

**Networking throughout the career cycle: The role of agency and imprinting****ABSTRACT**

Looking at the evolution of networking behaviours throughout the career life-cycle in a professional service firm (LegalCo) we find distinctive networking foci and activities that come with the tasks and roles of different career stages. Taking a closer look at networking behaviours *within* each career stage we identify and describe how the networking of high agency (HA) vs. low agency (LA) service professionals differs. We track the differentiation between HA and LA networkers across the career life-cycle from junior associate to partner and identify three overarching mechanisms of networking agency – seeking out (specific organisational actors), creating imprinting ties and playing on similarities – that account for distinctively different networking paths throughout the career life -cycle. We discuss the career implications and the role of homophily as an underlying groundwork that acts as an enabler or a hurdle to the activation of the identified mechanisms of agency.

**Key words: Networking, agency, imprinting, qualitative**

## **NETWORKING ACROSS THE CAREER CYCLE: THE ROLE OF AGENCY AND IMPRINTING**

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 acts 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) critique of structural determinism in network analysis applies well here, which they argue "neglects altogether the potential causal role of actors' beliefs, values, and normative commitments", in attempting to interpret and understand networking and social action. It is in this context that the role of agency becomes a key consideration for network research. On an individual level agency focuses on the question how actors purposefully create and shape 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, 2013). Yet in spite of calls to take agency more seriously in social network research (White 1992: p92) 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 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 career life cycle raises interesting questions about the role of imprinting ties (McEvily, Jaffee, and Tortoriello, 2012).

This paper addresses two related questions: First, it describes how networks and networking strategies evolve and change along the career life-cycle from a junior level to the most senior level. In this context our research focuses on the role of agency and examines how differences in networking agency play out at different career stages. The analysis allows us to also 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 possibly evolving utility of such imprinted ties is (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). Second, we aim to identify any overarching mechanisms of networking agency across the career life cycle to gain a better understanding what networking agency actually is, how it is manifested, and what its constituent elements are.

## **BACKGROUND AND RELATED LITERATURE**

Related literature falls into three categories: The growing field of network dynamics, studies of agency in individual networking processes, i.e. the creation and development of personal networks and research on the impact of imprinted relationships. While each field has developed into an area of research of its own our references to the findings in these three fields

will 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 and predict its direction 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. (2013) recent study on networking configurations features how different networking strategies and network structures are related to different attitudes towards networking and levels of agency. The study identifies three different networking types, Devoted Players, Selective Players and Purists, and describes how their networking behaviours differ, thereby ultimately resulting in different network structures, namely network density, size and efficiency. While the study covers an observed time span of about one and a half years into a new management role it is a too short time span to feature any longer term imprinting 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. The concept of imprinting has only recently attracted attention in network research. Focusing on the life stage or history of a particular tie or structure McEvily, Jaffee and Tortoriello (2012) find that bridging ties formed during early career stage have long-lasting benefits. While the cited works on network dynamics, agency and imprinting have created important insights there are still a lot of

questions pending at the interface for these fields. Bensaou's et al. (2013) study on the interplay of networking strategies, agency and network structures is limited to service professionals at the mid-career level and lets us wonder how the results may be modified over a longer timespan, for example for junior professionals or very senior employees. A dynamic focus starting with tie creation at an earlier career stage and the tracking of how these ties evolve and may gain importance at later career stages should help to shed light on the underlying mechanisms of McEvily's et al. (2012) observation.

## **METHODS**

Based on a lack of knowledge on mechanisms of networking agency at different career stages this study uses an inductive approach, grounded in individual case histories, to derive patterns of activities relevant to tie creation and development 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 10 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 9 experienced associates with an average of 4,5 years of professional experience after their law qualification and the third group were 9 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: T1, when participants had been promoted to a new position (within three months), and 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 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 agency in networking development. As we did not want to impose any networking 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 and an egocentric network survey. 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. The ego-network data from the T2 survey was available a few days before the second interview, which we used during the interview for data triangulation. At T2, subjects also completed a "closing" survey asking them to rate on a five-point Likert-scale a series of items assessing five scales concerning socialization and embeddedness in the context: task mastery (Chao et al. 1994; Morrison 1993; Morrison 2002), role clarity (Ashford 1986; Morrison 2002;

Rizzo, House and Lirtzman 1970), social integration with co-workers and clients (Chao et al. 1994; Morrison 1993), and organizational commitment (Allen and Meyer 1990).

