

Mechanisms of career agency: A longitudinal perspective

ABSTRACT

Looking at career agency throughout the career life-cycle in a professional service firm (LegalCo) we find distinctive practices of career agency that come with the tasks and roles of different career stages. Our findings illustrate how these differences in career agency are related to different dimensions of subjective career success. Tracking patterns of career agency across three career stages from junior associate to partner we identify three overarching mechanisms of career agency – seeking out (specific organisational actors), creating imprinting ties and playing on similarities – that account for distinctively different career experiences. Our study demonstrates that career agency is an important concept to explain how specific ties become imprinted and thereby provide benefits across several career stages. Career agency is also a key factor to explain how organisational actors may exploit (or not) homophily in their work context.

Key words: Career agency, network dynamics, imprinting

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Network research has found significant correlations between an actor's social network position and various individual-level outcomes, for example an actor's salary (Orpen 1996; Seidel, Polzer and Stewart 2000), reputation (Kilduff and Krackhardt 1994), innovativeness (Obstfeld 2005; Rodan and Galunic 2004; Subramaniam and Youndt 2005), job opportunities (Fernandez and Weinberg 1997; Granovetter 1974), and career progression (Gabbay and Zuckerman 1998). This predominant stream of social network research has mostly targeted outcomes and advantages that can be derived from networks, yet mostly without an explicit consideration of the behaviours and practices of network creation and processes of network evolution. Social capital is however more than network position and structure (Adler and Kwon 2002). Bourdieu's (1986) early definition of social capital sees actors embedded in relationships where leverage and advantage is not guaranteed by virtue of structure alone; rather that advantage must be seized through relational strategies and decisions of actors. Emirbayer and Goodwin's (1994) point to the critical question of agency when they argue to consider the potential causal role of actors' beliefs, values, and commitments, in attempting to interpret and understand networking and social action. In this context the role of agency becomes a key consideration. On an individual level agency focuses on the question how actors purposefully create and develop their personal networks. This creation and shaping of networks includes the choice among different strategies of networking reflecting different attitudes and levels of agency (Bensaou, Galunic & Jonczyk-Sédès, 2014). Yet in spite of calls to take agency more seriously in social network research (White 1992: p. 92) agency in social networking has only been rudimentarily explored so far (Ozcan and Eisenhardt 2009; Shipilov et al. 2007; Vissa 2012).

The understanding of the strategies actors employ when creating and evolving their professional networks is especially relevant to understanding the evolution and adaptation of

networks in the course of time. While it is taken-for-granted that the development of interpersonal relationships through networking is an important competence for business careers (Defillippi and Arthur 1994) we lack comprehensive studies analysing how organisational actors adopt their networks as well as their networking strategies throughout different career stages to meet new role requirements (Shipilov et al. 2007; Stevenson and Greenberg 2000; Vissa 2012). Looking at the evolution of networks and networking across the entire career life cycle raises interesting questions about the role of some ties that have a lasting influence. Ties, especially bridging ties, have been shown to be liable to fast decay in general (Burt, 2002). Yet some selected ties created at critical early career stages continue to influence organisational performance for much longer (McEvily, Jaffee, and Tortoriello, 2012). Little is known about how these lasting influential relationships come about and in which way they continue to exercise influence across different career stages.

This study is situated at the interface of career research and network dynamics. It draws on the concept of career agency to address two related questions: First, how does career agency inform network development at different career stages and what are the outcomes of such career agency in terms of perceptions of subjective career success? Second, can we identify any overarching mechanisms of career agency that span across these different stages?

BACKGROUND AND RELATED LITERATURE

Related literature falls into three categories: The growing field of network dynamics, studies of career agency, and research on imprinting. While each field has developed into an area of research of its own our references mainly focus on work at the interface of any two of these fields since this is the area in which our research questions are situated.

Calls for more research on the core processes that shape and define an actor's network structure (Gibbons, 2004) have recently received more attention in the study of network dynamics, including a recent special issue on this theme (Ahuja, Soda and Zaheer 2012). Although the majority of these studies are not at the individual level (most operate at the organizational level) they have improved our understanding of network dynamics. While it is too early to adequately summarize this emerging work findings suggest that the benefits of social networks may not be as sustainable as imagined thereby underlining the scope for human agency and a need to better understand its role in network genesis and development (Ahuja, Soda and Zaheer 2012). Bensaou's et al. (2014) recent study on networking configurations features how different networking strategies and network structures are related to different attitudes towards networking and levels of agency. While this study features agency in networking at the mid-career stage covering an observed time span of about one and a half years it is a too short time span to feature any longer term dynamics that may impact following career stages.

Research has demonstrated the impact of early career experiences for later career stages (e.g. Kacperczyk, 2009; Azoulay, Liu, & Stuart, 2011) and how these imprints impact career decisions in a new context. Higgins' (2005) demonstrates that early socialisation experiences in distinct organisational cultures had a lasting imprinting effect determining individual agency of following career transitions. Yet it is not only the individual that is subjected to imprinting. Some literature also points to the fact that the individual has some agency in the creation of lasting imprints (Higgins et al. 2010). Looking at a network context McEvily, Jaffee and Tortoriello (2012) found that bridging ties formed during an early career stage have long-lasting benefits compared to other non-imprinted ties that will decay quickly (Burt, 2002). We do however not know in what ways individual agency impacts that creating of imprinting ties and in which ways these ties may unfold different benefits at later career stages.

Looking at the creation and evolution of networks on an individual level this study draws on the concept of career agency. Career agency refers to the proactivity employees show with respect to managing their careers (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demarr, 1998; Orpen, 1996). Tams and Arthur (2010) describe career agency as “the scope to influence social structures in particular through bottom-up entrepreneurial enactment” (p.634) and point to the important role of “knowing-whom”, i.e. relationships and networks. Studies looking at the specific practices of career agency have come up with a great variety of behaviours, such as collecting information about current or upcoming career opportunities, actively seeking performance feedback, opportunity creation, involvement in activities to increase visibility and boundary management (e.g. King, 2004; Orpen, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001; Sturges et al., 2002). While some authors (e.g. King 2004) state that people engage in career self-management throughout the course of their working lives it raises the question if the multitude of identified behaviours are equally present at all career stages, how the emphasis evolves and how they concretely play out as practices at different career stages (Tams & Arthur, 2010). This raises two additional questions. First, it raises the question about some overarching mechanisms of career agency that can be found at different career stages even though the specific type of actions may differ. Second, in terms of outcomes of career agency it begs the question what the outcomes of any of such overarching mechanisms of career agency are, if they are the same throughout the career life cycle or if they result in different outcomes depending on the career stage.

This study addresses the aforementioned questions at the interface of network development, career agency and imprinting. Using a longitudinal approach it tracks how career agency is expressed at different career stages starting from a junior level to a senior level, how particular relationships end up having an imprinting role and how career agency is related to

perceptions of career success. This approach will also enable us to shed light on the underlying mechanisms of career agency across the career life cycle.

