

CAREER OR EMPLOYABILITY – HOW NETWORKING COMPETENCES DETERMINE THEM¹

Marzena Fryczyńska
Warsaw School of Economics, Poland
mfrycz@sgh.waw.pl

Alena Ivanova
Warsaw School of Economics, Poland
workdocli@gmail.com

Abstract:

The article is an analysis of employee networking competence as a determinant of employability and future career prospects. A body of literature has been researched, the research concept as well as the operationalization of variables have been formulated and the results of empirical tests have been presented. Survey research has been conducted among employed people and people in training or receiving education (N=131). Stated hypotheses that there are a strong and positive correlation between networking competence and employability ($r_s=0.305$, $p=0.01$) as well as networking competence and career development ($r_s=0.283$, $p=0.01$) were both confirmed. However, the strongest correlation between employability and career development has been observed within the sub-category of networking competence, namely the ability to establish personal contacts (with employability $r_s=0.403$, $p=0.01$ and career success $r_s=0.461$, $p=0.01$). The subcompetences: of establishing contacts remotely is not correlated with employability and career success, maintaining contacts remotely is significantly ($p=0.05$), though not very strongly, correlated to employability ($r_s=0.220$) Maintaining personal contacts is correlated to employability $r_s=0.212$, $p=0.05$, and career success $r_s=0.251$, $p=0.01$, however not as strongly as establishing new contacts in person. Personal activities undertaken as a networking competence explain a larger degree of variability in the employability and career development of employees, especially if they are proactive and take initiative, i.e. establish contacts in person. The impact of networking competence with regard to remote contacts is unclear and requires further study.

Keywords: employability, career success, networking, competence networking competencies

1. CAREER AND EMPLOYABILITY – THEORY APPROACH

1.1. Employability

The problem of employability shall be taken up from several perspectives (Wiśniewska, 2015). In times of economic instability and labour market globalization that are marked by unemployment risks, employability is a mechanism impacting demand and supply on the labour market on the macro level. In Europe, employability is the foundation of public policies, which are to provide the security and flexibility of employment for the workers. (Marzec 2010, p. 132-135).

For the institutions employing workers, employability means management practices (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, Kaiser, 2013), including those supported by the State. On the other hand, the concept proposed by Hogan, assumes that employability gives employers a chance to keep newly employed staff effective. Employability is also reflected in the interactions and relations between the organization and its employees. The research results (Veld, Semeijn, van Vuuren, 2015) indicate that both organizations and employees are responsible for enhancing employability.

More Rothwell, Arnold (2007) defined employability as “the ability to keep the job one has or to get the job one desires.” The concept of employability has been described in a four-field matrix created as a result of crossing two dimensions: dimension 1/internal vs external labour market and dimension 2/

¹ The research reported in this publication was supported, in part, by the National Science Center, Poland Grant Number UMO-2015/17/B/HS4/02039 entitled "Network Competences of Knowledge Workers".

personal vs. occupational attributes. It assumes that the employability of a person is achieved inside a certain organization as well as in the labour market with regard to personal characteristics (in the current workplace and the labour market) and the interest in job positions available in the current workplace and outside of it.

The outcome of employability is then not only the employee maintaining his job here and now. It is the combined potential of employee competences gathered in the course of work that is allocated in a manner consistent with their expectations. The above mentioned concept of employability, despite the fact that it takes into account the organizational and labour market contexts, represents an employee as its key subject, as it is his self- assessment, as well as the opportunities within the organization and on the labour market that determine the changes in the employment status.

The key role of someone creating one's own employability is played by a person active on a labour market or aiming to enter the labour market. From the psychological perspective, Fugate et al. (2004, p.15) describe employability 'as a psychosocial construct that embodies individual characteristics that foster adaptive cognition, behaviour, and affect, and enhance the individual-work interface'. In this perspective, the psychological condition of the employed people is the driving force of employability. This has been underlined by Fugate (2006), expressing a dispositional employability as 'a constellation of individual differences that predispose employees to (pro) actively adapt to their work and career environments'.

In a concise competence based view, an individual's employability is "the continuous fulfilment, acquisition or creation of work through the optimal use of competences". The main competence of employability is the occupational expertise complemented by four competences: anticipation and optimization, personal flexibility, corporate sense, and balance. (Van Der Heijde, Van Der Heijde, 2006) These competences give an individual an opportunity to perform their work and adapt to changes present in the internal and external labour market.

