

**‘The role of social capital for self-employed information  
professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand’**

**by**

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## Abstract

**Research problem:** The aim of this qualitative study was to explore how self-employed information professionals perceive the role of social capital in the development of their businesses in New Zealand. This required gaining an understanding of their professional relationship-building, networking, help-seeking and related activities.

**Methodology:** A purposive sample of eight self-employed information professionals was interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured and occurred via Skype, phone, and face-to-face meetings. Anderson, Park, and Jack's (2007) conceptual framework of social capital served as a theoretical lens in the interview design and data analysis.

**Results:** Social capital was described in terms of giving (voluntary activity) and sharing (exchanging information and resources). Ethics, generosity, human touch, and mutuality emerged as important behavioural principles in the development of strong and effective relationships and networks. Apart from market opportunities, personal and professional well-being appeared to be equally important outcomes of social capital.

**Implications:** In focusing on a lesser-known, but potentially growing, occupational group of sole traders, the study contributes to the library and information studies and social capital research in New Zealand. The results are indicative only and more data is needed, but they provide a useful resource for future and present self-employed information professionals.

**Keywords:** Self-employment, contracting, information professionals, social capital, networking

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# 1 Introduction

Self-employed information professionals form a very small occupational group in New Zealand, working mostly as independent consultants or contractors in a fairly limited market to which they have adapted well (Fields, 2003). The sustainability of their independence relies heavily on the relationships, networks, and reputations they have built over time. These aspects are often equated with the relational resource of social capital, and it seems reasonable to assume that high levels of social capital contribute to the well-being and success of self-employed information professionals. As the Toronto-based consultant Ulla de Stricker (2009) puts it:

I use my social capital to connect people who may benefit from finding each other, to ask for help when I need it, and, in general, to navigate within the profession with a view to assisting our future influencers. And what have I discovered? Social capital appears to be inexhaustible and self-renewing (p. 14).

In North America, Europe, and Australia, self-employment began to receive attention in the 1980s and developed into an increasingly common and supported career path for information professionals (Broadbent & Kelson, 1984; de Stricker, 2008; Frey, 1985; Warr, 1992; Wüst & Oswald, 1994). Today, the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) and the Special Library Association (SLA) are key players in connecting and supporting self-employed information professionals internationally. However, this mode of work is neither well known nor very common in New Zealand, which is reflected in the lack of small business and entrepreneurial education in the curriculum of the key qualification providers as well as in the lack of a relevant special interest group as part of the established professional associations such as the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), Te Rōpū Whakahau (TRW), or the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ). It therefore seems likely that self-employed information professionals in New Zealand are required to proactively develop their social capital and draw on it even more than their international counterparts.

These thoughts triggered the idea for a research project that involved talking with New Zealand-based self-employed information professionals about their social capital and how it helped them make their business work. The interview study was carried out in early 2014

and forms the subject of this report. To begin with, the report will discuss in more detail the reason and purpose for undertaking research in this area. Then, the research questions and the theoretical perspective that guided the study will be outlined. A literature review that examines self-employment in the information sector as well as social capital will assist in positioning the project within the wider research context. After outlining the research design and the associated philosophical assumptions, the methodology that was employed for the recruitment of study participants and for data collection and analysis will be described. Subsequently, the limitations and delimitations of the study will be outlined. Finally, the findings and implications of the study will be presented and discussed, while taking the research literature and theoretical considerations into account.

## **1.1 Rationale**

There is reason to believe that self-employment is an area of growth in New Zealand, and that developments in the job market force information professionals to consider alternative career paths or work arrangements, which increases the need for more local research. Careers New Zealand (2013) confirms poor job prospects for librarians, library assistants and records advisers, and average prospects for archivists. This is mainly attributed to funding cutbacks in the public sector. A de-valuation of information skills in the post-Google era seems to have affected the job market in the corporate environment too (Sibthorpe & Ralph, 2009). Furthermore, due to an aging workforce, opportunities to achieve leadership and management positions are very limited (Barthorpe, 2012). Information professionals are therefore increasingly forced to advance their careers outside traditional, permanent employment.

Information professionals who consider going solo and who wish to make well-informed decisions require access to current research, especially research into the social factors that help them succeed. Within the New Zealand context, Alison Fields' study from 2003 is to date the only piece of academic research that has investigated the practices, work environment and experiences of contractors and consultants. Most of the literature is otherwise based on informal surveys, personal experience, and advice for potential clients (Lowther & Spanhake, 1999; Matthews, 1994), and for those considering self-employment as a career path (Day, 2006; Dobbie, 2000; Morden, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Sawyer, 1995).

Particularly influential in this area are Bates' (2010) comprehensive handbook on developing a successful research business and de Stricker's (2008) vocational guide on consulting.

Developing effective relationships and networks that facilitate action is a widely acknowledged key requirement for the overall sustainability of self-employment in these works, but no research has so far been undertaken that specifically explores the social dimension of self-employment among New Zealand information professionals in more detail.

## **1.2 Study objective**

The aim of this research project was to explore the role of social interactions, relationships and networks in the development of the businesses of self-employed information professionals in New Zealand. Closely connected with this objective was the intention to contribute to the body of knowledge of New Zealand social capital research in the field of entrepreneurship by investigating the perspectives of a so far neglected occupational group.

Starting a business is a very personal decision and can be challenging on various levels, which is why research into the experiences and perceptions of specialists seemed particularly useful. Thus, the study aimed to generate knowledge that may support a wide range of practitioners, including:

- Information professionals who consider self-employment as a career path in New Zealand.
- Information professionals who already work as consultants or contractors and who are interested in their peers' experiences and perceptions.
- People who work with self-employed information professionals, either as clients, sub-contractors, or as collaborators in the widest sense.
- Managers who wish to a) review their management of consultants and contractors, b) support relationship-building in mixed project teams, or c) develop entrepreneurial approaches within their organisation.



### 1.3 Definitions

<i>Information professional</i>	Professionals who engage in librarianship, information science, information management, knowledge management, records management or archives (Carr, 2003).
<i>Self-employed</i>	“A person who operates his or her own economic enterprise or engages independently in a profession or trade” (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.).
<i>Relationship</i>	Any form of connection between two or more individuals or institutions.
<i>Networking</i>	A form of relationship-building that initiates and develops productive relationships for business or professional development.
<i>Social capital</i>	A relational resource that facilitates the exchange of information and resources (Anderson & Jack, 2002).
<i>Resource</i>	A source or supply from which any kind of benefit is produced.

## **1.4 Research questions**

The question that guided the study was:

How do self-employed information professionals develop, utilise, and describe social capital?

Study participants were accordingly questioned about with whom, in what ways and for what purposes they build effective relationships and networks. In doing so, it was hoped that the study would also shed some light on the following sub-questions:

- a. What strategies are used in the processing of social capital among self-employed information professional?
- b. In what ways may the way in which information professionals develop and utilise social capital change over time throughout the development of their business?
- c. What do self-employed information professionals consider as important outcomes and benefits of social capital?

## **1.5 Theoretical considerations**

The study drew on a theoretical framework that was developed by Anderson, Park and Jack (2007) through grounded theory research in the attempt to conceptualise social capital in the context of entrepreneurship. Anderson et al. (2007) utilised a thorough literature review of social capital, in general and specific to entrepreneurship, to develop a preliminary framework for an empirical study. The authors then conducted semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of entrepreneurs from 10 technology firms in Aberdeen. A qualitative approach was chosen in order to build a complete picture of the development of the firms, with a focus on the “nature and categories of social capital” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 255). The participants were interviewed about their social interactions, ties and networks, and how these impacted on entrepreneurship.

The four themes that emerged from the study were then categorised as four distinct elements of social capital:

- **Connectivity** (e.g., dependencies, connectedness, friendships, family ties) is seen as the condition, or the **characteristics of social capital**.
- **Credibility**, the “symbolic token of the right to social capital” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 258), is categorised as the **sum of the process elements**.
- **Market opportunities** are either created by or recognised through social interactions, and are therefore seen as an **outcome of social capital**.
- **Networks and contacts**, finally, form the operating **medium of social capital**.

These carved out elements of social capital largely correspond with the key findings pertaining to the social dimension of self-employment in the information profession as discussed in the following literature review (see 2.1 and 2.2), but are presented in such a coherent way that it rendered Anderson et al.’s (2007) framework highly applicable to the present study. The framework informed the interview design (see 7.4) and was also used as a theoretical lens during data analysis by taking these aspects into account: *the connectivity* (with whom and in what ways are people connected), *the entrance tickets* (rules and requirements, such as trustworthiness, credibility, image), *the outcomes* (market opportunities), and *the medium* of social capital (networks and relationships).

The framework was considered as a working construct that assisted the research design and analytical effort, but it is important to acknowledge the limitations of any framework when applied to empirical research that is not identical to the research from which it arose. The discussion of results will therefore include theoretical reflections on the plausibility and applicability of Anderson et al.’s (2007) framework to self-employed information professionals, and in the context of New Zealand.

## 2 Literature review

In order to develop a better understanding of the study’s positioning within the wider research context, a review of the research literature is needed. Relevant examples from the library and information studies literature were consulted to first explore early international research into self-employment and fee-based services. The literature review then moves from the international perspective to works specific to New Zealand. Vocational guides and works based on personal experience, anecdotal evidence or informal surveys were briefly

discussed in the introduction, but are outside the scope of this literature review. An exception was made where a high degree of currency and relevance to the study and to the profession demanded it.

