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Entering the Occupation: the case of law and management graduates

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Resumo

This paper examines search strategies of law and management graduates and employers' selection practices. It examines whether universities and social networks enhance graduates' outcomes at entry-level positions. It draws on research conducted in 2005 involving graduates from three universities in Porto, in addition to business organisations and law firms. Interviews with graduates revealed different strategies to enter the occupation. Interviews with employers and senior lawyers in a range of organisations indicate that the widespread use of the university as a main selection criterion goes along with market closure practices. Prospective lawyers depend mostly upon contacts to find the mandatory internship, however, when applying to important law firms the university and grades dominate. Among management graduates, the university plays a key role in shaping access to the labour market. Management graduates seem prone to apply to large national or multinational companies, which favours organizations' stringent selection strategies. At entry-level positions, the university seems to influence pay levels, work satisfaction in addition to career expectations. Increased participation in higher education has led to changes in occupations, but the outcomes of a university degree vary according to the university. In some cases, entering an occupation may represent a chain of precarious work experiences.

Palavras-chave: Job search; social networks; recruitment and selection
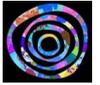
1. Theoretical Views

Both economists and sociologists have been concerned with labour market processes, albeit for different reasons. Economists have been interested in the labour market as a market therefore comprising mechanisms for the distribution of resources (Fevre 1992). Common views about the relationship between education and labour market outcomes originated in human capital theory (e.g. Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993), which accounts for the expansion of education systems in the early 1960s an describes rational individuals interested in investing in education to maximise their returns. Sociological accounts introduced different views. For example, Collins (1979) portrays the educational system as the source of cultural stratification as it produces credentials that legitimise access to cultural and professional monopolies. Instead of economic investments, Collins purports strategies for ensuring privileges, namely access to managerial and professional jobs. In France, Bourdieu and Passeron (1970, 1985) found out that the educational system 'was less about 'nature' or ability and more about 'nurture' and stratifying' (Guimaraes 2006): 14). Later Bourdieu (1996 :276) affirmed that human capital theory overlooked the role of the educational system in 'the reproduction of social structure in sanctioning the hereditary transfers of cultural capital'.

During the 1990s, academics discussed the outcomes of the expansion of higher education, and pinpointed changes in work, skills and occupations (see Devine et al., 2000). Research also demonstrates that recruitment and selection practices are changing to accommodate credential inflation (Werfhorst et al., 2005) and management trends (Brown et al., 2004; 1994). Credentialed skills, also depicted as key, or technical skills are devalued as employers favour skills that derive from graduates' personal investments and are not explicated in the academic curricula. Social skills, accent and charisma appear among the selection criteria used by employers when searching for new graduates (Brown et. al 2004; Guimarães 2006). Sociological approaches to search strategies have accentuated the distinction between formal and informal procedures (Granovetter 1995) and have detailed the impact of informal processes, namely social networks, also depicted as contacts (Granovetter 1995).

2. Law and Management

Law emerged as a field of studies since the foundation of the Portuguese university, whereas management dates from 1972. During the 1980s and mid 1990s higher education expanded, the private sector developed and led to the inflation of degrees in law and management. In 2006 there were eighteen law schools in Portugal and management degrees were available in every public and private university. In 1996, there were 47 degrees in management at university level and 69 bachelor degrees, mostly in private universities (Freire, 1998:291).The number of graduates from both fields of study increased and impacted on the labour market, although in different ways.

The field of lawyers is regulated by the professional association (hereafter Ordem). It is facing a number of challenges, such as a large number of young lawyers competing in a tight market, the development of law firms, new managerial practices, new processes such as professional's bureaucratisation and career mobility. In 2005 half of the 20,000 then registered lawyers made less that €1,000 per month and at least about 5,000 lawyers lived on little more than national minimum wage (Coelho 2005). The traditional status of the lawyer working solo or in small offices is eroding. In 2006 there were 700 law firms, in addition to small offices and solo players. Self-employed lawyers represent 59.3 percent of the professional group (Galrão, 2006), and only six percent of all lawyers were associates or partners. In addition, although 58.2 percent of the total number of active lawyers are less than forty years of age, generations of fifty and sixty year-olds dominate top positions. Competition is stringent, as there are currently between twenty to twenty five thousand registered lawyers in a market that could do with 10,000 (Dâmaso, 2006). The overcrowded field of advocacy results from the increase in the supply of law courses, mainly in the private sector. Lately, however, the proportion of law graduates has been steadily decreasing.

