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**Client Embeddedness
of Service Professionals**

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Abstract

The embeddedness literature has provided rich insights into the constituents and consequences of firm-level relational arrangements; much less is known about their construction and dynamics. In particular, there is paucity of research about how individuals participate in the construction of embeddedness of inter-firm relationships. This is particularly important to our understanding of professional service firms (PSF's), where client-professional social relations are crucial to the performance of work. Our study is concerned with the mechanisms of how junior service professionals become socially embedded with clients. We develop a measure of embeddedness based on junior professionals' self-assessment of their social integration with clients and then induce, through grounded theory building, what distinguishes junior professionals who score high on this measure from those who score low. Our data come from survey and in-depth interviews with 68 respondents recently promoted to client-facing roles in three PSF's. We discover that young professionals who find themselves more socially integrated with clients rely on framings, norms and strategies that lead them to focus on clients at the expense of partners. Alternative career logics provide basic ingredients to constructing such (more) embedded relationships with one over another key stakeholder in their future. These findings suggest that development of embedded relationships requires trade-offs and focus by the individuals at the core of inter-firm relations. Our study contributes to an understanding of the social structures surrounding economic action as fragmented and conflicting, and highlights the importance of agency in embeddedness construction.

Keywords: professional service firms; embeddedness; clients; careers

The social embeddedness of economic exchange has been a topic of great interest to organizational scholars (Granovetter, 1985; Dacin, Ventresca & Beal, 1999; Uzzi, 1996, 1997; Zukin & DiMaggio, 1990). Embeddedness refers to the contextualization of economic activity, that is how economic exchange is informed by social relations and related socio-cognitive, cultural, and political institutions (Dacin et al., 1999, Zukin & DiMaggio, 1990). When engaging in exchange relationships, people rely not only on self-interest as a guide for action but also on motives derived from the patterned social relations to which they belong (Granovetter, 1985). For instance, exchange between an employee and a supervisor or peers is informed by the nature of the social identity constructed over time amongst these relations (Podolny & Baron, 1997), and a firm's exchange with outside partners will be informed by the trust, fine-grained information transfer, and joint problem-solving arrangements that go beyond fulfilling the terms of the economic transaction at hand (Uzzi, 1996). Failure to establish embedded relationships may lead to lower survival chances for firms (Uzzi, 1996) and reduced upward mobility for individual actors (Podolny & Baron, 1997). In contrast, embedded ties may improve the exchange of resources and information and, more generally, enhance coordination and learning. Understanding the mechanisms and sources of embeddedness, then, is important (Dacin et al., 1999).

It is particularly important and potentially valuable to our understanding of professional service firms (PSF's), where 1) exchange with external economic actors (clients) represents the core work of these firms, 2) social relations are widely understood to be important to the performance of these exchanges, and 3) junior professionals are generally encouraged and expected to develop richly embedded relationships with clients. How service professionals become more embedded in their client relations, however, is not well understood. Certainly, the presence of strong, integrative relationships between service professionals and clients is by some accounts the most prominent distinguishing feature of

professional service firms and a necessary condition for profitability (Maister, 2003). Yet, how junior professionals go about forming deeper, more integrated client relationships—and in settings where typically only the partners “own” the client relationships (Greenwood, Hinings, & Brown, 1990)—is not a trivial question. Embedded relationships between junior professionals and clients should not be presumed; they must be constructed, and will depend upon both the opportunities provided by the firm and the strategies and actions followed by employees. In turn, strategies for building embedded relationships may depend upon the cultural scripts, understandings, and priorities young professionals hold and enact over time, as they are socialized into their respective professions and select alternative ways of advancing their careers. Important for our purposes is that variations in this process are likely, and so some junior professionals are likely to progress faster and further than others in how well they embed themselves with clients. Such variance is worthwhile to explain and is the main research question of this paper, a qualitative study of junior professionals – accountants, consultants and lawyers – navigating their first year or two in a client-management role.

Our study is concerned with the mechanisms of how junior service professionals become socially embedded with clients. We want to explain the construction of client embeddedness, rather than its operation in steady state, that is how already established characteristics of social relations inform and constrain ongoing action. The embeddedness literature has provided much insight into the consequences and constituents of relational arrangements; there is more work to be done on their dynamics and unfolding (Dacin et al., 1999). Ours is also an emic perspective, meaning we attempt to learn from the actors themselves—from their point-of-view—how they go about developing (or not) embedded client relationships. We develop a measure of embeddedness based on the junior professional’s self-assessment of their social integration with clients and then induce, through

grounded theory building, what distinguishes junior professionals in professional service firms who score high on this measure from those who score low.

We discover that young professionals who find themselves more socially integrated with clients frame their interactions with clients as advisory rather than task fulfilment. They rely on distinct technical interaction norms and relational strategies to create tight social relationships with clients at the expense of developing embeddedness with partners, another key stakeholder in their future. Supporting these actions is a career logic that aims for building many opportunities rather than focus on the next step on the promotion ladder within the firm. These findings suggest that development of embedded relationships requires trade-offs and focus, and that alternative career logics provide basic ingredients to constructing such (more) embedded relationships.

CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS

Literature on PSF's (Greenwood et al., 1990; Morris & Empson, 1998) has highlighted many facets of work in the professional service context and makes it generally clear that the *social* relationship between professionals and clients is important to the success of firms. Professional service firms "sell" the expertise of their employees and owners: "PSF's are organizations that trade mainly on the knowledge of their human capital, employees and producers-owners, to develop and deliver intangible solutions to client problems" (Morris & Empson, 1998: 610). In order for the firm to be viable, newly promoted partners must develop reputations in the client marketplace through which they can attract work and then deploy junior professionals to execute this work (Gilson & Mnookin, 1989), and it is widely accepted that these reputations will be based on not only the quality of the technical work but also the extent of social comfort with, attachment to, and acceptance by clients (Maister, 2003). For young professionals, strongly embedded client relationships will be at least one important driver of their career prospects: "Building strong client relationships

is the most important thing that young consultants can do to advance their careers in consulting” (Ulvila, 2000: 1679).

