Networking on the Network: A Guide to Professional Skills for PhD Students

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66000 words

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Chapter 3

Building a Professional Identity

So far I have been talking about networking at the one-to-one level. That's where it starts. But the research community is a public place, and as you become established in your field, publishing in journals and speaking at conferences, you will also develop an identity. This section describes some of the basics of building such an identity. I call it a professional identity because its workings are governed by the tacit rules of the research profession.

3.1 Socializing at conferences

Sooner or later (hopefully sooner), you will start attending research conferences in your field. Section 2 has already discussed the techniques for approaching someone at a conference that you have already written to. This section offers more suggestions for getting the most from a conference.

First, though, let me explain what a conference is. Almost any professional field will have one or more annual meetings, typically three or four days in length, sponsored either by a professional association or by an organization created specifically to host that particular conference. Most such meetings are held in a different city each year, although some smaller meetings are held in specific appealing places (e.g., Hawaii in January). In recent years many conferences have started gesturing toward globalization by (for example) rotating between the United States and Europe. Most conferences, especially larger ones, are held in expensive downtown convention hotels, for the simple reason that such hotels are the only places where large numbers of out-of-towners can sleep. At first it might seem like a scam that everyone in your field gets to travel to a different interesting city every year for a conference. You'll stop thinking that way, though, once you have been to a few dozen conferences and gotten sick of traveling. People's home institutions are spread out, they have to meet somewhere, and so they might as well meet someplace reasonably nice, hopefully with good airline connections. They'll be spending most of their time in homogenized airports and hotels anyway, so it's not like a trip to a resort.

The fundamental purpose of professional conferences is networking. Everyone in your field has a professional network, just like you. They built their networks the same way you are, and they attend conferences to keep their networks in working order. In the old days, before the Internet, conferences were also occasions when committees would meet, for example to edit journals or plan future conferences. That does still happen to a degree, but e-mail and the Web have moved most such logistical matters online, leaving the more ceremonial functions to face-to-face conference interactions. Conferences are also occasions to publicize your work, although that function can hardly be dissociated from networking, and they are places for the job market. Some conferences have evolved rituals for interviewing job candidates in hotel rooms; others simply provide hunting grounds for advanced graduate students to network with senior scholars whose departments are likely to be hiring. For all of these reasons, you should attend conferences, and take them seriously as professional occasions, as soon as you have research that's ready to report.

Although each field has its own practices, as a broad generalization conferences accept papers in two different ways: either you submit your paper (or perhaps an abstract) as an individual, or else you join a coherent "panel" of papers that are submitted to the conference as a group. In either case the program committee somehow decides which papers get accepted. You should find out which practices obtain at the conferences you hope to attend, and plan accordingly. If the conference only accepts panel proposals, it would not be excessively presumptuous of you to start organizing a panel yourself. You might discover that the people you approach are already putting panels together, in which case they might (or might not) include you in their planning. This process can get a little bit clumsy, but don't worry about it.

If the conference takes individual paper submissions, then you should seek detailed advice about the politics of the process. For example, some conferences require you to provide a few keywords on the title page so that the program committee can route your paper to the most suitable referees.

Obviously you want to include the keywords that get your paper routed to the referees who are most likely to appreciate your work's virtues, and only your faculty advisors can tell you what those keywords are likely to be. (You should find out whether the conference is formally refereed, meaning that the program committee recruits people to actually write comments on each paper, accepting some and rejecting others. Formally refereed conference papers are more valuable in career terms than papers that were handled more informally.) Papers that are accepted individually will usually then be grouped into panels by the program committee, so that the program will list your paper alongside a few other people's, and responsibility for convening the panel will be assigned to a panel chair, most likely a regular conference attendee whom the program committee has drafted for the job.

