

Making sense of career networking

Towards a qualitative approach to social capital

*Johanna Hofbauer¹, Alexandre Iellatchitch², Wolfgang Mayrhofer³,
Michael Meyer⁴, Thomas Schneidhofer³*

¹Department of Sociology and Social Research

²5p Consulting

³Interdisciplinary Unit of Management and Organisational Behaviour

⁴Department of Management

Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (WU-Wien)

Augasse 5-7, A-1090 Vienna, Austria

Tel. +43-1-31336-4553

Fax +43-1-313 36-724

<http://www.wu-wien.ac.at>

(Please direct correspondence to the first author: johanna.hofbauer@wu-wien.ac.at)

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Introduction

Career research has emphasized the significance of network relationships for designing career paths (e. g. Raider & Burt, 1996). In the last years, career research has particularly focused on individual network configurations (see, e. g. Forret & Sullivan, 2002; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Sparrowe & Popielarz, 1995), i.e. how each actor has a network of relationships with colleagues, friends and other associates who provide information supporting the development of one's career opportunities (e.g., Bozionelos & Wang, 2006; Bozionelos, 2006; Emmerik, Euwema, Geschiere, & Schouten, 2006; Bu & Roy, 2005; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Burt, Hogarth, & Michaud, 2000;). It is assumed that the way a network will be configured is directly related to one's amount (and quality) of social capital and thus to one's chances of career success.

Network research has mostly been looking at networks from an individual level, often portraying complex models of contacts. To be sure, such modelling tackles important issues for career research. More particularly, it captures the structure of an individual's network, his/her networking strategies and preferences in cultivating relationships, as well as "unlinked" areas in his/her portfolio of relationships. Nevertheless, it misses out the question why some connections seem easier to establish than others, or conversely, why some favourable connections seem to be irremediably out of reach. Hence, the major strength of network modelling is to offer a view of the overall structure of relationship patterns, which may be very useful for comparing e.g. the network structures of different individuals and relating the observed differences to attributes such as economic status, education, gender, etc.

In contrast, we propose a more dynamic view of career networking, which draws upon their emergence (Stephan, 2001; Goldstein, 1999) and development. Furthermore, our understanding of networking practices takes us to research the dimension of meaning, i.e. the sense which individuals make when cultivating relationships, trying to join a network, or coping with failure or inhibition. Finally, we are interested in the issue of homosociability accounting for social selection as well as assimilation of network members.

Building on the theoretical framework elaborated by the late French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, we associate his definition of social capital to his key concepts of habitus and social field (e.g. Bourdieu, 1986; 1977). More particularly, we specify the concept of habitus in a more focussed "career habitus" (Mayrhofer, Meyer, Steyrer, Maier, & Hermann, 2007; Mayrhofer et al., 2004).

The habitus operates a double selection: the first happens through the individual perception of career opportunities and influences therefore one's career strategy. The second selection operates through one's embodied habitus and the way other actors perceive and classify it. This perception may be advantageous (in this case the habitus may be a key for entering specific networks) or disadvantageous (not "fitting" to other networks).

In sum, the aim of this paper is to introduce an approach for understanding practices of career networking in a dynamic, relational way, i.e. networking practices which are structured, on the one hand, by the social sense of individuals for their networking capacities, chances and risks; on the other hand, by gate-keeping practices, be they conscious or not. We shall deal with networking not in terms of rational action but as practices structured by competencies

and skills according to social background, education, etc. An explorative empirical study will illustrate the added value of combining network research with a qualitative approach for career study.

Career Fields, Career Habitus, and Career Capitals

The capital, field and habitus perspective of careers (for a more detailed discussion see Mayrhofer et al., 2004; Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, & Meyer, 2003) conceptualises both the structural context of careers and the actors' roles and strategies in line with Pierre Bourdieu's major theoretical concepts of field, habitus and capital.

Career fields

According to Bourdieu, a social field is a patterned set of practices which suggests competent action in conformity with rules and roles as well as a playground or battlefield in which actors, endowed with a certain field-relevant capital, try to advance their position. As such, they constitute a network of positions, a playground where actors try to follow individual strategies. If you act according to the rules of the game as defined by the specific set of capital most valuable for holding power within the field, you will contribute to the reproduction of the fields (Bourdieu, 1986; 1977).

Career fields are the social context within which individual members of the work force make their moves. The latter are equipped with a specific portfolio of field-relevant capital and try to maintain or improve their place in the given and unfolding network of work related positions. This is done through a patterned set of practices, which are potentiated and constrained by the rules of the field and, in turn, contribute to the shaping of these rules. Career fields have a dynamic quality. This reflects the focal relationship between work and time (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989). Careers themselves are not a field, but unfold within a field and are the sequence of positions resulting from work-related efforts.

Career capital

Bourdieu differentiates between three basic types of capital: economic, social, and cultural capital (Postone, LiPuma, & Calhoun, 1993; Bourdieu, 1986).

- Economic capital appears, above all, in the form of general, anonymous, all-purpose convertible money, which is bequeathed from one generation to the next. It can be more easily and efficiently converted into cultural, social and symbolic capital than *vice versa*.
- Social capital involves relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance, resources based upon social connections, and group or class membership.
- Cultural or informational capital appears in three forms: (1) incorporated, i.e. durable dispositions of habitus, (2) objectivised through cultural products like books, paintings, machines etc. and (3) institutionalised through academic titles and degrees, which are relatively independent of the actually incorporated cultural capital.

As a fourth type of capital, symbolic capital is closely related to the respective fields. The rules of a particular social field specify which combination of the basic forms of capital will be authorised as symbolic capital, thus becoming socially recognised as legitimate.

Career capital is the particular sort of capital valued within the fields of career. Every individual within a specific career field has got a unique portfolio of career capital. Through personal, educational, and professional development processes, an increasing portfolio of career-field-relevant career capital evolves. From a different theoretical perspective, “knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom” have been identified as components of career capital linking the individual and the collective level (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999).

Career habitus

For Bourdieu, habitus is an ensemble of patterns of perception, thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking, and acting that pre-formats all expressive, verbal, and practical manifestations and utterances of an actor (Krais & Gebauer, 2002; 1985). It has a corporal dimension, being the embodied history, the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product (Bourdieu, 1990). Through habitus, regular action patterns over time can be explained which are neither the product of external structures nor of mere subjective intention. The habitus is continually adjusted to the current context. Although the primary socialisation is of great importance, the development of habitus cannot be restricted to that period. Habitus is constantly reinforced or modified by further experience, i.e. by positive and negative sanctions during a whole life.

Career habitus consists of those schemes mentioned above that are actualised by the encounter with specific career fields. It is both a product of a social field's structure (*opus operatum*) and a main force of (re-)structuring these fields (*modus operandi*; Bourdieu, 1992: 281). As such, career habitus establishes a link between contextual factors and the individual. While the general habitus can be regarded as a durable but evolving system of dispositions potentially actualised, the career habitus is more confined. It is a habitus 'fitting' to a particular career field. It is specifically related to a career field and may be defined by the dispositions which tend to be actualised 'automatically' within this field. A particular career habitus ensures that an actor acts, perceives, and thinks according to the rules of the field. His movements within the field of career appear as 'natural'. He acts „intentionally without intention“ (Bourdieu, 1990: 12; Bourdieu, 1987). The idea of progression and a desire for growth is central in career habitus. This dynamic quality may take different forms depending on the field's rules: climbing the hierarchical ladder, increasing reputation, developing a higher level of expertise etc.

