

Networking and Perceived Employability as a Buffer for Job Insecurity: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

The role of social networks is prevalent in everyday life, but it is intriguing that the organizational behavior researcher's interest in the subject remains scant and primarily concentrates on social network management. This study demonstrates the role of strong and weak ties in improving perceived employability and reducing the risk associated with job insecurity (J.I.). We have taken a qualitative approach to the inquiry and adopted a snowball sampling approach to recruit respondents. Our study's research sample consisted of 18 adults who had experienced a layoff or similar insecure situation in their careers. Content analysis was carried out to identify the themes. Our work is deeply rooted in social capital theory, and we have come out with an indirect archetypal that propounds that access to resources can act as a mechanism that links networking and perceived employability.

Keywords: Social Networking, Strong and Weak Ties, Perceived Employability, Job Insecurity, Social Capital Theory

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1. Introduction

In a knowledge-driven economy, the nature of work has changed significantly. The outcome of this change has resulted in job forms like online jobs and virtual team memberships. The progress attained by human beings in artificial intelligence and machine learning can displace many people from jobs that are of lesser value. The classic example is that of Tesla's self-driving car, which, if fully developed and implemented, can eliminate drivers from the workforce. Job insecurity is considered a classic stressor that has significantly affected people emotionally. Insecurity is a natural element of every job and can be traced back to when people started to work for others. According to the definition provided by leading psychologists from various health forums, Insecurity is a psychological condition where people experience anxiety or elements that can instill fear, impairment, or damage in individuals' lives. Insecurity creeps into the human mind due to political, economic, religious, or ecological scenarios or from a job environment (De Witte, H.,2005). The future may witness more situations that can reinstate fear and Insecurity in human minds toward their careers, resulting in greater job-related Insecurity.

Organizational change that leads to an increased feeling of Job Insecurity has become a common challenge in organizations over the last decades. Following the literature on the contemporary labor market, employees work in volatile work settings marked by flexibility and organizational changes (Kalleberg, 2009).

Literature is replete with studies that showcase job insecurity as a classic stressor and perceived employability as a coping resource (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2007; Silla et al., 2009). Perceived employability is an individual's perception of their prospects of securing a new position or the ease of getting into new employment. A study carried out by Fugate et al. (2004) indicates that perceived employability augments one's confidence in having control over one career and acts as a buffer during times of J.I. Forrier and Sels (2003) depict perceived employability as an intermediate substitute for job security in uncertain environments. Workers in project-based organizations know that they have an element of uncertainty embedded in their job roles, especially among people working in the information technology sector. The employees in such project-based organizations expect their employer to provide opportunities for learning, training, and development in exchange for job insecurity. This helps them cope with the stress related to J.I. and positions them in a more employable lot. Perceived employability facilitates a feeling of control over one career and will help lessen the detrimental consequences of felt job insecurity. In brief, it acts as a psychological shock absorber (Cheng & Chan, 2008; Sverke et al., 2002). De Cuyper and De Witte (2007) reveal that the association between perceived job insecurity and employee well-being is expected to be much less harmful when perceived employability prospects are higher. Some of the work in the area has empirically validated the assertion that perceived employability impacts employee well-being (Berntson et al., 2010) and affective commitment to change (Kalyal et al., 2010). An inquiry probing these relations is worthy; a

study by Yizhog et al. (2017) reveals that an employee's perceived employability significantly impacts their job-related attitude.

Green (2011) investigated the relationship between job insecurity and mental well-being and found that employability is a buffer during job insecurity on one's happiness and psychological well-being.

Surprisingly, the debate over the connection between job insecurity and employability has mainly remained speculative (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte, & Alarco, 2008). This raises the question of whether an insecure but highly employable workforce is possible and, more generally, the relationship between job insecurity and employability. This subject is examined from employee perceptions: perceived job insecurity, perceived employability, and their interface. Given that perceptions can significantly influence employee attitudes and behaviors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), they are essential for long-term career development and the success of labor-market strategies (Chung & Van Oorschot, 2011).

The transformation from lifelong employment to a contingent workforce has made people develop strong ties and attempt to fill the vacuum created by weaker ties (structural holes) by augmenting interactions with members inside and outside their organization (Akkermans et al., 2018). Individuals develop nourishing relationships to mitigate the risk of job loss (Van Waes et al., 2018). In the current VUCA world, active social ties are rising, and maintaining existing relations is an absolute necessity as it assists them in job search and sharing aspirations and interests (Mehreen et al., 2019). Further, individuals with access to significantly high resources feel less vulnerable to resource loss. The present study investigates job resources such as peer support, feedback, and access to career-related information in lessening perceived job insecurity (J.I.).

A social network consists of agents, whether people or businesses, dyadic interactions, and other types of social transactions (lexico.com). Granovetter's research from 1973 emphasizes the difference between strong and weaker forms of social interaction. Strong partnerships, in Granovetter's view, consist of strong interpersonal relationships, while weak bonds are represented by casual acquaintances (1977).

