

# Towards Women's Empowerment: The Importance of Social Capital in Employability

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**Abstract:**

Women's employability refers to their ability to secure and maintain employment while balancing family and professional responsibilities. The primary challenges they face include gender stereotypes and unpaid domestic obligations. Enhancing women's employability requires creating an environment that values their skills and addresses gender inequalities. Social capital plays a crucial role by facilitating access to professional networks, increasing visibility, and supporting women's autonomy in their career paths.

This study explores the contribution of social capital to women's employability and empowerment. We conducted an in-depth review of theoretical and documentary literature from 1999 to 2024 to address our research question. A conceptual framework specific to this study was developed, synthesizing the research findings. To achieve this, we integrated four theories: the social resources and instrumental action theory, empowerment theory, gender and development theory, and human capital theory.

The results indicate that social capital is a key factor in enhancing women's employability and empowerment, emphasizing that through improved employability, women can achieve greater autonomy with the support provided by social capital.

**Keywords:** Social Capital; Employability; Women's Empowerment; Gender Equality; Education.

## Introduction

Empowering women is a major issue in the pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive society. Among the various factors contributing to this empowerment, social capital emerges as a central element, particularly in enhancing women's employability. Social capital, encompassing all resources accessible through networks of relationships, mutual trust, and cooperation among individuals and groups, plays a fundamental role in generating professional opportunities and accessing quality jobs.

By promoting skill acquisition, access to information, and mobilizing diverse support networks, social capital can transform women's career paths and bolster their position in the job market. This dynamic is particularly significant in contexts where women encounter systemic and cultural barriers that hinder their economic participation.

Therefore, exploring the contribution of social capital to women's empowerment through employability allows a better understanding of the mechanisms through which networks and interpersonal relationships can be mobilized to overcome barriers to gender equality and promote sustainable economic inclusion. Indeed, our research question could be formulated as follows:

### ***Does social capital influence women's empowerment through employability?***

This research question invites exploration of the links between social capital, women's empowerment, and employability, with a focus on relational dynamics and the resources that social networks can provide. It also proposes examining how these elements can help mitigate specific challenges that women encounter in the professional world.

To address this research question, this paper begins with a literature review of the key concepts of our study in its first section, followed by an analysis of the causal relationships between these concepts in the second section.

## 1. Literature Review

In this first section, we will present a theoretical framework necessary to conceptualize the key concepts under study: social capital, employability, and women's empowerment.

### 1.1 Social capital

The concept of social capital has generated growing interest for at least a decade, highlighting the importance of social connections. Coleman, Bourdieu, and Putnam are pioneers in the theory of social capital. Michael Woolcock (2001) identified at least seven domains where the concept of social capital was applied: family and youth, education and the school system, organizational work structures, community life, democracy and governance, challenges of collective cooperation, and economic development.

It seems difficult to develop a universal definition of social capital that encompasses various theoretical perspectives. However, according to the OECD (2001), social capital corresponds, by definition, to: *«networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups»*. Snijders (1999) defined social capital as an individual quality shaped by personal relationships, describing it as the anticipated value of the benefits that individuals can gain from their interactions with others.

Thus, following an analysis of the concept of «social capital», Putnam (1995) suggests this definition: *«By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital (tools and training that enhance individual productivity) "social capital" refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit»*.

The definition of social capital suggested by Bourdieu (1980) pertains to: *«the set of current or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition; or, in other words, belonging to a group, as a set of agents who not only share common properties (perceived by observers, by others, or by themselves) but are also united by permanent and useful ties»*.

According to the World Bank, the social capital of a country or territory originates from five main sources: the family unit, local communities including neighbours, informal groups and grassroots associations, businesses and professional organizations, civil society representing social interactions outside the market and the state (though this can be subject to interpretation), and finally, the public sector as a factor of social cohesion (Gadrey, 2003).

There are three main approaches to social capital. The first, of a micro nature, focuses on cooperative behaviours and their forms, emphasizing the value of collective cooperation in social capital. The second, more macro-oriented, highlights the conditions that promote or hinder cooperation while focusing on the value of social integration and cohesion in social capital. Finally, the third approach, more meso-level, examines the structures that facilitate cooperation, giving social capital a more instrumental value (Franke, 2005).

To clarify the notion of «social capital», Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) suggest three associated dimensions: structural (the institutional bases of social relationships), relational (including trust, respect, friendship, etc.), and cognitive (involving common interpretations, representations).

In other words, the structural dimension of social capital involves analyzing the nature of interactions among individuals within an organization. According to Bolino et al. (2002), sharing information and knowledge is facilitated and more objective when employees are connected to each other within the organization.

The relational dimension of social capital is associated with the emotional bonds among employees who share common characteristics. According to Bolino et al. (2002), teams where members share common values adapt better to environmental changes, are more flexible, and therefore more effective.

The cognitive dimension of social capital promotes internal cohesion within the organization, which is crucial for improving company performance. This dimension encompasses not only shared languages and narratives but also a common vision that enables organization members to share a coherent interpretation of events (Bolino et al., 2002).

According to Franke (2005), the concept of «social capital» encompasses five essential dimensions that are crucial for understanding social fabrics within communities. Firstly, social participation and engagement represent the willingness and involvement of individuals in collective activities and social structures.

Next, self-control and regulation reflect the ability of society members to manage their own behaviours and adhere to established norms. Perceptions of the living environment are also important as they impact how individuals interact with their surroundings and with each other. Social interactions, social networks, and social support constitute another key dimension, describing interpersonal relationships and connections within a community, thereby providing a crucial support network (Franke, 2005).

Finally, trust, reciprocity, and social cohesion are fundamental elements that strengthen social bonds by promoting cooperation and facilitating positive interactions among members of society. By considering these five dimensions, the concept of social capital offers a complete perspective of social life and how people interact within their community (Franke, 2005).

