



Research Article

Social Networks and Employability in the Tamale Metropolis of the Northern Region, of Ghana

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The research examined how social networks contribute to enhance employability and the factors that determine employability in the Tamale metropolis of Ghana. Data were collected from 90 respondents using questionnaire. SPSS was used in the data analysis to run a binary logistic regression and factor analysis. Based on the analysis, the following were evident: The research found out that a high percentage of respondents were graduates from tertiary institutes with a low percentage of the respondents having been through the basic level of education. Out of the various forms of the job strategies, social network was found to be accessed by respondents for work for job. It was also realized that majority of individuals who mostly accessed social networks for job were from the private sector. The factors that contributed overall in enhancing employability: relation to organizational member, prevalence of shift work, participation in symposia, engagement in part-time jobs and access to social support. Year's respondents for work for job. It was also realized that majority of individuals who mostly accessed social networks for job were form the private sector. The factors that contributed overall in enhancing employability: relation to organizational member, prevalence of shift work, participation in symposia, engagement in part-time jobs and access to social support. The researcher recommends that higher educational institutes as well as organizations should include participation in workshops, seminars, conferences to enhance new entrants into the job market with career-oriented skills and those in the working field with skills to promote organizational performance.

Keywords: social networks, employability, job progression, job strategy, social support

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that employers today no longer hire employees on the basis of educational status only (Stewart et al., 1999). Prevalently, some of these hiring is done based on "whom you know" and probably 'what you can do'. This could be by a friend, a social network, relative, a schoolmate, colleague and some others of closer ties. Employability has become an important construct and has been present since the 1900s. As can be expected, there are those skeptics who argue that employability is no more than "the latest buzz-word" (Clarke, 2008) which brings with it a shift in responsibility for career development, making the employee ultimately responsible for the investment and continuous development of his/her career. As such, each person becomes increasingly aware of the importance of learning

and the role of the higher education institution in this regard (Van der Heijden et al., 2009). Indeed, employability resembles a steady move away from bureaucratic career structures and life- long employment and, to some extent, a shift away from the traditional psychological contract.

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The debate around what constitutes employability is not limited to its definition or scope, but also relates to those influential factors that are perhaps not as well defined in current knowledge. Such influential factors often have various names and may be defined somewhat differently by authors. In spite of the level of employability of individuals in Ghana, however government has put in place some policy interventions to promote employability in Ghana. These include: Policy to promote acquisition of employable entrepreneurial skills for youth. Policy to ensure, through collaboration and partnership building, that youth vocation and employability training take place within the broader context of youth empowerment. Policy to promote informal non-academic, employment experiences and opportunities and skills training opportunities for the youth. Policy to encourage resource development to positive youth development as an economically sound investment in youth. (*Eduzie, 2002*) Employability becomes very important nowadays as it facilitates individuals to move from one job to another, within and between organizations. According to *Tome, (2007)*, for an employer to hire a person who is valuable for the company and the value is measured in terms of his productivity and quality of performance. On the other hand, employers will also hire persons based on the level of connectedness; based on “whom you know”. Thus, employability has mainly benefited employees with highly developed skills differentiating them between workers’ internal and external employability. The motive of employability is always a high concern this days with the uncertain economic condition that exposes both employers and employees to ambiguities. Employees who are less skilled and incompetent are susceptible to retrenchment (*Tome, 2007*) Employers have to juggle between the need to contain cost and maintain productivity for efficiency.

Circumspectly, an inquiry into the model of social support and employability, to ascertain definitely the differences in access to social support both material and service assistance is going to be considered. Although there is no consensus on how employability should be viewed, it could be said in a general way that it reflects people’s possibilities. Employability refers not only to the ability to secure and maintain employment or move between sectors; it also refers to the continued ability to create work by means of occupation-specific skills as well as those proactive career behaviours and abilities that allow people to obtain or generate work through optimal use of occupation-related competencies (*Coetzee et al., 2010*). The debate around what constitutes employability is not limited to its definition or scope, but also relates to those influential factors that are perhaps not as well defined in current knowledge.