Relationships between service providers and clients have been examined through the lens of “service encounters” (Czepiel, Solomon, & Surprenant, 1985)—brief interactions between customers and employees analyzed in the context of service organizations such as stores, airplanes or call support centers. This perspective regards customers as “partial employees” of the service organization, actors who also take part in the production and coordination of the service provision (Mills & Morris, 1986). This is very much true in professional service settings: professional advice cannot be delivered without close cooperation between the supplier and the client. Clients help define the central problem, choose amongst proposed solutions, and then develop and implement the recommended course of action (Lowendahl, 1997). More generally for service work, the technical work or basic exchange is likely to be tightly interwoven with the relational work, even to the point of service workers carefully scripting interactions with customers (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991). For example, service workers have been found to use ignoring, rejecting, reacting and engaging as strategies to control the service encounter with the client (Rafaeli, 1989).

Such elaborate control strategies, of course, may not always hold in professional service provision, where the technical interactions tend to be highly customized and so difficult to closely script (Abbott, 1988). The strategies and behaviours junior professionals use to develop embedded client relationships are an open debate. PSF’s are typically operated as partnerships, with collegiality and professionalism replacing the hierarchy and direct authority relationships prevalent in more traditional firms (Greenwood et al., 1990). Extant theories of socialization in PSF’s, therefore, propose that junior professionals absorb the expertise and knowledge of senior members through experience and tenure at the firm (Gilson

& Mnookin, 1989). Presumably, then, constructing embedded client relationships should go hand-in-hand with strong mentoring relations with partners who are themselves so skilled in client relationship management and who take great pains to teach, encourage, and monitor such client relationship building. It is unclear, however, to what extent client relationship know-how is learned from or encouraged by partners. As the opportunities to “watch and learn” as well as individuals’ capacity to pick up client management approaches used by superiors may differ (Ibarra, 1999), the juniors will differ in terms of skillfulness for reinforcing their client embeddedness. More study is needed of the mechanisms by which (or not) partners come to influence and direct junior professional development. Alternative modes of know-how acquisition have been proposed. Some suggest that professionals engage in much self-management (Manz & Sims, 1980) and that the role of service professional leaders is coordinative and developmental rather than directive (Mills et al., 1983). Supervisors offer mostly technical guidelines and information and focus on controlling the output of the client interaction rather than actively coaching and seriously monitoring relational conduct, even though the importance of client relations would be a generally espoused belief. This would suggest that junior professionals’ interactions with clients are not regulated by partners but are largely self-learned. Another, perhaps more extreme, view proposes that, because expertise substitutes for formal leadership in these settings and because problems are local and unique to the project, junior professionals rely mostly upon one another in developing various skills and expertise (Kerr & Slocum, 1980). This view suggests that peer relationships are most important for developing effective client interactions. Overall, we are still far from a consensus on how young service professionals become more firmly embedded in client relationships.

One useful way in which an individual can be thought of as embedded is by social integration. Social integration involves mutual acceptance and attachment, to the point where

there is easy alignment and comfort with the other actors. Here we particularly draw upon Granovetter's (1985, 1992) conceptualization of embeddedness, which stresses inter-actor ties and the contextualization that occurs as a result of concrete, ongoing systems of social relations, as opposed to contextualization driven by wider cultural values and beliefs or political institutions (see Dacin et al., 1999 for a review of the main constituents and levels of embeddedness). "Contextualization" in this case means constructing and maintaining shared impressions of belonging ("at home"), social comfort, and social acceptance; our focus, then, is on embeddedness as social assimilation and inter-actor attachment (e.g., see also Uzzi & Gillespie, 2002). One measure of social assimilation that is well suited for questions of embeddedness is the extent to which newcomers have integrated with their co-workers (Morrison, 1993, 2002). We adapt Morrison's measure of social integration to the client context. In our case, social assimilation occurs as junior service professionals grow more attached and integrated with their clients. Social integration with clients, then, becomes our measure of the extent to which young service professionals see themselves as party to embedded client relationships.

Our paper now turns to examining the ways in which young service professionals become more integrated with clients, and in particular we want to understand why some achieve considerably more client integration than others. Our attention is on the actions and development of young service professionals during their first year or two in jobs which require them to take on more responsibility within their respective firms, as we will describe below. In the following section we will also describe our methods, sample, and present our measure of client social integration. We then describe our findings and present our supporting evidence. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of our results and their implications for research and practice.

DATA AND METHODS

Our research method is grounded theory building based on longitudinal data collected from three professional service firms: an accounting firm, a law firm, and a consultancy. The level of analysis is the individual service professional, and in all cases these professionals were recently promoted project managers or the equivalent. In general, these service professionals began their careers at respective entry level positions for their professions; junior associates in audit, trainees in law, or junior consultants. After approximately 5 years in audit and consulting and 3-4 years in law, young professionals are promoted to the position of “project manager” (in audit and consultancy) or “qualified associates” (in law—budding lawyers spend an additional year or two in professional law society programmes prior to entering the law firm’s trainee ranks, although they can be sponsored by the firm during this time). Overall, this promotion represented roughly the mid-stage of their professional development, the fulfilment of that development being partnership within their respective profession. Prior to this promotion, these service professionals are focused on technical work and learning the special procedures and skills necessary to their respective subfields of expertise. They also tend to be the most junior members of client project teams, and so faced a good deal of “grunt” work. As project managers or associates, they are given greater responsibilities and independence, including managerial responsibilities (i.e., subordinates) and (particularly for auditors and consultants) the leadership of client project teams, greater client-facing duties and interactions, and relatively direct access to partners. In other words, this is their first significant managerial role and the point in their careers at which they move beyond the technical aspects of the job and start to be involved in the ‘big picture’ that is their particular professional practice.