### **Data analysis**

Given the lack of theory on mechanisms of networking agency, we opted for a grounded theory approach (Eisenhardt 1989; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Yin 1989). Data analysis proceeded in two phases. The first phase we used the scales Bensaou et al. (2013) had developed for their coding of networking types for mid-career level professionals in audit and consulting firms to rate the intensity of networking activities for our T2 interview data. This enabled us to attribute each participant to one of the three networking types – Devoted Player, Selective Player and Purist. In line with Bensaou's et al. (2013) categorization of networking types we labelled the Devoted Players as high agency (HA) professionals and the Selective Players and Purists as low agency (LA) professionals. We then coded our T1 and T2 interview data looking for commonalities and patterns among the HA vs. the LA service professionals across the different career stages. Based on Miles and Huberman (1994), we used constant data comparison and iteration to first create categories of networking actions. This process generated a variety of first order actions which resulted in categories. We then aggregated the categories into broader generative elements (Strauss and Corbin 1998) that described mechanisms of networking that we could observe across career stages.

## **FINDINGS**

The rest of the paper will be structured as follows: In a first part we describe the typical career path in a law firm across three career stages from starting out at junior level to reaching partnership. The description emphasises what stakeholders have a particular relevance at each career stage in terms of networking and how the network structure is impacted by the changes in

seniority. While our descriptions draw on the interview data gathered from junior associates, experienced associates and partners we also draw on the social network survey data to triangulate our qualitative findings and run pair-wise Scheffé mean comparisons between the three groups to detect any significant differences between the three career stages. The second most comprehensive part of the paper delves into each career phase and takes a close look at the differences between high agency (HA) and low agency (LA) service professionals and how agency plays out at each respective career stage. We identify three mechanisms of agency that differentiate HA professionals from their LA peers. Our analysis describes these mechanisms and how they are interrelated. Finally, the discussion and conclusion part focuses on the mechanisms of HA we discovered and elaborates on the contributions to be drawn from this for research on networking across the career life cycle. We also consider the limitations of the research setting and how future research contributions may build on this work.

### **Network evolution throughout career stages: Form junior associate to partner**

Based on the coding of the interview transcripts we find that each career stage can be characterized by a different focus in terms of which groups the service professional is mostly engaging with for networking purposes and what type of networking activities can be seen as typical. As a junior associate the immediate focus is on increasing the competence level of the newly qualified lawyer. Building up this task mastery mainly through seeking a lot of task advice from more senior colleagues results in the gradual increase of confidence in terms of being able to fulfil the role of a junior associate in an adequate way. While juniors have occasional interactions with partners, due to the hierarchical nature of the way the work is organised their partner exposure is rather limited. Also, at this junior stage, client interactions are rather limited as well. Juniors' most important networking contacts are more senior associates who provide

feedback and check their work as well as peers for social support. While junior associates may still have a lot of contact to former peers who they met during their two year traineeship before qualification, this peer network tends to fade away as they lose touch with former peers who have joined other departments. Apart from learning the job the focus at this early stage is to smoothly integrate into the department and to get to know at least on a name basis all department colleagues. Through the project work juniors explore the variety of topics, industries and partners who are heading the projects in their department. Typical networking activities are participating in internal social events and building up rapport with work colleagues who are on the same project team. With time, juniors will assume more responsibility for specific parts of the project work leading them to interact with clients more frequently which may include some form of client socialising. With increased experience they may start delegating some minor tasks to trainees.

Looking at the experienced associate level at 4 to 5 years after qualification client integration becomes the main focus of experienced associates. At the same time questions of organisational fit and the professional future become more pressing. With a high level of professional competence and a good sense of what is expected of an associate, experienced associates have established themselves as the first point of contact for operational issues at the client. They are handling the client to some extent on their own, knowing they can count on the partner for advice and input and as a point of last call. Establishing good client relationships is a focus of this career phase where associates try to strengthen ties with clients through more socialising but also through building up client industry knowledge. Experienced associates who do a client secondment may derive additional networking benefits from this secondment. First, the exposure to an important LegalCo client gives them a deepened understanding of the particular client needs which may open future selling opportunities. More immediately, the client

may become a source of partner feedback (“Andrew is the General Council at the bank I’m seconded to, 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, a partner at LegalCo thinks very highly of me, so I do get good feedback”, FA, T2) and may help to reinforce the associate’s reputation through positive client feedback.

