

Conformism of the recruiter: a French field experiment

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Abstract

We evaluate the effect of experiencing an atypical employment (part time, fixed-term contract) or being unemployed (short- or long-term unemployment) on the chances to find a new job, using a field experiment. Between February and May 2015, we answered 300 published job offers in Paris region for seven applicants in three occupations (accountants, sales assistants, and servers in the food-services sector) by filing a total of 6,300 applications (300 x 7 x 3). We show that job seekers' current employment or unemployment status does indeed have a marked impact on their subsequent trajectories on the labor market. The impact depends on employment applicants' personal characteristics as well as on the vocational fields for which they apply. The interpretation adds the conformism of the recruiter to the equation.

JEL classification

C93, J23, J64

Keywords

Unemployment duration; Atypical employment; Correspondance studies

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1. Introduction

In early 2016, the French labor market entered its sixteenth semester of continuous decline. The number of job seekers increased by 2.5 million, an upsurge of 80% since the beginning of the rise in unemployment in mid-2008. The unemployment rate has reached 10.5%, more than three percentage points higher than at the beginning of the crisis. In this context, duration of unemployment has risen sharply and specific employment situations (unemployed people in reduced activity, part-time workers, workers employed on short-term contracts, etc.) have developed. This context of ongoing crisis poses in renewed terms the issue of links between people's current work situation and unemployment, as well as their chances of gaining access to quality employment in the future. Many studies indicate that employment status and the unemployment situation influence the subsequent trajectory of people on the labor market (Givord, 2005; Fremigacci and Terracol, 2014; Fontaine and Rochut, 2014). Having a poor quality job can reduce the chances of integration on an ongoing basis. Hence there is the risk of an insecurity trap for people who agree to take atypical jobs and of stagnating in long-term unemployment for those who refuse to do so. This phenomenon maintains and amplifies the dualism of the labor market, opposing stable jobs to poor quality jobs. It is also an unemployment persistence factor at the macroeconomic level that has been identified for a number of decades (Blanchard and Summers, 1986) and which is the subject of renewed attention in the context of the Great Recession. In the United States, recent studies have shown that among workers who experienced 6 months of unemployment between 2008 and 2012, only 11% have found steady work 15 months later (over the last 4 months) (Krueger *et al.*, 2014). The chances of obtaining work are highly dependent on the time spent unemployed, especially the first eight months of searching and when local markets are in turmoil (Kroft *et al.*, 2013). The crisis may well have reinforced this negative correlation with duration of unemployment (Kroft *et al.*, 2014). In so doing, it would seem to have altered the

cyclical properties of the American economy, making it generally more sensitive to shocks, that is to say less resilient.

Theoretically, the link between the current unemployment or employment situation and an individual's subsequent trajectory on the labor market can be addressed by referencing two types of mechanisms: a human capital effect or a pure signaling effect. According to the first mechanism, having had a particular form of employment is avocational experience that changes individual human capital. It can alter an individual's vocational skills and modify his or her cognitive or non-cognitive abilities, for example by affecting the person's motivation. According to the second mechanism, even if the person's particular job-seeker characteristics are unchanged, having had an atypical form of employment represents information that can be used by employers when recruiting. It is important to differentiate these two mechanisms according to whether they are being applied to the labor-supply or -demand side, insofar as public policy recommendations will be very different depending on the side in question. Considering the effects of human capital, it is appropriate to implement individual mechanisms for support and training. But if these have stigmatizing effects, such measures are likely doomed to failure and we must instead prioritize targeting employers through information and awareness-raising campaigns or incentives tantamount to affirmative action initiatives.

But the chances of exiting unemployment and gaining access to a high quality job depend on many individual and contextual factors. Among this set of factors, it is particularly complicated to identify the specific effect of an individual's previous job status or past duration of unemployment, both of which depend on the same factors. We must guard ourselves against selection and endogeneity biases. This is the subject of extensive

microeconomic literature that applies duration models to an analysis of unemployment. And it is even more difficult to break down this effect according to the mechanism in play, whether human capital or signaling. This is why very few studies identify these mechanisms at all. Only an experimental approach makes it possible to control all observable and unobservable characteristics of job applicants in order to measure the specific effect of the signal transmitted by employment status. Since the first study using an experimental method to measure the effects of duration of unemployment on the chances of obtaining a job, carried out in Switzerland in 1999 (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008), some American studies have continued in this vein by using data from a correspondence operation (Kroft *et al.*, 2013). These studies have pointed to a simultaneous human-capital and signaling effect, leading to a weakening in the chances of exiting unemployment after only six months. A study carried out in Sweden with the same type of method indicates for its part that the effects of past employment and unemployment situations are relatively insignificant, while the effect of the applicant's present situation would seem to be greater (Eriksson and Rooth, 2011). No such study has yet to have been conducted in France.

In this article, we are using the experimental method of correspondence study to measure, other factors being equal, the causal effect of the employment situation or past and present unemployment (part time, fixed-term contract (CDD), or unemployment) on the chances of obtaining a job. We initially position ourselves on the side of labor demand and examine the perception that recruiters have of these types of experiences when they appear in an applicant's resume so as to see whether various current or past situations have a persistent effect, and if applicable, an effect of comparable magnitude, on the chances of obtaining a job.

