# Benefits of membership in a business networking group

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## ABSTRACT

The aims of the study were to explore the perceptions of members of a regional business network about the benefits of networking and the importance of such benefits. Furthermore it explores to what extent these benefits are realised within the regional network and what additional competencies members develop as part of the network. The one case at the regional level is made up of fourteen embedded cases. Twenty four interviews were conducted among different categories of members in the HunterNet network. Respondents confirmed that intangible benefits such as a sense of community and legitimacy, accessing knowledge, information and learning were important. Members of the Hunternet business network believed that these benefits can be realised in the regional industrial cluster and developed an appreciation of the competencies of other members. The table of the benefits of networking can be used as a discussion tool for learning within such networks.

## INTRODUCTION

This research investigates the perceived benefits of membership in a formal business networking group in a regional industrial cluster in Australia. The HunterNet Cooperative is a twelve year old industry group promoting member engineering businesses and the engineering sector in the Hunter region of NSW, Australia. HunterNet members offer highly specialised and innovative engineering capabilities in information technology, mechanical and electrical engineering services, manufacturing, machining and electronics. Established and progressive member firms promise a commitment to quality certification and continuous improvement with a focus on market and customer orientation through the sharing of information and resources.

**Background**: In the 1999—2000 year, Hunter manufacturing turned over almost $6 billion, out of the $74 billion NSW manufacturing base and the $231 billion Australian manufacturing base. This figure is larger than manufacturing in Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory. Manufacturing turnover per capita was $10,298 in the Hunter and $12,065 for Australia. (Hunter Valley Research Foundation 2003). The Hunter produces some 36 % of Australia's coal and 35 % of Australia's Aluminium (Hunter Valley Research Foundation 2003). Newcastle is the largest coal port in the world and the largest export port in Australia. The above industries require maintenance and services, which are part of

the HunterNet offer HunterNet members have a combined turnover in excess of $400 million and employ more than 2000 people. Collaborating with a competitor for mutual benefit did result in initial tensions but time overcame these tensions. HunterNet members use trust and cooperation to match or better the efficiencies of a vertically integrated entity. HunterNet members believe that HunterNet has benefited their businesses by increasing opportunities for individual work through increased awareness of capabilities and through group tendering for projects. The fact that HunterNet is still functioning after more than ten years when so many networking groups have failed indicate that HunterNet is a group worthy of research (Lake 2004).

**Benefits of Networks**

A formal business-networking group can be defined as *'a formal group formed to facilitate the networking of independent members so that relationship building and relationship maintenance can take place with a view to delivering mutually beneficial community and business focused outcomes through working together'* (Lake 2004 p.152-3). The formal nature of such a group is to facilitate networking and relationship building as independent businesses will not follow mandates directing networking or relationship building and maintenance. Because of the independent nature of the members working together for mutual benefit, it would normally be expected that strong relationships would be required in order to match efficiencies delivered by vertically integrated businesses. Networks offer many benefits to participants. Benefits may be tangible or intangible but unless the members perceive that there is a benefit in membership, it is unlikely that the utilisation of scarce resources directed at membership — time and money — can be justified. It follows that members must recognise potential benefits from membership as important and believe that it can be realised in the network. Thus, the authors propose that members recognise benefits, indicate their importance and to what extent such benefits can be realised within a specific.

Table 1 compares benefits that members of a network may perceive and are drawn from the literature on clusters, alliances and networks. The authors have placed these benefits into three categories, firstly benefits that occur in clusters, alliances as well as networks, secondly benefits linked to membership of alliances and networks, and thirdly benefits associated only with networks. The cluster, alliance and network category includes benefits that can be gained through a transactional relationship as may exist in a cluster or as mutually beneficial relationships as may exist through a network or alliance. The network and alliance category includes benefits that require a mutually beneficial relationship to maximise the benefit. Communication with like minded people and, a sense of community and legitimacy, are categorised as applicable to only a network because either one may be the primary benefit one initially receives from a network but it is unlikely that an alliance would be formed purely to access this benefit. Whilst it can be argued that any effective relationship or group would exhibit these two benefits, the focus of this study is a formal business networking group.

