

**Networks and Identities:
Reciprocal Influences on
Career Processes and Outcomes**

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Abstract

Sociologists have long viewed the unfolding of a career as intimately tied to a patterned series of relationships that gradually define a person's sense of self. While empirical findings and conceptual developments indicate a strong link between networks and careers, on one hand, and between career and identity development, on the other, little work thus far has examined the reciprocal relationships between networks and identities as they affect and interact with career phenomena over time. In this chapter we review what we know to date about how networks affect careers and encourage research that investigates the social processes by which networks and identities co-evolve with career experiences and transitions. We extend the current static treatment of networks and identities, highlighting instead the importance of dynamic conceptions.

Networks and Identities:

Reciprocal Influences on Career Processes and Outcomes

Networks of relationships are social resources as well as social contexts in which careers take shape. A large body of empirical research shows evidence of the central role networks play in the career development process. Networks directly shape career outcomes by regulating access to jobs, providing mentoring and sponsorship, channeling the flow of information and referrals, augmenting power and reputations, and increasing the likelihood and speed of promotion (e.g., Brass, 1984; Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973; Higgins and Kram, 2001; Podolny and Baron, 1997). Social networks also affect careers indirectly as settings in which processes such as socialization and identity development unfold (Barley, 1990; Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Career decisions are socially embedded and thus influenced by the social networks that affect referrals and opportunities as well as the development and change in people's identities over time.

While the past decades of research has yielded a great deal of knowledge about what kinds of networks produce desirable career outcomes and what situational characteristics shape the possibilities within which people construct their social networks, we know much less about what leads people to form networks with particular characteristics, nor do we understand well what factors produce significant changes in people's networks over the course of their careers. In this chapter we develop the view that an important motive for network interaction is the construction, maintenance and alteration of valued social identities. This perspective departs from a view of the formation of network ties in organizational settings that is premised

exclusively on conceptions of economic and social exchange (DiMaggio, 1992). Instead of acting only to maximize, or to trade-off, instrumental and expressive resources, individuals and organizations, by forging, maintaining and dissolving network links, develop, manage and change their identities (Kilduff, Ibarra and Tsai, forthcoming).

A focus on identity, as well as current career trends, necessarily brings into focus the need for greater attention to network dynamics. Understanding what leads people to form relationships, in turn, sheds light on what leads them to alter fundamentally their patterns of interaction with others. We argue that an identity perspective on the relationship between networks and careers is especially relevant in a world in which, increasingly, career changes are self-initiated rather than imposed as part of formal organizational socialization or career planning processes, and the experience of role transition and career change has also become more frequent (e.g., Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Careers are not only more fluid and self-designing; the context in which they unfold has also changed. Organizational trends such as restructuring, alliance-formation, globalization and the externalisation of work as well as the rise of free-lance careers and the increasing use of internet-based job boards and professional communities suggest a work environment in which multiple, sometimes competing groups, rather than a single firm, provide potential anchors for a person's professional identity. In this chapter we encourage research on the interactions among multiple identities and networks that integrate or segment those identities, as well as speculate about the dynamic processes that lead to career development and change.

This paper is organized two sections. In the first section we review what we know about how networks affect careers. We review evidence of direct effects on career outcomes, as well as the large body of conceptual and empirical work on mediators of

the relationship between networks and careers, in particular, access to resources and identity development. While empirical findings and conceptual developments suggests a strong link between networks and career outcomes, on one hand, and between networks and identity construction processes, on the other, little work thus far has examined the reciprocal relationships between networks and identities as they affect and interact with career phenomena over time. The second section argues that future studies must investigate the social processes by which networks and identities co-evolve with career experiences and transitions, and suggests directions for research on how people adjust, adapt and change the relationships that form such a critical part of their work lives.

With a plethora of research findings comes a plethora of books and articles that provide overviews of basic network terms, methods and controversies. Our objective in this paper is neither to attempt a comprehensive review of the relevant dimensions of networks nor to catalogue the current debates in the field on the advantages and disadvantages of closure versus structural holes, or strong versus weak ties. Rather, we refer the reader to excellent reviews that already exist. (see Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003; Seibert, Krainer and Liden, 2001 and Kilduff and Tsai, 2003 for excellent recent treatments).