We propose to distinguish the impact that these different pathways can have, depending on whether the applicant is male or female. The perception of a recruiter as regards this sort of experience may vary depending on the applicant's gender, women more frequently having part-time work, often not by choice (in 2011, 30% of women had a part-time position, as opposed to only 7% of men) and fixed-term contract jobs (in 2011, 11% of female employees had a fixed-term contract (CDD), as opposed to 8% of men), as well as being unemployed (in 2011, the unemployment rate for women was 9.7%, as opposed to 8.8% for men).

This article presents the results of a test conducted in Ile-de-France between February and May 2015 concerning three occupations: accountants, sales assistants, and servers in the food-services sector. Seven fictitious applications were invented for each of these occupations. They differ from a reference application in that the applicant purportedly worked part time, had a fixed-term contract, or was unemployed at the time of the application, as well as in terms of the applicant's gender. In total, we responded to 300 job offers published in Ile-de-France for each occupation by filing 6,300 applications (3x7 x 300). We will begin with a detailed presentation of the protocol of this controlled experiment before revealing the results.

2. Experimental design

2.1. The principle of a correspondence study

To evaluate the effect of an individual characteristic, such as reduced activity, a fixed-term contract or a period of past unemployment, on a person's chances of obtaining a job, it would be ideal to compare this individual's access to employment depending on whether or not he or she exhibits this characteristic. However, in reality, personal traits are a given: an individual has a specific set of characteristics and the evaluator cannot measure what the person's

situation would have been if he or she had different characteristics, since this state of being, by definition, has not materialized. One strategy therefore consists in comparing the situation as regards employing distinct individuals with very similar characteristics apart from the trait whose effect we want to evaluate, in this case past experience. Economic theory identifies a large number of factors influencing the chances of obtaining a job. At the same time, all of these potential determinants cannot be called up in administrative data or in the available surveys. Some determinants are imperfectly observable most of the time (quantitative and qualitative vocational experience), others are unobservable (job-search effort, self-selection). However, to evaluate the effect of a given characteristic, we must be able to observe and isolate the potential effect of all other determinants.

Experimental data can be used to assess the effect of an “all else being equal” characteristic. In particular, the method of correspondence study is best suited to measuring the effect of an individual characteristic on the chances of landing a job (Neumark, 2012). It consists in building from scratch fictitious applications that are practically identical apart from the trait whose effect we want to evaluate and then to file them simultaneously in response to the same job offers. It will then suffice to compare the chances of success of the fictitious applicants in order to evaluate the effect of the characteristic tested. This method eliminates the usually unobservable heterogeneity of job applicants, selection biases, and the effects of networking. Its main limitation concerns the generalization of results to the entire labor market. Evaluations from correspondence study data produce a one-time measurement specific to a particular and partial labor pool since a small number of occupations are examined. However, in this specific field, a correspondence study provides a good measurement of employer preferences.

2.2. Choice of occupation

The first stage consists in selecting the occupations to be tested, for which we use a reproducible measurement procedure. Three equally weighted criteria were applied in our specific use of the Île-de-France labor statistics database, the *Fichier Historique Statistique* (FHS), drawn up by *Pôle emploi* for the period between May 2012 and April 2013. The first two criteria are commonly used in correspondence studies in France (Duguet and Petit, 2005; Duguet *et al.* 2010). First of all, since discrimination analysis will make use of differences in success rates between applicants, we have chosen occupations in regards to which the labor market is tight. For the purpose of measuring labor market tension, we have applied the indicator traditionally used by *Pôle emploi*, which, at the end of each month, records category A (OEE/DEFM*) job offers, calculated for each ROME code¹. This selection criterion has proven to be very useful in a context of sharp economic slowdown. However, in so doing, we take the risk of underestimating actual discrimination since it is, a priori, more costly for an employer to discriminate in a tight labor market.

In a second stage, in order to minimize the risk of detection and avoid interfering with the labor market as much as possible, we focus on occupations displaying a high fluctuation of job offers. This second criterion is expressed statistically by selecting ROME codes where the number of OEE (recorded job offers) and DEFM (end-of-month job seekers) is high. These are occupations in regards to which the labor market is most active.

* recorded job offers/end-of-month job seekers

¹The *répertoire opérationnel des métiers et des emplois* (ROME), the jobs and positions operational directory of the French national employment agency, is an operational nomenclature which draws up an inventory of trades based on a definition of skills. We work on data extraction from the *Pôle Emploi* FHS, comprising employment applications and offers recorded for the period between May 2012 and April 2013 in the Île-de-France region, disaggregated by 532 ROME codes.

The third criterion is specific to the subject of research. The occupations studied in regards to this item are occupations for which atypical employment and unemployment situations are neither excessively rare, nor unusually frequent. Statistically, we have chosen ROME codes that are near the regional median in terms of duration of employment, which is specified for each recorded job offer, applying a synthetic indicator made up of the proportion of offers of more than seven months. In other words, the purpose is to select occupations where atypical jobs are not unusual.

We attribute equal weight to these three criteria. The occupations singled out are the most active and tight ones, and where atypical jobs, measured on the basis of duration of employment, were closest to the regional median. As a result, we classified 532 ROME codes on the basis of each criterion and subsequently selected the ten ROME codes displaying the highest overall score in the three categories. The results of this procedure are shown in Table 1. Out of the ten ROME codes, we chose the ones which seemed most specific to a particular vocational setting or sector and finally singled out sales assistants (code D1401), accountants and accounting secretaries (codes M1608 et M1203), and food-services servers (code G1803).