In this increasingly busy career stage experienced associates rely on people below them to delegate some work to which implies that they get more involved in people management versus having a pure content focus. Being very busy has at least two implications: First, their peer network with people on the same level is decreasing for time issues but also because they may feel an increased peer competition at this level. Second, the long hours may also trigger a soul searching process about their professional future. Having spent a few years with LegalCo experienced associates also try to figure out if they see themselves staying with the organisation and hence pursue partner track or what alternatives they may like to explore.

At a partner level the network focus changes from an internal focus to an increasingly external focus. Due to the changed role demands partners see themselves dealing with existing clients in a much more comprehensive way including administrative tasks such as fee negotiations but also dealing with client complaints as well as strategic issues such as anticipating clients needs and follow-up selling. Partners spend a great amount of time on external networking activities to gain visibility and raise their profile to acquire new client mandates. At the same time they assume a brokerage role between their internal organisation and the clients. Assuming a greater internal management role in terms of contributing to LegalCo’s strategy, training and leading their teams and acting as internal knowledge brokers, partners refer to their peers (other fellow partners) for advice on these managerial issues. While they need to ensure that their teams work effectively partners will perceive an increasing distance between the associates who deal

with the operational work and themselves. Partner networks are hence mainly composed of two groups, clients and other peer partners and their networking aim is to broaden and deepen these ties for future business. Table 1 summarizes the networking contacts and activities at the three depicted career stages.

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To check for consistency and also to generate additional insights we used the ego network survey data and ran Scheffé mean comparisons between the three groups, junior associates, experienced associates and partners. The triangulation confirms our transcripts analysis. It shows that making it to partner level coincides with a big increase in partner networking while more junior staff becomes less important. We also find that at partner level the number of external, mostly client contacts increases dramatically compared to earlier career levels. In line with these observations the network structure changes significantly. Starting out with a tight-knit very dense network within one team in a specific department on a junior level, network density is continuously decreasing throughout the career cycle as service professionals branch out internally and externally and create new contacts outside their immediate group. The overall effective network size is hence increasing as is network efficiency. When it comes to social integration measures we find that organisational commitment and co-worker integration are the highest at the partner level and the lowest at the experienced associate level, indicating that this mid-career level is a phase of soul searching where the increasing peer competition is intensely felt and where questions about the personal future career path with LegalCo become more pressing. Table 2 details the significant differences between the three career levels.

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To shed light on the question how agency plays out at each of the respective career stages we then analysed networking behaviours and focus at each career stage separately. Interview transcripts revealed that there were considerable differences *within* each career stage. The following paragraphs detail in which respect networking behaviours differ among high agency (HA) versus low agency (LA) service professionals.

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

High agency juniors have a clear networking aim (“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) compared to their LA peers which includes a clear sense of how their network (structure) should be developing in the future (“Your relationship and reputation outside the firm is going to assume greater importance going forward”, PPJ, T1). LA 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. Especially when it comes to project allocation HA juniors demonstrate a much greater sense of agency than their LA peers. When prompted about how project work gets allocated LA juniors convey an overwhelming sense of lack of influence (“You have to take on whatever you’re given”, RK, T2). Under this perspective luck (“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), availability (“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) and specialisation (“I think a lot of it is down to chance, it also depends what you end up doing a lot of”, JM, T1) are the main factors determining how work gets allocated. Only a few months after qualification HA junior associates find that there are ways to influence project allocation: “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 HA juniors voice their preferences (“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) and seek out specific partners. With a heightened sense of awareness who “the good partners” are (“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”, OL, T1) and how they can be classified in terms of partner hierarchy (“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) HA 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 HA juniors apart from LA 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 (“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 3 summarizes the differences between HA and LA juniors who have been working as junior lawyers for three (at Time 1) to 18 months (at Time 2).

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For HA 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 was 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 LA juniors could feel very unhappy about an allocation (“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”, AE, T1) they equally felt trapped in an unchangeable situation (“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) since they did not perceive any possibility to change their assignments. Based on their rapport building activities with partners HA juniors had built up the social capital to either avoid such predicaments in the first place (“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) or to actively address such situations (“I asked to be taken off the case because I had a very junior role”, SM, T2).

