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Article

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Now Is the Time to Reconnect With Your Dormant Network

by Thomas Roulet & Ben Laker

With social distancing, the Coronavirus has triggered the decay of our social networks with both our close and distant connections to others. But the current crisis presents an opportunity to reconnect with our dormant ties, those we have progressively lost touch with, and who are physically far from us, but are experiencing the same uncertainty throughout the globe.

The lockdowns in cities and countries across the globe due to COVID-19 are likely to last for a fair bit of time. If and when conditions of social distancing start to relax in locations where the novel coronavirus outbreak is subsiding, most professional events, conferences and gatherings have already been cancelled for the foreseeable future.

For professionals and managers, in-person events offer unique opportunities for strengthening social networks. They do so by reinforcing both strong ties, helping people bond with individuals they have already built strong business connections with, and also by fostering weak ties – enabling people to meet others who may have complementary interests, resources, and information. Without this ability to meet with friends and colleagues and to make new connections, it is likely that our social networks will weaken.

But this time stuck at home is also the perfect opportunity to reawaken our dormant ties. Those underexploited links and relationships we have often forgotten about with the distance of time and geography: for example, university friends, co-workers from a previous job, former neighbors or even distant relatives. [Existing research](#) has shown the power of reconnecting with dormant ties, especially when individuals can share similar forms of experience.

The current uncertain climate prompts sensemaking – not only by gathering news from our contacts but also sharing personal updates with regards to how a global situation is affecting us. Now is the time to reopen your old online chats, and reach to old friends and colleagues through via social media platforms, or perhaps, even an old-fashioned phone call.

The power of dormant ties in times of uncertainty

The input we can get from those dormant and weak ties is often more valuable than the input we get from close friends, colleagues, and family. Stronger ties in our network often provide redundant information as they are more likely to share the same background and experience. [Studies of entrepreneurs](#) have shown that capacity for creative action is empowered by non-redundant knowledge because it enables innovation and helps people avoid the dangers of conformity.

Sharing with dormant ties also helps dampen the overload of redundant news updates and information overload that occurs in a crisis. Additionally, the pandemic has left many of us with uncertainty over the future of our organizations and work. By exposing ourselves to different ideas and fresh perspectives, we can harness creativity to find potential solutions and paths forward to recovery.

Even when the immediate public health crisis is over and normalcy progressively returns in certain ways, we will still be facing the challenge of a severely damaged economy. But these

reawakened social ties might help many of us find our next career move, whether it is a business partnership or job opportunity. Those reawakened ties will also have “snowballing” consequences: they will open the door to other connections you had lost touch with, and entire parts of your network that had remained underutilized.

Digital technologies: more than ever the path to reawakening dormant ties

The use of social media to reconnect with dormant ties is nothing new: how many stories of old school friends reconnecting via Facebook have we heard about? In the current context, social media and a variety of apps – many of which are finding new levels of usage and fame due to social distancing orders, such as [Zoom](#), the video conferencing software and [Houseparty](#), a video chat app – offer accessible means for reconnecting with our long lost neighbors, friends, and colleagues.

These tools are particularly adequate in a situation like ours. The ability to process others’ messages before answering them (the ‘asynchronous’ nature of digital communication) [has been found](#) to help us process emotions. In the same fashion, it enables communication by reactivating a shared history and bonding over the current conditions of our social life - we have seen people reconnecting while sharing mundane stories of their quest for toilet papers in a time of bizarre shortages. While our lives might have taken us apart from each other, social media highlights the absurdities of the current situation.

But by offering a new source of moral support, a platform to share ideas, and perspectives in a situation of high uncertainty, reawakening our dormant ties will make us more resilient to both the current situation and what is to come our way. Investing in relationships, old and new, is one way to make use of the time we have at home and engage in meaningful reconnections, in a time when having each other is our only certitude.

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