Importantly, networks are based on formal contractual relationships, such as subcontracting relationships, strategic alliances or participation in an industry-wide

research consortium and informal ties, based on common membership in a professional trade or association, or even a looser affiliation with a technological community. One can differentiate networks with respect to their duration and stability. Several key concepts provide potent analytical tools that apply across different types of networks and permit assessments of their effects. First, we consider the differences between strong and weak ties (*Granovetter, 1973*).

Interpersonal terms a strong tie is a person with whom you interact with on daily basis, while a weak tie is an acquaintance, or a friend of a friend. Strong ties are more important for social support, but much of the novel information that a person receives come from weak ties. Strong ties are based on common interest, consequently most important information that is passed reinforces existing ones. Weak ties introduce novelty in the form of different ideas or tastes, and by introducing new information they are, for example, invaluable in job searches and other circumstances where a small amount of new information is highly useful. Weak ties have a longer reach, but a much narrower bandwidth than strong ties. Strong ties between two parties may restrict information gathering in terms of the breadth of search but the information that is exchanged is detailed. Weak ties are thinner and less durable but provide access to non-redundant information. Whether location in a network is highly malleable or not, position in a network both empowers and constrains opportunities. Over the years, people have received help in one way or the other support from their families, friends and other people of stronger ties or even organizations across the globe. *Barnes (1954)* was the first to describe patterns of social relationships that were not explained by families or work groups.

Within the social network, social support is seen to be expressed. The primary role of social networks is to provide social support for the members within it. In our context, a study is made on the kind of support provided which enhances an individual’s employability. According to *Gottlieb, (2000)* social support is seen as the process of interaction in relationships which improves coping esteem, belonging and capability through actual or alleged exchanges of physical resources. In this definition, the key features of social support are, collaboration, coping, esteem belonging, capability and exchange. *Uchino, (2004)* describes four main functions of social support: esteem, informational, social companionship, and instrumental social support. Social esteem and informational support are probably directly effective in dealing with several kinds of stressful events, whereas social companionship and instrumental support seem to be more effective when matched with specific needs elicited by stressful events. Definitions of the forms of social support are: Instrumental support (offering help or assistance in a tangible/physical way which involves the provision of material aid, providing money, time, labour

etc.), Social companionship/network support (conveys information that the person is part of a social network of reciprocal help or mutual obligation), informational support (provides advice or information) and esteem support.

This is offering of sympathy, care, affection, love, trust, recognition, closeness, inspiration or caring. It is the warmth and nurturance provided by social support. Providing emotional support can let the individual know that he or she valued. It also referred to as passionate or appraisal support (*Frijda, Kuipers and Ter Schure, 1989*). Employability, a relatively obscure concept a decade ago, now commands a central place in labour market policies in the UK, many other European states and beyond. At the supranational level, employability formed one of the four original pillars of the European Employment Strategy (ESS), having emerged as a defining theme of the Extraordinary European Council on.

Similarly, the cognitive-affective nature of career identity melds the other individual differences (e.g., dispositions, knowledge, skills, and abilities) that comprise employability and facilitate the identification and realization of career opportunities.

Career identities serves as institutionalised career structures guarding individuals to securing employment opportunities, (*Fugate, Kinicki and Ashforth, 2004*). According to *McArdle, Waters, Briscoe and Hall (2007)*, the desire of individuals to meet the demands of the situation is contingent on one's willingness and ability to change personal factors, dispositions and behaviors to enhance employability. Ultimately, five individual differences meet the requirements of personal adaptability which are optimism, propensity to learn, openness, internal locus of control, and generalized self-efficacy. These elements of personal adaptability are cognitively and affectively united and directed to yield a powerful influence on the identification and realization of opportunities at work. The third dimension of employability is social and human capital. Individuals and organizations make investments in social and human capital in anticipation of future returns in the workplace. More specifically, one's ability to identify and realize career opportunities (i.e. employability) is greatly influenced by such capital. Moreover, both social and human capital are incorporated into individual's career identities, further embedding them in the construct of employability.

Social capital is the goodwill intrinsic in social networks. Social capital adds an explicitly on social and interpersonal element to employability, and it sends information as well as influence to the "holder" via the networks (*Adler and Kwon, 2002*). For a person to have to career opportunities and to achieve occupational aspirations, he/she need information on the availability of such opportunity, (*Fugate et al. 2004*).

