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► To cite this version:

Dominique Baruel Bencherqui, Anne Janand, Mohamed Kefi. Gender as a discriminating factor in employee networking and intention to develop employability through career strategies. *Management & sciences sociales*, 2017, *La diversité : regards croisés. Aujourd'hui et demain*, 23, pp.120-135. hal-01856609

HAL Id: hal-01856609

<https://hal.science/hal-01856609v1>

Submitted on 13 Aug 2018

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Gender as a discriminating factor in employee networking and intention to develop employability through career strategies

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The purpose of this paper is to seek to shed light on how French workers, men and women, use their professional connections, in order to develop their employability and deploy their career strategies. This article uses a quantitative methodology to examine the effect of gender on employee networking, intentions to develop employability and career strategies within a sample of 410 French employees almost evenly divided between men and women. Our findings show that men prefer to develop their internal employability by forming and developing instrumentally-driven, intra-organizational networks. Women prefer to develop their external employability, notably by forming their own instrumentally-driven, inter-organizational networks, in an effort to adopt career strategies that can be best characterized as “boundaryless”. Allowing and fostering networking, without making any gender distinctions and moving toward “career communities,” would be a strategic move for firms. It would cater to employees’ individual aspirations in terms of career strategies and, by developing workers’ employability, would contribute to firms’ capacity to remain agile in increasingly turbulent times.

Keywords : gender, networks, employability, career development, career mobility

L’objectif de cet article est de comprendre la manière dont les salariés français, hommes et femmes, utilisent leurs liens professionnels pour développer leur employabilité et mettre en œuvre leurs stratégies de carrière. Afin d’étudier l’effet du genre sur la manière dont ils mobilisent leur réseau, ainsi que sur leur intention de développer leur employabilité au travers de stratégies de carrière, une méthodologie quantitative est utilisée et examine cet effet au sein d’un échantillon de 410 salariés français, équitablement répartis entre hommes et femmes. Nos résultats montrent que les hommes préfèrent développer leur employabilité interne en s’appuyant sur des réseaux intra-organisationnels instrumentaux. Les femmes préfèrent développer leur employabilité externe, notamment en construisant leurs propres réseaux inter-organisationnels instrumentaux, dans le but de mettre en œuvre des stratégies de carrière davantage « sans frontière ». Compte tenu de ces résultats, une démarche stratégique pour les entreprises serait de permettre et de favoriser le réseautage sans faire de distinction de genre et d’encourager la construction de « communautés de carrières ». Ceci répondrait aux aspirations individuelles des salariés en termes de stratégies de carrière et contribuerait, pour les entreprises, à rester agiles dans des périodes de plus en plus turbulentes, tout en développant l’employabilité de leurs salariés.

Mots clés : genre, réseaux, employabilité, développement de carrière, mobilité de carrière

Workers today face a world of uncertainty where performance is everything. Gone are the days when employees could look forward to a lifelong “career” in a single firm. Now, they are forced to take a more proactive role in mapping out their career paths.

In France, the concept of employability has taken on increasing importance for firms (see Deauville talks organized by the French employers’ union, Medef, in Deauville in 1998) as well as for social partners, which view it as a means of safeguarding professional careers (National Multisectoral Trade Agreements of 2003, 2008). Similarly, although lawmakers make no explicit mention of the term ‘employability,’ they have enacted laws (2002, 2004, 2009) aimed at developing learning and knowledge tools (e.g. ongoing professional training), providing greater security for professional careers by promoting “*occupational insertion or reinsertion for workers, so as to help give them to keep a foothold in the working world, fostering the development of skills, providing access to different levels of professional qualification, and contributing to peoples’ cultural and economic development as well as to their social advancement*” (Law n° 2004-391, Article 2). As a result, a variety of economic actors have taken a new look at employability: not only individual employees, of course, but also firms, social partners and lawmakers. Moreover, there is growing research exploring employability and its relationship to other concepts, focusing, in particular, on a set of “good practices” that offer career security and, in turn, promote the maintenance/development of that same employability.

Although employability has been recently studied under the angle of motivation (Van Emmerik *et al.*, 2012), i-deals (Oostrom *et al.*, 2016), psychological capital and career identity (Ngoma and Dithan Ntale, 2016), protean career attitude and learning-goal orientation (Lin, 2015) not to mention managerial policy (Baruel Bencherqui, 2005), workforce and skill planning (Baruel Bencherqui *et al.*, 2011), and internal mobility (Janand, 2013), the intention to develop employability has garnered less attention. Let us cite the work by Hategekimana and Roger, who designed a survey instrument (2000, 2002) and, more recently, work by Baruel Bencherqui *et al.* (2012) who examined,

in particular, intention and its link to networking and satisfaction within an international-scale group, or the study undertaken by Baruel Bencherqui *et al.* (2013) among young employees, between 18 and 30 years of age. Similarly, although networks have been examined through the perspective of gender (Ibarra, 1992, 1993; Forret and Dougherty, 2004; Durbin, 2011), there is not in France, to our knowledge, any study that focuses specifically on the impact of gender on a firm’s intention to develop employability and (intra/inter organizational and social) networking.