This research treats employability as an individual feature of people who have the competences needed on the labour market, reflected by a positive attitude with regard to the future of their career, are ready to react to changes at work and anticipate them in a manner consistent with their needs.

1.2. Career

The boundaryless career is based on the assumption that each individual "navigates the changing work landscape by enacting a career characterized by different levels of physical and psychological movement" (Sullivan& Arthur, 2006, Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The protean career is focused on individual career management rather than on the organizational (Hall, 2002). Adopting a protean career means taking responsibility for one's own career path and individually analysing the professional situation, competences, the search for a job, facilitating further growth, establishing new contacts and building professional relationships (Hall, 2002). They are focused on increasing their work prospects in a manner consistent with their personal priorities.

When dealing with a new work and career model, including boundaryless and protean career models, employability emerges as one of the key career objectives. Employability becomes the objective of career development and its achievement is the measurement of career success. A satisfactory definition needed to carry out the empirical research is the one proposed by Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz (1995, p. 486), which reads as follows: 'the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements one has accumulated as a result of one's work experiences'.

An objective assessment of the career is carried out on the basis of past achievements, e.g. the number of promotions, salary increases and the position held (Hall, 2002). At present, when employability is one of the career development objectives, career success means performing work in a manner that is consistent with one's objectives. This can, for instance, be measured by the number of months that a person is unemployed or is performing work that is incompatible with their expectations (the fewer the months, the more successful the career). The subjective career assessment encompasses the opinions the employee holds on his own career, which, in the view of Hall (2002), are as important as the objective achievements. They can present an individual perception of one's career satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley, 1990), in relation to one's own values and past plans and comparisons to other individuals who have similar profiles (Heslin, 2003). The career success assessment relates to the past or, at most, the present moment in time, whereas employability is a forecast of career success. To meet career assessment research objectives, subjective measures, i.e. the opinions of the employed, were used, however they did regard the "hard" career assessments of, for example, promotions, work evaluations, and "soft" career assessments of, for example, satisfaction or the degree of realizing personal career objectives.

2. NETWORKING COMPETENCES – THEORETICAL APPROACH

Gibson et.al. 2014 analysed the available networking concepts as employees' attributes, which allowed them to define it as "a form of goal-directed behaviour, both inside and outside of an organization, focused on creating, cultivating, and utilizing interpersonal relationships".

Based on research review, Forret (2014) states that networking helps during a job search, as it provides the work seeking with information, emotional and social support, feedback, and instrumental support. With networking the employees achieve better work results and engage in more ambitious projects (Thompson, 2005, Burt 2005). Their salaries grow (Seidel, Polzer & Stewart 2000, R. Burt 2005), and they are more frequently promoted (Podolony & Baron, 1997). Networking facilitates career development, although surprisingly, due to the increasing importance of boundaryless and protean career models, this happens rather inside the organization than outside. The results achieved thanks to the networking activities are the same when measuring career success. Participation in the network relationship is important for professional success (Gayani Fernando, Amaratunga, Haigh 2014). Fryczyńska empirically shows that networking behaviours correlate significantly, but moderately with the career satisfaction measure ($r_s = 0,370$) and less so ($r_s = 0,306$) with perceived career opportunities, which nearly means the same as employability.

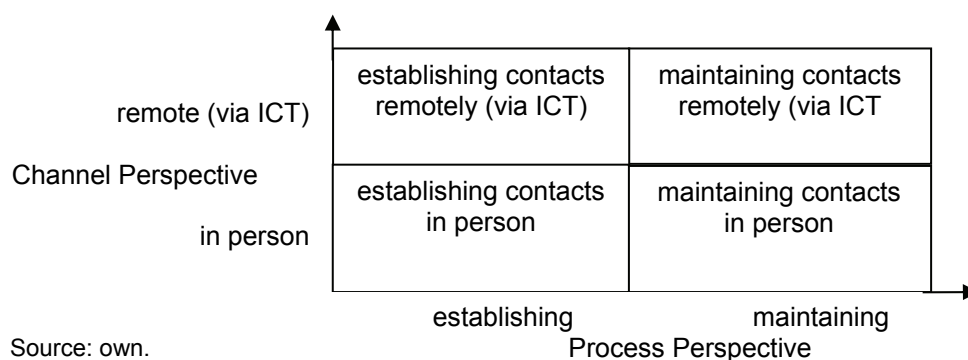
Based on the above theoretical presentation a research hypothesis is formulated:

H1. Career development and workers' employability depend on networking competence.

