

The Fields of Career. Towards a New Theoretical Perspective

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1. Introduction

The development of new career patterns, along with the seeming decline of traditional organisational careers, has been the major topic of career theory in the past decade. Along with this evolution appears the discussion about the changing meaning of the term “career” and, more generally speaking, the changing meaning of “work” as well as the significance of organisations for the construction of career. The complexity of this debate poses a number of theoretical and methodological questions for research. As careers represent actors’ movements through a social structure over time (Becker and Strauss 1956), they form the link between person, organisation, and society. At the individual level, careers are expressed as a sequence of work role transitions, representing choices between opportunities offered by organisations. At the organisational level, careers can be viewed as a part of a process of social reproduction, which points the way to linking organisational form and behaviour with comparatively stable career patterns characteristic of particular firms or types of firms (Gunz 1989a; Evetts 1992). Every comprehensive theory of career must include these dimensions. Furthermore, such a theoretical frame has to model the interface between structure and action in a way which does not excessively prefer one of the two sides. In addition, empirical investigation requires a multi-method approach.

Most of the current ‘grand’ social theories try to illustrate this interface in a reflexive, circular way (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; Luhmann 1984; Coleman 1990): Structure both enables and restricts action, and action both follows and reproduces structure. The medium and the process of mediation between structure and strategy makes the difference between different theoretical angles. In terms of career: societal and organisational structure functions as an enabling frame for individual careers, and at the same time each single career decision reproduces social structure since it either confirms or modifies structural frames. Of course, the existing literature offers many different frameworks for the explanation of career patterns. Focusing particular aspects, each of them has its own qualities. Nevertheless, the perspective of Bourdieu offers some advantages.

This paper is a tentative of defining the theoretical framework chosen for the ViCaPP (Vienna Career Panel project) research conducted by our department. This research deals with questions concerning the development of new career patterns of business administration university and polytechnics graduates, and the factors influencing the formation, stabilisation, and modification of these patterns. Avoiding a choice between objective or subjective career and macro or micro perspective, the theory of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers an interesting framework to illuminate particular important aspects sometimes not sufficiently stressed by recent career research. In particular, it allows to re-introduce – despite the supposed weakening of organisational structures and the progressive disappearing of the publicly accessible elements of the “objective career” like official positions, formal statuses, and titles (Weick and Berlinger 1989) – themes like power distribution, social hierarchy, and thus social inequalities into career research.

Based on this theoretical framework the present paper focuses on *social fields* as one major element of a more comprehensive theoretical framework for professional and managerial careers (Mayrhofer et al. 2000). In particular, it discusses

- the constituting characteristics of social fields,

- the application of this concept to professional careers, thus providing (part of) a conceptual framework for the analysis of careers and
- the advantages as well as the problems related to the application of this concept in the area of professional careers.

In discussing these issues the paper begins with a characterisation of crucial elements of career fields ('looking inside') before analysing the context in which career fields are placed ('looking outside'). In a subsequent step, the concept of career fields is used to demonstrate its ability to address crucial issues in career research. First, by linking the concepts of career fields and career *habitus*, various levels of analysis are combined ('looking across'). Second, the concept is used to frame certain future developments ('looking ahead'). Finally, the conclusions discuss the capability as well as the problems of this approach.

2. Looking inside: fields of career

The close interaction between Bourdieu's three crucial concepts of field, capital and habitus may be summarised through the following equation (Bourdieu 1994b) : [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. Thinking of practice in relation to professional career, it becomes clear that it may be interpreted only through the definition and the observation of the different terms of the equation. Moreover – and this the equation does not show – the main influencing elements on career also have to be defined. Following Bourdieu's work, we focus on the consequences of changes occurring in the domain of professional careers. More precisely, we ask about the conditions, possibilities, and modalities of the adaptation of individuals to rapidly evolving career patterns. Although, through their habitus, individuals are constrained by the rules and norms they internalised, Bourdieu still considers practices as open to ingenuity, creativity and strategy. New forms of careers may bring about unexpected problems, creating a new dynamic which, in our view, can be observed through the evolution of what we understand by the "field of career".

2.1 Constituting characteristics

Following Pierre Bourdieu's theory, a "social field" is characterised both by a patterned set of practices which suggests competent action in conformity with rules and roles, and as the playground or battlefield in which agents, endowed with a certain field-relevant capital, try to advance their position. Each field, considered as a social sub-system, is based on an historically generated system of shared meaning. The boundaries of the field have to be investigated by empirical research. Bourdieu considers the boundaries of the field where its effects end, i.e. where the stakes of the game lose their impact. Fields are historically embedded social contexts, i.e. they change over time. Yet even more characteristic of fields is their inertia. Bourdieu stresses this aspect when he refers to the concept of habitus.

Fields are the social contexts within which practices take place. They correspond to a network of positions, to a playground where agents realise individual strategies, playing according to, and thereby openly reproducing, the rules of the game (as defined by the specific set of capital most valuable for holding power within the field).

