

MISQ Archivist

Interventions for Improving Professional Networking for Women: Experimental Evidence from the IT Sector

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Abstract

Professional networks are vital for individuals' career advancement. Research demonstrates, however, that women are often disadvantaged in their access to such networks. Using a randomized field experiment at an IT conference, we found that women had worse networking outcomes than men. Relative to men, women met 42% fewer new contacts, spent 48% less time talking to them, and added 25% fewer LinkedIn connections. We theorized that in fields where women are underrepresented (e.g., IT) two networking barriers—search and social—differentially affect men and women. We designed and experimentally tested interventions for reducing these barriers. The search intervention was designed to facilitate locating diverse contacts and information. The social intervention was designed to facilitate helping behavior and connecting across social boundaries. We find that the search intervention increased the number of new contacts women met by 57%, the time they spent talking with them by 90%, the number of LinkedIn connections they added by 29%, and their odds of changing jobs by a factor of 1.6. The social intervention increased the time women spent talking to new contacts by 66%. The interventions did not improve men's outcomes. Our results show that simple interventions can help women grow their networks and find jobs.

Keywords: IT workers, women in IT, gender gaps, social network analysis, networking, randomized field experiment; career mobility