Four assumptions characterise the concept of habitus (Müller, 1986; Krais, 1985):

- *Unconsciousness*: Habitus operates at the subconscious level throughout life. Therefore, it is largely resistant to easy reflection and instant and deliberate modification.
- *Incorporation of social structures*: Habitus as a cognitive, perceptive and action matrix leads to cognitive structures that can be seen as incorporated social structures.
- *Strategy*: Habitual thinking, acting and perceiving is directed towards objects specific for a particular social field.

- *Stability*: Habitus is primarily formed by childhood socialisation and is largely of an inert disposition. Nevertheless, it can be modified by secondary, professional and organisational socialisation.

Habitus and field are linked in a circular relationship. Involvement in a field shapes the habitus which, in turn, shapes the actions that reproduce the field (Crossley, 2001). In order to understand and explain the action of players in the field, one needs information about their dispositions and competence – their habitus – and about the state of play in the game as well as the players' individual location in the field. The actors' logic is shaped both by their habitus and by the requirements and logic of the game as it unfolds. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same is true for career habitus and career field. By their career habitus and the way in which it shapes the perceptions, motivation, and actions, individuals in career fields lean towards recognising and playing the rules of the career field in the first place.

Social Capital, Network Theory and Research

Social capital and network theory

The concept of social capital is rooted in neoclassical economic approaches (Becker, 1964). The diffusion of this concept in social sciences has been mainly initiated by James S. Coleman's (e. g. 1988) rational choice theory. He compares social capital with human capital and defines social capital as any aspect of social structure that creates value and facilitates the actions of the individuals within that social structure. "Social capital (...) is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate action." Compared with human capital, "Social capital is even less tangible for it is embodied in relations among persons." (Coleman, 2000: 304).

At the very opposite end of the theoretical spectrum, in Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, social fields and capitals, the notion of social capital is positioned centrally, too. From this perspective, social capital involves relationships of mutual recognition and acquaintance, resources based upon social connections and group or class membership. It is 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, in the course of which economic capital may also be spent (Bourdieu, 1983: 191f.). Unlike Coleman's rational choice approach, Bourdieu explicitly stresses the importance of social origin, i.e. the social status of the family of origin, which results in inheritance of social capital. He also emphasizes the institutionalization of social capital by means of group membership and career pattern (Bourdieu, 1992: 187; Bourdieu, 1983: 190).

Most recent research in social capital rather relies on social network theory (SNT) than on Coleman or Bourdieu (Portes, 1998). Social network researchers have taken the lead in formalizing and empirically testing theories related to the concept of social capital. A network can be defined as "the pattern of ties linking a defined set of persons or social actors. Each person can be described in terms of his or her links with other people in the network." (Seibert et al., 2001: 220). Within SNT four different approaches can be distinguished (Seibert et al., 2001: 220 f.; Schweizer, 1996):

The first approach focuses upon the density of social networks and primarily distinguishes between uniplex and multiplex relations. If there is high density in a social network, which corresponds with dominance of multiplex, i.e. multifunctional relations, a high degree of conformity and control of the individual actions can be observed (e.g. Kapferer, 1969; Bott, 1957). Within a multiplex network, the relations between actors are quite dense and multifunctional, i.e. not restricted to some specific area. Within a looser network, only certain types of relationship exist (e.g. occupational, kinship, friendship). One of the major findings of this approach is that in a close-knit, highly connected network the actors have a higher stake and thus try to settle conflicts by means of negotiating and mediating, whereas loose-knit, dispersed networks tend towards externalized arbitration and pass-fail-decisions (Schweizer, 1996: 116f.). Thus, close-knit networks tend to be more stable.

The second SNT-approach to social capital – weak tie theory (Granovetter, 1982; 1973) – focuses on the strength of social ties used by social actors. Granovetter argues that ties among members of a social clique are likely to be strong, defined as emotionally intense, frequent, and involving multiple types of relationships, such as those with friends, advisors and coworkers. Thus the information possessed by any single member of a strong-tie-network is likely to be either shared quickly or already redundant with the information owned by other members. On the other hand, ties that reach outside of one's social clique are likely to be weak (i.e. not emotionally intense, infrequent, and rather uniplex), they often form a bridge between densely connected networks and thus provide unique information and resources. Such weak ties are more likely than strong ties to be the source of information of job openings (Granovetter, 1974). Subsequent research has provided mixed support for this weak-ties hypothesis (McPherson, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992; Bridges & Villemez, 1986; Murray, Rankin, & McGill, 1981).

Compared to the weak-tie approach the third approach, Ronald S. Burt's (1992a) concept of structural holes, focuses not on an actor's direct ties but on the pattern of relations among the alters in ego's social network. A structural hole exists between two alters who are not connected to each other. According to this approach, it is advantageous for ego to be connected to alters who are themselves not connected to the other participants in ego's network, i.e. it is advantageous to bridge structural holes. This provides an actor with three primary benefits: more unique and timely access to information, more bargaining power and thus control over resources and outcomes, greater visibility and career opportunities throughout the social system. First empirical evidence has been quite supportive but also shown a number of restrictive conditions limiting the theory's range of application (Sparrowe & Popielarz, 2002; Burt, 1997; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Burt, 1992a).

The fourth major SNT-approach to social capital is social resources theory (Lin, 1999; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981a; Lin, Vaughn, & Ensel, 1981b). Unlike the approaches presented above this theory does not focus on the relationships themselves but on the nature of resources embedded within a social network. Nan Lin argues that it is not the weakness/strength of ties or the bridging of structural holes *per se* which makes social relations valuable, but the fact that such ties enable ego to reach alter who provides resources which help ego fulfil his/her instrumental objectives. "The theory begins with an image of the macro-social structure consisting of positions ranked according to certain normatively valued resources such as wealth, status, and power" (Lin, 1999: 470). Lin's theory is based on three propositions: (1) social resources exert an effect on the outcome of instrumental action, (2) social resources are affected by the original position of ego (as represented by parental or other previous resources) and (3) social resources are also affected by the use of weaker rather

than stronger ties. This social resources theory combines certain aspects of Coleman's, Bourdieu's and Granovetter's approaches to social capital.

Research on Social Capital, Networks and Careers

Social networks and social capital are also well established topics within career research. Many studies focus on the relation between social capital and salary. Belliveau et al. (1996) show that a chair's absolute social capital and a CEO's social capital relative to his or her chair's significantly increased CEO compensation. Social Capital in terms of number of external ties is positively related to pay for executive team members in Swedish public firms through networks based on strong not weak ties, with social capital adding to human capital to explain executives' pay (Meyerson, 1994). A Dutch study points into the same direction: Social capital in terms of external work contacts and memberships increases managers' pay (Boxman, De Graaf, & Flap, 1991).