Our study focused on the development of these service professionals during approximately the first year to two years in their job as project managers. Data were collected at two points in time in order to assess the starting conditions and then the changes that they

experienced as they became more versed in their new roles and the associated social structure and relations: data were first collected soon after their appointment as project managers/ associates (3-6 months) and then some 15 months after the first interview on average¹. Our exploratory discussions with company representatives supporting this research suggested that this was a critical time in the development of young service professionals, and we believe that an interim period of 14-18 months was a sufficient time period to allow development to occur; because of finite and relatively short partnership clocks following their promotions (see Table 1), their conduct over the first year or so of this new role is critical and a good indication of how they are adjusting and approaching their career development.

Insert Table 1 about here

Data Collection

The target organizations were large professional service firms and significant players in their respective fields and/or regions. The accounting firm is a major international player. We gained access to two of its main global offices, one in the US and one in Europe. The law firm and consultancy are both major European professional service firms, and we interviewed people from their main regions of activity (i.e., their “headquarters”, although consulting work tended to be dispersed). All three firms are long-established and have well-honed routines surrounding professional development, recruit selectively, and have comparable internal career paths. This constancy made them good grounds for studying the development of young service professionals. The diversity offered by three different professions, however, was useful for inducing theory about similarities in career development strategies and client

¹ Averages interim periods for the three firms were very similar: 15.3 months (audit), 15.5 months (law), and 16.1 months (consulting). The minimum period we waited for an interview was 13 months and the maximum 18, mostly for the convenience and schedule of the respondent.

integration. Similarities observed across diverse samples offer firmer grounding for general propositions than those observed in homogenous samples (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991).

Sample. We collected the first round of data on 88 respondents: 46 accountants (two offices), 23 lawyers, and 19 consultants. We conducted the second round of data collection interview with 68 of the original 88 respondents. The rest had left the firm, were away on maternity leave, or chose not to participate further. The final sample used to build theory consists of 68 respondents, among whom 15 were lawyers, 37 accountants, and 16 consultants. The first round of data collection consisted of a semi-structured interview, focusing on their history with the company, their early impressions of their new job and in particular the relational work this required. It ended with a social network survey. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were taped and transcribed. The second round of data collection consisted of a second social network survey, an interview (also taped and transcribed), and a closing survey that included the questions examining their social integration with clients. The second interview tapped their impressions of their job in the intervening period, focusing on how they were establishing themselves relationally in this work (e.g., with partners, subordinates, clients).

Measure. Our measure of their social integration with clients (SIC) consisted of six items and was built from a comparable scale measuring social integration with co-workers (Morrison, 1993). Clients in professional service organizations are prominent, distinct, and regular social relations in the lives of service professionals. They are similar to co-workers in the important sense of being a social entity to which one can integrate to a greater (or lesser) degree during regular work interactions. The exact items are listed in the appendix. Factor analyses conducted on the entire sample (68 responses) show all items load highly on a single factor (0.99 of the variance explained by the factor, with item loadings between 0.60 and

0.75); the scale's Cronbach alpha is 0.83, and the variance of results adequate (on a 5-point scale, the range of scores is 1 to 4, with mean 2.59² and standard deviation of 0.62).

Data Analysis

We conducted our analysis in two steps: first, using the results from the final survey, we identified the low and high SIC scorers. To do this, we sorted all the responses by the SIC score and by firm. We selected two sets of responses for analysis: those that scored approximately in the top third and bottom third of their respective firm range, for a total of ten cases from the consulting firm, ten from the law firm, and twenty from the accounting firm. We then conducted our qualitative analyses on these 'extreme' responses. This method of analysis emphasizes comparisons or differences as an analytical technique (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Comparative reading of cases that scored very high and very low fuels thinking about properties and dimensions and focuses the theory building. This method is consistent with the 'contrast table' method (Miles & Huberman, 1994) used for conceptualising theoretical differences across exemplary cases high and low on the variable of interest.

The second step of the analysis focused on the qualitative interviews. We followed an inductive, grounded theory development process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Sutton, 1991), finding client relationships, partner relationships, and career motives as strong themes in the data. We searched the interviews for categories that reflected similarities across the firms and participants. Four categories emerged: relationship framings, technical interaction norms, relational strategies, and career logics. We decided to focus on two sets of relationships as key for young managers' client embeddedness process: the clients themselves and the partners. Peers and subordinates were much less present in respondents' discussion of their project work, especially at the time of our second interview (a year or more after

² There are differences in the distribution of SIC scores across the three firms. The mean for the consulting firm is 3.03, for the accounting firm 2.53 and for the law firm 2.67. This suggests that some kinds of professional work is more conducive to high-quality interaction with clients than others. Nevertheless, all three firms exhibit considerable variance in their scores (0.46 in consulting, 0.62 in accounting and 0.50 in the law firm).

promotion). In the first interview, when asked to compare their role as project manager or associate with the role they held prior to promotion, respondents repeatedly highlighted three themes: the managerial challenges of leading a team of consultants underneath them, changes in their rapport to the partners, and new standing relative to the clients. Over time, however, the managerial challenges of leading a team of very junior professionals took the back seat among project managers' concerns, while partner and client issues increased in relevance, against a background of career priorities more clearly articulated. We have focused on young professionals' relationships with clients and partners as most promising areas for our theory building. We then went back and forth between the emerging categories, the data, and the literature to further develop explanations for why some service professionals were more integrated with clients than others. Table 2 provides an overview of the coding results.

