

Falling through the net:

An inquiry into networking opportunities at Concordia University

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Performance Needs Assessment Report

The purpose of this report is to outline the need for a performance improvement campaign that focuses on helping graduate students from Concordia's Department of Education fully understand the benefits of networking. The Chair of the department has requested an inquiry

into the lack of interest with regard to networking events on campus. The Chair has noticed poor attendance at said events and would like to address the problem.

Information for this report was gathered through interviews with astute experts in the subject matter: Claude Martel, professor in Educational Technology, and Rosa Cerone, Internship Coordinator for the Department of Education. We have also conducted interviews with other graduate students to get their perspective on the matter, as well as to get a glimpse into their perceptions of career networking. Furthermore, we will be building off of the research in the needs assessment conducted by Michael Di Giacomo in October of 2015. Being graduate students ourselves, we can give first hand accounts of our perceptions of networking.

Background Information

Concordia University serves as an outlet for networking events for its student body. Students are sent emails and are made aware of networking events. Given that they do not fully understand the benefits of networking and have very busy schedules, they feel that networking is tedious (Kozma, 2016). They feel it takes them out of their comfort zone, so they would rather give all of their attention to their studies. Outlets such as the Student Success Center serve as sources of information regarding networking benefits and networking events. This project is sponsored by the Chair of the Department of Education as there is low turnout at networking events, despite the information and resources that are available to students.

The Request

The Chair of the Department of Education has requested a performance improvement campaign that will help graduate students understand the benefits of career networking. The campaign should identify the gap that exists between students and the resources (career networking events, information, and peer support) that are available to them through Concordia University. If the resources exist, and the information is available, why aren't students taking full advantage? The target population for this improvement campaign is graduate students from the Department of Education who will soon be ready to hit the job market.

Business Need

The business need underlying the request is to generate revenue for the university. If students take advantage of the networking opportunities that they have access to, they will one day reap the personal and professional rewards. In turn this will reflect positively on Concordia's reputation. The university will be renowned for supporting its students. More students will want to enroll, leading to more investment in the university, generating revenue for Concordia.

Current Situation:

Fred is a Concordia University student who is currently enrolled in Educational Technology. Fred is close to graduation and is at a point in his Master's where he needs to start thinking about possible landing spots for his career once he is out in the workforce. Lately, Fred has been getting many emails about certain department events, as well as University events where certain people enrolled in his area of interest currently work.

The first thing Fred does is consult with his friends, who are also enrolled in the program, to see if they are interested in going. His friends notify him that they will not be going. Seeing as there is poor attendance at these events, Fred feels that they really do not offer much, otherwise more students would be going to them. Fred knows that he is given this information for a reason but, in his mind, feels that he has no use for it.

As a graduate student, Fred has a pretty hefty amount of work that he has to do on top of having lectures three times a week. In his mind, he feels that his time is so limited, he would rather spend that time concentrating on school than worrying about networking. His misshapen understanding of networking causes him to believe that it is a tedious chore. A few months after graduation, Fred has yet to find a job. It seems everyone else in his graduating class has moved on to greener pastures. He wants to reach out to them but feels it might be inappropriate. Fred wishes he had made better connections with his colleagues while they shared the same classes. He is applying to many places but isn't receiving a reply. He wishes there would be someone to put in a good word on his behalf.

Ideal Situation:

Fred is a Concordia University student who is currently enrolled in Educational Technology. He is close to graduation and is at a point in his Master's where he needs to start thinking about possible landing spots for his career once he is out in the workforce. Lately, Fred has

been getting many emails about upcoming event within the department, as well as university events, involving subjects that fall into his area of interest.

Fred notices that he has been getting a lot of emails like this and decides to speak to an advisor in the department to get a better idea of what these events consist of. He has been told that he can email advisors should he have any questions. Having spoken to someone, Fred realizes that there will be people he knows from the department at these networking events, and that he does not have to get all dressed up and put on an act to impress potential employers.

He learns that there are alternative approaches to networking. He can use email, but at the same time, the meeting he had with the advisor was a networking meeting in and of itself. He sees the true benefit of using networking practices and is able to make use of the information Concordia has provided him.