Comparing the statements of HA junior associates with the recollections of HA partners about their behaviours at a junior career level we found striking similarities in terms of patterns of behaviour. HA partners reported having been selective about the projects they worked on thereby also revealing some of the strategies they had developed. Julian, a HA 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)."

### **In the middle as an experienced associate: High vs. low agency**

Looking at the next career stage, the HA vs. LA patterns observed at earlier career stages are confirmed and reinforced. Apart from the partner rapport that HA associates use as an informal work allocation mechanism some HA associates had set up an informal project trading mechanism among selected peers to ensure they got the exposure and experience they were seeking ("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?'"") which is another way to steer partners ("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, HA experienced associates showed an increased sense of identification with partners which made it easier for them to approach partners ("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).

Interestingly, when re-starting from scratch in terms of relationship and network building HA experienced associates applied the same patterns of actively seeking out specific partners to be assigned to good projects. Paul, a HA 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 HA 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 HA associates volunteer to organise trainings for associates from other offices or departments (“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), engage in cross-departmental marketing activities or go on an internal secondment (“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 HA 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).

LA 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. LA experienced associates found it difficult to establish closer relationships with partners (“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 LA was an implicit choice of these experienced associates, two observations indicate that LA was not a chosen strategy but more a default setting which was perceived as a burden due to the unpredictability of work experiences (“You can ask to work on a particular deal, whether you’d get on it or not I don’t know”, AL, T1) and career progression. First, LA experienced associates referred to an increasing extent to “luck” or coincidence in various forms, either in terms of schedule capacity (“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), a mentor or godparent who might take an interest in them (“The godparent partner is

allocated to you, so it's then a question of luck if you get along", AC, T1) or also physical proximity such as office location ("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 than my location towards the energy team. I think that certainly has something to do with me having less contact to them", KOS, T1) and office mate allocation ("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) as having a positive or negative impact on their progression. At the same time they recognized that competition on the peer level was increasing ("There are lots of lawyers at the experienced associate level who are scrambling to get access to some of these good pieces of work", DE, T1), yet the only 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 HA "in-group" of experienced associates who were part of established "elite" teams with elaborate informal mechanisms of project allocation and a floating around LA "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 4 summarizes how mid-career level professionals' networking patterns differ dependent on their level of agency.

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### **Reaching the top: High vs. low agency partners**

It may be surprising to find the same differentiation between HA and LA as well on partner level, a clear indication that also LA service professionals can make it to the top of the organisation. As seen at previous career stages the differences between high and low 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 (“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) HA partners purposefully developed strategies how to seek out these powerful peers while LA partners claimed that “Once you have made it into the partner club there are no more differences, we are all partners” (JM, T1). HA 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 (“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) which was a source of gaining work through internal referrals. In comparison, LA partners felt more insecure about internal bridging (“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) as well as about selling to clients “Selling work is not something I find hugely easy to be honest“, BG, T1). One way how HA 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 HA 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 HA vs. LA partners indicates, the awareness of the importance of networking is significantly different between the two groups. While HA partners

stress the importance of networking throughout the career track (“What is much more important to your ability to become partner is your ability to internally network. And that for me is the key”, JP, T1) LA partners either downplay it (“I tend to deal with people I know on an as needed basis just as the job requires“, RK, T2) or admit that they gained this awareness at a late career stage (“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 HA and LA partners and considering the social capital accumulated by HA professionals at earlier career stages we find clear indications that role clarity as well as the sense of organisational integration is considerably higher for HA 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.” While also HA partners may find it initially difficult to assume this new role the adaptation process is clearly faster than for LA 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 HA 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 LA 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). Brian, a LA partner in the finance department admits: “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 networking differences between HA and LA partners.

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### **Creating imprinting ties**

Coding interview transcripts across the entire career life cycle at LegalCo we identified another key principle of HA 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 HA juniors were engaged in, our analysis revealed that HA junior associates laid the foundation of critical relationships at very early career stages with three groups: Much more senior associates within their departments ("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), partners within their department ("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) and clients at their peer level ("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 ("It is a self-perpetuating system", DE, T1) is also shared by LA 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: “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”, as Angela, a LA junior states (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 LA juniors who were not part of “repeat teams” and had not built up strong partner ties referred to partnership track as “a bit of a mystery, I wouldn’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 (“It’ll be a few more years, they don’t really track you until a few more years down the line” (AL, T1). Through their close contacts with more senior associates and partners HA 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. “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 juniors even state that the first two years of qualification are the decisive window in time to make up your mind about partner track (“The first two years you know whether people are aiming to go on that track”) while at the same time they suspect that even at this very early career stage partners assess the partnership potential of young associates (“I think the first two years already actually you will ask yourself that question and also the partners will ask themselves that question”, MW, T2; “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", RK, T1).