METHODS

Based on the lack of knowledge on mechanisms of career agency at different career stages this study uses an inductive approach, grounded in individual case histories, to derive patterns of activities that express career agency in relationship management at each career stage. Our sample consists of newly promoted service professionals working for the London office of a global “Magic Circle” law firm LegalCo. Our sample consists of 28 lawyers entering three crucial career stages. The first group of ten junior associates had just finished their two year training contract with the firm and were all starting to work as newly qualified lawyers in one of LegalCo’s departments. The second group were nine experienced associates with an average of 4,5 years of professional experience after their law qualification and the third group were nine recently promoted partners who had an average job tenure of 10 years. The sample was representative in terms of age, gender, number of years with the company and areas of specialization at LegalCo. All participants had been promoted to their new positions not more than three months prior to the first data collection point.

Data collection took place at two times: Time 1 (T1), when participants had just been promoted to a new position, and at time 2 (T2), an average of 16 months later. We found that this time span allowed them to settle into their new jobs, with regular relational patterns and styles emerging, but without so much time having passed that their ability to recall important actions and events was in jeopardy. The aim of T1 data collection was to understand the subjects and their new roles, and to get early input on relationship management in the new role; the aim of T2 data collection was to gather detailed information on how they had managed their relationships

over those 16 months, including a close look at career agency in networking development. As we did not want to impose any constructs on our subjects, we based our interviews on a broad definition of networking as behaviours that individuals use to develop and maintain relationships with others, relevant to their work and careers, whether internal or external.

Each data collection moment consisted of a semi-structured interview. Interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2 hours and were tape recorded and transcribed. T1 interviews created an understanding of the subject's new role. As participants had only been recently promoted we used open-ended questions to understand how this new position differed from what they had done before, and how they thought of their future development in this role. Particular emphasis was placed on how they were managing their key professional relationships, as well as probing how they felt about networking as an activity in general. Interviews at T2 were more structured and detailed than at T1. The aim was to ask the subjects what they had been doing to develop, manage, or dissolve their professional relationships. The interview started with open questions about highlights of the past year and any major professional or personal events, such as achievements or failures, to help anchor discussions in concrete events.

Data analysis

Given the lack of theory on mechanisms of career agency across the career life cycle, we opted for a grounded theory approach (Eisenhardt 1989; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Yin 1989). Data analysis proceeded in three phases. In a first phase we coded interview transcripts for each career stage by examining statements referring to career agency in relationship management in its widest sense. Following Miles and Huberman (1994), we used constant data comparison and iteration to first create categories. This process generated a variety of first order concepts—for example, establishing contact to partners at social events, which resulted in categories—for

example, “socialising with partners”. We then aggregated the categories into broader generative elements (Strauss and Corbin 1998) that described a particular dimension of career agency for which we abstracted labels for example “seeking out partners”. Looking at the practices of career agency for all professionals of the *same* career stage we found that some individuals were highly engaged in a variety of practices that expressed career agency which allowed us to categorise each professional as showing either high career agency (HCA) or low career agency (LCA). In a last stage we were then looking for commonalities and patterns among HCA and LCA service professionals *across* the different career stages describing overreaching mechanisms of career agency.

FINDINGS

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The first part describes the behaviours and practices of career agency at each of the three career stages and shows how differences in career agency play out for network development. For each respective career level we present the differences between high career agency (HCA) and low career agency (LCA) service professionals. We also show how career agency is related to perceptions of subjective career success at each career stage and portray how this differs between HCA and LCA. Based on these descriptions we identified three overreaching mechanisms of career agency that can be observed across the entire life cycle of professionals’ careers: The seeking out of particular individuals who may play an important developmental role at the respective career stage, the creation of imprinting ties, i.e. ties that are actively created at an early career stage yet that unfold (various) benefits only at later career stages and the playing on similarities to develop and deepen a contact. Our analysis describes these mechanisms and analyses how they are interrelated. Finally, the discussion and conclusion part discusses how the concept of career agency can provide new

insights for network dynamics. We especially highlight how career agency helps us to gain a better understanding about the nature and development of imprinted ties. We also consider the limitations of the research setting and how future research contributions may build on this work.

Starting out as a junior associate: High vs. low career agency

High career agency (HCA) juniors have a clear networking aim compared to their LCA peers which includes a clear sense of how their network (structure) should be developing in the future as the following quotes illustrate:

“I have built a good relationship with all the people, I wouldn’t say with everybody, with all the people that I want to”, OL, T2

“Your relationship and reputation outside the firm is going to assume greater importance going forward”, PPJ, T1“When you get to sort of this stage, senior associate or even partner level you need to re-establish all these links with other partners in different departments, well firstly because it is important that you sort of bond with all the other partners in the firm, but also from the professional perspective you know, if you need to get help from other departments”, OL, T2

LCA juniors anticipate network changes to be depending to a greater extent on contingency factors out of their hands such as the project size, department growth and project allocation. Amy a junior associate states:

“Networking in the office is completely driven by which case you work on and which room you sit in”, AM, T2

Especially when it comes to project allocation HCA juniors demonstrate a much greater sense of agency than their LCA peers. When prompted about how project work gets allocated LCA juniors convey an overwhelming sense of lack of influence. Ryan, a first year associate from litigation confirms that “You have to take on whatever you’re given”, RK, T2. Under this perspective luck, availability and specialisation are the main factors determining how work gets allocated. The following quotes highlight the perceived lack of career agency.

“When your job finishes you get a job with another partner, it’s very much a swings and roundabouts. It’s totally out of your control”, AE, T2, “I don’t actually have a choice as to who I work with, it is just

depending on how the clients come through and who has capacity at that time, ME, T1;...“Project allocation, I think a lot of it is down to chance, it also depends what you end up doing a lot of”, JM, T1

Only a few months after qualification HCA junior associates find that there are ways to influence project allocation as Oliver from corporate explains:

“I think it is important to recognise that the selection of you or other individuals for transactions is not wholly random, it is a mix between indicating your preferences and trying to get on with people, being an amenable person and third the social versatility that you have. I think it is important to get on with everybody” (OL, T1).

To seek out specific projects HCA juniors voice their preferences and seek out specific partners as Susan states:

“I think that it’s a case of standing up and shouting and saying ‘I want to do this’ otherwise it’s not going to happen and you would just get put on whatever was left over”, SM, T1

HCA juniors have a heightened sense of awareness who “the good partners” are and where they rank in terms of partner hierarchy. Oliver explains:

“If I was coming cold to the department but knew a little bit about the background of the ten [partners] I think the five that I would choose to work for would be the five that I have worked for”....“The seniority speaks for itself really, one of the transactions I work on at the moment has got three partners on and they are very clear what sort of levels of seniority they are and who is leading the transaction”, OL, T1.

HCA juniors try to make sure to work for specific partners.

“I’ve sort of always pursued the same strategy which is– not actively but passively chased work with certain partners and as a result I have ended up working for them”, OL, T1.

