

European Group Organisation Studies submission to Sub-Theme 01: SWG Rethinking Careers: Theoretical Foundations of Career Studies and their Development.

Careers constructed on location: A Bourdieusian critique

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Everyone has a career that is played out through power and privilege. We argue that existing conceptions of career limit our theorizing. We seek to break open our understanding to allow more inclusive notions of career. The paper is situated within the emerging area of critical career studies. We are critical in two key ways: we place questions of power and privilege centre stage; we question taken-for-granted assumptions of careers such as who and what are included as objects of study (Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Roper et al., 2010).

Our argument is based on two broad critiques: Firstly, that most career theory and empirical work is based around privileged elites - predominantly male, white, western, professional - resulting in a narrow base for theorising careers and providing practical guidance. Secondly, we argue that power relations are inherent in career identities and situated practices. As critical scholars we regard the contestation of power as central to career outcomes. Issues arising from social identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality have direct consequences for access to work, quality of working lives, resulting status and financial reward. This critical approach challenges individualistic assumptions of traditional career theory and the extent to which unencumbered agents create career 'choices'.

Many authors have noted the separate contributing discipline silos of psychology and sociology to careers; the differentiation of objective and subjective perspectives, and the ongoing tensions between agency and structure (Moore et al., 2007). It is the relationship between persons and organisations on which we focus. An incessant thread through our discussion is the pivotal influence of context. As a consequence we theorise careers as situated; careers as constituted by the interaction between person(s) and the specific

situation(s) in which they are enacted. Our work is further informed by Collin's (1998) definition of career which links individuals with organisations and society. Her definition implies that who the individuals are, and where the situation careers are enacted, matters.

Our aim is to demonstrate how Bourdieu's theory can be developed to open up career theory to a diverse range of work and social groups. Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a foundation from which we theorise situated careers using the key concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*, building on earlier work in career theory (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2010; Duberley & Cohen, 2010; Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer, et al., 2004).

In an effort to expand career theory, two departures from the normative subjects and place of careers are discussed through counterpoint cases from two empirical projects. The first uses nascent career theory developed from how Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand) construct their career identities (Reid, 2011). This research expands career understandings from a collective-based culture, explicitly critiquing the mono-cultural dominance of existing career theory. This theory implicitly assumes assimilation as the most viable career strategy for non-dominant group members. The second study is an analysis of careers in the film industry; mooted as the prototypical future work structure (Jones & De Fillippi, 1996).

Through the Māori case we explore the greater emphasis given to *habitus* in the field-habitus dynamic, and speculate on implications for the careers of people from a collective culture. In a parallel way we argue that the *field* in the film industry plays a key role in the construction of people's careers. We speculate on how this specific context of a strong field affects people attracted to the industry, and how they enact their situated careers.

A crucial aspect of Bourdieu's concept of *field* is that it is place of conflict and competition where participants contest power and status. It is not simply an unproblematic process of capital accumulation which may be then traded for career positions of greater or lesser privilege (Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

Within this short paper we first interrogate some contemporary career definitions, drawing out recurring omissions. What follows is a brief overview of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and capitals before we draw on them in our analysis of two studies: of Māori careers and careers in the film industry. Both examples are situated within the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand. We provide a short conclusion that indicates discussion points for the full paper.

Critiquing career definitions

The influential *Handbook of Career Theory* (1989) provides probably the most cited definition of career in organisation studies. Careers are ‘the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time’ (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989:8). Twenty years later, Sullivan and Baruch (2009) create a more expansive definition of careers building on intervening research. They note that careers occur within many environmental factors and incorporate objective career markers and subjective elements. They define ‘a *career* as an individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individuals life span’ (2009:1543, italics in original). Career appears as a noun, ‘a pattern’, potentially non-linear, more contextual but remains relentlessly individualistic. Who or what defines the ‘relevant’ experiences is unknown.

In a related definition, Jones & Dunn (2007:439) state that ‘a person’s career unfolds in sequences of roles in occupations and organizations, placing the individual in temporal and spatial context’. Significantly they also note ‘careers as the mechanisms linking person and institutions’. They introduce the notion of different time perspectives, space denotes a specific context, but again the focus is solely on the individual.

While our thinking is informed by these definitions it is particularly oriented by Collin’s offering (1998:412); careers are not a ‘privatised’ but rather arise ‘from the interaction of individuals with organisations and society’. To develop career theory further we need to move from its psychological roots.

