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The Network Advantage: Demographic Differences in Job Applicants' Connections

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professional networks serve several important purposes in helping workers improve in their career. People's connections can provide a worker with information about skills on the rise, new job openings, second degree connections to connect with, and more. One potential advantage is for job seekers, where a connection can serve as a referral, whether formally or informally, and source of information for an applicant to the job post's company.

In this research note, we examine the extent to which job applicants differ in having a connection at the job posting's firm where they apply, and how it is correlated with downstream hiring. We examine five million randomly sampled job applicants between July 2019 and December 2025 across the following economies: US, Singapore, UK, France, Germany, Australia, Netherlands, Italy, Brazil, Spain, Sweden, and India.

Take for example, the U.S. and its findings at a glance:

- **Across the U.S.:** In the US, almost 14% of applications submitted between 2019 and 2025 had an inside connection, and connected applications converted into hires at 6.7x the rate of unconnected ones (0.7% vs 0.1%). That is, internal connections can make a meaningful difference in the hiring process. While only 14% of applications came from someone with a connection at the company, those applicants were hired at nearly 7 times the rate of other candidates.
- **Network size:** In the US, 20% of applications by members in the top network size quartile (Q4) submitted between 2019 and 2025 had an inside connection, compared to just 1.3% in the bottom quartile (Q1). However, the connected applications for Q1 members converted into hires at 10x the rate of unconnected ones.
- **Seniority:** In the US, 20% of applications submitted by managers between 2019 and 2025 had an inside connection compared to 12% by entry-level applicants. However, the lift is highest for entry-level job seekers (7.1x vs 6.1x for managers).
- **Age Generation:** In the US, 11% of applications submitted by Gen Z between 2019 and 2025 had an inside connection, compared to 19% for Baby Boomer applicants, but the lift is comparable across generations, ranging between 6.3x and 6.8x.
- **Gender:** Men consistently have a higher share of connected applications than women. In the US, 15% of men's applications submitted between 2019 and 2025 had an inside connection compared to 13% for women. The lift is similar for both genders at 6.8x for men and 6.4x for women.
- **Education:** In the US, 18% of applications submitted between 2019 and 2025 by members holding an MBA had an inside connection, compared to 9% for STARs. However, the lift is highest for Bachelors or Higher (8.0x), while MBAs have a lower lift at 6.6x and members with Bachelors only are at 6.1x.
- **Verification:** In the US, verified members have a higher share of connected applications (15%) with respect to non-verified members (10%), but the two groups have the same inside-connection lift at 6.7x.
- **Job Industry:** In the US, Technology, Info & Media and Manufacturing are the industries with both the highest share of connected applications at around 6% and the highest inside-connection lift at 8x.
- **Company size:** Applications to larger companies are far more likely to have an inside connection (32% for enterprises with more than 10,000 employees), but the lift peaks at mid-size firms (51-500 employees) at 7.1x.
- **Network size x Generation:** The generation gap in access to inside connections persists even among the most connected members. In the US, among members in the top network size quartile (Q4), 26% of Baby Boomers' applications had an inside connection, compared to 17% for Gen Z. The lift in the top quartile, however, is stable across Gen Z (7.5x), Millennials (7.5x), and Gen X (7.7x), with only Baby Boomers lower at 6x.
- **Network size x Seniority:** Among members in the top network size quartile (Q4), 27% of applications submitted by managers in the US had an inside connection, compared to 19% by entry-levels. However,

connected applications by entry-level Q4 members converted into hires at 8.5x the rate of unconnected ones, compared to 6.2x for managers and 7.4x for seniors in the same network size quartile.

2. APPLICANTS WITH AN INSIDE CONNECTION GET HIRED AT 4–8X THE CONVERSION RATE OF UNCONNECTED APPLICATIONS

Across the 12 countries analyzed, about 14–21% of applications have an inside connection — a minority of the pool — yet these connected applications converted into hires at far higher rates (e.g. 0.7% vs 0.1% in the US). The inside-connection lift ranges from 3.8x in France to 8.5x in India, with the US (6.7x) and Brazil (7.2x) sitting well above the cross-country mean of ~5x.