As illustrated by the previous citation their focus on seeking out work is first and most importantly on the person leading the project, the partner, a considerable difference that sets HCA juniors apart from LCA juniors who not only find it difficult to purposefully influence project allocation but the preferences they may voice will be focused on the work content as John, a junior with low career agency expresses:

“It is not a case of wanting to work for a particular partner that would be the guiding force, it’s more the type of work you are interested in”, JM, T1.

Table 1 summarizes the differences between HCA and LCA juniors who have been working as junior lawyers for three (at Time 1) to 18 months (at Time 2).

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For HCA juniors the established partner links represent an invaluable source of support for dealing with tricky and potentially career damaging situations. The most often described difficult situation at this early career stage is being allocated to a project they did not enjoy working on (sometimes because of the partner, sometimes due to the project content or due to the little learning and exposure potential of the work). While LCA juniors could feel very unhappy about an allocation they equally felt trapped in an unchangeable situation as Amy admits:

“I’m involved in a particular area of work which I just absolutely hate and I really, really would not want to get involved in this kind of thing on an ongoing basis”,“You just can’t talk to anyone about it. You just have to get on with it and so it’s quite difficult really”, AE, T1

Based on their rapport building activities with partners HCA juniors had built up the social capital to either avoid such predicaments in the first place or to actively address such situations.

“Those two [the appraisal partner and the work allocation partner] would be the two I would speak to if for example I had done two or three transactions which were of a very similar nature and I wanted to try and do something a bit different, I would go and have a word with them and say look rather than putting me automatically on the next job that comes in perhaps I can hold back and if one of these type of things comes in could you think about me?”, OL, T2

“I asked to be taken off the case because I had a very junior role”, SM, T2.

Comparing the statements of HCA junior associates with the recollections of HCA partners about their behaviours at a junior career level we found striking similarities in terms of patterns of behaviour. HCA partners reported having been selective about the projects they worked on thereby also revealing some of the strategies they had developed. Julian, a HCA partner comments on this very junior phase of his career:

“I tried as far as I could to say that I wanted to do public M&A...It is very difficult for an associate to be selective because you have to do as you are told, but the way that I did it was just to take on lots of work and to say, to warn everybody each time I took on work that I am getting very busy, and people tended to decide for me almost. If a partner came in and offered me something that wasn't quite so high profile I would say yes, sure, no problem, but I would, if something else came along that was high profile I would say I'd love to do it, can you square it with Brian [the other partner on the low profile project]?” (JP, T1).

Similarly the active seeking out of specific partners was part of their more or less explicit networking strategy at the time:

“I did make efforts from very early stages in my career to impress the right people, –when I qualified in the corporate department I spotted those partners who – I got a sense who were the partners that did the best, highest value transactions. And there are a handful of five or six partners who would do those” (JP, T1).

Table 2 demonstrates how differences in career agency are related to perceptions of career success in terms of satisfaction, perceived autonomy and empowerment, understanding of the internal hierarchy of the organisation as well as a sense of role clarity. After only 18 months in the new role HCA juniors have a distinctively different perception of their role in the organisation compared to their LCA peers.

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Experienced associates at mid-career level: High vs. low career agency

Looking at the next career stage, the HCA vs. LCA patterns observed at earlier career stages are confirmed and reinforced. Apart from the partner rapport that HCA associates use as an informal work allocation mechanism some HCA associates had set up an informal project trading mechanism among selected peers to ensure they got the exposure and experience they were seeking as Michael from finance explains:

“There's a lot of horse trading between the associates as to ‘I want to do this next time, you've done a lot of those. Do you mind if I do that?’“If I'm busy and I know that so and so has a particular interest in this deal then when the partner says ‘Have you got capacity?’ then I'll say ‘I'm up to my eyeballs but so and so is keen’ and they favour that way”, MN, T1.

As a consequence, HCA experienced associates showed an increased sense of identification with partners which made it easier for them to approach partners. Michael states:

“I don’t mind approaching partners to talk about problems. A lot of the difficulties and the pressure is perceived by the individual rather than actually applied by the partner or the firm”, MN, T1.

When re-starting from scratch in terms of relationship and network building HCA experienced associates applied the same patterns of actively seeking out specific partners to be assigned to good projects. Paul, a HCA experienced associate who was sent on a one year client secondment to a top US client of LegalCo illustrates the replication of the seeking out patterns he had applied as a junior associate at the beginning of his career with LegalCo.

“Every month there was an associates’ cocktail party and again I worked out who the partners were who were amusing and – you know, the top M&A partners, and I thought, I am going to go and press a few paths, and I also chose my partner” (PP, T2).

Having approached George, a top M&A partner at LegalCo’s investment bank client first in a social context allowed him then to ask to prove himself on a highly prestigious deal George was working on and thereby start a self-reinforcing spiral:

“I started getting very positive feedback and you know, by the end of the year I had done three or four deals with this partner who I had singled out, I had done two or three deals with this other guy who was also a top partner” (PP, T2).

It is at this intermediate career stage that HCA experienced associates start to branch out internally across departmental and organisational boundaries. As Michael explains:

“You have to make yourself known around the place as much as possible which is great fun, it’s all about staying friends with all people”, (MN, T1).

To raise their profile and create visibility HCA associates volunteer to organise trainings for associates from other offices or departments, engage in cross-departmental marketing activities or go on an internal secondment Alan, an experienced associate from dispute resolution explains:

“I did a number of seminars for associates in various departments to train them up, well I think it is important to do it, period, but it is also quite good in terms of networking and exposure because the other

departments value that, that is added value that you bring to their associates”, AB, T1).“I managed to do an internal secondment to the litigation department, it was also a good opportunity for me to be seen by a wider variety of people and number of partners than I would otherwise have been exposed to just by sitting down in dispute resolution”, AB, T1).

Looking at the recollections of HCA partners of this career stage, they refer to similar bridging behaviours as experienced associates such as actively seeking out key partners and clients and taking the initiative to bring them together at self-initiated social events. John, a litigation partner at LegalCo recalls:

“I hosted a table at the Burns supper – kilts and all the rest of it, it is organised by the Scottish Lawyers in London society so you just take a table and you can invite a variety of clients and a variety of partners from the firm and just have a good time.” (JB, T1).