Insert Table 2 about here

CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL EMBEDDEDNESS WITH CLIENTS

The work project managers and associates perform is project-focused and client-customized. But what exactly does the relationship between the junior service professional and the client consist of? Two different framings of junior professionals' client relationships emerged from the data: *advisory* and *task fulfilment*. An advisory approach to client relationships consists of seeing one's role as a strategic thinker helping the client solve their problems. Understanding the underlying business problem the client is facing is important. Managers and associates try to learn the client's business and overall strategy, above and beyond the immediate need on the project, and learn how to think about problems from the client's perspective. They strive to bring innovative solutions to the project, and keep an eye open for the particular client problem when reading the latest professional literature. A second

approach to content management evident in the testimonies of our respondents was task-fulfilment. Project managers and associates who embrace this approach focus their attention on getting the job done. The goals are to meet client expectations and deadlines, do a good quality job and do it efficiently. They focus much less on understanding the general business problem at the core of the project or underlying client’s needs; priority goes to executing the immediate demands well and in time.

Respondents who scored high on the social integration with clients scale overwhelmingly take an advisory approach to their client relationships; respondents who scored low on the scale take a task fulfilment approach to client relationships. To understand what embeddedness with clients consists of and how it is constructed, we analyzed three areas of thought and activity that emerged as important to its development: the technical interaction norms, relational strategies and career logics of respondents, each of which informed these two alternative framings of the client relationship.

Technical Interaction Norms

The alternative framings impact our respondents’ day-to-day interactions with clients and partners by selectively focusing their attention on different aspects of the transaction and on different courses of action. Technical interaction norms are the personal rules these junior professionals use when interacting with clients and partners on the technical aspects of work. We found evidence for two kinds of technical interaction norms: *dialogue* and *execution*. A dialogue norm dominated the interactions of professionals who frame client relationships as advisory roles (high SIC score); an execution norm was common across professionals who took a task-fulfilment approach instead (low SIC score). Table 3 provides evidence of the technical interaction norms.

Insert Table 3 about here

Dialogue. Professionals high in SIC engage the client contacts in business conversations, where they not only show mastery of the technical aspects of the problem but also display willingness to listen and learn about the background, circumstances and nuances of the problem. They like clients who are “proactive”, engaged in the project and ready with the information, but also curious, probing, and open to a two-way relationship with the service professional. Increasing confidence on both sides in the young professionals’ competence gives them leverage in relationships with clients beyond what their age or title might indicate. They make their points by convincing clients of their sound business reasoning and by learning how to “rein-in” people when the discussion gets out of control:

The more I calm down in a confrontational atmosphere, the more I get my way, because you can't force people to do things but they may see a result that they may not have seen when you are getting upset.

Respondents in this category take control of the jobs within the PSF team, and aim to be as much in charge of the projects as possible. In doing so, they effectively limit the role of the partner on the project, taking ownership of high-profile tasks such as leading client meetings and handling client’s requests. Says one lawyer respondent: “the partner tends to fall out of the picture after a few weeks and so you become the main client contact”. Project managers and associates may even assume the role of lead contact for client, up to the point of acquiring new work opportunities themselves. They consciously attempt to limit partners’ control of the projects either by establishing a division of labour with them or by engaging them in a collaborative, almost peer-to-peer fashion. Those who construct a division of labour do so by managing the project by themselves and only deal with the partners at the outset of the project, when big-picture tasks and timelines are established, and at the end, when the final reviews are done. Some respondents think this is a useful strategy for dealing with partners, because “if you’re a partner you need an associate to take all the work off your

shoulders.” In the collaborative approach, young professionals deal with partners on a more collegial level, going in to discuss best solutions to the project, bounce ideas, and get friendly advice. Those who take this approach feel that, on the one hand, this interaction provides them with a better learning experience, and, on the other hand, that there are good returns to project effectiveness from working with the partners in a smooth, “intuitive” and “mutually understood” manner. In either case, though, they construct project encounters which give them relatively more responsibility or control vis-à-vis partners.

Execute. An execution norm toward client interactions meant focused attention on the immediate project tasks: planning for future jobs, calling clients to schedule meetings and negotiate the timeline for the project, booking the necessary staff, and coordinating the work of the staff as the project advances. This is the norm most common among participants who scored low in SIC (task-fulfilment approach). Respondents aim to convince the clients that they are competent in their technical abilities (e.g. “how you see yourself resolving the problem”) and that the job will get done on time. Young professionals who took a task fulfilment approach argued that executing the tasks as efficiently as possible and being “at their back and call” gained them clients’ trust best (e.g. “It’s important to clients to feel they have someone available”, or “you earn their respect by doing a good job”). They strive to execute tasks for which they feel well qualified, and avoid taking risks with tasks where they feel less technically competent (e.g. “I do the routine work, the contracts. When I deal with them on the phone, they would know I’m only in this position for six months. I’d rather not have them know that”).

Young professionals in this category let partners’ requirements influence the way they manage projects. Client work takes secondary place to partners’ requirements, so that managers and associates aim their efforts at keeping the partners happy. As an accounting professional put it, “When you get busy, you tend to prioritize contacts, and important

partners get priority.” In practice, managers and associates who use this approach are always at the call of the partner, and work very closely with the partners on all parts of the projects (e.g. “sometimes she needs answers quickly to questions from the client or the other offices, and she just gives them to me and I work on them, ongoing”). They prepare the results in “digestible pieces”, which partners can understand easily, and feed new insights into client problems to the partner who then talks about it with client’s top management level.

