How to build your network after the pandemic

Written by

[Michelle Rogan](#), [Anne ter Wal](#)

Published

17 May 2021

Category

[Management](#)

Key topics

[Careers](#), [COVID-19](#), [Digital Transformation](#), [Culture and Inclusion](#), [Networking](#)

A well-maintained network can help broaden your skill set and bring diverse views and ideas that accelerate your work. But in the last few years our relationships have been tested as never before. Giving your network a little TLC now will pay dividends in the years ahead

Share this podcast

X

At the height of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we were forced into new digital interactions with friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Despite the inevitable awkwardness of our first video meetings, we learned there are many ways to touch base with others that don't require great investment of time and effort.

Digital interactions allow us to keep our networks in shape by simple actions such as regularly checking in with people to see how they are faring. It could be by email, an

exchange on social media, setting up regular virtual coffees, or allowing a little more breathing space in virtual meetings to encourage more natural and spontaneous exchanges.

The question to ask ourselves now is **which of these network adaptations we should keep** (a French invention, the "Skypero", an online aperitif with friends, comes to mind) and what should we leave behind. Could we now audit our new networking patterns, and cherry-pick the best bits?

The answer to this question depends on what type of network future you would like for yourself. To paraphrase Nobel prize winner Dennis Gabor's famous quote, the best way to predict your future network is to create it.

Continued below video

There are three things to keep in mind as you build your post-pandemic network.

1. Seek spontaneous interactions

Take advantage of post-pandemic opportunities for spontaneous interaction. It's these spontaneous exchanges with colleagues, or the random connections we might make day to day – what are called "tier-two-ties" – that fuel creativity and innovation. They can lead us to ideas we were not looking for, and they can help us spot new solutions to problems we might face. They help us see things differently – and they must be encouraged.

2. Build diversity

Take stock of who your go-to contacts are. Whom do you most often go to for advice, for support, for resources, for ideas? To what degree are they similar to you or similar to each other? Diversity is a critical element to healthy networks. Unfortunately, our natural tendencies are to connect with people who are like us, i.e. from the same culture, from the same educational background, or of same gender. But too much similarity in your network can limit your job effectiveness, in particular at innovation tasks.

How to add diversity to your network? One effective way to do that is to join members-only networks that are "diverse-closed": communities that unite people with varied interests and backgrounds and foster strong bonds among them combine the advantages of high diversity, and high cohesion and trust.

At Imperial Business School, our students embody this kind of diversity within a close-knit group. They benefit from tight, deep connections, while their differences – background, education, religion, ethnicity, politics – become a real asset.

Digital interactions can help us reach more people – and more different people – further afield. There's no need for us to stop this when normal life resumes. We can still reap the benefits with less disruption to the working day. If we can complement our day-to-day spontaneity with intentional digital networking, we have the best of both worlds.

3. Be individual

Ironically, even though many of us were working from home, being in crisis mode at work during the pandemic meant we had to prioritise building and maintaining network ties for our companies. These are the relationships we had to maintain to meet our immediate goals, like revenues for the quarter.

Our individual networks (the professional relationships we have to others inside and outside our companies that exist not because of the current demands of our roles, but because of the unique value we bring to others) are likely to have withered. Now is the time to rebuild your individual ties: the ones that exist because of the value you bring to them, the ones that will stay with you if you change jobs. These individual ties are related to your ability to identify new opportunities and new knowledge, both key parts of innovation.

As the limitations imposed by the pandemic recede, our hunger for face-to-face social interaction is already leading to an explosion in lunches, drinks and gatherings. We might easily fall into a trap of "over networking" – committing to everything and then under delivering. But social butterflies aren't always the best networkers – it takes time to build genuine relationships and follow through on promises. Our message is to be consistent, deliver on your promises, and continue to perform for others – this is key to building and maintaining your social capital and becoming a "network asset".

Learn more about joining a diverse student body on Imperial Business School's [Full-Time MBA](#)

This article was updated on 6 September 2022 to reflect the increasing time since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Written by

[Michelle Rogan](#), [Anne ter Wal](#)

Published

17 May 2021

Category

[Management](#)

Key topics

[Careers](#), [COVID-19](#), [Digital Transformation](#), [Culture and Inclusion](#), [Networking](#)

Share

𝕏

About Michelle Rogan

Professor of Strategy & Entrepreneurship
Dr Rogan was a Professor of Strategy & Entrepreneurship at Imperial Business School until the academic year 2024-25. Her research centres on how individual and firm social capital affects entrepreneurship and innovation. She was previously a faculty member at UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School and, prior to that, INSEAD.

Her research has been published in several top journals, including Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management Journal, Organization Science,

Management Science and the Annual Review of Sociology. She teaches topics related to innovation management, corporate entrepreneurship and networks on postgraduate and executive education programmes.

Read Imperial Profile for more information and publications.

About Anne ter Wal

Professor of Technology & Innovation Management
Anne ter Wal joined Imperial Business School in 2009 and is Professor of Technology & Innovation Management. His research, often in collaboration with leading multinational companies, focuses on the role of networks in innovation and entrepreneurship. In his research, Anne studies how individuals access new knowledge and ideas through networks within and between organisations. He also looks at the challenges they face when seeking to apply these ideas to the creation of novel products and services. He leads a large-scale EU-funded research project studying how entrepreneurs build valuable networks that help them achieve business and innovation success.

Prior to joining Imperial College London, Anne was a doctoral researcher at the Section of Economic Geography at Utrecht University. His work has been published in leading journals in management, innovation studies and economic geography, including the Administrative Science Quarterly, Organization Science, the California Management Review, the Journal of Product Innovation Management, Research Policy, and the Journal of Economic Geography and Economic Geography.

Read Anne's Imperial Profile for more information and publications.

Monthly newsletter

Receive the latest insights from Imperial Business School

Sign up now

Leadership in a Technology Driven World

Imperial Leadership in a Technology Driven World Programme is a five-day immersive course that equips participants with the skills to lead their teams through the digital age.

[Read more](#)