In other words, the dimensions of social capital maintained within the context of personal relationships encompass interactions and emotional bonds that develop both within the family sphere and in the workplace (Gadrey, 2003). These bonds can be deeply rooted in family history and culture, shaping interpersonal relationships and mutual support within the household.

In the professional context, the dimensions of personal connections can manifest through cooperation, mutual trust, and support among colleagues and team members. These connections can also be influenced by factors such as effective communication, respect for individual differences, and the ability to manage conflicts positively.

The research of Sibony (2016), in conjunction with social capital, identifies five dimensions: formal and informal networks, social engagement and civic participation, trust and social norms, and institutional context.

In summarizing the dimensions of the concept of «social capital», we present the following table:

**Table 1.** Dimensions of Social Capital

Authors	Contexte	Dimensions
Nahapiet and Ghosal (1998)	<i>«Social capital, intellectual capital and organizational advantage»</i>	Structural Relational Cognitive
(Gadrey (2003)	<i>«Personal relationships»</i>	Social interactions Emotional ties (family or professional)
Franke (2005)	<i>« Measuring social capital»</i>	Participation and social involvement Self-control and self-mastery Perceptions of living environment Social interactions, social networks and social support Trust, reciprocity and social cohesion
Sibony (2016)	<i>«Social Capital: Dimensions of a Relevant Concept»</i>	Formal and informal networks Social commitment and civic participation Trust and social norms Institutional context

*Source: Authors*

Referring to the dimensions of social capital identified by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), their work identifies three indicators of the structural dimension: network ties, network configuration, and appropriability of an organization. Thus, the relational dimension is explained by four factors: trust, norms, obligations, and identification. As for the cognitive dimension, it is measured by two aspects: shared codes and languages, as well as shared narratives.

In examining these dimensions and their measurement indicators, we observe that the majority of dimensions defined by other authors (Gadrey, 2003; Frank, 2005; Sibony, 2016) are central to Nahapiet and Ghoshal's measurement indicators. Therefore, in line with our research, we have chosen the dimensions proposed by the latter authors, which appear suitable for linking social capital to employability. This assumption will be justified after studying the causal link between these two concepts. Before addressing this point, our next step will be to conceptualize employability.

## 1.2 Employability

The concept of «employability» is now at the heart of discussions concerning unemployment, employment, and vocational training. It emerged in the early twentieth century, first in England and then in the United States. It is a complex and multifaceted concept. For this reason, Gazier (1999) considers it as: *«a vague notion, often poorly defined and sometimes not defined at all»*.

Employability refers to: *«the possibility that someone has of being assigned to a new job»* (Encyclopédie Universalis). It is a: *«form of social protection and an element of security in the labour market»* (Hilmi and Hilmi, 2016). In other words, employability denotes the ability to move independently within the job market to achieve one's full potential through stable employment (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). According to Albert and Emery (1998), employability is defined as the capacity to make oneself attractive and desirable in the job market, whether within the company or outside of it.

Saint-Germes (2004) perceives employability as a: *«dynamic ability to work, that is, an ability to be in employment, to stay there, to adapt, and to bounce back if necessary»*. Meanwhile, Peretti (2001) considers it as: *«the more or less high probability that a person looking for a job has of finding one, the attractiveness of a person in the labour market, and the ability of a person to maintain themselves in a state of keeping their job or finding another one quickly, within or outside the company's profession»*.

According to Hillage and Pollard (1998), the current interest in the concept of employability is fueled by two main factors: firstly, the evolution of public employment policies that now prioritize skill-based approaches and work to address economic and social challenges, and secondly, the decreasing job security and increasing uncertainty among employers regarding their future job needs, necessitating new relationships between employers and employees.

Similarly: *«Developing employability means maintaining and developing employees' skills and human resource management conditions that enable them to access employment within or outside the company, under favorable conditions and within favorable timelines»*, (the Development and Employment Office, 1993; cited by Finot, 2000).

Gazier (1998-2001) identified seven operational versions of employability over time, reflecting the evolution of this concept. The definition and perception of employability have evolved from a simple binary distinction to more nuanced conceptions that consider both individual factors and broader conditions in the labour market.

The first version of employability is dichotomous, emerging in the early 20th century in the UK and the US, classifying individuals as either «employable» or «unemployable». The second version, socio-medical, emerged before the 1950s, focusing on the gap between the work abilities of disadvantaged individuals and the demands of the job market.

The third version of employability is associated with labour market policy. It emerged in the 1960s in the United States, extending this idea to other disadvantaged groups. This was followed by «flow employability», originating from French sociology in the 1960s, which emphasized job accessibility. Subsequently, labour market performance became a measure starting from the late 1970s, focusing on the outcomes of employment policies.

Employability by initiative is the sixth version, emerging in the human resource development literature in the late 1980s, highlighting the necessity for individuals to develop transferable skills. Finally, interactive employability, originating in North America and expanding internationally since the late 1980s, emphasizes the importance of individual initiative while recognizing the role of labour market conditions and activation policies targeting disadvantaged groups.

In general, most authors have focused on these last two versions: interactive employability and initiative employability. For more details, they are detailed as follows:



**Interactive employability**, supported by several authors (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Finot, 2000; Mac Quaid and Lindsay, 2005), is a concept that incorporates individual qualities, professional skills, the labour market situation, as well as corporate and state training policies (Outin, 1990). McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) emphasized this approach, which they conceptualized as a dynamic interaction between individual characteristics, personal circumstances, labour market conditions, and other contextual factors.

**Initiative employability** is important in today's global economy, where job insecurity is a significant concern (Misra and Khurana, 2017). It is based on individual and psychosocial factors. This approach, which places the individual at the forefront, implies that workers are responsible for cultivating their skills and professional networks in their workplace to strengthen their position when considering or needing to change roles (Gazier, 1998a, 1998b, 2001).