LCA experienced associates did not greatly differentiate between partners in terms of the need to impress specific members of the partnership. With their focus on project content their networking activities were still more focused on exploring different team constellations. LCA experienced associates still found it difficult to establish closer relationships with partners as Fiona explains:

“I am not quite at the level where I would be actively trying to network with partners”, FA, T2

While it could be assumed that low career agency was an implicit choice of these experienced associates, observations indicate that LCA was not a chosen strategy but more a default setting which was perceived as a burden due to the unpredictability of work experiences and career progression. Andrew, an experienced associate from corporate states:

“You can ask to work on a particular deal, whether you’d get on it or not I don’t know”, AL, T1

First, LCA experienced associates referred to an increasing extent to “luck” or coincidence in various forms, either in terms of schedule capacity, a mentor or godparent who might take an interest in them, or also physical proximity such as office location and office mate

allocation as having a positive or negative impact on their progression as the following example quotes illustrate:

“One of the partners that I would really like to work with came into my office and said I have a really interesting price fixing case, do you have the capacity? And I said no, I don’t right now, I am just absolutely stumped. Now that job went and I am still sitting on my hands not doing a lot. And that is what I mean by luck”, DE, T1,

“The godparent partner is allocated to you, so it’s then a question of luck if you get along”, AC, T1

“The rest of the general corporate specialists are further up the hallway and so my interaction with them was certainly not as simple or as convenient as my location towards the energy team. I think that certainly has something to do with me having less contact to them”, KOS, T1

“My office mate has only recently joined the company, so he is not a great source of advice about the internal politics either, but he is a very knowledgeable source of task advice”, FA, T2

At the same time they recognized that competition on the peer level was increasing, yet the only career agency they referred to in terms of work allocation were formal mechanisms such as talking to the staff allocation assistant. The overall impression at this mid-level career stage was that of a widening gap between a HCA “in-group” of experienced associates who were part of established “elite” teams with elaborate informal mechanisms of project allocation and a floating around LCA “out-group” who was trying to find their way in a corporate environment that was characterised by a multitude of coincidences which might work in their favour or not. Table 3 summarizes how mid-career level professionals’ career agency patterns differ.

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Table 4 summarizes how differences in career agency at the mid-career level coincide with perceptions of job satisfaction, the quality of performance feedback and the clarity about the career track, especially how to make it to partner level. While this work cannot establish any cause-effect relationships the impression is that at mid-career level associates find themselves in a self-reinforcing system. Triggered by the level of career agency they get extensive or very little

performance feedback which is likely to reinforce their subjective positive or negative perception of career success.

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Reaching the top: High vs. low career agency partners

It may be surprising to find the same differentiation between HCA and LCA as well on partner level, a clear indication that also LCA service professionals can make it to the top of the organisation. As seen at previous career stages the differences between high and low career agency lies in the active seeking out of specific individuals, at this stage within or outside the organisation. Based on a heightened awareness of who were the most influential partners HCA partners purposefully developed strategies how to seek out these powerful peers as Julian admits:

“Before [making it to partner] the people I had to impress were the partners for whom I worked and they could be senior or junior whereas now I am a partner, there are certain partners who are more influential than others and that’s why they are on the list”, JP, T2

In sharp contrast to this assessment LCA partners claimed that

“Once you have made it into the partner club there are no more differences, we are all partners” (JM, T1).

HCA partners’ seeking out behaviours focus on internal branching out as well as internal-external bridging. Cross-departmental talks or cross-office presentations and updates ensured that they were known internally across the organisation which was a source of gaining work through internal referrals. William, a HCA partner from litigation explains:

“Similarly I have given talks in other offices and I try and keep the whole network with various lawyers up-to-date on certain issues”, WR, T1.

In comparison, LCA partners felt more insecure about internal bridging as well as about selling to clients as Brian states:

“I only know a couple of partners there in the whole tax department, and I don’t know them very well, and so if I need some tax input on a job it is not like there are people I can easily call up.....Selling work is not something I find hugely easy to be honest“, BG, T1.

One way how HCA partners approached clients was by using their internal bridging activities to accumulate knowledge that was available across the organisation and package it to attract clients. William, a HCA partner in litigation explains:

“You look at what we are doing across the network, internally, within the London office, within the entire firm. You try and pull it all together and then you find out where you could be going with that sector. How do you cross-sell between departments, how do you cross-sell between offices. And this is a way to land new mandates.”

As the comparison of statements from HCA vs. LCA partners indicates, the awareness of the importance of networking is significantly different between the two groups. While HCA partners stress the importance of networking throughout the career track LCA partners either downplay it or admit that they gained this awareness at a late career stage as the following examples show:

“I tend to deal with people I know on an as needed basis just as the job requires“, RK, T2

“I think it took a long time for me to learn that that [i.e. networking] was a necessary part of the game and in fact, you know, a hugely important part of the game“, NG, T1

Comparing the description of HCA and LCA partners and considering the social capital accumulated by HCA professionals at earlier career stages we find clear indications that role clarity as well as the sense of organisational integration is considerably higher for HCA actors when they reach partner level. Julian explains how his role as a partner has changed and how he settled into it:

“It’s a shift from being a doer to a thinker, planner, creator, checker. So my role changed to that.” (JP, T1)

While also HCA partners may find it initially difficult to assume this new role the adaptation process is clearly faster than for LCA partners. Julian explains:

“The first 3 or 4 months I was kind of struggling to keep my head above water and feeling like this is a very, very difficult thing, if it goes on like this - but now I feel strong and in charge and confident” (JP, T2).

This quick, sometimes rather seamless adaptation is also echoed by his fellow HCA partner William who states:

“As soon as you cross over into partnership you do just start leading the meetings, you lead the direction, you lead the strategy and that was almost instantaneous but it feels a very natural progression because that is exactly what you are working towards partnership for,” (WR, T1).

Other LCA peers report a sense of uncertainty about their role even 18 months after their promotion to partner:

“I think it is years before you become really clear about your role, where you should focus your efforts” (JM, T2).

“I don’t think I’ve really got a sense yet of how the place really ticks, you know what I mean”, (BG, T1).

Table 5 summarizes the differences between HCA and LCA partners in terms of seeking out particular organisational actors.

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Table 6 summarizes how the differences in career agency are related to different perceptions of subjective career success. While all professionals have made it to the highest organisational level, partnership, perceptions about the ability to get good staff, the ease of delegation and cross-departmental collaboration or the acquisition of new work differ greatly among newly promoted partners even 18 months after having been promoted to partner.

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Creating imprinting ties

Coding interview transcripts across the entire career life cycle at LegalCo we identified another key principle of HCA professionals' relationship building, the creation of imprinting ties, meaning the early formation of relationships that assume significant importance at later career stages. Looking at the variety of relationship building activities HCA juniors were engaged in, our analysis revealed that HCA junior associates laid the foundation for critical relationships at very early career stages with three groups: Much more senior associates within their departments, partners within their department and clients at their peer level. The following interview quotes illustrate the early creation of ties that have a long lasting impact:

“My first office mate was a very senior associate and he became a mentor even during traineeship and advised me later on questions such as the best team to join in corporate and how to approach the senior partner to ensure I would get into that particular team and even though he is now a partner we are still friends”, OL, T1

“You click with a particular partner and you're going to have more of a rapport on that kind of relationship and the work is going to flow from the partner to those associates more”, BC, T1

“I organised a big event for our clients at the more junior end, that usually wouldn't be invited but will be the big clients in about 10 years time, just to build up a bit of good feeling”, DS, T2.

The most immediate tangible outcome is derived from imprinted partner ties as Oliver explains:

“You often find that the team, that the composition of the team will repeat itself even though they are different transactions..... so from a junior perspective you know who the partners are that you want to work with and then you continue working with them on a hole variety of cases” (OL, T2).