Networking is a prehistoric practice of developing and maintaining personal and professional contacts with a diverse set to create a pool of resources to garner information that can support the job search (Batistic & Tymon, 2017). Academicians and practitioners in the literature emphasize the advantages of the network that can aid in positive career-related outcomes at the individual and organizational levels (Fugate et al., 2004; Seibert et al., 2001; Wolff & Moser, 2009).

Research is replete with studies that validate that networking can improve employability by establishing contacts that can facilitate access to relevant sources (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973; Kanfer et al., 2001; Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). The majority of the studies quoted above adopt the

view that there is an explicit link between networking and employability. Wanberg et al. (2000) reinforce these studies' findings and highlight that 36% of jobs are acquired through networking. However, these study's results are only replicable in some of the subsequent studies. VanHoye et al. (2009) study that networking is circuitously linked to a positive outcome on individuals' job search-the authors assume that networking builds social capital that is highly helpful, such as advocacy and mentoring support, which otherwise involves much human and financial capital, aligning with prior work by Simon, (2013). Social networking helps access career management resources, resulting in better employment prospects for an individual (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973). The researcher has questioned people's ability to successfully utilize social networks' benefits (Adler & Kwon, 2002). The most prominent perspective suggests that individuals gain access to the resource (Anderson, 2008; Seibert et al., 2001). However, network capital theory implies that resources entrenched in relationships must be explored, and access is only granted to individuals within the network (Huggins, 2010).

Hay Thornthwaite(2002) observes that strong ties enable workers to gain more access to information than weaker ties, as information depends on the platform used for exchanges. Luthans et al. (1988) present that networking fosters an organized structure of collaborating with individuals and accessing critical information(Adler & Kwon, 2002). Prior studies showcase that a widely distributed network offers a higher potential for accessing relevant information (Brown & Konrad, 2001; Van Hoye et al., 2009). Further, the study reinforces that access to elite information on career opportunities helps in floating targeted applications, lesser competition, and a higher degree of favorable outcome (Brown and Konrad, 2001; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000). Network relationships spread across boundaries or technically described as weak ties may offer more significant employability benefits as job seekers are at ease while approaching lesser-known contacts. The networking behavior gains a strategic role in the above scenario and describes Huggins et al. (2012) as calculative ties and enhances their ability to access information about employment and assistance from a far less frequented actor in the network.

It is worthwhile to explore the complex relationship that is assumed to be in existence between networking behavior and employability, as few studies probe the area. Further, this study adds value to the literature through qualitative reasoning, as there is a lack of empirical evidence connecting networking behavior with augmented employability (Van Hoye et al., 2009; Wanberg et al.,2000).

The present study attempts to define a model that illustrates resources as a critical element facilitating networking behavior and employability. Prior studies (Wanberg et al., 2000; Batistic, 2017) focused on unemployed youths and college students to understand the relationship between perceived employability and network intensity.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Job Insecurity

Job insecurity relates to "the perceived stability and continuation of one's job in its present state" (Probst, 2003). It indicates if a worker believes the expected aspects of his/her employment are reliable or if he/she is capable of staying employed. Employees with low job security typically feel uncertain about their future employment. Employee's well-being, behavior, and mood can all be influenced by how they perceive their insecure employment. Affective and cognitive unemployment are two distinct forms of joblessness, according to De Witte (2005). Affective work insecurity refers to worries about losing one's job, whereas cognitive work insecurity refers to the perception that one's job is in danger of being eliminated soon. Uncertainty in the job can be rather expensive. Downsizing, rightsizing, reorganization, and layoffs have all contributed to a considerable increase in job insecurity, as stated by Karkoulian et al. (2013).

Employees who trust their supervisors are less likely to be concerned about the security of their work, as indicated by the association between credible leadership and occupational safety. Golombek and colleagues researched bullying and job Insecurity (2014). They concluded that angry workers are more likely to be confused about their occupations, which increases the risk that they will quit. According to Ellen and Natti, the single most crucial factor contributing to job insecurity is the high unemployment rate (2015). Restructuring and downsizing, according to Burke and Singh, enhance job insecurity and have a detrimental influence on employee well-being (2016). Lstad et al. (2018) investigated the elements contributing to job insecurity. Both were linked to exhaustion. People who are sheltered are more likely to find work. When there are risks in the workplace, productivity suffers. It is critical to look into the factors that can help mitigate job insecurity's negative impacts.

2.2. Perceived employability

Employability has been a theme of human resource development literature for years. However, employability is a term that has yet to be well-defined in the prevailing research (Forrier & Sels, 2003). Employability can be defined as the ability of an individual to obtain initial employment, remain in employment, switch roles in their organization, gain new positions if the situation warrants, and be in matching and satisfying roles (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). One of the most popular definitions is that employability is a psycho-social theme with internal (subjective) and external (objective) components. Fugate et al. (2004) viewed employability as an individual's potential, knowledge, and attitude (subjective attributes). In contrast, Forrier and Sels (2003) accept it as an attribute derived from the existing labor market conditions (objective attributes).