Table 1

The ten occupations that are the tightest and most active and whose duration of employment is closest to the regional median in the Île-de-France region

ROME CODE	Occupations
K2104	Education and supervision in educational institutions
D1401	Sales assistance
I1304	Industrial and exploitation equipment installation and maintenance
I1604	Automobile mechanics
I1401	Computer and office equipment maintenance
G1204	Sports education
M1608	Accounting secretarial services
M1203	Accounting
K1207	Socio-educational intervention
G1803	Service in the food-services sector

Data source: extraction from the FHS, Pôleemploi

Scope: applications and offers recorded between May 2012 and April 2013, Île-de-France region. Disaggregation: 532 ROME codes ; Tension indicator: $\frac{3}{4} * OEE/DEE + \frac{1}{4} * OEE/DEFM$; Fluctuation intensity indicator: number of job offers recorded and number of DEFM ; Atypical employment indicator: deviation from the regional median (two engagements of more than seven months for three offers) concerning job offers of more than seven months from among all offers.

2.3. Building fictitious applicant profiles

For each of the three occupations, we want to measure the effects of the following situations on the chances of obtaining employment: *i*) current short-term unemployment; *ii*) current long-term unemployment; *iii*) a past history of jobs primarily with a CDD; and *iv*) a past history made up primarily of part-time work, depending on whether the applicant is male or female. The impact of these factors will be measured in relation to a reference situation characterized by a past history made up of full-time work with a CDI and without a jobless episode, depending on whether the applicant is male or female. In all, for each of the three occupations tested, we have built seven perfectly matched fictitious resumes, with the exception of one characteristic. These work profiles are presented in Table 2.

Table2*Work profile of fictitious applicants*

Applicant	Description	Gender	Age	Past and <i>current</i> situation
1 <i>Reference</i>	M_CDI	Male	33	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently with a CDI</i>
2	M_STU	Male	32	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently unemployed for 3 months</i>
3	M_LTU	Male	31	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently unemployed for more than 1 year</i>
4	M_CDD	Male	33	Work profile with a CDD <i>Currently with a CDD</i>
5	M_PT	Male	31	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently part time with a CDI</i>
6	F_CDI	Female	32	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently with a CDI</i>
7	F_PT	Female	31	Work profile with a CDI <i>Currently part time with a CDI</i>

The only characteristics that clearly differentiate the applicants are their work profiles and their genders. The applicants are perfectly matched for all other resume components. They have the same types of degrees (the most common ones in their occupations), identical work histories, the same type of experience from a qualitative point of view, and the same computer and language skills. They are between 31 and 33 years old, of French origin and French citizens. They live in the same area, where the job is being offered. They all originally come from outside Île-de-France and have a car and a driver's license (class B license). The details of their work profiles and other characteristics can be found in Annex 1.

To build these profiles and make sure that they are realistic, we based our work on French Labor Force Survey (*Enquête Emploi*) data, from which we derived average or modal characteristics of employed workers in each of the occupations in question, limiting ourselves to workers aged 30 to 35 years old from the Île-de-France region who resemble our applicants (Table 3). Our fictitious applicants have been built to reproduce these modal characteristics.

Given that these applications were filed simultaneously in response to the same job offers, the applications had to include elements of differentiation. These differences concern the resume presentations, i.e. font type, font size and page layout, all the while remaining standard in form. The applicants offer experience acquired in real companies; these firms differ, but are comparable in terms of their activities, size, market power, etc. The applicants' leisure activities are different as well, while also remaining very typical and impersonal (team sports, individual sports, cinema, reading, music, etc.). The short emails sent along with the resumes were also worded differently, while remaining standard in style. An address, cell phone number and email address were attributed to each applicant. These resumes were compiled based on the expertise of representatives from each of the vocational fields in question, people consulted for their opinions as to whether or not the applications appear realistic.

Table 3
Standard profiles of workers in the occupations tested

Occupation	Accountants		Sales assistants		Servers	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Gender (in %)	84.79	15.21	34.02	65.98	46.26	53.74
CDI (in %)	89.60		97.34		90.22	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
CDD (in %)	88.6	95.12	98.91	96.47	86.67	93.26
	8.38		2.47		6.21	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Seasonal (in %)	9	4.88	0.6	3.5	6.87	5.63
	0.2		0.2		2.09	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Temporary (in %)	0.2	0	0.2	0	3.89	0.55
	1.2		0		1.48	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Training (in %)	1.4	0	0	0	2.56	0.55
	0.7		0		0	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Average working time (in hours)	0.8	0	0	0	0	0
	35.40		39.51		34.93	

	F	M	F	M	F	M
Proportion of part-time work (in %)	35.04	37.05	37.98	40.29	34.39	35.39
	21.2		3.57		32.79	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
	23.7	7.3	7	1.79	35.52	30.44
Proportion of workers previously unemployed (in %)	23.37		18.16		22.01	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
	23.99	19.94	16.44	18.98	25.84	19.02
Average length of unemployment prior to employment (in days)	249.79		324.35		523.19	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
	247.56	264.48	406.29	290.15	431.14	620.79
Average age at end of studies (in years)	21.19		22.07		19.5	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
	21.04	22.00	22.00	22.16	20.16	18.92
Highest diploma obtained (type)	DUT, BTS		DUT, BTS		CAP, BEP	
	44.85		33.59		19.00	
Potential experience (in years)	11.28		10.37		12.88	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
	11.49	10.13	9.92	10.61	11.79	13.84
Number of observations	395		553		254	