Another focus of interest is the relation between social capital and promotions. Burt (1992b) shows that managers of high-tech-enterprises with non-redundant relations bridging structural holes build clusters of influential actors and rather succeed in early promotions. Very similar are the findings of Michael/Yukl (1993) and Orpen (1996): Both internal and external ties exert some positive influence on managerial income and promotion, especially from middle to top-management. According to a recent and still unpublished study of Sparrowe & Popielarz (2002), the structure of a manager's career network predicts job mobility within and across firms. Structural holes in career networks benefit managers when crossing the social frontier from one organization to the next. But the structural holes are not significantly related with within-firm promotion rates. The latter are strongly influenced by a "mixed composition career network", i.e. participation both in racial majority and in racial minority networks (ibidem). Higgins shows that the greater the diversity of an individual's network of advisors, the greater the likelihood that an individual will change careers (Higgins, 2001).

Social network approaches to career success, growing out of a sociological research tradition, tend to focus on occupational status, job mobility and income as the primary career outcome variables (Burt et al., 2000; Lin, 1999; Burt, 1997; Sparrowe & Popielarz, 1995; Ibarra, 1993; Burt, 1992b; Lin et al., 1981b; Granovetter, 1973). Seibert et al. (2001: 219) criticise that these studies are often restricted to single organizations and small samples, use few control variables, or assess outcomes over short time spans only. On the other hand, organization theory research tends to have large samples and models with broad sets of career processes. These scholars often use a differentiated set of objective and subjective, of individual and organizational career outcome variables (e.g. Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Gunz, 1989; 1989; 1988). Seibert et al. (2001) try to link social capital research and career success research and formulate a causal model of social capital effects on career success, measuring success by means of salary, promotions and career satisfaction. They show that two measures of network structure, weak ties and structural holes, positively relate to the level of social resources embedded in a person's network, measured as the number of contacts in functional areas of organizations other than their own and contacts to higher levels. Social resources were in turn positively related to current salary, number of promotions over the career, and career satisfaction via their positive relationship with the three measures of network benefits: access to information, access to resources, and career sponsorship (Gunz, 1988).

Empirical Illustration

Against the background of the extensive research on social capital, networks and career we turn on to our research on the significance of networks for careers and the meaning of habitus for networking. Our contribution is based on qualitative research focussing on the sense individuals make of networks and networking practices. By interrogating subjective perceptions we also aim to gain a more differentiated picture on the unwritten rules which regulate the practices in a particular field of career. Thus, rather than modelling systems of relations we aim to shed light on the interrelation of network practices, habitus and careers.

Sampling and data collection

The sampling can be viewed as “non-probability”-approach, which explicitly does not establish a random or representative sample, but is rather based on identification of people who have information about the respective process (Hornby & Symon, 1994: 169). We selected in a two-step procedure: first, we asked two top managers of the Austrian banking industry according to an interview guide about their reconstruction of the history of their career, and their evaluation regarding the relevance of networking for the subjective career. Additionally, we asked them to give us three relevant contacts and investigated the relationship between them and the focus in a circular manner. Subsequently and second, we interviewed the named persons and tried to derive their positions in the respective agenda. Overall, the methodological design of our research encompasses 8 narrative interviews with managers in the Austrian banking sector.

The interviews were guided

(1) by general questions on the social background and career of the respondent, the significance of contacts during career and their meaning at significant or critical stages in the career;

(2) questions which aimed to explore the personal network of two interlocutors (X);

(3) Furthermore, the two Xs were asked to name three significant contacts (Y1,2,3), specify the relationships with y1,2,3 and elaborate on their own contributions to those relationships (in terms why they considered as meaningful inputs to the relationships with Y1,2,3, such as loyalty, experience or the like);

(4) Finally we interviewed Y1,2,3, equally asking them about background, career, contacts (see 1) and about their relationships to X;

By researching the mutual perception of X and Y1,2,3 on the relationship we aimed at a relational perspective on the contacts (Fig.1).

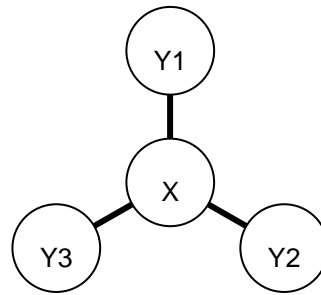


Fig. 1

Data analysis

In order to understand practices of career networking in a dynamic, relational way, we systematically analysed interview transcriptions theory-based on categories derived from Pierre Bourdieu's field and habitus based approach.

Methodically, this corresponds to a combination of narrative interviews (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003; Hermanns, 1991) with qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2003), which is used if communicative content is of greatest importance and if categories can be formulated in advance (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000: 66). Hence we focused on the daily understandings of the interviewees in the course of the interviews and adopted the perspective of the narratives throughout the interpretation, in order to prevent re-duplication of our own prior understandings (Mayring, 2003: 34). Despite the fact that because a re-interpretation is always possible this process is infinite *per se* (ibidem), the findings have explorative character, too. They are only deemed to illustrate the value added of such an approach. The coding and interpretation process was assisted by using the NVivo 7 as a software tool.

The following section presents the major findings, focussing on four spotlights:

- Types of networks
- General Habitus
- Field-Person-Network Fit
- Reciprocity

Types of networks

Asked for the significance of contacts in or for the respondent's professional career some interviewees focused on professional contacts, while others highlighted family ties or "intermediate" networks construed in order to reconcile work and family-life. Our case study thus points to different kinds of networks, i.e. relationships which matter in different areas of life and relate to careers in different respects or to different degrees.

Family as a network

Starting with family ties, one respondent with upper middle class family background points out that her father and brothers hold professional positions that give her access to potentially relevant information as well as networks she would otherwise not be able to reach (as easily). At the same time, she stresses that her family network stands out compared to other networks and argues that occasional exchange of resources is a by-product of relations of care. In other words, sustaining those relationships does not require any particular efforts. When it comes to situations of need, family members would willingly support each other. Furthermore, they would understand support in terms of help which does not ask for a gift in return. Thus, the respondent's family operates as an important background, being used only occasionally and asking for little or no investments, still conveying a strong sense of security over time.

„... one network is certainly that of a functioning extended family, whose members help and support each other unconditionally; and ... ah ...who are there ... when called, actively as well as passively ... ah ... and that includes my husband's family too; with my own family ... in human-private matters I'd say as well as in ... professional respect too“¹

In this respondent's case the significance of family ties also shows when it comes to the issue of networking habitus. Having been brought up as the daughter of a former high-ranking manager in an international company our respondent has gained upper middle-class social skills. As a consequence, she knows how to approach high-status clients and superiors and, in fact, would not feel any sort of reservation, no matter how high-standing her business partners are. This means an advantage for networking. Other interviewees in our sample have also pointed out personality traits which they regard as helpful networking skills, such as being an extrovert or an open person (see below). Tacit knowledge about upper middle-class interaction style still means an additional advantage as it supports a sense of self-efficacy due to experiences of fitness of one's habitus with interaction styles and dispositions that are most recognised in the field.