Some conferences distinguish between papers and posters. A paper is something that you present in front of an audience, at a set time, with a microphone and audio-visual aids. Posters, on the other hand, are grouped into one big room. You'll be given a bulletin board of a set size, and you'll be asked to prepare a poster that can be tacked up on the board. Conference attendees will be able to browse through the posters, and certain times will be advertised when poster authors are asked to be available alongside their posters to chat with passers-by. A poster is a lower-status form of presentation than a talk, but no stigma attaches to it, and you shouldn't be embarrassed to prepare a poster. Once you get over the feeling that you're a salesperson waiting on customers in a shop, it can be a more relaxed way to talk to people individually than the crush after a panel is over. If you do prepare a poster, take the time to do it right, with appealing and legible graphics.

Conferences cost money. Most conferences have discounted student rates, which you might even be able to afford. Many conferences offer free registration for students who are willing to engage in menial jobs such as staffing the registration desk, and you should go ahead and accept such deals unless it offends your pride. There might be a Web page for students looking for other students to share hotel rooms with, or perhaps you can establish such a page yourself. If you are getting ready to go on the job market then you should guilt-trip your thesis advisor into paying your airfare to the conference, or at least make sure to write travel money into the relevant grant proposal well ahead of time.

Here, finally, is the promised advice for socializing at conferences, partly adapted from notes by Dan Ryan.

Many conferences are preceded by smaller one- or two-day workshops; these events will usually provide a more focused and comfortable occasion for mixing with people than the larger conference. It is much easier to approach someone at random during such an event, something that tends to work poorly in a crowded conference setting.

Stay in the main conference hotel if at all possible; when you check in, locate the fitness center, if any, and the nearest good breakfast place. Study the conference schedule to determine which talks you'll be attending, and find out in advance where the meeting rooms are. You'll be happier if you don't look lost. Go find the room where you will be speaking and check it out. Find a moment when nobody is using the room, stand at the speaker's podium, and get used to the energy.

Once the event gets rolling, act like a host. Introduce people to one another, include them in things, and notice when they are feeling bad or being oppressed. Hunt for the person who is chairing the panel that you are speaking on.

When your talk comes, keep it simple. Practice your talk several times in realistic conditions before traveling to the conference, so you can be confident of doing well when the time comes.

If you aren't accustomed to speaking with a microphone, take a moment to do it right. If the room has an audio technician, ask if you can get a cordless lapel mike, which is much less constraining than a mike that is mounted on a podium. Refuse to use a headset or a hand-held mike, which are only for experienced performers. If you must use a podium mike, you can avoid looking like a fool by stopping briefly to familiarize yourself with its on-off button. If you are the first speaker in a session to use the mike, check the sound level ("can you hear me?") before you launch into your talk. If you are seated at a table with the mike on a stand in front of you, resist the temptation to press your mouth right up against it. You don't want the mike directly in front of your mouth, since the wind from your sibilants (s-sounds) and plosives (p-sounds) will make a roaring sound in the speakers. Sound travels in all directions, not just straight out of your mouth, so put the microphone just below your mouth. That will also help people to see your face. If you have problems with the microphone, don't be shy about stopping to get help. It happens all the time.

The chair of your session should tell you in advance how long to speak for. If not then ask. Try to finish on time. But if your talk runs more than a minute over your allotted time, suppress the overwhelming urge to race through the rest of it at 100mph. Don't be one of those people who says "in conclusion" but keeps on talking. Instead, just give up. Shrug and say, "oops, well, I've gone over time so I'll just stop here; I have the full paper here if anyone wants it", and then briefly remind everyone what your bottom-line conclusion is. Everyone will be impressed at your poise.

After all the panel members' talks are over, a question period typically follows, with audience members specifying which speakers their questions are addressed to. Don't worry if you aren't asked any questions; questioners are often drawn to the most provocative comments, and provocation doesn't imply quality. If you are asked a question, resist the temptation to launch into a long speech that explains all of your intricate thinking from the beginning. If the question has a short, conclusory answer (such as "yes" or "no"), say the short answer first. Having said the short answer, you might find that the long answer becomes shorter as well.

When your panel is over, hang around for a few minutes in case anybody wants to chat. Bring business cards to exchange (but, as the speaker, don't offer anyone a card unless they offer a card to you). Affect a calm, low-key demeanor and ask them, with genuine interest, "are you working in this area as well?". When you're done, go get some fresh air.