Source: French Labor Force Survey from 2007 to 2012 (INSEE). Scope: Private-sector salaried employees aged 30 to 35 years old from the Île-de-France region

Accountants: 312c (Accountants, chartered accountants, liberal accountants), 373a (Senior managers financial services or accountants from large companies), 373c (Senior managers financial services or accountants from small and medium-sized companies), 543a (Accounting- or financial-service employees); Sales assistants: 225a (Independent trade brokers, from 0 to 9 salaried employees), 463a (Sales technicians and technical/sales representatives, data-processing representatives), 463b (Sales technicians and technical/sales representatives, capital and intermediate goods representatives, inter-industry trade representatives (other than data processing)), 463c (Sales technicians and technical/sales representatives, consumer goods representatives for companies), 463d (Sales technicians and technical/sales representatives, service representatives for companies or professionals (other than banking, insurance, data processing)); Food services: occupation codes 561a (Servers, kitchen help, waiters (bar, brasserie, coffee shop or restaurant)).

2.4. Responses to job offers

We carried out a simple job interview test by sending applications for the same job offer after the job was posted online, at short intervals by email from the email address of each applicant,

or by regular mail². By this way, no applicant had to undergo the interview in person. This method was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, interviews in person introduce bias on the part of recruiters related to the applicants' physical appearance and personality. These inevitable biases are not perceptible by researchers and are impossible to control. We assume that since interviews generate a cost, the recruiter would invite for an interview only applicants who objectively have a chance to obtain the position. No photographs were added to written applications. Secondly, since the data collection process is less burdensome and is completed within a given time period, we were able to constitute a fairly large sample.

Finally, in order to ensure that the formatting or content of a specific application would not systematically influence companies' choices of a particular applicant (in spite of the precautions taken when the applications were created), we interchanged the resume layouts and cover letters between female and male applicants with the same characteristics (female / male with a CDI; part-time female / male), as well as between applicants having been unemployed for different lengths of time (short-term / long-term unemployed male). These two sets of resume and cover letter components were randomly assigned to the job offers tested.

3. Empirical strategy

3.1. Experimental data collection

All full-time job offers for sales assistants, accountants and food-services servers with a CDD or CDI in the Île-de-France region fell within the scope of this study. We tested all those brought to our attention between the beginning of February and the end of May 2015, until we

² The resumes were sent from different offices involved in the sending process in order to minimize the risk of being detected by recruiters.

had reached 300 job offers for each occupation. A total of 900 job offers were tested, corresponding to 6,300 job applications sent. The sample composition is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Job offers tested

Occupation	Number of job offers tested	Number of job applications sent (seven times the number of job offers)
Sales assistants	300	2,100
Accountants	300	2,100
Food-services servers	300	2,100
Total	900	6,300

We collected data concerning the characteristics of the jobs offered as they appeared in the ads. In the sample of these offers, we note that the proportion involving a CDI is lower for jobs for servers and that the remuneration and the prerequisite qualification levels are also lower in the sample (Table 5).

Table 5*Characteristics of the job offers tested*

	Sales assistants	Accountants	Servers
Proportion of offers with a CDI	76.66%	73.67%	49.33%
Median hourly wage in euros	13.09	15	10.71
Proportion of offers paying a wage above the median	46.67%	44.67%	19%
Proportion of offers requiring a degree	57%	68%	14.33%
Proportion of offers for a higher-level position than the last job held	26%	11%	33.67%
Number of observations	300	300	300

An answer is considered to be positive when the recruiter invites the applicant to an interview or contacts the applicant for more information about his or her current situation or qualifications. On the other hand, the answer is considered to be negative if the recruiter explicitly rejects the application or does not answer at all. Information provided in missed calls has been processed in a specific manner.

3.2. A two-step empirical strategy

Firstly, we record these positive answers for each applicant (Table 6) which gives a first overview of the hierarchy of candidates called or contacted by email. We then perform a paired success-rates comparison in order to determine if the differences we observe are significantly different from zero (Table 7). Since our experimental applications are similar except for their last position on the labor market, if we reject the null hypothesis, we are able to interpret this difference as the result of differential treatment linked to this position. Our experimental protocol allows us to estimate econometrically the differences in success rates through a linear probability model, which includes all the paired differences of interest. The model is the following:

$$Y_{ij} = \alpha_1 \cdot M_{STU} + \alpha_2 \cdot M_{LTU} + \alpha_3 \cdot M_{CDD} + \alpha_4 \cdot M_{PT} + \alpha_5 \cdot F_{CDI} + \alpha_6 \cdot F_{CDI} + \alpha_7 \cdot F_{PT} + \beta_{ij} + u_{ij} + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Using the panel dimension of responses to applications, it is possible to add a job-offer fixed-effect, which allows us to control the heterogeneity of firm. Then we calculate more robust estimates by performing the bootstrap method. Finally, we restrict this model to subsamples of quality job offers in order to detect possible compositional effects.