**Table 1 Comparison of benefits between alliances clusters and networks**

| Benefit | Authors | Application to alliance cluster or network categories |
|---|---|---|
| Accessing technology | Bergquist et al 1995; Culpan 1993; Greenhalgh 2001; Lynch 1989. | Alliance, cluster, network |
| Accessing labour | Howarth et al 1995 | Alliance, cluster, network |
| Economies of scale | Best 2001; Culpan1993; Doz & Hamel 1998; Evans & Wurster1997; Greenhalgh 2001; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996; Rayport & Sviokla 1999. | Alliance, cluster, network |
| Accessing expertise | Bergquist et al 1995; Best 2001; Howarth et al 1995; Patterson 1996; Porter 1998. | Alliance, cluster, network |
| Private sector leadership | Porter 1998; Zerrillo & Rainia 1996. | Alliance, cluster, network |
| Inventory savings | Best 2001; Campbell & Wilson 1996; Porter 1998. | Alliance, cluster, network |
|  |  |  |
| Accessing/Building knowledge, information and learning | Culpan 1996; Greenhalgh 2001; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996; Lake & Erwee, 2005a; Poh & Erwee 2005. | Alliance, network |
| Accessing core competencies | Bergquist et al 1995; Czerniawska 2002; Hakansson & Sharma 1996; Osland & Yaprak 1993. | Alliance, network |
| Coordinating and speeding up the value chain | Culpan 1993; Iansiti & MacCormack 1997; Jarillo 1993; Lynch 1989; Malone & Laubacher 1998; Patterson 1996. | Alliance, network |
| Economies of scope | Bergquist et al 1995; Culpan 1993; Greenhalgh 2001; Hakansson & Sharma 1996; Lynch 1989; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996; Rayport & Sviokla 1999; Ross 1993. | Alliance, network |
| Improve strategic position | Doz & Hamel 1998; Lynch 1989. | Alliance, network |
| Increased flexibility, efficiencies & rewards | Bergquist et al 1995; Greenhalgh 2001; Lynch 1989; Campbell & Wilson 1996. | Alliance, network |
| Expand capabilities to meet client demand for integrated offer | Bergquist et al 1995; Howarth et al 1995; Patterson 1996. | Alliance, network, |
| Reduce transaction costs | Campbell & Wilson 1996; Culpan 1993; Rayport & Sviokla 1999. | Alliance, network |
| Reduce risk and uncertainty | Culpan 1993; Howarth et al 1995; Lynch 1989; Hakansson & Sharma 1996. | Alliance, network |
| Share R&D costs and shorten design and development stages | Culpan 1993; Howarth et al 1995; Iansiti & MacCormack 1997. | Alliance, network |
| Share resources – resource access | Bergquist et al 1995; Patterson 1996; Zerrillo & Rainia 1996. | Alliance, network |
| Strengthen customer-supplier links | Campbell & Wilson 1996; Howarth et al 1995. | Alliance, network |
| Synergies | Culpan 1993; Hakansson & Sharma 1996; Lynch 1989; Patterson 1996; Zerrillo & Rainia 1996. | Alliance, network |
|  |  |  |
| Sense of community & legitimacy | Abell & Oxbrow 2001; Bergquist et al 1995; Burton-Jones 1999; Lake & Erwee 2005b; Park et al 1993; Zerrillo & Rainia 1996. | Network |
| Communicate with like minded people | Abell & Oxbrow 2001; Bergquist et al 1995; Campbell & Wilson 1996; Lake & Erwee 2005b; Lipnack & Stamps 2000; | Network |

(Source: Lake 2004, constructed from various authors)

The literature indicates that there is a large range of benefits that members could possibly identify in networks, alliances and clusters. For example membership in clusters, alliances and networks could lead to access of labour, economies of scale and accessing expertise. Downsizing and de-integration are also drivers of collaboration (Jarillo 1993). Fewer staff means fewer skills available to carry out all the tasks necessary to meet market needs resulting in the growth of outsourcing.

