Project Title: Gender Differences in Informal Network Composition and Usage
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Faculty Advisor: Nancy Rothbard, Management Department

Descriptive Summary
Purpose:
The primary goals of this field study are to 1) examine how the composition of men and women’s informal networks in the workplace differs at three distinct hierarchical levels of the firm, 2) examine how the usage of men and women’s informal networks in the workplace differs when faced with a complex work-related decision at three distinct hierarchical levels of the firm, and 3) examine how composition and usage of informal networks relate to performance/career trajectory for entry-level and senior-level employees.

Some theoretical background:
An informal network, also known as an interaction network, is a web of relationships created among people in an organization. These relationships act as channels for the dynamic exchange of resources (Fombrun, 1982). Access to informal networks in organizations is beneficial for many reasons including personal empowerment, increased motivation, higher performance (e.g. Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Spreitzer, 1996), and possibly a higher probability of reaching upper-management levels (Brass, 1985). Forret & Dougherty (2004) posit that engaging in networking behaviors is an important strategy for career success (p. 419). Further, authors define “network behaviors” as individuals’ effort to build relationships with others in the workplace that have the ability to provide work-related assistance (Forret & Dougherty, 2004, p. 420). Therefore, advice-seeking is considered a key networking behavior.

Ample organizational research illustrates that women have limited access to important interaction networks compared to men (Kanter, 1977; Harlan & Weiss, 1982; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1990), and that women may receive fewer network rewards, like advantageous information or endorsement from senior managers, than men (Brass, 1985; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990; Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1993). The question remains, why are women sometimes excluded from important interaction networks? Do they exclude themselves (based on preference) or are they excluded (based on external constraints)?

Prior relevant research:
In order to investigate this question (Do women exclude themselves based on preference or are they excluded based on external constraints?), I conducted a network lab study at the Wharton Behavioral Lab in January 2007 using a 2x2x2 (gender of advice-seeker; gender of advice-giver, and type of relationship) between subjects vignette design. This study allowed me to assess the type of person men and women were more likely to seek out for advice. In doing so, I attempted to parse out three variables that have often been confounded in prior research (Ibarra1992, 1993, 1995): gender of the advice-seeker and gender of the advice-giver which together potentially create a phenomenon called gender-based homophily (Rogers and Kincaid, 1981); and type of relationship (Fombrun, 1982;
Kanter, 1983) (instrumental or multiplex) which is a characterization of the relationship shared between the advice-seeker and advice-giver. *Instrumental* relationships are those in which individuals exchange job-related resources, while *multiplex* relationships are those in which individuals exchange both job-related and friendship resources. By varying the choices in this way, I was able to assess network preferences free of constraints, in that I held constant the types of opportunities men and women had in terms of their informal network of relationships.

Results from this lab study indicated that both junior-level men and women have similar first-preferences and different next-preferences in informal network preference behavior related to likelihood of advice-seeking from advice-givers who are very senior (i.e., influential men and women in the workplace). More specifically, I predicted that 1) both men and women first prefer seeking advice from same-sex multiplex ties, which was supported; 2) women next prefer seeking advice from opposite-sex multiplex ties more so than same-sex instrumental ties which was supported; and 3) men next prefer seeking advice from same-sex instrumental ties more so than opposite-sex multiplex ties, which was partially supported. Men showed no significant difference in preference between same-sex instrumental ties and opposite-sex multiplex ties.

**Rationale for field study:**
By conducting a network study in the field, I plan to map how men and women *compose* their informal networks which will provide an indication of accessibility to powerful others in the workplace. Then, after participants read and respond to the same work-related scenario, I plan to map how men and women actually *use* their network ties, which will provide an indication of preference for approaching others in the workplace.

**Method and Timeframe**
This field study examining men’s and women’s network composition and usage patterns at three distinct hierarchical levels will take place at a Wall Street investment bank. The three levels include: investment banking Analysts who begin directly out of undergraduate institutions; investment banking Associates who begin directly out of MBA programs; and investment banking senior vice-presidents who are typically MBA’s plus 3-5 years experience. To test hypotheses, I will primarily use survey data generated from computer-based survey instruments as well as data from qualitative one-on-one interviews.

**October 2007**
1. Conduct focus group with HR heads over investment banking and corporate finance in order to customize surveys to Investment Bank’s organizational environment.
   - Identify all necessary HR data to collect
2. Conduct 4-5 one-on-one interviews with current or former investment banking analysts to gather data on reasonable/believable vignettes, number of individuals in informal network, sensitivity around questions (i.e. naming people in your network on a survey), interest level in understanding your personal network
3. Conduct 4-5 one-on-one interviews with current or former investment banking associates to gather data on: 1) situations where they have sought advice, support, mentorship, strategic information, etc., 2) the number of individuals in informal network, 3) any sensitivity around network questions (i.e. naming people in your
network on a survey, etc.), 4) overall interest level in identifying and understanding personal networks

4. Conduct 4-5 one-on-one interviews with current SVP’s to gather information on the nature of network connections between senior and junior employees (How often do you talk to junior employees? For what purpose? Are you happy to do it? Is it bothersome? Etc.)

December 2007

5. Pre-test surveys within Investment Bank at a non-investment banking/corporate finance group. Need at least 20-30 participants for each of two computer-based surveys.

January 2007

6. Data collection 1: Survey 1st-year, 2nd-year, and 3rd-year investment banking/corporate finance analysts and associates (undergraduates and MBAs) in order to map network structures and usage patterns. All data will be stored on a secure server at Wharton Business School. Total sample approximately 650-800 participants with an estimated response rate of 20-30%.

February 2007

7. Data-collection 2: Survey all identified advice-givers (about SVP level) from Data Collection 1 in order to map network structures and understand perspectives/nuances of senior employees’ network connections with junior employees. All data will be stored on a secure server at Wharton Business School. Total sample approximately 150-200.

February/March 2007

8. Conduct 4-5 post-survey interviews at each hierarchical level—Analysts, Associates and SVP’s

Detailed Budget

- Already incurred travel costs to secure field site

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- Approximate travel costs to conduct research: $1,575
  - $1,575.00 to fund 9 trips for Monica Stallings to travel to New York, NY for one-on-one interviews, focus groups, data collection and follow-up interviews.
    - Travel cost = $175.00 per trip; Total cost for travel = $1,575

Total request: $2,455.50

Other current sources of research and travel funding: None