In summary, dialogue as a technical interaction norm prompts young professionals to discuss the business issues openly and comprehensively with clients and partners. Participants who use dialogue rely not only on their technical competence to gain the attention of clients and partners but also on their business acumen and professional self-confidence; they engage in technical work from a position of intellectual equality with the others. In contrast, participants who use execution emphasize their technical qualifications and process management skills. They aim to build credibility with clients and partners by getting the job done to the specifications received. They presume less about their own business judgment and prefer to listen to the decisions taken by those superior in rank.

Relational Strategies

Relational strategies are the tactics junior professionals use to build and maintain relationships. Some take a collegial approach, which lets them approach clients and partners pro-actively and in on equal footing. Others, in contrast, take a more timid and formal, hierarchical approach. Professionals who take an advisory approach to client relationships (high SIC score) prefer the collegial strategy; those who take a task-fulfilment approach (low SIC score) rely on a hierarchical relational strategy. Table 4 provides evidence for relational strategies.

Insert Table 4 about here

Collegial. Managers and associates who score high on the SIC scale often spend a lot of time in clients' offices. They engage in frequent, often spontaneous, interactions with members of the client team: playing sports together, going out for lunch, talking about things that do not relate directly to work, or going out for drinks. Socializing is frequent, either via team events or one-on-one with client contacts, often "just to build up a bit of good feeling". They prefer to gain clients' trust first by taking a friendly, open, discussion-role, rather than "going in with the air of technical authority". Some of these interactions are triggered by strategic goals. Junior professionals aim to be the "first port of call" for clients and play on their direct knowledge of the client's problems and their friendship with client contacts to encourage the client to contact them, and not the partner, for any routine project issues. But relationships are also born out of natural affinities (e.g. same age, similar humor, common friends and interests, "sharing frustrations when it comes to dealing with the other sides of his organization"). Project managers who take this approach to relationship building generally put effort into maintaining client relationships after the project is over, by calling up to say hello, to offer tips on a recent event that might be of interest to clients, or just to keep them informed of developments in the PSF.

Respondents in this category also manage partner relations in a collegial manner, collegial in this case meaning having some semblance of power and authority vested equally amongst actors. Junior professionals engage their seniors on issues at all levels of importance, and the relationship takes on collegial aspects. This does not necessarily mean that the relationships are always warm and friendly; on the contrary, sometimes managers and associates feel ignored and not well appreciated by their partners (e.g. "I don't have much awareness from partners"). Yet from the young professionals' perspective, these relationships are set on a relatively equal footing, at least in competence terms, whereby the junior

professional feels that his or her contribution entitles them to a dialogue, not order-taking, from the partner. Many of the managers and associates who take this approach are very proactive in managing their partners and meeting new ones: they explicitly discuss expectations upfront, pre-empt team problems by proposing alternative plans, ask for feedback at the end of the project, and keep in touch with partners not actively working for. They would rely extensively on partners, whether formal mentors or not, for career advice in general and, more specifically, on counsel for which projects to take on next, and are very active about the need to create a “buzz”, a good reputation among the partners.

Hierarchical. Project managers and associates low on the SIC scale are much less engaged in relational interactions with clients. They discuss the work issues over the phone, in arranged, formal infrequent meetings, and often accompanied by partners (e.g. “I have never ever taken a client out to lunch on my own, I would always go with a partner or someone”). This can be because they are not given the opportunity, the tasks being too remote from the direct needs of the client, or because they feel clients would not take them seriously because they are too junior (e.g. “you are not at their level”) or they fear that they do not bring real value (e.g. “clients don’t value audit people”). Socializing is less frequent and more formal than in the case of the junior professionals who take a strategic-advisory approach. Managers might plan a couple of dinners per year for the client team, to thank them for the business done together, but they would not interact casually with client contacts on one-on-one basis or for informal purposes such as sports playing. This can be either because the occasions do not present themselves, or because project managers feel socializing is not the best way to manage the relationship: they feel that their main responsibility is to get the job done, and while strengthening relationships is important, it is premature at this stage (e.g. “At my level we don’t think about this too much yet. We know it’s important but we don’t have set rules for it yet”) Professionals rely on their performance on the job to speak for itself, instead of

pro-actively promoting their service to the clients. They are much less likely to engage clients in dialogues, preferring instead to fulfil their wishes rather than contradict them (e.g. “You can't argue with them. They pay our bills”) and often wait for the partners to introduce them to client contacts.

Participants low on SIC generally do not have very close relationships with the partners. They are concerned with impression management, and seem to be always on the guard. They worry about their reputation among partners, and how this might reflect on their chances for promotion. Most of the relationship management work revolves around these two focal concerns. But whereas some managers tend to focus on their work, and let the results speak for themselves, others are more proactive with their reputation and interact more often and in more diverse ways with the partners: some try to build a personal component into their relationships while others actively seek feedback. At the same time, they recognize that assignment to projects is often led not by their personal relationships with the partners, but by their reputation of expertise in a certain area or skill. They sometimes select partners to work for based on expertise fit between the junior professional and the partner, reasoning that the partner might be more likely to appreciate their skills this way. Managers who take this approach in our sample are very respectful of technical expertise, and believe this is the best way to gain partners' trust and have a successful career in the firm (e.g. “you have to mark yourself out through a niche area of expertise to get on good projects”). They place more importance on hierarchy, and the right timing to forging closer relationships, waiting to feel confident in their position before initiating casual conversations with the superiors.

