



Timo Järvensivu

**MANAGING**  
(in)  
**NETWORKS**

Learning, Working and Leading Together

# **Managing (in) Networks**

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**Timo Järvensivu**

Translated by Helena Lehti

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# Introduction



**T**his book is about networks and managing networks. I have studied and developed networks since 2003. Over the years I have come across two turning points which hopefully help to explain why I think this book is worth writing. The first was *embarrassment*: I recognised a big mistake in my thoughts about the practice of networking. The second was *trust*: I had to learn networking in practice and through that I finally learned to trust others and myself in the act of collaboration.

Through these turning points, I came to realise some of the most crucial points of networking: why and when it is needed and how it can be developed and managed successfully. I have written this book in order to share these ideas with you.

I stumbled upon the first turning point at the start of my career. I had just graduated as a Doctor of Economics in 2007. My doctoral thesis discussed values-driven management in strategic business networks.

Based on my research, I understood something about managing networks — and I imagined I understood quite a lot. What I understood I wrote in my thesis and I graduated.

The start of my career as a fresh post-doc researcher was promising. Already before my graduation, my thesis advisor asked me if I would like to run a research group at the university

in one of his upcoming projects. I of course agreed — it was after all important to secure a job after graduation.

The project was interesting. I got to investigate regional development of elderly services from the point of view of managing networks. Because of my thesis, I was familiar with half of this topic: the management of networks. The other side, developing elderly services, was new to me.

At the start of the project it became clear that I did not know the half what I thought I did. *Embarrassing*.

Of course I knew a lot about managing networks, as a post-doc researcher is supposed to. I knew for instance that coordination and commitment are needed, as well as shared goals. Trust is also needed, because it opens the gates to sharing and co-creating knowledge.

I knew these kinds of basic facts of networking, and I thought that because I had this knowledge, I would be good at networking. But right away in that first project, my skills were challenged, so my research team and I started off with more mistakes than successes.

We had analysed the situation the project network was in and we had chosen a networking strategy we thought would work best. It turned out that there were many participants in the network that did not believe in the chosen strategy. We felt that we were not understood and we wondered why the participants hesitated with their commitment.

It took us surprisingly long to realise what was wrong. And when we realised it, I blushed with embarrassment.

The network strategy had been planned, but it had not been planned *together*. We had forgotten to include the network in the process! Not really connecting to the network, is it?

Later I realised that I had not respected the practical side of networking enough. I must have thought that practice is good, but theory is better. I put theory first and I did not care enough about the issues arising from practice.

Determined to do better, I decided to try a new way of thinking. I did not begin to think that practice on its own would suffice or that theory would be useless.

However, I began to wonder: what if the best theory is a perfect description of practice?

This would mean that good theory is based on practice and must also work in practice. And vice versa: a theory is bad if it is not based on practice or it does not work in practice. This realisation of the relationship between theory and practice is nothing new, and practice theory researchers know this very well. It just came to my mind terribly late.

How could or should this thought be applied to networking in the field? Let's start with defining networking.

Networking is cooperation that is (1) voluntary, (2) implemented between free agents, (3) based on trust, (4) reciprocal and (5) done together.

Working in a network does not mean work which someone is forced to do or which is done from one side only. A true network thus cannot have a strategy, which someone else has created for the network.

The biggest mistake I made was to create a strategy for the network first and only then to include the network in the implementation. This did not work, because we were not able to gain the network's trust later.

Slowly I began to get excited about the mistakes we made. We could actually learn from them! If an approach did not work, then we could look for one that worked in practice and make a theory of it.

For there to be a stronger connection between theory and practice, we decided with my research group to change our research method from interviews to action research. Action research is a method where theories are born in action and these theories are further used to develop actions. This creates a continuous cycle of learning where theory and practice shape each other.

My career progressed through new projects. With each project, my research became more and more based on practice. At the same time, my freedom as a researcher increased as I received personal grants for my research. Encouraged by my practical experiences and inspired by my increased freedom, I began testing new networking practices ever more boldly.

I worked in different projects in different roles: as a planner, expert, facilitator, coordinator, researcher, evaluator, and so forth. In our projects we created frameworks, tips and guides for networking and applied them to practice — and continued to learn.