The literature on job search indicates that perceived employability inherently comprises internal and external components (Rothwell et al., 2008; van der Heijden, 2002). The internal components can be connected with the perception of an individual's abilities, aspirations, career attributes, and proficiencies, whereas external factors, such as labor market dynamics and demographic factors, are not controlled by an individual (Fugate et al., 2004). Thus, the two aspects mentioned above are fundamentally related and complimentary.

Clarke (2018) defines perceived employability as an appraisal of an individual's proficiency attributed to prevailing labor market conditions and economic status quo. Its key components are an individual's ability to adapt, career-related identity, and social capital (McArdle et al., 2007).

We envisage the idea that access to unique resources gained by networking is related to both of the above components. Further, it helps better manage ambiguous situations and enhances the adaptability of individuals.

Kramer (2004) observes that individuals tend to gather information from various sources to develop a sense of control, which helps lower the anxiety level of individuals to a great extent. It is worth mentioning that the further enhancement of information helps model the future with a certain degree of precision, and an attempt to gather information provides a sense of control to individuals burdened with feelings of job-related Insecurity (Seibert et al., 2001). The literature on job insecurity reveals that J.I. and uncertainty at the workplace substantially negatively impact employees, irrespective of their level and skill (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011). However, perceived J.I. can be significantly high for people in their early-career roles (CIPD, 2015).

Affective adaptability is the human ability to respond to environmental changes (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). Effective adaptation involves agility to incorporate changes and the inclination to learn and reinforce new compartments. However, one should understand that to assess and understand the need for change, information and feedback, accompanied by optimism, are very much needed (Ashford & Taylor, 1990). Finch et al. (2016) put forth that continuous access to information about careers can help people recognize emerging needs at the workplace, map or upgrade their skills to meet these requirements, and strategize and brand them as employees with potential.

A review of the several works in the above section of this paper highlights that access to resources enhances both internal and external aspects of perceived employability; hence, the authors propose that access to a resource by networking enhances perceived employability.

2.3. Social networking

For this study, the authors follow the definition of networking given by Finch Dougherty (2004). According to them, networking epitomizes individuals' preemptive efforts to nurture personal and professional relationships and connect with others to benefit each other in their work or career-related goals. Managing one's career has been transferred to the organization (Hall, 1996,2005; Mayrhofer,2016). This transformation emphasizes the importance of having social and professional ties in one's organization and the outside world as it protects against career-related shocks.

De Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting (2003). Higgins (2000) and Higgins & Kram (2001) observe that developing multiple relations through networking to enhance one's career has gained prominence recently. Kram & Isabella (1985) and Murphy & Kram (2010) established the notion of relationship

constellation, which suggests that both career and related psychological assistance arise from a host of ties inside and outside one's workplace. Further, these type of relationships augments our social capital. An individual's ability to develop and nurture a relationship with others is a resource that can help generate new ideas, reduce information asymmetry, create job opportunities, generate business leads, and aid in garnering social support (Baker et al.,2007). Relationships developed through networking assist in approaching people who can exchange information about job openings and connect with people with potential information. Successful network relations are embedded in trust and reciprocity pillars (Baker W.E., 2000), which develop over time between individuals. There is more chance of getting assistance from trusted relationships at most crucial times and reducing the anxiety of being exploited by lesser-known individuals for personal gains (Gouldner, 1960).

Social capital offers individuals a considerable advantage in managing their careers (Adler & Kwon, 2002). In their work, Seibert Kraemer and Liden (2001) report that various attributes of an individual's network, such as content and structure, help them access information about resources and career sponsorships. Effectively, this information relates to one's compensation, career advancement, and satisfaction with one's career. Social capital is considered a unique resource that is tougher to emulate than human capital (Forret & Sullivan, 2002).

2.4. Social Network Ties and Perceived Employability

In a VUCA World, interpersonal relationships help individuals identify job opportunities and land up successfully. These benefits motivate individuals to engage in networking behavior and actively interact to obtain multiple job opportunities and procure suitable positions (Tian & Lin, 2016).

Akkermans et al. (2018) opine that individuals are responsible for developing their careers and putting in efforts to occupy job positions that are secure and suitable. Based on an agentic career perspective, this notion prompts individuals to be involved in activities to enhance professional knowledge and skills. An individual should have excellent interpersonal skills to participate in developmental activities and be nominated by managers for such programs. Prior studies also underline that individuals with strong network connections in their social circle have a high probability of receiving information on job postings both within and outside the organization Mehreen et al. (2019) and can explore better-quality job opportunities. Barbulescu (2015) focuses on the strength of various network ties that can aid in the job search process and puts forward the notion that weaker ties help get invited for interviews, whereas closely connected, regularly interacting ties help in converting these job interviews into job offers. Sabatini (2009) has carried out an empirical analysis on the correlation between a firmly knitted-family and unemployment, and the outcome suggests that strong network relations among family members help identify job opportunities, reducing the chance of remaining unemployed. The author further validates that weak ties help access new updates concerning job vacancies, which seldom happens with strong ties.