Relax. Take care of yourself. Breathe. Drink water. Buy a book. Don't drink coffee. Don't eat junk food. Rarely pass up an opportunity to go out with a group to eat. If you run out of things to do, go figure out who the smartest people at the conference are, especially the more human and less established ones, so you can start promoting their work.

If you have a laptop computer, consider typing in a straightforward narrative account of the ideas presented at the conference; after the conference is done, you can help others by editing this narrative for clarity and sending it to a mailing list of people in your field. This is a low-effort way to help the community and get your name out.

Start imagining yourself into the role of conference organizer by consciously noting aspects of the conference that are especially well- or poorly-organized.

Some technically advanced conferences have created Web-based systems for helping attendees connect with each other and schedule their time before the meeting even begins; advocate that such a system be built for any conference that you might be involved in organizing.

The most basic skill for attending conferences is talking to other researchers about your work. They will ask you, "What do you work on?", and you need to be able to answer this question any time, to anyone, at any length. This is amazingly hard, and you may end up kicking yourself at your stammering non-answers. That's fine; it's part of the process. You should rehearse answers to this question before attending conferences. Your local research group may not be helpful; since they already know what you're working and share all of your assumptions, you rarely need to explain yourself at a basic level to them. Try practicing ten-second explanations, one-minute explanations, five-minute explanations, and so on, up to a full-length talk.

The hardest part is tailoring your explanation to your audience, and this is an area where you should invest sustained, structured effort. Do you remember when you were in the library, identifying researchers whose work was related to yours in various directions? This is similar. Try to avoid explaining your work to a complete stranger. Instead, get them to talk first. And while they are talking, work to articulate specific elements that your respective research interests share in common. (By the way, the phrase "I am interested in ..." actually means "I am conducting research on ...".) Perhaps you both employ qualitative research methods. Perhaps you are both doing comparative work. Perhaps you both have a political agenda, even if maybe not the same one. Perhaps you are both studying the history of a certain region, or a certain century, or a certain industry, even if other elements of your research topics are different. Perhaps you are both aiming your work at industrial applications. With practice, you will begin to spot the commonalities at a greater distance.

Once you have identified the commonalities between your two projects, fashion an explanation of your own project that puts the common elements in the foreground and leaves the other elements in the background. For example, if you are using economic theories to study the Mongolians, and the other person is using cultural theories to study the Mongolians, put the Mongolians in the foreground; explain what sources of evidence you're using, what particular people and places you're looking at, and so on, and then mention along the way that you're using some economic ideas to look at those things. On the other hand, if you are using economic theories to study the Mongolians, and the other person is using economic theories to study the Japanese, put the economic theories in the foreground. Explain what theoretical authors you are drawing on, what methods you are using, what big economic questions you're hoping to help answer, and so on, and then mention along the way that your case study happens to be drawn from the Mongolians.

This strategy of foregrounding shared elements might seem weird at first; it might even seem manipulative or phony, as if there were one single authentic answer to the question "What are you working on?" and all the other answers are artificial. But that's not how it works. The answers that you construct for people from unfamiliar backgrounds will certainly feel unfamiliar. But if they are honest representations of your work then they are good, informative, relationship-building answers. Once you get some practice consciously constructing explanations of your work for many sorts of people, you will begin adjusting your explanations automatically, and the sense of weirdness and fakeness will dissipate.

