

EMPLOYEE NETWORKING BEHAVIORS IN POLAND: PURSUE FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES LINKAGES

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Abstract

The article explores the phenomenon of networking in human capital management. Specifically, it addresses the problem of employee networking behaviors. The goal was to present the general trends in employee networking behaviors in Poland as well as to verify how networking behaviors are differentiated by socio-demographic factors: gender, age, education attainment, the length of professional experience or employment status and job position level. In order to achieve that goal, an empirical study involving 373 respondents was designed and conducted by the authors, using the adapted version of a networking behaviors questionnaire first designed and applied by for studies in the USA. The questionnaire measured the frequency of networking behaviors in general, as well as the frequency of five sub-types of networking behaviors identified on the basis of previous studies: Maintaining Contacts, Socializing, Engaging in Professional Activities, Participating in Church and Community, Increasing Internal Visibility. The article presents the scope of up to date research findings in the field conducted by other scientists. It then describes the study sample, setting and method, as well as the hypotheses. Data overview is presented to show the general trends in the findings. The hypotheses are verified. The data shows that the frequency of employee engagement in networking behaviors is rather low and counts 2.62 on a 6-point scale, and it differs between the specific scales. Furthermore, the authors found out that gender, age, education attainment, the length of professional experience or employment status do not differentiate the frequency of undertaking networking behaviors. Only in the case of job position level (managers vs non-managers) statistically significant difference exists in the frequency of networking behaviors. This goes along with other research findings. These findings are shown to support intercultural competencies research and propose further research directions.

Key words: network behaviors, networking, professional career, career development, competences.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management.

1. Network behavior and the present state of research

Networking is a phenomenon increasingly regarded as crucial to human capital management. This trend is largely due to the impact that networking behaviors have on Human Resource (HR) practices and tools. Research on networking behavior stems from management's network paradigm (Czakoń, 2011). Forret and Dougherty (2001) define networking activities as "proactive attempts by individuals to develop and maintain relationships with others for the purpose of mutual benefit in their work or career". Indeed, networking is a characteristic of both employees and the organizations that employ them. Maintaining inter-organizational networks among enterprises and organizations (employers) requires employees to participate in the employer's network of relationships. Yet employees do not participate in such networks in order to realize professional tasks and/or goals.

Research on the phenomenon of networking dates stems from the Social Sciences and dates back to the 1930's. This body of literature includes the following concepts: six degrees of separation (Milligram, 1967), weak interpersonal ties (Granovetter, 1983) and structural holes (Burt, 1992). Research to-date tackles various issues including: work satisfaction (Kilduff & Krackhardt, 1994), conservativeness of all actors in a network (Brass, 1995) and the conservativeness of managers (Burt, 2004). It seeks to explain the impact of network participation on: work results (Uzzi, Linden, Wayne & Kraimer, 2001), recruitment (Fernandez, Castilla & Moore, 2000), employee assessments (Burt, 2005), career development (Higgins & Kram, 2001), promotions (Podolony & Baron, 1997) changes in pay

(Burt, 2005; Seidel, Polzer & Stewart, 2000) and labor-market mobility (Granovetter, 1983). These studies show that networking leads to the intensification of labor market results and improves career achievements. According to Ritter (2002), the networking competencies of any company derive from the relations between the company itself and its employees. The author thus defines networking as “the tasks and the degree of network qualifications held and used by people in order to maintain relationships of enterprises” (Ritter, 2002). Wolff and Mosser (2008) identify networking as a ‘behavioral syndrome’, i.e. „behaviors aimed at creating, maintaining and utilizing [of] informal relationships that voluntarily provide value (or have such potential) for professional activities as they voluntarily provide access to assets and maximize joint advantages” (Moser & Wolff, 2008). Forret and Dougherty (2001) examine network behaviors as an individual perspective (i.e. from the perspective of employee) and define networking behavior as “individual efforts in developing and maintaining relationships with others who have the ability to promote the work and career”. These were the products of studying career management strategy during an era of boundary less careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Kram, 1996).

2. Networking behaviors or competences debate

Networking has also been shown to be a tool by which employees take responsibility for the development of their own career(s). Although the organizational career development system is essential, “the individual (i.e. the employee) is considered to be the main” (Valickas & Gražulis, 2014). In this construct, conceived by employees, career possibilities are related to objective career possibilities and subjective evaluation. The subjective evaluation is viewed as most important for employees’ career development.