In short, a summary of the above reviews helps conclude that strong ties and weak ties have roles in job search and in forming perceptions about an individual's employability. An individual should attempt to network greatly to reduce anxiety related to job insecurity. They should also attempt to convert weak ties into strong ties. In short, social networks act as a critical recruitment tool that helps create a pool of potential candidates where the brokers fill the vacuum created by structural holes between recruiters and job aspirants. Therefore, effective networking practices enhance internal and external perceived employability by providing access to resources and information sharing.

Our study explores how strong and weak ties influence individuals' perceived employability, as information related to a job opening that matches an individual's capabilities is limited.

2.5. Perceived Employability and Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is defined as the dismay of losing one's job abruptly (De Witte, 1999). Workers with uncertain occupations have an edge when reacting to changes in the labor market since they have greater perceived employability (De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & De Witte, 2011). Perceived external employability (PEE) is characterized as future employment with another employer by De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, Berntson, De Witte, and Alarcón (2008). Employees with a high perceived external employability (PEE) are more likely to be confident in their abilities since they know their talents are transferable to other organizations (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011). This concept is essential to both the boundaryless (Arthur, 1994) and the protean careers (Hall, 2004).

According to research (Berntson et al., 2010; Kalyal et al., 2010; Silla et al., 2009), PEE can minimize the adverse effects of employment volatility on people's life. According to the notion, stress and job insecurity are comparatively low among highly employable people but high among those who are not. According to a recent study, PEE can help people feel less stressed and nervous (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, et al., 2008). This option has a low chance of being chosen. PEE emphasizes the necessity of relaxing at work, whereas older models pay more attention to stress and unemployment.

Perceived employability is a personal resource. Personal attributes include resilience, ambiguity tolerance, and contextual management (Hobfoll et al., 2003). PEE differs conceptually from professional or general self-efficacy in that PEE considers contextual or situational factors, whereas self-efficacy is an individual trait (Berntson et al., 2008). PEE, like self-efficacy, is a unique resource that improves transition skills. PEE results from various personal resources, such as employability-related behavior and competencies (Berntson et al., 2006; Wittekind et al., 2010). PEE is determined by personal resources and labor market demand (Berntson et al., 2006).

It has been portrayed that perceived external employability is an alternative to job security or a progressive response to employment insecurity (Forrier & Sels, 2003). When employees perceive that their current job is in jeopardy (job insecurity), they may take refuge in the chance of obtaining employment elsewhere. Also effective could be PEE. PEE protects against the perception of work

insecurity. This buffer concept has yielded varied outcomes (Berntson et al., 2010; Kalyal et al., 2010; Silla et al., 2009). Therefore, we investigate whether PEE can diminish job security.

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993) and the Conservation of Resources Theory can be viewed in the context of the theory that PEE may alleviate feelings of job insecurity (Hobfoll, 2001). Employees regularly haggle a return on earlier investments, a central Human Capital Theory tenet. These revenues generally consist of monetary incentives but may also contain quasi-rewards (Brown et al., 2003). Prior investments in, for instance, developing skills, training, or more general ability substantially impact how employability is perceived (Wittekind et al., 2010). These costs are incurred in support of highly employable workers: The attributes of highly employable individuals are in high demand in the labor market. Employers may bond this personnel to the organization and keep them away from rivals by offering them relatively stable employment. In a competitive labor market, job security is likely an attractive quality. This is congruent with Worth's (2002) conclusion that workers value long-term employment as a payback on previous investments in human capital.

According to the Conservation of Resources Theory, having command and control over resources is advantageous. The Conservation of Resources Theory postulates that personnel who possess resources have an enormous profit potential or a reduced loss risk. They instead conserve the available resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Control is a significant factor in PEE, just as perceived employability is (De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, et al., 2008). According to earlier studies, there is an inverse link between PEE and job insecurity (Berntson et al., 2010; De Cuyper, Bernhard-Oettel, et al., 2008; Kalyal et al., 2010). This work also assumes a relationship between job insecurity and perceived employability. However, this direction is more exciting: There are two competing perspectives on the effects of job insecurity on employability or the profession in general. Some experts contend that feelings of job insecurity motivate employees to continually review and improve their competitiveness (Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011)

2.6. Information Sharing

Global communication has transformed, enhancing social skills and boosting competition (Cox et al., 2013). Data flow between people, businesses, and technologies depends on information sharing. Information sharing was described by Heide and Miner (1992) as the volume of interpersonal communication. Social networks allow people to converse simultaneously with friends, coworkers, and bosses. According to Bakshy et al. (2012), strong associations are more crucial for information exchange, whereas weak ties encourage the diffusion of fresh information. Knowledge exchange is essential for both internal and external employability to establish and strengthen such relationships. Strong network connections increase an employee's propensity to offer their services out of self-motivation or for personal gains, such as reciprocity in ties, reputation, or self-development (Lin, 2007). Close friends cannot get the unique information that weak network links can Bakshy et al. (2012). Social networks offer employees a means of forming connections with coworkers and exchanging information, improving their employability. According to Park et al. (2014) 's study on

weak ties, employees can share information via social networks thanks to their reputation. Wei et al. (2013) claim that the interchange of market knowledge moderates the link between creative culture and a positive outlook and attitude. In Kang's opinion, sharing knowledge lowers volume uncertainty and network embeddedness (2016). Professionals gain enough information from sharing their expertise within their network to enhance their view of employability in the market.