Fred has redefined his idea of networking and no longer sees it as a tedious chore. He finds opportunities to talk to people in his program that are interested in similar projects. Some time after graduation, Fred receives an email from an old colleague. There is a position that has just opened up and the old friend has mentioned Fred's name to their boss. Fred takes the opportunity and is hired by an up-and-coming e-learning company.

Task Analysis in Ideal Performance

Main and Supporting Tasks

Goal: Rebrand the term “networking” to excite students about networking opportunities

- Main Task : Graduate students will move away from the misconceptions that surround networking
 - Graduate students will pursue paths towards networking that are informal and organic in nature
 - Students will distinguish between networking and “schmoozing”
 - Graduate students will report a positive conception of the term networking
- Main Task: Graduate students will access available resources

- Graduate students will access the Student Success Center, as it is a great resource for information
- Graduate students will enroll in Grad Pro Skills workshops on networking
- Graduate students will consult with professors and department administrators
- Main Task: Students will use alternative methods of networking in light of their busy schedules
 - Graduate students will use social networking as a way to create new relationships
 - Graduate students will use social networking as a way to maintain their relationships

Performer Demographics

General demographics

Concordia is host to more than 7,000 graduate students, hailing from over 150 countries. The graduate student body is on that is extremely diverse and includes a large number of international students.

Those who identify as “introverts”

Negative: Nat has always kept to herself. Although she does have many friends and is sociable, she prefers her own company. Nat has been invited to a few networking events but has declined every time. She believes them to be formal, crowded, and awkward gatherings, where people congregate and suck up in order to get ahead. The thought of dressing up in order to impress a bunch of strangers does not appeal to Nat in the least.

Indifferent: Ionel considers himself an introvert. He isn't shy and can actually carry on a conversation quite well. Social gatherings, however, have a tendency to really drain his energy levels. For this reason, he has traditionally avoided gatherings. He is curious about an upcoming networking opportunity that his department is hosting, but doesn't exactly know very much about what to expect. He might attend if the event was less formal.

Positive: Natasha has never performed well under pressure. Throughout her life, she had always shied away from large groups of people and was never fond of strangers. Natasha was recently diagnosed with Social Anxiety disorder. Since discovering this, however, Natasha has been taking steps to address the issue, as she has noticed that her anxieties have stopped her from reaching out and making connections within her community. She is hopeful about meeting these challenges and overcoming them.

Those who identify as “extroverts”

Negative: Despite the fact that Nigel feels very comfortable around others, he holds a very negative view of networking. In his mind, he doesn't want to schmooze and “suck up” to a potential employer. He sees networking as dishonest and phony. If he tried, he could probably do well at meeting people and making contacts, but his negative attitude towards networking prevents him from doing so. Due to his outspoken nature, his professors have taken notice of his brilliance and his talents. They fail to understand why he has never approached them after class for a chat.

Indifferent: Ian isn't too concerned about his professional future. He has always gotten by because of his strong work ethic. People are easily attracted to Ian because he isn't afraid of expressing his ideas. His views and his talents have been noticed by those that surround him and has already formed many strong partnerships to work on a variety of projects. He doesn't think too much about networking, as making connections had always come naturally. He doesn't regularly attend networking events but was once attracted to one by the smell of coffee and muffins that made its way into the hall. He would attend more events and workshops if they didn't get in the way of his work/school schedule.

Positive: Paula has taken note of every upcoming conference, internship report, and meetup that her department has organized. She won't be able to attend all of them but will do her best to make time for a few. She has been to various department functions in the past and understands that they aren't that big of a deal. In fact, now that she has made some friends in the department, she looks forward to the conferences and events because she knows she will see some familiar faces.