Secondly, we use the French Labor Force Survey data that gives us a map of the characteristics of each labor market tested. It is through this analysis that we can interpret our results through the hypothesis of the recruiters' conformity to the majority norm in the profession.

4. The herding as a rational sorting criterion

4.1. Gross success rate

Table 6 provides the success rate for receiving a job interview by the seven fictitious applicants in each of the three occupations; the applicants differ from one another only with respect to their employment situation and past joblessness. The success rate of each applicant is in a comparable order of magnitude according to the occupations tested, all of which are in tension.

For the reference applicant (a man currently with a CDI as well as a past history with a CDI), the gross rate of positive answers is 19.7% for sales assistants and 21.7% for accountants. An applicant must apply for five jobs to receive one interview. The gross success rate is 16% for servers, i.e. slightly more than six job applications, with the hope of receiving one interview.

Table 6*Gross rate of positive answers*

	Sales assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI	19.7***	21.7***	16***
M_STU	21.7***	26.7***	17.3** *
M_LTU	20.3***	18***	18.7** *
M_CDD	13.3***	14.3***	13***
M_PT	16.3***	16.7***	16.7** *
F_CDI	26.3***	25.7***	20.3** *
F_PT	23.7***	24***	25.3** *
Proportion of job offers with at least one positive answer	43.67	43.67	45.67
Number of observations	300	300	300

Notes: On average, a sales assistant applicant with a CDI received a positive answer for 19.7% of applications. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.

Within each of the three occupations, the success rate for the fictitious applicants is, however, quite different, depending on applicant profiles. Short-term unemployed accountants had the highest success rate (26.7%), while servers with a history of having only a CDD had the lowest success rate (13%). Within each occupation, the maximal success-rate difference, depending on employment status, is 61.3% among sales assistants, 86.7% for accountants, and 94.6% for servers. The extent of these differences suggests the significant presence of signaling effects, depending on the employment status as perceived by the employer.

4.2. Success-rate comparisons two by two

In Table 7 the two success rates involving the same job offers are compared, making it possible to underscore employment status with regard to the reference situation. The study protocol allows us to distinguish between the impact of being unemployed (depending on the length of unemployment), the effect of a prior history of having only fixed-term contracts, and the impact of being part time. It also makes it possible to measure the effect of gender on the chances of receiving a job interview and of being part time as related to gender. A step-by-step comparison of these effects needs to be made. We begin by describing these impacts on all the job offers and then we then look at subsamples of quality job offers, whether CDI jobs, with a higher-than-average hourly wage, specifically asking for a degree, or corresponding to jobs at a level superior to the last job held by the applicant at the time of hiring. These various subsamples contain increasingly fewer job offers, thus making it progressively more difficult to underscore the impacts with statistical precision. The corresponding tables can be found in Appendix, from Table A2 to Table A4.

Table 7*Paired success-rate comparisons*

	Sales assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI vs. M_STU	2 (0.369)	5** (0.023)	1.3 (0.528)
M_CDI vs. M_LTU	0.7 (0.761)	-3.7 (0.154)	2.7 (0.194)
M_CDI vs. M_CDD	-6.3*** (0.001)	-7.3*** (0.001)	-3 (0.128)
M_CDI vs. M_PT	-3.3 (0.109)	-5** (0.025)	0.7 (0.741)
M_STU vs. M_LTU	-1.3 (0.484)	-8.7*** (0.001)	1.3 (0.542)
M_CDI vs. M_CDI	6.7*** (0.010)	4* (0.088)	4.3* (0.088)
F_CDI vs. M_PT	-2.7 (0.24)	-1.7 (0.459)	5* (0.058)
F_PT vs. M_PT	7.3*** (0.002)	7.3*** (0.003)	8.7*** (0.001)
Number of observations	300	300	300

Note: Differences are provided in percentage points. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.

4.3. Five main results

Result 1: job seekers with a CDD-based career are disadvantaged

The first effect studied in our protocol is the one relating to the *contrat de travail à durée déterminée* (CDD) (fixed-term contract). In two out of the three occupations studied, applicants currently employed under a CDD and whose career history is entirely composed of CDDs are considerably penalized when compared to a reference applicant whose career is made up of *contrats à durée indéterminée* (CDI) (permanent contracts) (Table 7). The disadvantage is most significant for sales assistants (-7.3%), significant for accountants (-6.3%), but negative, while remaining statistically non-significant at conventional levels, for servers³. It is important to note that in the Île-de-France region, CDD arrangements are most rare in sales assistance jobs (see Table 3).

³All variations in this section are presented in percentage points.

The disadvantage associated with aCDD-based career is sustained, or even reinforced, when the sample is limited to quality jobs. It is significant for CDI job offers for all three occupations; for accountants and servers regarding above-average-wage jobs; for accountants and sales assistants regarding positions that represent advancement from previously held employment; and for positions requiring a specific degree level. It is also significant for accountants for offers of a higher position than the one they held previously, although the sample is very limited in this regard.

Here the herding assumption is at play. All things being equal, if an applicant has never been offered a CDI, the recruiter may find it preferable not to propose the person for the kind of employment concerned. This effect may be combined with a mechanism of deviation from the employment norms in force, which explains why it has a lesser impact on accountants and servers, given that CDDs are much more common in their career pathways.