2.7. The study

Our work will help us to understand how networking behavior can help enhance employability through the identification and access of resources. Secondly, our study helps to learn how perceived employability helps cope with job insecurity. Thirdly, our study will help identify the coping mechanism that could help individuals and their mentors anxious about employability. Further, it will help them to capitalize on their existing network. Also, this study helps identify mechanisms that can assist individuals in mitigating uncertainty associated with job insecurity. The association between job insecurity and job satisfaction was marginally more significant than the correlation between job satisfaction and self-perceptions of employability. This may be because workers have yet to entirely accept employability as a new kind of security (De Cuyper, N., Piccoli, B., Fontinha, R., and De Witte, H. 2019). Our findings represent a paradigm change and will enrich the existing academic literature on post-pandemic conditions.

A review of literature on the topic helps to identify the following questions.

1. Do Individuals have a habit of establishing professional networks?
2. How does networking help people in gaining access to resources?
3. How does networking help in improving the perception of employability
4. Do Strong networks (based on reciprocity, multiplicity, and familiarity) provide significant advantages in the job search phase and employability perception
5. Does self-perception of employability buffers Job Insecurity related feelings

This study investigates the direct and indirect associations between social relationships and job insecurity. This study investigates the effect of social ties on the perception of employability and job insecurity. The research investigates the connection between information exchange and perceived employability. This study investigates the perception of social ties and job insecurity in India to enhance employability and network strength. The findings expand our understanding of job insecurity and how social interactions might enhance employability.

3. Methodology

We followed a snowball sampling approach to recruit respondents. We have set the criteria; our respondents would have faced layoff situations, changed jobs due to uncertain environments, or

worked in a highly volatile industry where rampant layoffs are expected. This snowball sampling helped to identify respondents who had experienced job insecurity in their recent career phase. The snowball sampling helped us to have heterogeneity in the respondents' pool. Heterogeneity among respondents' pool adds value to a study based on social cognition and prior experience. These two dimensions significantly influence choosing a coping mechanism that suits one's personality. The respondents' selection is based on Miles and Huberman's theoretical significance guidelines (1994). Further, it is noteworthy to mention that a well-selected sample provides the researcher with broader insights into probed questions in the study (Kerlinger& Lee, 2000; Silverman, 2020).

3.1. *The Interview*

Our study's research sample consisted of 18 adults who had experienced a layoff or similar insecure situation in their career. Ten of them were males, and eight were females. The average age of respondents was 36 years, and the youngest respondent was 27. Five were from the Information Technology industry, and two were working in a leading airline that had recently shut down its operations. The other respondents were employed in the Aviation, Banking, Construction, Automobile, Pharma, and E-commerce sectors. Each interview lasted for a time duration ranging from 30 to 50 minutes and focused on the following threads. The networking behavior showed them how they managed job-related Insecurity during an uncertain environment. The networking mechanism helped them cope with anxiety—they displayed other coping mechanisms while they experienced J.I. The face-to-face interview helped the respondents share their responses, the strategies adopted, and the coping mechanisms they resorted to when they felt job insecurity. Throughout the study, we adopted a structured approach; the interviewer occasionally probed for more information when we felt such additional inquiries needed to garner a more accurate picture of the respondent's reactions. We have also spent some additional time with respondents, asking them to elaborate on occasions where we felt stereotypical answers. We ensured that our participants thoroughly understood our questions and could provide appropriate answers to address them. We took precautions to reduce bias attributed to In-depth interviews, as indicated in the work by Chenail (2011). These biases include querying in detail about respondents' experiences using short and direct questions, eliciting more responses, and are easily interpreted. The responses were recorded by using an electronic recording device.

3.2. *Documentation and Data Analysis*

We documented the interviews systematically and generated verbatim transcripts. We maintained a diary of field notes and interview notes. This procedure helped us maintain consistency and reliability while carrying out the analysis. We have also devised a mechanism for inviting a peer to review our themes and field notes comprehensively. This process has helped us in enhancing the reliability of our analysis. Principles bind researchers and should maintain high professional standards to uphold ethical standards, even when subjects are unaware of ethical issues related to research (Kerlinger& Lee, 2000). By following these guidelines, the participants were given free will to

participate or not participate in our work. We have briefed them about the objectives of our study and its implications. This exercise was carried out to ensure transparency and gain their confidence. However, adequate measures are taken to prevent the sharing of excessive information related to the study.

We have followed a content analysis approach to categorize words and derive themes for arranging and classifying the data gathered from the interview (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). An inductive approach was adopted to give the data meaning and extract meaningful themes. This has provided a possible explanation of individuals' reactions and relates them to various theories.