Subsequently, the focus of the review shifts from library and information studies to the concept of social capital in general, and then, as discussed, to small business and entrepreneurship studies. These are limited to qualitative studies only; quantitative research and network analysis are outside the scope of this review.

## **2.1 Understanding a new phenomenon: Working for fees, not salaries**

Early research studies, such as the questionnaire-based surveys conducted by Frey (1986) in Australia and by Warr (1992) in the UK, can be summarised as attempts to gain first insights into alternative service provisions and work arrangements that were evolving in a world that was moving towards a technology-dependent and service-based economy. These works focused on the overall appraisal of the fee-based information services sector, often referred to as information brokering or information consultancy.

Abell, Carlsten, Hyde, and Wormell (1995) followed a more specific approach by studying the critical success factors of fee-based information services in Sweden, Denmark and the UK. The research project included a survey (via questionnaire) of 53 information professionals engaged in fee-based services who were either working independently or as employees for public or private sector institutions. Of particular interest are the findings concerned with professional image, marketing, and ethics: 'word-of-mouth' is seen as the most important marketing tool (Abell et al., 1995, p. 28). Of particular note is the importance of current clients as the potential providers of recommendations and referrals, of clients who may require services repeatedly, and of occasional co-workers with whom good work relationships are highly desirable and necessary. It was observed that clients need to have confidence in the service provider's professionalism, integrity, confidentiality, and the ability to understand the information needs and to deliver results. Becoming part of the client group network is an essential marketing method, and achieving this requires both skills and a professional image. Although a professional image may be based on proven skills and conformity with relevant codes of practice and business ethics, it exists to some extent

independently from these factors: the professional image is what we create in our minds based on what we see (for example a business card) and what we hear (customer/client feedback) of the independent information professional, even if we have not met the person or witnessed their work before (Abell et al., 1995, p. 35).

This study laid the foundation for a more recent publication which can be described as a comprehensive guide to information consultancy (Wormell, Olesen, & Mikulas, 2011). A noteworthy addition made in this guide is that it further expands on the range of stakeholders involved. Information consultants direct their relationship, trust, and image building efforts at multiple groups: clients, prospective clients, partners, peers, competitors, and suppliers (Wormell et al., 2011, p. 65). This diversity requires a broad range of strategies.

## **2.2 Self-employed information professionals in New Zealand**

Fields' (2003) pioneering study of consultants and contractors provided valuable insights into a so far neglected part of New Zealand's information sector. The study contributed to a better understanding of the persons involved, the work, the market, business practices, relevant standards and codes, best and worst things about being self-employed, and perceptions pertaining to professional development and support. A qualitative approach was used, and 26 people were interviewed. The findings show that the participants did not form a homogenous group – tasks, job titles, and specialities were varied. To summarise some of the key findings relating to social capital:

- Marketing/finding work: The most common methods were 'word of mouth', referrals, being approached by clients, and networking. Also mentioned were "developing strategic partnerships" and "being known within the industry" (Fields, 2003, p. 25).
- Skills: Communication skills were most often selected as essential to the interviewees' work, followed by professional skills and technical expertise, and then by interpersonal abilities.
- Professional support: Listservs and mailing lists, professional associations, and networking were most frequently used for professional support.

At the time the study was conducted, major online social networking sites were not yet developed, which suggests further investigation into the role and capacity of social media in the development of support systems and business relationships.

Interestingly, personal feelings such as isolation, lacking a sense of belonging, being invisible or being regarded as having only a temporary role within an organisation, formed a strong theme in the responses concerning the negative aspects of being self-employed (Fields, 2003, p. 40). This raises the question if (and if yes, in what ways) social interactions, relationships and networks are used to overcome these feelings.

Drawing attention to one specific relationship, de Courcy and Donald (2013) describe the collaboration between a freelance archivist and the client, here represented by the manuscript librarian of a major public library in New Zealand, while working over a longer period of time together on large collections which could not have been processed by permanent staff. Although not based on research but on personal experience, a noteworthy contribution of this article is that it represents both the contractor's and the organisation's perspectives. Of particular interest is the observation that communication and trust were highly valued by both parties. Comparing the collaborative effort with a minuet, communication and trust required some time to develop, implying that the building of strong relationships with clients or employed co-workers is both a challenge as well as essential to the continuing success of independent information professionals. In this specific case, it has led to contracting work stretching over a period of eight years, and to the extension of services from collection work to staff training. It would be interesting however to further investigate how such relationships based on trust are actually developed.

The importance of 'word-of-mouth', interpersonal skills, contacts, trust, and image building are widely acknowledged in the previously discussed works, but none of the discussed studies contributed to or made use of theoretical perspectives, concepts, or models that seek to understand these fragmented social aspects holistically. Studies that have tried to achieve this are usually found outside the field of library and information studies, and they tend to employ the sociological concept of social capital.

## 2.3 Social capital

Social capital is a widely used and frequently challenged concept in the social sciences. The theoretical debates have been significantly influenced by the works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000). Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the sum of the actual and potential resources available to those who possess “a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 249). This notion highlights the importance of networks and sees social capital as a structural element, while Coleman (1988) focused on its function: “social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (p. 98). It is a resource that manifests itself in relationships, and it depends on reciprocity and trust between individuals and among groups (Coleman, 1988). As such it is not a given condition but rather a quality of relationships which needs to be developed proactively.

Moving away from sociological perspectives, the political scientist Putnam (2000) applied the concept of social capital to entire nations, arguing for the positive effects of social capital on the functioning of democracy and civil society which he considered to be in a state of erosion in America. Within New Zealand’s bicultural context, Robinson and Williams (2001) also looked at social capital at the societal level, and addressed the need for recognising and accommodating various meanings and expressions of social capital in the legislative process. Noting that Putnam’s notion of voluntary activity is focused on an aspect of social capital that occurs outside the family, Robinson and Williams (2001) demonstrated that this conceptual distinction between family and community is not applicable to the Māori context:

In contrast, the Māori concept of family (whānau) moves seamlessly from the immediate family to the wider family network (hapū) and the tribe (iwi), where the (extended) family becomes the community and the community is made up of the (extended) family. Social capital is created through networks and relationships that are within all these expressions of ‘family’ (or community). Thus, [...] the distinction between cultural and social capital disappears (p. 55).

Accordingly, the whānau is the source of relationships, values and norms, and Robinson and Williams (2001) illustrate with selected case studies how reciprocity and cultural obligation are intrinsic to Māori community activities. The researchers furthermore describe the

difference in Māori and Pākehā views of voluntary activity as a “distinction between *giving* (European concept of volunteering) and *sharing* (Māori concept of cultural obligation)” (Robinson & Williams, 2001, p. 52). The fact that sharing, unlike volunteering, does not depend on formal institutions has wide reaching policy implications.

Within the library context, social capital has been discussed as a resource communities can draw on in order to “achieve desirable goals for the benefit of that community and the individuals within it” (Goulding, 2004, p. 4). According to this perspective, public libraries can and should take an active part in the fostering of social capital for its positive outcomes on community well-being. Social capital is here understood as a phenomenon associated with high levels of group cohesion on a macro-level. However, the present study was rather concerned with individuals to whom existing relationships and creating new contacts with potential was important. Research that aims to understand social capital on such a process oriented micro-level can be found in small business studies, and the following section of the literature review will focus on those based on qualitative research.<sup>1</sup>

## **2.4 Social capital and entrepreneurship**

In an exploratory study concerning the nature of social capital in entrepreneurial networks, Anderson and Jack (2002) conduct a detailed literature review and collect data through participant observation and in-depth interviews with three well-connected entrepreneurs. Their findings suggest that the process of forming social capital is deemed as more significant than its actual outcomes. All study participants highlighted the importance of *creating* contacts rather than *utilising* contacts, and they commented on rules and etiquettes that constrain the building of social capital (Anderson & Jack, 2002, p. 202).

Based on the data, Anderson and Jack (2002) refine their conceptualisation of social capital, defining it as the “process of creating a condition for the effective exchange of information and resources” (p. 207). Following Putnam’s (2000) proposition of two types of social

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<sup>1</sup> Further discussions of the history of the concept, its various uses in social theory and attempts at quantifying social capital would go beyond the scope of this review and readers are referred to the thorough literature reviews provided by Barbieri (2003) who studied social capital through network analysis, and by Anderson and Jack (2002) and Anderson, Park and Jack (2007).



capital, Anderson and Jack (2002, p. 207) distinguish between bonding capital (between people who already know each other, i.e., ties) and bridging capital (new connections of formerly unacquainted people; linking effects), and particularly emphasise the bridging effect of social capital in entrepreneurial networks. The processing of social capital is here understood as the linking of individuals, and the linking of several individuals into networks. These links, or bridges, tend to be more effective if they are built and maintained “from each side of the gap” (Anderson & Jack, 2002, p. 208). The bridging capital of wide reaching networks of acquaintances may consist of ties that are weaker than those associated with the bonding capital among people connected through high levels of collegiality, friendship or kinship, but the importance of weak ties in mobilising help, work, clients, and resources is widely acknowledged and was most notably coined by Granovetter as the “strength of weak ties” (1979).