Country	Share of connected applications	Connected conversion rate	Unconnected conversion rate	Inside-connection lift
Australia	20.8%	0.83%	0.19%	4.5×
Brazil	21.2%	0.59%	0.08%	7.2×
France	16.6%	0.47%	0.12%	3.8×
Germany	14.5%	0.68%	0.17%	4.1×
India	21.0%	0.35%	0.04%	8.5×
Italy	17.2%	0.44%	0.10%	4.3×
Netherlands	18.2%	0.94%	0.24%	3.9×
Singapore	20.0%	0.43%	0.10%	4.5×
Spain	15.5%	0.62%	0.13%	4.8×
Sweden	19.1%	1.20%	0.27%	4.4×
United Kingdom	13.6%	0.60%	0.12%	5.0×
United States	13.8%	0.68%	0.10%	6.7×
Cross-country mean	17.6%	0.65%	0.14%	5.1×

3. NETWORK SIZE ACCOUNTS FOR THE LARGEST GAP IN ACCESS TO INSIDE CONNECTIONS — THE SHARE OF CONNECTED APPLICATIONS RISES UP TO 31 PP FROM SMALLEST TO LARGEST QUARTILE — BUT THE HIRING LIFT IS HIGHEST FOR THE SMALLEST NETWORKS

Across all 12 countries between 2019 and 2025, 25% of the applications submitted by members in the top network size quartile (Q4) had an inside connection versus 2% by members in the lowest quartile (Q1). This trend holds also at country level, with Brazil (+30.7 pp) and Singapore (+28.6 pp) having the largest Q4–Q1 gap, and Germany (+17.9 pp) and the UK (+18.9 pp) the smallest.

Yet the lift tells the opposite story: Q1 applicants experience an 8.4x lift on average when they do have a connection, versus 6.3x for Q4, suggesting how inside connections are more valuable for those with sparse networks.

	Share of connected applications		Inside-connection lift	
Country	Q1 (smallest)	Q4 (largest)	Q1	Q4
Australia	2.7%	28.9%	4.1×	4.8×
Brazil	1.9%	32.6%	11.8×	7.0×
France	1.5%	22.6%	8.8×	4.0×
Germany	1.3%	19.2%	9.5×	4.5×
India	2.5%	28.2%	6.5×	8.9×
Italy	1.5%	27.6%	9.5×	4.4×
Netherlands	1.8%	23.0%	2.3×	4.2×
Singapore	1.8%	30.3%	13.4×	4.2×
Spain	1.3%	24.1%	8.2×	4.2×
Sweden	2.9%	25.9%	5.7×	4.5×
United Kingdom	1.1%	20.0%	10.8×	5.2×
United States	1.3%	20.5%	10.0×	7.4×
Overall	1.8%	24.6%	8.4×	6.3×

4. GEN Z AND ENTRY-LEVEL APPLICANTS HAVE THE MOST TO GAIN FROM INSIDE CONNECTIONS — BUT THE LEAST ACCESS TO THEM

Averaged across the 12 countries, entry-level applicants have a connected application share of just 15%, compared to 23% for managers. Yet entry-level job seekers experience a higher lift (5.5x) than managers have (4.6x), with the gap being the widest in India (Entry 9.7x vs Manager 8.2x) and the US (Entry 7.1x vs Manager 6.1x).

The same pattern holds across generations. Among Gen Z applicants, on average only 14% of applications had an inside connection, yet when they did, they converted into a hire at a rate 5.7x higher than those without a connection — the highest generational lift.

Early-career members have had less time to build networks, so they apply with inside connections less often — but when they do, the hiring advantage is largest.

Seniority	Share of connected applications (cross-country mean)	Inside-connection lift (cross-country mean)
Entry	15.2%	5.5×
Senior	19.3%	5.1×
Manager	22.8%	4.6×

Age Generation	Share of connected applications (cross-country mean)	Inside-connection lift (cross-country mean)
Gen Z (1997–2012)	14.0%	5.7×
Millennials (1981–1996)	19.1%	5.0×
Gen X (1965–1980)	22.7%	5.5×
Boomers (1946–1964)	22.6%	4.7×

4. GENDER GAP PERSISTS IN NETWORK ACCESS, WITH MIXED LIFT PATTERNS ACROSS COUNTRIES

Male applicants have a higher share of connected applications than females in all 12 countries (cross-country mean 19% vs 16%, a +3 pp gap). The gap is widest in Singapore (+4.6 pp), Italy (+3.8 pp) and Netherlands (+3.7 pp), and narrowest in Sweden (+1.3 pp) and Germany (+1.6 pp).

On average, the lift is nearly equal (5.0x female vs 5.1x male), but country-level patterns diverge: in Italy, Brazil, Spain, and Sweden females experience a higher lift than males, even though slightly; while in India, Australia, the US, and UK males have a moderately higher lift. This suggests the structural disadvantage is primarily in access (fewer connected applications), while the value of the connection once present is not substantial.

5. VERIFIED MEMBERS HAVE MORE NETWORK ACCESS, BUT UNVERIFIED MEMBERS BENEFIT MORE WHEN THEY DO HAVE A CONNECTION

Based on 2025 data only, verified members have a connected-application share of ~20% on average, compared to 16% for unverified members (+4 pp gap), consistent across all 12 countries. However, the lift is higher for unverified members (5.9× vs 5.1× on average) in 9 of 12 countries.