Before trying to define the nature of the field of career, it is necessary to elaborate on the meaning of the term "career". We use this notion as a sequence of work role transitions. Thus, the field of career could be defined as the field of professional work considered in a

dynamic perspective, or in other words, as the moving field of professional work. Accordingly, the agents within the field of career are individual members of the labour force. As the definition of the labour force varies according to national and institutional context, we have to define the way in which we refer to “occupational activity”/“work”. Within our theoretical framework, we will consider work as the process of transformation of cultural and social capital into economic and capital. It does not mean that other forms of capital do not occur through this process. To be sure, social and cultural capital are also redistributed through social status, knowledge, etc. Nevertheless, the increment of economic capital remains the determining element of work. “Career” signifies the sequence of positions in the course of this process of transformation. This process potentially generates *career capital*, whose distribution forms the structure of the *field of career* (Fig.1). The selection of the members of this particular field is, unlike other fields, not very rigid since anyone engaged in a professional activity also has a career of some sort. The struggle is therefore more about what sort of career may take the individual and about reaching a dominant position within the field than about entering it (although a high rate of unemployment could dramatically increase this difficulty).

Considering professional careers, it is actually more correct to talk about labour rather than work. As some scholars have argued (Conrad, Macamo et al. 2000), labour is an “invention” of modernity. The radical change which happened during the 19th century was that social status became increasingly defined by labour, instead of working activities being defined by social status. Furthermore, labour is codified and regulated through a complex legal framework. But the decisive point for career is that labour may be defined as giving a social status, i.e. a relative position of a person on a recognised scale or hierarchy of social worth. The dramatic importance of this change needs to be underlined. It was the precondition for the belief that social status was not decided by birth, but that the social ladder could be climbed through education and hard work. The moment of the emergence of this belief is also the moment of the emergence of the modern sense of career.

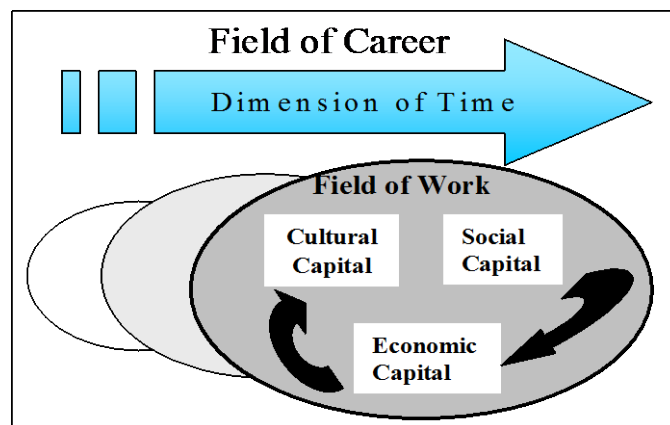


Fig. 1: Field of work and field of career

2.2 Capitals of the field of career

Like any other field, the field of career values a particular sort of capital. *Career capital* consists of the different modes of support the individual obtains and has at his/her disposal and may invest for his/her further career success. Career capital is a mix of the three generic sorts of capital identified by Bourdieu: economic, social, and cultural capital.

- *Economic capital* is the most efficient form of capital, for it alone can be conveyed in the appearance of general, anonymous, all-purpose convertible money from one generation to the next. It can be more easily and efficiently converted into cultural, social and symbolic capital than vice versa (Postone, LiPuma et al. 1993). Income is a particularly important element of economic capital.
- *Social capital* involves relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance, resources based upon social connections and group or class membership. It might be legitimised and institutionalised by family-, group- or class-membership and works as a multiplier which enhances the effects of economic and cultural capital. Social networks can be regarded as a product of permanent efforts in the form of continuous acts of exchange in order to institutionalise social relationships, whereby economic capital may also be spent (Bourdieu 1983).
- *Cultural or informational capital* designates education, i.e. durable dispositions of the body (culture, cultivation). To attain these, an internalising process is necessary which consumes time. Therefore the duration of this process seems to be the most exact indicator (Bourdieu 1983). It appears in three forms: (1) incorporated, i.e. durable dispositions of habitus, (2) objectivised, that is in form of cultural products (books, paintings, machines) and (3) institutionalised, in form of academic titles and degrees, which are relatively independent of the actually incorporated cultural capital. Institutionalised cultural capital may more easily be compared and converted into other forms of capital. In any case, cultural capital is the accumulated result of educational and cultural effort, undertaken either by the agent or by his/her ancestors.
- Bourdieu, furthermore, adds a fourth sort of capital, *symbolic capital*. This he understands as the form of capital which is perceived and socially recognised as legitimate. The rules valid within particular social fields specify which combination of the basic form of capitals will be authorised as symbolic capital.