Anderson and Jack’s (2002) conceptualisation of social capital in entrepreneurial contexts was further expanded by Anderson et al. (2007), which was chosen as the theoretical lens for the present study (see 1.5). As previously mentioned, an objective that arose from this choice was to explore the ways in which the experiences and perceptions of self-employed information professionals in New Zealand support or challenge the plausibility of this framework, in particular with regards to market opportunities, the third element, that Anderson et al. (2007) see as the key outcome of social capital. Market opportunities may have been a dominant outcome of social capital in their study, but other important outcomes, such as opportunities for professional development or creating a sense of belonging, may be just as important. This assumption is supported by Thomas and Mosey (2006) who found that women entrepreneurs who use the Internet for informal business-related learning consider it as a tool to access both informational capital as well as social capital. The qualitative study was based on a case study design with three different data sources, and it involved a purposeful sample of four women entrepreneurs. The women showed a preference for bonding capital in the form of emailing colleagues to seek advice, exchange information, and generate knowledge cooperatively, but expressed a dislike for bridging capital generated through discussion forums (Thomas & Mosey, 2006, p. 194). The information profession is traditionally a female domain, and it will be interesting to see whether the participants of the present study shared these preferences or not.

In a cross-comparative study based in grounded theory, Foley and O'Connor (2013) talked in semi-structured interviews with Māori, Australian Aboriginal, and indigenous Hawaiian entrepreneurs about their networking practices in various industries. The researchers found that the networking differed significantly between the ethnic groups, and concluded that cultural, socio-political and historical factors shaped the social capital and networking realities of indigenous entrepreneurs in different ways. In regards to the case study of Māori entrepreneurs, participants felt that developing industry credibility was particularly important in overcoming racist views that Māori were unreliable. Overall, networking seemed essential to the participants' business operations and, appearing as an "extension of their cultural norm" (Foley & O'Connor, 2013, p. 286), reaffirmed Robinson and Williams' (2001) notion of the coalescence of cultural and social capital in Māori community engagement.

## **2.5 Summary**

Self-employed information professionals are a diverse group with regard to offered services, information sector backgrounds, job titles used and targeted clients. What they do seem to have in common with other entrepreneurs is their dependency on the following abilities:

- Communicative skills.
- Ability to develop relationships with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., current clients, prospective clients, co-workers, other contractors, peers, suppliers, etc.).
- Networking skills to form new connections, social skills to strengthen existing ones.
- Generating a professional image and a reputation for trustworthiness.
- Ability and willingness to seek and provide support.

This last aspect speaks for the reciprocal nature of social capital. A recurring theme is the importance of word-of-mouth as marketing and networking tool, which is in itself an indicator for social capital as it relies on the willingness of others to share information, to make referrals and to vouch for that person to some extent. The literature review helped establish that social capital may indeed be relevant to self-employed information

professionals in New Zealand, and that questions pertaining to the “how” deserve further attention.

### **3 Research design and methodology**

The research was conducted as a phenomenological inquiry into people’s experiences, attitudes and perceptions of social capital in their work life, which demanded a qualitative approach (deMarrais, 2004). For a quantitative research design the group addressed in this study was too small, not much was known about the topic, and the data needed to answer the research questions required a more personal setting in which participants felt they could freely talk about their business-related social interactions and relationships. An interpretive-qualitative research approach was therefore seen as better suited to gaining deeper insight into these people’s perceptions.

#### **3.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations**

The data that the researcher collected for this purpose derived from interviews and is therefore based on subjective understandings and interpretations. These were then analysed and interpreted in order to explore perspectives on a specific phenomenon, that of social capital. Accordingly, the research design was based on the assumption that reality is a social construct, which further implies that the study reflects knowledge constructed by the participant and researcher alike (Myers, 2013, p. 41). Knowledge derived from such studies is subjective, and the researcher needed to carefully reflect on her behaviour, thinking and bias throughout the research process in order to work towards trustworthy results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 170).

#### **3.2 Study sample**

Study participants were determined through purposeful sampling, using the following selection criteria:

1. Participants should engage directly in one of the information professions as exemplified by Carr (2003): librarianship, information science (scholarship), information management, knowledge management, records management, and archives.

2. Their main income source is, or was until recently, self-employment. Self-employed is here defined as:

A person who operates his or her own economic enterprise or engages independently in a profession or trade (including partnerships). The self-employed can be defined in terms of the criteria of economic risk and control. Most or all of the following characteristics are indicative of self-employed people. They control their own work environment and are responsible for getting the work done and make decisions on; when, where and what hours they work; how much they get paid and when they take holidays. They invest their own money in the enterprise and provide the major assets and equipment for the job (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.).

3. The nature and set-up of the participants' work requires them to proactively develop relationships.

In order to locate suitable participants, the researcher used the Yellow Pages, Google searches, the list of consultants provided on the ARANZ website, as well as personal contacts and referrals. The most successful tool in recruiting participants was to promote the study in an invitation email sent to the listservs of the New Zealand library, records, and special libraries communities (see 7.1). Eight people responded and all of them fulfilled the selection criteria.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations**

The Human Ethics Committee of the School of Information Management at Victoria University of Wellington granted approval for this research project.

The relationship between researcher and study participant needs to be based on reciprocity and therefore requires trust and respect (Myers, 2013, p. 125). To foster this, the researcher informed the respondents prior to the interview of the nature and purpose of the study, and of measures taken to protect their privacy. All of the eight respondents gave their informed consent to participate, which included agreeing to the recording of interviews, and the publishing of study results (see 7.2 and 7.3). The participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the project within a specified timeframe (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 105). However, none of the eight participants made use of this option.

### 3.4 Data collection

Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for collecting data because they are particularly suited to the gathering of personal experiences, perceptions and interpretations that concern a specific phenomenon (deMarrais, 2004). While the method of participant observation may be more suited to obtaining a wider range of contextual data and further perspectives from different angles of the same relationship or network, interviews allowed the researcher to learn more about what individuals personally considered as significant to social capital in the short amount of time available.

In-depth face-to-face interviews of 0:50 to 1:40 hour's duration allowed for the collection of rich data. Four of the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting and the remaining four interviews took place via Skype. In two instances, Skype interviews had to be completed on the phone due to connection problems. As the study drew on the participants' memory, flexibility and room for follow-up questions were required, and it was seen as vital to give the interviewees enough freedom to tell their stories about specific social situations. It was therefore decided to conduct semi-structured interviews, meaning that the questions were flexibly selected from an interview guide containing a list of predesigned open-ended questions, which also provided space for new questions that arose from the discussion (Myers, 2013, p. 123).

The research questions and the elements of social capital as discussed by Anderson et al. (2007) informed the design of the interview questions regarding content (see 7.4). In terms of techniques, broad open-ended questions were used to give participants an opportunity to freely talk about their experiences and opinions. To complement this, participants were asked to recall specific situations and to describe associated actions, observations and experiences (deMarrais, 2004, p. 62).

The interviews were audio-recorded and notes were taken to better memorise any impressions, external factors, and non-verbal data, such as gesture and facial expression. Certain techniques and strategies were needed to ensure the quality of the interview. For example, by finding the right balance between showing empathy and interest without

disclosing personal opinions, the researcher may encourage conversation as well as minimise the risk of reactivity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 153, 157).

The researcher tested the interview in three pilot studies in order to practice interview techniques and to ascertain the practicalities and time required for transcription and coding. Furthermore, interview questions were revised to make them more specific and to improve clarity of expression as a result of the pilot studies. However, none of the pilot studies took longer than 50 minutes, which is why the researcher did not anticipate the extended duration of some of the interviews. Regarding interview ethics, this may have created some pressure on the participants. To minimise this, the researcher narrowed down the selection of questions, and reassured participants that interviews could be concluded at their convenience. Furthermore, the researcher who speaks English as a second language proficiently did not anticipate the limitations of not being a native speaker in the heightened situation of the actual interview, and she felt that the imparting and perceiving of finer nuances in verbal expression were sometimes compromised, which may have led to some distortions.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

The interviews were fully transcribed and emailed to participants for review. Some of them provided further comments and feedback. The careful reading of the enriched transcripts then initiated the process of analysing the data with a focus on meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 201).

In adopting a data analysis approach that was developed for grounded theory, three types of coding were used: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Accordingly, the transcripts were first split into manageable segments which were assigned to labelled categories and sub-categories that emerged from the data. This practice of open coding was initially guided through inductive thinking. In addition, a deductive coding scheme was utilised that was closely aligned with the interview questions. Through axial coding, connections and comparisons were made among categories and sub-categories, within and across coding schemes, relating them to each other in new ways. Axial coding and open coding went “hand in hand” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198).

Categories were re-labelled, merged, dismissed, and new ones arose in the process. Finally, selective coding aimed for integration and led to the identification of central categories and key themes that were synthesised from the lower level categories, connections and contextualisation thereof (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 143).

Overall, the analysis involved the identification of conceptual commonalities, differences, and patterns within and across interviews, which demanded constant scrutinising and comparing. In the following sections, the findings will be presented using the method of “thick description” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, p. 104). This means that the researcher tried to provide sufficient detail of the data collected and of the researcher’s interpretation and analysis in order to enhance the credibility of the work. Aiming for completeness, the objective is to create a coherent picture of participants’ reported experiences with and perceptions of social capital in the context of their work (deMarrais, 2004, p. 52).

### **3.6 Delimitations and limitations**

The population to be studied and the criteria for purposeful sampling were determined by the researcher’s choice of topic, study objective and rationale (see 1.1. and 1.2.). Furthermore, the researcher focused on researching the participants’ social capital in their professional lives, acknowledging that the professional and the private spheres are merely conceptual distinctions rather than incontestable entities. The researcher recognises that her philosophical and methodological choices (see 3.1 and 3.4) make study results vulnerable to distortions.