RESEARCH TO DATE ON NETWORKS AND CAREERS

This section focuses on the current state of research on career outcomes of networks as well as the processes by which networks shape professional and managerial careers. Networks directly shape career outcomes by influencing job attainment,

promotion and income (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1985, Brass, 1984, Boxman, De Graaf & Flap, 1991, Belliveau, O'Reilly and Wade, 1996, Podolny and Baron, 1997; Seidel, Polzer and Stewart, 2000). They also directly affect a variety of processes that mediate the relationship between networks and careers, including channelling flows of information, resources and sponsorship; regulating influence and reputation; providing socialization, mentoring and providing models for constructing identities (Granovetter, 1973, 1985; Brass, 1981; Westphal and Milton, 2000; Higgins and Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Zuckerman, 2003; Morrison, 2002).

We rely on some basic career concepts to organize current findings and identify promising areas for future work, notably the external and internal career (Schein and Van Maanen, 1977) and the distinction between instrumental and psychosocial resources (Kram, 1985). The external career consists of extrinsic measures of career success, objectively observable achievements such as salary and promotions; the internal career refer to individual's subjective feelings of satisfaction, accomplishment and passion with their careers. Instrumental career resources include information, influence, and sponsorship; psychosocial resources include socialization, mentoring, friendship and identity formation (Kram 1985).

As illustrated graphically in Figure 1, we attempt to capture the current state of knowledge on the relation between networks, careers and identity in three parts. First, we summarise the research demonstrating direct effects on external career outcomes such as job attainment, promotions and salary, on one hand, and internal career outcomes such as satisfaction, on the other. This essentially correlation body of empirical evidence has relied on many of the mediating mechanisms outlined in Figure 1 as theoretical

explanations for the effects of networks on career; but, empirical evidence of the actual causal mechanisms linking networks characteristics to career outcomes is scant. Second, we provide an overview of research delineating the two primary mediating mechanisms - - instrumental and psychosocial resources -- that explain how networks shape careers. Third, we summarize network research on contingency factors moderating the effect of networks on careers outcomes and mediating variables, in particular gender and race. Finally, we conclude with an assessment of key gaps in this tradition. We note that the bulk of network research on career outcomes has favored the external career to the detriment of the internal career, as well as examined instrumental rather than psychosocial mediators. We note as well that the feedback arrows and dynamic processes that shape both networks and careers are often mentioned but infrequently investigated.

Effects of Networks on External and Internal Career Outcomes

A wealth of empirical studies has established direct linkages between network characteristics and career outcomes. Social networks affect external career outcomes including promotion and advancement to senior ranks (Brass, 1984; Burt, 1992; Podolny and Baron, 1997), compensation (Boxman et. al., 1991; Belliveau, et. al., 1996; Burt, 1997, Seidel et al. 2000), entry into the organization (Granovetter, 1973, 1995; Bridges & Villemez 1986, Montgomery, 1992, Petersen et. al. 2000) access to occupations (Lin & Dumin, 1996, Lin et. al., 1981) and performance (Sparrowe et. al 2001). Networks also affect internal career outcomes, notably people's own subjective experience and satisfaction with their work life and role (Gersick, Dutton, and Bartunek, 2000).

External Career: Jobs, Compensation and Promotion. Job attainment is one of earliest career outcomes studied by network researchers. Granovetter's (1973) seminal findings on the strength of weak ties inspired a large number of empirical studies; these generally support his claim that individuals with many weak ties are at an advantageous position in the job market compared to those with redundant ties (see Granovetter, 1982 for a review). Empirical support for the strength of weak ties argument, however, is strongest for finding a job as compared to other outcomes such as promotion and salary (Boxman, De Graaf & Flap, 1991; Lin, Ensel and Vaguhn, 1981; Granovetter, 1982).