Applying Bourdieu

We draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986, 1992) to expand career theory. His theory captures dynamic social forces and enables the discussion of power distributions, social hierarchy and social inequality (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). His concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* have the potential to link agent(s) and structure in a dynamic reciprocal interplay. Each of the key concepts will be briefly outlined before the two cases are discussed. Unlike others, we do not refer to a career field but argue that career is a transitory outcome of interactions between habitus and field. We agree with Mayrhofer’s et al, (2004:873) early assertion that ‘careers themselves are not a field, but unfold within a field’.

A *field* is a semi-autonomous relational multi-dimensional social space. ‘A social playground for individual and collective actors with its own rules’ (Mayrhofer et al., 2004:876). Limitations vary according to the habitus of the players and the structural constraints of the situation within which careers are enacted (Duberley & Cohen, 2010). Consequently a field is a space of conflict and competition in which participants seek to establish their position. Power is unthinkable outside of context (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Similarly *capital* exists only in context and only in relation to a specific field.

Capitals as theorised by Bourdieu (1986) are economic, social and cultural capital. Each individual within a specific field has a unique portfolio or package of capital, the value of, which changes according to the specific field. Economic capital is easily convertible to money. Social capital involves resources arising from social connections and class membership. Within career theory it is often described through networks; informal and formal. Cultural capital as theorized by Bourdieu (1986) has three components; capital arising from embodied or long-lasting dispositions, objective forms of cultural goods (e.g. art works) and institutionalized forms (e.g. educational credentials). Scholars applying cultural capitals to careers have tended to emphasize educational aspects (e.g. Duberley & Cohen, 2010).

These three forms of capital are accumulated and assigned value as *symbolic capital*; the attributed worth resulting from the degree to which the constituent *capitals* (economic, social, cultural) are socially recognised and valued in the relevant social context.

Habitus is a major concept developed by Bourdieu to connect structure and individual action. It is a ‘generative and dynamic structure’ (Lizardo, 2004:376), which although located within the individual, is constituted through interaction with the environment. Habitus is not fixed but is moulded through reciprocal influences in the field. Significantly, Bourdieu theorises habitus not as an individualised ego but an ‘individual trace of an entire collective history’ (1990:9). It has the potential then, to be applied to collective as well as individualised cultures.

Emphasizing habitus - Māori careers

Critical voices continue to point out the limited populations of careers studies, many still confined to professional, highly educated populations. Further critiques also highlight the extent to which ‘careers’ are a western construct, applicable only to industrial individualistic societies (Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2007). While there is substantial

literature on cross-cultural international careers in various forms, it holds individualistic western career models as the norm. Consequently acculturation becomes the important explanatory concept for understanding career processes (Reid, 2011). Extant literature is far removed from indigenous cultures, and fails to consider collective cultures (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). In our effort to expand career theory we discuss Māori research that through career narratives sought to contribute to ‘career using indigenous voices and indigenous framing of experiences which have been so often neglected in the literature’ (Reid, 2011:188).

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand making up approximately 15% population. Significantly Māori are also a collective culture meaning that relationships within a kinship structure are central to identity. Māori identity is based on connectivity where first it is ‘about one’s relationship with one’s own whanau, and in a broader sense it emphasises one’s connection to all peoples and all things in the natural world’ (Ratima & Grant, 2007:2). We open the possibility that habitus may play out differently in a collective culture from how Bourdieu theorised it within a French cultural context.

The study we draw on includes life history interviews with Māori volunteers. Women and men participants were deliberately selected across the life span and came from almost all major occupations. A three-way typology based on both cultural and career features (‘cloaked’, ‘seekers’ and ‘keepers’, Reid, 2011) emerged from analysis. The methodology and typology will be described in the full paper.

In Māori identity, the emphasis is on relationships, while occupational structures present a secondary concern (Reid, 2011). Underpinning the career narratives and subsequent typology was the individual’s degree of identification with the culture. Culture was the centre of the compass guiding career direction. Cultural influences were interwoven with relationships within the collective web. Relationships helped, hindered and inspired cultural journeys which were reflected in people’s workplace choices. Both past and present relational experiences influenced the meaning and purpose attached to the construct of ‘career’, (that has no equivalent in the Māori language). The more participants were identified with their traditional culture, the more the past and knowledge from elders, myths and legends guided their decisions in the present. This aspect of career process presents potential implications for career planning.