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 6 summarizes the imprinting ties and behaviours for HA junior associates and compares them with their LA peers.

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HA 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 HA 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: "Senior associates who are

about to make partner speak 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 LA 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 imprinted ties cultivated from a junior level onwards HA partners show a very different overall big picture comprehension of LegalCo than their LA counterparts. “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), a statement that is in strong contrast to what LA 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 HA 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).

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### **Playing on similarities**

The third agency mechanism that differentiates HA from LA 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 HA 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 agency lies in the fact that HA juniors were actively looking for any such similarities to act as a lynchpin and then actively leveraged them. HA 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”, (KOS, T1). LA associates were either not aware of similarities that could act as lynchpins (“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) or decided that the active leveraging of similarities was not part of their networking strategy: "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).

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Our transcripts however 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 used 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 high agency way and seek out specific individuals such as clients ("There is much more male bonding, going to the pub thing, client socialising", SM, T2) or key partners ("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", NG, T1) and build imprinting ties ("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). Based on a lack of similarity and a rather small number of potential role models ("I really admire her from the professional perspective, yes a role model, the personal lifestyle is not a role model, what I need to find is a female role model who has done the two, who has made it to a partner and has a family life", AJ, T1) female and foreign associates also commented how the

identity transformation process to the next career level was hampered: “People on partner track build up the rapport with the partners in the sense that, you know, I am one of you in an informal way, we’ve got the same interests, we have the same family structure, we live in the same places, all those sorts of things, they create a life that resembles those around them but I do find it quite strange that there are no partners really to speak of, they don’t fit that type of profile, (AC, T1). The need to fit a dominant partner profile and the realisation that all sorts of partner similarities are instrumental for the rapport building may imply an insurmountable identity change for some associates as explains Anna, an Australian experienced associate: “If I wanted to be a partner and I do not even know if I could achieve that but I don’t even know if I’m prepared to rebrand myself if you like. I think I would be giving away too much of myself” (AC, T1).

On the other hand associates who “by nature” shared a series of demographic and personal characteristics with partners made the process of identity transition much more seamlessly as Julian, a British Oxbridge graduate confirms: “As I started getting to two, three years qualified, I started getting on very well with people who were either about to become partners or were junior partners, and that wasn’t through any effort on my part, saying I am going to get on well with these guys, it was actually just a natural thing that these people seemed to be the intelligent, bright, forward thinking and committed people, who were committed to their environment, committed to the firm, usually very amusing and good sense of humour and so on. And I found myself, you know, naturally becoming friendly with them”, (JP, T1). Table 9 summarizes the hurdles minority employees face for the playing on similarities as one key mechanism of high agency throughout the career life cycle.

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## DISCUSSION

Our study identifies three overarching mechanisms of networking agency describing how high agency professionals build their networks across the career life cycle. These mechanisms are the seeking out of specific organisational actors, the creation of imprinting ties and the playing on similarities. While networking behaviours and relationship building have been studied before, the set-up of this work allows us to identify agency patterns that reach across career stages and hence to identify patterns of agency that are exercised over a long time span.

This work goes beyond previous studies on agency in network building by demonstrating how the seeking out is a stable agency mechanism that can be traced throughout all three career stages yet the focus of the seeking out in terms of who are the key stakeholders that high agency professionals aim for will change throughout the career life cycle. Also, 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 HA 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 and most of the seeking out behaviours are directed at generating additional business. The comparison between HA and LA service professionals shows that we find distinctively different ways how service professionals go about performing their job and fulfilling their role in regard 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 HA and LA professionals may even point to the conclusion that LA and HA professionals literally seem to live in different worlds. A last observation about the seeking out mechanism is that it may come as a surprise to

see that even at the top level of the organisational hierarchy LegalCo does provide room for LA profiles. It will deserve further investigation to tease out the key mechanisms that make LA service professionals succeed and eventually reach the top organisational level.