“... and then I am benefiting from, I don't know, having seen a director general xy ... at home one night and therefore ... am able to talk to any status group without any fear or anxiety or scruples [...] not being intimidated needlessly, as many are, who ... didn't have those continuous contacts [...]; well, that is something that probably my parents have given me to take with me...”²

¹ *“... ein Netzwerk ist sicher, das...der funktionierenden Großfamilie, die sich bedingungslos hilft und unterstützt; und...äh, auf...Zuruf da ist, sowohl aktiv als auch passiv...ähm...und das schließt die Familie meines Mannes ein, mit meiner eigenen...sowohl in...menschlich-privater Hinsicht sage ich mal wie sicher auch...in beruflicher Hinsicht;”* (BRU R_1)

² *„... und dann kommt mir zugute, das sich mich, ich weiß es nicht, dem Generaldirektor xy...dass ich den am Abend zuhause schon gesehen habe und daher...ohne Angst oder Furcht oder Skrupel...mit jeder Schicht sprechen kann...und konversieren kann ohne eine gewisse Grenze der...Vertraulichkeit zu überschreiten, aber andererseits nicht...eine unnötige Scheu zu haben, die sehr viele haben, die halt...die laufenden Kontakte nicht hatten, wenn man so will; also das ist etwas, was mir wiederum die Eltern möglicherweise mitgegeben haben...”* (BRU R_4)

Networks to reconcile work and family

To be sure, “family” generally means partners and/or children, that being also true for our interviewees. Even though intimate relationships such as those within the “nuclear family” are hardly ever regarded in terms of “networking”, the issue turns up when it comes to caretaking responsibilities. Not surprisingly, we noticed a significant gender bias at this point. One high-ranking male manager e. g. thinks of “family” as wife and three children who give him vital emotional support, and allow him to pursue his career, working long hours and staying away from home for several days in the week, without ever having to worry about home and kids. In contrast, two women managers with children had to establish entire caretaking-networks as a precondition for pursuing a professional career in the first place. Though these networks do work well, restrictions in terms of maximum working hours and mobility remain.

Taking a closer look on the case of one women manager who is married and has three young children (aged 7,8,10): In order to organise everyday-family life and render her work-life “invulnerable” to harms from family obligations, she had to make up a well-functioning circle of babysitters, teachers, sports trainers, parents of kid's friends, etc. Generating and sustaining those relationships costs considerable amounts of time and energy, as she does not just delegate caretaking on. Her aim of networking rather is to commit network-members to responsibility towards her children which means having to build up strong ties with all persons involved in her kids’ every-day life (“*so that other parents treat them just as their own kids and the trainers likewise*”³).

Another woman manager in our sample has a similar approach to her caretaking-network. She is divorced and has been a single mother of two teenage sons. In order to set up a well-functioning care-taking-network she had to invest considerably over time. Her network has become highly reliable meanwhile, i.e. there is always somebody who would help out. Yet, accepting help out means having to pay back in one way or the other. Our manager e.g. apparently pays back in her “free” time as, on weekends, her house feels like a youth hostile with other working mothers’ children all around the place that she would look after.

Beyond having to sustain “intermediate networks” the two women managers share a sense of risk being a high performing manager and responsible parent at the same time. Both take career risks as working mothers with limited time resources, thus not being available to the same extent as fellow managers without caretaking responsibilities. Their semantics of rendering work “invulnerable” from family obligations or of having to invest on caretaking-networks as an issue of “survival” points to this: “*I construed a circle of friends, with many women and kids...and that was ... existential, necessary in order to survive*”⁴

³ „um sicherzustellen, dass es...dass die anderen Mütter und Väter sie wie ihre eigenen Kinder behandeln und die Trainer wie ihren eigenen” [BRU R_3]

⁴ “habe ich mir...einen eigenen Freundeskreis aufgebaut, auch mit vielen Frauen und Kindern...und, das war...lebens, war überlebenswichtig...weil einfach dort immer jemand war, den man anrufen konnte” [HOF R_7]

Networks at work

Moving on to the professional context, the strategic approach towards networking seems to become less obvious again. With a view on our evidence, the question has to be raised in the first place, where “professional” relationships begin and “private” relationships end. Clearly, there exist endless numbers of informal contacts, business contacts on friendly terms, even friendships do occur. Thus, within the formal, rational setting business, emotional bonds emerge, and eventually turn into assets as e. g. relationships of mutual trust help to manage tasks, acquire information, settle conflicts, find the right person for the job, etc. Against this background, it is less surprising that our respondents favour relationships which are professionally and personally meaningful at the same time.

Careerist networking versus networking for day-to-day performance

Asked for their understanding of networking our respondents distinguished between purposeful, strategic action driven by career aspirations on the one hand (“careerist networking”) and making contacts as a necessary and at the same time meaningful part of the job (“networking for day-to-day performance”).

“Careerist networking” is associated with an instrumental approach to social contacts that is regarded as unethical or unattractive because of lack of time and energy for more satisfactory social exchange. When characterising “careerist networking” issues turn up such as “misusing friendship” (SCH R_1), overdoing it when having drinks just in order to elicit information, loosing time on social events of elitist associations or trying hard to gain access to interest groups or political parties:

“ ...I am against this...this networking in the sense of ... at Lion’s [Club] or round tables or interest groups...there I say, I prefer to spend the rare leisure I’m having with family...than perhaps... saying with respect to those societal issues, I could get access here and accept obligations there”⁵

The respondents in our study rather make attempts to invest in contacts which are important for business and mean pleasant or interesting company at the same time. Thus, they appreciate networking as practices that allow for the establishment of informal contacts which make business go smoother: meeting up members of networks at social events, exchanging news and views, talking over problems, likes and dislikes; or ending up sharing private problems, establishing relationships of mutual trust, care and loyalty.

⁵ *“gegen dieses...dieses Netzwerken im Sinne von...bei Lions oder Round Tables oder Industriellenvereinigung bin...da sage ich, da ist mir die spärliche Freizeit, die ich habe, schon wichtiger, die mit der Familie zu verbringen als ...als dann vielleicht noch...in gesellschaftlichen Sachen sagen, da könnte ich noch reinkommen und dort habe ich noch Verpflichtungen eingehen” (EBE R_9)*

Careerist networking	Networking for day-to-day performance	
	I. Extensive networking Spreading contacts	II. Focused networking Concentrating on significant ties
	EBE JAN	BRU HOF KOC SCH would like to do (more) I but is hampered by limited time resources used to practice I at an earlier stage in career but meanwhile became II

Extensive or focused networking

While respondents are generally reluctant towards “strategic networking”, they deliberately and willingly take efforts to sustain relationships whether in terms of extensive or focused networking.

Respondents practicing extensive networking invest significant amounts of time and energy in socializing, spreading contacts irrespective of the fact that their professional relevance remains to be seen.

“... you have contacts without any ulterior motives, you think who knows, perhaps this is helpful or perhaps not; at the end of the day you may have met somebody interesting, who may perhaps open up new perspectives to you or who shows you the world from a different angle”⁶

From the way our respondents talk about socializing, being enthusiastic about social events and making new contacts with interesting people, we conclude that socializing means a source of vitality to them. They have a strong inclination to enter the social stage and use it as a source of reassurance or recognition. Therefore, extensive networkers do not distinguish between socializing in order to do a good job and get on with one’s career on the one hand and socializing in order to feel good and “*spend a good day in pleasant company*” (EBE) on the other hand.