Capital required for change can be used more efficiently if partners concentrate on their core competency and the group leverages the combined competencies by taking a strategic position. However, if collaboration is to be successful, the cooperation of partners must still match coordination efficiencies (Doz & Hamel 1998; Jarillo 1993).

Accessing information, knowledge and learning in alliances and networks could occur through the use of technology (Culpan 1996; Greenhalgh 2001; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996). Coordination is enhanced if technological potential is maximised and through the application of technology can realise value. Thus learning and internalising knowledge are the keys to realising the value potential of technology (Ford et al 1998; Jarillo 1993; Limerick et al 1998; Lipnack & Stamp 1994; Oral & Kettanni 1998). Lake and Erwee (2005) found that knowledge within HunterNet is primarily exchanged through informal conversation that includes the knowledge exchange processes of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. HunterNet members have an ability to understand engineering related explicit knowledge externalised by members in conversation. The HunterNet members thus build knowledge as individuals or a group, and build relationships and trust through the process of knowledge exchange inside and outside their organisations. Members have a learning intent, which is a prerequisite for learning and knowledge exchange.

In alliances and networks maximising the economies of scale and scope (Bergquist et al 1995; Culpan 1993; Greenhalgh 2001; Hakansson & Sharma 1996; Lynch 1989; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996; Rayport & Sviokla 1999) through cooperative use of resources — including competencies — is a way of coping with technological change (Buttery & Buttery 1994; Child & Faulkner 1998; Czerniawska, 2002; Doz & Hamel 1998; Yoshino & Rangan 1995). This is particularly the case in industrial clusters where failure to take up technological advances may result in a business not being able to join a value chain.

Technological advances in communications have allowed independent companies more flexibility in designing products more quickly and with the ability to make changes to reflect the market even during implementation. The response time to bring a concept to market has also been reduced by technological advances in communications better linking members of the value chain (Bergquist et al 1995; Iansiti & MacCormack 1997). In alliances and networks the interconnected independent firms can be more responsive to customers or implement performance strategies (Campbell & Wilson 1996). Market access, learning and direct technical assistance are some of the advantages – that help alleviate risk in the alliance - to small firms (Patterson 1996).

The authors summarised benefits from membership that could emerge from a formal business-networking group from the literature. The research issues were to explore the perceptions of members of a regional business network about the benefits of networking and the importance of such benefits. Furthermore it explores to what extent these benefits are realised within a regional network and what additional competencies members develop as part of the network.

## METHOD

The critical realism paradigm is used in this study as the assumption that reality is imperfectly understood is applicable to a complex and dynamic regional business network. The exploratory nature of the research, the contemporary issue of networking, and the critical realism paradigm justify the choice of case study methodology (Yin 1994). Interviews, the networks' website and member company documents are the primary means of collecting primary data. Purposive sampling is used to select cases that are information rich and offer maximum variation across the HunterNet member classes. Two pilot interviews with the Executive officer and manager of the network were used to test the statements in the table of benefits.

HunterNet has four membership classes. Patron members are large businesses with a presence in the Hunter region that support the concept of HunterNet. Sponsor members are businesses in the Hunter who offer support to HunterNet and services member businesses may wish to acquire. General members are small to medium sized businesses involved in the engineering manufacturing and services sector in the Hunter region. Associates are micro businesses that offer services and support to HunterNet. Revenue rather than employee numbers was used to determine the business size. Small businesses is defined as being turnover ranging from 1 to 10 million dollars, medium businesses as turnover ranging from 10 to100 million dollars and large businesses as turnover greater than 100 million dollars.