Our findings on the role of imprinting resonate with the recent work of McEvily et al. (2012) whose work connected 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 (McEvily et al. 2012) our qualitative study adds with its process level perspective the behavioural element, the agency, in the construction of what later become imprinted ties. It is not just the incidental matching between newcomers with other peers or with superiors at critical career stages that lead to imprinting in any case. Our work shows that early-career stage ties of young lawyers do not generate value per se but become influential through a deliberate thoughtful process of 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 benefits individuals can draw 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 they also contribute to the identity formation and adaptation that will be required at future career levels. It is in this context that the link between imprinting and agency becomes again apparent: As our analysis suggests, high agency professionals have an elaborate sense of future potential exaptation of contacts.

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 networking agency mechanisms, the creating

of imprinting ties and the seeking out of specific individuals. Our work 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 playing on similarities as an underlying groundwork to the activation of further agency mechanisms helps to shed more light on the question of how homophily impacts networks and networking behaviours. At the same time we also find that playing on similarities is also an act of agency in itself in the sense that it has to be actively pursued. We find that LA service professionals who have the potential to play on similarities based on demographic similarities may refrain from doing so while HA individuals who may be lacking demographic similarities with most of organisational actors may actively engage in the creation of similarities.

#### **Future research directions and limitations**

Our ability to draw conclusions is 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 or banking but also in different industries. Second, as for practicality reasons we did not follow the same individuals across her/his different career stages we have to make the assumption that the HA versus LA patterns and behaviours our service professionals reported at one career level are consistent with HA versus LA behaviours at other 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 agency. We hope that this work will encourage future research at the interface between network dynamics, agency and imprinting.

**TABLE 1: NETWORK(ING) EVOLUTION THROUGHOUT THE CAREER STAGES**

Career stage	Network at time 1 (T1) and time 2(T2)
<b>Junior associate</b>	<p><b>T1:</b>            Focus on department            Split network between own department and ex-trainee network            Network content moving from social (ex-trainees) to high task focus: Learning the job: Tasks and role            Reach out to more qualified associates for input on task advice            Little client contact            Establish yourself in the team            Create a reputation            High level of exploration: Variety of transaction types, industries and topics =&gt; experience working with different partners</p> <p><b>T2:</b>            Settling down in department, sense of integration            Fading away of peer ex-trainee network who work in other departments            Broadening network within department            More client interaction, more responsibility, some client socialising            Some delegation                ⇒ Improving task mastery                ⇒ Building confidence in the new role                ⇒ Increased co-worker integration (sense of belonging)</p>
<b>Experienced associate</b>	<p>Much more client contact: Handling client on your own, strengthen client ties including client socialising, build up client industry knowledge                ⇒ Increased client integration            Dialogue with partners based on gained competence            More delegation and managing downwards: Increased people management vs. content focus            Increasing specialisation            Consolidation of peers (very busy and increased sense of peer competition)            Soul searching: Is it for me? Do I fit in? Do I want to become a partner?</p>
<b>Partner</b>	<p><b>T1:</b>            Shift from internal focus to external focus            Changed client role: Fee negotiations, complaints, follow-up selling, more client consulting and socialising, increased role consciousness (status change)            Raise public profile: Conferences, speeches, articles, quotes in business press            More managerial role internally: Billing, knowledge management, administration =&gt; Refer to peers for management advice            More delegation downwards, more people management, more distance to associates</p> <p><b>T2:</b>            Stronger and more partner (= peer) ties            Bigger external network: Clients, expert associations, external lawyers</p>

TABLE 2: SIGNIFICANT MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CAREER STAGES