New concepts and themes emerged during the content analysis, and the researchers made it a point to examine and adjust the codes regularly to account for these developments. The data cleaning and processing activities were completed using QDA Miner Lite. Despite intense disputes on a few occasions, we reached the final themes and conclusions through dialogue.

4. Findings & Discussion

4.1. Networking Behavior

People engage in networking behavior and use strong ties when they perceive J.I. The following statements validate our observation. " yes, definitely, whoever is released to the bench(an insecure position in I.T. company), they will ping their friends and network with people and ask if there any openings in any other account within the company itself..." Similar sentiments echoed in the words of another respondent: "So networking is one thing so that I can equip my network to understand what are the different opportunities I can explore into, another one is starting my venture ..so I did these things at a stage where I experienced job insecurity." The statements depicted above indicate that social ties and networks help enhance perceived employability and alleviate the stress related to potential job loss, as Mehreen et al. (2019) concluded in a study carried out among School teachers.

4.2. Strong ties and information

A detailed analysis of respondents' experiences helped us understand that strong ties are very much associated with accessing information, which can be witnessed in the following words of a respondent.

"Towards the end, when I came to know that I was going to be released from the project, once the project was delivered, My and I kept on checking with friends if they had an opening in their organizations, so we kept our resume ready and be prepared because nobody wants to go to the bench again."

A couple of related statements from another respondent showcased below helped us conclude that interpersonal skills create good relationships inside and outside the organization, which aid individuals in identifying job opportunities.

“I had a boss in XXXXX, and when he got into our organization’s merger, we got to know each other, and when he was regional controller for XXXXX and switched to another company, YYY. At YYY, there was an opening, and he suggested my name for that interview. So, even I do not know that he gave my name for that role, and I was interviewed and selected for YYY; it was like things happened in such a short time.”

“ There is a group called RMG- Resource Management Group(RMG); they handle openings. In RMG, some people are assigned to different projects. So, how many accounts do we need? They have a list in an Excel sheet for requirements in Trivandrum, Cochin, Bangalore, etc. They send the information to people on the bench or talent pool. We can check whether the requirement matches and filter and check the requirements. We can submit our resume to the mentioned Project Officer for shortlisting, therefore, when there is an opening, before even reaching the RMG. People would have contacted and blocked the positions by utilizing their connections.”

Another comment by a respondent who is also a middle manager emphasized the need for networking and the usefulness of strong ties at the mid-career level.

“Insecurity at the midcareer level is relatively high as it is challenging to get a job unless you can stand out in the crowd. It would be best to have a better network of people who believe in you. Networking with peers or managers you have worked with can significantly help. ”

Overall, the above statements help us conclude that strong ties reduce job insecurity to a great extent, as discussed in prior studies (Feeney & Bozeman,2008).

4.3. Family support

Respondents elaborated on the support they received during the time of the crisis.

“But my family was supportive, in the sense that when I told them the workplace story, they were compassionate and mentioned not to worry. They said, "You can come back; we are there behind you." You have some. You can go back. I have yet to learn about the layoff. It happened randomly. I do not know on what basis?”

The support from family can be viewed in remarks made by another respondent.

"I was lucky because I had external support in terms of psychological counseling when I was highly pressured. During this time, I completed two marathons that helped me reduce my stress level; the next thing was my mentor's support. My family support helped me - they continuously supported me, and connecting with some of my networks and close friends helped me sustain the pressure level. Such support boosted my confidence, and I continued doing what I was doing.”

Similar statements were further noted.

My family has contributed to supporting me. With their support, survival was easier. My wife has been supportive in caring for my other family members."

The sentiments mentioned above were in line with studies carried out by Sabatini (2009), where the author concludes that strong family ties support individuals in their job search and placement, thereby reducing the instability lingering within the individual in that context.

4.4. Information Sharing and Perceived employability and learning

A set of interviews helped us come out with the point that information sharing is indirectly related to perceived employability, which is consistent with the prevailing research work on these lines by Cox et al. (2013)

"We are in a social setup, and we naturally tend to know some of our counterparts, peers in other industries and organizations. Natural, but if we put some extra effort in terms of networking, we call it supporting and establishing a career that depends on the organization or the role in your organization. Moreover, I have received help to grab the job opportunity; networking can also inform my network to understand the different opportunities I can explore, build my capabilities, and apply where I fit in when I feel insecure."

Networking also helps respondents access a resource that helps in career development and related learning. The following narrates this.

"I am now taking guidance from a senior, a professor at IIT. With his guidance, I have come so far. As soon as I got into logistics, I wanted to learn strategic planning. People in my network told me that the operations and supply chain is a part of strategic planning. Therefore, I enrolled in the IIM Kozhikode business program in Strategic Planning for Supply Chain Management. This happened at a stage where I am unsure about my next career move."

Thus, networking helps access information that helps choose people for the right job and career enhancement programs.

Another respondent said that she lost her job because she did not have enough information and network, which put her in a highly vulnerable situation.