Career capital is the particular sort of capital valued within the field of career, obtained through the investment of the different sorts of capital into professional activity and the recognition of the *economic system*. “Investment” should not be understood as out of a rational choice, but through the *habitus* (cf. Chapter 4) as an inextricable mix of programmatic and strategy, or in Bourdieu’s words: a strategy without strategic intentions. As a matter of fact, career capital is nothing other than symbolic capital within the field of career, since it legitimises the necessary investment. The higher the recognition within the field, the higher are the chances to gain a dominant position. The particularity of career capital relies on the fact that this recognition is granted both inside and outside the field through *internal* recognition, i.e. recognition by the other agents within the field, and *external* recognition by the economic system, i.e. its belief in a useful utilisation for its own needs. Career capital is interpreted in two different ways: it is symbolic capital within the field of career, and human performance for the economic system. The external recognition is processed mostly through economic capital (cf. Our definition of work as transformation of social and cultural capital into economic capital). It may be mediated through income, but also through more symbolic forms of reward like particular privileges (big office, official car, etc.). For a scholar, for example, recognition could be a (non-paid) publication in a prestigious journal. These internal and external modes of recognition permit both the formation and (eventually) accumulation of career capital.

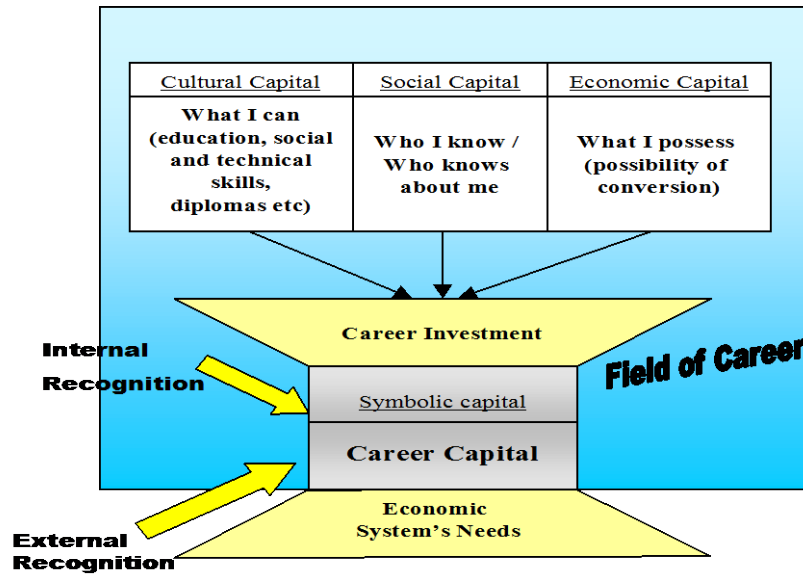


Fig.2: The making of career capital

3. Looking outside: The making of career fields

In Bourdieu's theory, a field designates a relative autonomous space, a microcosm with its own rules. This relative autonomy means that no field can completely escape from the constraints of the macrocosm, i.e. the social space enclosing all the fields. It also means that observing a particular field leads to the question of its degree of autonomy vis-à-vis other fields. As pointed out by Lash (Lash 1993), the more autonomous a field is, the greater the extent to which production in this field is only for other producers and not for consumers in the social field (or field of power). In this way, the most autonomous field is the scientific field, while the political field is the least autonomous: for the first, the logic of true and false dominates, whereas the second functions through the logic of friend or foe, largely determined outside the political field. If today political or ideological values succeed in influencing the scientific field (for example, Lyssenko whose absurd monopoly on the Soviet biology during the 1940s and 1950s was actually based only on the argument of a struggle between "proletarian science" versus "bourgeois science"), it would be a clear indicator of decreasing autonomy. In the case of the fields of professional careers, if for instance family life places an increasing weight on strategic career decisions, one could argue that their autonomy is weakened, since the influence of exterior elements is enlarged. Struggles and strategies within the fields also have a bearing on the degree of autonomy. So the degree of autonomy – which will nevertheless always remain relative – has to be seen as a moving characteristic of each field.

The way in which we defined the recognition allowing the formation of career capital is a first and strong indicator of the impossibility of a complete autonomy of the field of career. At the very least, the field of career needs organisations, institutions or individuals which will offer economic capital for human performance (manpower, skills, know-how, and so on). For these latter, the logic is most of the time an economic one: they need human performance to survive, function, and grow. Considering the field of career, the next step in understanding its functioning is the identification of its system of reference. The latter is composed of different and more or less influential sub-systems. In other words, the system of reference is the ensemble of actors influencing the rules of the game of the field of career. These actors themselves follow a different mode of logic and different goals and may thus be regrouped into distinct sub-systems. "System" is here meant in a weak sense, as an ensemble

of more or less interdependent actors, too different in their nature and goals to be direct competitors, and thus making the concept of field non-relevant. We choose to focus more particularly on two sub-systems, the economic and the legal. Nevertheless, one could also argue that the family, for example, also plays a determinant role.

3.1 Economic system

The particularity of the relation between these two kinds of structures, the field of career and the economic sub-system, is that one is dependent on the existence of the other. The non-existence of the economic system would signify the impossibility of selling the outcome of one's work, leading back to a situation without any labour division; a completely autonomous economic system (that is, one that is not dependent on the field of career) would suppose that it could function without any human resources that have to be paid for, for example in the case of a fully automated production process or in a society where slavery is usual. This interdependency is not definitive in its form and strength, but depends on the changes occurring in both kinds of sub-systems considered.

The influence of the economic system on the field of career depends above all on the economic context. If unemployment is high, the impact of the economic system will be increased. If, on the other hand, unemployment is low or even non-existent, the agents of the fields of career will be in a position to impose their own conditions on organisations.