		1 = Juniors	2 = Partners	3 = Experienced associates					
	Definig variable	Cluster number	Cluster mean	Cluster comparison (	Mean difference	p value	mean di	F	p-value overall
<b>Social integration</b>	Co-worker integration	1	4.13	1 to 2	-0.23	0.80		3.72	<b>0.0434</b>
		2	4.36	2 to 3	0.93	0.06			
		3	3.43	1 to 3	0.70	0.13			
	Organisational commitment	1	3.31	1 to 2	-1.09	0.02		9.25	<b>0.0014</b>
2		4.40	2 to 3	1.57	0.00				
3		2.82	1 to 3	0.48	0.41				
<b>Network structure</b>	Effective size T2	1	6.07	1 to 2	-5.50	<b>0.09</b>		2.77	<b>0.0869</b>
		2	11.58	2 to 3	2.93	0.51			
		3	8.64	1 to 3	-2.57	0.56			
	Efficiency T2	1	0.49	1 to 2	-0.14	<b>0.08</b>		3.52	<b>0.0488</b>
		2	0.64	2 to 3	0.02	0.93			
		3	0.61	1 to 3	-0.12	0.16			
	Density T2	1	0.56	1 to 2	0.19	<b>0.04</b>		4.23	<b>0.0295</b>
		2	0.37	2 to 3	-0.04	0.83			
		3	0.41	1 to 3	0.14	0.14			
	Proportional density T2	1	0.85	1 to 2	0.31	<b>0.01</b>		6	<b>0.009</b>
		2	0.54	2 to 3	-0.08	0.74			
		3	0.62	1 to 3	0.23	<b>0.07</b>			
<b>Interaction content</b>	External (relative) T1	1	0.09	1 to 2	-0.16	<b>0.09</b>		2.72	<b>0.0902</b>
		2	0.25	2 to 3	0.08	0.61			
		3	0.18	1 to 3	-0.09	0.47			
	Task (relative) T2	1	0.64	1 to 2	0.23	<b>0.09</b>		3.44	<b>0.0521</b>
		2	0.41	2 to 3	-0.02	0.97			
		3	0.43	1 to 3	0.21	0.14			
	External (relative) T2	1	0.07	1 to 2	-0.18	<b>0.08</b>		3.52	<b>0.0491</b>
		2	0.26	2 to 3	0.18	0.11			
		3	0.08	1 to 3	0.00	1.00			
	Increase external (relative)	1	0.07	1 to 2	-0.18	0.08		3.52	<b>0.0491</b>
		2	0.26	2 to 3	0.18	0.11			
		3	0.08	1 to 3	0.00	1.00			
<b>Contacts level of hierarchy</b>	Hierarchy T1 Partners	1	2.78	1 to 2	-5.67	<b>0.00</b>		47.51	<b>0</b>
		2	8.44	2 to 3	6.35	<b>0.00</b>			
		3	2.09	1 to 3	0.69	0.62			
	Hierarchy T2 Partners	1	2.89	1 to 2	-7.11	<b>0.00</b>		16.73	<b>0.0001</b>
		2	10.00	2 to 3	7.14	<b>0.00</b>			
		3	2.86	1 to 3	0.03	1.00			
	Hierarchy T1 Associates	1	7.56	1 to 2	6.56	<b>0.00</b>		16.65	<b>0.000</b>
		2	1.00	2 to 3	-4.91	<b>0.00</b>			
		3	5.91	1 to 3	1.65	0.36			
	Hierarchy T2 Associates	1	4.00	1 to 2	3.29	<b>0.05</b>		4.75	<b>0.0205</b>
		2	0.71	2 to 3	-3.71	<b>0.04</b>			
		3	4.43	1 to 3	-0.43	0.94			
Hierarchy T2 External	1	1.33	1 to 2	-5.10	<b>0.03</b>		5.01	<b>0.0172</b>	
	2	6.43	2 to 3	4.43	<b>0.07</b>				
	3	2.00	1 to 3	-0.67	0.93				
<b>Interaction partners Location</b>	Location T1 my office but another expertise	1	3.44	1 to 2	-1.11	0.64		4.68	<b>0.0184</b>
		2	4.56	2 to 3	3.28	<b>0.02</b>			
		3	1.27	1 to 3	2.17	0.16			
	Location T2 outside the company	1	1.78	1 to 2	-4.79	<b>0.03</b>		4.62	<b>0.0225</b>
		2	6.57	2 to 3	4.29	<b>0.08</b>			
		3	2.29	1 to 3	-0.51	0.96			

**TABLE 3: HIGH AGENCY VS. LOW AGENCY JUNIOR ASSOICATES**

	<b>HA</b>	<b>LA</b>
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 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 4: HIGH AGENCY VS. LOW AGENCY EXPERIENCED ASSOCIATES**

	HA	LA
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)