McQuaid et al. (2005) argue that the initiative approach brings significant value by generating diverse sets of skills and supporting the implementation of national and institutional policies and practices, which can promote the enhancement of individual employability. From this perspective, individuals should be able to find employment, whether within their current organization or elsewhere, and to work in their current professional field or in a different one (Blanchette, 2022).

The distinction between these two approaches is evident in the emphasis that initiative employability places on individual responsibility for professional development, implying that each worker must take steps to enhance their skills and professional network.

On the other hand, interactive employability acknowledges the importance of individual adaptation combined with collective responsibility, where workers, employers, governments, and other social actors share the responsibility for creating an environment conducive to professional development and mobility. This highlights the interdependence between individuals and their socio-economic context.

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2005) developed a framework for analyzing employability in the information and communication technology sector for a European project. Their approach clearly distinguishes between factors influencing employability (individual, organizational, and contextual factors) and the consequences of employability, such as professional success, based on skills theory.

They define employability as the ability to acquire and maintain employment by effectively using one's skills. Their model identifies five key dimensions of employability:

- **Professional expertise:** Specific knowledge and skills within the field, essential for obtaining and maintaining qualified employment;
- **Anticipation and optimization:** Ability to foresee changes in the labour market and prepare for them to maximize professional opportunities;
- **Personal flexibility:** Ability to adapt to various professional changes, such as job or company changes, crucial in evolving business environments;
- **Collective sense:** Engagement in teamwork and professional networks, involving the sharing of knowledge and responsibilities to achieve common goals;
- **Balance:** Management of conflicts of interest between employer and employee, as well as between different spheres of personal and professional life.

This model emphasizes the importance of developing a range of interpersonal, technical, and adaptational skills to enhance individual employability in dynamic professional contexts.

Kluytmans and Ott (1999) highlight three key elements of employability: knowledge and skills, the willingness to adapt to changes in the labour market by being mobile, and understanding the labour market by mastering information about it and techniques to position oneself effectively within it. They emphasize that these factors are essential for maintaining employability in an ever-changing professional environment.

Berntson (2008) measures employability through two essential dimensions: situational factors and individual factors:

Overall, situational factors play a role in how a situation is perceived. According to research on employability, there are three main determinants of these factors: the structure of the labour market, opportunities within the labour market, and organizational factors.

While situational factors influence the perception of employability, various individual factors also play a crucial role. These factors include skills and knowledge, social capital, abilities, personal traits, demographic characteristics, and dispositions.

This means that different individuals may interpret their chances of finding a new job differently, even if they are in the same situation. Thus, all these elements are considered determinants of employability.

In the study conducted by Othmane (2011), he models the term “employability” by operationalizing it through six dimensions: professional qualities, networking development, job search, personal flexibility, adaptation and development, and balance between professional and personal life.

The authors mentioned earlier have suggested several dimensions of the concept of «employability», which we will present in the table below:

**Table 2.** Dimensions of employability

Authors	Contexte	Dimensions
Kluytmans and Ott (1999)	<i>«Employability management in the Netherlands»</i>	Knowledge and know-how Willingness to move Knowledge of the job market
Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2005)	<i>«The development and psychometric evaluation of a multidimensional measure of employability and the impact of aging»</i>	Professional expertise Anticipation and optimization Personal flexibility Collective sense Balance
Berntson (2008)	<i>«Perceptions of employability: nature, determinants and implications for health and well-being»</i>	Situational factors Individual factors
Othmane (2011)	<i>«Employability: definition, creation of a measurement scale and contribution to the study of determinants»</i>	Professional qualities Networking Job search Personal flexibility Adaptation and development Work-life balance.

**Source: Authors**

Since this table presents a collection of authors’ perspectives, we have chosen to analyze the theoretical framework proposed by Bernston (2008). This analysis has allowed us to identify, in the table below, the dimensions of employability as well as their measurement indicators.

**Table 3.** Dimensions of Employability and their Measurement Indicators According to Bernston (2008)

<b>Employability</b>		
<b>Situational factors</b>	Structure of the job market	Total number of jobs
		Percentage of full-time employment
		Percentage of part-time employment
		Percentage of temporary employment
		Percentage of permanent employment
		Economic situation
	Job market opportunities	Salary level
		Working conditions
		Degree of advancement
		Stability and turnover rate
	Organizational factors	Hiring standards
		Company career planning
<b>Individual factors</b>	Skills and knowledge	Integrity
		Generic skills
		Job-specific skills
		Transferable skills
		Collective sense
		Professional expertise
		Work experience
		Self-management
		Formal education
	Social capital	Formal and informal networks
		Knowledge of the labour market
	Attitudes	Adaptability and flexibility
		Willingness to relocate
		Proactive career management
		Willingness to learn and adapt
	Demographic factors	Gender
		Age
	Dispositions	Neuroticism
		Affectivity
		Self-efficacy
		Self-esteem
		Locus of control

*Source: Adapted from Bernston (2008)*

Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2005) are among the authors upon whom Bernston relied to formulate the dimensions of employability and their determinants. When comparing their work with that of Othmane (2011) and Kluytmans and Ott (1999), it appears that all dimensions examined by these authors are included in Bernston's table of employability dimensions, but as measurement indicators. However, two specific dimensions are not represented: anticipation and optimization, as well as balance.

On the one hand, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2005) explain the dimension of anticipation and optimization as preparing for future changes in a personalized and innovative way, while aiming to achieve the best possible outcomes. On the other hand, Bernston (2008) describes adaptability and flexibility as an individual's ability to be flexible and ready to adjust to new circumstances.

This is deemed essential as professional life grows more unpredictable, with organizations showing increased flexibility and undergoing frequent reorganizations, making these traits even more important for job seekers.

In the same vein, Weick (1996) emphasizes that employees increasingly have to design their own jobs due to the complex nature of job requirements and challenges faced by employers in predicting future job content. Fugate et al. (2004) also view employability as a form of dynamic adaptability in the workplace, enabling workers to identify and seize career opportunities.