The observation of cemented team constellations of recurring project teams that operate like cliques of a self-perpetuating system is also shared by LCA juniors who watch these recurring team constellations from the side-lines while they themselves experienced a high level of exploration with frequently changing partner and team constellations as Angela, a junior low on career agency explains:

“There seems to be particular people who only ever work with that partner and you know, so it seems quite strange in a way because you thought they just mix teams”, (AE, T1).

An additional outcome of the early foundation of strong partner ties through repeating team constellations is the early understanding of partnership criteria. 18 months after qualification LCA juniors who were not part of “team cliques” and had not built up strong partner ties referred to partnership track as “a bit of a mystery, I don’t have a clue, I don’t know how it works” (JM, T2). Also, they could not say who of their more senior peers was on partner track or were convinced that partner track would start far later.

Through their close contacts with more senior associates and partners HCA juniors had picked up on changes in attitude they had observed for people “on track”, an early hunch of the identity transformation that is coinciding with a move towards partnership. Patrick explains:

“The talks that you have with more senior people and you see how other people who are going through the process behave and react, that sends messages to you about what the [partnership track] process is like and how you have to behave to get to that stage, so you know” (PPJ, T2).

Some HCA juniors even state that the first two years of qualification are the decisive window in time to make up your mind about partner track while at the same time they suspect that even at this very early career stage partners assess the partnership potential of young associates.

“The partners start looking at candidates for partnership very early on, I wouldn’t be surprised if they were looking around my year and seeing who is worthy of being seriously considered for partnership even at this stage”, PPJ, T1.

“The first two years are decisive to signal partner track ambitions and to be spotted”, NW, T2.

While the immediate benefit of wining and dining junior clients seems rather limited, even junior client ties give junior lawyers a better understanding of clients’ needs and functioning combined with a level of social capital that they can draw on to access some industry and client information to enhance their own understanding when working on transactions. The following

table summarizes the imprinting ties and behaviours for HCA junior associates and compares them with their LCA peers.

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HCA partners referred to the same tie imprinting behaviours as reported by the juniors yet with the hindsight of being able to crystallise what the return of these imprinting relationships had been. Julian, a HCA partner from the corporate department reflects on his early cultivation of clients contacts at his peer level.

“The contacts that I built up from investment banks and corporate clients in the last seven years have not necessarily brought me transactions but they have helped me to impress on the deals and they have made my life more comfortable. They have allowed me to get information about clients, so often I can ring up and ask for a bit of information. And they have created an aura around me of being someone known in the City” (JP, T1).

Julian’s reflection on his career path confirms that the early creation of close ties to partners and senior associates at a junior level contributes to a high sense of role clarity combined with the feeling of high co-worker integration. Julian explains:

“I had friends in the partnership. And it helped me to understand very early on how partners looked at associates, what they were looking for in a good associate and what their expectations were” (JP, T1).

His reflections also point to the ease of socialisation through early close ties with senior peers as it taught him “the language of the firm” (JP, T1). Adopting “the language of the firm” and signalling to partners appropriate behaviours at a junior level increases the chances to be perceived as partner material. Comparing Julian’s statements with Jim, a LCA partner recalling his growing up in the firm, the sharp contrast becomes apparent:

“The one thing about being made partner is there is very little – rightly or wrongly there is very little insight given into what people are really looking for. It is a sort of amorphous thing, no one actually sits you down, and says right, you need to be a very good lawyer and these are the ten things you need because it is not quite that defined (JM, T1).”

As an outcome of imprinted ties cultivated from a junior level onwards HCA partners show a very different overall big picture comprehension of LegalCo than their LCA counterparts.

Julian explains:

“When I went to the partnership induction course, not much was a surprise to me. I kind of knew pretty much how the system worked, I knew which parts of the firm were profitable and which parts weren’t”, (JP, T1).

This statement is in strong contrast to what LCA partners report:

“You are not privy to budgets, you are not privy to more strategic marketing goals or strategic goals in the firm. But in the partnership induction process for the first time you see, you get to see an extract of the firm’s business plan” (BG, T1).

Last but not least HCA partners are systematic about using early formed external ties to bridge and leverage to generate additional external ties. William explains:

“I’ve got my time at university. That is a source of potential new recruits, it is a source of conference speaking, it is a source of academic credibility, it is a source of academic writing, it is a very big method of profile raising, and I use the university ties from way back in the past for articles that I then present at conferences to meet prospective clients” (WR, T2).

Table 8 summarises the benefits that HCA partners had been generating from the creation of ties at an early career stage with various actors. It also demonstrates how the benefits derived from the very same contact change and evolve with the career cycle.

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Table 9 demonstrates how this mechanism of career agency is repeated at partner level with different organisational actors.

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Playing on similarities

The third mechanism career agency that differentiates HCA from LCA service professionals is the playing on similarities. As the following analysis will show playing on similarities is a mechanism underlying the seeking out of particular individuals and the creation of imprinting ties that may hence act as an enabler or a hurdle to their activation.

The playing on similarities mechanism is activated by HCA associates by drawing on homophily which facilitates the creation of strong ties and contributes to the seemingly seamless formation of ties. While similarities on demographic characteristics such as gender, race, nationality or past schooling and university attendance are unchangeable individual characteristics the individual lawyer cannot manipulate, the career agency lies in the fact that HCA juniors were actively looking for any such similarities to act as a lynchpin and then actively leveraged them. HCA associates drew explicitly on homophily as a selection criterion whom to approach.

“Some American partners are going to be, if you like, more Eurofied. They will respect you more, whereas others will be more Apple Pie, you know, who is this little Brit, kind of thing. And I picked a couple of partners that I thought, these guys are doing cross-border deals, they are obviously very well respected, they are supposed to be very amusing, so I just went and pressed their paths” (PP, T2).

Searching for similarities also in terms of shared experiences and common acquaintances was also a conscious strategy to establish common ground with clients:

“Out of the three clients that were at that particular dinner I had indirect contacts with two of them without any of us knowing it until we got into discussions – it is just amazing how you can find some sort of common point down the track when you are talking to people. I think finding that common thread sometimes is the thing to – you know, building up some sort of rapport with them anyway without looking like you are consciously doing it”, (AS, T1).

LCA associates were either not aware of similarities that could act as lynchpins or decided that the active leveraging of similarities was not part of their networking strategy.

“I [Oxford graduate] don’t know if there is or there isn’t an Oxbridge internal network, I don’t have anything to do with it”, JMc, T2

“If I was going to go along the partnership track I know that I would have to work a lot more than I currently do on being blokey with the partners, you know showing that you laugh at the same jokes and you’re interested in the same things” (AC, T1).

Table 10 illustrates the difference between HCA and LCA associates in terms of leveraging similarities to create ties.

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Our transcripts also revealed how homophily acted in several ways as a hurdle to create rapport or to impede the identity transition needed for the next career stage. Female and foreign (non-British) associates described how the lack of similarity was perceived as a means of exclusion:

“I think there is a little bit of the sort of well she’s a girl she’s going to fall pregnant and have babies and go anyway” (MW, T1)

“People don’t view foreigners here as partner material”, (DS, T1).