Forret and Dougherty (2001) advanced this research by creating and validating a measurement scale for networking behaviors. The authors completed an explanatory factor analysis to determine the dimensions of 33 primary behavior items. Reliabilities of at least 0.65 were attained for five dimensions and included: (1) maintaining contacts, (2) socializing, (3) engaging in professional activities, (4) participating in church and community, and finally, (5) increasing internal visibility. Results showed that employees who engaged in socializing behaviors that aimed to increase their internal visibility (for example: taking on prestigious tasks, having lunch with the boss and/or being recognized by a large number of co-workers) found themselves at an advantage for possible within-company promotions. Those, who focused on maintaining contacts outside of the company and/or engaged in professional development activities faced a wider scope of possibilities for job change (i.e. change of either employer and/or vocation). These five dimensions may be regarded as competency labels as described by specified behaviors and here, as behaviors items. This is due to the theoretical approach used, as it presents each competency as a set of behavioral indicators. Each results from the knowledge, skills, attitudes, style, values and motives of the employees (Rostkowski, 2014; Sienkiewicz, 2013; Boyatzis, 2007; Juchnowicz & Sienkiewicz, 2006). In this original study, networking behavior was not listed as competency. The competency assumption in intercultural competency research is more specified and is regarded as one of the leading perspectives in the competency debate. The intercultural competency is rooted in the conjunction of three important components: knowledge, abilities (skills) and attitudes. In this case, each competency must be described by its respective and specific knowledge, abilities (skills) and attitudes.

3. Empirical Research of Employees Networking Behaviors

This study seeks to expand the existing literature by examining the determinants of networking behavior and its frequency among employees in Poland. Our hypotheses include: H1. The frequency of network behavior varies by gender; H2. The frequency of network

behavior varies by age; H3. The frequency of network behavior by educational attainment; H4. The frequency of network behavior by years of professional experience; H5. Managers engage in networking behavior more frequently than their non-manager counterparts; H6. Persons who are self-employed engage in networking behaviors more frequently than their contracted/salaried counterparts.

3.1. Data and Methods

This study draws upon data collected through the Networking Behaviors Scale (*Forret & Dougherty, 2001*). Before its implementation, the 28-item (closed-ended) questionnaire was translated into Polish and piloted (in paper version) by a sample of 8 native Polish speakers, actively employed, in Poland, during the pilot stage (*2014*). These pilot-study respondents were asked to evaluate the survey instrument for clarity, fluency and comprehension. Next, the questionnaire was edited and improved per consultations conducted with each of the 8 pilot-study respondents.

The final survey tool was implemented between January and March 2015 among a sample of 373 employees who accepted our invitation to participate in this survey. The questionnaire was administered in paper form. Participants were asked to provide their replies using a 6-point scale (where 1 = low frequency and 6 = high frequency) In addition to the questionnaire, participants were also asked to provide data regarding their gender age, education, job experience, employment status, employee title and the economic sector for which they work.

3.2. Descriptive statistics

373 persons were tested, the majority (66%) of whom were women (men constituted only 30% of the sample. and 4% did not specify their gender). A vast majority of respondents were aged 26–35 (45%). The sample's age distribution is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of sample respondents according to age (own study)

Age group	Frequency	Percent
Less than 25	81	21.7
26–35	167	44.8
36–45	86	23.1
46–55	16	4.3
Over 55	8	2.1
No data	15	3.8

More than half of the subjects surveyed reported high levels of educational attainment. Table 2 reveals that 61 percent of the sample completed a Master degree or beyond. Nearly 30 percent of the sample held a Bachelor degree.

Table 2. Educational attainment (own study)

Group	Frequency	Percent
Vocational	1	0.3
High school diploma	18	4.8
BA diploma	111	29.8
MA diploma	218	58.4
PhD.	11	2.9
No data	14	3.8

The survey respondents also differed by their employment status. Only 2.5 percent of the sample reported being unemployed. Table 3 shows that the remaining subjects were active in the labor market at the time during which this study was conducted.

Table 3. Employment status (own study)

Group	Frequency	Percent
Unemployed	9	2.4
Employed on job contract	274	73.5
Employed on civil contract	47	12.6
Self-employed	28	7.5
No data	15	4.0

Table 4 shows the distribution of job experience within our sample. With the exception of those employed for less than one year, the number of individuals derived from the remaining three categories of job experience (i.e. 1–5 years, 6–10 years, and 10+ years) is rather comparable.