The managerial field emerged with the development of professional management and as elsewhere engineers might have performed much of the work now attributed to managers. Engineers have been partially replaced by professional managers, mostly from business and economics faculties. This shift suggests a move from the development of rational production to the prominence of profitability strategies and broad efficacy of the business (Freire,1998). Despite the modernisation effort, in the early 1990s some 25.4 percent of Portuguese entrepreneurs and managers reproduced the family business, 24.3 percent had working class origin and 13.6 percent peasant origin. Currently, few micro and small-sized firm owner-managers have higher education training and professional managers may have a degree in any field of study (Queiroz, 2005). Large firms, however, seem to favour management graduates to managerial related positions (Guimarães, 2006). The number of university graduates within the broader category of Business and Administration has been decreasing, from 22.4 percent of all graduates in 1998 to 15.7 in 2004. Managers depend mostly upon the structure of the economic field, In 2003, 275,000 enterprises were registered, 99.6 percent of which were small and medium-sized (hereafter SME). Large firms amounted to 0.4 percent of the total number of firms in 2003, and the proportion of medium-sized firms was 2.3 percent. As it happens in other countries (Barber et al., 1999) large firms seem to dominate in recent management graduates' projects. Both fields are feminised although women have little visibility in higher echelons.

3. Search Strategies

This paper discusses data from a research conducted in Porto, in 2005. It considers solely the interviews to law and management graduates from three universities in Porto, Blue, Yellow and Green in addition to interviews with employers. Altogether, fifty-five 55 semi-structured interviews reside the basis of this discussion. Fourteen out of the thirty graduates interviewed were women. Employers are nine directors and nine staff of human research departments as well as five representatives of law firms. Organisations were all medium and large-sized, and ten out of the eighteen participant firms were Portuguese. In the case of law, interviewees were four senior male lawyers and a female lawyer working as a human resource manager in a multinational law firm, as well as two female executives who run a private placement firm operating exclusively with lawyers and law related occupations. The interview to graduates consisted of questions about the starting point of their career. In the case of organisations, the interview consisted of questions about recruitment and selection criteria. Questions about the use of contacts and referrals were included in both cases. Overall, the interviews suggested increased segmentation of occupational markets and the stratifying effect of universities when used as selection criteria.

3.1 Ways into Lawyer's Trainee Positions

As mentioned, the internship is the mandatory way for qualifying as a lawyer. Self-employed lawyers and small practices absorb the majority of trainee lawyers. In the absence of direct ties in the field, social networks become critical to link graduates to trainee positions. In the absence of social networks, the Ordem appoints sponsors, regulates, and assesses internships. These became more selective since the last revision in 2004. The internship encompasses a national assessment and aggregation exam that acts as a gatekeeper and constitutes a structural determinant of the occupation. One of the senior lawyers interviewed, who is teacher at a private law school and a partner in a successful albeit small law firm said that in his day as a trainee: "Any fool would become a lawyer". Currently, however:

 "the internship, the way it is now formatted makes it a sort of a filter (…) but perhaps, if we want to be rigorous we have to make the internship more demanding, I wish it were not financially demanding. And it is demanding both in professional and economic terms, because it is like this: either one has the means to support him or herself or else…".

Such concerns relate to the fact that most trainee positions comprise no pay. Paid trainee positions are common but only in law firms, which amount for their desirability. Some law firms use trainee positions to recruit new associates as one senior lawyer explained: "We have not had trainees for three years now. … my

law firm accepts trainees only when it is possible for them to stay as lawyers". However, the rate of graduates that find the internship in a law firm is low. As one interviewed who worked as a HR manager in a law firm asserted, "only 4% of law graduates end up in large law firms". Her law firm also limits the number of trainees and their retention rate is near 90%. Finding the internship is the main concern of a prospective lawyer. In the absence of connections, graduates may apply to the Ordem. Only one out of the twelve law graduates interviewed actually resorted to the Ordem to find the sponsor. Apparently, this was an exception in a field where the use of one's social networks appears as the rule. That was the case in ten out of the twelve law graduates interviewed who found the internship through their parents' connections or in their parents' offices. It is, therefore, a private endeavour, in the same way that the sponsor-trainee relationship is conceived, at least formally, as that of a mentor-mentee relationship. However, in law firms the sponsor/mentor role requires adaptation to the organisational setting. In addition, there are lawyers who will formally accept to sponsor trainee lawyers to conform to their corporative duties, but neglect the trainee's supervision.