As network research shifts attention from career outcomes to processes, recent research on job attainment has accordingly recognized the multistage nature of process, and explored network effects at the various stages of recruitment and hiring process. Fernandez and Weinberg (1997) attempted to sort out the mechanisms by which ties lead to job offers. They found that job applicants who were referred by a current employee of the bank had more appropriate resumes, better-timed applications, were more likely to be interviewed, and ultimately receive a job offer than applicants who were not referred by a current employee. The authors postulate that two mechanisms may account for these differences: information and influence. In terms of information, social ties communicate otherwise unobtainable information about the job and employer, on one hand, and about the applicant, on the other. For example, employee referrals increase the likelihood of a job offer by obtaining a better match between the new hire and the job requirements (Fernandez, Castilla & Moore, 2000). Social ties are also multiple sources of influence, including a "reflected basking" effect that favourably influences the employer's view of the candidate (Seidel, Polzer and Stewart, 2000).

The role of referrals appears to be particularly important in explaining how network ties affect the job attainment prospects of women and minorities. Petersen, Saporta & Seidel (2000) observed that most of the effects of race on hiring outcomes are explained by network disadvantages at the referral stage, before the organization is comes into the contact with the potential candidates. Similarly, Fernandez and Sosa (2003) find that most gender bias creeps into the hiring process via network processes associated with referral. This recent body of work indicates that job attainment is a multi-stage process that may be affected by different network characteristics at different stages, and as we discuss further below, begins to deepen our understanding about the interplay between networks and job attainment by pointing to mediating effects.

A more limited body of empirical evidence indicates that networks also affect compensation (Boxman et. al., 1991; Beliveau, O'Reilly and Wade, 1996; Burt, 1997). While the social network literature on compensation is much smaller than the compensation literature within economics tradition, it has revealed some unique insights about the managerial wage setting process. Jobs found through weak social ties and work related informal contacts lead to higher income (Bridges & Villemez, 1986). However, these effects greatly diminish when controls are added for worker productivity. Consistent with Fernandez, Castilla & Moore's (2000) findings, network ties appear to enhance income primarily through better job matching rather than through unfair advantage.

Network ties to insiders also appear yield advantages when it comes to salary negotiation (Seidel & Polzer, 2000). This mechanism explained salary differentials

between racial majorities and minorities: Members of demographic minorities, who were less likely to have existing ties to insiders, lacked negotiation power on starting salary.

The effect of networks on compensation is not restricted to the focal individual's network; relative differences in social capital between the focal individual and key decision makers appear to also have an effect. Belliveau, O'Reilly et al. (1996) found that, CEO compensation depends not only on the CEO's social network, but also on the network of the compensation committee chair. Compensation committee chairs with higher absolute social capital were able to set lower CEOs pay while CEO's with relatively higher social capital than their committee chairs garnered higher compensation.

Networks also increase the likelihood and speed of promotion (Brass, 1984; Boxman et. al. 1991, Podolny and Baron, 1997; Burt, 1992). In a study of managerial careers, Burt (1992) found that managers with non-redundant networks advanced more quickly in their careers. These ties provide information and resources that actors can access in competitive situations including mobility contests. Following Burt, Podolny and Baron (1997) argued different networks provide different resources or benefits associated with mobility. They found that mobility is indeed enhanced by having a large, sparse network of informal ties for acquiring information and resources. But, consistent role expectations are also important for performance and mobility, and these arise from a small, dense network of individuals (Podolny & Baron, 1997). As discussed further below, although these authors make theoretical arguments about mediating mechanisms, their empirical evidence concerns exclusively the direct effects of networks on promotion.

Internal Career: Satisfaction. Networks have powerful effect on attitudes and perceptions, and thus may predict a range of internal career phenomena including job satisfaction, perceptions of ability to take risks, feelings of belonging or acceptance, and organizational commitment (see Rice, 1993, and Ibarra and Andrews, 1993 for reviews). Although empirical work in the direct link between network characteristics and career satisfaction has been scarce, recent qualitative studies (Gersick et al, 2001) and conceptual treatments (Stephens, 1994) have renewed interest in this connection.

