

IMIS

JOURNAL

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THE BIGGER ISSUE

Beating the credit crunch

MOVING ON UP

Profiles and news for and about IMIS students

Job-hunting v Networking

Plus ETHcol, Legal Notes & IMIS Update

Last week I attended a business event. You know the sort of thing we do; arrive a little late, take time to eat, chat to a few folk, and then leave well before the end. It's what we call 'networking', right?

Well, that evening as I entered the room, I noticed a man with a colourful bunch of folders under his arm. Being bright yellow they caught my eye immediately, though it was his behaviour that really drew my interest. While most folk were standing around eating and talking, this fellow circulated quickly. He would go up to a new

forces us to spend our time today, to redress issues that occurred yesterday. In contrast, networking is an investment decision we choose to make today, to realise some desired returns tomorrow.

So, what else could John do to be more effective?

Effective networking

When seeking a new career position all channels have merit, yet some channels are more equal than others. Research indicates that the least likely route for filling vacancies is directly through adverts; some studies

Network news

group, chat for a moment or two, hand over folders, then move on.

A distinctive trail of yellow folders was left in his wake; my curiosity got the better of me. I approached one group to enquire of the content; each folder contained his résumé. To protect his innocence, let's call him John.

I went over to him to chat, to discover that his company had recently restructured, and his job had disappeared. Thankfully for John, his firm was considerate enough to provide access to outplacement services, and he was definitely utilising their resources to the max.

John had a really positive outlook, and had already built a solid résumé by reflecting on his past career. He was putting himself about, demonstrating great courage by breaking the ice with many new contacts at the business event. These were all fantastic things to do.

However, his answer to my question "Why are you doing this?", was insightful. He replied: "I am networking because I have just lost my job."

Taking control of one's life through action is an intensely positive decision, and a great choice for John.

Yet, though his desperate search that evening might help him feel a little better, what were the chances it could help him achieve his objective, that of securing a new job?

Less than one might imagine is probably the most honest answer. Yes, John was doing some fantastic things, and full credit to him for that. However, he thought he was 'networking' when, in reality, he was more likely only 'job hunting'. So what's the difference?

In my experience, job hunting is something that many of us do in despair. It

suggest this direct figure may be as low as 20 per cent.

Conversely, around 60 per cent of job positions are more likely filled through personal connections. Emphasising this, in a 2006 Chartered Management Institute poll, well over 60 per cent rated networking as an important option when looking for career development opportunities.

When performed well, networking is an immensely productive channel, opening up many new possibilities. John, then, was very wise to consider networking as one of his options. Who you know does count, but where in your network do the best opportunities arise?

Most of us imagine that the people we know well deliver the best opportunities, right? We believe that our closest friends and associates are the most likely to know about us, who we are, what we do, and what we want, don't we? Moreover, we feel that those closest in our network are the ones that most of all want us to succeed, don't they?