"No, I was not aware that the organization had adopted resizing tactics because if I had known it, I would have taken steps to secure my career. I would have started looking for a different opportunity in Mumbai. One of my fired colleagues did not tell me the story behind it. I would be well prepared if she had told me one month before. However, we needed a stronger connection; the same is true with my reporting manager. "

It is evident in the above statements that the exchange of ideas between people helps develop interpersonal skills and perceived employability (Cox et al.,2013). Further, information-sharing

practices help them access novel information circulating within their social network (Lin, 2007). It also helps them to broaden their existing networks.

4.5. H.R. practices and employability

Our study helped us understand the organizational culture and well-defined people management practices significantly impacting employee learning and perceived employability.

"We serve customers across the world, and there are many cross-cultural aspects also, and even though we hired engineers for them, we train them a lot in communication, articulation, interpersonal skills, cross-cultural skills, even grooming etiquettes. Our whole performance management system is defined and meant to give the impression that anybody who joins us will evolve and invest in themselves by using the learning opportunity here. The performance management system considers our job improvement and other factors, such as communication, commitment, dedication, and peer interaction. There is a chance that the person accesses himself or herself and gets feedback from the line managers."

Thus, H.R. practices and employability are also well supported by Liu (2018), who concludes his work with the view that competency development, sharing of information, and employee recognition facilitate employee learning, which augments their employability.

4.6. Weak Ties and Employability

Our study has helped us validate that access to job information helps in career success (Brown & Konrad, 2001; Zottoli & Wanous, 2000) as it reduces competition for a job position. Weak ties or a more comprehensive network helps to have greater employability as people are more at ease approaching fewer familiar people seeking job information. This can be witnessed from the experience shared by one of our respondents.

"A telecom major shortlisted me at first; they denied me in the campus recruitment, saying that I do not know Malayalam(a vernacular language used in India), so I was upset. However, I am still fit for the job if I know the language. Therefore, I wrote a message to The H.R. Recruiter who came for the campus interview. I called him, and he did not even open my message. I texted him on WhatsApp and LinkedIn. I followed up with him and tried to convince him that not knowing a language is not a barrier that prevents someone from performing in an organization. I was interviewed again, and I was extended an employment offer. The guy from H.R. always quotes this incident and says that in his 16 years of experience, nobody has approached him like that."

A weak attempt through a weak connection helped this respondent to land a job she yearned for. This real-time experience depicts a situation where social relationships play a crucial role in influencing even third parties involved in recruitment just utilizing "putting in a word," which can act as a pivotal factor in selection situations (Stiff & Vugt, 2008).

4.7. Contribution to the literature

The current study explores social ties and their role in buffering subjective job insecurity and enhancing perceived employability. Only a few studies investigate the role of social networking and its reconciling effect on perceived employability. Our work adds value to the existing literature on job insecurity and highlights the role facilitated by social ties. Social ties help inflow novel information that can enhance interpersonal relationships and improve perceived employability. The study attempts to elucidate the process of networking and its positive effect by going beyond direct models. Our work is deeply rooted in social capital theory (Lin, 1999), and we have come out with an indirect archetypal that propounds that access to resources can act as a mechanism that links networking and perceived employability.

Our work helps in adding empirical support to the argument that social ties help gain access to information and novel resources that help in positive career outcomes (Hwang et al., 2004). Further, it helps demonstrate the attributes of social capital and its structure (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) and its role in enhancing employability. The outcome of our study augments the prior studies in the area, bolstering the notion, as the structural views present only a partial version of this story. Our work also identified behavior displayed by individuals in their social networks (Kilduff & Brass, 2010) and used it to develop relationships and access resources. The study provides evidence that social capital must be capitalized on for a favorable outcome (Anderson, 2008).

Prior studies have highlighted the importance of networking in successfully managing a career (Seibert et al., 2001; Wolff & Moser, 2009) and obtaining employment in particular (Burt, 1997; Granovetter, 1973; Wanberg et al., 2000). However, not much focus has been provided on the strength of social ties in buffering the negative aspects of job insecurity, and works in this context are lesser known. Our study concludes that networking access to resources and learning goals are pivotal in enhancing an individual's employability. It also showcases how individuals interact and complement each other to enhance their employability. Based on our work, we propose the following (Fig-1) model that helps to buffer job-related Insecurity.

4.8. Implications

Our study can be used by individuals involved in career planning and those who aid them. Individuals can benefit significantly by inculcating networking behavior as it enables better access to resources related to career opportunities. De Janasz and Forret (2008) propound the view that networking behavior can be groomed in individuals who attend career guidance sessions. Hence, the counselors in these areas should design training programs to equip their clients with networking skills.

One of the critical contributions of our work is that social network ties act as a game-changer in the individuals' career stages and reduce the anxiety felt by them due to work-related J.I. Further, such ties help them gain information that helps them focus on developing their career-related skills and remaining competitive. Moreover, both strong and weak ties improve their interpersonal relationships with other professionals in the field who can assist them in identifying new opportunities.

In addition to the benefits mentioned above, weak ties bridge employer and employee through referrals. Hence, professionals aspiring for change should try to transform their weak ties into strong ties. Besides, investing time in developing social capital will reward them with professional development and job opportunities.