Mediating Effects of Networks on Career Outcomes

As noted above, although most researchers who have studied the direct effects of networks on career outcomes have inferred mediating mechanisms, few have provided direct evidence of these effects (Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden, 2001 is a notable exception); at the same time, many studies about proposed mediators, as summarized below, fail to measure career outcomes. Following evidence provided by Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) that the effects of social networks on career success are fully mediated by access to information, access to resources, and career sponsorship, we use these categories to review the literature on how networks affect access to these instrumental resources, and how these, in turn, affect both concrete job prospects and satisfaction with one's career. Subsequently, we review the literature on how networks affect access to psychosocial resources including socialization, mentoring and role modeling, and identity formation. In this domain, empirical evidence linking mediating processes to external and internal career outcomes is scarce.

Instrumental resources. Network ties are conduits of valuable information for career success (Podolny & Baron, 1997; Fernandez, Castilla & Moore, 2000; Seibert et al. 2001, Morrison, 2002). The literature on egocentric networks emphasizes the information benefits of personal networks characterized by weak ties, non-redundant relationships, and high range or diversity. Weak ties serve as bridges through which socially distant ideas, influences, or information reach the individual (Granovetter, 1973) and as means for contact with people of higher status (Lin, 1982). Strong ties, by contrast, tend to connect people to similar others, and thus, a network high in strong ties is more likely to link the individual to interconnected parties and redundant resources, and to confine interaction to people of similar social and occupational status. More recent work reveals, however, that in work organizations people use strong and weak ties to access different kinds of valuable information (Shah, 1998).

People who are centrally located within organization-wide webs of interaction also have greater control over scarce resources and enjoy a broad array of benefits and opportunities unavailable to those on the periphery of the network (Burt, 1982; Brass, 1992; Ibarra, 1993). Network centrality is correlated with perceived power, promotion (Brass, 1984), and ability to diagnose the "political landscape" (Krackhardt, 1992). Networks not only provide direct and indirect access to resources, they also serve as signals of the current or likely future status of an individual. Being perceived to have connections to the "right people," for example, has a positive effect on individuals' reputations as effective performers (Krackhardt and Kilduff, 1994). Network structure shapes career outcomes by influencing reputation in organization (Brass, 1984) and evaluations of a person's potential (Ibarra, 1995, 1997). Social networks also affect the

extent to which individuals learn, comply with and internalize organizational and occupational norms regarding the presentation of self (Ibarra, 1999).

Kram (1985) defined sponsorship as connections that support a junior person's career advancement by opening doors, providing exposure, protection, and challenging assignments. Although the terms mentor and sponsor are often used interchangeably, we will limit our discussion here to these instrumental roles, and treat mentoring relationships below under our discussion of psychosocial support (Kram, 1985). A broad literature documents the positive effects of sponsorship relationships on promotion (Dhreher and Ash, 1990) and job satisfaction (Chao et al, 1992). But, although scholars have begun to integrate research on social networks with work on mentoring and careers (Seibert, et al. 2001; Higgins and Kram, 2001), empirical work on how networks influence sponsorship dynamics remains scarce.

Psychosocial mediators. Early socialization in the organization has significant effect on the careers of individuals. Morrison (2002) found that characteristics of newcomers networks, in particular, size, density, strength, range, and status related to three different indications of learning: organizational knowledge, task mastery, and rule clarity. Characteristics of their friendship networks, in turn, affected their social integration and organizational commitment.

Social networks enable career development by providing sources of mentoring and role modelling relationships (Higgins and Kram, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). Mentors provide counselling with respect to personal and professional dilemmas; ongoing support, acceptance and confirmation; and, eventually, mutual caring that extends

beyond the requirement of the job (Kram, 1985). By modelling valued behaviors, attitudes and skills, they help the junior person achieve competence and a clear professional identity (Morrison, 2002; Sparrowe et. al. 2001). Although mentors have been identified as a critical part of a broader, career-related network, little empirical work to date has investigated what kinds of networks facilitate the formation of mentoring relationships; the link between mentoring and both external and internal career outcomes, however, is better established (Higgins and Kram, 2001).

The development of a professional identity has been a central theme in the careers literature (Schein, 1978). Although identity development occurs in the context of a network of relationships, little empirical research has investigated the relationship between identity and networks. Networks are not only sources of information and support, they are also the contexts in which individuals discover, construct and transmit their identities (Coleman, 1988, Foreman & Whetten, 2002). Following Coleman (1988), a recent stream of network theory and research considers as providers of social identity, conveying a sense of personal belonging within a collectivity and clear normative expectations associated with one's role (Podolny and Baron, 1997). Network ties enable individuals to improvise their identities and undergo career transitions successfully (Ibarra, 1999). Recent research has begun to study networks, not as instruments for achieving preconceived career ends, but career defining ends in and of themselves (Gersick et. al., 2000).