Although we are aware that these arguments may enhance the critics of Bourdieu's work concerning the economist perspective on agency (Caillé 1989), we find it helpful to explain the logic of the fields of career and the economic system through the model of an exchange. We understand this as follows: an actor of the economic system – an organisation for example – needs a competence to increase its own position in its particular field (for instance the aeronautical industry). In other words, the company needs the highest competence at the lowest price in order to improve its position in a competitive market. This competence may only be found within the field of career. The organisation therefore acts as the buyer while an individual in the field of career is the seller. This relation between the company and the individual will be translated differently through the different logic within the two kinds of structures. For the company, driven by an economic logic, buying a competence is understood as the acquisition of a resource; for the individual who sells his/her competence, this bargain is interpreted as a signal of recognition. The higher the recognition and thus career capital, the better the place will be within the field of career.

In order to enhance the chances of recognition, individuals within the field of career have to interpret the signals of the economic system. The quality of this interpretation depends on the different capitals they possess. Let us consider an example. We could say that an MBA from a prestigious business school is very helpful for an individual to reach top management positions. In the field of career the individual is confronted with several conditions for the handling of this information:

- the individual needs to have access to this information
- a managerial career has to be desired
- business schools are expensive
- business schools are selective

The way in which these points will be treated is related to the volume and structure of social, cultural, and economic capital one may have, allowing access to knowledge about valued resources and strategies. The interdependence of the field of career and the economic system may also be seen with regard to the fact that each organisation is actually made up of

agents of the field of career. The more an individual may influence what kinds of capitals will be valued by the actors of the economic system, the more dominant his/her position within the field of career will be, since one of the major element of struggle is precisely about the definition of the legitimate capitals for career.

3.2 Legal system

The relation between field of career and economic system is characterised by interdependency. What we call the *legal system* plays a quite different role, since the importance of its influence varies according to the country being considered. Following neo-liberal rationality for example, regulation of the labour market should be left to the only logic of market and no more regulated by the State. The legal system is defined as the ensemble of actors deciding about the legal frame of the process of recognition between the field of career and economic system. Actors may be deputies, senators, governments, unions, judges, lawyers, lobbyists, and so on. The influence of the legal system may concretely be seen in labour legislation. This influence will decrease (and even disappear) if the relation between the field of career and the economic system is regulated only by the market. And once again, the influence or the connections individuals may have in this system may improve their own position within the field of career.

The legal system also has a major influence on the institutionalised cultural capital. The higher the significance of, for instance, university degrees for valued career capital, the higher the impact on career capital. Another example may be seen in the definition and regulation of particular professions. Take the example of the British surgeons who became recognised as such, i.e. as distinct from barbers, in 1844. This particular example shows a possible strategy, by “creating” a specific and highly specialised group within the field of career and protecting it through rules which clearly define who may be part of it (and thus creating a new sub-field). Such a creation of a recognised group depends on the social capitals the interested agents may mobilise. This may lead to the creation of intermediary bodies, whose role is to regulate and defend the interests of a particular group, as for example the German and Austrian *Ärztzammer* and the French *Ordre des médecins* for physicians. The example of the British surgeons shows the importance of the logic of distinction (i.e. logic of domination use by agents to classify themselves and the others) in the creation of a new field or within a field (Bourdieu 1984). More generally, the connections between agents through their social capital within the field of career and legal system, and thus their possibilities of influence, play a major role for career interests and strategies.

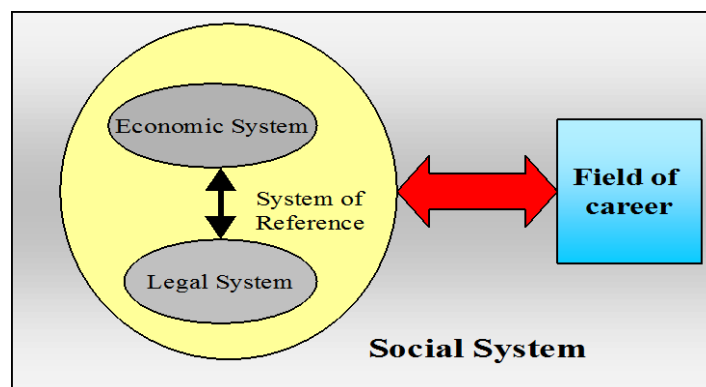


Fig.3 : The field of career and its system of reference

4. Looking across: Fields of career and career habitus

Along with the concept of *field*, the concept of *habitus* is Bourdieu's theoretical proposal for the interpretation of the occurring of regular patterns of conduct over time which are neither the product of some abstract external structures or of subjective intention. While the field defines the structures of the social setting in which the habitus operates, the habitus refers to an ensemble of schemata of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking, and acting that structures all the expressive, verbal, and practical manifestations and utterances of a person (Krais 1993). The habitus is embodied history, the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product (Bourdieu 1990). This ensemble of schemata is not a set of fixed and finite rules, but refers to a (necessarily limited) generative principle. The relation of the habitus to the different sorts of capital may be summarised as follows: the habitus can be oriented primarily to the accumulation of symbolic or economic capital, but is basically made up of cultural capitals, or knowledge in the widest sense of the word (Lash 1993). The adjustment of the habitus to the conditions of action is a continuous process, which cannot be reduced to the first socialisation of the first years of life. If this period of time is of course of great importance in the making of the habitus, the latter will be constantly reinforced or modified through further experiences and sanctions during a whole life. Therefore, the habitus is not constituted once and for all, but evolves through adjustment to the conditions of action.

