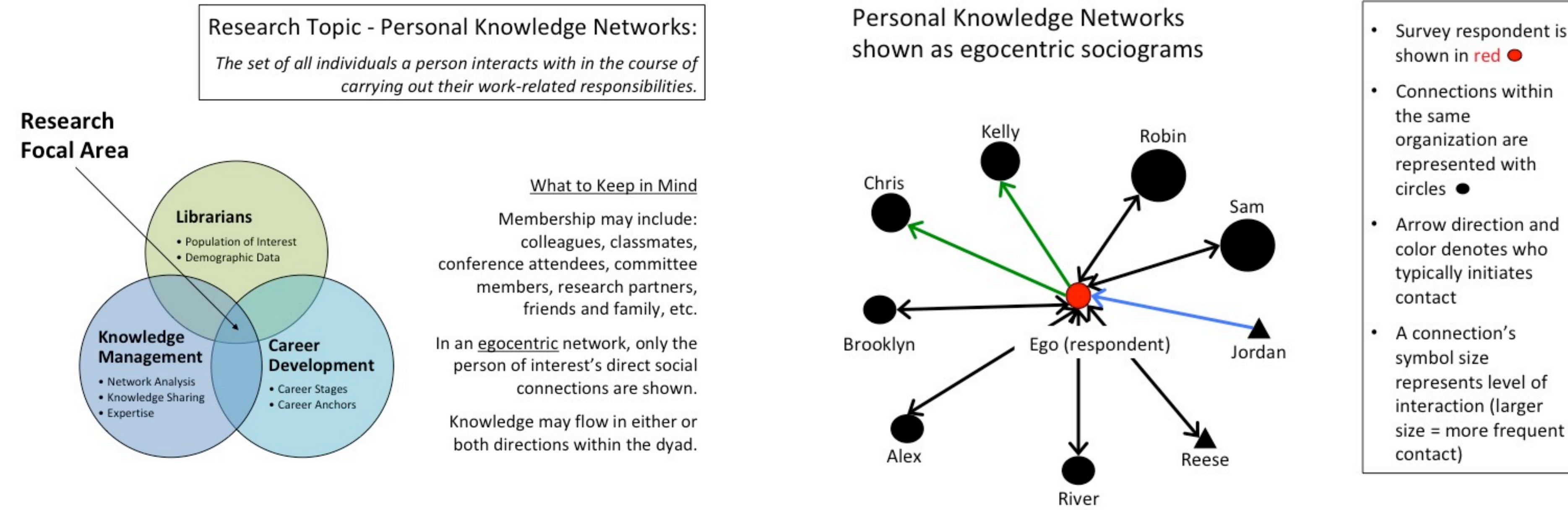# It Takes a Village: Incorporating Intentionality Into Network Development

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## Background

**Research Topic - Personal Knowledge Networks:**
*The set of all individuals a person interacts with in the course of carrying out their work-related responsibilities.*

**Research Focal Area**

- **Librarians**
  - Population of Interest
  - Demographic Data
- **Knowledge Management**
  - Network Analysis
  - Knowledge Sharing
  - Expertise
- **Career Development**
  - Career Stages
  - Career Anchors

**What to Keep in Mind**

Membership may include: colleagues, classmates, conference attendees, committee members, research partners, friends and family, etc.

In an *egocentric* network, only the person of interest's direct social connections are shown.

Knowledge may flow in either or both directions within the dyad.

Personal Knowledge Networks shown as egocentric sociograms



- Survey respondent is shown in red ●
- Connections within the same organization are represented with circles ●
- Arrow direction and color denotes who typically initiates contact
- A connection's symbol size represents level of interaction (larger size = more frequent contact)

## Results: Network Development Drivers & Constraints

**Drivers of Network Development**



**Constraints to Network Development**



## Research Design

**Research Questions:**
- What forces drive librarians to engage in network development activities?
- What constraints hinder the network development activities of librarians?

**Methodology – Social Network Analysis**
1. Prompted survey respondent to list between 6-25 members of their personal knowledge network
2. Asked survey respondent targeted questions about each of their self-identified connections:
   *Who initiates contact? How frequent is the contact? What type of knowledge is shared? What type of boundaries (organizational, departmental) does the relationship cross?*
3. Used available tools to generate a sociogram for each respondent

**Methodology – Exploratory Research**
1. Asked open-ended questions of survey respondent:
   *Now that you can see a picture of your social network, is there anything that jumps out at you?*
   *Do you have intentions to add to your network of work-related contacts? Why or why not?*
2. Used content analysis (primarily via a qualitative lens) to identify and examine recurring themes in the data

**Survey Respondents:**
280 degreed librarians
Surveyed online May-June 2019

Gender:
- 82% Women
- 14% Men
- 3% Queer/Fluid/Nonbinary

Race/Ethnicity:
- 88% White (non-Hispanic)
- 3% Black/African American
- 3% Hispanic/Latino
- 2% Asian

Age:
- 19% 21-30 years
- 43% 31-45 years
- 38% 46 years and over

Library Type:
- 52% Academic
- 34% Public
- 7% Special
- 3% School
- 2% Government

## Discussion & Implications

**Key Preliminary Findings:**
- While Schein's (1978) career anchors have some overlap with the drivers and constraints identified in this study, there are enough differences to hypothesize that librarians rely upon a different set of motivators for career development choices than for professional network development decisions
- Certain career phases tie to a stated cessation of network development activities:
  - Nearing retirement (but still several years away)
  - New to and feeling unsettled in a position
- While not fully explored, it is common for librarians to desire *organic*, *informal* or *natural* connections and to resist developing connections that feel *artificial* or *forced*
- Considering that outreach—an activity reliant upon social connections—is common in certain library types and positions in the field, it is surprising that the topic is not more prevalent in the responses

**Implications:**
- How should libraries and mentors support network development in their staff or mentees?
- How can librarians actively develop their networks if they lack institutional support?
- Does librarianship need a rebranding or re-education on what network development actually is and how to go about engaging in it?