An interesting avenue for exploring the effects of networks on careers as mediated through their effect on identity arises from recent work suggesting that different identities are advantageous at different stages in career (Zuckerman et. al.

2003). Complex, multivalent identities are advantageous because they afford greater flexibility while simple, focused identities are advantageous because they facilitate evaluation. Focused identity is helpful in gaining entry into an arena but subsequently leads to increasing limitations (Zuckerman et. al. 2003). In the following section, we will further examine potential consequences of such interactions for career outcomes.

Moderators of the Effects of Networks on Careers

Among the various contingency factors that appear to moderate the effect of networks and careers, most empirical work has focused on gender and race. Studies involving the moderating effects of personality characteristics are rare, although certain psychological variables like self-monitoring appear to influence career success through their effects on networks (Mehra and Kilduff, 2001). As discussed in more detail below, these studies raise important questions about how different people and groups create and benefit from social networks as their careers unfold.

Demographics variables like gender, race, religion, occupation and age shape the network structure and composition through availability, exclusion and identity dynamics (Ibarra, 1992, 1995; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 2001; Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass, 1998; Molica, Gray and Trevino, 2003). In skewed organizational settings, in which white men dominate in positions of power and authority, women and minorities tend to experience both exclusionary pressures from the dominant group and heightened preferences for same-race or gender ties as a basis for shared identity (Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass, 1998). Identity confirmation, however, is a network formation mechanism that operates independently of membership in a similar social

category (Milton and Westphal, 2003; Mollica, Gray, and Trevino, 2003). But, although homophilous (i.e., within group) ties provides access to valuable psychosocial support, they also limit access to instrumental resources (Ibarra, 1993; Mollica et al., 2003). Empirical evidence of the disadvantages of homophily in ample is studies of the career disadvantages faced by ethnic minorities: marked disadvantages in recruitment (Petersen, et al., 2000) and salary negotiations (Seidel & Polzer, 2000) disappear once network composition is accounted for.

A combination of exclusion and identity dynamics appears to lead women and minorities to develop "functionally differentiated" informal networks: one for access to task-oriented networks and resources through internal ties to the mostly white, male co-workers who populate the power structure, the other, through external ties to same-gender or race contacts that can provide both psychosocial support and non-redundant information or resources (Ibarra, 1993, 1995, 1997). They also explain findings that members of underrepresented groups particularly benefit from cosmopolitan networks. Westphal and Milton (2000) found that minority directors tend to be more influential if they have direct or indirect social network ties to majority directors through common memberships on other boards (Westphal and Milton, 2000); and ethnic businesses tend to be more successful to the extent that their owners develop wide-ranging network contacts outside the immigrant community (Oh, Kilduff, and Brass, 2004).

Identity concerns also explain the finding that successful women and ethnic minorities tend to be well connected to both minority and majority circles and have wide-ranging networks that extend outside focal work units and firms (Ibarra 1995;

Thomas and Higgins, 1996). The pertinence of male colleagues as role models can be limited since ways of conveying competence and confidence are often gender-typed (Ibarra, 1999). More generally, networks have a significant role in shaping professional identity, cultural beliefs about race and gender, and consequently, self-perceptions that affect career relevant decisions (Correll, 2001). However, the bulk of empirical studies have concerned themselves with the effect of demographic characteristics in regulating the relationships among networks, instrumental resources and the external career.

Summary of current research

Empirical findings have converged on several principles, including the value of diverse networks, weak and strong ties and structural holes or bridging positions (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1985; Higgins and Kram, 2001). Contingency approaches followed, delineating the characteristics of people and situations that make being connected in one way or another more or less useful (Burt, 1997). These studies generally conclude that strong, redundant and weak, non-redundant ties serve different purposes (Podolny and Baron, 1997; Higgins and Kram, 2001); the former are more closely associated with the external career and instrumental resources, while the latter enhance the internal career and access to psychosocial resources. This picture is complicated when the moderating effects of industry or organizationally demography are considered: strong and weak, redundant and non-redundant ties appear to be differentially useful for members of minorities and majorities (Burt, 1992; Ibarra 1995, 1997), but the effects of numerical representation (the social environment) still need to be untangled from the effects of identity (individual motives and preferences in building networks).