The size of the study sample depended on the potential participants’ willingness to respond and participate in the research. In comparison to Fields (2003) who systematically determined the population and achieved a very high response rate, the insights delivered by the participants of the present study cannot be seen as representative for the entire sector. Accordingly, the results need to be seen as indicative only. The size of the sample as well as that of New Zealand’s information sector made maintaining the privacy of participants particularly challenging and constrained the open comparability of responses. Furthermore, the scope and time available to conduct the study limited the researcher in including other data sources for triangulation.

## **4 Discussion of results**

### **4.1 The participants, their background and work**

The very small size of the study sample, as well as the nature of New Zealand's information sector, allow for only a selective discussion of details about the participants to safeguard their privacy.

All of the eight participants were women who were based in five different New Zealand cities, with a majority living in Wellington. The participants came from diverse cultural backgrounds. All of them were highly qualified professionals with university degrees in various academic disciplines (Bachelor's and above), and with postgraduate qualifications in information studies and related disciplines. Those who received a library qualification before postgraduate study was offered in New Zealand have been awarded a library certificate.

The vast majority had a professional background in librarianship, with a mix of public, tertiary and special libraries expertise followed by information, content and records management. One half of the group had worked temporarily outside the information sector, and two of those had had careers in other sectors before pursuing careers in the information profession. All participants had at least some work experience within their respective fields before setting up their own business or beginning contract work, and six out of eight had extensive work experience (over 10 years). Yet interestingly, three of the participants started working as self-employed information professionals soon after gaining their information-related qualification. In Fields' (2003) study all of the respondents had extensive work experience within their fields before starting to work on their own. It seems as if in the past decade very slight changes may have taken place that made at least some information professionals enter self-employment at an earlier point in their careers. The reasons that were given by those participants included the lack of jobs, taking up opportunities that arose, and the wish to work independently.

When asked about their current work and business, the respondents reported they were working as consultants, contractors, freelancers, or sole traders, providing one or more of the following services:



- Library consulting
- Management consulting
- Professional development, training, higher education
- Project management
- Information and research services
- Library technical services
- Information management
- Content management
- Knowledge management
- Records management

Their clients were varied and fall into the categories of libraries, local and central government organisations, education providers, corporate firms, private customers, and non-profit organisations.

With regards to years of experience in self-employment, the group were highly diverse. Two of them worked for less than two years as self-employed information professionals. The remaining participants had significant experience in contracting. All of them were sole contractors who operated their business without partners or employees. The professionals worked mostly on their own; only those with very long careers or who targeted corporate clients worked, or were inclined to work, in collaboration with other contractors, with or as sub-contractors.

## **4.2 Locating work**

All of the participants highlighted the importance of word-of-mouth in locating work, which corresponds with the previously discussed literature (Abell et al., 1995; Fields, 2003). Work was mostly found through existing contacts such as former colleagues, clients, previous employers, and any people met through earlier jobs. Someone's contacts may know of work that might be coming up, or they suggest talking to people who might require the services of a contractor. Getting introduced through a mutual contact was also seen as highly effective in bringing client and consultant together. As one participant pointed out, "If you

know someone who can introduce you to someone else, it's much better than if you haven't."

Self-employed information professionals who worked in the area of professional development, training and education reported that they had reached a significant number of people over time through their work, which in turn extended their network of people placed in various organisations that either created opportunities or shared their knowledge thereof.

Furthermore, those with established businesses reported a willingness and generosity among self-employed information professionals to share their work during busy periods.

One participant stressed the point that many jobs are not advertised but are circulated informally through networks. In these cases, being proactive, making direct approaches, and having mutual contacts that were willing to vouch for the professional have proven to be extremely helpful.

A recurring theme in the interviews was obtaining successive work from the same clients, which was linked to the importance of maintaining good relationships with clients, and with their employees where applicable; this reaffirms observations made by Abell et al. (1995) and de Courcy and Donald (2013). Several study participants noted they were maintaining contact with clients outside work, who referred them on to other potential clients.

Maintaining good relationships also depends on the skills and professionalism a contractor has demonstrated in the past. Receiving glowing references and repeat work opportunities from satisfied clients is not only a sign of excellent interpersonal skills, but also of being very good at something. Furthermore, finding a niche, or having a highly specialised skill, also opened up opportunities or led to referrals. Getting 'shoulder-tapped', for example in response to a conference presentation, was mentioned as a very special way of receiving both acknowledgment as well as job offers.

The contacts-based ways of finding work (i.e., word-of-mouth, old contacts, repeat work from same clients) speak for the importance of bonding capital as discussed by Anderson and Jack (2002), and occurred as the result of both strategic as well as serendipitous

relationship-building and networking. All of the participants had engaged in networking activities before setting up business, and several had cultivated networks and relationships they strongly benefitted from as independent workers. Two of them had never advertised and managed to find work solely through their existing contacts, networks and reputation which were developed in the course of long careers.

Various marketing methods were used to make one's business, services or skills visible, to reach potential clients, other contractors who might have sub-contracting opportunities, and to generally get oneself known in the industry.

These marketing tools were:

- Social media, in particular, LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, and blogging.
- Publishing articles.
- Publishing and circulating newsletters.
- Having a website.
- Mailing brochures.

When marketing and reaching out beyond one's established contacts, being available and being able to deliver were considered crucial prerequisites. Social media fulfilled numerous purposes which are discussed below in more detail. One participant who used different social media tools noted she was not sure whether this had produced any work opportunities. Having a LinkedIn profile was considered a useful tool as it allowed potential clients to look up contractors and consultants, serving as a substitute for a business website. The respondents who used a website for marketing tended to target corporate clients.

Traditional marketing via newspaper advertising or cold calling was seen by one participant as less effective and even inappropriate within the information sector. For one of the participants however, regular mail-outs proved to be a quite effective marketing tool, noting that "when people see a colourful brochure arriving on their desk (if they take the time to read it) I find I've had a better response to that than to an email".

Other methods for locating work were checking job websites such as SEEK and Trade Me, following job advertisements on professional listservs, and utilising the services of recruitment agencies. It was noted that “not fitting a mould” made it difficult for recruitment agents to categorise the work self-employed information professionals could do. Developing a relationship with recruitment agents assisted communication about skills and market demands.

### 4.3 Relationship-building

During interviewing it soon became evident that the eight participants developed relationships with various groups of people ranging from prospective, past and current clients, clients’ employees, collaborators, sub-contractors, specialists in other fields, recruitment agents, to peers such as likeminded information professionals, former colleagues or fellow students. The importance of maintaining relationships on a global scale was highlighted by those who were highly engaged Twitter users and by those who worked mostly with corporate clients. Interestingly, many of the relationship-building behaviours or strategies that the eight participants mentioned were relevant across types of contacts rather than to one specific group. The strategy of ‘treat everyone the same – and like you want to be treated’ was a recurring theme in the interviews. This implies two things: firstly it confirms the mutual nature of social capital. Secondly, categorisations of contacts depend on the context and may be temporary as the same contact can be client, co-worker, competitor and friend.

When the study participants talked about how they developed relationships with current and prospective clients, clients’ employees, and co-workers, various strategies and behaviours emerged:

Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being friendly and helpful.</li> <li>• Being personable and approachable.</li> <li>• Being assertive when negotiating.</li> <li>• Using active listening techniques.</li> <li>• Trying to understand the wider context in which individuals and groups operate.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing intercultural communication skills (mentioned in the context of working with international corporate clients).</li> <li>• Asking for support and advice when needed.</li> </ul>
Ethical/integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being trustworthy.</li> <li>• Being honest and saying when you think you are not the right person to help.</li> <li>• Respecting different and sometimes conflicting loyalties when working on projects that involve multiple parties.</li> <li>• Owning up to mistakes.</li> </ul>
Professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answering queries promptly.</li> <li>• Being open, visible and transparent.</li> <li>• Giving updates and progress reports.</li> <li>• Delivering what was promised and when it was promised (recommended motto: under-promise and over-deliver).</li> <li>• Being honest about gaps in skills or knowledge and following up on these, either through up-skilling or referrals.</li> <li>• Ensuring the professional look of emails and other business correspondence and documentation.</li> <li>• Delivering good quality work.</li> <li>• Being committed to improving things for clients rather than to only selling services.</li> <li>• Providing ongoing client support after the contract or project is finished.</li> <li>• Tailoring services and support to someone's needs rather than to assumed needs.</li> <li>• Doing 'freebies' on occasion, i.e., offering support and advice without charging.</li> <li>• Paying sub-contractors promptly.</li> </ul>

An interview theme was that these behaviours form the basis for professionalism and trustworthiness, which are incremental to someone's credibility. Behaving in a way that both generates and reaffirms their credibility and trustworthiness helps in maintaining access to social capital. This corresponds with Anderson et al.'s (2007) notion of credibility and its associated norms and values being the entrance tickets to social capital as well as the "process elements that show how social capital works" (p. 263).

When talking about the *strengthening* of relationships with their contacts in general, the interviewees brought up methods and behaviours that applied to various types of contacts:

- Being genuine.
- Being generous in sharing information and opportunities.
- Making the effort to stay in touch, for example by touching base through email, phone, Skype and social media, or meeting for coffee or a drink.
- Engaging with contacts on Twitter.
- Keeping it personal and showing interest in people's lives.
- Not always talking about work or meaningful things when meeting.
- Staying for the 'drinks and nibbles' to chat when attending events or meetings.
- Being available for your contacts.
- Asking for favours and doing favours.