The alternative framing, technical interaction norms and relational strategies provide a good representation of how the young service professionals in our sample approached their interactions with clients and partners, and the basic mechanisms for creating embeddedness. Patterns in the data suggest that managers and associates highly integrated with clients take an

interest in the overall business problem of the client rather than merely performing the job for which they were hired, and focus their attention on servicing the clients rather than the partners. Nonetheless, partners are important stakeholders for junior professionals in these PSF's. We turn next to the career logics that underscore junior professionals' relational choices.

Career logics in PSF's

There is not just one way to "make it" in a PSF. Alternative motivations and paths exist that are well institutionalised within the firms we analysed, and in the PSF industry overall. Desirable career options include partnership, lateral move to smaller PSF, or good position in the industry. The following quote echoes the words of many participants:

The great thing about being somewhere like this is that you can't really go too far wrong because you'll get a great CV. If I wanted to go as an in-house lawyer later then I'd get a pretty good job. If I decide to do something more commercial, again this firm has a great name. But unquestionably it's a great partnership if you can get there, there's no doubt.

For each career option, the pro's and con's are different, and the motivations of those who prefer them equally distinct. Furthermore, there are several ways in which it is considered that one can reach any of these goals. Consider, first, internal promotion, the most obvious career choice for our respondents. Promotion to partnership is decided via assessments and discussions among all the partners in the firm. Many different aspects of manager's work performance are being evaluated: technical competence and managerial abilities, but also relationship skills, the potential to create new client relationships and sell new work, as well as commitment to the firm, evidenced by non-billable activities such as training and mentoring, attendance to conferences and seminars.

The two framings of client relationships, advisory vs. task fulfilment, support alternative strategies for promotion. The first focuses on creating new opportunities, inside as well as outside the firm. It relies on forging new business relationships and maintaining old ones, and on accumulating a variety of experiences and skills valuable beyond the immediate

set of jobs. This strategy aims to achieve promotion via client skills and new work generation, and we labelled it client driven. It is the predominant career logic for high SIC participants. The second focuses on the opportunities within the firm, and specifically project opportunities that will enhance your chances for promotion. This is a more local, focused approach to the next step in the career, and relies on approval from partners as the primary vehicle to promotion; we refer to it as partner-driven. It is the most frequent career logic for low SIC participants.

Client driven. An advisory framing of client relationships is consistent with a career strategy that emphasizes client skills, new work acquisition, and creation of new business opportunities. It has been shown that knowledge-intensive service firms give client relations higher priority than technical expertise (Starbuck, 1992). Experts with greater social skills become client-relations specialists, and these receive higher compensation and wield greater power than other experts, precisely because of the possibility that they leave and take clients with them (Starbuck, 1993). This is well reflected in our data:

One of the biggest factors, if you want to make partner, is the ability to keep, retain clients as well as to make new clients. You have to be a good technical lawyer and have the right kind or set of skills in dealing with clients.

An advisory approach to content management can be triggered by a desire to learn (e.g. “there’s no better way to learn than when you’re dealing with the senior management of an organisation. You understand the thought process behind what they did and see whether it worked or not”). This approach, of course, is also highly valuable in solving clients’ project demands. In this sense, an advisory approach is seen as the best means for gaining client credibility in the present and for gaining new work opportunities for the future: to the extent that the client knows how well the professional understands their business, and sees the innovative solutions proposed, they are more likely to come back to the firm when new problems arise (e.g. “The clients actually said to the senior management and partner, I hope

she's still with us on the next engagement”). Junior professionals may also suggest new projects themselves as they become aware of the wider business issues facing the client, and bring in new clients (e.g. “Happy clients bring others”). Relational strategies reinforce this career logic. A collegial approach helps get to know the client on a personal level and forge a level of trust and intimacy which, the professionals hope, could result in future business:

As you become more senior, to have social contact with the client becomes more and more important, because in the end you don't win only a project because of mere content, you also win projects because of your social connections, and if you have a good contact to your clients, it is sometimes more important than your concept on paper. Everybody can do a good concept, in the end the client chooses the people.

Partner driven. Task fulfilment framing of client relationships is consistent with a strategy for promotion via partner support. Partners' recommendation is a crucial determinant for promotion, and is based on the impression partners form of the junior professionals during projects where they work together, as well as the overall reputation the junior has around the firm:

If a partner knows you well he'll come back and ask you to do something for him. And that's the best way of getting more interesting work and getting known. Because ultimately it's always the partners that decide on the promotion and not the person you're actually working for.

The tournament metaphor used to refer to this system of promotion in PSF's incorporates the subjective and political dimensions of partner selection process (Nelson, 1992). The debate over who should get promoted will be conducted in human capital terms. But the ultimate decision will reflect the power of various partners and departments to support 'their' candidates. Powerful partners might be better to work for than less known ones, and to that end young professionals are willing to put up with difficult working relationships and do their best to please the partners. Impression management is also key, and many of our respondents, as we saw, take a pro-active stand toward it. This suggests that a hierarchical approach in terms of technical interaction norms, as well as careful personal relationships with partners, is a wise course of action for a junior professional interested in partnership. The efforts project

managers put into executing partner's requests contribute to better partner-client relationships, and thus, indirectly, to future selling opportunities flowing to partners and the firm. But these efforts also serve managers' interests in the short run: client-related tasks allow managers to show off their skills to partners and are the means by which managers gain recognition from the partners

The more you take away from their workload, the more they are coming to you because you're leaving them time to do what they should be doing as partners, which is actually bringing in the business.