There is one case at the HunterNet level made up of fourteen embedded cases (see Yin 1994). The membership classes participating in the embedded case studies are General Members and Patrons. The HunterNet Executive Officer provided guidance about member businesses who are information rich case study participants. Active participation in the network is assumed to be an indicator of information richness. Longevity could be a further indicator of information richness due to the history surrounding membership and relationships. The greater number of embedded case studies from the membership class of General Member reflects the positioning of HunterNet as 'the competitive edge in engineering'. Willingness to cooperate is another factor in determining the embedded cases.

Eight interviews were conducted in five small businesses with the owner-managers and marketing managers. Twelve interviews were conducted in seven medium sized companies with owner-managers, marketing managers and general managers. Four interviews were conducted in two large businesses with the general managers, a marketing manager and a project manager. The interview protocol includes the size of the company in turnover, number of employees, core competences of the business and the ownership structure before going onto the questions in terms of the research issues. These interview questions related to the importance of the benefits of networking, to what extent they believe the benefits were realised in Hunternet and what competencies did they gain by membership of Hunternet.

## RESULTS

Frequencies were calculated for each group of members and assigned to the appropriate column in tables. Data was grouped in terms of similarity and a number

is then assigned to answers that enjoy a common pattern to facilitate further data reduction as illustrated in the tables. Data reduction was then carried out by reducing data into statements that combined similar patterns. Frequencies in the data displays are used to identify patterns, not as quantitative analysis. Patterns or themes within a case are identified from interviews and cross checked from other sources such as prior theory, pamphlets, and company policies. Key informants reviewed the case study summary for accuracy as a means of enhancing construct validity.

**Perceptions of importance and realisation of benefit**

Interviewees' were presented with a list of benefits (adapted from Table 1) and asked how important are these benefits of networking. Additionally they were asked to what extent they believed that they receive these benefits from HunterNet membership. Table 2 shows all interviewees' perceptions of benefits and the extent to which respondents believed that they realised the benefits in HunterNet. Some dominant patterns emerge for all respondents. The most important benefits to all members were three mainly intangible benefits, namely 'a sense of community and legitimacy', 'communicating with like minded people' and 'accessing/building knowledge information and learning' designated by eighty three to ninety two percent of all respondents. All three benefits have a high rate of realisation from membership of HunterNet. The 'strengthening of customer-supplier links' was also perceived as a more important benefit, followed by the benefit 'expand capabilities to meet client demand for an integrated offer' (71 to 75% of respondents) but both indicated a lower realisation frequency than the three benefits mentioned above. The next most emphasis was placed upon 'private sector leadership' and the realisation of this benefit was also high.

'Accessing expertise', 'maximising synergies across the value chain', 'improving strategic position' and 'coordinating and speeding up the value chain' were the next group of most popular benefits but the realisation of benefits from HunterNet was lower for all four statements. 'Reducing risk and uncertainty', 'share resources – resource access' and 'accessing core competencies' were the three benefits emphasised next as most important (54% of respondents) but all three had much lower rates of realisation from HunterNet membership. 'Economies of scope', 'increased flexibility, efficiencies and rewards', 'shared R&D costs' and 'economies of scale' were emphasised as next most important but again, all four enjoyed low realisation rates through HunterNet membership. In the lowest grouping of importance, 'accessing technology' and 'accessing labour' enjoyed similar low realisation rates from HunterNet membership. The other two benefits in the lowest importance grouping, namely 'reducing transaction costs' and 'inventory savings' had lower realisation rates.

A further analysis of responses per membership category was made. The responses that 100 percent of Patrons found most important were 'access knowledge', 'speeding up the value chain', 'improve strategic position', 'reduce uncertainty', 'sense of community', 'communicate with like minded people', and 'customer-supplier links'. Patrons also tend to confirm that they were able to realise these benefits form membership in the Hunternet, but this ranged from 50 to 100 percent. The response that 90 percent of General Members selected was 'sense of community' and they argued that 90 percent indicated that they could realise this

benefit within Hunternet. The next most important benefits (80 Percent) from networking for General Members were 'communicate with like minded people', and 'customer-supplier-links' but they argued that they realised such benefits from Hunternet at a rate of 85 percent and 50 percent respectively. It should be noted that whilst only 70 percent of General Members selected 'access knowledge', there was an 85 percent realisation frequency.