It thus appears that the dimension of «anticipation and optimization» is already integrated by Bernston under the determinant «adaptability and flexibility», which is associated with the «attitudes» dimension in the individual factors of employability.

The missing dimension in Bernston's study (2008) is that of «balance». However, this dimension remains of great importance, especially for women, who are the focus of our study.

This dimension could represent a constraint for women, as it has been suggested that changes in the job market favor employment opportunities for men, thereby making them more employable (Flecker et al., 1998; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005).

This constraint can be explained by the predominant role of women in domestic and caregiving tasks, which constitutes a major obstacle to their employability. This unpaid workload reduces their availability for full-time careers and can negatively influence employers' perceptions of their professional commitment. Social expectations and biases can thus limit their opportunities for advancement and access to positions of responsibility, despite their skills and qualifications.

For this reason, women seeking employment or aspiring to do so must commit to maintaining a balance between their professional and personal lives. This also involves finding common ground between the divergent interests of employees and employers. A fair balance in the exchange relationship between the employee and the employer is important for enhancing employability (Paauwe, 1997).

In summary, our study explores the relationship between social capital and women's empowerment through employability. To achieve this, we use the dimensions defined by Bernston (2008) to link the concept of employability to the key concepts of our research. We plan to include the dimension of «balance between work and personal life» as a determinant of the «attitude» dimension in individual factors, as well as the dimension of «balance» as a determinant of the «organizational factors» in situational factors, representing a compromise of interests between the employee and the employing organization. Our next step is to conceptualize women's empowerment to address our research problem.

### 1.3 Women's empowerment

According to the World Bank, empowerment involves enhancing the ability of individuals or groups to make decisions and successfully translate those decisions into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are efforts to strengthen both individual and collective resources, as well as to improve the effectiveness and fairness of the organizational and institutional systems managing these resources.

In contrast, Mandal (2013) argues that empowerment encourages individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge required to overcome challenges in their lives or work environments, ultimately fostering personal growth and development or contribute positively to society.

While the concept of «women's empowerment» was developed in the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach aimed at shifting power relations to support women's rights and achieve greater gender equality (Batliwala, 2007).

Shiva (2001) states that: *«women's empowerment means that women, wherever they are, are in good health, have enough to meet their needs, their own survival as well as that of their family and community, to live with dignity in a safe and nurturing environment that allows for their holistic growth and development, including physical, emotional, social, and economic aspects»*.

Kapur (2001) defines women's empowerment as a process through which women gain greater control over resources (whether material, human, or intellectual, such as knowledge, information, and ideas, as well as financial resources like money and access to it) and decision-making at various levels, including household, community, society, and nation, thereby increasing their power.

In a similar context, Griffin (1987) argued that women are empowered if they achieve the: *«power to contribute at all levels of society and not just within the household. Power also means that women's contributions are recognized and valued»*. To achieve this, it is essential to empower women socially, economically, and politically so they can overcome male domination and achieve equality with men (Avasthi and Srivastava, 2001).

Aligning with Porter's (2013) perspective, women's empowerment results in a range of practical expressions of their agency in community life. Additionally, their involvement in decision-making at all levels serves both as a critical outcome and a key mechanism of their empowerment.

In a different aspect, if the empowerment of women is to be achieved, it can only be accomplished through education. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to raise the level of women's education (Sundaram et al., 2014).

As a result of this reality, the first dimension of empowerment, mentioned by Wolfensohn, lies in education. Indeed, education can generate numerous benefits within households: if women with higher educational qualifications earn higher salaries and have improved job prospects, then focusing investments on women's education rather than men's could potentially have a more beneficial influence on children's health (Duflo, 2012).

In other words, empowerment is typically assessed as an objective achieved through education. However, measuring empowerment involves more than just learning; awareness and skill development are also important indicators. Education, profession, or work are personal characteristics, but empowerment is a process rather than a trait. Additionally, attaining a level of education, good health, self-esteem, and self-confidence can be seen as a component of the concept of progress (Richardson, 2018).

In her 1999 work, Kabeer attempts to establish indicators using three-dimensional conceptual frameworks to assess women's empowerment. Initially, she discusses «resources» as essential elements for empowerment. Next, she elaborates on the concept of «agency» to describe the process aspect of women's empowerment. Finally, she discusses indicators to account for «achievements», aimed at effectively measuring outcomes.



Malhotra et al. (2002), in their thesis on measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development, propose a detailed conceptual framework for this concept. Their synthesis highlights six dimensions: economic, family/interpersonal, legal, political, psychological, and sociocultural. This latter dimension encompasses various sub-domains of empowerment, ranging from marital systems to norms governing women's physical mobility, as well as non-family social support networks available to them.

Mujahid et al. (2015), drawing on the World Development Report from the Center for Social Policy and Development, utilized three dimensions of women's empowerment in their study: social, economic, and political empowerment. Meanwhile, Pratley and Sandberg (2018) employed economic, social, and psychological dimensions to measure women's empowerment.

For Soharwardi and Tusawar (2020), their study utilized data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) across 38 developing economies focusing on women aged 15-49 who had been previously married to specify dimensions of women's empowerment. They adopted five main dimensions: women's employment status, awareness, participation in decision-making, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

From the theoretical specifics regarding the term «empowerment of women», we can outline the following table containing the dimensions of said concept:

**Table 4.** Dimensions of women's empowerment

Authors	Contexte	Dimensions
Kabeer (1999)	<i>«Resources, empowerment, achievements: reflections on measuring women's empowerment»</i>	Resources Power to act Achievements
Malhotra et al. (2002)	<i>«Measuring women's empowerment as a variable in international development»</i>	Economic Socio-cultural Family/interpersonal Legal Political Psychological
Mujahid et al. (2015)	<i>«Dimensions of women's empowerment: a case study from Pakistan»</i>	Social empowerment Economic empowerment Political empowerment
Pratley et Sandberg (2018)	<i>«Refine the conceptualization and measurement of women's empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa using data from the 2013 Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey»</i>	Economic Social Psychological



Soharwardi et Tusawar (2020)	«Dimensions and determinants of women's empowerment in developing countries»	Women's professional status Awareness-raising Participation in decision-making Self-esteem Self-confidence.
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**Source : Authors**

For our study on women's employability, it is recommended to consider the dimensions defined by Malhotra et al. (2002) to develop our analytical model. These dimensions include economic, sociocultural, familial or interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological aspects.