These points imply that likeability or relating well to others might complement credibility as an access point to social capital. Additionally, some aspects were specifically related to the strengthening of relationships with clients and co-workers within organisations:

- Maintaining ongoing communication.
- Keeping things friction-free and hassle-free.
- Taking time for informal chats.
- Understanding and adapting to the organisational culture and political forces.
- Treating people as people, not just as business contacts.
- Seeing people as part of one's professional development community.
- Keeping ongoing engagements after the contract or project ended.

In some cases, participants had clients they never met, which made developing effective communication channels both challenging and important. Overall, many indicated that they made an effort to meet their contacts in person if possible, and deferred to Skype or phone if necessary. Furthermore, knowing who the key contacts and decision-makers are within organisations or projects and finding ways in communicating with them is important to get the job done.

To summarise the key themes that arose from the interviews in regards to relationship-building, participants felt that face-to-face contact was the most desirable communication method if possible. Treating people as people and showing genuine interest in them was specifically highlighted. Making the effort to develop the personal element of relationships was linked to the power of 'little things', such as liking someone's Facebook post, meeting for coffee, or having informal chats in the corridor or on the way to an event. Furthermore, trying to better understand the wider context aids self-employed information professionals to better understand people, organisations, and situations, and helps to enhance the effectiveness of relationships. As a participant put it: "Trying to learn as much about the broader context actually really helps me to then tap into what's important to maintain that relationship."

#### **4.4 Networking**

All of the participants noted that they engaged in networking activities before entering self-employment and developed contacts and networks as employees that they often benefitted from as contractors or consultants. These activities involved:

- Joining national professional associations.
- Voluntary activity in regional committees and special interest groups.
- Attending and contributing to conferences and weekend schools.
- Attending and contributing to local events organised by professional associations, and their regional and special interest groups.
- Union engagement.
- Developing local student support groups.
- Engagement with various informal librarian networks, based on a shared interest.

- Participating in high profile professional development programmes.

Those who had sole charge roles or worked in organisations other than libraries stressed how the need to “influence without authority” shaped the relationship-building and networking within organisations. As these jobs tend to be solitary roles, exchanging ideas with peers in similar positions in other organisations was also seen as important. This implies that sole charge employees face similar challenges to some self-employed information professionals.

There was a significant overlap in the participants’ professional networks and networking activities before and after entering self-employment. The networks themselves were obviously described from an ego-centric perspective as groupings or categories of contacts that reached some level of coherence through either a common interest, an institutional affiliation, a shared experience (e.g., previous studies), or a shared preference for networking tools or hangouts among information professionals (e.g., online communities). Current independent networking groups or forums were:

- Listservs
- Past students’ and new professionals’ networks
- LinkedIn groups (e.g., groups of national and international associations, business groups, women’s groups)
- Twitter communities
- Blogger communities
- Facebook friends and groups
- Women business networking groups
- Online forum communities

Social media fulfilled multiple roles, i.e., as a communication tool, forum for networking, and as a network in the sense of community. Preferences for social networking sites were highly diverse among the group. Interestingly, the respondents had different ideas about the separation or overlapping of the professional and private spheres in this context, which poses a research problem that deserves addressing in future studies.



The participants also engaged with networks that were either associated with specific organisations or were synonymous with organisations that provided forums for networking:

- LIANZA, TRW, and associated special interest groups and regional branches
- New Zealand Digital Forum
- Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
- Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) with Asia-Pacific chapter
- Special Libraries Association (SLA)
- New Zealand Institute of Management
- Project Management Institute
- Aurora Foundation
- International Network of Public Libraries
- Chamber of Commerce
- State sector networks
- Not-for-profits networks

As several participants noted, most of these networks tended to overlap, were flexible and fluid, and were dominated by informal networking. Furthermore, the interviews revealed various purposes and reasons for networking:

- To give something back to the profession (relating to voluntary activity in associations).
- To have a support system (giving and finding help and advice, managing in tough times).
- To socialise, to stay in touch with friends and contacts and to meet new people.
- To further increase the range of connections beyond the information profession.
- To enable recommendations and referrals.
- To share information, resources, and opportunities.
- To be part of a group that lends credibility to one's work.
- To expand understanding of a specific area, i.e., up-skilling.
- To stay in touch with what is happening in the industry.
- For mental stimulation (bouncing ideas off, testing theories).

- To engage with likeminded people.
- To create a sense of belonging.
- To learn and to grow with others, i.e., social professional development.
- To get yourself known and to build a reputation.
- To save time, i.e., pooling information and resources helps achieve goals faster.

All of these points are different expressions of the “process of creating a condition for the effective exchange of information and resources” (Anderson & Jack, 2002, p. 207).

Furthermore, the researcher gained the strong impression that being social was seen as both a means and an end in networking, which speaks for Anderson and Jack’s (2002, p. 202) observation that descriptions of *creating* contacts weighed more heavily than those of *utilising* contacts.

The participants employed various strategies when engaging with their networks, and these can be summarised as follows:

- Being visible and active online.
- Becoming valuable to networks through skills and knowledge.
- Being personal, not just business focused.
- Being responsive and available to help in a moment’s notice if necessary.
- Being flexible and open to different ways of thinking.
- Combining humour with professionalism.
- Making use of informal moments and spaces to connect with people.
- Trying to find something one has in common when networking.

Several stressed the importance of meeting people in person, either through meet-ups, at conferences or professional events, as the face-to-face setting allows for both immediacy and for connecting during shared experiences. As one participant puts it: “You can all sit down and listen to a lecture or presentation and then talk about it afterwards and that brainstorming and sparking off each other, that’s really where you make the networks and go forward.” However, being self-employed was associated with limited opportunities for face-to-face contact due to time constraints: “I think one of the difficulties with self-

employment is that you tend to be limited to any amount of face-to-face networks you can have. That's why a lot of my own networking is happening online." This goes hand-in-hand with the geographic scope of the networks participants had developed. Furthermore, some felt that conferences and professional development events put financial pressure on sole traders, which is why more affordable alternatives were used. For some, Twitter was crucial to their networking:

If we wouldn't have Twitter it would be far more difficult to be able to be a self-employed contractor in the information professional service, it's amazing what one wonderful platform can really do for communication and networking information.

#### **4.5 Help & support**

When talking with the study participants about what they perceived as key sources of support for self-employed information professionals in New Zealand, it soon became evident that no local organisation provided combined support in the areas of information and business. Instead, most of the participants noted that it was very much up to them to find and proactively develop such sources. This was largely achieved through the following:

- Personal support systems and strong networks of trusted people that give each other professional and collegial support.
- Partners, family and close friends as sources of emotional, financial, organisational and practical support.
- Peer support in social media communities (e.g., Twitter, bloggers, specialist online forums).
- Informal mentoring relationships.
- Support systems involving repeat clients/employers (becoming 'part of the family' through repeat work in the context of New Zealand public sector institutions).

These were largely described as informal sources of support, and one study participant felt that informal networks were more powerful in mobilising support than formal networks.

In addition, some official or rather formal sources of support were mentioned that were not specific to the information sector but proved to be highly useful in regards to business know-how:

- Inland Revenue (offers support and seminars for self-employed people and small business owners).
- Business Mentors New Zealand ([businessmentors.org.nz](http://businessmentors.org.nz) – a mentoring service).
- Business.govt.nz (the New Zealand government business website provides free access to a wide range of resources).
- Chamber of Commerce (business training and business networking).
- New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (free workshops).

Some participants hired a business coach for a while, and mentioned the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) and their relevant regional group as the one source of support that covered both business and information profession-related aspects. The few participants who were members of the AIIP found it extremely helpful and used it to gain access to information and resources for the development of their business and professional expertise. One participant, for example, found other independent information professionals with specialist knowledge they lacked through the AIIP, and were able to then collaborate with them.

There seemed to be wide agreement on the lack of an organisation, association, or sole network in New Zealand that specifically catered for self-employed information professionals. One participant stated that the initiation of such a network was highly desirable in order to further develop peer support, while another participant felt that self-employed information professionals in New Zealand would generally support each other rather than compete. Another participant felt it would be helpful if LIS qualification providers could raise awareness of this career option and even include topics into the curriculum that better supported students who might want to work as independent information professionals.

Several participants felt the national professional associations' acknowledgement of self-employed information professionals, their needs and potential, was limited. Interestingly, one participant felt strongly about the support mobilised through national professional associations and stated that the networking and professional development opportunities provided by them were underutilised. This implies several things: firstly, what is seen as a fitting source of support depends on the professionals' area of specialisation and on their typical client group. Secondly, active engagement in associations creates, understandably, the expectation that others make use of what is offered, which demonstrates again that social capital is based on reciprocity.

Within organisations or projects, co-workers or clients are as a matter of necessity the internal key sources of support to get the job done. In this context, contractors or consultants are in an outsider position and need to make an effort to be given access to information and resources. This may include requiring access to institutional knowledge, or getting people to do something and fulfil their part of the job. Participants who needed to mobilise resources in similar situations found the following approaches useful: being both professional and supportive, using social skills to persuade others to do something that may be difficult, and asking for recommendations if someone is not able to help. Being able to identify and speak to decision makers or key informants within organisations is a requirement for completing the work to everyone's satisfaction. Hence, being perceptive and understanding how people operate, think and communicate is crucial when institutional knowledge needs to be mobilised. This involves 'hanging out' with people, talking, going to meetings and reading the documentation that is available. Being proactive and open about needing help, and showing gratitude and giving credit when it was provided, are important elements. Especially in the areas of records or knowledge management, respondents found it crucial to draw on internal support. The majority, however, discussed their help-seeking in terms of finding external support to fill in gaps of expertise. This type of help-seeking is very much about being proactive in up-skilling and saving time by doing this with the help of others.