Finally, young professionals have a third career strategy: leaving the PSF for a job in the industry. The key career decision for junior professionals in large, prestigious PSF's is whether to continue to work their way up the hierarchy or leave if such promotion is unlikely. Project manager or associate is thus a transitory position, albeit a crucial stepping-stone. The timing of the next move may change slightly, since not all junior professionals of the same intake are proposed for promotion at the same time, and some may be given more leeway than others to prove themselves, but it is understood by all parties that one cannot stay in this position indefinitely. Junior professionals are very aware of their precarious position and of the need to have contingency plans. Some start working on this right away, while others prefer to first "consolidate" in the project manager or associate position, then figure out future options. In parallel, the peculiar career system in PSF's, with its periodical nature, is well known to both clients and smaller PSF's, who attempt to recruit managers disenchanted or discouraged with the big firms when the next round of promotion approaches. By forging solid client relationships, some respondents acknowledge, they are building possible exits from the PSF's. Working for a client as an in-house counsel, CFO, or director of strategy and business development are very frequent career options for our respondents. An advisory perspective on client relationships eases the way towards such positions in the industry. Alternatively, project managers and associates may hope that their hard work towards

partners' wishes increases their value on the external market through technical skill acquisition. Both the advisory and the task fulfilment approach can pay off for non-PSF jobs.

DISCUSSION

Client vs. Partner Trade-Offs

Clients and partners hold special standing in respondents' accounts of their working lives. Young professionals maintain that in their new roles they have a double duty to perform: one towards the external clients with whom the firm has a contract, and one towards the internal hierarchy in charge of the clients. Challenges of managing work so that both external and internal expectations are met dominate participants' accounts (e.g. "I work for two clients: the client, and the partner", or "My job is sandwiched between clients' and partners' demands"). A few of our respondents would try to satisfy both client and partner. Most, however, opted for one over the other: either the client comes first, because "they are the ones paying for performance" and "because they are external to the organization", or the partners do. Patterns in the data suggest that strategies for dealing with clients are nonetheless closely interwoven with strategies for managing partners. In fact, we argue that to be able to understand the nuances of dealing with clients we have to look in parallel at how respondents manage their interactions with the partners – how they enact the trade-off between clients and partners demands.

The alternative framings and supporting norms, strategies and logics that contextualize our respondents' relationships with clients point to an underlying tension in the structure of relationships in which young service professionals are embedded: the conflict between client and partner pre-eminence. As we saw in the discussion on career institutions, promotion requirements demand, on the one hand, that junior professionals prove themselves technically and managerially capable while working for partners, and, on the other hand, show their ability to generate new work and forge fruitful client relationships. It is difficult to be

independent, entrepreneurial, and resourceful vis-à-vis the client and partner at the same time. Young professionals in the middle of their career within a PSF find that taking the steps towards more client acquisition takes attention away from getting the job done for the partner supervising the immediate project. Young professionals have a limited amount of time and energy at their disposal and cannot cater to everybody's wishes to the same extent. Behaviors appreciated by clients, such as extensive time spent in their offices solving their problems might be considered useless by the partner and peers:

In the internal promotion process, the client is more of a hygiene factor. You can do a great job, if nobody sees that on a superior level and then transfers that into the organisation, it's not necessarily an advantage, it's just what you are supposed to do.

From partners' perspective, doing a good client job is sufficient; going too much beyond may even bring negative returns to the young manager in the form of a reputation for inefficient work habits.

But the trade-off junior professionals face regarding client vs partner work goes beyond the issue of time allocation. This is also a trade-off between individual partners' short-term interests and the long-term gains to the PSF. The trade-off between the value junior professionals add to clients versus the value they add to partners is built into PSF's governance structure, in particular the blurred line between ownership and management (Hinings, Brown, & Greenwood, 1991). Partners are alternatively managers of young professionals on the projects at hand, and owners of the extra business the juniors may generate. In effect, in the short run, partners have incentives to mislead and delay valuable candidates about their chances of making partner (Nelson, 1992: 746), because the more a good manager or associate dedicates their effort to serving the partner's client, the better off the partner (e.g. "The more the project manager works on his own and does a good job in the eyes of the client, the better it is for the partner"). When a manager gets promoted, the partner needs to find a replacement, which takes time and risk. The partner will have to invest time

and effort in the replacement manager to bring them up to date on the history of the project, the idiosyncracies of the client, and so on. These steps represent a cost to the partner that they would rather avoid by keeping the same junior professionals on their jobs.

The story of a recently promoted senior associate in our sample illustrates well this point. The associate knew that in order to increase his chances for promotion, he would have to be known by many partners, including those outside of the specific technical area in which he had been working. He obtained the agreement of his main partner to do so: “My partner and I decided that I should go and work in another team within our corporate department for the sole purpose of trying to work for other partners.” But he faced difficulties when trying to do so in practice, because the same partner hesitated to let him go:

There was a tension there, because the partner to whom I am referring, he had a problem in that he wanted his jobs in his team done well which meant staying there. So there was a natural conflict in what was best for me and what was best for the team.

The stand-off was resolved only when other partners intervened at the associate’s request: “I had to ensure that other partners put sufficient pressure on him to ensure that I was able to go. So there was a little bit of politicking to make sure that that answer came out.” ‘Politicking’, in the form of the intervention from more powerful partners, changed the priorities of the hesitant partner from the immediate demands of his job to the larger interests of the firm.