**TABLE5: HIGH AGENCY VS. LOW AGENCY PARTNERS**

	HA	LA
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: CREATING IMPRINTING TIES: HIGH AGENCY VS. LOW AGENCY JUNIOR****ASSOCIATES:**

	<b>HA</b>	<b>LA</b>
Create imprinting ties with partners:	“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)	Strengthening partner relations happens later: “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) “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)
Create imprinting ties with client peers:	“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)	“You don’t have a lot of client exposure when you’re a junior basically”. (AE, T2) “I tend to have the client relationship that the client wants, I don’t try and particularly foster that.” (OG, T2)
Create imprinting ties with more senior peers	“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)	

TABLE 7: PARTNERS: REAPING BENEFITS OF IMPRINTED TIES

	<b>Imprinting actions</b>	<b>Benefits of imprinting</b>
Benefits from imprinted ties with client peers:	“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)	“Andrew and Carrie, these are two investments in clients that have paid off.” (DS, T1)
Benefits from imprinted ties with senior associates:	“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) .	“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.”
	<b>HA</b>	<b>LA</b>
Benefits from imprinted external ties	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.	Keep in touch, yet not very useful: “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)
Creating imprinting ties: Staff	Early spotting of talent/people they like by partners: “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) “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). “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)	“It’s often difficult to find an associate to take your work”. (RK, T2)

TABLE 8: HA VS. LA ASSOCIATES: PLAYING ON SIMILARITIES

	HA	LA
Drawing on homophily with peers/other associates: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University</li> <li>- Junior school</li> <li>- Senior school</li> </ul>	<p>“I see people who I was at <b>Oxford</b> 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><b>School and/or university ties:</b> “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"> <li>- Personalities</li> </ul>	<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 <b>rapport</b> which might make me an immediate choice next time something came up”. (OL, T1)</p> <p>Attracted to partners with similar personalities: “Their <b>personalities</b> 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>

**TABLE 9: HOMOPHILY BARRIERS AT DIFFERENT CAREER STAGES**

Junior associate	<p><b>Demographics:</b> “If you have a look at the cross section of the partners, if you are male, white, middle class, you have been to the right school and the right university you know, you are able to communicate in a way which is in harmony with the way that some of the partners can communicate, well then you are fine”. (RK, T1)</p> <p><b>Gender:</b> “There isn’t anybody [role model] in my team and that’s a real disadvantage. Because I think it actually really helps to have role models near in your close environment and it’s just unlucky I think, it kind of depends on which team you’re in. So that’s one thing where I definitely think that would be one reason why I would leave LegalCo because I think it’s quite important”. (MW, T2)</p> <p>“I also think that there are partners here who bully females more than males.” (MW, T1)</p> <p>“I think I mean there’s only one female partner in the whole of the finance department. It quite shocked me when I found out.” (NS, T1)</p> <p><b>Foreigners:</b> “I have yet to know one Australian associate who has actually been made a partner here. (ME, T2) ... LegalCo are expecting them to go back and they only want them for a few years”. (ME, T2)</p>
Experienced associate	<p><b>Social class:</b> “Speaking with the right accent, I think it’s an informal you’re one of us but I think the accent thing is something that is quite tangible because there are people who tell me they are Scottish and have lived in Scotland for 20 years and speak with the most upper middle class British accent.” (AC, T1)</p> <p><b>Foreigners:</b> “I think you will find that none of the Antipodeans that are here, whatever, Australians, or New Zealanders, would ever expect to be in the running for a partnership at LegalCo.” (FA, T2)</p> <p>“I would say it is more of a problem in Antipodeans establishing links within English society, there are closed doors, not openly closed doors, but closed doors that you’ll come up against, that make it a bit more of a harder battle, I think.” (FA, T2)</p> <p><b>Foreigners:</b> “A lot of the people coming in from abroad, are used to turn the wheel at the lower level, but will never actually make it to partnership within LegalCo”. (FA, T2)</p> <p><b>Gender:</b> “That’s it actually, a very typical example, Helen is a Canadian and she is 12 years running, she is not going to make partnership. Sarah is a New Zealander and she is I think about 10 years qualified, now obviously they weren’t going to make her a partner.” (FA, T2)</p>
Partner	<p><b>Gender:</b> “I think you have to shout about it a bit more, you have to be very good and it is not going to happen for you quite as naturally as it is going to happen for a bloke who is good. There is a subtle difference.” (NG, T1)</p>

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