My practice-based approach began to interest people from outside the academic world as well. My project partners were pleased and asked if I could continue working with them as a consultant. Why not, I figured. The work offered was interesting and was connected to my expertise. I said yes. One acceptance led to another, a third, a fourth, and so on. My career as a researcher subtly changed into entrepreneurship.

In the past I have been able to enjoy cooperation and learning in dozens of networks where I have developed, trained, researched, facilitated, coached, sparred, consulted, promoted, wondered and so forth. Some networks I have worked with for several years, and with others my encounters have been brief. All of them have been fruitful learning experiences.

My second turning point, learning to trust, took place during these development-filled years.

I noticed a recurring phenomenon in my work: I was often bothered by a feeling of insecurity, waiting for when I would encounter my next moment of embarrassment with a mistake I made. Situations I was responsible for (workshops, training sessions, expertise tasks, and so on) were shadowed by a fear of failure.

Mistakes were something I could learn from and I knew I should not fear them, but I still noticed myself thinking of ways to protect from embarrassing moments: “Be better prepared! Do not show your insecurities! Think about how to answer

difficult questions without revealing you actually do not know the answer!”

Finally, luckily, I began to understand that my insecurities were connected to trust, or more accurately, a lack of trust. My fear was rooted in not daring to encounter my own flaws. I was unable to trust.

This was a shocking observation for me, because networking should by definition be based on trust. Why then were my networking experiences so often affected by my own insecurities and mistrust?

I decided to study in detail what trust is both in theory and in practice and how I should act in networks so that I could end my mistrust and start trusting.

I began with the basis of trust: trust feeds trust and mistrust feeds mistrust. Trust must begin with someone and a good place to start is with the person in the mirror. I would have to stop feeding fear and learn to trust. I began to practise trust in situations where my mistakes would normally arise, in situations where I felt insecure.

For instance, I began to practise assuming that others are trustworthy, instead of assuming them to be untrustworthy. In my trainings, I decided to trust that difficult questions from participants are always valuable and based on good intentions, even though they might leave me at a loss for words.

I started to tell participants that it is a good sign if I blush at challenging situations, because that means that we can learn something. I began to go confidently towards moments of embarrassment instead of running away.

My first experiments with trust created good experiences. Whenever I dared to trust, the network responded by demonstrating trust. Theory became practice and practice became theory. *I learned to trust.*

I did other similar experiments. Knowing others is important in networks, so I practiced getting to know people better, and I developed methods that would help participants in the network get to know each other better. Commitment is also

important, so I tried different ways to support the participants' motivation and opportunities for action. There were successes and failures, and we learned from both.

It is very doable to succeed in managing networks when both the basis and objective is reciprocal cooperation based on trust and when you suit your action to your words and your words to your actions. From practice to theory — from theory to practice.

\* \* \*

I have written this book, because in my experience, networking theory and practice do not often meet. My goal is to offer a structured basis for networking and managing networks: how can we work, learn and lead together?

I begin with an overview of the underlying theoretical and practical principles of networking: what networks are and the perspectives from which networking is viewed.

Next I present the core elements of networking and describe how knowing, trust and commitment enable cooperation and continuous learning within networks.

I continue by describing the management of networks: what kind of leadership is required and the stages through which networks can best evolve.

At the end I present additional perspectives for in-depth collaboration and describe how to manage a network of networks. To conclude, I pull together the central elements of networking into a comprehensive framework.

\* \* \*

And before I forget! I hope you find a good flaw in this book and bring it up. I will gladly blush at my mistakes and learn from them with you.

# MANAGING (in) NETWORKS

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**Networking** is cooperation based on trust and reciprocity and it takes place between individuals, groups and organisations. Networks are needed when we seek to develop something new, work more flexibly and respond to clients' needs comprehensively.

**D.Sc. (Econ.) Timo Järvensivu** has studied and developed networking and managing networks for over 15 years, initially as a university researcher and currently as a full-time entrepreneur and trainer. Based on this experience, this book reviews:

- What is the basis for vibrant networking?
- What are the required practical steps?
- What type of leadership is needed?
- What types of networks exist?



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