Result 2: the stigmatizing effects of long-term unemployment

It might be expected that employers would have a preference for employed applicants over those who are unemployed. This is not the case. The fact of being unemployed for fewer than three months has no significant impact on opportunities for access to employment in the case of servers and sales assistants (unemployed applicants have, moreover, a consistently higher success rate than employed applicants, but the difference, which reaches two points in the case of servers, is statistically insignificant). The fact of being unemployed on the short term even has a positive effect in the case of accountants, for whom the success rate increases by five points. We note that this impact is no longer significant if we limit the sample to quality job offers, with a CDI, those offering a higher-than-average hourly wage, those requiring a degree, or those proposing a position superior to the last one held by the applicant (tables in

Appendix). This first result may be linked to the fact that job applicants, in the three occupations tested, are frequently unemployed (approximately a quarter of them according to French Labor Force Survey data).

Nor does long-term unemployment have any significant impact if the reference applicant is employed. As compared to an applicant who currently has a CDI, the fact of being unemployed for more than a year has no significant effect for applicants in the three occupations tested (Table 7). This is also the case if we limit the sample to quality job offers. For the three occupations in question and for all other definitions of quality jobs, the fact of being unemployed on the long term is not detrimental as compared to being currently employed (Table A2 in Appendix).

And yet extended unemployment has a negative impact if the reference applicant was unemployed for fewer than three months in the case of accountants. For this occupation only, we note that a long-term unemployed applicant has reduced chances of landing a job (Table 7). In this instance, our result coincides with the findings of the experimental study completed in Switzerland by Oberholzer-Gee (2008) concerning effects that depend on duration of unemployment. Given that unobserved heterogeneity is controlled, the underlying economic mechanism is interpreted as being the herding effect: recruiters, whose information as to the quality of applicants is asymmetric, display a herd reflex when faced with long-term job seekers. They assume that many employers must already have refused to give this unemployed person a job if the job seeker has not yet found work. In the absence of any other information, it is probably wise to “follow the herd.” This effect resists controlling for the quality of jobs offered when the sample is limited to job offers with a CDI or requiring a given level of qualification (see tables A2 and A4 in Appendix), but does not resist

controlling for other definitions of quality jobs (higher-than-average salaries, a job level higher than for a previous position, etc.). We note furthermore that the fact of limiting the sample to job offers with a CDI or requiring a given level of qualification has a significant reverse effect for servers only, representing a hiring advantage for long-term unemployed applicants.

To reconcile these results, one interpretation is that applicants currently with a CDI send a positive message concerning their employability, but a negative one as regards their availability. An applicant who has been unemployed on the short term is equally employable, but more available than an applicant with a CDI, who will have to give advance notice before changing jobs. Availability is especially valued when it comes to low-quality jobs, while employability is valued for quality jobs, such as well-paying jobs with a CDI. A long-term unemployed applicant is as available as a short-term unemployed job seeker, but the former sends a weaker message as to employability if recruiters exhibit the herding instinct. A comparison between an applicant with a CDI and a short-term unemployed job seeker thus shows that the latter may have an advantage (availability effect), while the former may have an advantage compared to a long-term unemployed applicant if the employability effect outweighs the availability effect. In the specific case of servers, it is important to note that unemployment before hiring lasts for a longer time in the Île-de-France region labor market⁴. Long-term unemployed applicants have the most common profile, a phenomenon that may help attenuate the herding effect. Furthermore, for these CDI job offers or for jobs requiring a given level of qualification, the employer may show a preference – work experience being equal – for long-term unemployed applicants who will potentially accept lower remuneration.

⁴ For workers 30 to 35 years old in the Île-de-France region, the average duration of unemployment prior to getting a job is 249.8 days for accountants, 324.4 days for sales assistants, and 523.2 days for servers (source: data processed from French Labor Force Suvery (EnquêteEmploi) from 2007 to 2012 – see Table 3).

Result 3: male part-time employed job seekers are disadvantaged

Our study protocol allows for an evaluation of a third effect, which is part-time employment. Compared to a reference applicant whose career history is entirely composed of CDIs, an applicant whose employment background is the same but who is currently a part-time employee may be disadvantaged when it comes to hiring. This penalization is significant for accountants and is on the borderline of significance for sales assistants: in both occupations part-time employment is rare, even unusual (Table 7). The impact remains significant for accountants if we limit the sample to CDI job offers and offers requiring a degree, where the effect is significant for sales assistants as well. The negative effect of holding part-time employment is never significant for servers, regardless of whether the sample is limited or not. Part-time employment is most common among male servers, comprising almost a third of such jobs (Table 3).

These inter-vocational differences suggest that a deviation from the norm in the vocational realm plays a decisive role concerning the effects of a given personal characteristic: this individual-specific factor, such as having current part-time employment for instance, may be disadvantageous when it is rare in the setting, but not disadvantageous for the job seeker when it is common in the stock of jobs - for servers in this case.

Result 4: hiring advantage for women

In our protocol, we included a gender variable with a view to measuring the specific effect of gender and the cross effect of gender and employment status, which is interpreted as conditional discrimination. Previous correspondence studies of Île-de-France region data had already shown this type of conditional discrimination when crossing the gender and origin

variables or gender and place of residence variables, but gender and employment status had not yet been studied from this perspective.