In pursuing that line of research, we shall look at firms’ intention to develop employability and exploit networking, as seen through the lens of gender. Specifically, the question we shall consider is that of determining whether there is a differentiated effect, in France, on men and on women regarding organizational intention to develop employability and exploit networking in their efforts to develop employability. To that end, we conducted an empirical study among a sample of 410 French respondents.

First, we will provide an overview of research literature on employability and networking. In the second section we shall explain our research methodology. And in the third and final section, we will present and discuss our findings.

Review of research literature : from corporate intention to develop employability... to the effective exploitation of connections and networks

Employability: an overview of the concept

Defining employability is no easy task, given that the concept has been used to refer to an array of approaches and definitions over the years (see Chart 1). At first (at the start of the 20th century), employability was defined as an individual’s capacity to find employment. According to Gazier (2001), the concept of employability underwent four major shifts in meaning, ranging from dichotomic employability (1900-1950), where a distinction was

made between individuals who are employed and those who are not employable, up to a more recent concept of labor market performance employability (1970-1990), where employability was viewed as an individual's likelihood of finding employment, according to various labor market outcomes achieved through policy interventions, measured in terms of days or hours worked and wage rates (also measured in terms of likelihood).

In the 1990s two new visions of employability emerged *"both of which were interactive and dynamic, seeking to consider the interplay between an individual's action and the context in which he finds himself"* (Gazier,

1999, p. 11): **the first vision, called interactive employability**, was defined in 1994 by the Canadian Labor Force Development Board, which focused on the fact that employability involves an interaction between a number of stakeholders (e.g. the individual, the State, the firm, etc.). The second vision, known as initiative employability, sees employability as involving a number of the individual's psychosocial characteristics (Fugate *et al.*, 2004; Fugate and Kinicki, 2008; Eby, Butts and Lockwood, 2003; DeVos and Soens, 2008). Nevertheless, some authors, such as Hallier (2009), pointed the gap which appears between the rhetoric and practice of employability;

Chart 1
Employability: Several definitions of the concept

Authors	Definitions
Fugate and Kinicki (2008, p.504)	<i>"Employability is a disposition that captures individual characteristics that foster adaptive behaviours and positive employment outcomes'."</i>
Arnold and Rothwell (2007, p.25)	<i>"An individual's ability to get and retain a job or obtain a desired job."</i>
Gazier (1999, p.39)	The possession of <i>"dynamic and updated competences and labour-market-oriented behaviour for every person participating in the workforce."</i>

Although the concept of employability has been explored extensively in research literature, as we have just seen, that is not at all the case for the question of the individual's intention to develop his employability, which is the subject of our present study. This concept was first highlighted by Hategekimana and Roger (2000), who saw intention as a primary factor behind *"the implementation and ultimate realization of the individual's efforts"* (Baruel Bencherqui *et al.*, 2012). Hategekimana and Roger (2000) developed a survey tool, which we have relied upon for the purposes of this paper, based upon a 3-point measurement scale: (1) professional training; (2) mobility/participation in networks; (3) information searches. Moreover, the authors drew attention to three factors liable to play a role in encouraging individuals to develop their employability: (1) the individual's level of job satisfaction; (2) the individual's personality; (3) expectations, relative to rewards the individual

may receive. This study is intended to examine the impact of social and organizational networks on an individual's intention to develop employability.

Networking: individual social capital

Although Field (2008, p. 1) defines networking as merely a *"question of relationships,"* he stresses that social networks are, in fact, a valuable asset at the center of social capital. That aspect was highlighted by Bourdieu (1980, p. 2), who described social capital as being *"the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition."* Moreover, he adds that, if such a network is to endure, it must be maintained *"in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits"* (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 2). And as

Ferrand has stated (1996, p. 1), the term 'social' in 'social capital' refers to "collective and structural conditions behind the regulation of exchanges, which allow the circulation of resources to produce enduring effects". Nonetheless, for such resources (i.e. relationships) to produce effects, they must be not only in place and available but also efficiently exploited (Forsé, 2001, p. 191). In that light, social capital ought perhaps be seen as the individual's degree of investment in his relationships (Lin, 1995).

In his study on social capital, Burt (1995) would introduce the notion of "structural holes" which he defined as a gap in the connections between two contacts, where there is no redundancy in network. That gap would be filled by a third party, who would serve as an intermediary, allowing the two contacts to liaise with each other. Granovetter (1973), for his part, would develop studies on networking by shedding light on two possible types of interpersonal bonds: strong ties (which connect close friends and family members) and weak ties (which connect acquaintances, such as, for example, the friend of a friend). It is the weak ties which, in Granovetter's view, are most useful for career purposes. Lin (1995) goes even further by drawing a distinction between two types of social interactions: homophilic interactions, between individuals who are similar in age, sex, hierarchical position, etc., on the one hand, and heterophilic interactions, on the other hand, created between dissimilar individuals. Merging his ideas with those of Granovetter, Lin states that, in heterophilic interactions, weak ties serve as "intermediaries between two hierarchical levels" (Lin, 1995, p. 689).