Overall, the participants relied heavily on their existing contacts and networks to find help and support, which demonstrates a preference for bonding capital as discussed by Thomas

and Mosey (2006) in the context of female entrepreneurs who use the Internet for professional development. Developing bridging capital and reaching out beyond established relationships only occurred when the resources available were exhausted, or when seeking help and support within an organisation fairly new to the contractor required it so. One participant reported using online forums to find answers to specific problems. Referring back to Fields (2003) who observed that listservs were one of the main sources for professional support, the participants of the present study all noted that, although they all subscribed to several, they barely participated actively. Instead, listservs were mostly seen as useful tools to stay current with developments in the industry and profession, as well as with work opportunities.

This discourse on finding help touched upon another related topic, that of having to constantly be abreast of developments and taking care of one's own professional development as a self-employed person. Some of the strategies mentioned, such as self-directed research and reading, were considered a fairly non-social task, although one might argue that the fact that someone went to the trouble of sharing knowledge and information in a document, print or online publication, and that the reader puts some form of trust into the author or resource, speaks for a case of social capital. This demonstrates that "social capital is difficult to see and measure" (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 265), and that research into its boundaries might be particularly illuminating.

#### **4.6 Strong relationships and networks**

The participants were asked various questions about their opinions on the make-up, potential risks, and outcomes of strong relationships and networks. In summary, ethics, generosity, the human touch, and mutuality were stressed as being important components:

- Ethics: Trust, honesty, integrity, respect, reliability.
- Generosity: Sharing information, resources, knowledge and opportunities; acknowledging others' expertise and 'giving kudos' as deserved.
- Human touch: "It's about communicating honestly and about seeing people as people rather than as business."

- Mutuality (in the sense of commonalities): Having shared goals, interests, or values, and learning and working collaboratively.
- Mutuality (in the sense of reciprocity): “It’s a two-way thing” – both the effort put into relationships and the benefits need to be mutual.

This last point reaffirms reciprocity as a key element in the social capital literature as discussed in 2.3 and 2.4. Interestingly, some of the responses from participants working with private sector clients rather focused on more defined business relationships whose mutuality was discussed in terms of obligations and transactions, while the remaining responses rather focused on personal components and described mutuality in terms of sharing and long-term expectations. This might imply various things which can only be speculated about and therefore deserve attention in future research.

When talking about what was considered detrimental to relationships and networks, risk factors were largely expressed in terms of failure to behave in ways that were described as effective and desirable relationship-building methods (see 4.3, p. 24). The following generalised examples demonstrate that disrespect, dishonesty, unethical behaviour and unprofessionalism are the most significant risk factors:

- Not respecting someone’s work approach, overstepping and interfering.
- Not meeting a collaborator’s professional standards when dealing with shared clients reflects badly on both.
- Invading someone’s personal space, e.g., phone calls at inappropriate times.
- Letting people down, i.e., being unhelpful, not providing what was promised.
- Taking people for granted and making assumptions.
- Stealing work or intellectual property from other self-employed information professionals.
- Being indiscreet and speaking out of turn.
- Betraying people’s trust by ‘slugging them off behind their back’.

Overall, all of these points can be summarised as the failing of reciprocity in social capital. Several participants stressed the importance of taking responsibility and apologising for

mistakes, noting that everyone makes mistakes at some point. However, some participants also gave examples of behaviours with negative long-term effects. In these instances, it became clear that unethical acts are particularly detrimental to the wrongdoer's credibility in New Zealand's small information sector.

When asked about the key outcomes and benefits of having strong relationships and networks, the responses strongly corresponded with the earlier discussed purposes of networking (see 4.4), and can be summarised as follows:

- Belonging – being part of a group, collegiality, and friendship.
- Support – having a support system, and ongoing access to information and resources.
- Being able to do a better job through collaborative learning.
- Increased efficiency – sharing information and resources saves time.
- Industry credibility.
- Continued work and income.
- Increased awareness of the profession, contractors, and consultants.

Reflecting back on the theoretical framework and the research question regarding outcomes, Anderson et al. (2007) conceptualise market opportunities as the outcome of social capital in entrepreneurship, but the responses given in the present study show that at least some self-employed information professionals in New Zealand paid equal or more attention to other outcomes, such as belonging, collegiality, support, and generally being able to deliver high-quality work efficiently. The outcomes listed above and the reasons given for networking (see 4.4) highlight various facets of the overarching process of sharing information and resources, including those that produce benefits for personal well-being as well as for achieving business goals: “Hopefully one day some of that might lead to money, but I think that in terms of developing and maintaining relationships, money is secondary.” This reaffirms that Anderson et al.'s (2007) framework is too limited to fully acknowledge and encompass what the interviewed information professionals considered to be important outcomes. Furthermore, several interviewees pointed out that business or market



opportunities are desirable and needed by-products of networking in order to sustain oneself, but this outcome is difficult to anticipate, plan and monitor through networking.

Considering that the effectiveness of weak ties in networks has been researched in the past (Granovetter, 1973), it should be noted that the researcher did not address and further explore the difference between *strong* and *effective* relationships and networks, and rather used these terms interchangeably. It is a limitation of the study and poses an interesting research problem.

#### **4.7 Credibility**

Credibility and associated qualities such as trustworthiness and reputation have been discussed as significant elements of social capital in the literature review. Anderson et al. (2007) describe credibility as a “symbolic token of the right to social capital” (p. 258) and due to the value placed in it, the participants were asked how they developed their credibility and trustworthiness over time. The responses largely reaffirmed the strategies mentioned in the context of relationship-building behaviours (see 4.3 and 4.6). To focus on the essence of this, credibility was particularly developed and regenerated “through hard work”, and through the meeting of high professional and ethical standards (e.g., reliability, honesty, flexibility, integrity, perceptiveness, staying current, and delivering quality work). Furthermore, voluntary activities and unpaid work were mentioned as contributing factors, speaking for someone’s genuine interest and involvement. Being visible online and being transparent so that people can judge someone’s credibility and trustworthiness, also remotely, was mentioned as an additional helpful strategy. One participant highlighted that being in business for a long time boosted her credibility, which implies that credibility cannot evolve without social interactions, and gains stability with time and a good track record. Conversely, unprofessionalism and unethical behaviour (see 4.6) pose serious risk factors.

Responses relating to how participants located work (see 4.2) were particularly informative to understand the role of credibility as an access requirement to social capital as outlined in Anderson et al.’s (2007) framework. Examples of referrals, recommendations, getting shoulder-tapped at a conference or event, and receiving repeat work from the same client

were based on the fact that the respondents had proven themselves to the person who vouched for them, or to the client through previous work or other means that helped demonstrate their expertise and other qualities.

Several interviewees have developed social capital and associated qualities such as credibility and trustworthiness during long careers in employment. They drew on reputations that were built long before they set up their own business, and found the following strategies, which could be read as list of suggestions, particularly helpful in winning the respect and trust of others:

- Being passionate about what you are doing.
- Taking opportunities and being willing to do extra work.
- Being dedicated and contributing actively to the professional community.
- Not being afraid to do the right thing under pressure or in difficult circumstances.

The participants were also asked whether they promoted or marketed their credibility and related personal qualities online. Some of the participants developed their professional image and extended their professional voices online via social media, especially via Twitter and blogs. Some included testimonials of satisfied clients on their business websites. Yet most of the respondents said they did not promote their credibility and related personal qualities online. Doubts were voiced about how this would be possible. Some felt this was an area they needed to address to further their business. A very interesting gender-related remark was:

This may possibly be a female way of working in that you hope that your work speaks for itself rather than going out and overconfidently overselling yourself on in a brash kind of way. I think I'm a woman of a generation that just stands back and hopes, which isn't good for someone who's self-employed but it is something that is ingrained in us, that we're not pushy so we don't go out there like a used car salesman saying 'you can trust me'.

Similarly, two participants felt the 'tall poppy syndrome' specific to New Zealand made it difficult for people to market themselves in general, and in particular to market their qualities beyond the mere mentioning of skills and expertise. This confidence-acceptance

issue raises interesting research questions about its sources and implications for self-employment that the study was not able to address.

#### **4.8 Isolation & ambiguity**

All of the respondents who were asked if they ever felt professionally isolated said they did, to different extents. The various reasons for this and closely related feelings that were mentioned largely correspond with those observed by Fields (2003, p. 40). One source of isolation seemed to lie within the nature of self-employment:

- Working from home often means a lack of social interaction, e.g., not having a tea room to socialise, or not being part of regular meetings.
- Not having a team or colleagues who naturally help you through tricky situations.
- Having to carry the costs of professional development and conferences alone and without the support of an employer can create isolation.
- Having a temporary status and not knowing if contracts will be extended is linked to job insecurity and makes it difficult to develop long-term relationships. Here is a quote that illustrates this particularly well:

I always go back to the Stone Age brain, wired to think of ourselves belonging to villages: I am just someone who is going from village to village; I'm having a great time but being in the village only for a short time, the relationship to the people is completely different than if I belong to that village.