⁶ *“... man hat die Kontakte ohne Hintergedanken, man denkt sich wer weiß, vielleicht bringt das was oder auch nicht; am Ende des Tages hat man vielleicht jemand Interessanten kennengelernt, der einen vielleicht irgendwelche neuen Perspektiven eröffnet oder die Welt von einer anderen Seite zeigt;”* (JAN R_4)

Focused networking, in contrast, means an attempt to concentrate on significant ties, thus controlling investments in social relationships. Our evidence show that this attitude is due to:

The lack of inclination to spreading contacts in the first place:

“...I indulged myself in some sort of luxury...network I’d not even call it, some sort of...having a circle of acquaintances with people ... who, who cultivate a certain style of discourse”⁷

“... I cannot go for a strategic lunch with people [...] or...have coffee for half an hour; I could, but I lack ...I don’t value that highly, ah, because I have the feeling, that it also works otherwise; yes ... and that I urgently need the time for other things;”⁸

Missing reasons to make ever new contacts is weak as the current position appears satisfactory and fascination of socializing has diminished:

“... bankers for example or some...ah...persons of the ministeries, with whom one cooperates more closely ...ah, with those...you go out to lunch at times or for a drink...yet...here I say I keep this limited [...] I used to [...] got to social events more often, it was pleasant, enriching... only some day it is simply [...] you are in a different phase in life [...] there I say that is too much, there I see to keep that within limits;”⁹

Another (gender-specific) reason for concentrating on significant ties rather spreading contacts are, of course, time limitations due to caretaking responsibilities (HOF, BRU).

General habitus

Looking at the available interview texts from a habitus angle in general and a career habitus perspective in particular, one can structure the findings along four dimensions – the dimensions of inner self (‘psyche’), the social dimension, objects at stake, i.e. strategy and time dimension. Those dimensions relate to basic assumptions of habitus regarding stability, unconsciousness, incorporation and strategy.

⁷ *“...habe mir den Luxus gegönnt, quasi...Netzwerk würde ich gar nicht so sehr sagen, einen Bekanntenkreis zu haben, von Leuten...die, die ein entsprechendes Gesprächsniveau pflegen” (KOC R_2)*

⁸ *“...ich kann nicht strategisch Mittagessen gehen mit den Leuten [...] oder ... eben mir einen Kaffee ausmachen, für eine halbe Stunde; ich könnte es, aber dazu geht mir...das ist in meinem Wertgefüge nicht weiter oben, äh, weil ich das Gefühl habe, dass es so und so so auch geht; ja...und ich die Zeit für anderes dringend brauche ;” (BRU R_5)*

⁹ *“...Banker zum Beispiel oder irgendwelche...ähm...Personen von den Ministerien, mit denen man enger zusammenarbeitet...ah, mit denen...geht man dann mal Mittagessen oder was trinken...wobei...da sage ich, das halte ich sehr in Grenzen [...] eine zeitlang [...] bin ich mehr auf Veranstaltungen gegangen, es war nett, es war bereichernd...nur irgendwann einmal ist es einfach, einfach, jetzt...man hat einfach eine andere Phase des Lebens [...] ich sage, das ist zuviel, da schaue ich, dass ich es in Grenzen halte; (SCH R_5)*

Inner dimension ('psyche')

Self-descriptions of interviewees about who they 'really are' and what constitutes their genuine self revolves around some general characteristics as well as predispositions concerning specific skills and competencies.

Regarding general characteristics, a pattern of positive belief in oneself, linked with being authentic and being in control of one's own life and, as far as possible, one's environment, emerges. The foundations are often laid in early childhood (HOF) through great freedom within a given frame enforced by strict discipline. This leads to a basic positive conviction about oneself and a generally positive attitude towards life (HOF).

„Really, I have to say that I am a very open and positive person“ (HOF¹⁰).

At the same time, authenticity, being self-reliant, in control of oneself and one's job (BRU) and being rational instead of emotional (EBE) as well as a high ability to suffer (HOF) are core general characteristics, too.

In terms of skill and competency related predispositions, an interest in understanding complex relationships at the macro-level (KOC), a combined interest in 'facts and figures' as well as 'people' and good analytical-mathematical skills (EBE) are prominent.

Social dimension

Looking at elements of the general habitus directed towards others, four major aspects emerge: communicating and networking, presenting oneself to others, decision making and handling work-non-work interfaces.

Regarding communicating and networking, respondents show a high consciousness of being open rather than uncommunicative (EBE). Sometimes from early childhood on being open in a group and communicating with others is regarded as important (JAN; KOC). In the organisational setting, the ability to communicate well in all kinds of situations, also with very high ranking organisational members such as the director general (BRU), selling one's achievements (EBE), expressing one's point of view instead of subduing it (EBE) and standing firm to one's convictions even if it is costly (EBE) is important.

„Here it is again important that one proclaims his opinion, which sometimes is also negative; and not ... bottle things up and swallows and ... retains. (EBE¹¹)

At the same time, this does not prevent interviewees from emphasising the importance of being able to mediate conflicts (SCH) and being loyal to people and causes rather than playing political games (KOC).

¹⁰ *„Also das muss man wirklich sagen, ich bin ein sehr offener und positiver Mensch.“ HOF R_6*

¹¹ *„Da ist wieder nur wichtig, dass man auch seine Meinung, die manchmal auch negativ ist, auch kundtut; und nicht...in sich hineinfrisst und schluckt und...aufstaut.“ (EBE R_8)*

Presenting oneself to others is characterised by a certain modesty in appearance and style – listen rather than talk, talk only if it is better than being silent (EBE) – while being clear about one's importance. Nevertheless, saying positive things about oneself does not come natural (KOC) and being the centre of attention makes one nervous in spite of being a thrilling experience (JAN). In all this, self-presentation is a controlled matter. From early childhood on there is a great emphasis on self-monitoring, i.e. being aware of others' expectations and acting accordingly.

“My mother, ... she has educated us in the sense that she always said, you have to know in advance, what others want from you, to direct your antennae into all directions and permanently see what you take in and how you meet one another.” (HOF¹²)

Respondents are aware that one often is on stage, that life is a theatre play (EBE) which sometimes leads to being hypocritical (EBE).

In terms of decision making, fast decision making and reducing complexity in decision situations (SCH) is highly valued. This includes being resolute, sometimes even brushing others off (SCH). However, this by no means includes an authoritarian or ‘loner’ type of decision making. On the contrary, having confidence in others, giving them the stage, (EBE; HOF) and including them into decision making (JAN) is frequently reported by interviewees.

“I simply got such a leadership style that it is important to me to include others” (JAN¹³)

The social dimension of the habitus not only expresses itself in the world of work, but also in handling the family/life situation. Interviewees report a high centrality of work with a time-driven life split between work and home – in the case of a woman with children getting up at 5.30, leaving home at 7 a.m., coming home at 7 p.m., going to bed at 11.30 (HOF) –where getting pregnant immediately after career entry was viewed as a catastrophe (HOF). At the same time, interviewees do not immediately jump at career opportunities. Rather than taking on new jobs head over heels, they report extended and deep going periods of reflection and hesitation because of specific family/life situations, often regarded as job-related constraints as well values in themselves in the moment of a huge career leap or upcoming career opportunities (BRU; HOF).