4.1 Habitus and field

Fields relate to habitus in a number of ways. On the one hand, one needs to combine a consideration of players' dispositions and competence (*habitus*) with a grasp upon the state of play of the game and the players' individual location in it (*field*) to understand and explain their action. Agents' logic are shaped both by their habitus and by the exigencies and logic of "the game" as it unfolds. At a deeper level, however, it is because of their habitus and the way in which it shapes their perceptions, motivations, and action that the players are disposed to recognise and play the field in the first place. Thus, field and habitus are locked in a circular relationship. Involvement in a field shapes the habitus which, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the field (Crossley 2001). However, this circularity is above all a tendency: dispositions lead to the smooth reproduction of exactly those assumptions that define the (relative) autonomy of the field, i.e. the spontaneous sharing of the common sense in which the "game" appears as self-evident. But this reproduction is neither closed nor mechanistic. Both fields and dispositions can change.

Nevertheless, working with the concept of habitus may be no more helpful than using notions like culture or value without defining them more precisely. The habitus has to be clearly defined following the particular questions of a piece of research. A career habitus is a habitus which "fits" to a particular career field. Having this particular habitus signifies that moving within the field of career, doing, perceiving, and thinking according to the rules of the field appears as the "natural" way. An individual acts "intentionally without intention" (Bourdieu 1987). Thus, one could argue that the individuals holding the dominant positions within a field logically are carriers of that career habitus. This assumption is not a rule. But it seems arguable that an individual "born" in a field (which may sound curious in the case of the field of career, but capitals are also inheritable: for example the fact that, as demonstrated in the case of the United Kingdom (Rosa 1993), graduates from a business family background showed a greater tendency to enter self-employment compared to those from employee background) has more chances to succeed than another who would first have to learn (or try to change) the rules of the game. This process of learning and adaptation may be more or less

difficult following the gap existing between one's habitus and the ideal career habitus. By entering a field, an agent does not have to possess the particular habitus tacitly or explicitly requested, but more a habitus close enough, and above all compatible and malleable enough and therefore susceptible to be converted into a "conform" habitus, i.e. docile and congruent. *Career* habitus only makes sense in relation to the field of career, since no other than the career field solicits it.

4.2 Career habitus and work habitus

4.2.1 The dimensions of work

Work has an ethical dimension, a social dimension and an economic dimension. These three dimensions influence the evolution of the field of career and their relations to other fields.

- The ethical dimension represents the moral obligation of having a work activity. The more work is morally valued, the greater the importance of the field of career in the whole social space, since work gives a sense to life.
- The social dimension of work is reflected by its identity-shaping power. The more an individual identifies him/herself (and is identified) through work-related communities (Parker and Arthur 2000), the stronger this dimension will be.
- Last but not least, the economic dimension of work is located in the very definition of professional activity. Indeed, the outcome of the activity is embedded in an economic process. The outcome (service or product) may be valued (the Marxist value of use of work). In other words, a professional activity only makes sense in this relationship between a working individual and an instance (individual or organisation) agreeing to value and therefore to pay for the outcome of the work.

4.2.2 From work to career

We began this paper by defining the field of career as the moving field of professional work. Following this, the career habitus needs to be distinguished from the work habitus. Indeed, this latter would signify an individual's behaviour and thinking that are mainly oriented toward work, or in other words what may be subsumed under the *work ethos*. Such an ethos would imply a great importance of the ethical and the social dimensions of work. The more the importance of these dimensions shrinks – thereby giving more importance to the economic one (which would mean that one is working only because one has to do so in order to survive) – the less this kind of ethos will exist. The career habitus brings its dynamic dimension: one does not only value work *per se*, but also some social recognition through one's sequence of work positions. In other words, the idea of progression is central in a career habitus. Although recognition may take different forms depending on the career field considered, we would argue that some elements like income or recognised expertise will often play a determinant role. The difference between work habitus and career habitus could be defined through the distinction made by Lalive d'Épinay (Lalive-d'Épinay 1994) of the two variants of the work ethos: what he calls the bourgeois morale and the proletarian one. For the first, work and its morale are used as instruments for social progression and power; for the second, the morale is an "expressive" one, meaning that satisfaction comes more from the

very gesture of work and the contemplation of the finished product, than from the advantages one could expect from work. Following this, career habitus would clearly be associated with the first kind of ethos, while work habitus would be associated with the second one. To summarise, career habitus will be characterised by a desire for growth. Growing may take different forms, following the context in which the career takes place: climbing the hierarchical ladder, increasing reputation or level of expertise, etc. The point is that the way a habitus is solicited ultimately depends on the characteristics of the field. How career success (i.e. occupying a dominant position within the field) is defined depends on the legitimate values within the field.