Many of the potential relationships and feedback loops and in the summary model (Figure 1) have been rarely investigated. Among the mediating variables, the relationship between social identity and social networks has been remarkably under-investigated. Yet, social psychological processes such as social comparison, categorization and attraction, which shape social identity, provide the conceptual underpinning for prevalent network theories. Similarly, while the social networks within which individuals are embedded have effects on their social identity development, but identity also affects social networks, specifically those aspects of identity that are ascribed rather than achieved. Demographic characteristics such as gender and ethnicity are particularly salient aspects of individuals' identities, and can have strong effects on network ties, and through these ties, on career outcomes. The effects of career outcomes may also be indirect: career changes, for example, can trigger identity changes that lead the focal person to seek out and build a different network configuration.

Further, no empirical research has tested a dynamic model. While networks affect careers, it is also likely that career outcomes affect a person's network position and characteristics, as well as the instrumental and psychosocial mediating processes. Career success brings prestige, status and visibility (Kotter, 1982) drawing network members to the focal person, and leading him or her to be further included and sought out for information and advice. The resulting changes to the network might be direct, for example, more high status and external contacts may be drawn to the network.

In sum, we know little about how networks emerge and about the processes produce significant changes in networks over the course of an organization's life-

cycle or a person's careers. We suggest two reasons why the dynamic study of networks is essential to understanding the complex relationships among networks, identity and careers. First, careers develop in passage through transitions. Although career transitions have been conceptualized as requiring major changes in role relationships and networks, these transitions typically have not been studied with network methods. Second, the pace of change in careers and the organizations in which they unfold has increased such that a network perspective premised on assumptions of stability rather than change runs the risk of distracting researchers from the most promising questions.

RECIPROCAL INFLUENCES OF NETWORKS AND IDENTITY ON CAREER DYNAMICS

Although networks have been thoroughly studied as conduits for information and resources, we still know little about the role they play in creating and shaping identities. Social networks socialize aspiring members, regulate inclusion and convey normative expectations concerning roles. As such, they confer social identity (Podolny and Baron, 1997). Further, people adapt to new professional roles by experimenting with provisional selves that represent trials for possible, but not yet fully elaborated professional identities (Ibarra, 1999). Network characteristics potentially affect the creation, selection, and retention of these possible selves as the essential processes -- selective observation and imitation -- are highly dependent on incumbent professional networks, from which are selected more or less adequate models for identity trials. Network characteristics such as the number and diversity of models, the emotional closeness of relationships, and the extent to which models share with the focal individual salient social and personal characteristics are likely to affect what possible selves people try and test. These networks, however, are not static inputs to the

adaptation process. Rather, they evolve in concert with people's identity experiments. As new role aspirants seek more suitable models, they alter their networks and forge new relationships premised on new possible selves.

We take as given, therefore, that social identity emerges through network processes: the people around us are active players in the co-creation of who we are at work. Work identities are created, deployed and altered in social interactions with others. Identities, therefore, change as people change roles, jobs and organizations (e.g., Becker and Carper, 1956; Hill 1990; Ibarra, 1999). How people negotiate, with themselves and with others, what identities they craft as they assume a new work role, and what "raw material" serves as input to that crafting process, however, has only begun to receive empirical attention. Exploring the reciprocal interaction between networks and identities is particularly pertinent in a world in which individuals enjoy considerable choice regarding occupation, employer, and career paths (Albert, et al, 2000).

Identity and Network Change in Career Transition

Just as few studies have examined networks over time, few attempts have been made to explore the role of networks of relationships in transporting an individual from one role to the next. Career transitions not only require the learning of new skills and competencies but also the development of new or altering of old relationships. Thus, the transition process is facilitated or hindered by the relational context -- the set of relationships with peers, seniors and juniors inside and outside the firm --- in which it takes place (Hall, 1996; Kram, 1988).