This choice is justified by the diversity and relevance of these dimensions, which allow for a thorough analysis of empowerment. They guide the theorization of this research by specifying the elements that may be influenced by the contribution of social capital to women's employability.

## 2. Research methodology

As part of this research, our analysis focused on a literature review comprising multiple articles, specifically targeting those published between 1999 and 2024. This period was selected due to significant advancements in women's employability and empowerment, marked by increased participation in the labour market, the implementation of gender equality policies, and the strengthening of social capital through professional networks.

These advancements have also been supported by global initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015, as well as various programs and partnerships aimed at improving social capital and women's employability. To demonstrate the causal links associated with these key concepts, we conducted an in-depth literature review, incorporating two theses and several articles sourced from databases like Web of Science, Cairn, JSTOR, and Springer.

## 3. Theories employed for this research

At this stage, we have defined each of the key concepts central to our study. In order to develop a model that addresses the research question, we are now able to examine the relationships that exist between these key concepts. To achieve this, we have employed several theories, including the social resources and instrumental action theory, empowerment theory, gender and development theory, and human capital theory.

### **3.1 Social resources and instrumental action theory (a theory of social capital)**

In line with Lin's thinking (1982, 1995), this theory: *«focuses on the resources contained within a social network and on how individual actions benefit from access to and use of these resources»*. The theory suggests that intermediaries in the labor market are necessary when information about jobs and skills is not fully accessible. In an ideal market where such information is transparent and social connections are direct, intermediaries would be unnecessary (Lin, 1995).

The social resources and instrumental action theory helps explain how social capital can be a driving force for women's empowerment through employability. It demonstrates that individual skills alone are not enough; the ability to mobilize and leverage resources available within one's social network to achieve professional goals is equally important. This has significant implications for public policies and development initiatives: encouraging the creation and strengthening of women's social networks could be an effective strategy to enhance their employability and empowerment.

### **3.2 Empowerment Theory**

According to Poorman (2003, p. 220), Empowerment Theory particularly focuses on the role of race, ethnicity, and culture, as well as, to some extent, social status in shaping individuals and the issues affecting them.

Feminist theory or women's empowerment theory provides tools and economic analysis perspectives that illuminate how to measure women's empowerment. In this context, economic literature also examines the impacts of this empowerment on human development (Ellé and Abbé, 2020).

This theory centers on the processes through which marginalized individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives. In relation to employability, this theory helps to understand how social capital can be a catalyst for enhancing women's abilities to make autonomous decisions regarding their careers and lives.

### **3.3 Gender and Development Theory**

The concept of gender refers to the social and cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity, the roles assigned to each sex, and the competencies attributed to men and women, which are developed from the biological differences between the sexes (Constantinidis and Cornet, 2008).

The literature on Gender and Development Theory examines how the roles and experiences of men and women have evolved in the global labor market. However, recent studies have shown that, despite a significant increase in women's employment since the 1960s, they remain less likely than men to secure jobs (Powell, 2014).

This theoretical approach emphasizes the importance of gender dynamics in development processes, including access to employment and economic resources. It allows for the analysis of how social structures and gender norms influence women's access to social networks and employment opportunities.

### **3.4 Human Capital Theory**

Human Capital Theory was developed through the pioneering work of economists such as Shultz (1961) and Becker (1975). Several scholars have linked access to employment and socioeconomic status more closely to human capital than to social capital (Marsden and Hurbert, 1988; Wegener, 1991). Human capital refers to the set of resources, qualifications, skills, and knowledge that individuals possess and acquire to enhance their employability (Caspi et al., 1998). Kamanzi (2006) adds that: *«by analogy to human capital, Loury considers social relations as a potential instrument for achieving goals»*.

Furthermore, the skills an individual acquires through education confer distinctive value, making them a valuable resource. These skills also influence individuals' behavior in the labor market, leading them to seek higher compensation. Highly qualified individuals are often willing to remain inactive longer, waiting for a job offer that meets their expectations. These differences in job search strategies highlight the importance of the match between the company and its future employee (Vignolles, 2012).

This theory, which focuses on investing in skills and knowledge to improve productivity and economic prospects, can be related to social capital to understand how social relationships complement human capital in terms of employability.

#### **4. Linking social capital and women's empowerment promotion: the mediating effect of employability**

After a thorough theoretical analysis of the concepts at the heart of our research, this second section will strive to answer our research question by demonstrating the tripartite relationship between social capital, women's empowerment, and employability. In this first section, we will present a theoretical framework necessary to conceptualize the key concepts under study: social capital, employability, and women's empowerment.

#### **4.1 Social capital and women's empowerment**

The link between social capital and empowerment was first highlighted by the World Bank in its World Development Report (2000-2001). It views empowerment as a broader concept and identifies the development of social capital as one of the pillars of the empowerment process.

Similarly, the World Bank (2001) regards the building of social institutions and social capital as key pillars aimed directly at promoting empowerment. It asserts that empowerment is closely tied to poverty reduction and manifests at all levels - macro, intermediate, and micro.

In this regard, Grootaert (2003) argues that there is an interconnection between social capital and empowerment. Strengthening social capital promotes empowerment. Adopting a multi-level perspective on social capital and empowerment facilitates their integration into poverty reduction strategies.