5. Looking ahead: The future developments of career fields

The field of career has to be considered as a kind of “super-field” which may be divided into a multitude of sub-fields, following the interest and the special focus of the research. The lawyers, Microsoft, or the pharmaceutical industry may be analysed as fields with specific characteristics and rules of the game. Clearly, because the aim of this paper is to propose a general research framework for the evolution of careers, we cannot integrate the particularities of each organisation or industry, although we believe in the rich possibilities of inter-connections in future research. Nevertheless, for a better comprehension of career, we have identified four different career patterns – defined through the dimensions of coupling and stability (Fig.4) – each of them forming a sub-field within the field of career. Considering these four sub-fields of career within the “super-field of career” makes it possible both to integrate the specific characteristics and the particular logic of functioning of each career pattern to the meta-rules of professional career, and to consider the evolution of each sub-field in relation to the others.

The *coupling dimension* focuses on the closeness of relationship and the degree of mutual influence between the focal actor and the other actor(s) in the configuration. Tight coupling indicates that the actors are closely intertwined in their decisions. On the other hand, loose coupling indicates a type of relationship where the decisions of one actor have very little consequence for the decisions of the other. Thus, in a tightly coupled relationship the decisions of one partner reduce the other’s degrees of freedom much more than in a loosely coupled relationship. The *stability dimension* focuses on changes over time in the configuration of relationships between the focal actor and other relevant actors. A stable configuration would mean that there is a low rate of change in the actor configuration. Conversely, a variable configuration implies that there is a frequent change in the configuration. This dimension says more about the rate of change in the configuration than about the number of actors relevant for the focal actor. Combining these two dimensions into a matrix results in a simple typology with the following ‘ideal-typical’ extremities:

- Company World is the field of the traditional organisational career. It refers to the structure of jobs in an organisation in which there are few points of entry, other than at the bottom, usually direct from school or college, and where promotion is up a well defined career ladder. Such movements are generally linked to seniority, as consequently is pay. Employees enjoy high job security and tend to stay with the organisation a long time. In return, the organisation gains the loyalty of staff (Hendry 2000). The key resource is hierarchical position.
- Free Floating Professionalism can be defined as the field of specialists. Individuals have loose coupled relations with one customers. In most cases the customer is an organisation.

This relation is a short-term one. The agents within this field stay in their particular domain of expertise, which may of course be increased and diversified through the experience and the knowledge gained in the different jobs and/or projects. The main goal is the increasing of independence, this especially though recognition as an expert. The key resource is therefore knowledge and reputation (Kanter 1989b).

- Self Employment is the field of career with individuals working outside organisations. Typically, these are either self-employees or entrepreneurs. Autonomy and independence are highly valued.
- Chronic Flexibility may appear quite similar to *Free Floating Professionalism*, since careers are also characterised by frequent job changes. The fundamental difference relies on the disappearing of the boundaries of a domain of expertise. This means that changing from one job to another may imply not only a change from one organisation to another, but also from one industry to another, from an organisation to self-employment, and so on. This field of career is characterised by a potentially high level of diversity and radical professional transitions. The key resource may be defined as the capacity and the rapidity of conquering a new domain.

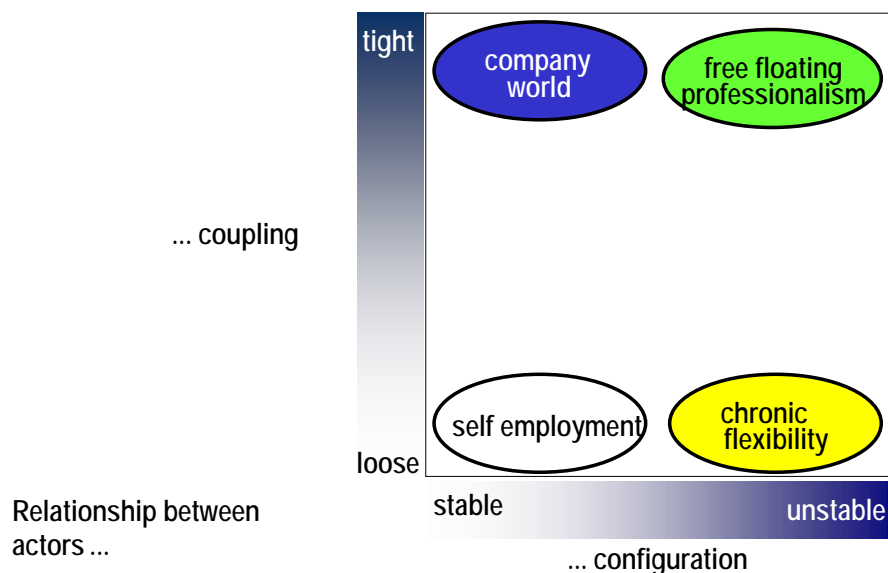


Fig.4 : The coupling and stability dimensions

These four distinct fields of career represent four types of career logic, i.e. career pathways, based on different values and with different objectives. This means, related to our theoretical framework, that each field of career values different sorts of capital (or at least different combinations of capitals), and different rules of the game. Some kinds of habitus prepare for the field more than others do, i.e. they allow better and easier adaptation. So the problem for individuals is therefore not only to have a career habitus, but also to have the “right” habitus, i.e. a habitus which fits the field. It should be clear that the defined fields of career have to be considered as ideal-typical, i.e. representing main career patterns which could certainly also be divided into more differentiated “sub-sub-fields”. Considering, for example, the *Self-employment* field of career, it may seem surprising to bring together psychoanalysts, self-employed cabdrivers, and entrepreneurs. Obviously, they are not competing with each other. Nevertheless all of them conform to rules and values in order to

succeed in their career – affording specific sorts of capitals – similar enough to be brought together in the same field. The importance of each of these four fields within the field of career is variable, depending on the time and the country one is considering.