One might think that the later case would be an outcome of the overcrowded field. Evidence suggests otherwise as two of the senior lawyers interviewed reported similar experiences. One, having graduated in the early 1980s refused a mock internship with a prominent lawyer and accepted another with an obscure lawyer who, nonetheless, provided good training and supervision. A decade earlier, another interviewee did not hesitate and accepted a mock internship:

"I accepted a sponsor, whom I still like very much, but who did not give me anything to do, I mean, he was a cool bloke, and I was there as we had arranged. … This kind of internship was very common in those days".

Both senior lawyers were newcomers to the field, which suggests that more relevant than the position of one's contacts within the social network, is the position of the contact or the network within the specific field. Another law graduate from Yellow University interviewed came from a family with a longstanding tradition of lawyers on his mother's side and of entrepreneurs on his father's side. His uncle became his sponsor, and when he had to move from Porto to Lisbon to join the army, he easily found a trainee position in a large law firm, whereas keeping his uncle as the sponsor. Although he learned a lot in the law firm, where training was complex and "any important business in the country would go through there….", he ended up returning to Porto and to his family practice. His trajectory was smoother than the majority of the graduates interviewed.Apart from contacts, academic achievement also helps graduates find the internship. In the law school, an outstanding student is likely to receive offers from teachers. Academic results are also relevant when graduates apply to a trainee position in a large or medium-sized law firm. However, small law firms operate in many ways as the traditional law practices, and therefore may deploy different criteria. University and grades are a common denominator among law firms that follow universalistic criteria. Transferable skills such as English language proficiency, in addition to post-graduations and extra-curricular activities seem to warrant advantage.

The university and academic results are valued because they provide objective information about applicants. One senior lawyer admitted, nonetheless, that the ranking of the universities is rather subjective. He then explained that his firm screened university academic staff "we examine the teachers, we more or less know them, and there are no doubts regarding their scientific value". Such was how his firm selected five law schools out of the existing eighteen. The universities are still the same and include Blue and Yellow universities, but exclude Green University. The HR manager already mentioned, further explained how grades are absolute values. In her firm, a partner graduated from one of the unlisted law schools, "but he was the best student from [that school] of all times". They also had five trainee lawyers from the same school, "but it is not fair to say that we accept all applicants from [that school], because we don't. As a rule we don't". In her law firm, one law school dominates and in her view, that relates to the fact that the majority of the partners are alumni of the same law school. It seems reasonable that searching for graduates that underwent a similar academic training could be a way to cope with uncertainty, especially when there are many law schools, and few objective assessments of their performance. However, as Bourdieu points out

consecrating a few law schools means to consecrate the pre-existing structural differences (e.g. Bourdieu, 1996, 2003). It also originates a division between us, the "old boys" (Bourdieu 1998:22) and the others.

Not all law firms select law graduates according to their law school. Although this calls for further research, the study suggested that small law firms share the market with small law practices and self-employed lawyers and are prone to use internships in specific ways. As one senior lawyer from a small law firm said, in that market it is very difficult to escape the pressure of social networks. He acknowledged receiving more requests for trainee positions than the firm could provide. He explained that no selection was deployed except that of referrals:

"If a high judge that we know, from the Supreme Court of Law asks for an internship for his child in our office … for as much as we regret not following objective criteria, we tend to accept the high judge… the child of a good client, the child of another colleague".

Internships may be a way of forming, and accumulating social capital, building up social networks binding firms and key agents, as well as developing relationships of reciprocity and mutual obligation among peers. This depicts the traditional law field, where the informal and particularistic processes still dominate (Guimarães 2006). Larger law firms, tend to be more selective regarding referrals. Usually "they have to be people […] strongly connected to us. If they are other lawyers it is more difficult, it is more difficult", clarified one of the interviewees from a medium-sized law-firm. In large law firms recruitment and selection of trainees is usually formal and meritocratic. Even so, one senior lawyer from one of those firms explained that sometimes they needed to compromise, especially when actual or potential good clients were involved. He acknowledged, nonetheless, that such requests created tension "between our willingness to professionalise the firm and the absolute necessity of, once in a while, being absolutely flexible with the child of a CEO of a large firm that is our client or that we would like it to be… and family relationships". However, he emphasised that his firm never compromised in relation to crucial selection criteria: university and grades.