Responses were analysed by size of company. All respondents from small businesses (100 percent) selected 'Coordinating the value chain', 'sense of community' and 'customer-supplier-links' as the most important benefits, yet indicated that they could realise this in Hunternet only with a 63 to 88 percent frequency. A second category of responses were those that were selected by 88 percent of small businesses namely 'economies of scope', 'improve strategic position', 'communicate with like minded people', 'expand capabilities', 'accessing expertise', 'maximising synergies', 'reduce uncertainty', 'share resources', and 'increased flexibility and rewards'. The responses in this category for small businesses had realisation rates from 25 to 88 percent.

The responses that 100 percent of the large businesses found most important were 'access knowledge', 'speeding up the value chain', 'improve strategic position', 'reduce uncertainty', 'sense of community', communicate with like minded people', and 'customer-supplier links'. Large businesses perceived that they could realise such benefits from 50 to 100 percent in Hunternet. In contrast the response rate for medium sized businesses indicating their most important benefits was lower than those for small and large businesses. Medium sized businesses selected 'sense of community' (83 percent) and 'communicate with like minded people' (75 percent) but had a high realisation frequency (92 percent) for both responses.

All respondents from the non-owner category selected 'customer-supplier links' as the most important and ninety three percent selected 'sense of community' as the second most important benefit. The extent to which these benefits were realised in Hunternet was 64 percent and 100 percent respectively for non-owners. Seventy nine percent of non-owners selected 'communicate with like minded people' and 'access knowledge' as the third category of important benefits, with 93 and 79 percent realisation rates respectively. In contrast ninety percent of owners selected 'sense of community' and 'communicate with like minded people' as most important and eighty percent noted that they could realise this within Hunternet. Eighty percent of owners also selected 'expand capabilities' as a benefit and the majority agreed that they could realise this benefit.

**What competencies have you gained from being a member of HunterNet?**

It could be argued that competencies gained from networking are a form of benefit and respondents' statements were gathered from interviews. These were analysed according to membership category, size of company and type of ownership (see Table 3). The most frequent response that members provided were that they gained 'An increased awareness of the competencies possessed by others' an that they learnt how to function in an 'open discussion forum based on trust relationships'. Members also indicated that they learnt 'benchmarking and best practice' and achieved a 'feeling of well being through being involved with good things'. Responses such as

'Personal development' and 'we're happy to give more than we receive' were endorsed by many members. 'Access to information and contacts with information', 'a better understanding of client needs' and 'skills in cooperating with people in business' were also frequently mentioned by members.

When difference of responses is viewed across categories, further trends emerge. It should be noted that between 92 to 100 percent of the interviewees in the categories according to size of organisation, membership and ownership, chose the statement 'increased awareness of the others competencies'. An 'open discussion forum' was emphasised more by General Members, small and medium businesses, and owners. The response 'Being happy to give more than you receive' was more evident amongst small businesses and owners. 'Community spirit' and a 'feeling of well being' enjoyed greater frequency by General Members and medium businesses.

'Benchmarking and best practice' was a more frequent response amongst General Members, owners, medium and small businesses (see Table 3). 'Personal development' was given greater response rate by General Members, owners, small and medium businesses. 'Access to information, from members, contacts or HunterNet' was given greater prominence by General Members, small businesses, and owners. 'Skills in cooperating with people in business' was given much greater emphasis by small businesses and owners. Small business interviewees' tended to emphasise 'increased awareness of the competencies that other possess' more than large and medium businesses.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that HunterNet members highlight three mainly intangible benefits of membership, namely a sense of community and legitimacy, communicating with like minded people and accessing knowledge, information and learning. The results confirm the authors' postulation that members do receive specific and identifiable benefits from membership of a formal business networking group. Members recognise which benefits are more important than others and to what extent they can realise these benefits in Hunternet. This has a positive impact on the success of HunterNet because members distinguish value from the costs associated with membership and are therefore willing to allocate resources to realise further benefits (see Jarillo 1993; Rackham et al 1996).