5.1 Moving within the field of career

If the four fields of career have many identical characteristics, their differences have to be found in the distinctive career capitals they value. In other words, “growing” i.e. evolving to a dominating position will have a different meaning according to the field of career being considered. *Figure 5* shows the principal criteria for “success” within the four fields, always depending on the amount of career capital. These criteria are general ones, which of course do not take in account the contextual levels of organisations or industry. They are only indicators for observing the relative positions of the agents within a field of career. Thus, they have primarily heuristic value. They do not say anything about the manners and the different ways of reaching them. Each possible way, each strategy developed by an agent will depend on his/her amount of career capital and his/her habitus. The more the rules of the game are known, embodied, seen as legitimate and thus worth (or even necessary) following, the greater the chances of success are. But as indicated by the very definition of a field, the struggle within each of them is also about the definition of what is legitimate in the game. Therefore the agents who have a dominant position will try to conserve the field in its existing state, with its existing rules. Newcomers may act in different ways, which may be summed up by the catchwords *exit*, *voice*, and *loyalty* (Hirschman 1970). These different sorts of actions (and their chances of success) will also strongly depend on the amount of capitals one has available.

- *Exit* means that an agent leaves a field of career for another one, because his/her habitus does not “fit” in the field. If I reach a career ceiling in an organisation, but if my habitus makes me want to increase my social status, I may for example try to start my own business, entering the *Self Employment* field.
- *Voice* could be translated into “revolt of the dominated” or in other words, an attempt to change the legitimate stake of the particular game of the field, or at least modify the rules of the game.
- *Loyalty* means acceptance of the existing rules of the game. Through playing the same game with the same rules as the dominating agents in the game, my chances of success are objectively higher, since the structures are working for me. In this case, the habitus really fits in the field.
- Hirschman’s model is based on easy observable manifestations: an individual is leaving a company or at the contrary keeps on working as usual, a strike breaks out, etc. Because of the ambiguity of *loyalty*, another possibility should be added : *passivity*, which would designate the passive acceptance of the rules of the game and the acceptance of a more or less dominated position in a field. This case occurs if a habitus does not fit to the field of career one is in, or if the particularities of the career habitus are not sufficiently well-defined in one’s habitus. Unlike *exit*, the individual does not possess the habitus and the needed capitals to try his/her chance somewhere else.
- Because of the way we defined *passivity*, a fifth possibility should be added: *recalcitrance*. This means a conscious and active rejection of the rules of the game (or at

least of certain rules). Using every means of competition, even unfair means, may be rejected: for instance if I definitely do not want to join the “rat race” of career, thinking that work is not the only way of self achievement.

Company World			
Income	Security	Loyalty	Official position
Free Floating Professionalism			
Income	Level of expertise	Independence	Reputation
Self Employment			
Income	Control over one's work	Independence	Power
Chronic Flexibility			
Income	Openness to change	Alternative Engagement	Independence

Fig.5: “Success” criteria within the fields of career

5.2 The evolution of the fields of career

The evolution of the different fields of career depends on both the strategies and needs within the economic field, the interventions of the State, the capacity of intermediary bodies to mobilise interests, and the expectations within the fields of career. If companies no longer can (or will) offer secure and long-term jobs, if governments and scholars propagate the idea of the necessity of self-management (DuGay 1996), and if young people entering the labour market have accepted the idea that rapid changes (between jobs, companies, sectors, etc.) characterise a “normal” career, it could be argued that *Company World* will decline, to the benefit of *Free Floating Professionalism*, *Self Employment* and *Chronic Flexibility*. It could also be argued (Jacoby 1999) that *Company World* becomes a more hard-to-enter field, but in any case it loses the predominant position which it used to have throughout the industrial era.

This evolution, and the growing importance of the other fields of career characterised by loose-coupled relations to organisations, has a dramatic impact on the agents within the fields. This is not to say that what seems to be a decreasing importance of *Company World* means the loss of paradise: its bureaucratic rigidity implied a particular habitus and capitals not given to anyone. Moreover, its neutral rationality is ideal-typical, gender and race having played (and still playing) a decisive role in the distribution of career chances. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that *Company World* is actually a recent field of career, which reached its peak (i.e. it was the most important field of career) during the 1970s. This particular field of career did not automatically emerge with the first organisations nor did it dominate the whole field of career. Indeed as observed by Jacoby (Jacoby 1985), instability was a characteristic feature of the traditional system of factory employment. Labour turnover rates were continuously high throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and it was not uncommon for firms to have annual turnover rates in excess of 300 %. *Company World* in fact emerged through the bureaucratisation of organisations, and more precisely between the two World Wars, when engineers like Taylor decided to formalise personnel relations. Bureaucratic systems of control were developed, characterised by formalised recruiting and

training programs, centralised control on engagement, promotion, and removal, and the introduction of clearly defined career pathways (Carroll, Haveman et al. 1990; Savage 1998).