In law firms, family and staff also request internships, which seems unproblematic in most cases. In some cases, however, family and staff members may not stay after completion of the internship. That was the case of one of the interviewees. To remain in her father's law firm, she became the firm's HR manager. At times, networks of practising lawyers are crucial for the reproduction of the profession, in what seems a dense interdependency for internship provision. Such was the view conveyed by the senior lawyer from the small law firm. Large firms, however, may require the same rigid criteria – university and grades – to family and staff internship requests. The suggestion was that in such cases, both family and staff know what it takes to get a trainee position in the firm. As an interviewee put it:

 "I mean the partner's child is aware that if she or he will have good grades, the likelihood of coming to the firm is very high. If she or he will have bad grades, not only the likelihood of coming to the firm decreases abruptly, as she or he will be creating the father or the mother a problem. Thus, things have been fine so far, because those that we have accepted have very high grades, 16, 17, so there is no motive for them not to come."

Hence, in this firm, associate lawyers and partners are aware of the stakes involved in the reproduction of their positions. They know what kind of cultural investments are required in order to "perpetuate their social being" (Bourdieu 1998:19). The impossibility of inheriting law firms after the death of partners encourages family reproductive strategies. Whenever possible partners tend to encourage their children or close relatives to follow their footsteps so that they may take their position in the firm. Most of law graduates that did the internship and qualified as lawyers found their sponsor through family contacts. Only one interviewee resorted to the Ordem to have a sponsor appointed. Law firms tend to deploy formal recruitment and selection procedure, adopting practices and principles close to business and bureaucratic organisations.

3.2 Becoming a Manager

Many management graduates started their careers as a trainee. That is the rule at Blue University, since the internship is curricular. In the other cases, internships depend upon firm's policy. As one HR manager explained, 'the firm's policy is that of recruiting recent graduates, is a policy of training and afterwards of helping people to grow'. Large firms engage in active co-operation with a number of universities participating in 'milk rounds' and working closely with universities' careers services, the typical procedure of multinational corporations. Therefore, while in the case of law graduates the internship is the mandatory way of becoming a lawyer, in the managerial field, internships are an option of firms to select and eventually retain the best trainees. In addition, trainee programmes may also be a strategy to cope with internal demands for specific qualifications. Moreover, they can emerge as a way of taking advantage of public internship financing programmes. A HR manager from a shoe ware manufacture explained how in her firm entry-level positions were typically professional internships:

"…we resort to the professional internship, after having selected the person that we want for the position... but in general we also resort to [the internship] because of the State's help in paying the fee"

The regulation of such internship programmes admits that after pre-selection of applicants, firms disclose the list to the job centre, where the process will follow its path. Such programmes have been set up since the mid 1990s, and helped one of the interviewees from Blue University to find her way into the labour market, and finally to find the job that she keeps for a few years. Another interviewee, this time a graduate from Green University entered the labour market through a similar programme, a year after applying to it. When the three-month internship was completed, she found herself out of work again. She sounded utterly disappointed "What I have learned is that we can be excellent professionals, we can do our best, and we can work really hard […] but if we have to be kicked out, then we are."

As said, at Blue university a three-month internship is obligatory in the final year. Currently, the careers service helps students find the internship. However, such was not the case a few years ago, according to my interviewees. Four out of the six graduates from Blue University that were interviewed stayed in the same firm after completion of the internship. In some cases, the curricular internship paved the way to a professional internship, as one of graduates mentioned. When the internship was about to finish, a contact provided her with the opportunity to apply to a consultancy position in a large multinational company, where she was still working. Another graduate from Blue, currently in a top management position in a bank, is still in the same organisation where he found his curricular internship. Another graduate from Blue, currently a successful executive in his own company, also found his internship in a Bank where he stayed for a number of years. In the meantime, he went to the UK for a master degree and after returning, decided to start his own business and left the bank.

If curricular or national internship programmes seem to facilitate access to the occupation, international internships have paradoxical results. Two interviewees, one from Blue and the other from Yellow universities, reported unsuccessful outcomes of international work experiences in trainee positions. One worked for a year at Nokia, in Japan, after studying as a free mover in Finland. The other spent a year working in Norway. Both found it hard to enter employment in Portugal. The former decided to eliminate the entry pertaining to the work experience from the resume. The latter ended up finding a job through connections. Apparently, returns from the international work experience tend to be more personal than practical. Multinational firms, mainly in consultancy and auditing, have extensive annual recruiting programs. In some firms, namely auditing companies, high rates of turnover call for annual recruitment and selection of large number of graduates. One of the employers interviewed reported that her company selected 60 to 100 applicants each year because:

"The turnover is very high in the fourth year, because the auditing career is an immense school, and develops close contacts with different types of firms. Therefore, many of the new entrants see auditing as a school … and afterwards they end up working in a finance department".'