Furthermore, the favorable relationship between social capital and empowerment, reinforced by high levels of trust, requires engaging with local institutions and maintaining and strengthening trust among members to effectively empower disadvantaged local populations. Thus, social capital's institutions, networks, and norms directly foster local-level empowerment and indirectly enhance state institutions' responsiveness to the needs of the poor through various processes (Nega et al., 2009).

In this regard, the more members of the group trust each other and participate actively, the more social capital positively impacts empowerment. Active engagement at high levels of trust can lead to increased direct benefits for empowerment, such as enhanced information sharing, fewer obstacles to exchange, and improved coordination of collective actions (Nega et al., 2009).

The results of the study by Widiyanti et al. (2018) indicate that dimensions such as network, trust, and normative social capital play a significant and positive role in women's empowerment. Additionally, women's participation in empowering low-income households, using the existing social capital within the community, can optimize the outcomes of the empowerment process (Achmad et al., 2022).

For targeting women, especially those in poverty, social capital is particularly significant as it is one of the scarce resources available to them (Mayoux, 2001). In this context, a study by Mayoux (2001) on social capital and women's empowerment in Cameroon shows that women can leverage existing social capital to enhance their contribution to poverty reduction, empowerment, and financial sustainability.

Therefore, social capital plays a fundamental role in women's empowerment, particularly in improving financial sustainability and mobilizing community resources. By building strong networks and enhancing trust, women can access economic and social opportunities that were previously inaccessible to them. This mobilization of resources and effective utilization of social capital not only contribute to their individual empowerment but also to the economic resilience of their households and communities.

At this level, women must leverage the economic opportunities provided by social capital to achieve empowerment. Generating income through employment or income-generating activities enables them to both acquire the resources needed to improve their well-being and strengthen their household economy.

In other words, the constitutive elements of women's social capital include trust, social values and norms, as well as reciprocity. These elements not only form the foundation of the mechanism but also foster the development of cooperative organizations that enhance household economy (Achmad et al., 2022).

Consequently, these structures contribute to women's empowerment by facilitating their active and influential involvement in decision-making and economic processes.

Indeed, by participating in social events, discussion forums, and cooperatives based on mutual trust, women can overcome financial obstacles. This approach expands their access to economic resources by emphasizing strong relationships, essential for the sustainability and growth of the household economy (Achmad et al., 2022). Therefore, social capital improves women's access to economic resources, thereby enhancing their empowerment and that of their families.

Simultaneously, a strong social network within the cooperative would facilitate members in acquiring information and developing mutually beneficial collaborations, offering women the opportunity to effectively utilize their resources. Similarly, a robust social capital based on trust would enable women to access loans to start, maintain, or expand their businesses, thus strengthening their empowerment (Widiyanti et al., 2018).

in brief, we have presented enough arguments to justify a direct relationship between social capital and women's empowerment. Research conducted in this framework has shown that social capital has a positive and significant effect on women's empowerment. At this stage, we will continue to identify the causal links between the concepts under study. The next step involves exploring the relationship between social capital and employability.

## 4.2 Social capital boosts employability prospects

In the literature on employability, many authors have recognized social capital as a key factor (Granovetter, 1973; Fugate et al., 2004; Bader, 2007; Berntson, 2008). Additionally, an individual's social capital, viewed as an investment in relationships within a network, is a crucial asset for developing employability (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Forsé, 2000; Coleman, 1994).

In his theory of social resources, Lin (1995) asserts that social capital is crucial for obtaining employment, emphasizing the importance of social relationships as essential resources. He distinguishes between «access» to available social resources and the «use» of these connections to mobilize these resources.

Lin also identifies two types of important social interactions for employment: «homophilous» actions (between individuals at the same hierarchical level) and «heterophilous» actions (between individuals at different hierarchical levels).

In attempting to conceptualize the concept of employability, Fugate et al. (2004) consider human and social capital as dimensions of this concept. They describe human capital as a framework of factors that drive career progression, representing a person's ability to perform tasks effectively and adapt to the job market. In contrast, social capital strengthens and broadens an individual's ability to discover and leverage employment opportunities across multiple companies and sectors throughout their career.

These authors further add that social capital plays a role in shaping employability. The strength and size of a personal network are considered important for being employable, and it is through work and contact with others that career opportunities emerge. They also introduce that employability can depend on the ability to activate individual skills and seize career opportunities.

Simultaneously, networking has been recognized as a crucial aspect of employability (McArdle et al., 2007). Therefore, when a person seeks employment, they rely on their networks, as social capital can also have «external» repercussions, meaning it benefits individuals who do not possess it themselves (Putnam, 1999).

Therefore, social capital is of paramount importance in an individual's ability to find employment. By facilitating access to professional networks and strengthening trust relationships, it increases career opportunities. Thus, social capital contributes not only to professional integration but also to improving personal and economic development prospects.

Following Fukuyama's line of thought (1996), social capital refers to: «*the ability of people to work towards a common goal within groups and organizations*». Fukuyama added that the presence of a specific set of unofficial values and common norms among group members promotes their cooperation (1997).

Social capital is based on a productive social structure that facilitates the accomplishment of certain actions that would otherwise be impossible (Coleman, 1994). This social structure includes norms, trust, knowledge, relationships, and connections with others, thus constituting a valuable resource for job search (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Seibert et al., 2001).

In this perspective, individuals with strong social capital are expected to participate in both formal and informal networks (Fugate et al., 2004). In this regard, other researchers argue that employability hinges on understanding the labour market, particularly how information is exchanged through formal and informal networks (Kluytmans & Ott, 1999).

To sum up, social capital is an individual resource consisting of beneficial relationships and contacts for job searching. These connections facilitate access to professional opportunities and enhance the individual's credibility and visibility in the labour market. By cultivating a strong and diverse network, a person can not only find potential jobs more quickly but also benefit from advice and support for their long-term career.