Claiming that new career patterns offer new opportunities, more freedom for employment, which leads to a life with more challenge and excitement, may be true. But this kind of subjective judgement also has to face the fact that rapid changes in the fields of career require a capacity to evolve in the same way, i.e. to have the necessary capitals and habitus to be able to inhabit this changing environment. When fields have a certain stability over time (and that is what they have through their tendency to reproduction), individuals may enter them without being confronted with a tension between the conditions of formation of their habitus and the present conditions of action. If a field now changes rapidly, or if through the “hardening” of its rules it becomes more selective, the agents who occupy the dominant positions have the best chances to adapt to these changes. Thus one could argue that more selective rules, which make it more difficult to enter a field, are initiated by the dominant agents and that they meet the interest of dominating groups to preserve their advantages when the field is tending to shrink. Generally speaking, high amounts of capitals (especially cultural and economic ones) allow a kind of filtering of social upheavals, which first hit those with low amounts of capital.

Individuals with less career capital may be confronted with the situation of being in a field which does not fit their habitus, and in which their career capital is under-evaluated. In Nicholson’s words, old structures persist in people’s minds, in what people want and expect (Nicholson 1996). In this way, the ontological relation between habitus and field defended by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1994b), needs to be questioned. The question would therefore be whether the post industrial society is characterised by a dis-adjustment between habitus and field. This would mean that the habitus of a majority of people is adjusted – which only works when the structures where practice takes place are the same, or at least comparable to, the structures which produced them (Bourdieu 1994b) – to structures which no longer exist, or only in part, causing what Bourdieu calls a *hysteresis* effect (Bourdieu 1984). Nevertheless this hypothesis may lead to another one: because of this kind of lack of adjustment, agents may be tempted to rejoin or create new fields, based on other values. The fields of career we defined could evolve in many directions, through the fundamental questioning of the centrality of work. Family life, leisure time, and self-fulfilment may gain in importance, decreasing the autonomy of the fields. The less autonomous the fields of career are, the less will be the importance of labour for social status.

Translated into our framework, the debate about the future of careers leads to the following questions: if the meaning of occupational work changes and loses its significance for social identity, the central position of the “super-field” of career within the social space will be seriously challenged. The question will therefore be: who will be the challengers? Secondly, as already mentioned, the importance of each of the four fields of career within the super-field is constantly changing. It seems that in most industrialised countries, *Company World* still has a leading position, but certainly no longer the same as in the 1970s. *Free Floating Professionalism* is gaining in importance, as is *Self employment*. The prospects remain unclear concerning *Chronic Flexibility*. Stinchcombe showed that the emergence of new forms of organisations is influencing the structures of the labour market and thus the possibilities of career (Stinchcombe 1979). The interesting point is that the appearance of new forms of occupational activity did not lead to the disappearance of the old ones, but to a change in distribution among these different forms.

6. Conclusions

The interest in considering career through Bourdieu's concept of field has to be seen in its very definition as *field of struggle*. Although power does not appear per se, capitals as defined by Bourdieu represent clearly the different forms of power, whether they be material, cultural, social, or symbolic. So are the chances to engage and win the struggle not only inegalitarian because of the distribution of power, but the chances to increase one's amount of power are linked to the structures of the field, i.e. the rules of the game, and the possibilities to understand them, to accept them, and finally to use them given by the habitus. Thus, using the concept of field for career theory oblige a constant link between the individual and the structural levels. Therefore could recent discussions, which focus on the rapid and spectacular changes of career patterns and the ways one should use to adapt to them, be seen as quite general and optimistic. As convincingly argued by Lindh and Dahlin, using Bourdieu in the domain of career counselling, the pronounced interest of the client cannot predict a fitting career, since the social and political dimensions have also to be taken in account by counsellors (Lindh and Dahlin 2000). This is in a way what we are trying to do in our ViCaPP project, with the difference that the goal of the research is not to counsel, but to understand which factors influence both the development of traditional and new career patterns, and the chances for individuals to adapt to their rules. The point is that if adaptability and flexibility became catchwords for the new careers, nevertheless is the habitus fairly resistant to change. So may inequalities be found in this resistance to changes necessarily for the new career patterns, and the shrinking of traditional patterns. The changes occurring within the different fields of career influence each others as they're influenced by other fields or systems. This aspect is certainly a problematic one when using Bourdieu's theory since, as observed by Swartz, the idea of relative autonomy of fields leads Bourdieu to give priority to their internal analysis. In so doing, Bourdieu leaves undeveloped the important question of inter-field contradictions as a possible source of crisis and change (Swartz 1997). That's one more reason why Bourdieu's concepts should be rather adapt for career theory rather than using them in a dogmatic way.

7. References

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