High turnover and low career expectations justify the annual recruitment and selection rituals of those companies. Usually, recruitment and selection campaigns are divulged directly at the universities, and on the Internet but seldom on newspapers. Such firms usually select a number of universities at national level. Graduates tend to develop strategies to take advantage of their favourable work situation, as two female graduates from Yellow and Blue universities explained. Being aware of the limited time left in the company given the low chances for promotion, they establish connections, as they know that former colleagues usually ended up working in client companies. Consultancy and auditing companies have large number of consultants and auditors but only a small number at top positions, and "and those positions are all taken by very young people […] and what will follows is that people will have to leave", a graduate explained. In such cases, contacts are essential to find the next job, which corroborates Granovetter's (1995) classical study.

Not all firms will recruit recent graduates in regular and systematic basis, but instead limit it to occasional vacancies. Internal moves usually open vacancies at entry-level positions. Besides, in a relatively rigid labour market firms can afford lazy recruitment strategies, as graduates tend to use self-applications. Firms commonly hold what some called a "CV nursery", that is hundreds or even thousands of curricula stored in databases. HR departments sometimes encourage this widespread practice. The HR manager of a French finance company explained how he sometimes placed a want advertisement only to 'feel the market' and regenerate the CV database. More often databases of self-applications are the first source used to recruit new entrants.

The university tends to be the first selection criterion used to reduce the number of applicants involved in recruitment and selection processes. Such was the case in fifteen out of the eighteen organisations interviewed. At times, interviewees voiced concerns with the quality of universities and training. In other cases, it is simply a way of cutting costs and saving time, given the large number of applications. In the case of management graduates, Blue and Yellow universities are among the small number of universities – usually five – unanimously accepted, in what sounded like a finely tuned chorus. However, the HR manager of a large brewery provided a comprehensive account:

"there is always a natural tendency to privilege some universities … Either because we have some protocols with those universities, related to our staff teaching in post-graduate courses… or a relationship, well, more at the executive level that might exist between the group and those universities"

She mentioned the past experience with applicants from other schools, which also helped them selecting the universities. Blue and Yellow universities were the two selected in Porto. In another interview, a young female HR manager of a telecommunication company voiced her disagreement with her company's policy, which also favours a number of universities. She thought that the preference for Yellow university resulted from the fact that some of the executives in the company had also graduated from Yellow. Such preferences may reflect reproduction strategies analogous to those observed among lawyers. The relevance accorded to a number of universities result in exclusive practices that affect the very structure of the economic field. The fact that some companies co-operate with universities suggest the ability to influence university's policy and even curricula. This can be described as anticipated socialisation. Economic rationality was, however, the main explanation of interviewees – selecting graduates from a number of universities allowed them to cut the costs involved in the process and maximise firm's utility.

If there was a degree of unanimity in the use of the university as selection criterion, differences arise when academic merit is concerned. In some managerial, grades seem relatively unimportant. This is when selection focuses on individual traits, transferable' skills, or perhaps more accurately personal capital (Brown et al., 2004). Applicants need to show their entrepreneurialism, as well as other valued qualities. Employers valued potential more than academic achievement. Only in specific jobs, such as auditing, consultancy, and some analytical jobs requiring a quasi-academic profile is academic achievement relevant. In sales, marketing and related jobs grades are unimportant. One HR manager related academic results to applicants' personality, since good students tend to be anti-social and take long to adapt to the organisation. Having set the tone, she then complained about universities that neglected the development of required skills, such as

communication skills, project management, and teamwork. In her mind, graduates left the university with an 'excessive technical profile.' Companies looking for 'analytical profiles', however, use grades as a second selection criteria, and 14 is the usual average grade required. Hence, investments in human capital may entail different outcomes and, in some cases, even jeopardise a graduate's chances in the labour market.

Employers' demands for transferable skills also relate to their perception of graduates as relatively alike, which is an outcome of market closure practices. Admittedly, graduates from the five listed schools may deploy similar technical skills. To differentiate a relatively undifferentiated population, employers look for other characteristics that might help them guessing about the potential 'fitness' of the selection. Thus, transferable skills and private investments (in cultural and social capital) constitute an advantage: going abroad during the holydays, doing an Erasmus programme, being an active member of the student's union (largely, a political role enabling students to develop important social networks), participating in junior firms or in international institutions such as AIESEC, and so forth. In some cases voluntary work deserves consideration, and in general, any activity that might indicate that the person behaves according to the rules of the economic field (active, with initiative, entrepreneur, dynamic, responsible, rigorous). Technical skills are only assessed in specific cases. The fact that there is so much pressure on the side of demand allows employers to enforce strict policies for both controlling the borders of their labour market and the selection processes.