Thus, networking, as a form of individual social capital, gained in importance particularly in terms of career advancement (Forret and Dougherty, 2004). Relying on the work of Van der Heijde *et al.* (2005), researchers Hofaidlaoui and Kammoun (2010) would also mark a distinction between intra-organizational networks within a firm, which facilitate exchanges of information, and inter-organizational networks, outside the firm, which include individuals that one knows personally.

Fombrun (1982, p. 281), following Kadushin

(1978), would identify 4 types of networks based on modes of interpersonal interaction, namely: "expressive (affect), instrumental (power), cognitive (information), or objective (goods)". Fombrun (1982, p. 281) also broke down network strategies by category, namely, nodal strategy (i.e. "decomposition of network into component nodes"), dyadic strategy (i.e. "decomposition of network into nodal pairs") and triadic strategy ("inventory of all possible triads in the network. Fombrun placed the focus on the composition of these triads in terms of the "relationships linking the three modes." At the organizational networking level, Fombrun (1982, p. 288) identified two types of networks that he dubbed "attribute networks" and "transactional networks." The former act to "link organizations by virtue of commonalities exclusive of interaction, such as output or input similarity (e.g., an industry group, or board directorates)". The latter emphasize the nature of relationships and communication modes between different organizations. More precisely, Bozionelos (2003, p. 43) states that, at the intra-organizational networking level, network resources also consist of the links that employees create between themselves, without regard to their hierarchical level, as when someone has "equal, lower or higher formal status than the focal individual". On this point, it was clear that our study should entail an examination of classic social networks, such as linkedin, as well as organizational social networks.

Research methodology : a micro-econometric approach

In attempting to determine if gender acts as a differentiating factor in an employee's intention to develop his or her employability and in the efficient exploitation of intra/inter organizational and social networking, we have relied on a quantitative methodology.

The questionnaire and data collection procedures

We used a multiple-item survey covering 3 general topics: 1) social networks (3 items); 2) intention to develop one's employability (15 items) designed by Hategekimana and Roger

(2000); and 3) intra-organizational social networks (6 items) and inter-organizational social networks (4 items) devised by Hofaidllaoui and Kammoun (2010). The descriptors, which appear on a 5-point Likert scale, were designed to ascertain the respondent's favorable or unfavorable attitude toward each study topic. The data was collected between the end of 2011 and the end of 2013 (410 respondents).

An HTML online survey was used to create (docs.google) and administer the questionnaire. The protocol used is an integrated web system, and the measuring tool was a dedicated online survey administration application that was hosted on a secure server. The online questions were matched to self-administered questionnaires, bearing in mind that various studies have shown that the criteria for evaluating the reliability of online and offline surveys are identical that the online survey meth-

od. As pointed out by Tung-Zong and Vowles (2013, p. 128), "the online survey method can be superior to other survey methods".

Reliability and validity tests performed

In our study, Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the internal consistency (i.e. internal reliability) of the questionnaire as a whole and of each sub-scale category (see Chart 2). The interpretation of the reliability coefficient was based on a threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). The alpha coefficient for the overall questionnaire is 0.92. The scale measuring "intention to develop one's employability" covers 13 items (2 online items with "relocation" having been deleted after further refinement of the survey). The "social networks" scale is comprised of 2 items (after 1 item had been removed). As for the "intra/inter-organizational social networks" scale, it contained 10 items.

Chart 2

Reliability coefficients for categories of sub-scale items

Survey Subtopics	Cronbach's Alpha
Intention to develop one's employability	0.72
Social networks	0.83
Organizational networks	0.99

As regards the discriminant and convergent validity of the questionnaire and its three sub-scale categories, the items measuring the same range of phenomenon are highly cross-correlated, and items measuring dissimilar phenomena are weakly cross-correlated. We can therefore conclude that the convergent and discriminant validity of the survey have been confirmed. Also, the internal consistency coefficients as well as the clear and consistent factor structures lead us to conclude that the questionnaire items show construct validity.

Components of the Study Sample

The study sample includes 410 participants, divided almost equally along gender lines, with 224 women and 186 men (see Figure 1). In terms of their socio-professional background (see Figure 2), 195 respondents held managerial level or similar positions, and 121 respondents were not currently employed (students or job seekers). The age groups (see Figure 3)

centered mainly between 18 and 28 years of age (314 respondents) and between 39 and 48 (43 respondents). Looking at how sex and age intersect (see Figure 3), women were primarily between 18 and 28 years of age (179 respondents) and 29 and 48 (18 respondents) whereas men were primarily in the 18 to 28 year-old age bracket (116 respondents) and 49 and 58 (26 respondents). Lastly, as regards educational level (see Figure 4) the majority of respondents have a university degree (187 respondents have completed 1 to 4 years of study beyond the high school diploma/baccalaureate). Most of the women (110 respondents) have completed 1 to 4 years of study beyond the high school diploma/baccalaureate, whereas male participants are evenly divided between those who have completed 1 to 4 years of study beyond the high school diploma/baccalaureate (77 respondents) and 5 or more years of study beyond the high school diploma/baccalaureate (76 respondents).