One of the first networking definitions, as networking behaviours, was proposed by Forret and Dougherty (2001). It refers to proactive attempts by individuals to develop and maintain relationships with others for the purpose of work or career benefits and they also prepared a measurement tool. The authors of networking set networking in the context of competence resources based management and human capital management. The new networking construct was the networking competence of employees, which means "their knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motives elicited during establishing and maintaining contacts interpersonally and by ICT tools in order to work effectively now and in the future".

We assume that networking competence is identified by two dimensions: (1) a process of establishing and maintaining social contacts and (2) an interpersonal and remote channels function. (Picture 1). As a result, we can speak of four subcompetences, i.e. establishing interpersonal contacts, establishing contacts via ICT tools, maintaining interpersonal contacts, and maintaining contacts via ICT tools.

Picture 1: Concept of networking competence



Source: own.

The following hypothesis is formulated based on the theoretical concept of networking competence, varied in internal processes and channels through which the contacts are established or maintained:

H 2a. The greater the intensity of the process of maintaining contacts in person is, the higher the assessments of career development and worker employability.

H 2b. The greater the intensity of the process of maintaining contacts remotely is, the higher the assessments of career development and worker employability.

3. RESEARCH

3.1 Research process

The research results presented were a part of a greater research project titled Networking competences of knowledge workers', carried out by the authors, in the years 2016-2017, at the

Warsaw School of Economics. The questionnaire forms were distributed among employed people and people improving their qualifications. In November/December 2016, 134 forms were submitted. The research tool consisted of: 40 statements diagnosing the behavioural manifestations of networking competence, statements diagnosing career (n=14), employability (n=8) and personal data questions: sex, age, education, occupation, years of experience, the number of work hours per week, professional status indicating the form of employment and position held and identifying the employer in terms of sector size. The statements were assessed on a 7-point scale, the frequency scale of the networking competence statements was described as follows: 1=never/nearly never, 2=very rarely, 3=rarely, 4=neither rarely, nor frequently, 5=frequently, 6=very frequently and 7=nearly always/always, and the remaining statements used the Likert scale with: 1= entirely disagree 2= mostly disagree, 3= somewhat disagree 4= neither agree, nor disagree, 5=somewhat agree, 6= mostly agree, 7= entirely agree. The authors also used reversed statements to reduce the evaluation error rooted on a selected point of the scale.

3.2 Sample of the survey

131 respondents participated in the study. The majority of surveyed participants were women - 61.8%. Men comprised 36.6% of the surveyed population. More than half of the respondents (53.4%) were 25 years of age and younger, and the smallest group was represented by people between 46 and 55 years of age (3.1%). After analysing the education of the people surveyed, the following becomes clear: the most numerous group comprised of undergraduate higher education (44.3%). The second largest group were people holding master degrees (30.5%). A little less than a quarter of the respondents (22.9%) had secondary education. Every third interviewee (71%) declared they are employed under a contract of employment. 51.9 % of the respondents had less than 3 years of total employment history. 16% of the surveyed candidates were employed between 5-10 years, and 15.3% had 11-20 years of employment history. The respondents varied in terms of working hours. Half of the respondents worked the working hours typical for full-time employment (40 hours a week) 15.3 % worked less than 40 hours (less than full-time), and every third worked over 40 hours. Personal details of the respondents are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: The demographics by gender, age and education

Gender	%	Age	%	Education	%
A woman	61.8	up to 25 years of age	53.4	Basic vocational	0.8
A man	36.6	26-35 years of age	16.8	Secondary	22.9
		36-45 years of age	16.8	Undergraduate university	44.3
		46-55 years of age	3.1	Graduate Masters	30.5
		56-65 years of age		Doctoral	
		over 65 years of age			
In total	98.5	In total	90.1	In total	98.5
Data missing	1.5	Data missing	9.9	Data missing	1.5
In total	100.0		100.0		100.0

Source: Own.

Table 2. Characteristics of professional status, average number of working hours per week and employment history of the respondents.