Compared with a male applicant whose career path is entirely composed of stable full-time employment, a female applicant with a similar history receives a hiring advantage in all three occupations tested (Table 7). Success-rate variations, all in favor of females and significantly different from zero, are 6.7% for sales assistants, 4.3% for servers and 4% for accountants.

The norm in each occupation may again be used to interpret these observations. According to the French Labor Force Survey data (*EnquêteEmploi*), the proportion of women in each occupation is different. The data for the Île-de-France region show that among employees hired less than a year earlier, 82.3% in accounting, 46.9% in food-services sector serving positions, and 42% in sales assistance were women. The magnitude of the hiring advantage for women is therefore inversely proportional to the importance of female representation in each occupation. For sales assistants, the hiring advantage remains substantial for all quality job offers, for high-paying CDI jobs and for positions that are a step up from the one previously held, but is no longer substantial for positions requiring a degree. On the other hand, the hiring advantage for female accountants and servers is not limited to better quality jobs. In these decidedly feminine occupations, quality employment positions are not the ones most accessible to women, except for higher-than-average paying positions for accountants.

The hiring advantage for women stands out even more when we put two part-time employee profiles side by side. The success rate difference in favor of women reaches 7.3% for sales assistants (6.7% for two profiles in regards to a position with a CDI), 8.7% for servers (4.3% with a CDI), and 7.3% for accountants (4% with a CDI). Variation remains significant when

limiting the scope of analysis to the following elements: quality employment, the four sample sub-categories, sales assistants, the first three samples in the case of accountants, or the first sample only for servers in a sector where quality jobs are generally rarer.

Result 5: part-time workhiring advantage for women

Finally, our research protocol makes it possible to single out the effect of gender-conditional part-time employment. We had observed that for men, current part-time employment had a negative impact on chances of obtaining a job, except in the case of servers given that part-time employment is common in their field. Current part-time employment status in the case of women has the opposite effect, but only in the occupation where it is widespread, i.e. for servers.

For a woman seeking employment as a server, being employed part time increases her chances of being invited for a job interview by five points in comparison with an applicant who is employed full time. There is no indication of differences in regards to other occupations, where female part-time employment is much more unusual. A female part-time server is in a situation which is much closer to the norm in her occupation and therefore benefits from a hiring advantage. Such is not the case for a part-time accountant or sales assistant: an atypical situation. The hiring advantage benefiting female part-time servers compared to male part-time servers is even more significant in relation to CDI jobs (7.4%) and for job offers with higher-than-average pay (10.5%).

5. Discussion

Further to this study, we are able to answer our initial question in the affirmative. Job seekers' current employment or unemployment status does indeed have a marked impact on their subsequent trajectories on the labor market. However, our findings do not go so far as to indicate that the impact of past or present employment or unemployment is determining or unequivocal. The impact depends on employment applicants' personal characteristics as well as on the vocational fields for which they apply.

For example, applying for a job under a *contrat à durée indéterminée* (CDI) (permanent contract) while unemployed has no incidence for servers and sales assistants, whereas it may have a positive impact for accountants applying for low quality jobs, where applicant availability is a priority. Long-term unemployment results in lower chances of landing a job in accounting, but it has no impact for sales assistants and it increases chances of obtaining a CDI serving job or one requiring a particular degree level. Part-time employment reduces employability of accountants and sales assistants, especially for quality jobs, but has no impact on servers. Long-term employment under a *contrat à durée déterminée* (CDD) (fixed-term contract), penalizes sales assistants and accountants, especially for quality jobs, but does not affect servers.

In order to interpret this inter-vocational variation, it is useful to combine two types of mechanisms that correspond to a form of recruiter conformity. The first is herding, where employers tend to imitate the behaviour of other employers. The recruiter for a CDI position would not therefore choose a long-time unemployed person, whose career is made up of CDDs, because other employers probably did not offer him or her a CDI.

The second mechanism is a deviation from employment standards for each occupation. This is quite blatant in regards to part-time employment. In each of the studied occupations, the divide is along the gender line: it is very rare for male employees and weakens the applicant's prospects of being invited for an interview. However, it is frequent for women and increases their chances of being called for an interview, especially for serving jobs where it is most widespread. This deviation from the rule operates in every occupation. An entire career of CDD or part-time jobs is not a disadvantage for servers, in whose field it is rather frequent and, indeed, the norm.

6. Conclusion

Our experimentation results have helped us bring to light several examples of the relationship between the employment or unemployment status and their trajectories on the labor market for three occupations in the Île-de-France region for which we tested available data between February and May 2015. The above results and interpretations suggest that there is no unequivocal determinism as regards the impact of a given characteristic of job seekers on their chances of vocational integration. It would be wrong to consider that any employment situation would automatically affect applicants' future pathway. Our interpretation is that, in and of itself, no employment situation – or unemployment – will induce a particular effect. The applicant's singular character is the determining factor instead. For example, part-time employment will automatically have a negative impact only if this type of contract is unusual in the vocational field or for the type of applicant concerned. A job history made up of short-term contracts would have no negative impact for occupations where short-term employment is the norm.

In a context where special forms of employment are spreading and becoming less atypical, while long-time unemployed persons are becoming a majority among job seekers, recruiter conformity may play to the advantage of personal trajectories. Its spring force role in the labor market could reduce the penalization effect associated with various employment and unemployment situations. This mechanism may help to contain the risk that acceptance of an unusual job may become a precariousness trap or that refusing such employment may drag a person into long-term joblessness.