The benefits highlighted as realised are mainly intangible benefits, one example being accessing knowledge, information and learning (see Culpan 1996; Greenhalgh 2001; Lake & Erwee 2005a; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Patterson 1996; Poh & Erwee 2005). Learning is closely associated with networking (see Buttery & Buttery 1994; Child & Faulkner 1998; Doz & Hamel 1998; Yoshino & Rangan 1995) and all members highlighted the importance of discussion within the network. Understanding the range of benefits available decreases the chance that there will be an expectations gap whereby unrealistically low or high expectations results in misallocating resources to networking (see Child & Faulkner 1998; Doz & Hamel 1998). Thus members are able to strive for future realisation of benefits (see Patterson 1996) and recognise that allocating resources to participate in HunterNet

increases the likelihood of success within the network (see Jarillo 1993; Rackham et al 1996).

HunterNet members confirm that a sense of community and legitimacy (see Abell & Oxbrow 2001; Bergquist et al 1995; Burton-Jones 1999; Park et al 1993; Zerrillo & Rainia 1996) and communicating with like-minded people (see Campbell & Wilson 1996; Lipnack & Stamps 2000), are significant benefits linked to networking. HunterNet initiatives such as 'HunterNet Group Training', 'Make it in the Hunter', and 'A Model for Action' are examples of having actioned the stated HunterNet Mission of benefiting the region and industry sector resulting in members experiencing a sense of community and legitimacy as an intangible benefit. Communicating with like-minded people allows discussion of issues relevant to participants' particular business concerns with derived benefits such as relevant knowledge exchange likely to follow (Lake & Erwee 2005a). The focus of HunterNet on engineering related manufacturing increases the likelihood of community actions and communications being relevant to participants, thus increasing the likelihood of a virtuous cycle of interaction through participation leading to realised benefit in turn leading to increased interaction through participation (see Jarillo 1993; Lake 2004). Members can discuss non-confidential issues that impact upon their businesses with the resultant learning benefiting all or confidential matters between parties enjoying stronger relationships, perhaps resulting in further benefits for the parties concerned (Doz & Hamel 1998; Rackham et al 1996). Members highlight the importance of explicit knowledge expressed as understanding other members' capabilities and through observation in site visits or industry expositions.

The high realisation of benefits for the categories of small business, large business and owners indicates a high level of interaction within the network by these categories of members (see Howarth et al 1995; Paterson 1996). This interaction may be promoted by the nodal position of large businesses (see Doz & Hamel 1998) attracting the flexibility and specialisation offered by smaller businesses (see Child & Faulkner 1998; Doz & Hamel 1998; Greenhalgh 2000; Jarillo 1993; Osland & Yaprak 1993; Yoshino & Rangan 1995). Owners perceive that they achieve more benefits and this may be a result of their ability to build relationships without having to justify the allocation of resources to related parties.

HunterNet members have an increased awareness of the competencies of others and this implies the possibility of, and perhaps even willingness, to undertake cooperation strategies. Learning how to cooperate with others strengthens a network over time (see Culpan 1993; Lake 2004; Rackham et al 1996).

The authors acknowledge that the benefits included in table 2 were mainly intangible and this may influence the respondents. However the benefits were paraphrased from the literature and secondly, interviewee generated responses highlighted intangible benefits flowing directly to members or indirectly to HunterNet, the sector or region. It would be incorrect to suggest that members of HunterNet are not interested in tangible benefits. However, members emphasised the positive impact of intangible benefits to their businesses and understood that interaction based around intangible benefits can build relationships from which tangible benefits are likely to flow, based upon the promise of future benefits and the delivery of relevant competencies. The domains to which the HunterNet study's findings can be generalised include

engineering and manufacturing networking groups within a regional geographic boundary.