3.3 Publication and credit

Another dimension of the institutional structuring of professional relationships pertains to credit. If you do something new, you ought to get credit for it. Credit resembles money in the sense that you can "buy" certain things with it – for example further research funding. (Credit for this observation, for instance, belongs to Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar in their book, "Laboratory Life".) Credit can also be understood as an informal type of intellectual property. A research paper resembles a patent application, which is always drawn as widely as possible, consistent with the actual accomplishments of the work and being careful not to trample any prior art. But credit differs from money and property in other ways. The most important of these is that nobody is keeping an objective ledger of who gets credit for what; it's much more an evolving consensus that only becomes formalized years after the fact. Many people get neurotic about credit and invest tremendous effort trying to manipulate others into giving them the credit they think they're due. But the actual keys to getting due credit for your work are simple. The first is to publish promptly. When you do something good, write about it and get it out there. And the second is to do your networking. I have already explained one reason why writing helps with networking – it gives you something to talk about. A second reason is that if you talk about your work without having circulated it in written form then you will be (perhaps justifiably) paranoid that someone else will (perhaps innocently) publicize your idea before you and therefore get the credit for it. Don't get yourself into this demoralizing rut. And understand where the danger comes from: when two people are doing research in the same area, their relationship is inevitably structured by a tension between a natural alliance (helping one another, organizing things together, jointly publicizing the shared area of research) and natural competition (over credit for new ideas). This tension will be much easier to manage if you continually put sane amounts of effort into both your writing and your networking.

When you do publish your work, where should you publish it? Two errors are common. One error is to choose your publication venues reactively by simply publishing in the places where someone in your network happens to invite you to publish – for example, in a book that this person might be editing. While accepting such invitations might actually be a good idea, don't let invitations drive your publication strategy. Instead, talk to people who are knowledgeable, hit the library, map out all of the potentially relevant publications, and make conscious decisions. This leads us to the second common error, which is to get obsessed with publishing in the "good places". Lots of people get preoccupied with ranking journals, so that publication turns into a zero-sum status game. This is most unfortunate. It is much better, in my view, to think about publication choices in terms of professional relationships. A journal is not just a badge of rank. Much more importantly, it is a gathering-place for a particular community of people, namely the professionals in that field who read it. When you publish in a particular journal, you are doing two things: (1) you are representing yourself as being relevant to such-and-such a research community, and (2) you are introducing yourself to that community and inviting them to get to know you. So instead of asking, "where is the high-prestige place to publish", ask "who would I like to associate with professionally?". That makes the decision much easier. If you don't know what sorts of people read a given journal, you can always ask. Most likely you will get different answers from different people, according to their own relationships to that journal's readership, but that's alright. Just decide who you believe and carry on.

3.4 Intellectual leadership

The steps for making contact with people that I've been describing obviously do not exhaust the social skills that are necessary to get along in the professional world of research. But they do provide a necessary foundation – the basic strokes of the professional combustion engine. Having gotten your network going in this way, the obvious question is what to do with it. Well, maybe you do nothing with it. Having people to talk to about your research might be plenty. But if you'd like to do good in your field, or do well in it, or both, you'll want to try organizing something: a workshop, a journal issue, an e-mail discussion list, an approach to a funding agency, or whatever. Later sections will discuss these activities in more detail. Right now I want to introduce two important concepts related to them: "emerging themes" and "consultation".

Most everyone regards the notion of an "emerging theme" as hype, and no doubt I will be thought cynical for explaining it, but it's tremendously important anyway. Research, of course, is about new ideas – and not just individual new results, but whole new fields of research and whole new ways of doing research in a given area. New ways of doing research rarely spring full-blown from any individual's head. Rather, somebody who has been keeping up with many different research projects starts to notice a trend – a direction in which a substantial number of research projects are all headed. Perhaps it's a previously unnoticed analogy among various new concepts; perhaps it's a metaphor that makes sense out of a range of seemingly unrelated results; perhaps it's a pattern that appears to underlie the work of several different groups; perhaps it's a method from another field that several groups have been importing into their own field and have independently found useful or necessary; or perhaps it is a widely shared dissatisfaction with the old intellectual frameworks that is now starting to take form as a new framework. If you want examples, simply look at the titles and introductions to any edited book, any special issue of a journal, or any workshop. Fame and fortune justly attach to the people who notice such things, put names on them, and gather together the people whose research appears to fall within them. These people are the shamans; their role is not to create something out of nothing, but to help the community become conscious of new understandings that have been taking form below the surface. Such people have four qualities: (1) their own research is an instance of the patterns they are noticing (unfortunately, this is usually a prerequisite to being taken seriously in the role of pattern-seeker), (2) they care enough to actually think about other people's research (this quality is in short supply, thus creating abundant opportunities for those who possess it), (3) they communicate intensively enough with other people to actually keep up-to-date with them (this is where e-mail helps), and (4) they are smart enough to notice the patterns in the first place (this is sometimes the least important factor). You can work wonders if you cultivate these qualities.