Of the many human capital factors, education and experience have been found to be the strongest predictors of career progression. Some level of education is preferred if not required for most forms of employment whether a level of compulsory education, an associate's degree, a 4-year degree, a certification for a particular line of work, or a professional degree. Experience also is important and usually affords individual varying levels of proficiency and tacit knowledge which makes one more attractive to prospective employers. It's argued on the basis that, without a form of social network, it's cumbersome to obtain a job. This study utilizes the networks and knowledge with the aim of gaining access to those views and experiences of employable individuals especially those already on the field.

There are various ways of which one can be connected to a source of social support based on where an individual finds himself. The key question is, can an individual be employable without a form of social network based on *Clarke, 2008* proposition of employability, "As organisations have changed as a result of "downsizing", "restructuring", and "outsourcing", the emphasis on flexibility and similar employability skills has increased. Based on his proposition, it's seen that three factors have contributed in the emphasis on flexibility of hiring employees. Executives involved in restructuring often hire financial and legal advisors to assist in the transaction details and negotiation. It may be done by the new employer hired specifically to make the difficult and controversial decisions required to save or reposition the company. It generally involves financing debt, selling portions of the company to investors, and reorganizing or reducing operations. Strategic restructuring reduces financial losses simultaneously reducing tensions between debt and equity holders to facilitate a prompt resolution of a distressed situation.

The term outsourcing dates back to at least 1981 and basically talks about contracting out of a business process to another party. Outsourcing sometimes involves transferring employees and assets from one firm to another, but not always. Outsourcing is also the practice of handing over control from public services to profit corporations. Primarily it's said to help firms to perform well in their core competencies and mitigate shortage of skill or expertise in the areas they want to outsource. In the twenty first century, businesses increasingly outsourced to suppliers outside their own country, sometimes. Several related terms have emerged to refer to various aspects of the complex relationship between economic organizations or networks and also serves the purpose of proposing great budget flexibility and control. Outsourcing lets organizations pay for only the services they need to hire and train specialized staff, brings in fresh engineering expertise and reduces capital and operating expenses. One of the biggest changes in the early twenty first century came from the growth of groups of people using online

technologies to use outsourcing as a way to build a viable service delivery business that can be run from virtually anywhere in the world. The historical antecedents of the current employability debate can be traced back at least a century. *Gazier's (1998a, 1998b, 2001)* work on employability provides a useful overview of the concept's development towards currently accepted definitions. He distinguishes between seven operational versions of the concept of employability namely:

First, the increasing importance of employability in labour market policy can be partly sourced to an "emphasis on skill-based solutions to economic competition and work-based solutions to social deprivation" (*Hillage et al., 1998*). Within this context, the drive for employability is more than a means of offering workers the opportunity to develop flexible skills as an alternative to security of tenure.

Rather, the development of individuals' employability is viewed as a crucial step towards improving access to employment (particularly for disadvantaged groups) and therefore a necessary element within strategies seeking to address unemployment and social exclusion. However, the emphasis on the skills of individuals implicit within much of the labour market policy literature has raised concerns that the 'interactive' elements of the concept of employability have been lost amongst a welter of discussions centering on how best to activate and 'up-skill' the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. While (*Gazier, 2001*) and others suggest that employability is now commonly understood as involving an interaction between the individual and other actors and conditions in the labour market, the policy debate and the content of labour market strategies have often focused on individual-centered, supply-side solutions. This supply-side policy orthodoxy has antecedents in both economic and social theory related to responses to economic instability and labour market change and attempts to re-establish the balance between the rights and responsibilities of individuals within Western welfare states. These issues are discussed below, with particular reference to UK labour market policy (although, as noted above, they are of similar importance within the EU and international policy context). However, most local strategies (as opposed to specific policies within them) appear to consider both demand and supply factors, although the two may not necessarily be well integrated. There is little doubt that structural shifts have created mismatches between labour supply and demand in sectorial terms, there has been a shift in the UK, as elsewhere, towards various service industries. This has resulted in changing skills needs (with 'soft skills', such as interpersonal and communication skills increasingly valued (see, for example, *Belt and Richardson, 2005*), but also a shift towards part-time and more flexible work practices. In occupational terms, there