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## Table 2 Benefits all interviewees – in order of importance

| Benefit | Importance of Benefit n = 24 | | | Benefit Received from HunterNet n = 24 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Less Important | Neutral | More Important | Benefit Received |
| **Sense of community & legitimacy** | 0 % | 8 % | 92 % | 92 % |
| **Communicate with like minded people** | 0 % | 17 % | 83 % | 88 % |
| **Strengthen customer-supplier links** | 13 % | 4 % | 83 % | 50 % |
| **Accessing/Building Knowledge, information and learning** | 13 % | 13 % | 75 % | 83 % |
| **Expand capabilities to meet client demand** | 8 % | 21 % | 71 % | 58 % |
| **Private sector leadership** | 17 % | 17 % | 67 % | 71 % |
| **Accessing expertise** | 8 % | 29 % | 63 % | 54 % |
| **Maximise Synergies across the value chain** | 13 % | 25 % | 63 % | 46 % |
| **Improve strategic position** | 17% | 21 % | 63 % | 58 % |
| **Coordinating and speeding up the value chain** | 33 % | 4 % | 63 % | 42 % |
| **Reduce risk and uncertainty** | 17 % | 29 % | 54 % | 29 % |
| **Share resources – resource access** | 21 % | 25 % | 54 % | 38 % |
| **Accessing core competencies** | 21 % | 25 % | 54 % | 33 % |
| **Economies of scope** | 33 % | 21 % | 46 % | 25 % |
| **Increased flexibility, efficiencies & rewards** | 38 % | 17 % | 46 % | 17 % |
| **Share R&D costs and shorten design and development stages** | 38 % | 17 % | 46 % | 13 % |
| **Economies of scale** | 42 % | 21 % | 38 % | 13 % |
| **Reduce transaction costs** | 33 % | 33 % | 33 % | 13 % |
| **Accessing technology** | 46 % | 21 % | 33 % | 33 % |
| **Accessing labour** | 54 % | 13 % | 33 % | 33 % |
| **Inventory savings** | 63 % | 17 % | 21 % | 4 % |

**Table 3  What competencies have you gained from being a member of HunterNet?**

| Statement | Membership n=24 | | Size n=24 | | | Ownership n =24 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | General<br>n = 20 | Patron<br>n= 4 | Small<br>N=8 | Medium<br>N = 12 | Large<br>N = 4 | Owner<br>n = 10 | Non Owner<br>n =14 |
| **We're happy to give more than we receive** | 50 % | 50 % | 75 % | 33 % | 50 % | 60 % | 43 % |
| **Feeling of well being because of the good things you're involved in** | 85 % | 50 % | 75 % | 92 % | 50 % | 80 % | 79 % |
| **Personal development** | 80 % | 0 % | 75 % | 83 % | 0 % | 80 % | 57 % |
| **An open forum, amongst friends, discuss problems because of a relationship based on trust** | 95 % | 75 % | 100 % | 92 % | 75 % | 100 % | 86 % |
| **A better understanding of clients needs allowing us to market ourselves better by meeting those needs** | 60 % | 50 % | 75 % | 50 % | 50 % | 60 % | 57 % |
| **Increased awareness of the competencies that others possess for better integrated offer to meet client needs** | 95 % | 100 % | 100 % | 92 % | 100 % | 100 % | 93 % |
| **Skills in cooperating with people in business** | 55 % | 50 % | 100 % | 25 % | 50 % | 70 % | 43 % |
| **Access to information (or people with information) from members, contacts or HunterNet** | 65 % | 50 % | 88 % | 50 % | 50 % | 80 % | 50 % |
| **Benchmarking and best practice with other managers** | 95 % | 50 % | 88 % | 100 % | 50 % | 100 % | 79 % |