Performance Context

Interface Analysis

The following are ways in which students can be referred to benefits of networking. These would constitute interfaces or bottlenecks, that is, sources of note to consider targeting in a performance campaign:

1. **Student Success Center:** As per the Concordia University website: “Your support network from first-year to graduation. You'll find one-on-one tutors, study groups and workshops, plus a friendly community of professionals, peers and faculty who want you to excel” (Concordia University, 2016)
2. **Class/Professor:** Professors are experts in their respective fields and have amassed years of work related experiences. They can be very helpful and serve as business contacts when you have graduated.
3. **Advisors:** Advisors can connect students to information and resources. By understanding a student’s needs and ambitions, they can guide the student in pursuing a path, reaching out to a professor/researcher.
4. **Word of Mouth:** Although its impact may be hard to measure, this type of reference might be the most important. According to Thomas Denham of Maryland University, 90% of the job market is underground. Google hires only 1% of its staff by the job postings they place online (Denham, 2012).

Constraints

- **Time:** Time plays a huge factor on both the environment and the individual. Scheduling of networking events can clash with the scheduling of classes. Students may find themselves at a crossroads when they receive invitations for networking events. It becomes a choice between going to class, focusing on school work, or attending networking events at Concordia.
- **Emotional limitations:** For learners that have to overcome intense social anxiety, the practice of networking will provide a considerable challenge.
- **Drop dead deadline:** The Performance Improvement Campaign must be completed and ready to implement by April 5th.

Performance Objectives

Main and Supporting Objectives

Concordia provides a variety of ways for students to use networking to their advantage. As mentioned above, the Student Success Center, GradPro Skills workshops, University and department networking events are just some of the resources available. Rebrand the term “networking” to excite students about networking opportunities. For this to happen, students will have to take an interest in developing and expanding their social and professional circles. Students taking full advantage of networking potential will contribute to Concordia’s business need, which is to generate revenue for the University.

Goal: Rebrand the term “networking” to excite students about networking opportunities

- Given support services provided by the University, students will develop their interpersonal and communication skills.
 - Given free networking workshops provided GradPro Skills, students will attend, resulting in a 5% increase in attendance at department networking events
- Given time-saving alternatives, students will be able to access information at their own convenience
 - Provided with membership to a social media group, students will access readily available information, resulting in an increase in online networking activity
 - Given access through an FAQ page, graduate students will have accurate information about upcoming events and services, resulting in an increase in their use
- Given resources and opportunities provided by the University, students will apply their networking skills in a number of different contexts and settings
 - Given the Annual Alumni Event, students will attend and engage in networking, resulting in a higher enrollment total than in previous years
 - Given a student led speaker series, student will be able to attend an informal alternative, resulting in an increase in demand for such events

Performance Problem

Environment	
Information	<p>While information is widely available, it is very difficult to measure whether or not students are paying attention to it or recognizing its importance. E-mails about opportunities are sent out; are the students reading them?</p> <p>Students unaware that 90% of the job market is underground (Denham, 2012)</p>
Resources	<p>Concordia offers a variety of resources. Opportunities and information can be found at Student Success Center, GradPro Skills workshops, alumni events, ISPI competition. However, if students have never been exposed to these services, they may not be aware of just how fruitful they can be.</p>
Incentives	<p>Scheduling for events and workshops can conflict with class schedules. Many events on campus do not offer food and/or coffee.</p> <p>Events are not popular, making it that much harder to attract students.</p>
Individual	
Motives	<p>Students have a severe misconception as to what networking is. Some imagine it to only take place at formal events. Others hold negative views with regard to networking, seeing it as “sucking up” or “brown-nosing”.</p>
Capacity	<p>Emotional limitations (lack of confidence, anxiety). Students that struggle with anxiety may find it more difficult to “put themselves out there”.</p> <p>Students have a heavy workload and, therefore, time is an issue as they are busy with assignments and projects</p>
Knowledge/ Skills	<p>Students do not have the proper knowledge of how to network.</p> <p>Interpersonal skills are lacking to some degree</p> <p>Small efforts can go a long way. Networking does not have to be</p>

	elaborate and complex.
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Priorities

- **Job One:** Addressing the misconceptions of networking
This is essentially a branding problem. The term “network” carries with it a lot of connotation, much of it being negative. The first priority would be to either change students’ perceptions about this term, or perhaps rebrand the term to appeal to students more broadly.

- **Job Two:** Connecting students to opportunities
While resources on campus do exist, students are not always taking advantage of them. Solutions must be found to bridge this gap and connect the students to the actual opportunities.