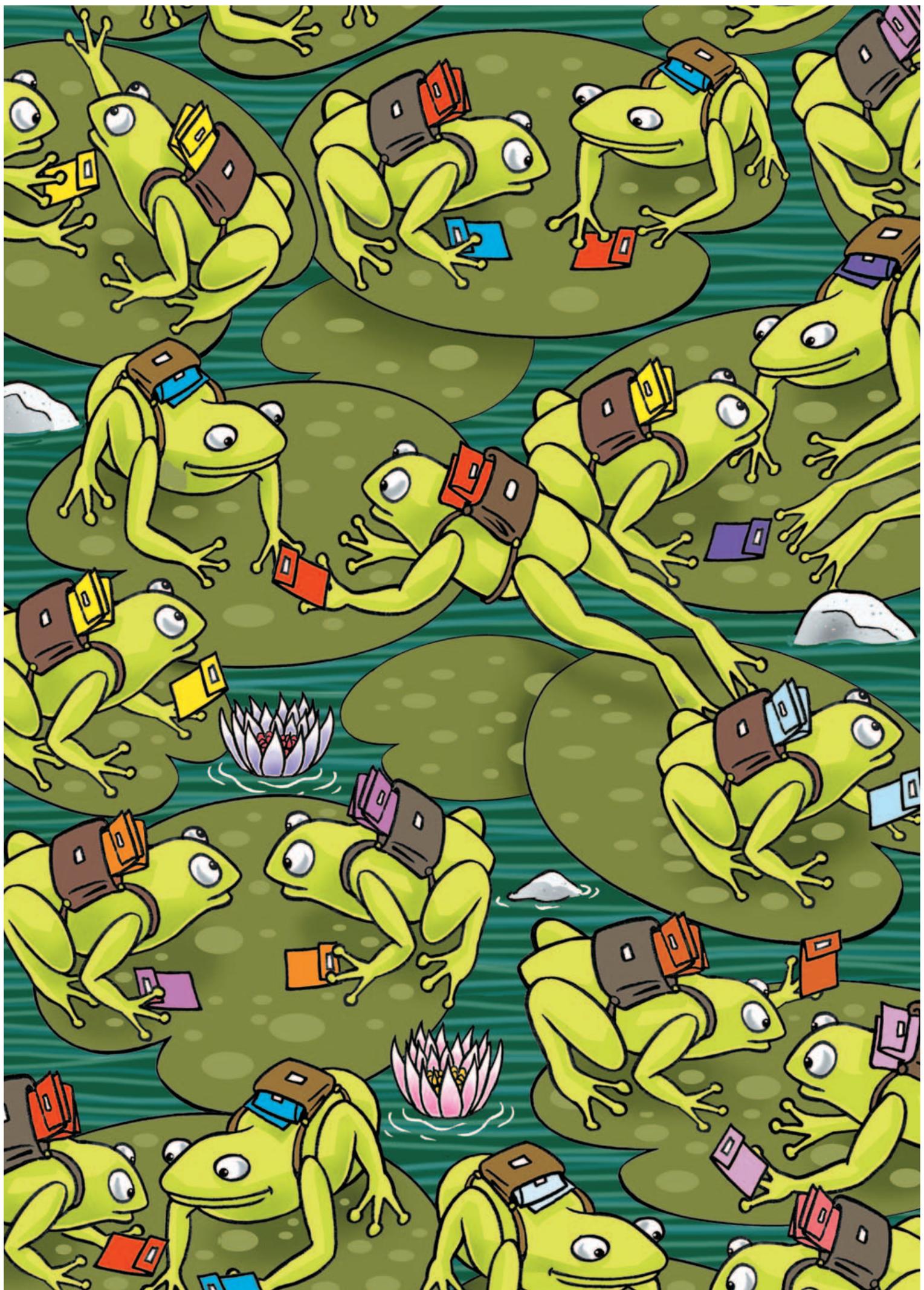
However, in Granovetter's 1974 study *Getting a Job*, he counter-intuitively found that of all personal connections in our network, the strongest ones were often the least fruitful. In contrast, our occasional and rare contacts were more likely to realise the most value!

Close friends share the same world as we do, occupying a similar space, with similar opportunities to those that we already can envisage. In contrast, new possibilities abound in the wider domain of occasional and rare connections.

Granovetter concluded that the 'weak ties' in our network are often the most productive, as they occupy a brave new world that differs radically from our own.

Many people think they have mastered the art of networking, particularly when using it as a means of pursuing career development opportunities. Patrick O'Brien, however, believes that there are significant lessons yet to be learned

... networking is an investment decision we choose to make today



However, this distant world of new possibilities often remains dormant, as people maintain a limited focus, restricting their network investments to activities involving only their close circle of friends.

Networking therefore can work powerfully in helping to locate new career opportunities. To be effective and make networking work for you, you need to think about how big your network is, who exactly is in it, and how you go about doing it.

The quality of your network

Great networkers treat their network as an asset, keeping it under regular review. From time to time, they ask themselves just how good their network is, using metrics to measure the levels of its 'goodness'. Quality can be measured in many dimensions and, for those new to networking, I've highlighted five areas to consider. All things being equal, paying attention to the growth in each of these areas will likely lead to you building a more productive networking asset.

- scale ~ the size of your network
- scope ~ the level of diversity within your network
- maturity ~ the timeframe over which you have built up that network
- investment ~ the level of help you have given to your network in the past
- involvement ~ the amount of time you have invested in maintaining your network

Network size brings benefits via 'Metcalfe's Law'; the bigger the network, the greater its value. Being constantly on the lookout for new, relevant connections allows you to increase the worth of this vital resource.

Increasing diversity builds value by increasing 'weak ties'. Importantly, it likely also gets you in touch with more of those people that Malcolm Gladwell calls 'connectors', those few folk who are very well connected indeed.

All good gardeners know that the time to prepare the soil is before a seed is planted, yet many people still believe that the moment job hunting starts is the signal to start network-building. Sad to say, they are wrong; that's far too late. It takes time to build up a mature network for today so that, when you need it tomorrow, your valuable asset is in place.