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Appendix

Table A1

	Sales assistants	Accountants	Serveurs
Vocational Experience	Four work experiences as a sales assistant with a CDI pathway Seven for a CDD pathway	Four work experiences as an accounting assistant and then as an accountant with a CDI pathway in an accounting firm and in a company Seven for a CDD pathway	Four work experiences as a server with a CDI pathway (seven for a CDD pathway), including a 2.5 year stint in a gastronomic restaurant
Diploma	Diplomas: BAC ES and DUT TC (with two internships)	Diplomas: BAC STT and BTS (with two internships)	CAP and BAC PRO diplomas in education
Specific skills	Practical command of English and Spanish Good command of Pack Office	Good command of Pack Office and the most common accounting software (Ciel, Sage, EBP)	

Productive characteristics of fictitious applicants

Notes: The diplomas and vocational experiences of the fictitious applicants are similar. An external expert confirmed this fact for each of the three occupations tested.

Table A2

Paired success-rate comparisons for quality job offers with a CDI

	Shop assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI vs. M_STU	2.2 (0.389)	3.6 (0.128)	-2.7 (0.389)
M_CDI vs. M_LTU	1.7 (0.498)	-4.1 (0.161)	4.1 (0.221)
M_CDI vs. M_CDD	-7*** (0.002)	-7.2*** (0.009)	-5.4* (0.072)
M_CDI vs. M_PT	-2.6 (0.316)	-5.4** (0.036)	2 (0.524)
M_STU vs. M_LTU	-0.4 (0.851)	-7.7*** (0.006)	6.8** (0.023)
M_CDI vs. F_CDI	5.7*	3.2	2

	(0.061)	(0.236)	(0.583)
F_CDI vs. F_PT	-2.6	-2.3	7.4**
	(0.325)	(0.385)	(0.039)
F_PT vs. M_PT	5.7**	6.3**	7.4*
	(0.037)	(0.024)	(0.06)
Number of observations	230	221	148

Note: Differences are provided in percentage points. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.

Table A3

Paired success-rate comparisons for quality job offers with an above-average salary

	Shop assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI vs. M_STU	5.7	2.2	-3.5
	(0.104)	(0.466)	(0.557)
M_CDI vs. M_LTU	4.3	-3	-1.8
	(0.228)	(0.418)	(0.732)
M_CDI vs. M_CDD	-0.7	-9***	-10.5**
	(0.798)	(0.006)	(0.026)
M_CDI vs. M_PT	-2.1	-5.2	3.5
	(0.475)	(0.123)	(0.478)
M_STU vs. M_LTU	-1.4	-5.2	1.8
	(0.652)	(0.177)	(0.733)
M_CDI vs. F_CDI	9.3**	9.7***	-7
	(0.015)	(0.008)	(0.216)
F_CDI vs. F_PT	-5	-4.5	10.5*
	(0.108)	(0.178)	(0.077)
F_PT vs. M_PT	6.4*	10.4***	0
	(0.055)	(0.005)	(1)
Numberof observations	140	134	57

Note: Differences are provided in percentage points. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.

Table A4*Paired success-rate comparisons for quality job offers requiring a diploma*

	Shop assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI vs. M_STU	0.6 (0.841)	3.4 (0.194)	0 (1)
M_CDI vs. M_LTU	-1.2 (0.69)	-4.4 (0.172)	7 (0.316)
M_CDI vs. M_CDD	-9.9*** (0.000)	-7.8*** (0.006)	-7 (0.263)
M_CDI vs. M_PT	-6.4** (0.024)	-5.4* (0.051)	7 (0.253)
M_STU vs. M_LTU	-1.8 (0.471)	-7.8** (0.011)	7* (0.074)
M_CDI vs. F_CDI	3.5 (0.303)	2.9 (0.304)	0 (1)
F_CDI vs. F_PT	1.2 (0.689)	-2 (0.513)	7 (0.366)
F_PT vs. M_PT	11.1*** (0.001)	6.4** (0.048)	0 (1)
Number of observations	171	204	43

Note: Differences are provided in percentage points. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.

TableA5

Paired success-rate comparisons for quality job offers at a position higher than the previously held job

	Shop assistants	Accountants	Servers
M_CDI vs. M_STU	0 (1)	6.1 (0.298)	3 (0.463)
M_CDI vs. M_LTU	2.6 (0.509)	-3 (0.698)	4 (0.251)
M_CDI vs. M_CDD	1.3 (0.706)	-9.1* (0.065)	-5 (0.157)
M_CDI vs. M_PT	0 (1)	-3 (0.31)	3 (0.439)
M_STU vs. M_LTU	2,6 (0.3)	-9.1 (0.243)	1 (0.828)
M_CDI vs. F_CDI	11.5** (0.026)	9.1 (0.165)	0 (1)
F_CDI vs. F_PT	-5.1 (0.192)	-6.1 (0.292)	4 (0.381)
F_PT vs. M_PT	6.4* (0.056)	6.1 (0.418)	1 (0.827)
Number of observations	78	33	101

Note: Differences are provided in percentage points. P-values are provided in brackets. P-values have been calculated using the bootstrap method, based on 1,000 replications:*** significant at the 1% level:** significant at the 5% level:* significant at the 10% level.