Professional Status	%	Length of employment	%	Number of hours	%
Employed under the contract of employment	71.0	No professional experience	2.3	up to 40 hours	15.3

Employed under a civil law contract	23.7	0.2 -3 years	51.9	40 hours	49.6
Sole proprietorship	1.5	3 – 4 years	7.6	over 40 hours	32.8
Unemployed	0.0	5-10 years of age	16.0		
		11-20 years of age	15.3		
		21-30 years of age	3.1		
		31-40 years of age	0.0		
		41 years and more	0.0		
In total	96.2	In total	96.2	In total	97.7
Data missing	3.8	Data missing	3.8	Data missing	2.3
In total	100.0		100.0		100.0

Source: Own.

3.3 Hypotheses verification

The data obtained has been analysed statistically to verify the previously set hypotheses. The Pearson's correlation coefficient has been used to measure the linear dependence between the following variables: networking competence, employability and career success. We have also analysed four subcompetences, i.e. establishing connections in person, establishing remote connections, maintaining connections in person, maintaining remote connections with the remaining variables, i.e. employability and career success.

The first part of the analysis was aimed to verify the research hypotheses concerning the correlation between networking competence and the workers' employability. The results obtained indicate a positive correlation between the networking competence and career success ($r_s=0.283$, $p=0.01$) and employability ($r_s=0.305$, $p=0.01$). Thus, the results obtained at test confirmed of H1 hypothesis.

The intensity of this correlation is not very high. It is, however, statistically significant and cannot be ignored. The next analysis was the test of correlation between each of the four subcompetences and employability as well as career success.

The values of Pearson correlation coefficients between the subcategories of networking competence and the indicators of employability and career success are included in Table 3.

Table 3: The results of correlation assessment for evaluating: subcompetences, career success and employability

Networking competence and its subcompetence	Career	Employability
Networking competence	0,305*	0,283*
Establishing contacts in person	0.461*	0.403*
Establishing contacts remotely (via ICT)	0.036	0.057
Maintaining contacts in person	0.251*	0.212**
Maintaining contacts remotely (via ICT)	0.123	0.220**

* - correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (both ways)

** - correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (both ways)

Source: own.

Based on the results listed in Table 3 it is evident that the majority of correlations are statistically significant and the strength of these relations is clearly varied. One of the interesting aspects of the analysed data are the weakest and strongest values of the correlation coefficient.

The 'establishing contacts in person' variable correlates the strongest with the career success variable ($r_s=0.461$, $p=0.01$) and employability ($r_s=0.406$, $p=0.01$). Whereas the correlation between employability and career success with the 'establishing contacts remotely (via ICT)' variable is weak and insignificant. This means that the " 'establishing contacts in person' variable is an important variable impacting the possibility of changing employment in the future and corresponding to the intensity and success of the workers' careers.

The diagnosis of two networking subcompetences: maintaining contacts in person and maintaining contacts in a remote manner with employability and career success points to a weaker correlation. No correlation coefficient reached the value of $r_s \geq 0.3$. Whereas, the levels of significance show a statistically significant and positive correlation between the analysed variables, with the exception of maintaining contacts in a remote manner and career success.

As a result, the raised hypotheses of H2a and H2b have been verified. It is, however, difficult to confirm that they have been positively verified, as the strongest correlation of career success and employability is seen with establishing contacts in person, while maintaining contacts in a remote way is in a rather weak way correlated with employability.

4. CONCLUSION

The addressed research problem regarded networking competence and its impact on career success and employability. Consistent with our assumptions and assumed hypothesis, the networking competence is in a significant and satisfying correlation with both career success ($r_s=0.283$, $p=0.01$) and employability ($r_s=0.305$, $p=0.01$), coinciding with research results of other authors presented in the theoretical part. Interestingly, connecting with people in person, one of the subcategories of networking competence had the most significant impact on career success and employability, respectively $r_s=0.461$, $p=0.01$, $r_s=0.406$, $p=0.01$. Statements, which are the 'establishing contacts in person' operationalization relate to such manifestations of competence, where employees at a workplace or outside of it take initiative to personally meet people, who are professionals or cooperators, and can be useful at work or future employment. Making a connection is the beginning of acquaintance. It can develop into a more permanent relationship, which would result from joint actions and trust vested in the other person. In line with these assumptions, maintaining connections, either in person or in a remote manner, creates positive conditions for these connections to further develop and turn into relations. Relations become permanent, afford easy access to information and other resources held by others within the network. These conditions should facilitate the growth of professional achievements, career satisfaction, competences needed at work and within a wider context of the labour market. The conducted research confirms that maintaining contacts in person is a significant predicate of career development and employability. Its intensity, however is not very high, respectively $r_s=0.251$, $p=0.001$ and $r_s=0.212$, $p=0.005$. Maintaining remote contacts increases employability $r_s=0.220$ and $p=0.05$, but is not related to career development. Remote contact, carried out by ICT tools, although very frequent in professional and other situations, does not seem to be a clear factor impacting career development and employability within the framework of workers' networking system.

