



IDENTIFY AND STRENGTHEN YOUR NETWORKS

Why?

We all need information and support from others over the course of our lives. It is important to have different kinds of people around us: our nearest and dearest, peers, people who spur us on and people who share our interests. You, too, already have a network of people around you, even if you feel that you do not know any “important” people. Your personal network can consist of your family, relatives, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, past and present colleagues and supervisors, fellow students, hobby group members and contacts made through your children, for example.

In Finland, networks play a massive role in job hunting because many jobs are never advertised publicly. Employees of the recruiting organisation may share these so-called hidden jobs with their personal networks in various channels. With the help of this assignment, you can reflect on questions related to networks and outline your own personal network.

Before you do this assignment, reflect on what your attitude to networking is at the moment. What is your preferred way of getting to know new people? Why and for what is networking needed? What can constitute networking?

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers! Return to these questions when you have completed the assignments and see if your thinking has changed. Bear in mind that networking is not about using other people in a calculative and one-sided way, but about sharing, which at its best is founded on mutual interests and reciprocity.

How?

Stage 1: Make your network visible to yourself

1. Start by sketching your network. Draw a circle in the middle of the paper to represent yourself and then draw several circles around it. Fill the empty circles with words that describe your network, such as friends, colleagues, former colleagues, fellow students, people you know through your hobbies, people you know through your international experiences, etc. Do not forget to include people from outside your inner circle.
2. Draw new, smaller circles and connect them to the existing circles with lines. Name the new circles, for example, as colleagues from organisation X, scouting, student organisation, study-related course X, project Y, student exchange, etc.
3. Around these smaller circles, add people (with names included) who belong to your network in that respect. Are some members of your network closer to you or easier to contact than others? Who are they? You can highlight their names using a different colour, for example.



4. Reflect on and write down the following: Who are the resource people in your life, the ones who help and support you in different ways? What kind of information about the world of work could these people offer you (e.g., tips, contacts, information about trends and skills needs in your field)?

Stage 2: What kind of networker are you?

Use the following questions to consider what you are like when you are networking or building connections:

- How easy or hard do you find it to network and get to know new people?
- What aspects of networking do you find nice and fun? What aspects do you find less easy and fun?
- What are you like in conversation? What topics do you like to discuss? What topics do you avoid when discussing with strangers? What conversation starters and topics would feel natural to you in situations where you do not know anyone?

Stage 3: Your next steps

Your career plans can change along the way, so a broad and diverse network can prove to be an invaluable help. As your position changes, so does your ability to help people.

If you constantly expand your network, you can ensure that you are part of a community in which you can both offer and receive support. Consider the following questions:

- **How could you activate and solidify your existing network?** You may have overlooked a relevant contact from a student organisation activity, traineeship, summer job, project, student exchange or [LinkedIn](#). Reviving this connection could be a useful and pleasant experience for both of you. If you think a member of your network could have the kind of information that you need, consider whether conducting an information interview would be a good idea. Because networking is about sharing, it is important that you also offer your network something in return: you can, for example, share a job advertisement you learned about or tell them about a course or some other interesting opportunity. Think about the kinds of skills and contacts you have. What kind of help or support could you offer others?
- **Blind spots – what is missing from your network?** Look at the network chart you drew for the first stage of this assignment: are you missing important professional life links from your network? On a new piece of paper, outline the people and organisations – perhaps yet unknown – that you would like to include in your network and that could be important role models and sources of information on your journey to the world of work. Also remember the international perspective!



- **Which networking channels could be right for you?** Is it easiest for you to connect with new people on LinkedIn or some other social media platform, or do you prefer events in which you can talk to people face to face (e.g., student organisation activities, professional organisation activities for students, mentoring, hobbies, events)? LinkedIn is a convenient tool, independent of time and place, for growing your network and keeping all your contacts in one place, even during your studies. You can add to your contacts both people you know and people you do not yet know who are studying or have studied the same field as you, who work in an organisation that interests you, or who interest you for some other reason. Wanting to know more about them and their thoughts is enough of a reason to send them an invitation.