

# Social networks that lead to leadership positions found to differ by gender for business students

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A combined team of researchers from Northwestern University and the University of Notre Dame has found that when it comes to the

usefulness of social networks in finding good positions after graduation, gender matters. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their study involving analysis of student emails and what it revealed.

For students working toward an MBA, connections are extremely important. Who you know can mean the difference between landing a [leadership](#) position upon graduation or instead, working your way up. In this new effort, the researchers sought to learn more about this process and the ways social networks influence job prospects.

The study consisted of analyzing 4.5 million emails exchanged between students at a prestigious business school. The emails were sent by 542 male students and 186 female students over the years 2006 and 2007 (when email was still the main form of online communication). The anonymized emails provided knowledge about the students' social networks and how such networks impacted their job prospects after graduation. The team combined data from the emails with data from school records to build networking maps that correlated with success after [graduation](#).

The data and maps revealed that [male students](#) who were part of the "right" networks were 1.5 times more likely to step directly into a leadership position as soon as they graduated, as opposed to men who belonged to less useful networks. Sadly, women did not fare as well. Even if they were in the so-called "right" [network](#), they did not see much of an improvement in their chances for landing a leadership position. But if they belonged to a social network made up of mostly women who did very well at school, they were 2.5 times more likely to step into a leadership position after they graduated.

The researchers were not able to explain why female-centric networks offered female job seekers better opportunities, but suggest it might

have to do with related social connections with women already in the workforce.

**More information:** "A network's gender composition and communication pattern predict women's leadership success," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2019).

[www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1721438116](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1721438116)

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