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**Author**

RYTTBERG, Malin (GESCHWIND, Lars)

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to explore the functions that professional networks could have as sense givers during the process in which professional support staff at higher education institutions make sense of their roles. The empirical data comprise interviews with three categories of support staff at three technical universities in Sweden and a review of home pages and other written sources from ten, both Swedish and international, professional networks. One conclusion is that the networks can serve as sense givers for the professional support staff related either to the professional task or to the relational characteristics. However, these functions are not straightforward. The support staff in focus comprise a new category, with no ready-made scripts for their roles. Given that membership in these networks is voluntary, the networks may face challenges in their functions as sense givers. The networks thus opt for other ways of attracting members. This voluntariness in combination with a plasticity in the roles of the support staff suggests that the functions of professional networks not only will vary, but might also be limited as sense givers in the sense making process of professional support staff at

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higher education institutions (HEIs). (HRK / Abstract  $\frac{1}{4}$ bernommen)