has been a shift towards non-manual work in general and knowledge work (requiring higher level skills and qualifications) in particular. Those without the skills to adapt to these changes are often faced with the choice of long-term unemployment or low-paid, unstable work. That the policy response to these problems has focused on the individual aspects of employability and has particularly targeted the long-term unemployed, reflects: first, a belief that measures to 'up-skill' and activate unemployed people will have positive impacts in terms of labour market participation, economic competitiveness and productivity; and, secondly, that long-term unemployment specifically is a crucial barrier to increased participation in the economy and wider society, and so to the realization of these associated macro-economic benefits.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the Tamale Metropolis in the Northern region of Ghana. Due to the fast pace of growth and development of the metropolis, more employment opportunities have sprung up and upcoming ones are yet to be created which require people who are employable to fit into those positions. Apart from the existing government institutions in the metropolis which have helped in the developing the metropolis to some extent, there exist non-governmental organizations who have also contributed greatly to this development.

Various strategies for jobs exist within the metropolis one of which is accessing of social networks for job, is the main concern relevant to this study. The researcher employed multi-stage sampling technique. Respondents were segregated with respect to their sector of work. These sectors of work were based on type of industry including; hospitality, education, health, agriculture, governance, business and public relations. Primary data were taken from 90 respondents both public and private sectors in the metropolis. Random sampling was used to select the various organizations and the stratified sampling was used to segregate respondents into the private and public sector. Secondary data were also collected from the metropolitan assembly. SPSS was used to run a binary logistic regression for the various components of employability and also was used to run a factor analysis of the determinants of employability to find out those determinants that really contributed to enhancing employability. The analytical tool was also used to come out with the statistical tables for the descriptive.

Based on McQuaid, 2005 these variables were selected in order to run the regressions for the various components of employability.

Table 1: A Prior Expectation for Regression

Variables	Measurement	Expectation
Sector of work	Dummy (0=public,1=private)	+/-
Position occupied	Dummy (0=high position,1=low position)	+
Engagement in part-time jobs	Dummy (0=no 1=yes)	-
Participation in symposia	Dummy (0=no 1=yes)	-
Promotion received	Dummy (0=no 1=yes)	+
Relation to org. member	Dummy (0=no 1=yes)	+
Essential attributes	Dummy (0=Not important, 1= important)	+
Basic transferrable skills	Dummy (0=Not important, 1= important)	+
Key transferrable skills	Dummy (0=Not important, 1= important)	+/-
Work culture	Dummy (0=Not important, 1= important)	+/-

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors that influence securing a job

The fundamental measures under the component of securing a job include relation to an organizational member, essential attributes, basic transferrable skills and key transferrable skills. The results revealed that individuals who are related to an organizational member besides the worker- worker relation are less likely report facing problems when it comes to securing a job. And therefore, an increase in the relation to an organizational member besides the worker-worker relation score will result in increased probability of securing a job recording a score of 1 in belongingness to a social network.

Table 2: Regression Analysis on Factors influencing Securing a Job

Variable	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig.
Relation to organizational member	-1.333	.680	3.844	1	.050**
Essential attributes	21.093	40192.946	.000	1	1.000
Basic transferrable skills	-.583	.784	.553	1	.457
Key transferrable skills	.452	.695	.424	1	.515
Constant	-21.655	40192.946	.000	1	1.000

*Significant at 99% level, **Significant at 95% level, ***Significant at 90% level

Source: Field Survey 2015

Factors that influence maintaining a job

The prevalence of shift work has a significant value of .068 with a B value of 1.028 which is significant at 95% level with the other categorical variables being insignificant. From a prior expectation, current position occupied at workplace was supposed to be positive but from the analysis was found out to be negative and insignificant. Individuals who reported of prevalence of shift work are more likely to assert to the fact that it contributed to an individual maintaining his/her job.