The results obtained are indicative and not representative. The tested sample was not a very large number and mainly included young people with higher education. Nevertheless, young people, who use the ICT techniques efficiently, and who were overrepresented in this study, should have impacted the results. This should point to a greater significance of a remote connection on networking competence and employment. However, this was not the case.

The obtained research results are part of the outcomes of the research project titled: Networking competences of knowledge workers. While undertaking subsequent stages of the research work, the hypotheses will be verified with pertinent tools among a larger and more representative research population.

REFERENCE LIST

1. Arthur, M.B., & Rousseau, D. (1996). *The boundaryless career*. New York: Oxford University Press.
2. Forret M. (2014). Networking as a Job-Search Behavior and Career Management Strategy. In K. Ute-Christine & A.J. Edwin van Hooft (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Job Loss and Job Search*.
3. Forret, M.L., Dougherty, T.S. (2001). Correlates of Networking Behavior for Managerial and Professional Employees. *Group and Organization Management*, 23(3), 283-311.
4. Fugate, M. (2006). Employability. In J. Greenhaus & G. Callanan (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of career development* (Vol.1, pp. 267-271). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
5. Fugate, M., Kinicki, A. J., & Scheck C.L. (2004). Employability: A psycho-social construct, its dimensions, and applications. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, 65, 14-38.
6. Burt, R. (2005). *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7. Gayani Fernando, N., Amaratunga, D., & Haigh, R. (2014). The career advancement of the professional women in the UK construction industry The career success factors. *Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology*, 12 (1), 53-70.
8. Gibson, C., Hardy III, J. M. and Buckley, R. (2014). Understanding the role of networking in organizations. *Career Development International*, 19 (2), 146 – 161.
9. Greenhaus, J. H., & Parasuraman, S., & Wormley, W. (1990). M. Effects of race on organizational experiences, job performance evaluations, and career outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal* 33, 1, 64–86.
10. Hall, D. T. (2002). Careers in and out of organizations. *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage*.
11. Heslin, P. (2005). Conceptualizing and evaluating career success. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 26 (2), 113–136.
12. Hogan, R., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Kaiser, R.B.(2013). Employability and Career Success: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Reality. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 6, 3–16.
13. Judge, T. A., & Cable, D. M., & Boudreau, J. W., & Bretz, R. D. (1995). An empirical investigation of the predictors of executive career success. *Personnel Psychology*, 48, 485–519.
14. Marzec I. (2010). Zatrudnialność jako czynnik bezpieczeństwa zatrudnienia i sukcesu na współczesnym rynku pracy, *Zeszyty naukowe wyższej szkoły zarządzania ochroną pracy w Katowicach*, 1(6), 127-138.
15. Podolony, J. & Baron, J. (1997). Resources and Relationships. Social networks and Mobility in the Workplace. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 673–693.
16. Rothwell A.,& J. Arnold (2007). Self-perceived employability: Development and validation of a scale, *Personnel Review*. Vol. 36, 1, 23-41.
17. Seidel, M., Polzer, J. & Stewart, K. (2000). Friends in High Places. The Effects of Social Networks on Discrimination in Salary Negotiations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 45(1), 1–24.
18. Sullivan, S., & Arthur M. (2006). The Evolution of the Boundaryless Career Concept: Examining Physical and Psychological Mobility. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69(1), 19–29.
19. Thompson, J.A. (2005). Proactive personality and job performance: A social capital perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90, 1011–1017.
20. Van Der Heijde C. M., & van Der Heijden Beatrice I. J. M., (Fall 2006). A Competence-Based and Multidimensional Operationalization and Measurement of Employability, *Human Resource Management*. Vol. 45, 3, 449–476.
21. Veld M., & Semeijn J., & van Vuuren T. (2015). Enhancing perceived employability An interactionist perspective on responsibilities of organizations and employees, *Personnel Review*. Vol. 44, 6, 866 – 882. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/PR-05-2014-0100>
22. Wiśniewska S. (2015). Zatrudnialność – pojęcie, wymiary, determinanty. *Edukacja ekonomistów i menedżerów*, 1(35),11–24.