

THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING

Departmental Research Seminar

Taking Your Hands off the Wheel: The Advantages of Relinquishing Agency During Networking By



Prof. Anne ter Wal
Imperial College Business School

Date : 30 Apr 2026 (Thu)
Time : 10:30 am – 12 noon
Venue : M802, PolyU

Abstract

While networking is an important tool for gaining valuable connections and information, most existing research on the topic uses a broad-strokes approach with long timelines, and little is known about how networking happens on the ground, that is, at the micro-level. To this end, we devised a field experiment resembling a networking event, where participants had to gain information from each other. As they moved around the room talking to each other, we tracked their movement using a combination of self-reported tracking forms and sociometric badges. Our abductive study yielded two intriguing findings, both of which point toward the value of relinquishing control during networking. First, people who let others approach them were more likely to gain valuable referrals than those initiating conversations. Second, those who spent time in advance to plan their search tended to maintain the initiative in starting conversations, at the expense of fewer referrals.

Prof. Anne ter Wal is Professor of Technology and Innovation Management in the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship at Imperial College Business School.

Prof. Wal's research explores how networks help turn bold technological visions into market reality. Working closely with leading multinationals, deep tech ventures and other start ups, he studies how scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs build relationships that give them access to new ideas – and how they then struggle, and sometimes succeed, in fusing what's technologically possible with what customers and society actually need.

From 2017 to 2023, Prof. Wal led a large scale EU funded research programme, "Networking for Innovation", which followed entrepreneurs and corporate innovators as they built and leveraged their networks to achieve business and innovation success. He also has a long standing interest in the management of creativity – in particular how bootlegging and other deviant, under the radar forms of creativity can drive valuable new products and services inside established organisations.

Prof. Wal holds a doctoral degree in Economic Geography from Utrecht University in the Netherlands. His work has been published in leading journals in management, innovation studies and economic geography, including *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization Science*, *Research Policy*, *Journal of Economic Geography*, *Economic Geography*, *Regional Studies* and *Industry & Innovation*.

He currently serves as Deputy Editor (Macro) at the *Academy of Management Journal* and sits on the editorial review boards of *Administrative Science Quarterly* and *Research Policy*.

All interested are welcome.



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