

Chapter 35

The NetLab Network

Dimitrina Dimitrova
York University, Canada

Barry Wellman
NetLab Network, Canada

ABSTRACT

The authors discuss the NetLab Network – an interdisciplinary network studying the intersection of social networks, communication networks, and computer networks. It has developed since 2000 from an informal network of collaborators into a far flung virtual laboratory with members from across Canada and the United States as well as from Chile, Hungary, Israel, Japan, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. Connecting them is a shared sensibility of interpreting behavior from a social network perspective rather than seeing the world as composed of bounded groups, tree-like hierarchies, or aggregates of disconnected individuals. NetLab’s researchers focus on the interplay between social and technological links, social capital in job searches and business settings, new media and community, internet and personal relations, social media, households, networked organizations, and knowledge transfer. NetLab has had two main achievements: first, its researchers make substantive contributions to the issues they study, and second, they demonstrate that this model of scholarly collaboration works.

INTRODUCTION

The NetLab Network (“NetLab”) is an interdisciplinary scholarly network studying the intersection of social networks, communication networks, information networks, and computer networks. NetLab gets its identity and zeitgeist from its distinctive subject matter, multi-disciplinary nature, and the way in which it functions as a social network.

As a network in its own right, NetLab comprises shifting teams, spatially dispersed relationships, and permeable boundaries. Its members have come from many disciplines: Communication Science, Computer Science, Geography, Information Science, Management Science, and Sociology. NetLab has been inclusive in academic status, including faculty, graduate, undergraduate, and high school students. Although centered at Toronto, Canada, NetLabbers are elsewhere in Canada, as well as Australia, Chile, China, England, Israel, Italy, Japan, Norway, Singapore, and the United States. Connecting them is a

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7601-3.ch035

shared sensibility of interpreting behavior from a social network perspective rather than seeing the world as composed of bounded groups, tree-like hierarchies, or aggregates of disconnected individuals.

Not only ideas connect the network. NetLab is an informal network of collaborators - faculty and students - that function as a community of practice: a self-selected, self-organizing, informal group of collaborators who solve problems together and learn from each other. In addition to congruent intellectual perspectives, frequent communication and a culture of inclusiveness and mutual supportiveness also connect NetLabbers. With its paramount interest in social networks, as well as its collaborative focus, interdisciplinary nature, remote team members, and partnerships with government and industry, NetLab exemplifies key trends in research (Wellman, et al, 2016). It is important not only for what it does but for also how it achieves it.

This chapter summarizes and updates an earlier description published in the *Encyclopedia of Cyber Behavior*. As the space allotted for this chapter is less than half of the original chapter, we emphasize recent research and refer readers to the earlier version for fuller discussions, citations and references (Dimitrova & Wellman, 2012).

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

NetLab research has been informed by a set of guiding principles:

1. *The world is composed of networks, not groups.* People function more as individuals connected via partial memberships in multiple networks and less as people embedded in tightly-bounded, densely-knit, settled groups.
2. Many people meet their social, emotional, and economic needs by tapping into multiple, loosely knit networks of diverse associates rather than relying on tight connections to a relatively small number of core associates.
3. The social structures people are in largely determine the operation of two-person relationships: it is sociology, not psychology. Ties are usually asymmetrically reciprocal, differing in content and intensity.
4. Ties link network members indirectly as well as directly.
5. Asymmetric ties and complex networks differentially distribute scarce resources.
6. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are usually extensions and enhancers of ongoing relationships. Few people have most of their ties in segregated virtual worlds.
7. Households have become more networked, with ICTs keeping mobile spouses and their children in contact.
8. At work, less-formal, fluctuating and specialized peer relationships are common, and the benefits of boss/subordinate hierarchical relationships are less obvious. The organization of work has become more spatially distributed, with ICTs connecting people, and appreciable numbers working at home full or part-time.
9. As the dividing line between work and home has weakened, so has the more general boundary between the private and public spheres of life. In the less hierarchical and less bounded networked environment where expertise is more in dispute than in the past and where relationships are more tenuous, there is more uncertainty about whom and what information sources to trust.

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-netlab-network/214573

Related Content

Twitter Based Capital Market Analysis Using Cloud Statistics

Sangeeta Gupta and Rajanikanth Aluvalu (2021). *Research Anthology on Strategies for Using Social Media as a Service and Tool in Business* (pp. 726-733).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/twitter-based-capital-market-analysis-using-cloud-statistics/283000

Opportunistic Networks: A Taxonomy of Data Dissemination Techniques

Radu Ioan Ciobanu and Ciprian Dobre (2013). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social Networking* (pp. 11-26).

www.irma-international.org/article/opportunistic-networks/96874

Modelling of Water Use Decisions in a Large, Spatially Explicit, Coupled Simulation System

Andreas Ernst, Carsten Schulz and Nina Schwarz (2008). *Social Simulation: Technologies, Advances and New Discoveries* (pp. 138-149).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/modelling-water-use-decisions-large/29260

Young Connected Migrants and Non-Normative European Family Life: Exploring Affective Human Right Claims of Young E-Diasporas

Koen Leurs (2016). *International Journal of E-Politics* (pp. 15-34).

www.irma-international.org/article/young-connected-migrants-and-non-normative-european-family-life/163143

The Role of Social Networking in Global Business Environments

Kijpokin Kasemsap (2016). *Social Media and Networking: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1635-1653).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-role-of-social-networking-in-global-business-environments/130438