Sustainability of networking working group

To what extent do networks and networks need formal organisational and cooperation structures?

To be successful, networks in the context of work need to achieve three things:

- The individual who is participating in the network sees an added value to participation.

The added value may be the opportunity to meet other experts in the field and gaining knowledge, gaining prestige from working at an international level, or building one's own personal network

- The employer who is funding the participation (even by just allowing the worker time to participate) must see an added value

The worker's participation in the network can provide an organisation with visibility at the European or international level, an opportunity to participate in funded research projects, or publicity for the organisations other activities.

- The network as a whole benefits from the participation

Participation of an individual who is representing the network can bring prestige to the network (e.g. if there is participation from ILO or similar organisations), it gives the network additional reach so it is able to spread its message further, and active participation brings knowledge into the network.

For individual, organisation, or network, the benefits may not be directly financial, but enhance the social capital of all and allow individuals and organisations to perform better.

What role do "weak links" play in the survival of a network?

"Weak links" are those people who you see infrequently or in different contexts – that is to say distant connections. They are seen as important in network theory as they allow new knowledge to enter a network. Research has shown that people hear about job opportunities more from distant acquaintances than from close friends.

For ENETOSH, the weak links may be people working in topics indirectly related to OSH in education and in education approaches. One example has been where ENETOSH and EU-OSHA invited researchers on body image to a workshop relating to MSDs and education and the mainstreaming of prevention of MSDs into education in 2019[1]. This engagement brought a new dimension to the discussions.

ENETOSH members should look out for people engaged in work that is obliquely linked to the mainstreaming OSH into education topic and try and find common ground.

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[1] https://osha.europa.eu/en/tools-and-resources/seminars/give-musculoskeletal-health-children-and-young-workers

How is funding for networks to be ensured?

Funding is always a problem for networks. At a national level, resources seem to be increasingly limited. However, there are opportunities where activities are carried out at the European level. The European Social Fund+[2] has a huge budget, other opportunities include CORDIS[3]. The challenge will all funding opportunities is that it takes time and experience to successfully apply for such projects.

A positive side is that COVID has strongly driven online networking and meeting opportunities. Online meetings complement but do not replace in-person meetings, but can help reduce costs of knowledge sharing, as does the use of social media.

How important is the fit with overarching European and international strategies?

The current EU Strategic Framework does not specifically identify mainstreaming OSH into education as a priority, nor does it particularly consider young workers[4]. As a result it is harder to promote work in the area and potentially could make obtaining funding more difficult.

A priority for ENETOSH is to ensure that mainstreaming gets into future strategies (in both OSH and education).

[2] https://european-social-fund-plus.ec.europa.eu/en
[3] https://cordis.europa.eu/
[4] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0323&qid=1626089672913#PP1Contents