Moving into a new career or learning a new line of work is a social learning process in which people become active participants in the practices of a social

community, constructing new identities in relation to this community and its members by participating in initially peripheral yet legitimate ways (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Every entrance into a new community network of relationships represents a departure from a previous set of contacts. In career change the process of assuming a new professional identity unfolds in parallel with a process of “becoming an ex” and is rarely a simple matter of adaptation to an existing and easily observable role but rather a process of identifying or creating one’s own possibilities (Ebaugh, 1988; Ibarra, 2003a). Our current theories, fashioned with empirical work on early career socialization, well-institutionalized status passages, and easily identifiable role incumbents, are not well equipped to explain the dynamics of changing well-entrenched professional identities and making work role transitions in which both the destination (i.e., what career do I want next?) and processes for getting there are relatively undefined at the outset.

Network studies can clarify influences on the necessary transition period that lies between role endings and beginnings, a time when identity is multiple, ill-defined and provisional (Bridges, 1989; Turner, 1969). This transition period appears to be shaped by small alterations in a person’s work activities, their social networks, and the self-narratives they construct to explain why they are changing (Ibarra, 2003). Transitions may be facilitated by dual network tasks – forging new connections with people and groups who can help a person in transition explore possible selves, while at the same time ending or diluting the strong ties within which outdated identities had been previously negotiated (Ibarra, 2003). Encounters with people in alternative careers provide validation for changes a person may be contemplating and knowledge about the feasibility and attractiveness of new options, such as free-lance work (Kunda,

et al., 2003). Further, in the process of “becoming an ex” people establish ties that are compatible with the desired future “self;” these ties preceded the actual change, “pulling” the individual into the new role informally, rather than being formed later as a function of the new role requirements (Ebaugh, 1988). Commitment to a new career escalates as salience and intensity of relationships premised on that career increase; at the same time, an eroding commitment to the old career, its professional norms and referents unfolds with decreased social contact in that sphere (Hoang and Gimeno, 2003; Stuart and Ding, 2003).

Diluting the strength of old ties and networks is as important as creating new connections. Old identities are the result of earlier identity negotiations (Swann, 1987) in which the interaction partners form images of the focal individual that are consonant with those identities, therefore, come to expect a particular set of behaviors. With public, repeated interaction, the focal person becomes more committed, even locked-in, to that identity (Swann, 1987; Shlenker, et al, 1994). New or distant acquaintances, by contrast, not only provide models and safety but also form a substitute normative community within which new identities can be negotiated without sanction (Ibarra, 2003b). Stuart and Ding (2003), for example, found that university scientists who were socially connected to ex-colleagues who had left academic to work in biotech firms were more likely to leave academia for biotech themselves. These extra-university ties, they argue, facilitate the formation of a reference group that condones what the scientific community sanctions (Stuart and Ding, 2003).

CONCLUSION

This chapter reviews the development of research on networks and careers to date. The field has come a long way from the simple correlational studies between network characteristics and career outcomes such as like job attainment or hierarchical position. A broad range of recent research has untangled a variety of mechanisms and contingency factors that regulate the effects of networks on careers. However, there remain many riddles in the field which are yet to be unresolved and many important emerging questions to be addressed. In particular we focused on two areas for further research and theory development. First, we argued that future network research should focus on subjective career processes and outcomes, including the development of social identity and satisfaction with one's internal career. Second, we argued that future research is needed to explore processes of self-reinvention and examines transitional states between clearly articulated identities and well-established network roles. We suggest that social identity theory provides a fruitful foundation from which to consider the dynamics by which networks change over time. Of critical importance for further theoretical development and empirical testing are questions concerning the sequencing of identity and network changes at critical life junctures and status passages.

While these remain key questions for the future, we suggest a need for greater theoretical clarity in specifying the dynamics of network emergence and change. We note how punctuated equilibrium, complexity and evolutionary theories are already informing network scholars, and suggest how these theories can further inform our work (Perry-Smith and Shalley, 2003).