Figure 1
Breakdown of the Study Sample by Gender

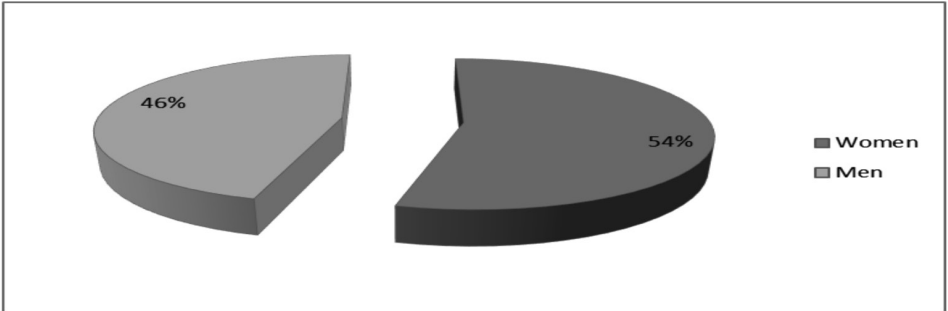


Figure 2
Socio-Professional Categories of the Research Sample Participants

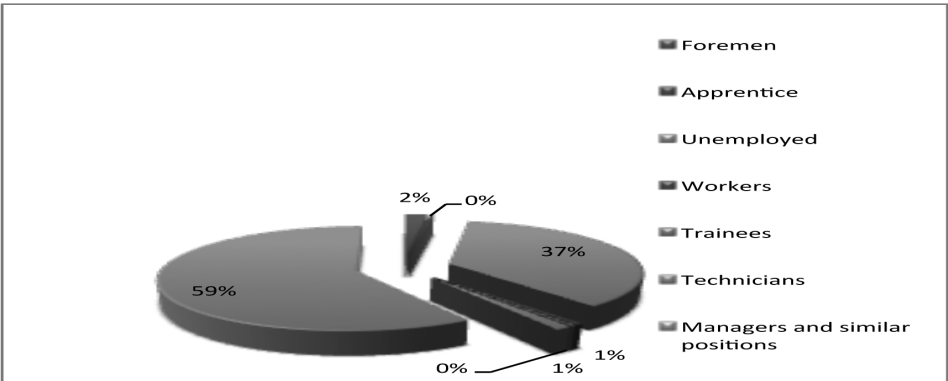


Figure 3
Age of Respondents and Breakdown of Research Sample Population by Gender & Age

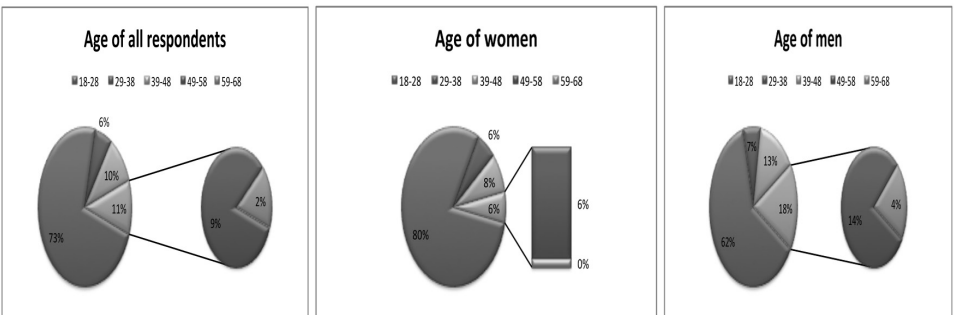
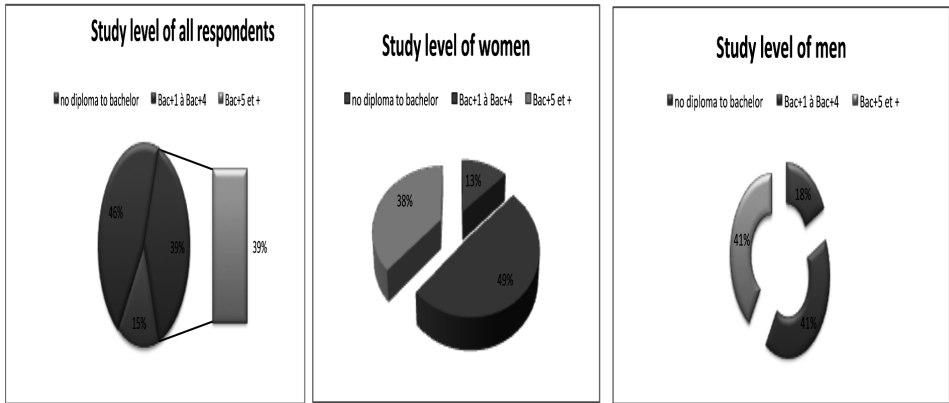


Figure 4
Respondents' Educational Level



Research model

The empirical study will serve as statistical support for components of the sample (2.3). We will study gender as a differentiating factor in an employee's intention to develop his or her employability and in the exploitation of intra/inter organizational and social networks, as well as the impact of these factors on the employee's intention to develop his or her employability and career strategy.