Our study helped to find that information exchange and interactions enhance the perceived employability of an individual as it proliferates an individual's point of contact, which he or she can look forward to for career-related guidance. Managers should enhance the workforce's perceived employability to retain and motivate the talent. They can design training programs that can result in the enhancement of their professional skills and abilities. Managers can also plan for social networks that connect managers of various divisions with colleagues. Such networks will help them better interact with employees at different levels and help them map to a position that best fits their abilities. Such initiatives by line managers and people managers will help improve interpersonal relationships with colleagues and improve their perception of their employability.

Psychological well-being is essential, as a confident employee can deliver well and help achieve goals. Additionally, it helps reduce perceived job insecurity and anxiety among employees and improves their emotional well-being. We proposed a model based on our work and review of existing literature.

5. Limitations, Future Research Directions and Conclusion

Our study has addressed all questions proposed; however, like any other scientific work, our paper is also not free from limitations. Our work is exploratory, and we have adopted a cross-sectional approach for data collection, which would have resulted in a method bias. A longitudinal approach helped reduce methodological bias. A mixed-method-based study on a future date will aid in reinforcing the findings of this study. We have considered respondents who have worked in service sector jobs such as information technology, airlines, and telecommunication area and their perception of the role of social networking as a buffer mechanism while they experience job insecurity. A systematic inquiry by including employees from another sector will help gain better insights into the role of social networks in buffering the adverse effects of job insecurity.

Our study has focused only on two attributes of a network, namely strong and weak ties. Other characteristics, namely reciprocity, network centrality, and density, which could have influenced perceived employability, were not examined, and this leaves scope for future studies by incorporating more variables such as support from peers, supervisors, etc.

This study attempts to explain access to resources as a mechanism that links networking and perceived employability. Social ties help free information flow, enhancing interpersonal effectiveness and perceived employability. It also alleviates the anxiety associated with job insecurity. Our study examines the role of strong and weak ties in enhancing perceived employability, thereby lessening the negative feelings associated with job insecurity. The study results highlight that strong and weak

ties are a valuable resource for enhancing employability. In other words, our study demonstrated the role of both strong and weak ties in improving perceived employability and reducing the risk associated with job insecurity.

Moreover, our analysis supports that information sharing boosts perceived employability and results in effective interaction between employer and employee. This interaction helps in the generation of new employment opportunities. We have validated the argument that ties result in improved employability for individuals, and they should develop professional networks to lessen the risk associated with job insecurity.

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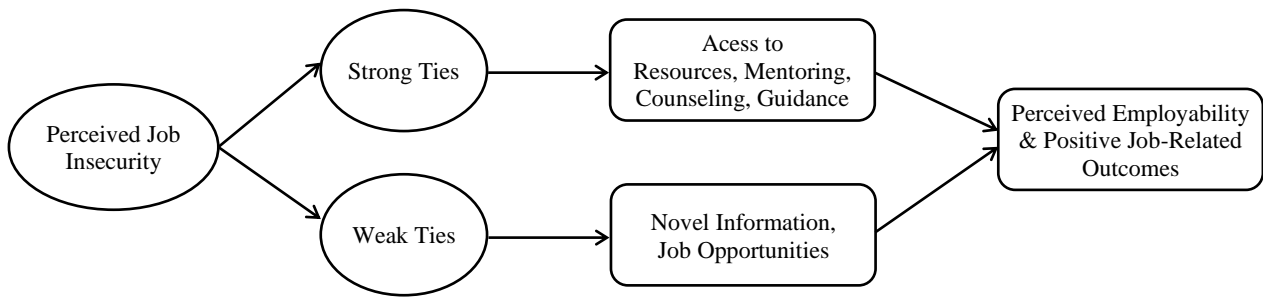


Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Model, Perceived Job Insecurity and Employability

Table 1. Details of respondent

Respondent Number	Gender	Education	Industry	Age
1	Male	BA Economic; Diploma in Marketing Management	Auto Industry	51
2	Female	MBA	IT Industry	46
3	Female	B. Tech(IT),MBA	E-Commerce	27
4	Male	B.Tech(Mech),PGDM(HR& Market),Mgt courses from LLM Kozhikode, XLRI	Pharma Industry	35
5	Female	B.Tech(IT);MBA	IT Industry	33
6	Female	BSc; MSc- Psychology; M.Phil-Psychology; Diploma- Training & Development	Airline	33
7	Male	Graduate; Pursuing MBA	Airline	27
8	Female	B.Tech; Pursuing MBA	IT Industry	30
9	Female	PhD	Research & Development-Nano Sciences	41
10	Male	M.Sc	IT Industry	49
11	Male	MSc	Pharma	37
12	Female	BSc	Para Medical	33
13	Male	B.Tech IT	IT Industry	27
14	Male	B.Tech Civil	Construction	32
15	Female	B.Tech -Mech	E-Commerce	49
16	Male	B.Com; MBA	Telecom	30
17	Male	B.Tech; MBA	Telecom	38
18	Male	B.Tech; MBA	Banking	36