“One also cannot act this out at the expense of the children, here I have taken me back completely and said, now for once the children come first ... I have to say, this was exactly right, for I have waited two or three years and have put in a slower gear...and only yesterday I had again a conversation, all doors are open, yes, all doors are open.” (HOF¹⁴)

¹² „Meine Mutter, ... die hat uns erzogen, in dem Sinne, dass sie immer gesagt hat, Ihr müsst immer wissen vorher, was die anderen von Euch wollen, Eure Antennen in alle Richtungen ...aufstellen und ständig schauen, was Ihr aufnehmt und wie Ihr anderen begegnet, das haben meine Geschwister genauso wie ich“ (HOF R_24)

¹³ „Ich habe einfach so einen Führungsstil, dass mir das wichtig ist, dass ich die Meinung von anderen mit einbeziehe“ (JAN R_12)

¹⁴ „Man kann dann auch nicht, dass...auf Kosten der Kinder ausleben, da habe ich mich komplett zurückgenommen und habe gesagt, jetzt sind mal die Kinder zuerst dran...und ich

Strategic dimension

Interviewees have a quite clear causal perspective on the relationship between their own efforts and work outcomes. In addition, they demonstrate a delicate balance between deliberate career ambitions and 'let things happen'.

Regarding one's own efforts, respondents are showing high self-efficacy, self-esteem and trust in positive effects of one's own performance. They are convinced that performance, primarily understood as direct, measurable performance 'objectively' visible to oneself and others, counts and is rewarded. Such a performance orientation and (self-)discipline (JAN), partly from early childhood on (HOF), can even lead to perfectionism (BRU). The just-do-it attitude and self-assurance that one can do new and demanding things (HOF) leads to the conviction that even in difficult situations, things always continue and somehow work out (HOF).

“Somehow I always throw myself in at the deep end...even if that sounds arrogant which it should not, I have this self-assuredness that nothing happens to me, I simply wanted it and I try and I just do it...if it does not work out, then one simply has to do something else.” (HOF¹⁵)

In times of crises, endurance and sticking to one's course is crucial – and in the end one wins, of course, and succeeds (HOF R_18). A certain caution, however, is also expressed: One does not lead a battle that one cannot win (EBE).

In terms of ambition, all of the interviewees are at the high end of the spectrum. Against the backdrop of a high work-orientation, they are hard-working and industrious (EBE; HOF), very ambitious (BRU; SCH) and constantly available, working long hours (EBE). However, in pursuing their career goals, a 'latent career goal orientation' occurs entailing a specific duality. On the one hand, interviewees report an overt, clear career goal orientation (BRU) and a high pressure to perform coming from oneself (BRU). On the other hand, individuals avoid giving the impression of being overambitious (BRU; HOF; JAN).

“That one moves laid back in these...in these circles, if you want, yes, yes...and does not give the impression of being overambitious.” (BRU¹⁶)

One thinks step-by-step (SCH) and does not – or at least pretends not to – explicitly use contacts at work. If you are approached, you also 'hesitate'. Most career moves are a matter of 'luck' and being a 'child of luck'. One's talent needed by the organisation is detected and

muss sagen, es war genau richtig, weil ich habe 2 oder 3 Jahre gewartet und habe langsamer getan...und gestern erst habe ich wieder...hier auch ein Gespräch gehabt, es sind alle Türen offen, ja...es sind alle Türen offen“ (HOF R_31)

¹⁵ *„Ich bin immer irgendwie so ins kalte Wasser hinein gesprungen...auch wenn es arrogant klingt, das soll es überhaupt nicht sein, ich habe diese Selbstsicherheit, dass mir nichts passiert, ich wollte es einfach und ich versuche und mache es einfach...wenn es nicht funktioniert, dann muss man halt irgendwas anderes tun.“* (HOF R_3)

¹⁶ *„Dass man sich locker bewegt in diesen...in diesen Kreisen, wenn man so will, ja; ja...und eben nicht überehrgeizig erscheint.“* (BRU_R 13)

recognized by others (BRU; HOF), e.g. the boss or crucial decision makers since the work results are so outstanding that they are also seen without self-promotion and permanently standing in the spotlight (HOF). Others then act accordingly, thus promoting one's objective careers. It is interesting to note that there seems to be a certain gender-based (female) self-restriction in terms of career aspirations. Being satisfied with where one seems to be partly internalised, and is supported by the specific career field and/or the organisation one works for (BRU). The duality in terms of career related goal orientation echoes the specifics of the career field – banks – regarding rules of the field and required career habitus.

Time related dimension

The time related dimension expresses itself in two facets of interviewees' narratives. First, they report a specific view of their professional socialisation via formalised education. Formal education is a mere 'entry ticket' and a tick-off item on the road to access the world of work. Real learning and real life happens in practice. While their performance at school varies considerably, e.g. being as a pupil merely above the minimum (EBE) vs. being a very good pupil (SCH), they clearly opted for experience in practice besides their formal education at various levels. While only some of them regard years in school as lost years (EBE), they are united in the conviction that a combination of theory and practice (HOF) is highly desirable, e.g. through a bank apprenticeship enabling one to learn everything from scratch, that university studies alone are not enough (JAN) and doing something during one's studies that has a practical effect and where knowledge can be applied (JAN) is preferable.

“I have started to study at WU and then I quickly realized for myself that WU alone is not enough...it was not so much the money, rather I said I even now want to do something somehow, where I can apply my knowledge or where I can move something further on.” (JAN¹⁷)

Second, the time related dimension of habitus refers to 'built-in' reactions in terms of career changes and transitions. Respondents are ready to change their professional ways (EBE R_16) or ways of life in fundamental ways, e.g. by changing the lifestyle one knows from one's family of origin (HOF R_25). They plunge into the unknown rather than being stuck with something that is not challenging or satisfying (HOF R_13, 21). When tasks become routine, new tasks and challenges are actively sought after (HOF R_11).

“Then there were a few things that got out of control in our department and I then rather said, I have to go, I have to leave, I simply jump in at the deep end, I once again jump.” (HOF¹⁸)

¹⁷ „Ich habe begonnen, an der WU zu studieren, und habe dann aber sehr rasch für mich erkannt, dass die WU alleine für mich zu wenig ist...aber mir ist es gar nicht so ums Geld gegangen, sondern eher darum, dass ich sage, ich möchte schon jetzt irgendwie was tun, wo ich Wissen schon anwenden kann oder wo ich irgendwas weiterbringe.“ (JAN R_1, 2)

¹⁸ „Dann gab es ein paar Sachen, die sind dann eskaliert sind...bei uns in der Abteilung und ich war dann doch eher so, dass ich gesagt habe, ich muss gehen, ich muss weg, ich springe einfach noch mal ins kalte Wasser, ich springe wieder mal.“ (HOF R_11)

Fit of field-person-network

As far as the relationship between field and person is concerned, members of our sample differentiate between the access to a specific network and the question of maintaining membership in this network.