In addition, they recognized themselves how their lack of similarity made it more difficult for them to act in a HCA way and seek out specific individuals such as clients or key partners and build imprinting ties.

“There is much more male bonding, going to the pub thing, or watching the games with clients”, SM, T2

“I hadn’t really got myself into their [the rainmaking partners’] pocket and – I think it is easier for a bloke to get themselves in the pocket of these men than it is for a woman but, I would emphasise that is a subtle difference”, NG, T1

“There’s not really a partner there to look out for you. Whereas I think if you’re English it’s easier to find people that -...yes they will connect to you, they will make sure you’ll be OK whereas if you don’t have that it’s much more difficult”, MW, T2.

DISCUSSION

This study combines a social capital perspective on network dynamics with the concept of career agency. Our study reveals three mechanisms of career agency that span across the career

life-cycle. This work goes beyond previous studies on career agency in network building by demonstrating how the seeking out is a stable career agency mechanism that can be traced throughout all three career stages with the focus of this activity evolving in terms of who are the key stakeholders that are targeted. Each career stage exhibits specific behaviours how the seeking out is enacted: As a junior there is a tight focus on individuals within one department or even one team who are part of the daily work interactions with a particular worry about project allocation. Some of these patterns carry over into the more advanced career stage, yet the seeking out focus for HCA experienced associates then shifts to internal bridging behaviours trying to seek out individuals across intra-organisational boundaries. At the last stage at partner level internal-external bridging becomes the main focus with the seeking out behaviours being directed at generating additional business. The comparison between HCA and LCA service professionals shows that there are distinctively different ways how service professionals go about performing their job and fulfilling their role in regards to the creation of ties even if they work for the very same organisation and at similar career stages. Some striking differences in perceptions and behaviours between HCA and LCA professionals may even point to the conclusion that LCA and HCA professionals literally seem to live in different worlds. It may come as a surprise to see that forward even at the top level of the organisational hierarchy LegalCo does provide room for LCA profiles. It will deserve further detailed investigation to tease out how LCA service professionals succeed and some may also reach partner level. What the interviews with LCA professionals suggest is that our overreaching mechanisms of career agency may still be valid but take a different shape. Instead of actively seeking out others, LCA professionals report that someone “somehow took an interest in me” thereby becoming a mentor which describes a passive form of seeking out. Being sought out by a mentor may also provide beneficial at later career stages such as a mentor putting their LCA protégé forward for a client secondment to help their client

management skills and generate positive performance feedback from outside for further career progression. In the same way, the passive form of “playing on similarities” is to attract the attention of others because of some shared demographic characteristics that then serve as lynchpins. Future research will have to focus on the question how LCA can still coincide with career progression and which other contingency factors may be relevant.

While networking behaviours and relationship building have been studied before, the longitudinal perspective of about 18 months for each career stage combined with the observation of three different career stages allows us to shed light on the question in how far ties that have been created at a previous career stage may gain importance at later career stages and what the benefits of such imprinted ties are (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Our findings on the role of imprinting resonate with the recent work of McEvily et al. (2012) whose work connects social networks with imprinting. Consistent with their findings we find that when and with whom ties are formed matters. While their quantitative approach demonstrates the value of imprinted bridging ties for early-career stage lawyers for firm growth rates at later career phases our qualitative study adds with its process level perspective the behavioural element, the career agency, in the construction of imprinted ties. Looking at the individual career progression we find that early-career stage ties of young lawyers do not generate value in the future per se but become valid through a deliberate thoughtful process of career agency with implies selection and choice (whom to target). Also, through the cross-section of three career stages our study can provide a more fine-grained picture of the exact benefits individuals can derive from imprinted ties. We find that these benefits not only cover immediately tangible support such as the provision of great learning opportunities by working on good projects or task and career advice by seniors but also contribute to the identity formation and adaptation that will be required at future career levels.

Last but not least the third mechanism “playing on similarity” connects to important work on networks and homophily (Ibarra, 1992). Our study shows how homophily can act as an enabler or a hurdle to the activation of the two other career agency mechanisms, the creation of imprinting ties and the seeking out of specific individuals. It reveals how in the context of LegalCo foreigners (non-British employees) and female lawyers perceive particular hurdles based on a lack of homophily which hinders the rapport building with specific individuals and impedes the reaping of the benefits of imprinted ties. The identification of this mechanism as an underlying groundwork to the activation of further career agency mechanisms helps to shed more light on the question of how homophily impacts networking behaviours and the accumulation of social capital. At the same time, we demonstrate that homophily as such is not enough. Playing on similarities is an act of career agency in itself that has to be actively pursued. We find that LCA service professionals who have the potential to play on similarities based on demographic characteristics may refrain from doing so while HCA individuals who may be lacking demographic similarities with most of organisational actors may actively engage in the creation of similarities. Future research should detail how homophily influences the level and scope for career agency.

Limitations of the study

Our results and conclusions are limited by several characteristics of the research design. First, the choice of the legal profession and its particular career path calls for a replication of this study in different contexts, including other types of professional service firms such as audit, consulting or banking but also in different industries. Second, due to practicality reasons we did not follow the same individual for eight years across three different career stages. We hence have

to make the assumption that the HCA versus LCA patterns and behaviours our service professionals reported at one career level would be consistent with HCA versus LCA behaviours at another career level. While we can draw on the full career progression picture from the partner interviews and the recollection of their networking behaviours at previous career stages these observations may suffer from ad-hoc rationalisations and inaccuracies.

Despite these limitations we believe that this research makes important contributions to the literature on network dynamics and career agency. We identify mechanisms of career agency that reach across the career life cycle. Based on previous work on the importance of imprinting ties our study adds a process perspective of how this imprinting is done and what its personal benefits are along the career life cycle. Last but not least we connect our findings to work on career agency and homophily and show how homophily acts as an enabler or a hurdle to the activation of the mechanisms of career agency.

TABLE 1:
Career agency at the junior associate level

	HCA	LCA
Seeking out projects	“I think you can play to it more, and you can have a bigger say in your own destiny, short term destiny in terms of which deal you get put on”. (OL, T2)	“Since I’ve been here I’ve just been allocated work I haven’t really had any say in what work I’ve done.” (NS, T1)
Seeking out partners	Use social events to approach partners: “One case came directly from me, probably from having had one glass of wine too many, and saying ‘I’d really like to work on the case that you are doing’”.(SM, T1) “You identify partners who you quite like to work for, and I wouldn’t say you don’t make yourself available to other people, but I think you certainly make it perfectly clear that you are available to work on such and such a job.” (OL, T1)	“You don’t get a good deal of choice [of partners you would like to work with].” (OG, T1) “I have always found it is quite difficult in a working environment if you have never really worked with someone, to build a relationship without the foundation of the work to get things moving.” (BJ, T2)
Seeking out important partners:	“One of the people that I may ask to be my godfather [official go-to-person, part of HR policy] is someone who I think is a very able partner and who I think is likely to be in another four or five years a very big name..... there is an element of clinging to their coat tails for want of a better phrase. I think it is important to have your own career in mind at all stages as well as other people’s. So you’ve got to be kind of mercenary about it.” (OL, T1)	“If you put ten [partners] in front of me, I wouldn’t know who was more senior”. (AM, T1) “Every six months you have lunch with this partner who has been assigned to be your godfather that you can speak to and I don’t think that works, I would never go to him and say I think I’m having problems.” (MW, T1)
Seeking in project	Partner/person focus: “When I look for a new experience, before looking for the client or for the content I look for the partner, I think that’s the most important thing for me when I am doing some work.” (OL, T2)	Content focus: “One of the partners is known for like technology work, that kind of thing so you know some people work with him because they’re interested in that but it’s not because you need to get to know a certain partner because it’s very open, very egalitarian.” (SS, T1)