To that end, we relied on two types of regressions: (i) linear regressions making it possible to determine the extent and significance of the contribution of explanatory variables to variations in the phenomenon under study (Evrard *et al.*, 2003, p.477); (ii) a logit (*logistic regression*) model that offers a major advantage in terms of "computational simplicity" (Le Blanc *et al.*, 2000, p.14), which we have described in further detail below.

Y_i = (exogenous variables: var1: intention to develop one's employability, or var2: intra/inter organizational and social networks)
 Where: i = 1..., n is the index for individuals.
 Y_i : is an observation of the endogenous

variable for individual i.

The general formula is as follows:

$$y_i = \sum_i b_i x_i + e_i$$

X_i is the index for endogenous variables (gender, age, social networks) for individual i.

Our endogenous and exogenous variables are expressed as binary, qualitative data. Given the nature of our endogenous and exogenous variables, we have chosen to use a logistic regression model¹ for our empirical study.

Let the variable *intentiondevempl_i* represent the intention to develop the individual's employability, so that:

$$P_i = P [\text{intentiondevempl}_i = 1] = F [b_i X_i] \quad (1)$$

Where **F** denotes the distribution function for a known likelihood function.

β_i Represents, respectively, the estimated coefficients for variables X_i .

All the variables are binary in nature².

The model can be written in more condensed form as:

1. Logistic law:

$$F(X) = 1/[1 + \exp(-x)]; y_i = \sum_k \beta_{ik} x_{ik} + \varepsilon_i$$

In the case where follows a logistics law, we have: $F(-x, b) = \exp(-x, b) / [1 + \exp(-x, b)] = 1 / [1 + \exp(x, b)]$ thus $p_i = \exp(x, b) / [1 + \exp(x, b)]$ this function may be inverted, which makes it possible to obtain: $\log(p_i / [1 - p_i]) = x, b$. $p_i = 1 / [1 + \exp y_i]$.

2. In a binary model, y_i can assume only one of two values, for example 0 and 1.
 By convention, $y_i = 1$ if the event being measured occurs and 0 if it does not occur.

$P_i = P[\text{intentiondevepl}_i = 1] = F(\beta'X)$ and $(1 - p_i) = \text{prob}[\text{intentiondevepl}_i = 0] = 1 - F(\beta'X)$

With $\beta' = (\beta_{ik})$

We consider that the probability distribution F follows a logistic distribution. The equation (1) defines the *Logit* model.

The beta coefficients β_i are obtained using the maximum likelihood estimate. The likelihood function of the model is expressed as follows:

$$l = \prod_{i=1}^n [P_i^{\text{intentiondevepl}_i} (1 - P_i)^{1 - \text{intentiondevepl}_i}] \quad (2)$$

Chart 3

Estimations for Factors behind the Intention to Develop Employability

Variables	Model 1		
	Coef	Student's t-test	Wald's t-test
Constant	1.6709		
Gender	5.7810	4.6710	1.9081**
Networks	3.0051	3.0103	2.4018
-2 log likelihood	387.014		
Max likelihood ratio	Chi-Square = 458.971 * (>Chi-Square (2))		
Percentage of agreement	69.6		
R ² (Mc Fadden)	42.9		

*: Coefficient is significant at the 10% threshold

** Wald Chi-Square coefficient significant to the 1% threshold.

Our results show that men, as well as women, rely on their (social and organizational) networks when they intend to develop their

Findings and discussion

Our study focused on showing the differentiating effect exerted by gender on the development of individual employability (see Chart 3), which revealed that women demonstrate more intention than men (Wald test: 1.9081) to develop their employability (see Chart 3).

Findings

employability (see Chart 4). However, gender exerts a differentiating effect in the way they use them.

Chart 4

Estimations for Factors behind Intra/inter-organizational Social Networks

Variables	Model 2		
	Coef	Student's t-test	Wald's t-test
Constant	1.3903		
Gender	8.2081	3.8010	2.6019**
Age ***	1.0051	1.9601	1.0042
-2 log likelihood	362.910		
Max likelihood ratio	Chi-Square = 458.971 * (>Chi-Square (2))		
Percentage of agreement	51.4		
R ² (Mc Fadden)	43.7		

*: Coefficient is significant at the 10% threshold

** Wald Chi-Square coefficient significant to the 1% threshold

*** Age is a control variable

Results show that gender, age and networking (see overall model in Chart 3) have an effect on the employee's intention to develop his or her employability. Gender (coef. 5.7810) has a clearly stronger effect on intention than the other exogenous variables.

Discussion of findings

A whole series of elements emerged from the results of this study, showing important points of convergence between men and women, but also divergences regarding the exploitation of networks, career strategy and intention to develop one's employability.

The network : a tool widely exploited but differently according to gender

As regards (social and organizational) networks, there is no difference in terms of gender regarding the fact that respondents consider networks useful for their career, which is in keeping with the findings by Forret and Dougherty (2004). Our sample has allowed us to shed light on the fact that, for both men and women, professional social networks (linkedin, viadeo) rest on strong family and friendship ties, which Lin (1995, p.691) called the "intimate social circle of individuals."