Table 3: Regression of Analysis on Factors Influencing Maintaining a Job

Variable	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig.
Position occupied	-.260	.534	.236	1	.627
Remuneration	.558	.859	.423	1	.516
Condition of work	-.161	.900	.032	1	.858
Working hours	.978	.636	2.367	1	.124
Prevalence of shift work	1.028	.563	3.337	1	.068**
Constant	-1.748	.517	11.458	1	.001

*Significant at 99% level, **Significant at 95% level, ***Significant at 90% level

Source: Field Survey Data, 2015

Factors that influence job progression

The relation to an organizational member, engagement in part-time jobs and access to social support was all significant at 95%. Looking at the first variable (relation to an organizational member) has a positive B value of 1.561 and significant at 95% which indicates that individuals within the social network who were related to an organizational member are more likely to answer yes to the question whether they've secured a new role in an alternative organization or not.

And it can also be said that in order to secure a new role in alternative organization, relation to an organizational member is key to facilitate your employability. Respondents who were engaged in part-time jobs looked more employable with reference to its positive B-value of 2.476 and its significant level.

Also, individuals who had access to social support were more likely to secure a new role in an alternative organization, therefore an increase in access to social support score will result in an increased probability of securing a new role in an alternative organization recording a score of 1 in belongingness to a social network.

Table 4: Regression Analysis on Factors Influencing Job Progression

Variable	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig.
Sector of work	-1.167	.730	2.557	1	.110
Promotion	.700	.860	.662	1	.416
Participated In symposium	1.135	.667	2.894	1	.089**
Relation to org member	1.408	.787	3.199	1	.074**
Lead role	1.063	.577	3.399	1	.065**
High level transferrable skills	.989	1.069	.856	1	.355
Work culture	.747	.888	.707	1	.400
Constant	-3.425	1.140	9.032	1	.003

*Significant at 99% level, **Significant at 95% level, ***Significant at 90% level

Source: Field Survey Data, 2015

Table 5: Regression of variables for securing a new role in an alternative organization

Variable	B	S.E	Wald	Df	Sig
Position occupied	-.331	.605	.300	1	.584
Relation to organizational member	1.561	.745	4.399	1	.036**
Part-time jobs	2.476	1.167	4.502	1	.034**
Helped acquire job	-.671	.578	1.349	1	.245
Essential attributes	-21.950	40192.970	.000	1	1.000
Basic transferrable skills	.966	.905	1.138	1	.286
Key transferrable skills	-.781	.862	.822	1	.365
Access to social support	1.140	.574	3.944	1	.047**
Constant	-4.256	1.399	9.253	1	.002

*Significant at 99% level, **Significant at 95% level, ***Significant at 90% level

Source: Field Survey Data, 2015

Sector of work where social network is accessed most

From table 5 and 6, it was evident that 14 respondents from the public sector accessed social networks to get their current job while 26 of the respondents in the private sector also did same. Comparing their percentages, it's found that people in the private sector were employed into work through social networks than that of those in the public sector.

Table 6: Current Job strategy used by public sector workers

Current job strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct contact	20	44.4
Social network	14	31.2
Mass media	11	24.4
Total	45	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 7: Current job strategy used by the private sector workers

Current job strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct contact	12	26.7
Social network	26	57.8
Mass media	7	15.5
Total	45	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Main form of social support expressed within the social network

Social support within the social network is expressed in three ways, which are listed table above. From the study conducted, it was realized that 31 respondents selected informational support been expressed by them to other individuals to help them acquire a job. Instrumental and emotional or esteem support were also seen to be expressed by 4 and 2 respondents respectively. 53 of the respondents hadn't helped anyone get a job, thus accounting for the no support. Therefore, it can be said that informational support is key when it comes to facilitating employability within social networks.

Table 8: Main form of social support expressed within the social network

Form of support	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Informational Support	31	34.4
Instrumental support	4	4.3
Emotional support	2	2.5
No support	53	58.8
Total	90	100

Source: Field Survey 2015

Deductions

- The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy was found to be .368 below the recommended .6.
- Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.
- The principal component analysis revealed that 5 components with Eigen values exceeding 1 were captured with their variance which include:

Personal factors

- Essential attributes- 18.2%
- Basic transferrable skills-12.6%
- Key transferrable skills-11.9%
- High transferrable skills-11.45

