Other [Specify] _____

The Covid 19 pandemic has forced many in-person networks to migrate to a virtual platform like Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Do you think that with this change, your networking opportunities have increased, decreased, or remained the same?

- My networking opportunities have increased with the use of the virtual platform. Why?

- My networking opportunities have remained the same with virtual platform
- My networking opportunities have decreased with the use of the virtual platform. Why?

In relation to the way you participate in in-person networks, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

"I act as a coordinator in the networks in which I participate."

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I invite other people to one or more of the networks to which I belong"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I usually participate in the meetings of the networks to which I belong"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"I usually participate in industry events"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

"My in-person networking activities usually involve me providing help to others"

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

“I engage in in-person networking activities hoping that my contacts will be helpful to me in future”

- Agree
- Undecided
- Disagree

Which of the following categories includes your age?

- 18 to 20
- 21 to 29
- 30 to 39
- 40 to 49
- 50 to 59
- 60 to 69
- 70 to 79
- 80 or more

Do you identify as an Indigenous person?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to say

Which options best describe your sexual orientation? Please select all that apply.

- Heterosexual
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Asexual, Pansexual
- I prefer not to answer

Which option(s) best describes your gender identity? Please select all options that apply

- Gender non-conforming, Gender Fluid, Non-binary, Genderqueer, Gender variant, X, Agender, Queer
- Man (includes Trans man)
- Two-Spirit
- Trans
- Woman (includes Trans woman)
- I prefer not to answer
- I prefer to self-identify as: _____

Do you identify with any ethnic, racial or national identity? If you wish, write the answer that best represents you

Do you identify with any equity-seeking group? If you wish, write the answer that best represents you _____