As a practical matter, you'll work these wonders through consultation. Research people, especially in academia, generally insist on being consulted beforehand on any matter that affects them. Consultation is the fundamental protocol of all academic life – both within institutions and within disciplines. So, for example, if you have noticed a hot new theme emerging from the research in your area, you should not immediately announce a workshop or a mailing list on the topic and expect people to flock to it. (In general, never try to organize a group activity just because you think, in an abstract way, that it would be a nice idea. It doesn't work that way.) Instead, you should decide who the affected parties are and communicate with them. One way to get started on this is to write a (short or long) survey paper that describes the pattern you see emerging, puts a name on it, sketches in a sympathetic way how various projects (your own and others') seem to fit within it, explains what can be learned by looking at things this way, extracts a set of axioms or principles or methods or organizing concepts, and outlines some suggested lines of future research. Another approach is simply to write a paper that explains your own research in terms of the emerging pattern and then, as a secondary matter, explains how the other projects fit in. And a third approach is to attempt to organize a workshop or other small-scale professional meeting around the theme you've begun to articulate.

To do this, write a draft announcement for the meeting that explains its unifying concept – the emerging theme. Clearly label it as a draft. Then – and this is consultation – send this draft individually to each of the ten people whose participation in the meeting is crucial. Include a cover letter/message soliciting their perspectives and their guidance. (The phrase "I'd like to ask your advice" causes miracles the world over.) Ask them if they think the time would be ripe for such a meeting, and ask them if you have articulated the emerging theme in the best way. Do not present anything as a fait accompli. When you get responses back from these people, take the responses seriously. Modify your draft to take them all into account. Rewrite it from scratch if necessary. Get lots of advice and really listen to it (even if you don't follow it). You will probably fail at this process once or twice before you succeed, but more importantly you'll learn what it's like to internalize other people's opinions – the basic mechanism of socialization into a community. And remember that consultation, like most things, works much better if you have gone through the six network-building steps I've described above, at least with a majority of the people involved.

This whole consultation process probably sounds like a lot of work. Many people even regard it as a thankless sort of "dues" that they must pay to their field. This is not so. Engaging in consultation is a powerful act. It changes your whole way of seeing the world. You learn to notice the conditions that make action possible, and you become able to internalize others' thinking without giving them power over you. As a result, a whole landscape of possibilities will become visible before you – a landscape that most people never see. It is a good idea, therefore, to organize professional activities in your field. It does require a lot of initiative, but it does not necessarily require a vast amount of work. The key is to delegate. If you are willing to lead – that is, to take the initiative to define, consult, oversee, subdivide, and keep track – then lots of people will be willing to take responsibility for one piece of the larger whole. If this doesn't happen – that is, if you can't get people to commit to narrowly defined jobs – then that's a sign that you have misjudged how much energy really exists around the theme you have identified. Either rework that theme through another round of consultation or simply abandon the whole project and write down the lessons you've learned from it. Don't force something to happen if it just won't. Lots of good ideas will never happen; your job is to find the ones that can happen.

When a new theme does emerge to organize the research of a community, often someone will complain that they had articulated that theme themselves some years before. Usually, however, that person had not done the hard work of talking to everyone, internalizing their perspectives, and building consensus around a particular formulation of the theme. That is what I am encouraging you to do.