External factors

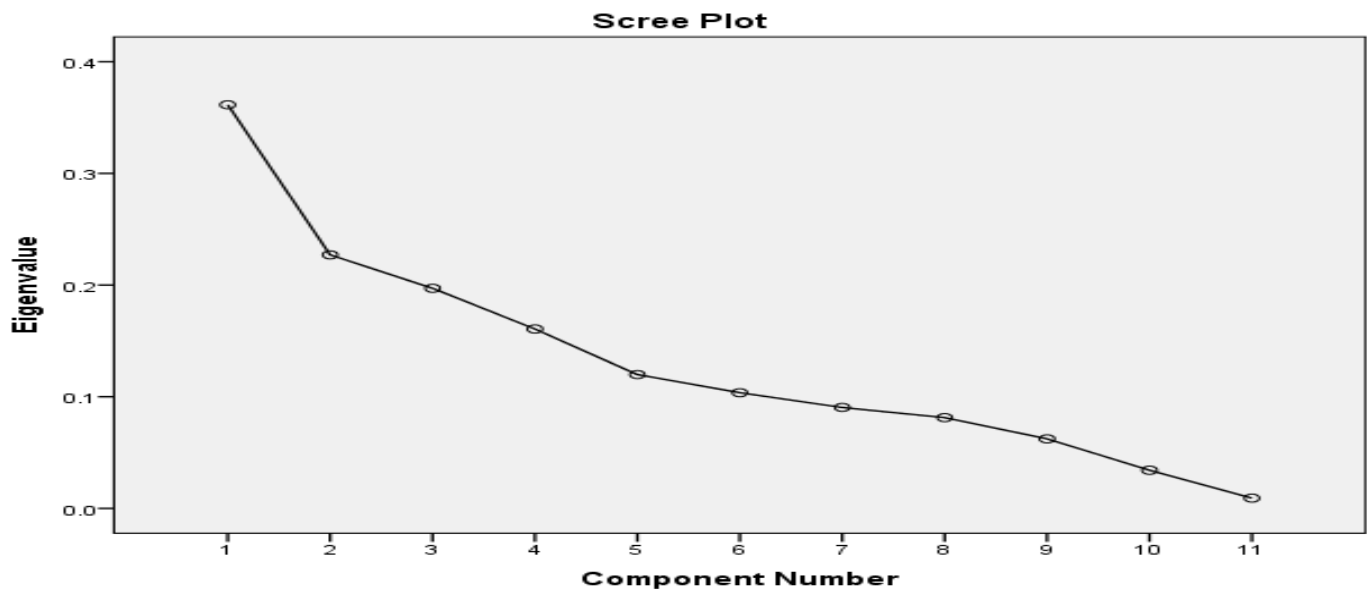
- Remuneration-10.37%
- An inspection of the Scree plot recorded a clear break from essential attributes to basic transferrable skills and will further be retained for further investigation using Cartell's (1966) Scree test.

Factor analysis of employability determinants

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings ^a
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	2.004	18.218	18.218	2.004	18.218	18.218	1.714
2	1.389	12.632	30.849	1.389	12.632	30.849	1.612
3	1.310	11.906	42.755	1.310	11.906	42.755	1.360
4	1.255	11.407	54.162	1.255	11.407	54.162	1.363
5	1.141	10.376	64.537	1.141	10.376	64.537	1.242
6	.981	8.917	73.454				
7	.831	7.551	81.005				
8	.771	7.010	88.015				
9	.634	5.763	93.778				
10	.432	3.926	97.704				
11	.253	2.296	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.



Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
Essential attributes	1.000	.674
Basic transferrable skills (basic social skills)	1.000	.763
Key transferrable skills (numeracy, literacy)	1.000	.751
high level transferable skills (ICT skills, problem solving)	1.000	.294
Remuneration	1.000	.587
Condition of work	1.000	.687
Working hours	1.000	.559
Prevalence of shift work	1.000	.767
Access to social network	1.000	.686
Social and household circumstances	1.000	.767
Work culture	1.000	.564

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.368
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	125.367
	Df	55
	Sig.	.000

CONCLUSION

Individual's belongingness to social networks was found to be relevant to enhancing employability. Relation (based on either weak or strong ties) to an organizational member, be it occupying a high or low position within the social network is key in order to increase one's chances of being employable. Individuals in the private sector access social networks the more when it comes to securing of jobs as compared to those in the public sector. Providing social support, the main function of social network is seen to be expressed in various ways to enhance an individual's employability with most expressed of the forms which is informational support

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