Successful networks work more by giving than receiving. This means you need to provide help to it, before you should expect to receive help from it. Reciprocity is a key networking concept; you know that paying it forwards now will pay you back then.

Finally, having built it, you need to stay involved with it. Maintain relations within

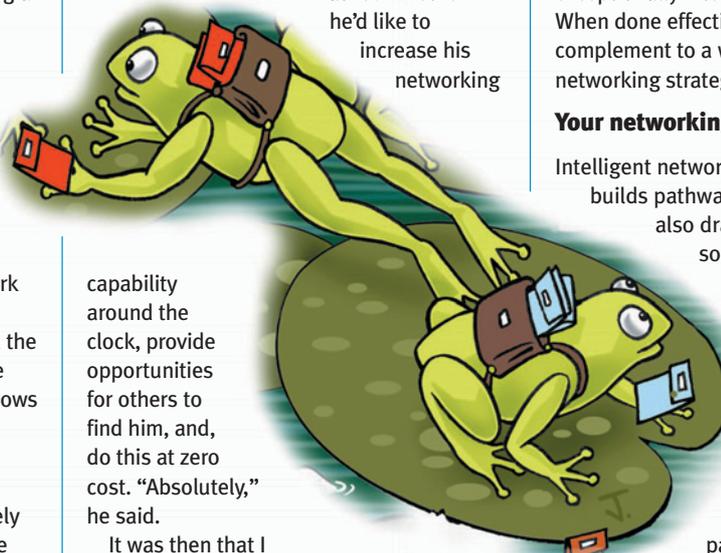
your network through regular, and relevant, communications. Little and often is a great friend and guiding mantra when networking.

Intelligent networking

Coming back to John, he shared with me that he was a serious searcher. He aimed to attend two or three events each week, yet this brought downsides. He found attendance a drain on his time, constantly reaching out to others was hard work, while this level of activity also brought with it additional costs.

Towards the end of our conversation, he asked me whether there was anything else he might do. John deserves full credit here, as he not only engaged me positively with relevant questions, he was also keen to see how he could improve his networking strategy.

I asked whether he'd like to increase his networking



capability around the clock, provide opportunities for others to find him, and, do this at zero cost. "Absolutely," he said.

It was then that I suggested he look at the social networking site www.Linkedin.com. While other social networking sites focus more on friendships, music, and photos, LinkedIn is quite different. It is oriented predominantly towards business, allowing

registered users to place an electronic version of their résumé on-line.

Going on-line removes the need to traipse around with an armful of yellow folders. Where a

contact is keen to find out more, John can point them speedily and directly to his on-line presence. This approach also allows him rather subtly to demonstrate that he is comfortable with, and has some competences in, the use of technology.

Being on-line also means that head-hunters searching for skills in his area can more easily find him. John is then networking intelligently, providing a presence 24/7 that

allows interested parties to locate him quickly at their convenience; he needs do nothing else.

All this, and at no additional cost! Yes, he needs to invest a little time to get his résumé on-line, though he has already collated that information. He also needs to invest a little time reconnecting on-line with

his other contacts. Yet, he can use this time to good effect, as time spent reconnecting also affords him the opportunity to make connections aware of his current situation, and future aspirations.

Getting connected brings its own set of networking metrics too, allowing him additional ways to measure and monitor the quality of his network, especially those 'weak ties'.

This is a contemporary, and an exceptionally intelligent, way to network. When done effectively, it is a powerful complement to a well thought-through networking strategy.

Your networking strategy

Intelligent networking needs a skill-set that builds pathways to a brighter future. It also draws on a broader set of soft skills, such as the

courage to connect, the relevance of rapport, the confidence to converse, the power to present, and a mindset to manage time.

Intelligent networkers are not passive bystanders, subdued and acted upon by their environment, but actors operating on their future careers. Rather than hold back to focus only on maintaining old, past dependencies, they constantly reach forward to build new, future capacities.

Above all other things, networking is built on trust. So be mindful, respect your network by maintaining a positive outlook; give without need to receive, promise first and then deliver, and thank those who offer their faith, commitment, and support in helping you.

Choose to network intelligently, and see how it can work for you. Enjoy!

*Patrick O'Brien FIMIS is managing director of The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd, which delivers soft-skills training solutions that focus on personal effectiveness and team productivity
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