TABLE 2:**Subjective career success at the junior associate level**

	HCA	LCA
Satisfaction	"I do seem to have ended up working for the partners that I might have chosen to work for (OL, T1)	"You don't get a great deal of choice who to work for." (OG, T1)
Understanding of internal hierarchy	"Partner seniority speaks for itself, for me it is very clear who is the most senior." (OL,	"If you put ten [partners] in front of me I wouldn't know who was more senior." (AM, T1)
Empowerment	"I think you can play it a bit more, and you can have a bigger say in your own destiny in terms of which deal you get put on", (OL, T1)	"Since I've been here I've haven't really had any say in what I've done" (NS, T1) "You have to take on whatever you're given." (RK, T2)
Autonomy	"So instead of now sort of being delegated to I can now delegate myself." (PPJ, T1)	"I suppose it's in one or two years that you start handling files down to juniors." (RK, T2)
Role clarity for partner track	"The talks that you have with more senior people and you see how other people who are going through the process behave and react, that sends messages to you about what the [partnership track] process is like and how you have to behave to get to that stage, so you know" (PPJ, T2).	"I mean my impression of partnership is something that is very tricky and I don't quite know how it works and I don't think that many people do, really. It's a bit of a mystery and so I'm not quite sure what they would be looking for for making up other partners in that department.." (JM, T1)

TABLE 3:**Career agency at the experienced associate level**

	High	Low
Seeking cross-departmental ties:	And you can do marketing in a way that involves other departments. I initiated a client seminar for marketing purposes that created networking opportunities to my client internally, networking opportunities for me to that client and networking opportunities for all the people from this firm meeting that client, meeting different bits of that client –“ (AB, T1)	When you are an associate, I think you deal with deal pressure much more as an associate than you do as a partner, it is very difficult to build up any kind of good relationship with people from different departments or office locations. (BG, T1) I would be open to it [client secondment] I think. I would question whether there is much choice involved, they tend to tell people but so far I have not been asked (AL, T2).
Seeking specific partners	Identify the important partners you need to impress: “You know who are the partners who are doing the good work, those partners who have particularly strong views about certain subjects”. (AS, T1) There are people whose opinion counts very much more than others, and it really is a handful of people. (AG, T1)	“I don’t think that any partners have more say than others in terms of the partnership track.” (AL, T1)

TABLE 4:**Subjective career success at the experienced associate level**

	HCA	LCA
Performance feedback	“Howard is general council at the client that I’m working with, now we do a lot of their work, so he knows the partners quite well, and so he will come back and tell me that Richard, you know, thinks very highly of me etc., so I do get good feedback” (FA, T2)	“Sometimes you don’t get feedback from the partners or other senior associates, either good or bad. So you are left in a bit of a limbo as to whether you are doing a good job or not.” (AL, T2)
Job satisfaction	“Certainly if I felt I wasn’t getting the kind of work I wanted to do I think I would say if X came in maybe could I be considered for it because I think it’s a two way process. It’s your career. If you don’t feel that you’re doing the kind of work that you want to do you should be able to say.” (PL, T1)	“The work I have had to date has been really crappy, well below what I am capable of doing, it is shelling peanuts.” (DE, T1)
Partner track criteria	“I have a few friends who are partners. And it helps me because it helps me to understand what you need to do and show to make it to partnership” (PP, T1)	“Being made partner ... there is very little – rightly or wrongly there is very little insight given into what people are really looking for. It is a sort of amorphous thing ... no one actually sits you down, probably rightly – and says right, you need to be a very good lawyer and these are the ten things you need because it is not quite that defined. (BM, T1)

TABLE 5:
Career agency at the partner level

	High	Low
Seeking out senior partners:	Assume internal committee position to approach specific senior partner: "I became a member of a committee where he is the chairman so I got to know him much better". (WR, T2)	No differentiation among partners once they have become a partner
Seeking out clients:	"We went round to about a dozen different clients, giving talks on human rights So there again a whole programme of offering people expertise and a taster so that they will know to whom to pick up the phone." (WR, T1)	"I would like to hit the ground running, generating work and generating revenues much faster than I did". (JM, T2)
Seeking cross-departmental ties/internal bridging:	Cross-departmental talks that often lead to cross-departmental jobs (WR, T1): "Through these various talks – I gave update after update after update talk – and that led on to my face being known internally so that people would then give me work." (WR, T1)	"I think there's going to be branching out, but it's easier to branch once you're fairly secure in your core". (JB, T2)
Seeking internal-external bridging ties:	Building a new practice: "You look at what we are doing across the network, internally, within the London office, within the entire firm. You try and pull it all together and then you find out where you could be going with that sector. How do you cross-sell between departments, how do you cross-sell between offices. How do you generate new work from these people, how do you develop the contacts in order to attract in the work." (WR, T1)	

TABLE 6:

Subjective career success at the partner level

	HCA	LCA
Ability to assess staff quality	“You know, even if you don’t work with somebody in your team you can tell who the good people are – just something about their level of commitment, the type of work that they are doing, the fact that when they speak at team meetings they make sense rather than they don’t really know what they are talking about. And you get a very good sense as to who the good people are and who the bad people are.” (JP, T1)	“You are not privy always to the views that other people have of particular other associates and trainees and people. So it is something of a trial and error” (DS, T1)
Ease of delegation	“I feel very much at ease with delegation, it’s a skill that I learned during my client secondment, I know that the people I delegate to will do a good job and I know when I have to come in and be a bit more hands-on.” (JP, T2)	“I think it will take a long time to know what things you can let go. It’s all part of delegation, it’s all part of trust in people. It’s all part of doing well. It’s where can I add value and at the moment I do find myself thinking is this something I actually should be getting as heavily involved with?” (JM, T2)
Selling new work	“Through these various talks – I gave update after update after update talk – and that led on to my face being known so that people would then give me work.” (WR, T1)	“It is something I feel quite conscious of meaning to do much more of now that I am a partner. And it is not something I find hugely easy to be honest.” (BG, T1)
Knowledge how partnership works	“I went to the partnership induction course, not much was a surprise to me. I kind of knew pretty much how the system worked, what capital and the points system and you know – I didn’t know the exact profits per point, but I had a reasonable thought that – I knew which parts of the firm were profitable and which parts weren’t. And all that was from having that network of partners from within the firm. (JP, T1)	“I don’t think I’ve really got a sense yet of how the place really ticks, do you know what I mean?” (BG, T1)
Ease of cross-departmental work	“Similarly I have given talks in other offices and I try and keep the whole network with various lawyers up-to-date on certain issues.” (WR T1)	“But I only know a couple of partners there in the whole tax department, and I don’t know them very well, and so if I need some tax input on a job it is not like there are people I can easily call up”. (BG, T1)