Based on the literature reviewed regarding the link between social capital and employability, it is evident that what holds true for individuals in general also applies to women. Therefore, social capital plays a crucial role in women's employability. For instance, women's access to the labour market requires strong networking and social relationships as resources to seize professional opportunities and advance in their long-term careers.

However, women's employability is also influenced by socio-cultural factors such as access to professional networks, family and social support, as well as the balance between work and personal life. Women who benefit from social and professional support often have better chances of success in the job market and in developing their careers.

Generally, social capital includes not only networks of relationships and personal contacts but also social norms, mutual trust, and shared information within these networks. For women, who historically have often faced specific barriers in the job market, social capital becomes an essential pathway to overcome these obstacles.



By developing strong and diverse networks, women can not only access job opportunities immediately but also gain valuable advice, mentorship, and support for their long-term professional development.

In conclusion, we have provided enough theoretical foundations to support the relationship between social capital and employability. Next, we will theoretically examine the presumed relationship between women's employability and their empowerment, as a logical step forward.

### **4.3 Empowering women is the ultimate goal of employability**

The Association of Independent Working Women (2005) states that: *«when a woman has income, she has job security; she owns assets in her name, she feels economically strong, independent, and autonomous»*. Therefore, the economic independence of women, achieved through stable income and asset ownership, is fundamental to their security, self-confidence, and autonomy.

For this reason, two essential factors related to women's employability are examined: the first is linked to education, and the second concerns training and skills development. These factors play a fundamental role in the economic, financial, social, political, and cultural empowerment of women. By strengthening their ability to obtain and maintain employment, as well as their independence and active contribution in all areas of society.

Education provides general employability skills, while training (whether internal, outsourced, or independent, even provided by academic institutions) focuses on job-specific skills (Maclean and Ordonez, 2007).

#### **4.3.1 Education**

The literacy of women, an essential pillar of this society, compromises our aspiration to become a superpower. It becomes imperative to recognize the primary necessity of women's education, as it in turn fuels the movement towards their empowerment (Mittal, 2021), especially since education is the sole means to empower them. It would give momentum to the process of empowering these women (Sundaram et al., 2014).

Indeed, the employability of women is often linked to their level of education and training. By investing in their education and acquiring relevant skills for the job market, women increase their chances of finding employment that aligns with their interests and abilities. Consequently, they can access better-paying positions and opportunities for career advancement.



According to Badr and Pattei (2024), collaboration and investment in lifelong learning promote the creation of a more diverse, dynamic, and egalitarian workforce. This will enable women to maximize their skills and contribute significantly to society.

In other words, all types of investments in human capital development appear to significantly enhance workers' problem-solving abilities (Groot and De Brink, 2000). This encourages businesses to make women employable through education and enhancing their learning capacity, enabling them to access decent positions and contribute to problem-solving. Furthermore, women's education has a multiplier effect on society, promoting gender equality, reducing inequalities, and stimulating socio-economic development.

Investing in human capital, particularly through women's education, is thus a winning strategy for both businesses and society. It not only strengthens women's ability to solve problems but also ensures inclusive and equitable development. By integrating more educated and qualified women, businesses can benefit from innovative ideas, perspectives, and solutions, contributing to their own success and that of society as a whole. Concurrently, women's education becomes a key factor in their empowerment (Mittal, 2021), enabling more equitable and effective participation in the workforce.

#### **4.3.2 Training and skills development**

Training and skills development programs play a crucial role in empowering women. These programs are designed to facilitate the acquisition of skills and knowledge that enable women to secure financial independence while strengthening their social and political standing (Kumar and Arora, 2022).

In this way, training and skills development programs provide women with essential skills to enter the job market, start their own entrepreneurial ventures, or advance in their careers (El-Fiky, 2020).

So women's employability plays a crucial role in their professional empowerment. Employability refers to a person's ability to find, maintain, and advance in a satisfying job within the labour market. For women, strong employability often means accessing quality job opportunities that align with their skills and career aspirations.

According to a conscientious theory, training and skills development programs play a significant role in providing women with skills and making them financially and socially strong (Watts and Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

In this vein, training and skills development programs enhance women's self-mastery and self-confidence, helping them gain knowledge about their rights, decision-making skills, and goal-setting, thereby empowering them (Gupta, 2021).

Research findings by Groot and De Brink (2000) demonstrate that formal vocational training, such as apprenticeships and ongoing job training courses, increases the likelihood of being assigned to other positions or departments within the company.

Conversely, workers in positions that require more than a year to become fully qualified are less likely to be transferred to other positions or departments compared to those in simpler roles that do not require an initiation period.

According to this research, it can be argued that training and skills development programs not only enhance opportunities for women to be assigned to different positions or departments within a company but also offer them the chance to diversify their skills and professional experience.