	Share of connected applications			Inside-connection lift		
Country	Female	Male	(M - F)	Female	Male	(M - F)
Australia	19.5%	21.9%	+2.4 pp	4.1×	4.7×	+0.6
Brazil	20.1%	22.1%	+2.0 pp	7.5×	7.0×	-0.5

France	15.2%	17.8%	+2.6 pp	3.8×	3.8×	0.0
Germany	13.6%	15.3%	+1.6 pp	3.7×	4.1×	+0.4
India	19.8%	22.0%	+2.2 pp	8.1×	8.8×	+0.7
Italy	15.3%	19.1%	+3.8 pp	4.9×	3.9×	-1.0
Netherlands	16.4%	20.0%	+3.7 pp	3.6×	3.9×	+0.3
Singapore	17.8%	22.5%	+4.6 pp	4.2×	4.4×	+0.2
Spain	13.5%	17.0%	+3.5 pp	5.1×	4.6×	-0.5
Sweden	18.7%	20.0%	+1.3 pp	4.3×	4.1×	-0.2
United Kingdom	12.3%	15.1%	+2.8 pp	4.7×	5.1×	+0.5
United States	12.8%	14.8%	+2.1 pp	6.4×	6.8×	+0.4
Cross-country mean	16.2%	19.0%	+2.8 pp	5.0×	5.1×	+0.1

	Share of connected applications (2025 only)		Inside-connection lift (2025 only)	
Country	Verified	Not Verified	Verified	Not Verified
Australia	24.3%	19.7%	3.4×	4.9×
Brazil	27.7%	19.2%	5.7×	9.0×
France	20.4%	15.2%	4.8×	3.9×
Germany	15.3%	12.7%	4.1×	4.7×
India	24.3%	19.0%	8.1×	10.9×
Italy	18.9%	15.3%	3.9×	4.3×
Netherlands	19.1%	16.6%	4.1×	4.0×
Singapore	23.9%	18.9%	6.3×	4.5×
Spain	17.5%	14.1%	4.3×	5.6×
Sweden	20.6%	17.4%	5.7×	4.7×
United Kingdom	14.5%	12.6%	4.6×	5.8×
United States	14.2%	11.7%	6.3×	8.0×
Cross-country mean	20.1%	16.0%	5.1×	5.9×

6. COMPANY SIZE INFLATES THE CONNECTED APPLICATION SHARE BUT THE LIFT IS STRONGEST AT MID-SIZE FIRMS

Applications to large enterprises have a much larger share of connected applications compared to smaller companies, but this is mainly driven by having more employees, hence a higher likelihood for job seekers to have at least one inside connection.

However, on average the lift at very large companies with 10,000+ employees (~4.1x) is lower than at mid-size firms — the lift is the highest in SME firms with 51-200 employees at an average of ~4.6x. The low lift in the smallest companies likely reflects data sparsity — few connected applications means noisier conversion estimates — rather than a genuine signal that connections are less valuable there.

Company size	Share of connected applications (cross-country mean)	Inside-connection lift (cross-country mean)
10,001+	32.3%	4.1×
5,001–10,000	21.9%	4.4×
1,001–5,000	17.1%	4.2×
501–1,000	12.2%	4.3×
201–500	9.6%	4.3×
51–200	6.8%	4.6×
11–50	5.0%	3.5×
1–10	3.8%	2.8×

METHODOLOGY & DEFINITIONS

Job application A job application is counted whenever a member either submitted an application on LinkedIn (onsite apply) or clicked the apply button of a job posting (offsite apply). Each member–company application is counted once, at its earliest application date.

Inside connection For each job application, we look at the applicant's first-degree LinkedIn connections at the time they applied. If at least one of those connections was already employed at the company the member is applying to, that application has an inside connection. Having an inside connection does not necessarily mean that the applicant actually used the connection or was referred.

Connected/unconnected applications A job application is considered to be *connected* if the applicant had an inside connection at the time of application; and vice versa it is *unconnected* if the applicant did not have an inside connection.

Share of connected applications = connected applications ÷ total number of applications, shown as a percentage. It is computed overall and separately within each cut (country, generation, gender, education, seniority, verified status, and network size quartile).

Confirmed hire A confirmed hire is a member who, within 180 days from the job application date to a company, adds that same company as a new position on their LinkedIn profile. This serves as a proxy for a successful hire outcome.

Connected application conversion rate = number of confirmed hires ÷ total number of connected applications, shown as a percentage.

Inside-connection lift How many times an applicant with an inside connection is getting hired compared to one without. It is computed as the ratio of the connected conversion rate to the unconnected conversion rate.

Network size quartiles Each member's network size is their number of first-degree connections, the highest count reached during the time window. Members are ranked by network size and split into four equal-sized groups across the full 12-country sample: Q1 = smallest 25% of networks, Q4 = largest 25%.

Verification status A member is considered verified if they completed LinkedIn's verification process (either through ID or workplace methods) before or on the date of their job application.