Male and female respondents stress the importance of organizational networks as part of their intention to develop their employability, as other works have already demonstrated (Baruel Bencherqui et al., 2013 ; Baret and Soto-Maciel, 2006). However, the type of organizational network that is joined, with a view to develop employability, differs depending on gender. Women favor inter-organizational networking comprised of weak ties ($r^2=0,28$, $p<0,0001$) as defined by Granovetter (1973), whereas men favor intra-organizational networking comprised of strong ties ($r^2=0.40$, $p<0.0001$).

Inside the firm (see Figure 5), if we look at the difference noted by Bozionelos (2003), following the example of Fombrun (1982), between instrumentally-driven organizational networks (whose objective is to promote the members' career interests) and expressive organizational networks (whose

objective is more relational/affective because members rely on the network to confront their concerns or voice their sentiments), we note that men favor the former (instrumentally-driven), while women prefer the latter (expressive). In this way, the defining characteristic of the male intra-organizational network is that it is centered around status (individuals at the highest hierarchical level) or power (individuals who hold important positions or who have connections with influential people), which Fombrun (1982, p. 281) dubbed an "instrumental network" recalling Lin's heterophilic social interactions (1995) "transactional networking" (Fombrun, 1982, p. 280). As for female intra-organizational networking, it tended to be more centered on exchanges (emotional support, feedback, information exchanges between colleagues, friendship networking) along the lines of an "expressive network" (Fombrun, 1982, p. 281) with homophilic interactions homophiles (Lin, 1995) or what Fombrun (1982, p. 280 and p. 281) called the "attribute network." As Durbin has pointed out (2011, p. 100) "homophily appears to be strong among women as they share similar identities or organizational group affiliations or both." Although women stress that organizational networking represents a means of securing opportunities to advance their careers, it actually constitutes, for them, a network of friends within the firm. Hence, as Kankkunen (2014) has stated, in female-dominated industries, hierarchical networks are virtually non-existent, in contrast to male-dominated sectors where hierarchical networks are prevalent.

Figure 5

Type of internal network used, by gender

Men	Women
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Instrumentally-driven networking and Transactional networking</i> (Fombrun 1982)	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>"Attribute network" and "Expressive network"</i> (Fombrun 1982)
<input type="checkbox"/> Heterophilic Interactions (Lin, 1995)	<input type="checkbox"/> Homophilic Interactions (Lin, 1995)
<input type="checkbox"/> Objective: build strong ties with people in power	<input type="checkbox"/> Objective: develop a friendship and support network, if attempts to gain access to power networks fail

All of the foregoing suggests that in-firm networking strategies differ depending on gender. Women continue to run up against the "glass ceiling," as Durbin (2011, p.97) has stated: "Men, as the dominant group, may want to maintain their dominance by excluding women from informal interactions". Burt (1992) had already determined that strong ties within the networks offer the most advantages, in terms of mobility (especially internal mobility) for men more so than for women. Indeed, to exploit that mobility, it is necessary to have strong ties with strategic partners. However, while men do, in fact, have interactions within their intra-organizational network with these partners, that proves far more difficult for women. They tend to have an internal networking behavior that favors expressive networking, developed by building ties with, notably, other women in the firm (Ibarra, 1992).

The impact of gender and networking on career strategy

In terms of career development strategy, our research shows that men tend to employ a strategy focused on internal mobility and, as a result, one focused, more specifically, on instrumentally-driven networking with the objective of "increasing internal visibility," in the words of Forret and Dougherty (2004, p. 420).

In line with Burt (1992), men within the firm develop strong and heterophilic ties, as defined by Lin (1995), with strategic partners (who occupy higher positions than they) and who may be useful in their careers, whereas

women favor strong homophilic ties within a friendship network. For men, career strategy, notably via internal mobility, is centered on intra-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.35$, $p<0.0001$), whereas female career strategy development tends to be oriented mainly toward inter-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.18$, $p<0.0001$). Moreover, as Ibarra has argued (1992, p. 439) women tend, more so than men, to make a distinction between their models of choice for building ties, relying on greater heterophilia in their instrumentally-driven network than in expressive networking. Female social exchanges are characterized by what Blau (1964, p.112) calls "an intermediate case between pure calculation of advantage and pure expression of love."

Intention to develop one's employability: what roles do networking and gender play in explaining differences?

The intention to develop one's employability, as measured on the scale developed by Hategekimana and Roger (2000) is based on 3 factors, which we will discuss in succession below.

Professional training: a constant among men and women in terms of intention to develop employability

Men and women are willing to improve their professional training, as part of their intention to develop their employability, using it to foster professional encounters and mobility (change in field of activity). Women associate professional training with personal studies

in their free time, exchanges of information and changes in work (i.e. work identity). As for men, they prefer to associate professional training with mobility as part of their efforts to change departments within the firm. In that way, as Gatignon-Turnau et al. (2015) suggest, *“staying in the same position more than 4 or 5 years is often seen as running the risk of being deemed unemployable, which renders all the more threatening any unforeseen events that might have adverse consequences on their professional life, and lead to a loss of control over their career.”* Indeed, in today’s turbulent environment, employees need to be proactive when developing their careers (Presbitero, 2015). Although both men and women link professional training and expressive intra-organizational networking, men—unlike women—will also exploit the strong ties they possess in their social network.