On the side of firms, social networks are best described, in this context, as referrals or recommendations. Some of the largest and important Portuguese groups do have official policy concerning recommendations: these are not an absolute advantage but might be determinant in the presence of two equally good applicants. In some cases, interviewees depicted referrals as safeguards against the risk of hiring a new employee (see Rees, 1966). Referrals are able to override selection criteria as they may include in the recruitment and selection process an applicant from an excluded university. However, afterwards 'no exception' policy applies. Since referrals, requests and the like entail ethical questions, in some companies there are explicit policies to prevent the recruitment of family members. Such impediments will not follow when requests are kin unrelated. Larger companies are overwhelmed with requests and recommendations. In such cases, the official policy follows what has been described and meritocracy apparently prevails. However, in the case of a draw, the informal bond determines the outcome.

In the shoe ware manufacturer, nevertheless, the informal becomes the formal: "whenever there is a vacancy we disclose it in our internal journal "If one knows of someone who is unemployed and wants to apply to this vacancy…"" In this middle-sized company the informality, friends and family, contacts are all welcome. The company favours recommendations but carefully monitors their source: "I mean recommendations coming from the managers, from people we can trust) […] not just anybody". The HR manager voiced the similar arguments to those evoked in the literature depicting contacts as a source of external control ensuring that the new employee will 'behave'. This company even grows a resume nursery and the resume database even included a field "for us to insert if [the applicant] is recommended and in which case, by whom. … I mean, if we have a large number of resumes we search for the recommended first… Usually they are recommended by CEOs, people in executive positions, because we save time, and thus this can be a selection criterion". Ultimately, recommendations are a delicate issue, especially in large corporations constrained by the need to follow universalistic, therefore formal and transparent criteria, and challenged by the necessity to maintain their business networks.

Informality has yet another opportunity to emerge. In most organisations, even when recruitment and selection is outsourced, three or four applicants will be presented to the company, where final decision is made. Usually there is a final interview conducted by the prospective boss who will select among the applicants the one that will stay. In this process, 'empathy' appears as the determinant factor. It also partially undermines the formal procedure. One HR staff conducting selection in a multinational insurance company commented, "many times we say… I am sure that he is going to pick applicant X and he does not. So many

times it is not the best applicant in the process, as there must be empathy … perhaps the chosen was the one with whom the boss empathised more. …".

Hence, formal processes seem hardly fully formal as there are many opportunities for particularism to emerge. Formal and informal seem to be part of the same process, although in different degrees. On the one hand, it is possible that a referral leads the applicant back into the selection process, but afterwards the normal process follows. On the other hand, after a meritocratic selection process, the final decision may depend upon empathy not merit. In addition, there are ways of keeping the informal formal, just as illusionists do when they pull white bunnies from their top hats only to make them disappear again.

4. Conclusion

The study suggested that formal and informal means of search are relatively blurred. In addition, the interviews revealed differences in graduates' trajectories according to their university, especially as the university is used as a main selection criterion. This is a practice common to both large and medium-sized business corporations and large and medium-sized law firms. In the universe of small law firms and sole players, for example, the rules are different, and internships are either an inconvenient obligation or a way to invest and accumulate business and influential contacts, thus little relevance is given to selection criteria. The symbolic capital of the scholastic title Bourdieu (1970, 1979) becomes irrelevant among both law and management graduates when the degree is part of a reproductive strategy. In such cases of 'self-recruitment' (Hansen, 2001) graduating may be an instrumental goal and the embeddedness of the family in the occupational field tends to prevail.

While management graduates from pre-selected universities tend to enter the occupation through formal recruitment processes, those from the unlisted university faced increased difficulties in a relatively rigid and stratified labour market. The same labour market leads employers to deploy passive search strategies, growing 'CV nurseries' which enable them to recruit and select without advertising vacancies and search the market. Employers also seem to scrutinise applicants' 'personal capital' (Brown et al., 2004), that is to say, a number of personal skills related to personal/family investments. The interviews also shed light on the networks binding employers and schools together. Interviewees did not account for labour market discrimination against gender. However, in both fields female professionals are predominant, although in lower echelons (Estanque 2004). Family projects and personal life are unequally affected in both occupational fields, especially when the dichotomy employed-self-employed is considered.

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