These promising new direction requires new conception of networks, and potentially, new methods. Conceptually, we advocate a view of network behavior that extends beyond the currently dominant instrumental or exchange perspective. An identity perspective provides a theory of motives for this new view: Instead of acting only to maximize, or to trade-off, instrumental and expressive resources, by forging, maintaining and dissolving network links, people develop, manage and change their identities. Methodologically, traditional approaches within the social sciences have tended to neglect processes of reciprocal causation and coevolution concerning individuals and the networks within which they are embedded. But these reciprocal and co-evolutionary processes underlie many of the important mediating processes that determine the shape and course of careers. We conclude by suggesting that future research should shift focus from how networks provide advantage in a fixed or stable environment to how networks help people or organizations learn and change.

The networks within which people are embedded have important consequences for the success and failure of their careers, whether objectively or subjectively defined. Over the past decades we have learned a great deal about what kinds of networks produce desirable careers outcomes and what situational characteristics shape the possibilities within which people and organizations construct their social networks. Future theory and research stands to benefit from a more complex, dynamic and interactive view of how careers unfold alongside a shifting array of personal and professional relationships.

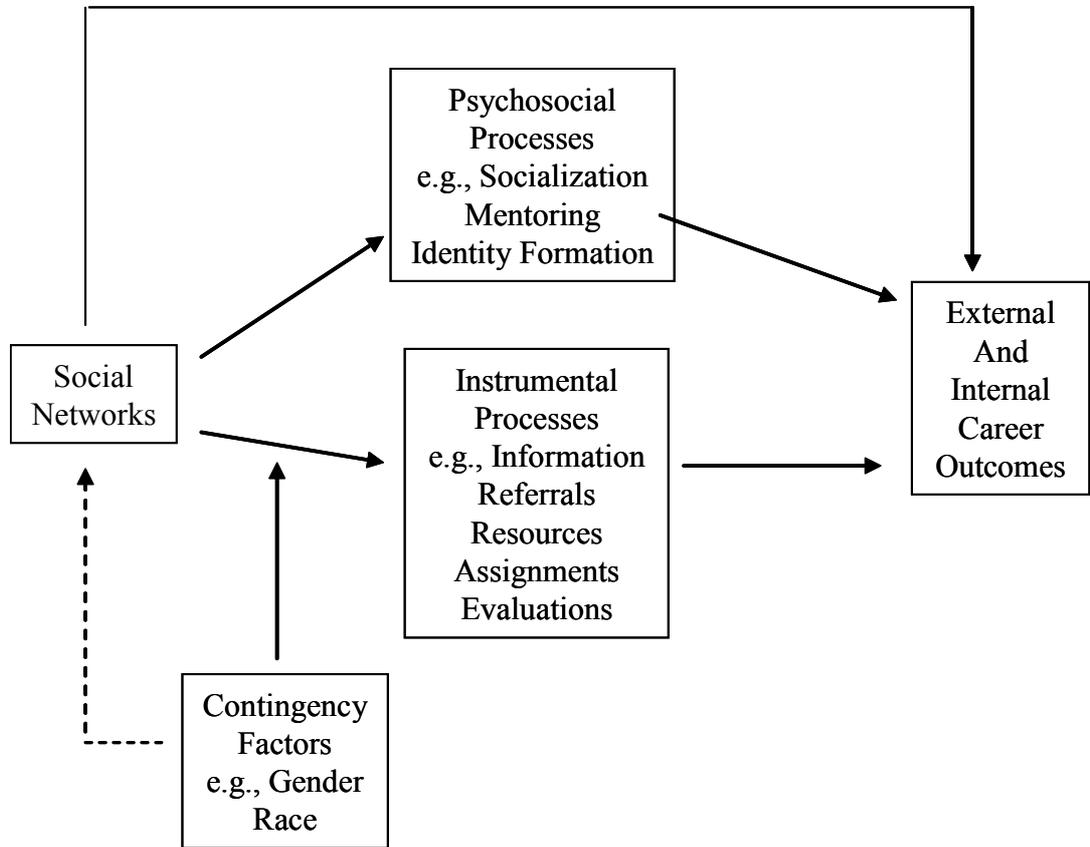


Fig. 1: The Landscape of Research on Networks and Careers

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