Exchanges of information: a common challenge in terms of career proactivity and personal adaptability but implemented differently by men and women

The exchange of information (individual human capital) is crucial for employability. Hence, Witterkind et al. (2010, p. 569) have stated *“the important role of opportunity awareness, or in other words, information about employment opportunities, for example, through job search, has also been addressed in human capital theory.”*

As regards the exploitation of networks as part of the intention to develop employability, men and women take advantage of professional gatherings (forums, conferences, professional groups, etc.) to join networks. For women, these gatherings afford opportunities to meet and create links with people who have clout (in terms of status and power, which supports the findings of Kumra and Vinnicombe (2010), who showed that women are well aware of the need to build social capital and use “the management of impression” to advance their career.

For both men and women, the intention to develop employability transpires through the exchange of information (between colleagues and co-workers, in an effort to learn about

the actual employment situation, or to chart their career paths and anticipate factors likely to have an impact at each career stage, etc.). Exchanges of information relating to changes in their organizational work setting or in the industry as a whole can help individuals adopt a proactive attitude in the face of upheavals in the immediate work environment or in the changing world of employment. As Fugate and Kinicki (2008, p. 509) have suggested, a proactive outlook toward their job and career *“reflects people’s tendencies and actions to gain information potentially affecting their jobs and career”*. Also, exchanges of information facilitate employability by enabling individuals to adapt because, as Fugate et al. (2004, p. 22) have argued, they are able to *“scan the environment to learn what jobs are available and what experience and skills are required. They are then able to compare the market opportunities with their personal profile and interests”*. Networking makes it possible for men and women to gain access to information that is useful for occupational purposes.

However, there is a series of convergences as well as divergences that arise to cause individuals to maintain a certain type of network depending on the kind of information being sought. For example, when women want to obtain information about the employment situation and the job market, they rely on their expressive intra-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.32$, $p<0.0001$), whereas men engage in professional social networking (e.g. LinkedIn, Viadeo) and instrumentally-driven, inter-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.40$, $p<0.0001$). When men and women exchange information about the actual employment situation and foreseeable job trends and developments, they turn to intra-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.27$, $p<0.0001$) as well as, for women, their instrumentally-driven, inter-organizational networking ($r^2= 0.430$, $p<0.0001$). When men and women want to join professional discussion groups in order to develop their employability, they exploit their intra-organizational network.

However, in contrast to women, men tend to link their intention to develop employability with exchanges of information, by connecting these exchanges with mobility (department change, change of work station). There is a

noticeable difference between men and women, then, regarding the interplay between the intention to develop employability, networks and mobility.

Mobility and career paths: noticeable divergences between men and women

Mobility is also a key concern for women as much as for men in their intention to develop employability. However, they do not rely on the same type of networking when seeking mobility. That is, if women want to want to exploit mobility to change jobs, they exploit their expressive intra-organizational network (individuals within the firm that they consider to be their friends who could help them to advance their careers) ($r^2= 0.40$, $p<0.0001$), whereas men will rely on higher ranking people to drive that mobility ($r^2= 0.29$, $p<0.0001$).

On the issue of **internal mobility**, when men want to make a change within the organization, they turn to their expressive intra-organizational network. By contrast, women turn to their inter-organizational network and call on their weak ties (people with connections to important people in other firms or in their community). That shows that, inside their firm, women still do not have direct access to decision-makers to facilitate their mobility and they have to go through other people to reach people who wield clout.

On the issue of **external mobility**, women tend to capitalize on their heterophilic ties as well as on both their intra and inter-organizational network. As for men, they tend to concentrate on their inter-organizational network by calling on both homophilic and heterophilic ties. However, the fewer heterophilic social interactions that men have within their inter-organizational network (powerful and influential members), the more they favor internal mobility.

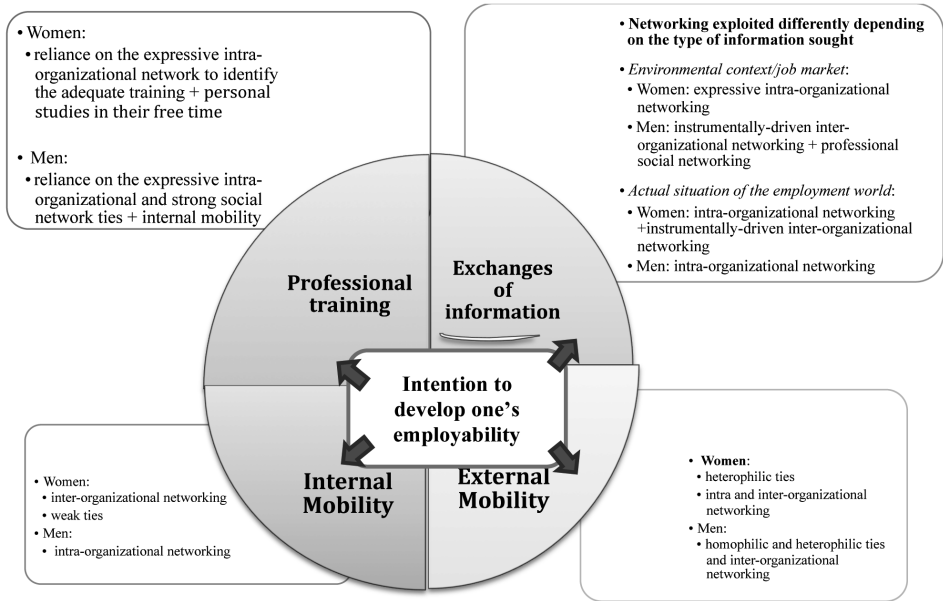
Our findings emphasize that men, more so than women, favor internal mobility in driving their intention to develop their employability. To do that, they activate their intra-organizational network comprised of heterophilic ties ($r^2= 0.35$, $p<0.0001$), contrary to women, who prefer to rely on external mobility ($r^2= 0.31$, $p<0.0001$).