The interviewees acknowledge that the career field is somewhat constructed, and that this construction is contrasted with the “well functioning family”, serving as first and ideal network that gives support in the private as well as in the occupational field (BRU). The family indeed is not only the heuristic for the model of professional networks, it also enables and restricts networking possibilities (EBE).

Networking allegedly gains importance in order to maintain one’s position or advance in the field. But few of the interviewees see themselves as networkers. Rather, they indicate that they are the exception of the rule, feeling some kind of security arising from a safety net resulting from established relationships which they never had to test, though. It is always the others who initially activate the contact or offer the possibilities, and these others appear “naturally” through one’s own mere presence in the firm and one’s performance. The latter is allegedly even operationalised by a high performance over time (10-15 years) (BRU). Additionally, it is a matter of position whether someone is known (KOC). Thus, networking in this field is not seen as resulting from a conscious activity, but contacts become numerous with time. This is especially true for formal networks (e. g. lions club, rotary) which consequently seem to be neglected and get explicitly devalued in the field. For male actors, mutual leisure activities – hunting or sailing being prominent examples – serve as important informal network platform.

“Of course, there you get to know a specific clientele.” (EBE¹⁹)

Nevertheless, some active efforts are acknowledged, too, including both formal events viewed as “marketplaces for contacts” (e. g., Alpbacher Finanzsymposium, JAN) and informal possibilities like the daily chat in the cafeteria. Every open position is announced internally (JAN). Therefore, the information flow is crucial. Most of the interviewees did not have to go through an official recruiting process at all; if they did, they had the guarantee that the process would have a favourable outcome.

Access to the network within is managed qua reputation, mutual trust and reliance. Trust is fostered by shared basic values, e.g. work ethos, family, religion. It reduces the danger resulting from the risky advance performance of the truster. Another possibility is to adapt mutual inequalities in the course of the initial internal developing program. Then much depends on the contacts established.. One interviewee puts it into a nutshell, quoting that the only thing her superior regarded as important was her personality:

“The head of the department that I then joined, he said: “<<first name>>, I don’t give a damn, you can learn whatever is necessary...the only thing that is really important for me is that you as a person and with your personality work in my department, everything else

¹⁹ *“Da lernt man natürlich auch ein gewisses Klientel kennen.” (Network Relations EBE R_85)*

doesn't matter and all other things you can learn.”, that was the message, and then I did not think about it twice any more.” (HOF²⁰)

Subsequently, it seems that it is more important to be seen as a good performer rather than to immediately realising this performance potential. In addition, interviewees see an advantage to be a generalist rather than specialised in some area of expertise and to show social competence (EBE) in order to sell the results accordingly. Accordingly in this respect does not mean that one has to show off in terms of one's own performance and results. Patience and the ability to identify the right moment appear to be of central relevance. Here, the influence of the specific field – banking – is especially visible. While even in banking there are some areas such as trading which have a different sub-culture, the members of sample belong to the upper echelons of their respective banks. Here, the ways of interacting with each other and showing interest in specific jobs resembles many of the stereotypes about traditional Central European banking such as being discreet, only hinting at things, being cautious in one's action etc.

Another way of enhancing one's personal fit within the network is to receive the familiar German “Du” word offered by a superior (EBE).

“Then I go down in my room, the head of the division follows me, but does not say anything, goes with me into my room, I happen to be alone in the room; he enters, lights a cigarette, comes near and says, “My name is Rupert, on a first name basis [per Du] it is easier to argue.”...then I got along with him better and better, if one had different views...I think I was the first account manager with whom he was on a first name basis, yes, there were many department heads who were not on a first name basis with him when he offered me the ‘Du’.” (EBE²¹)

It indicates proximity and “comes with the territory”, leading to positive consequences for one's career.

Interviewees mostly have shared views regarding the sustainability of contacts. There is a strong belief in a lasting tie resulting from the shared sector in which the career field unfolds (JAN). This is in line with the irritation that emerges when former intensive contacts vanish due to job transitions (HOF). One key operator in this equation is the balance of give and take – reciprocity.

²⁰ *„Der Leiter von der Abteilung, wo ich dann hingegangen bin, der hat gesagt, „<<first name>>, wurscht, du kannst alles lernen...das einzige was für mich wirklich ist...ist, dass du mit deiner Person und deiner Persönlichkeit bei mir in meiner Abteilung arbeitest, alles andere ist egal und alles andere kann man lernen“; das war die Aussage, wo ich dann überhaupt nicht mehr überlegt habe.“ (HOF R_14)*

²¹ *„Dann gehe ich runter...in mein Zimmer, der Bereichsleiter geht mir nach, sagt aber nichts, geht mit mir ins Zimmer rein, ich sitze gerade alleine drinnen; geht er rein, zündet sich eine Zigarette an, kommt her und sagt, „ich bin der Rupert, per du streitet es sich leichter“; (lachen); also...dann bin ich mit ihm immer besser ausgekommen, wenn man unterschiedliche Meinungen hat, ...ich war glaube ich der erste Kundenbetreuer, mit dem er per du war, ja...da waren viele Abteilungsleiter mit ihm noch nicht per du, hat er mir das du-Wort angeboten.“ (Networking Habitus EBE R_3)*

Reciprocity

Whatever the nature of the network and the style of networking, the notion of reciprocity appears to be a central element within the relationships we researched. The aim of our empirical research was to investigate the sense of reciprocity upon which our respondent's networking practices rest.

Reciprocity, in general, is defined as the attempt of each network member to balance "give and take". It could be easily regulated if only related to an immediate exchange of services in terms of "I give you a nut if you lend me your nutcracker". Yet, reciprocity is a much more complex matter as it requires mutual (implicit) agreements upon the kinds of gifts expected in return as well as upon the time granted to pay back. As for the kinds of investments gifts exchanged, our evidence points e.g. to high performance which is supposed to meet the expectations of a former mentor and now superior. Still, in many cases, relations of reciprocity rest upon virtual claims that have not yet been asserted and eventually will never be actually raised. Thus, it remains to be seen, how the network will react in case of failing or omitted exchange, e.g. when performance decreases for some reason or a wrong business decision with severe consequences has been made.

Balancing reciprocity

Even though our respondents evoke some connections as close ties within their network, i.e. people who they trust and with whom they may establish friendship, they are reluctant to ask for support. Nevertheless, they seem to share a notion of mutual support "just in case". Though it remains to be seen whether support will be actually granted when needed, network members feel quite "secure" and "relaxed" regarding job and career, as was expressed by some of our respondents:

"It is an important backing and a security net I always have with me. I know, I could say it is too much, I can't go on this way any longer at any point... without being a big problem for my future" (BRU)

"I would always have the opportunity to ask for help and obtain it for sure" (HOF)

The idea of reciprocity within a network is related to the problem of establishing and continuously re-establishing the right balance within the relationship. One interviewee perceived her unplanned pregnancy at an earlier stage in her career as a crack in the unwritten pact of reciprocity with the organisation.