This last point blends into another group of reasons that relate to how respondents felt perceived and treated by others:

- Being difficult to categorise, i.e., not fitting a mould.
- Being seen as competition when entering self-employment.
- Perceived as being on the hunt for work when getting in touch.
- Being overlooked within organisations and within the information sector: "There are people with my skill set out there, but we're working quite differently and the formal library system isn't yet acknowledging us."
- Being seen as not having a 'real job' or not being able to get one.

- Considered as being different, for example, revolutionary or particularly driven.

These and similar feelings that resulted from other people's perceptions recurred throughout several discussions and were not limited to responses concerning isolation per se. Remarks were frequently centred around the theme of ambiguity, linked to 'not fitting a mould' and being seen as different. In some instances, ambiguity created insecurity:

"Changing my status was a bit of a barrier [...] it changed the nature of my relationships".

Another comment referred to the 'tall poppy syndrome' as a limitation to the acceptance of non-traditional modes of work within the information sector. However, there was also the feeling that self-employment is becoming more accepted by newer generations of information professionals, and that progress was made in acknowledging alternative work modes by the LIANZA professional registration scheme.

Interestingly, some responses also dealt with isolation from an employee's perspective, such as feeling professionally isolated, either due to being in a sole charge position, or because colleagues did not share the same interests, passions or preferences. In the latter case, isolation was a reason for entering self-employment rather than its by-product.

Anderson et al.'s (2007) study participants talked about how "having their contacts allowed them to avoid isolation" (p. 260). This corresponds with many of the comments made in the present study. The respondents drew on their networks and relationships to minimise isolation or ambiguity-related feelings, and here is a summary of associated strategies:

- Finding people who are on your wavelength, such as other businesswomen, or information professionals with similar interests and passions, or people who do things that you find admirable.
- Being part of an online community that allows you to share thoughts with likeminded people and to be part of a profession wherever you are.
- Within organisations: Strengthening relationships to become an insider – getting a key, access to tea facilities and a work space contribute to a contractor's well-being.
- Developing personal relationships with repeat clients, especially when they are elsewhere, via phone conversations and meet-ups when in town.

- Creating free online opportunities for professional development. This was an impressive example of how giving back to the community can help others to overcome different types of isolation (e.g., geographical, professional, financial).

When asked if others should do something to foster inclusiveness, several participants noted that being proactive and asking for help and support is important and their own responsibility. In fact, some chose self-employment because it suited their personality to work on their own: “I am an introvert, I like quiet”. One participant added that it would, however, be good if those who hire independents would further recognise their isolated status and need to understand the full context to complete a project. This can be easily overlooked as client organisations are naturally dominated by insiders, but sharing information as much as possible with contractors and consultants was considered important.

#### **4.9 Social capital over time**

When talking about which contacts, support, and networking needs were particularly significant in the formative stages of their business, the responses largely related to the importance of old contacts and to the engagement with individuals and networks that helped in mobilising work, professional support, business advice, confidence and encouragement.

People whose social capital had an impact on the participants’ move to self-employment were mostly described as people who encouraged them to network, to go out and to meet others. A strong theme in the interviews was that of informal mentorship, which can manifest itself in small things, such as being taken to events and receiving encouragement from senior colleagues, former bosses, or teachers. Some became mentors themselves later on. Highly experienced and internationally esteemed contractors and consultants, sometimes called ‘gurus’, were mentioned several times as sources of support, motivation and inspiration. So were New Zealand-based peers who already worked as self-employed information professionals. To quote one participant: “There were these really strong women with very clear ideas of what they could do and how they could fit in society as information professionals”.

The need to find clients or contacts who generated work was a recurring theme when talking about the early networking needs in the formative business stage. Finding the first contract happened in many cases through former colleagues, earlier employers, and other established contacts, either through their referral or by getting offered a contract by them. Also highlighted was the ability of former colleagues and friends to know someone's situation and talents and recognise a match with a certain contract or job. The benefits of having networks and contacts to draw on that were built over time, and in some instances over long careers, were highlighted. In this instance, a connection was made between having strong and effective networks and relationships and having a well-developed reputation based on one's proven expertise and professionalism, implying that credibility is both a gateway to and outcome of social capital.

Having developed credibility and networks during employment was specifically useful for those who worked and developed relationships within the same sector they started contracting to. However, those who were either in the early stages of developing their entrepreneurial social capital or who targeted a client group different to the circles they used to work in needed to put extra effort into their marketing and networking in order to get themselves known in the relevant industry. This was largely done via the channels, methods and tools as outlined in sections 4.2, 4.4, and 4.5.

In order to exchange ideas and to seek advice about their business plans, marketing, taxation, accounting, and issues that arose early in the process, participants reported that they 'picked the brains' of other self-employed friends, family members and acquaintances, both within and outside of the information profession. Family and partners also played an important role in providing financial and emotional support in the challenging early phases of developing a business. Other areas where the advice and help of friends and peers was sought were in relation to website design, accounting software, intellectual property policies, and business administration.

A recurring theme was the need to be with people who believed in their ability, a role which was largely fulfilled by family members, partners, friends and peers. However, as one participant pointed out, confidence also grew with first successes and feedback of satisfied

clients. This implies that confidence is both an enabler and an outcome in the processing of social capital in the professional context.

All of this speaks for the initial strengths of bonding capital in times of professional transition. However, expressions of bridging capital were also significant to several of the interviewed professionals, especially when related to the creation of new links through the help of old contacts. Furthermore, some reached out to find the help of a business coach, several attended business training workshops (see 4.5 for providers) that also provided forums for networking, and some made extensive use of social media, especially Twitter and LinkedIn, to ask for tips and recommendations. One participant felt that self-employed people relied heavily on themselves and their own ability to find answers to a problem through self-directed research and proactive help-seeking: “I made the networks from the people I was working with but I actually didn’t have anyone there to hold my hand.” Some participants found the publications of consultant, writer and blogger Mary Ellen Bates particularly useful readings.

When asked directly whether the participants’ networking needs and strategies might have changed over time, several shifts were described:

- From being able to draw on old contacts to find work to expanding and broadening one’s network once opportunities were exhausted.
- From being very open in social interactions to becoming more circumspect in order to safeguard one’s business and intellectual property.
- From being more shy or nervous to being confident and calm about chatting people up. This in turn allowed respondents to be more purposeful in networking.
- From serendipitous networking to strategically putting oneself out there or targeting individuals, groups, and projects where certain skills can be developed.
- From networking within the library profession to expanding into other fields.
- From networking within the information profession to expanding into business networks.
- Expanding engagement with professional associations from the national to the international level (e.g., from LIANZA to ALIA, AIIP and SLA).

- From local to global, with various differentiations in-between (e.g., national, trans-Tasman, international).

With regard to the shift in the geographic scope of networking, one respondent remarked:

I think that in the course of my career my outlook of librarianship has become much more global and therefore my networking needs and strategies have become much more global to get a better handle on that and to see how New Zealand fits into that.

Respondents also talked about how some things stayed the same throughout times of change, such as the general desire to be social and to network. One participant felt her networking needs and strategies had not changed at all since leaving employment, but it became more heightened because of the need to secure work opportunities. Another participant felt that because most of her networking was online, her networking was never geographically contained.

## 5 Conclusion

The interview study explored the relevance of social interactions, relationships and networks to the well-being and success of eight self-employed information professionals in New Zealand. In doing so, the research revealed useful knowledge about help, work and support-seeking behaviours and strategies of this group, and confirmed that social capital is a fitting concept to study and describe the social dimension of their work.

The eight professionals interviewed had diverse backgrounds and worked in different fields of the wider information profession, although librarianship dominated. Most of them had either long-standing careers or gained relevant work experience before entering self-employment. However, starting a business or working as a contractor soon after getting qualified appeared to be feasible, albeit challenging, in New Zealand's information sector.

In order to gain insight into how participants describe, utilise and develop social capital, questions about networking and relationship-building practices were enriched with questions about finding work, help, and support. These areas appeared to be prone to occurrences of social capital according to the reviewed literature. To reflect back on the



research questions (see 1.4) and on a distinction suggested by Robinson and Williams (2001), the respondents described social capital in terms of *giving* through voluntary activity and associations, as well as in terms of *sharing* in the sense of exchanging information and resources. Both were associated, although to different extents, with expectations of mutuality. Ethics, generosity, human touch, and mutuality (in the sense of commonality and reciprocity) emerged as important behavioural principles in the development of strong and effective relationships and networks. It was through these relationships and networks that participants were able to mobilise social capital in various forms, such as tips and referrals leading to work and income, being able to find advice and support, exchanging information and resources that helped to achieve better results, and finally, creating a sense of belonging to minimise feelings of isolation which are common in self-employment. In this respect, the study further substantiated the notion of networks and relationships being the medium through which social capital is being realised (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 264). Furthermore, as all of these interactions were social in nature, being connected can legitimately be described as the “condition of social capital” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 256).

In order to learn more about the strategies and methods employed in the processing of social capital, the respondents were asked various questions about how they found work, information, help, and support, both within organisations and externally. The respondents made use of bonding and bridging capital complementarily. Bonding capital seemed particularly helpful when emotional support, financial support, encouragement, confidence, or collegiality were needed, and as a stepping stone to further develop new links. Bridging capital carried more weight in responses relating to locating work and to mobilise advice and support in professional and business-related matters. The respondents drew on their networks as well as on resources offered by various organisations for professional and business development. Certain strategies when engaging with networks contributed to the enablement of social capital, such as being visible and active online, becoming valuable through expertise, being personal, responsive, and flexible, and making use of informal moments to connect with people and relate to them (see 4.4).