- **Job Three:** Tackling capacity (Time, emotional limitations)
Accommodations must be made with regard to student schedules, workloads, and emotional limitations.

Cause Analysis

In order to analyze performance problems that prevent performers from achieving ideal performance, Chevalier’s Cause Analysis Worksheet was used. Environmental factors are presented as driving and restraining forces with regard to performance. ± 1 to ± 4 illustrates the strength of the factors.

After conducting this performance analysis, there are three major areas that are to be addressed in the performance improvement campaign. The gap in performance is due to the lack of incentive, motivation, and capacity. The majority of the focus is going to be placed on the lack of motivation of the performers. Students have no desire to attend networking events, and their expectations of networking are not accurate.

Evaluation Instruments

Engagement of Performers:

Engagement survey implemented to measure student []and feedback with regard to networking events

	Yes	No
In the past 6 months, I have attended at least one department networking event (both formal and informal)		
In the past 6 months, I have joined at least one social media group related to the Department of Education		
In the past 6 months, I have made use of the Student Success Center		
In the past 6 months, I have consulted with a professor or department administrator		
In the past 6 months, I have taken a GradPro Skills workshop		

Higher enrollment of graduate students attending department/university networking events

Attendance for Networking Events in the Department of Education	
As of	Reported Change
September 2016	
November 2016	

January 2017	
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- Graduate students are increasingly meeting informally to socialize outside of class

Transfer/Individual Performance:

- Graduate students report higher confidence with regard to interpersonal skills
- Professors create an atmosphere that will encourage students to interact with peers
- Professors provide opportunities to allow for students to interact with alumni
- Students will organize events for themselves

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel more confident with regard to career networking					
I consider networking to be an important part of my graduate career					
I know where to locate information about upcoming events and opportunities					
I am excited about networking events					
I network informally via various social media outlets					
I fully understand the benefits associated with networking					

Organization:

- Higher number of events offered by graduate departments
- University effectively markets workshops and campus events
- Workshops offered by the University to build the necessary skills for networking

Enrolled in 2016	Enrolled in 2017	Word of Mouth	E-mail	Posters and other print advertisement	Social Media (Facebook, Twitter)

Works Cited

Chevalier, R. (2003), Updating the behavior engineering model. *Perf. Improv.*, 42: 8–14. doi: 10.1002/pfi.4930420504

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Appendix

Interview with Rosa Cerone (Internship Coordinator):

Information

- Concordia/Ed Tech program provides information.
- E-mails are sent out weekly about opportunities and upcoming events

Resources

- There are many opportunities to network on campus/in Ed. Tech
- Claude Martel runs an alumni event (ISPI) every year
- Last year's event was poorly attended. Turnout was low.
- CAPS and GRADPROSKILLS offer workshops
- Alumni office offers workshops in networking and dining etiquette

Incentives

- The rewards are not immediate. They may only come to fruition later
- Events are held after 5pm, so that people can attend
- Networking is not just about people in your field
- Networking should be redefined. It happens "naturally"

Motivation

- Many students are uncomfortable with networking
- Intimidated, unsure, and hesitant at events
- Students might need help breaking the ice
- Workshops could help here
- People have misconceptions about networking. They regard it as vain.

Capacity

- Time may be an issue
- But students don't have to attend ALL events
- Speaking French makes one a much more attractive candidate

Interview with Mark Kozma (Graduate student/representative of DOEIGSA)

What is Job One?

- Scheduling. Students have classes in the evening (important classes). Students have daytime jobs (especially those in Ed Tech). Many are changing career paths and have other priorities/commitments (family, work). They are trying very hard to balance it all.

Information:

- There is minimal information provided
- Events on campus aren't usually directed at Ed Tech
- Mostly appealing to JMSB
- Education could use more opportunities and resources

Resources:

- Could be better delivered.
- Resources are lacking

Motivation:

- Students don't know what networking is
- There are misconceptions. Fear of being a brownnoser
- Misunderstanding of portfolio

Capacity:

- Time + Scheduling is an issue

- Psychological fear of networking

Knowledge/Skills

- Students **do** need training
- Interpersonal skills, sharing/talking to others
- Students need to better understand what networking is