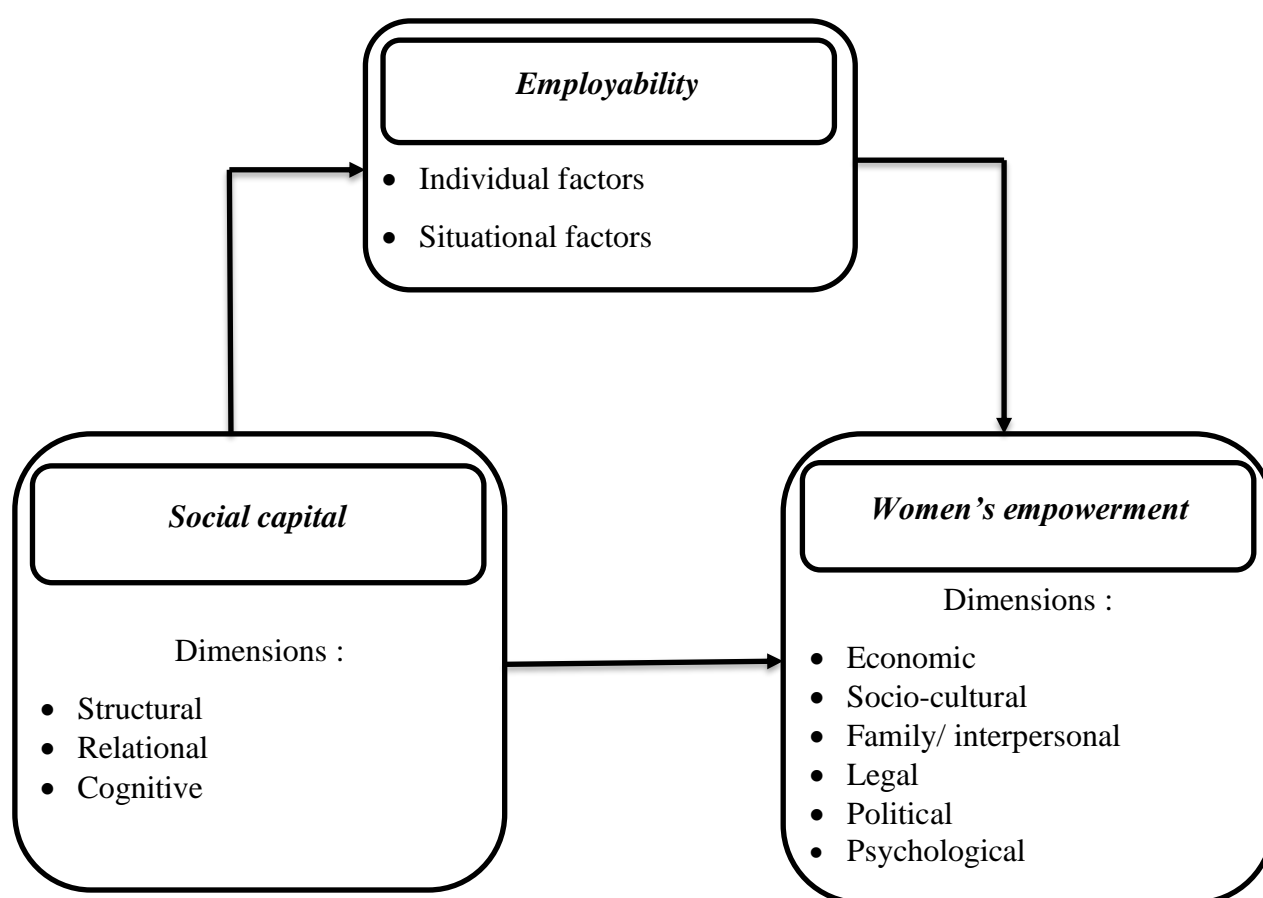
However, from another perspective, while skills development for employability is seen as a catalyst for enhancing women's employment, they encounter several obstacles. These include difficulties in acquiring necessary skills and securing productive employment, maintaining their position despite the effects of globalization or other factors, and progressing to higher-level positions. Additionally, they often face challenges when re-entering the job market after a period spent raising children (Ahamad et al., 2016).

Despite these constraints, training and skills development programs increase employment prospects and promote women's independence (Elneel and Almulhim, 2024). These initiatives enable women to acquire the necessary skills to meet the requirements of the modern job market, thereby enhancing their ability to secure sustainable and well-paying employment.

After examining these two factors (education and training and skills development), it can be argued that high employability among women involves the ability to adapt to changes in the labour market. Women who can continuously train, acquire new skills, and adapt to technological advancements or new job market demands are better equipped to maintain their employability in the long term, thus enhancing their empowerment.

In conclusion, this theoretical analysis highlights the relationship between women's employability, empowerment, and social capital. It is evident that employability plays a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment and also acts as a mediator with social capital. Simultaneously, social capital directly contributes to women's empowerment. The figure below illustrates our research framework summarizing our conclusions and responses regarding the issues addressed in this article.

**Figure 1. Research framework**



*Source: Authors*

## **Conclusion**

This article explores the crucial role of social capital in empowering women through enhancing their employability. To achieve this, we delve into the necessary theoretical foundations aimed at conceptualizing key concepts by determining their measurement dimensions.

Our primary theoretical contribution in this work lies in highlighting the significant gap identified by Bernston (2008) regarding the absence of the «balance» dimension, particularly critical for the women under study. Unpaid domestic responsibilities may limit their availability for full-time jobs and negatively influence employers' perceptions of their professional commitment.

To enhance their employability, it is crucial for women to achieve a balance between their professional and personal lives and effectively negotiate this balance with their employers. This study explores how social capital can contribute to empowering women by strengthening their ability to navigate these challenges, integrating critical dimensions of individual attitude and organizational factors.

Our second theoretical contribution demonstrates that social capital, in addition to knowledge and skills, is essential for employability by facilitating action opportunities through valuable networks of contacts. It encompasses social norms, trust, relationships, and connections that form a useful network in job searching.

Several studies recognize the significant role of social capital in shaping employability, emphasizing the importance of strong personal networks for accessing professional opportunities. Networking, both formal and informal, is crucial for exchanging information about the job market and enhancing employment prospects.

Individual attitudes play a crucial role in employability by influencing how individuals approach their work and job search. Among important attitudes, adaptability and flexibility are essential in an unstable and constantly evolving work environment. Additionally, willingness to relocate geographically and proactive career management are also considered significant factors affecting perceptions of employability. Lastly, a willingness to learn and adapt is recognized as a key component that can enhance women's employability according to specialized literature.

We also emphasized the role of education, training, and skills development in enhancing the employability of women and, consequently, their empowerment. These factors facilitate the acquisition of specialized knowledge and practical skills, boost professional self-confidence, and enable women to adapt to changes in the job market.

Finally, we concluded this study by proposing a hypothetical model that synthesizes the discussed theoretical conclusions. Validating this model will require a thorough exploratory study, essential to substantiate our observations and contributions. This approach represents a key perspective of our research.

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