In regards to the changes in developing and utilising of social capital over time, the study revealed several shifts. Changes in behaviours and strategies were linked to an increase in

confidence, scale, geographic scope, and purpose when networking. However, becoming more circumspect and protective was noted as an additional shift of attitude. Thinking of technological changes since Fields' study from 2003, social media, in particular LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and online forums, albeit with varying preferences, now appeared as essential tools and spaces of social engagement, sharing of information, and marketing. Listservs were still important tools to keep current with news and developments in the profession and industry on a national level.

Responses concerning the purposes of networking, isolation, and the benefits of maintaining strong relationships and networks provided insights into the outcomes of social capital from different angles. Opportunities leading to work and income were needed and desirable products of social capital, but other outcomes such as being able to deliver high-quality work efficiently (i.e., taking pride in their work), credibility, support, collegiality, friendship, and a sense of belonging, were highly valued. Accordingly, Anderson et al.'s (2007) conceptualisation of market opportunities being the outcome of social capital does not fully reflect what was considered as being important by the participants of the present study; here, personal and professional well-being and the achievement of business goals were equally stressed.

The participants developed credibility and related qualities, such as trustworthiness, by maintaining high professional and ethical standards. This appeared to be a crucial prerequisite for making repeat offers of work, referrals, recommendations, and direct approaches possible, which reaffirms Anderson et al.'s (2007) observation that credibility occurred as the "symbolic token of the right to social capital" (p. 258). Conversely, unprofessionalism, disrespect, dishonesty, and unethical behaviour were considered risk factors.

In summary, the study results support Anderson et al.'s (2007) framework as far as it concerns the entrance requirement (credibility), the medium (relationships and networks), and the condition (connectivity) of social capital. Regarding the outcome of social capital, a broader concept than that of market opportunities is needed to better reflect what the interviewed information professionals considered significant. The researcher suggests to

replace it with 'well-being' as an alternative element of social capital in the context of the present study, as it can accommodate the satisfaction of professional, personal, and business needs.

The study, however, was not designed to 'test' the validity of the framework, which was used as a theoretical lens and as a tool for managing the complexity of this fluid concept in interview design and data analysis. More data would be needed to do so, and the study results cannot be seen as representative due to the small size of the sample. Similar future studies could extend the population and sample by including information professionals active in the corporate environment, sole charge employees, and employees with fixed-term contracts to further increase the comparability and representativity of the data.

The study revealed several more limitations that pose research problems worth pursuing. For example, further research into the preferences for social media tools and how these are linked to their specific purposes would contribute useful practical knowledge about the online networking and marketing practices of self-employed information professionals. Furthermore, the study was not able to explore social capital 'in action', mostly due to time constraints and the methodological choices made. Case studies that include conference settings and ethnographic studies of online communities could be extremely effective to further tap into real life occurrences of social capital. An interesting research objective for future interview studies would be to further explore why self-employed information professionals might find it difficult (or easy) to market their credibility and similar qualities.

Some of the participants engaged significantly in voluntary activities that either lay outside the information profession or that went beyond those provided through the traditional channels in the sector. The study however did not provide sufficient space for these activities and their implications, and limited the full picture of the self-employed information professionals' social capital.<sup>2</sup> Thus, future research should specifically address the boundaries and interferences of professional and personal, of formal and informal spaces, in order to understand the social capital of the entire person in different contexts.

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<sup>2</sup> The researcher herewith acknowledges and follows up on a perceptive comment made by one of the participants.

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## **7 Appendices**

### **7.1 Invitation email**

**To all Consultants, Freelancers, and Independent Contractors**

#### **Invitation to participate in MIS research study**

My name is Simona Traser and I am currently studying towards the Master in Information Studies degree at Victoria University of Wellington. As part of the requirements of my degree I am conducting a research study and I would like to invite you to participate if you meet these criteria:

- Self-employment is, or was until fairly recently, your main source of income for at least 6 months.
- You engage in one of the information professions, i.e., libraries, archives, records, or LIS scholarship.
- Networking and developing relationships are important to your work.
- You are based in New Zealand.

#### **The project**

I am studying the role of social capital in the work of self-employed information professionals in New Zealand. The objective is to learn more about the role of social interactions, relationships, and networks in the development of small businesses. Participating will give you the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to social capital research in New Zealand's information sector. The study results will be useful to self-employed information professionals interested in different approaches to relationship building and networking, and to all information professionals who consider going solo or who wish to know more about networking practices from an entrepreneurial point of view. The Human Ethics Committee of the School of Information Management has granted approval for this research project.



## **Participation**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to meet with me in person or via Skype for an interview. The meeting will take place at a mutually agreed upon place and time between April and early May. The interview may last about 1 hour. You will receive a little thank-you gift as a token of my gratitude.

We will only proceed with the interview if you feel your questions about the research project, the processes involved and implications thereof have been answered to your satisfaction and you are happy to go ahead.

## **Confidentiality**

All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Anne Goulding, Professor of Library and Information Management. Participants, associated individuals and organisations will not be identified personally in any written report produced as a result of this research. Self-employed information professionals are however a relatively small community, which is why it may still be possible to identify individuals from published reports.

## **Contact**

If you would like to participate or receive further information about the project, please email me at [trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz) or contact me at 021 060 3436, home 09 XXXXXXXX, work 09 923 8053, if possible by 21st April. You may also contact my supervisor Anne Goulding at [anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone 04 463 5887.

Many thanks for your consideration.

Best regards,

Simona

## 7.2 Information sheet

**Research Project Title: The role of social capital for self-employed information professional in New Zealand.**

**Researcher: Simona Traser, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

As part of the completion of my Master of Information Studies degree, this study is designed to investigate how self-employed information professionals develop, utilise, and describe social capital. The objective is to learn more about the role of social interactions, relationships, and networks in the formation, running and development of small businesses. The study results will be useful to all information professionals who consider going solo or who wish to know more about networking practices from an entrepreneurial point of view. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting self-employed individuals who are currently active in any field of the information profession to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in a 1-hour interview. Permission will be asked to record the interview, and a transcript of the interview will be sent to participants for checking.

Participation is voluntary, and you, associated individuals and organisations will not be identified personally in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. Self-employed information professionals are however a relatively small community, which is why it may still be possible to identify individuals from published reports. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Anne Goulding, Professor of Library and Information Management. The research report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Should any participant wish to withdraw from the project, they may do so until 12 May 2014 and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within 2 years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at [trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz) or telephone 021 060 3436, or you may contact my supervisor Anne Goulding, Professor of Library and Information Management, at [anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:anne.goulding@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone 04 463 5887.

Simona Traser

### 7.3 Consent form

**Research Project Title: The role of social capital for self-employed information professional in New Zealand.**

**Researcher: Simona Traser, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing [trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:trasersimo@myvuw.ac.nz) by the 12 May 2014.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me or associated individuals and organisations. I understand that because self-employed information professionals are a relatively small community, it may still be possible to identify individuals from published reports.

I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others.

I understand that, if this interview is audio recorded, the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased within 2 years after the conclusion of the project. Furthermore, I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of the interview.

Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:

- ☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.
- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded.

Signed:

Name of participant:

Date:

## 7.4 Interview guide

Questions (selection and order flexible):

1. Please tell me a bit about your background, such as formal education and work experience?
  - a. When you were still an employee, did you do any networking? How?
  - b. How have the people you connected with while you were still an employee had an impact on your self-employment?
2. Can you briefly outline the nature of your current work and business (i.e., services, customers, set-up, years)?
3. Do you work mostly on your own or in collaboration with others?
4. Thinking of the time when you started developing your own business, what types of contacts did you need the most, and how did you get on about this?
5. How did you obtain support during the formation of your business?
6. Can you recall a recent project and describe the relationships, interactions, and communication tools that were important for you to get the job done?
7. Who are you depending on in the day-to-day running of your business?
8. How do you find work?
9. How do you develop relationships with people that are important to your work (e.g., prospective clients, current clients, client's employees, sub-contractors, peers, collaborators, other information professionals)?
10. How do you strengthen relationships?
11. Can you describe your professional network(s)?
  - a. How did you enter the network?
  - b. How do you engage with your network and to what purpose?

- c. What do you expect from the network, and the network from you?
12. In your experience, what are effective networking methods and tools?
13. In your experience, what are the key sources of support for self-employed information professionals in New Zealand?
14. Can you recall an incident when you were in need of specific skills or resources to do the job, and describe what you did to get support?
15. Can you recall an incident when you were in need of specific institutional knowledge to do the job, and describe what you did to find help?
16. What do you think makes up strong and rewarding relationships and networks?
- a. What do you think puts them at risk?
- b. Can you recall and describe a situation when a relationship was tested and how you dealt with it?
- c. Think of a past project that went extremely well. How have others contributed to your success?
17. How did/do you develop your credibility and trustworthiness?
- a. Do you try to present these qualities to people you don't know, for example by marketing your professional image? How?
18. Can you recall a work situation when you felt isolated or missed a sense of belonging and describe how you have dealt with it?
- a. Is there anything you think others (e.g., institutions, client groups, associations) should do to foster inclusiveness?
19. What are in your opinion the outcomes of developing and maintaining strong relationships and networks?
20. Have your networking needs and strategies changed in the course of your career? In what ways?