TABLE 7:

Creating imprinting ties at the junior associate level

	HCA	LCA
Create imprinting ties with partners:	<p>“The first two years are decisive to signal partner track ambitions and to be spotted.” (MM, T2)</p> <p>“There is an element of people knowing already who works well and who is good, and that is why you tend to get asked to work for the same partners time and time again.” (OL, T2)</p>	<p>”I think you have to get to a certain stage in your career when you start to cement your relationship with partners and at this stage, whereas I interact with them, I don’t feel as though I’ve got one of those relationships yet, this comes later.” (RK, T2)</p> <p>“Certain people have worked with the same partners over and over again, it just mysteriously transpires that they again end up on the same cases so I think they’ve built up their relationship.” (AC, T1)</p>
Create imprinting ties with client peers:	<p>“I also network with people outside the firm, clients on my level. Because if you take it logically through, as you are travelling through your career they will be too, and it makes sense in a way to keep pace with them. That last aspect is sort of the least important at the moment but it will assume greater importance later on”. (PPJ, T1)</p>	<p>“You don’t have a lot of client exposure when you’re a junior basically”. (AE, T2)</p> <p>“I tend to have the client relationship that the client wants, I don’t try and particularly foster that.” (OG, T2)</p>
Create imprinting ties with more senior peers	<p>“My very first office mate was a very senior guy and we became friends, so even if I have now moved out of that office I still meet him, ask him a couple of questions. He also advised me about what team in corporate I should join and how I should approach the senior partner.” (OL, T1)</p>	<p>“For some reason he has taken me under his wing a bit and I think he is slightly concerned about the fact that I am pigeon-holed on one case and he has been taking it upon himself a bit to get me involved in the other team.” (AJ, T2)</p>
Create imprinting ties with peers from other departments:	<p>“The university link isimportant because not only do I enjoy spending time with them outside the firm, but I enjoy spending time with them when I am here and I will meet them for lunch here or whatever..... in two or three years time they will be an invaluable source of information.” (PPJ, T1)</p>	<p>“Unfortunately we are all pretty busy so you hardly see any of your peers from the traineeship anymore except if they have joined the same department.” AJ, T2</p>

TABLE 8:

Reaping benefits of imprinted ties at the partner level

Imprinting actions of the past	Benefits of imprinting
<p>“At quite an early age did I try and develop relationships with investment banks. I got involved with the firm’s marketing, you know, every so often the partners will want to show a team to Lazard, and I would go along as the kind of good associate, so that the very junior people could call me and the senior people could call him, you know, up the chain. And so throughout the time that I was an associate I did build my list of contacts and I sent them Christmas cards and I invited them to wine tastings and you know, involved myself in the firm’s marketing efforts. I probably over-involved myself because it is a running joke that my expenses were bigger than any other associate’s because I would sort of take the firm’s clients out and have a laugh with them”. (JP, T1)</p>	<p>“Andrew and Carrie, these are two investments in clients that have paid off, we are now doing a lot of business with them” (DS, T1)</p>
<p>“I shared offices with senior associates who were about to make partner and because I was interested I asked lots of questions of them and of others, you know.” (JP, T1)</p>	<p>“As a result of that, you know, and because I was a kind of a good bloke I would get to know his friends who were partners and then I worked for a couple of the good partners and then he even took me for – you know, I got invited to his sort of partnership inaugural dinner because I was seen as a good young associate, one of the team, they wanted to motivate me, they liked me, come along, you know. And you get to – I was just kind of with them, you know, a mate, and I would get to hear snippets of the inside scoop as it were.” (JP, T1)</p>

TABLE 9:

Creating imprinting ties at the partner level

	HCA	LCA
Imprinting of external ties	<p>“I have a number of different areas of sources for new work. My time in Luxembourg. I’ve got my own personal network of contacts and friends across Europe, they are primarily friends but they are also an unbelievable source of potential contacts and potential work. I’ve got my time at University. That is a source of potential new recruits, it is a source of conference speaking, it is a source of academic credibility, it is a source of academic writing, it is a very big method of profile raising, and I may actually meet prospective clients at such conference”. (WR, T1)</p>	<p>“I have maintained some close relationships with lawyers at my previous employer MagicLaw and some with people I knew at Sydney. But particularly in relation to clients it is almost a complete change. There have been almost no common clients between the different firms”. (DS, T1)</p>
Imprinting ties with staff	<p>“I have already identified some people you would like to sponsor, because I know that I want the best people working for me”. (JP, T1)</p> <p>“I still, you know, just because I want to, I go out to lunch with them and I visit them. Some of them I do it because I want them to come back and join the department.” (JP, T1).</p> <p>“I still hang out with and it’s kind of important to me to have people on the coal face who I know and are sort of mates in a way”. (JP, T1)</p>	<p>“It’s often difficult to find an associate to take your work”. (RK, T2)</p>

TABLE 10:

Playing on similarities: Comparing HCA and LCA associates

	HCA	LCA
Drawing on homophily with peers/other associates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University - Junior school - Senior school 	<p>“I see people who I was at Oxford with probably two or three times a week, you know, we have lunch, in two or three years time they will be an invaluable source of information.” (PPJ, T1)</p> <p>School and/or university ties: “There is often a sort of cross pollination in that I might know friends from my university and I also know a lot of people from a different university who happened to be at my school or who happened to know someone at my school, not just school when I was 15 but school when I was 10. You know, there’s a sort of network of people and it does tend to find its way together in different ways. So you can often find a link back to somebody.” (OL, T1)</p>	<p>“I [Oxford graduate] don’t know if there is or there isn’t [an Oxbridge internal network]...I don’t have anything to do with it” (JM, T2)</p> <p>“I think once you get here it’s very much you’re all in the same boat, you’re all our trainees, pasts about schools and universities are sort of forgotten.” (AJ, T1)</p>
Homophily with partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personalities 	<p>Establish social relationship with partner of choice: “I would certainly actively go and speak to the partner concerned, but I would probably speak about other things but just hope that we had a sort of rapport which might make me an immediate choice next time something came up”. (OL, T1)</p> <p>Attracted to partners with similar personalities: “Their personalities are the sort of personalities that I would form social relationships with”. (PPJ, T2)</p>	<p>“If I was going to go along the partnership track I know that I would have to work a lot more than I currently do on being blokey with the partners, you know showing that you laugh at the same jokes and you’re interested in the same things” (AC, T1)</p>

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