## Tools & References

**Free Social Network Analysis Tools:**

EgoWeb 2.0 software:
https://github.com/qualintitative/egoweb/tree/dev

EgoWeb 2.0 help:
https://www.qualintitative.com/wiki/doku.php/egoweb_2.0_home
http://www.qualintitative.com/forum/

NodeXL Basic MS Excel Add-In:
https://www.nodexlgraphgallery.org/Pages/RegistrationBasic.aspx

NodeXL help:
https://www.smrfoundation.org/nodexl/
https://lib.manhattan.edu/c.php?g=728252&p=5751031

**References/Resources:**
Cross, R. L., & Parker, A. (2004). *The hidden power of social networks: Understanding how work really gets done in organizations.* Harvard Business Press.
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Helms, R., & Buijsrogge, K. (2005). Knowledge Network Analysis: A Technique to Analyze Knowledge Management Bottlenecks in Organizations. *16th International Workshop on Database and Expert Systems Applications (DEXA'05),* 410–414. https://doi.org/10.1109/DEXA.2005.127
Schein, E. H. (1978). *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs.* Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
Wiley, J. M. (2019). No Librarian Is an Island: A Network Analysis of Career Motivation and Progression in US Librarians (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University).
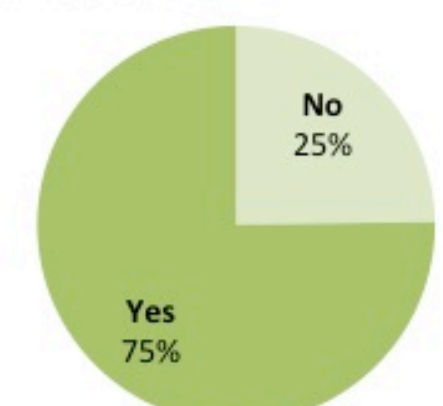
## Results: Visualizations

Not all librarians are visual in nature…
…but many made observations and drew conclusions…

**Is there value in visualizing your network?**


- No 25%
- Yes 75%

*"The people who appear [as frequent contacts] on the diagram aren't…the ones with whom I feel I have the most meaningful and productive conversations."*
…about how relationships are valued.

*"It made me sad to…see how much I reach out with few people reaching back…But, who needs me?"*
…about the give and take in relationships.

*"All my contacts are women."*
*"I have a small social work network. Should there be more [variety]? Should I be working to work with more people?"*
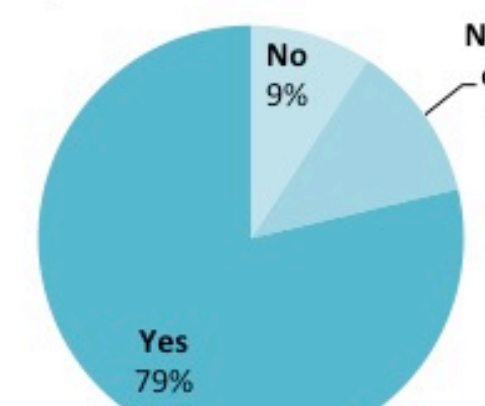*"I am sorely in need of outside influences that are real people (as opposed to articles)…"*
…about how seeing their connections led to new understandings.

## Results: Network Development

Librarians believe in the value of network development…
…but frequently lack clarity as to how to execute it.

**Intention to Practice Network Development?**


- No 9%
- No, but open 12%
- Yes 79%

*"I want more organic connections, not just a stack of business cards."*
*"Hopefully something will kick in."*
*"I…find it challenging to form contacts that get past the surface level."*

**Challenges to Network Development**

## Practical Implications: Self Assessment

Identify connections → Describe relationships → Identify network biases → Identify knowledge needs → Map knowledge needs to experts → Corrective Action Plan

**Identify connections**
- Current and past colleagues
- Educational contacts
- Professional membership and events
- Friends and family

**Describe relationships**
- Gender, Age, Ethnicity
- External or internal to the organization
- Organizational ladder level
- Relationship age
- Professional value

**Identify network biases**
- Where do you overly rely on contacts?
- Are your most frequent contacts the most similar to you?
- Do you prioritize ease of contact over the best knowledge?

**Identify knowledge needs**
- Job or task knowledge
- Technology use
- Organizational policies/procedures
- Mentoring
- Benchmarking/ best practices
- Most current knowledge

**Map knowledge needs to experts**
- Create a matrix with connections as rows and knowledge needs as columns
- Determine the contact(s) you go to for each knowledge need and mark in matrix

**Corrective Action Plan**
- Look for gaps, overdependencies, and inefficiencies in your knowledge network
- Make a proactive plan to address your knowledge needs including when, where, and how

*Adapted from Cross & Parker (2004)