Having identified an emerging theme and organized a meeting of the community around it, the next step might be to edit a book. You may not think of yourself as the sort of person who does book deals with publishers, but it's not that hard. Here is a simple method. Identify a senior member of the emerging community who is decent and well-connected, with whom you have good rapport and who would be regarded as an honest broker by everyone involved. Approach that person and say this:

I'm thinking it be might time for an edited book about this emerging theme. Here's a rough draft of a proposal for the book. Likely chapter contributors would be A, B, C, D, and E. I'd like to propose that we edit the book together. If you can help with the diplomacy of recruiting the authors then I will do all of the logistics. Don't use those exact words; hopefully you'll know this person well enough by now to find words that are comfortable for you. In any case, you have just signed up for a lot of work: iterating drafts of the proposal through consultation with the most important authors, dealing with the publisher and copyeditor, keeping track of all the manuscripts, sending reminders, cajoling people to offer comments on one another's draft chapters, drafting an introduction to the volume, writing your own chapter, preparing the index, managing your overcommitted coeditor, and fighting the half-dozen fires that will erupt along the way. It's work, but it's worthwhile. If you go through this cycle even once then you will truly understand how the world around you works. You will also have a book on your vita. Of course, you won't know how to do much of the work you've signed up for. How, for example, do you find a publisher? Asking advice from the people in your network is part of the process. If you take the initiative, and if your emerging theme has enough energy behind it, then people will be happy to help. That being said, here is some more advice for would-be book editors. You should organize the project in a loose way, for the simple reason that one or more of your chapter contributors may flake out on you. Everyone from the publisher to the people who review your book for academic journals will insist that all of the chapters fit together to make a coherent whole, and this is a good ideal to the extent that it is practical. Don't try to organize an edited book unless you do honestly think that the chapters will work together. But make sure that the book will still work if one or more of the chapters fails to materialize. Realize, too, that some people can't write, or can't make deadlines. One reason to build your network is that you can find out ahead of time which potential authors are good to work with in these ways, and which ones will cause you a lot of headaches for very little payoff. When you discuss the project with a publisher (or, more precisely, an acquisitions editor who works for a publisher), keep in mind that publishers only eat when they sell books. As a result, they always have a mental calculator going in their heads that tells them how many copies of your book they can sell. You can't trick these people, so have an honest conversation with them about how the book works as a business proposition. Who would buy it? Publishers are generally unenthusiastic about edited books these days, in part because they are less likely to be reviewed by large-circulation magazines and journals, much less newspapers. So you have to make a clear case that your project has a lot of social energy behind it, and that the topic you have identified is right on the verge of exploding into a major intellectual movement of the sort that sells books. Most academics find it hard to think in business terms about their publishing projects, so swallow your pride and let the publisher instruct you in the matter. Maybe a project or two will fail before you learn to see the world through the publisher's eyes.

If the book project goes forward, you'll be negotiating a contract with the publisher. Don't make it complicated. An academic publisher won't be making much money on your edited book, and you're probably not famous enough to be negotiating for special terms. The only hard question you'll face is how to distribute the royalties. Should the people who contribute chapters get any of the money? How much? It is common not to mention money when dealing with the chapter authors, so that the book editors pocket it all. This is not an unreasonable procedure given the work that's involved, and the publisher may not want to deal with the complexity of paying a percentage royalty to each chapter author anyway. Another approach that's a little more fair is to pay each chapter author a fixed honorarium that's basically a share of an advance. In most cases, however, you'll find that the authors are surprised to be getting anything. So don't worry too much about it.

When you do build your professional network and identify your first emerging theme, a voice in your head may tell you something like, "well, if you thought of it then it must be obvious; surely you are the last to know". And since the task of initiating activities such as the ones I've described can look like a steep mountain when you're doing it for the first time, you might be tempted to assume that it's not worth the trouble. You'll think, surely someone else will beat me to it. When you hear these voices in your head, pay close attention to them. They don't want you to succeed professionally. Why? Are they trying to protect you from the pain of failure? Or do they just think that you've been destined to fail since they day you were born? The fact is, if you've built your professional network, and if someone in that network already has activities under way around the emerging theme that you have identified, then you are likely to have heard about it already. Of course, as you progress with your organizing you might learn about other activities that are related to yours in one way or another. In rare cases an existing activity will render yours redundant. It happens. But much more often, the existing activities will be off at an angle from yours. In that case, you will want to have a friendly conversation with the people who are organizing them. Perhaps you will decide to join forces, or perhaps you will articulate the way in which your respective activities are complementary. (You will find that "complementary" is a useful word.) You can then decide whether and how to redesign your activity to bring out more clearly its unique contribution.