Power and privilege in the Māori collective groups was through individual's identification with Māori culture. The power of the individual may be as easily situated within their (unpaid) community involvement as the paid workplace; or more likely as some combination of the two.

Māori careers are mediated and modified by the collective and whanau (extended family) identity. We propose that within this ethnic group, habitus is not associated with the individual. A complex construction of relational and cultural influences give rise to what we term *collective habitus*. Collective habitus does not refer to summated actions of individual group members but is actively constructed by and through the group. It results in a career infused with valued features of cultural identity; of which collective belonging is primary. Career processes occur across a cultural-space, hence *cultural capital* has high symbolic capital for Māori careers.

From the three aspects of cultural capital outlined by Bourdieu cultural capital here emphasizes the embodied state, 'long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (1986:47), and spirit; linked to a collective habitus, a primary driver for career action.

Emphasizing the field- the film industry

As we have discussed, the *field* is a social space in which a particular game is played out. Through a film industry study we outline how film workers use the rules of the game to construct their own career identities. Analyses of the field are critical to understanding how habitus is moulded and how capital may operate as power levers for careers.

While film work predates the current mapping of the 'creative industries', it is viewed as an exemplar of the future of work more generally (Jones & De Fillippi, 1996). Careers in film, locally and internationally, are usually organised around short-term projects (Blair et al., 2001), precarious work, including periods of unpaid work. As a result the field is marked by low pay, high mobility, and long hours. Jones and De Fillippi (1996) view the 'boundarylessness' of film work in an optimistic light, emphasizing the 'entrepreneurial' nature of people in creative careers. In a recent literature review, Conor notes the tendency to celebrate the autonomy and freedom of creative work while 'masking issues of increased exploitation, precariousness, marginalization and discrimination' that they also represent (2010:29-30). A critical approach to creative work, pays attention to power relations, exclusions and privilege among various people in creative industries. From a critical

perspective crewing on a film is unpredictable, discontinuous work with no clear hierarchical structure for career progression. A career journey in this context is characterised by uncertainty and somewhat random opportunities.

In the New Zealand deregulated labour markets (Roper et al., 2010), the film industry is not unionised. While there are some basic legal safeguards and rights, many issues of pay, working conditions, and equity of access to work are up for negotiation, from one project to another. Within this context we interviewed experts in the policy area as well as conducting life history interviews with people working behind the camera. Respondents made connections between the positive traits of New Zealanders such as being ingenious and adaptable, and the requirements of film workers in a free-market model of work and career. The habitus required was to work hard, fit in, not complain, and to be enthusiastic.

Each individual negotiates their career in the social field of the film industry through accumulation and bartering of symbolic capital; (constituted by social, cultural and economic capitals). While the previous case emphasized cultural capital in the enactment of careers; film industry crew negotiate through *social capital* and to a lesser extent cultural capital. Cultural capital in this field has a different context from the previous case; in the film industry it is more aligned with 'industry cultures'. Individuals accumulate cultural capital in film work, by demonstrating skills and abilities but also by being a 'good' employee, with the appropriate habitus. While cultural capital of film crew members must be recognised it is the social capital that provides career progress. Almost all participants mentioned that contacts and relationships with others were the key to getting in and staying in. Recruitment into film work through social networks can reproduce existing patterns of social exclusion or introduce new ones. For those new to the industry without requisite contacts, getting work may require following 'hints and whispers'.

Power and privilege was evident in the process of personal patronage needed to gain initial work, and in maintaining it. Career progress was not aligned with upward progression in the industry rather the major signifier of career success was continued (although not necessarily continuous) paid work.

Conclusion

This paper provides empirical examples of how Bourdieu's theory can be developed to open up and extend career theory to address a diverse range of work and social groups.

Implications for theory from a non-dominant group, Māori, were that careers are not necessarily attached to individuals alone, nor are they necessarily situated within paid work. The film industry study highlights the influence of the field in structuring career processes. Inter-disciplinarity and diversity provide many opportunities for innovation by re-working new frames and connections, generating debates with new kinds of empirical data and between different social perspectives, rather than creating a single more inclusive theory.

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