Table 4. Years of job experience (own study)

Group	Frequency	Percent
Up to 1 year	20	5.4
1-5 years	130	34.9
6-10 years	89	23.9
Over 10 years	119	31.9
No data	15	4.0

Nearly half (49%) of the subjects were employed by large firms (over 250 employees). The shares of the other categories of firm size in this sample are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Size of employer firm (own study)

Group	Frequency	Percent
Micro	18	4.8
Small	22	5.9
Medium	53	14.2
Large	183	49.1
No data	97	26.0

Respondents were employed by both private (36.2%) and public (36.5%) sector firms. More than half of the subjects surveyed held non-managerial positions (54.7%). Only 18% of the sample reported holding a managerial position in their firm at the time that this survey was conducted. Unfortunately, 27% of the sample did not provide information about their role (position title) in their place of employment.

3.3. Variables and general results

This study uses frequency statistics to present the impact of age, gender, educational attainment, job experience, employment status, sector and position title on network behaviors among employees working in Poland. Network behaviors were measured by a scale

consisting of 5 sub-scales: (1) maintaining contacts, (2) socializing, (3) engaging in professional activities, (4) participating in church and community, (5) increasing internal visibility. The Kolmogorow-Smirnow test was conducted and revealed that none of the above mentioned variables presented with a normal distribution.

Respondents reported rather low network behaviors ($M = 2.62$). Among them they are more focused: on socializing ($M = 2.92$), engaging in professional activities ($M = 2.34$) and maintaining contacts ($M = 2.24$) than on increasing internal visibility ($M = 1.73$) and participating in church and community.

Table 6. Results for network behaviors scales (own study)

Scale	Maximum value available (in points)	Forret & Dougherty (2001) M	Fryczyńska, Fierla & Ciecierski (2015) M
Network behaviors	168		2.62
Maintaining Contacts	30	3.19	2.24
Socializing	42	2.74	2.92
Engaging in Professional Activities	48	1.95	2.34
Participating in Church and Community	24	2.36	0.74
Increasing Internal Visibility	24	3.19	1.73

Table 6 shows the differences of two researches findings. When compared to the findings of Forret and Dougherty (2001) that were captured at the start of the current millennium, employees in Poland in 2015 presented with a significantly smaller frequency of Increasing Internal Visibility, Maintaining Contacts and Participation in Church and Community. Thus, there are only 4 of 28 networking behaviors exceed a half of the scale (counted as a mean), i.e.: *Gone to lunch with persons outside the company? Contacted your friends from college? Talked about sports at work? Stopped by others' officers to say hello?*

The first three of activities are related to socializing activities. The frequency of socializing is a little bit higher than the frequency showed by Forret and Dougherty (2001). In Table 7 are the results for all questions. It is important to note that all questions were answered on a 6-point scale:

Table 7. Additional sub-question results (own study)

Scale	Question	Mean	Median
Maintaining Contacts	Given out business cards?	2.54	2
	Gone to lunch with persons outside the company?	3.18	3
	Given business contacts a phone call to keep In touch?	2.91	3
	Sent card, newspapers clippings, faxes, or e-mail to keep in touch?	2.81	3
	Sent thank you notes or gifts to others who have held you in your work or career?	2.21	2
Socializing	Contacted your friends from college?	3.85	4
	Attended social functions of your organization?	1.80	1
	Gone out for drinks with others after work?	2.82	3
	Participated in social gatherings with people from work (besides going out for drinks)?	2.84	3
	Played golf, tennis and so forth with coworkers or clients?	1.73	1

	Participated in company-sponsored bowling leagues, basketball leagues, and so forth?	1.50	1
	Talked about sports at work?	3.24	3
Engaging in Professional Activities	Attend conferences or trade shows?	2.52	3
	Attended professional seminars or workshops?	2.68	3
	Given professional seminars or workshops?	1.61	1
	Acted as a commentator for a newspaper, magazine, or talk show?	1.70	1
	Taught a course?	2.01	1
	Accepted speaking engagements?	2.09	1
	Published articles in the company's newsletter, professional journals, or trade publications?	1.63	1
	Attended meetings of business – related organizations?	2.31	2
Participating in Church and Community	Attend meetings of civic and social groups, clubs, and so forth?	2.07	2
	Participated in community projects?	1.74	1
	Participated in church work projects?	1.32	1
	Participated in church social functions?	1.46	1
Increasing Internal Visibility	Gone to lunch with your current supervisor?	2.14	2
	Stopped by others' officers to say hello?	3.88	4
	Been on highly visible task forces or committees at work?	2.18	2
	Accepted new, highly visible work assignments?	2.40	2

3.4. Testing of the hypotheses

Each of our study hypotheses were tested and verified. The procedure and outcomes are described below.

H1. The frequency of network behaviors varies by gender

In order to verify the hypothesis, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The result, with the significance level of .05 was 14,096 (df = 2), $p = .290$. Thus, there are no grounds to reject the zero hypothesis. Gender does not differentiate the frequency of undertaking network behaviors.