"... I come back and I am pregnant, that was of course a disaster for me...since it was not planned at all; I thought I've just started working there, they took so many efforts for me to come here and now I fail"²²

²² „...komme zurück und bin schwanger, das war natürlich für mich eine Katastrophe...weil das war überhaupt nicht geplant; habe ich gedacht, jetzt arbeite ich gerade hier, die haben sich so angestrengt, daß ich herkommen kann und jetzt falle ich aus und bin schwanger“ (HOF R_5)

At that time, she had just been granted considerable support by her superiors. Though nobody had made her any reproaches she felt very uncomfortable because of having received more than she could give. Her feeling of discomfort recalls the picture of a biased relationship between creditor and debtor the latter not being able to pay back (in time).

Our evidence, however, points to the fact that relationships with other network members must not be charged too heavily, in order to preserve the delicate balance between giving and receiving. Respondents invest in networking by showing outstanding performance. Even though they may not explicitly relate performance to networking, they seem to have a clear sense of the fact that through high performance they will approach fellow managers with a similar work ethos and profile. Thus, calling for support, even to trusted members of the network, would signify a weakness that is to be avoided in order not to risk a damage of one's reputation, i.e. a loss of symbolic capital.

Code of behaviour

Despite the differences of networking styles, the strong rejection by all respondents regarding strategic or "careerist" networking practices hint to a common "code of behaviour". Networking is associated to a kind of unwritten and implicit etiquette, saying that (immediate, obvious) personal benefits are to be avoided. Though our respondents are aware of the use of networking for making a career, they rather recognise networking for the sake of business, i.e. for their personal performance as well as that of the department or/and the company. This reserve concerning personal benefits, especially regarding further career moves, adds to legitimise networking practices which basically rely on personal characteristics and efforts. Personal benefit one could gain through his/her network cannot be expressed. To make personal benefits the main incentive for networking would mean to exploit contacts and weaken or endanger the entire system of relations. By stigmatising such behaviour our interviewees implicitly (and largely unconsciously) seem to opt for an alternative strategy. They seem to apply a code of loyalty and trustworthiness in order to sustain the network which they owe their status and resources. Thus, they pursue a strategy which is personally beneficial in the end, though not in the first place, nor at first sight.

Alternative ways to dealing with issues of balance

A male interviewee insisted particularly on the significance of applying purely professional criteria for support:

*"...The bright ones, when they are asked, they don't say I recommend someone whom I saw ten times on a party..., but they say... I know him from work."*²³

A "good networker" is above all a high performer at work, whose reputation is recognised widely in the profession. Cultivating contacts has to appear as "doing which comes naturally", without any careerist motives. Indeed, being suspiciously active in networking is useless, since the supporting effect of the network will happen "by itself" if the professional and behavioural criteria are fulfilled. Support, e.g. in terms of a recommendation for a position,

²³ „...die wirklich Gescheiten, wenn die gefragt haben, dann sagen die nicht, ich empfehle einen, mit dem ich schon...zehnmahl bei einer Party herumgestanden bin, sondern die sagen...den kenne ich von irgendeiner Arbeitsbeziehung her“ (KOC R_3)

may even be anonymous. However, it seems less risky for network members to base mutual support on rational decision making rather than on strong ties which rest upon sympathy or friendship.

Concluding remarks, Limitations and future research

The significance of networking for careers is obvious and has been extensively researched. Yet, our research shows a more differentiated picture with respect to the significance of habitus for accessing networks. Bourdieu's notion of habitus is particularly useful as it embraces the notion of unconscious and incorporated skills that are applied in a strategic way without necessarily be conscious. Still, our evidence supports the claim not to understand habitus in a deterministic way. Social background, for example, plays a less important role for accessing contacts than assumed. This is not to say that it does not play any role at all, e.g. one respondent (BRU) named a person from her network as a particular strong tie relating to the similarity of values developed in the same social milieu. Nevertheless, our evidence also points towards strong ties between persons from middle class and upper middle class background with persons from low status groups (EBE and BRU, JAN and HOF). Within the chosen framework, we interpret this as similarities in habitus rather than social background per se. This emphasises the importance of a more fine-grained analysis of social networks that not solely relies on 'quantitative surface data'.

Relationships of friendship also need to prove their professional value. One respondent e.g. distinguishes between friends which are apt for networking because you can trust their view on business issues (SCH und JAN) and those who are useless because they get situations wrong and thus are not trustworthy in professional terms, no matter if they share a similar social heritage or not. Finally, relationships rest upon similar styles of handling conflicts or dealing with problems, though the network partners may have entirely different social backgrounds (EBE and BRU, HOF and JAN).

Strong ties also can evolve between persons who subscribe to contrasting networking styles, such as extensive versus focused networking (EBE and BRU). Finally, persons can be included into networks despite of holding distant positions in the formal organisation, whereas close colleagues can be excluded because of lack of habitus congruence (JAN und her deputy, EBE and his fellow board member).

Furthermore, we found that there is no neat distinction between "private" and career networks whatsoever. First, family ties may have an impact on careers as they supply support of various kinds (from business contacts to caretaking resources) and equip with relevant skills (from social skills to self-efficacy). Second, networks are construed as a precondition for career. In this sense, networking for the sake of reconciling career and caretaking is career networking in a wider sense.

In fact, our evidence points to the fact that networking skills and the inclination to networking serve not only professional or career ends. Apart from those, they are used for building caretaking-networks as well. Thus, networking requires an ability to respond to heterogeneous networks as well as to heterogeneous members of networks rather than to stick to one best way of socializing.

This paper is an explorative study and thus has several limitations. First we only draw on careers in the Austrian banking sector. Some of this career field's characteristics may be

specific ones regarding e.g. the comparatively small size of the Austrian banking sector. Given the moderate size of the labour market, high potentials and performers are highly visible which also means that bad or good reputation disseminates rapidly. Second, a particularity which has not been reflected in this study is the political influence on the banking sector which has traditionally always been strong in Austria. If this influence now tends to decrease, political orientation nevertheless still plays an important role especially in top management positions. By and large, respondents remained silent about this dimensions. From our point of view, this points towards social desirability effects. While it is clear that the political influence has been drastically reduced over the past two decades, it is obvious even for the casual Austrian observer that political networks still do play a significant role in career terms. Finally, the homogeneity of our panel is a further limitation of our research as we focussed on upper middle and top management. All these points are limitations in terms of the possibilities for empirical generalisation. However, given the embryonic stage of qualitative network analysis, focused sector-specific empirical studies do contribute to an enhanced understanding of the relationship between networking, career habitus and career field.

This leads to a call for further research especially in two areas. First, more empirical work is clearly needed in the area of qualitative network research. Hopefully, this paper has illustrated the potential of qualitative network analysis for enhancing our understanding of how social networks form and continue to exist and which effects these networks have on work careers. Social network analysis clearly adds to our understanding by complementing and deepening the insight gained by more classical quantitative network analysis. Both approaches do not mutually exclude each other but are – at least to a certain degree – complementary. Second, additional work is needed at the conceptual level. Bourdieu's conceptual framework applied in this paper offers some promising routes towards understanding the interplay between individuals and their context in terms of careers. However, despite some efforts to make this framework useful for the analysis and the understanding of careers (see, e.g.), there is much room for development. Neither the cornerstones of this concept – habitus, capitals, and fields – nor their interplay are adequately understood when it comes to their application on career issues. Networking and social networks are a well-suited area of application of such a conceptualisation since all three theoretical cornerstones clearly are relevant for our understanding.

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