Those, then, are some of the rudiments of intellectual leadership. (I will return to the subject later on.) Many people don't want to be leaders because they associate leadership with abuses of power. It's true, many leaders do abuse power, and if you lead then you will acquire power that you will be tempted to abuse. But real leadership does not require you to manipulate people, and a community of well-informed and confident people cannot be manipulated. So even if you can't imagine yourself as a leader, I hope that you will organize something, just once, so you'll understand how it works. Focus on articulating shared values and you'll be fine.

3.6 Recognizing difference

These concepts, I hope, further illuminate the complex structure of professional relationships within the institutions of research. As with any social system, the point is not that some infinite power imposes this structure on us from the outside, but rather that we recreate the structure ourselves every time we interact with another person. And these numerous local accomplishments are all the more remarkable given that, structures and systems notwithstanding, people really are different from one another. If you are carrying around an overly rigid view of institutions and their workings (say, for example, the view you probably got from your experiences of undergraduate education) then you might not even notice the real and rewarding work of exploring the differences between yourself and your professional acquaintances. The skills of recognizing human difference – not in the abstract, but concretely, within particular interactions and particular relationships – are growing more important as research communities in all fields lose their national and cultural boundaries.

A common mistake is (usually unconsciously) to use networking skills to seek out people who seem identical to you, either by ignoring the differences, putting easy labels on the differences, or blowing the differences out of all proportion. This might have worked alright when research worlds were heavily segregated by gender, culture, discipline, research "school", and everything else, but it doesn't work now. Just about everyone is being forced, for example, to reflect on different national traditions' remarkably different ideas about the relationship between theory and evidence. And we are likewise learning to develop professional relationships with people who don't already speak the same disciplinary language that we do – it no longer suffices to detect potential allies simply because they talk the same way. Nobody yet knows how the practices of professional networking might evolve under the pressure of these increasingly prevalent types of professional difference. My sense, though, is that e-mail is poorly suited for the initial stages of establishing a shared context for discussion between people with different cultural or disciplinary backgrounds. If this is true then my emphasis on careful mixing of electronic and face-to-face communication takes on new importance.

A problem that often arises when talking with someone from a different intellectual tradition involves "results". What counts as a "result" in your field? A theorem? A policy prescription? An experimental outcome? A newly theorized concept? As you start talking to people, you will be surprised to discover just how diverse the various fields' conceptions of a "result" can be. People who have been socialized into a given school of thought will habitually search anything they read for the specific type of "result" that they are accustomed to. Even neighboring subfields of the same intellectual tendency within the supposedly same field can fail to communicate because they are trying to discover incompatible types of "results" in one another's work. This failure of communication can be calamitous. Each side may perceive the other to be doing poor work – or, literally, no work at all. They may even accuse one another of hiding their conclusions. Emotions may become strong, and serious conflict may result. In many cases the conflict will be ongoing, and (sub)fields may have developed elaborate and nasty stereotypes of one another. These stereotypes can be hard to puncture because they are expressed in the metatheoretical shorthand that each field has developed for its own discussions. The neighboring (sub)field, for example, may be said to have "no ideas", where the word "idea" has acquired a complex history of unarticulated baggage that automatically rules out anything that does not fit that particular group's ways of working and talking. Or, to take another example at random, qualitative fieldwork methods might be disparaged as "anecdotes that don't really prove anything" – not a good way to think if you're going to start a professional relationship with an anthropologist. Needless to say, you'll want to anticipate this problem and defuse it before it damages anyone's reputation or messes up a potential relationship. This may require you to overcome your own disciplinary socialization, which has almost certainly included a lot of taken-for-granted invidious distinctions that mark certain "others" as intellectual barbarians.