H2. The frequency of network behaviors varies by age

This hypothesis was verified with the use of the Kruskal-Wallis test. The result, with the significance level of .05 was 9.93 (df = 2), $p = .075$. Therefore, there are no grounds to reject the zero hypothesis. Age does not differentiate the frequency of undertaking network behaviors.

H3. The frequency of network behaviors varies by Levels of Educational Attainment

In order to verify this hypothesis, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used. The result, with the significance level of .05 was 5.29 (df = 2), $p = .259$. Therefore, there are no grounds to reject the zero hypothesis. Education does not differentiate the frequency of undertaking network behaviors.

H4. The frequency of network behaviors varies by Years of Professional Experience

This hypothesis was verified with the use of the Kruskal-Wallis test. The result, with the significance level of .05, was 3.95 (df = 2), $p = .267$. Therefore, there are no grounds to reject the zero hypothesis. Age does not differentiate the frequency of undertaking network behaviors.

H5. Managers engage in networking behaviors more frequently than their non-manager counterparts

In order to verify this hypothesis, the U-Mann Whitney test was used. The result, with the significance level of .05 was 5091 (df = 2), $p = .001$. Managers undertake network behaviors more often (mean rank: 208.12) than non-managers (mean rank: 140.89).

H6. Persons who are self-employed engage in networking behaviors more frequently than their contracted/salaried counterparts

This hypothesis was verified with the use of the Kruskal-Wallis test. The result, with the significance level of .05 was 6.731 ($df = 2$), $p = .810$. Therefore, there are no grounds to reject the zero hypothesis. Job status does not differentiate the frequency of undertaking network behaviors.

4. Conclusions

As our study results show, the frequency of engaging in networking behaviors is rather low ($M = 2.62$). Networking behaviors were showed more frequently as socializing ($M = 2.94$), engaging in professional activities ($M = 2.34$) and maintaining contacts ($M = 2.24$) than increasing internal visibility ($M = 1.73$) and participating in church and community.

Neither gender, age, education attainment, the length of professional experience, nor employment status differentiates the frequency with which employees undertake networking behaviors. Only job position level does significantly differentiate networking behaviors, which goes along with other researches findings.

Our results are significant not only to members of the academy, but also to managers. This lack of participation may have the effect of lowering the human capital stock of organizations which employs such individuals. The implications associated with this finding may also include: less opportunity for collaboration and teamwork and decreased innovation when completing assignments or meeting institutional goals. Low involvement in networking weakens opportunities for development and promotion among employees which, in turn, may lead to a sense of stagnation or decreased job satisfaction among such employees. There are limitations to this study, many of which stem from the design of the survey instrument itself. The questionnaire was initially intended to measure behaviors characteristic for American society. (Forret & Dougherty, 2001) In addition, the survey was created nearly 15 years ago. Since then, much has changed in various markets, including the labor market. For example, digital technology has nearly entirely replaced paper with electronic correspondence.

The design of our study also introduces some concerns. Our sample was not representative. Namely, we oversampled young employees (ages 45 or less) with high levels of educational attainment (approximately 95% of the study sample completed an undergraduate university degree or more). It is worth to mention, that the sample of Forret and Dougherty (2001) research was similar. This limits our interpretation of the statistical results as well as the generalized of our findings.

The results and discussion provide a starting point for further study and analysis. One future undertaking entails updating the survey instrument and making it suitable to measuring modern determinants of network behavior. As such, these updates would also need to entail a cultural component which would better capture popular and culturally-linked networking behaviors present among employees in Poland today. Finally, a survey instrument which may easily be transformed to meet the specifics of global and local entities would also need to be created. Based on this research and its findings, we believe that future research needs to expand beyond the measurement of the frequency of networking behavior and include networking competencies. Further study will need to ensure a sample that is representative of the population to which its findings will relate, with particular care given to the sampling of individuals pursuing managerial careers in both the private and public sectors. To-date, the literature (Luthans, 1985) suggests that professional development among employees from either sector is comparable. However, the literature needs to verify the extent to which this professional development is due to the frequency of engaging in networking behavior and to what extent it is due to differences in its determinants. Additional research questions include:

the frequency of networking behavior among employees from various sectors of the labor market and to validate if a given sector distinguishes employees who engage in network behaviors and if so, which behaviors are relevant. Nonetheless, an interesting direction for future study may also include furthering our understanding of network behavior among individuals who are and who are not, active in the labor market. It is worthwhile to confirm the extent to which individuals from either or both groups participate in certain networking behaviors. Finally, the authors suggest verifying the extent to which network behaviors are associated with perceptions about current and/or future professional career development.

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