These findings are in line with the work of Valcour and Tolbert (2003), which showed that men tend to capitalize on internal mobility more than women. Their results show that *“intra- and inter-organizational mobility are both influenced by gender and family characteristics. Men are more likely to experience job shifts within an employer, while women are more likely to move across employers”* (p. 782). These different approaches to mobility affect the way in which men and women exhibit their intention to develop their employability. Valcour and Tolbert suggest that women are more committed to the *“boundaryless”* career model, which allows them *“to integrate their family demands successfully with their careers”* (p. 783). Men, however, tend to develop their employability more through the traditional career model, by relying on intra organizational networks and, especially, promotion opportunities. These observations led Valcour and Tolbert to argue that (p. 783): *“boundaryless career and traditional career patterns split on gender lines, with men continuing to pursue traditional careers while women pursue boundaryless careers.”*

Hence, our results (see figure 6) tend to confirm the findings of these studies, namely, that women prefer to develop their external employability, notably by forming their own instrumentally-driven, inter-organizational networks, whereas men prefer to develop their internal employability by forming and developing instrumentally-driven, intra-organizational networks. Indeed, as Ibarra (1993) has shown, a number of studies have pointed out that women in particular have limited access or are excluded from, intra-organizational networks, requiring them to make *“strategic choices among structurally limited alternatives is offered”* (Ibarra, 1993, p. 56).

Figure 6

Summary of the effect of gender and networking on employees' intention to develop their employability



Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore men's and women's intention to develop employability and how they exploit their networks and pursue their career strategies to that end. In spite of the inherent limitations in this study, in terms of sampling and the survey measuring scales used, the results obtained clearly point to a relationship between intention to develop employability, networks and gender; they also reveal a difference in career strategies according to gender.

In particular, studies show that internal mobility emerges as men's preferred means of driving their intention to develop their employability. Intra-organizational mobility appears, in that regard, as a relevant and useful tool for developing employability, provided that it is part of a genuine plan to construct a career path. Indeed, a possible danger is that this might become a source of disruption (Janand, 2013) as employees dissipate their talents by hopping from career to career without de-

veloping a solid career track record, in terms of area of business or field of expertise. This highlights the fundamental role of the human resources department, in helping employees to orient themselves, and, second, in supporting their employability, through well-structured career paths within business lines, for example.

As for women, they tend, especially, to exploit their inter-organizational network in an effort to adopt career strategies that can be best characterized as "boundaryless" as the term was defined by Arthur and Rousseau (1996). This explains the willingness on the part a number of French CAC 40 groups to develop female-focused internal networks, in order to facilitate women's careers. Nonetheless, we might wonder if the development of such women-oriented networks is appropriate for creating or reinforcing strong ties with those in power (in a strategic or high-ranking position in the firm). By referring to McKie *et al.* (2013), it would also make far more sense, in our view, for firms to better acknowledge

women's specific work-related expectations (enhancing work-time control, and gaining greater flexibility in order to meet family and work demands) in their career strategy choices. It would be more appropriate, then, for firms to promote "career communities" networking (Parker *et al.*, 2004), rather than gendered networking (which might be seen as "positive discrimination"); Tams and Arthur, 2011), bringing together men and women to engage in discussion groups or to reflect on practices or traineeships related to a given profession, business activity, etc.

In conclusion, the exploitation and development of networks must be seen as having strategic implications for both employees and firms. As Arthur and Rousseau (1996, p.11) have stated, "network relations simultaneously serve the careers interests of individual actors and the strategic interests of firms". And so, beyond individual motivations, "employers gain from highlighting the employability of their employees. Indeed, increasing the ability to demonstrate flexibility and mobility enables organizations to remain adaptable to changing technologies and customer demands, and thereby improve their competitive edge and competitive position" (Müller and Djuatio, 2011, p. 58). Allowing and fostering networking, without making any gender distinctions and moving toward "career communities" would be a strategic move for firms because that would cater to employees' individual aspirations in terms of career strategies and, by developing workers' employability, would contribute to firms' capacity to remain agile in increasingly turbulent times.

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