

## Build confidence and form networks – while focusing on your core competence

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Reading the articles in the network-themed issue of LUMEN magazine was a very positive experience. It became particularly clear that our personnel and partners have realised how significant networks are for our operations and how they are created and developed. Networks are not formed by official agreements between the parties, although these are needed as well. What is essential is trust, as Outi Törmänen and Marika Kunnari point out in their article. From my working career and my research into the matter, I have formed the view that networks are multilateral partnerships that are necessarily based on three kinds of trust: trust in people, trust in competence and trust in the processes of the other party.

As Kimmo Heikka states in his column, knowledge moves in networks, most often without any specific compensation. Knowledge moving in the other direction acts as the compensation. The Finnish language is special in that we originally have just one word for knowledge. The word covers data and information as well as competence. The transfer of data and information can be enabled with money. The movement of the most valuable knowledge – tacit knowledge – requires trust.

Trust is always based on trust in a person, although I often hear critique that operations between organisations must not be personified. Whether they must or must not, they will be personified, but they do not have to rely on one person. In her article, Soili Mäkimurto-Koivumaa highlights the concepts of strong tie and weak tie as used in the science of sociology. If I have a strong tie to a certain person in another organisation, I have a weak tie to his or her colleagues and partners who trust him or her. When that person brings me together with his or her colleagues or partners, the conditions for the creation of trust are excellent. In the

same way, I can open doors to my colleagues. Of course, they must always confirm the tie by demonstrating their competence and a credible way of operating. Operations are based on people, but over time, the interface becomes sufficiently extensive and, therefore, less vulnerable.

Networks enable the efficient use of resources. Each partner can focus their contribution on their core competence and its development. When acting alone, a person, team or organisation also has to do the things they are not best at. Focusing on everything leads to not having sufficient resources for developing the core competence. In a network, everyone can focus on their peak competence. The principal task of the University of Applied Sciences is to transfer competence into the target organisations in various ways: in the form of competence of young graduates, by training those already in working life and by collaborating on applied research and development. Naturally, this is a partnership in which knowledge and competence also move in the direction of the University of Applied Sciences, improving the ability to serve the local actors. Without networks, we would be doing everything ourselves and the level of competence would not be able to increase. When operating in networks, we can also transfer the peak competence of our partners to the local actors. By investing in our own peaks, we create competence that acts as an instrument of exchange.

Most of the articles in this magazine are about individual projects including partners from the research, education and customer sectors. A project is an excellent tool when a specified target state must be reached by the deadline with limited money, human resources and other resources. In practice, all these resources are always scarce and the schedule is tight. Therefore, a network with special competence and clear roles makes the use of resources more efficient. A functioning network is always formed by sufficiently different actors complementing each other, which eliminates competition that weakens trust.

This issue of the magazine is a pleasantly wide and varied collection of articles describing the work done by Lapland University of Applied Sciences in different fields as part of networks. The examples include learning projects in the tourism industry (Valtonen, Hanni-Vaara, Tapaninen; Kaihua, Sipponen), the development of testing services (Mört), helping immigrants form networks (Santala), the collaboration of forestry actors (Väisänen), promoting sustainable construction (Sirkka), companies supporting the development of education and guiding it into the right direction (Ryynänen), productising education services in collaboration between educators (Kantanen), the development of international networks of companies

(Puukko; Parkkila, Leinonen, Sipola; Muje), the search for new technical solutions (Kuisma), bringing actors together (Siimes, Kotkansalo), etc. The networking theme inspired more than 20 articles to be written.

It is actually very natural that our people also have adopted networks as an operating model. After all, this is the way the whole world operates today. The Finnish government, the EU, the UN and many others are all networks that operate between those members of the networks that have managed to build mutual trust. If the trust weakens, the functional ability of the whole system weakens. Those networks strongly emphasise a key condition for operating in networks: a network functions just as well as the management of its member organisations wants it to function. Fortunately, the management of Lapland UAS wants their networks to function well.