Furthermore, the exceptionally good junior professional might take the client away with them when promoted: behind the hierarchical relationship between partner and junior professional at the stage of project manager or associate there lies the prospect of direct competition once the junior becomes a partner. In today’s PSF partnerships, partners do not have a guaranteed tenure, but are regularly assessed on their business performance, most often by the amount of new work they bring to the firm (Galanter & Palay, 1991). And although mature partners are secure in their business niche, the same is not necessarily true for junior partners, who still have to create a stable roster of clients. Promotion criteria in PSF’s that

encourage junior professionals to demonstrate their ability to bring in new business in order to be considered for partnership exacerbate the competition between professionals and extends it across hierarchical levels. Through a managerial ideology that emphasizes strategic planning and economic rationalization of the internal operations of the firm, the partnership tournament in PSF's allows firms to mold associates into motivated producers, even though there is no guarantee of eventual partnership (Nelson, 1992: 747). Partners' dual position in the PSF, therefore, is at the origin of the conflicting pressures on young professionals towards more embedded relationships with clients or with partners.

Our analysis supports this conclusion. Respondents who scored high on social integration with clients want to assure that more of the value-creation kudos which emerge (from clients) is appropriated directly by them. They take an advisory approach to client relationships, are engaging in their technical interaction norms, rely on collegial rapport to create and maintain relationships, and take a client-work route to career progression. Respondents who scored low on social integration with clients seem more content to let partners capture kudos from clients, focusing instead on capturing related (or not) kudos from partners. They take a task fulfilment approach to client relationships, execute as their technical interaction norm, favor hierarchical relationships, and rely on a partner-sponsored, technical expertise tactic for career progression. Our analysis implies that young professionals who are well embedded with their clients are less immersed into the net of partner relationships in the PSF and vice-versa.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This study explored the mechanisms junior professionals in PSF's rely on to build embedded relationships with their client contacts. The qualitative analyses revealed that social integration with clients is the result of a balancing act between client and partner demands, a trade-off enacted in different framings, technical interaction norms and relational strategies,

and motivated by distinct career approaches. Young professionals construct embeddedness with clients at the expense of execution-based, partner-focused relations, and distinct career logics make possible individual-level choices in prioritizing one set of relationships over the other. The results of this study support Granovetter's (1985) key insight that economic action is contextualized in social structures, but also suggest some important new directions for theory and research.

The present investigation contributes to embeddedness literature by answering recent calls for fine-grained sociological approaches that stress the potential for contradiction and conflicts between and across different forms and levels of embeddedness (Powell, 1996). In the case of junior service professionals, we find that embeddedness with one important constituency occurs at the expense of embeddedness with another very important constituency. The notion of trade-offs during the construction of embedded relationships is a potent one, and shows the importance of analysing the social structures surrounding economic action as fragmented and conflicting. Furthermore, once we look at social structures as generative of multiple, potentially conflicting rules for action, it becomes imperative to put more analytical emphasis on the capacity for agency of the actors in the middle. We have too often equated institutions and embeddedness with constraint and conformity (Powell, 1996), when in reality, becoming embedded may be a choice among alternatives or a struggle fraught with tensions as actors navigate social worlds not perfectly aligned. There is room for agency in the theoretization of embeddedness construction.

Our study also contributes to the empirical side of embeddedness literature. Studies of sources of inter-organizational embeddedness have highlighted the role of repeated transactions with the same parties (Gulati, 1995), the development of strong, cohesive relations (Gulati, 1998), and the role of trust, judgment and discretion (Uzzi, 1996, 1997). Our study complements them by going down across levels of analysis to understand the micro

mechanisms that people involved in such inter-firm linkages undertake to construct embedded relationships. Further research should aim to distinguish the firm-level implications of the different embeddedness strategies at the individual-level we highlighted here, that is, in what circumstances behaviors aimed at creating close personal level relationships actually result in embedded inter-firm relationships. Our study takes a step in this direction and suggests that an advisory approach to client relationships might lead to better trust, finer information-exchange and more suitable problem-solving arrangements (Uzzi, 1996).

Finally, this research has implications for the theory of professions and PSF's . Professionals' behavior is usually regarded as inconsistent with working in a bureaucratic organization: professionals typically insist on engaging on role-making rather than role-taking (Bucher & Stelling, 1969). This points to an inherent tension between professionals' drive for autonomy and the structures of organizations, such that the more individualized, indivisible the work, and the more the authority of professionalism matters in the governance of the organization, the more intense this tension (Greenwood et al., 1990). We show that this tension reflects itself in the trade-off client vs. partner, and we suggest that two major career paths, or logics, dominated in our respondents' accounts: one in which expertise-building, learning and development are given priority with a view to career opportunities not limited to the boundaries of the current employer; and one in which immediate task-fulfilment in response to expectations from superiors is preferred, with a view to securing promotion within the firm. Recent studies of professionals' commitment have shown that that promotion opportunities in law firms drive organizational commitment but not professional commitment, and have encouraged researchers to look beyond the structural characteristics of professionals' work settings to improve our understanding of drivers of professional commitment (Wallace, 1995). Our study answers that call by pointing to alternative career

logics that might affect differently professionals' commitment to their organizations and professions.

Implications for performance and ongoing research

Our study has implications for the management of PSF's. The trade-offs that junior professionals face beg the question of how to then structure their career development. Is there a "correct" way to handle young professionals in PSF's? There are, of course, many ways to evaluate performance in PSF's, and skill at handling client relationships is just one. Professionals high on social integration with clients may be particularly desirable in a firm that looks to acquire many new clients or strengthen existing relationships. But technical partners, who have built their case for partnership on their technical expertise and less so on their social abilities with clients, are also very useful to the firm (Lazega, 2001). Partner focus is also arguably more appropriate for quality control in the provision of professional service. In principle then, both junior professionals who are highly embedded with clients as well as those who are highly embedded with partners are beneficial to the firm. In one aspect, however, junior professionals' embeddedness with clients is crucial to the firm. We showed that managers and associates closely integrated with clients take on a advisory role with clients and engage in problem-solving, communicating with clients and learning to think from their perspective. These professionals actively generate new knowledge that combines existing PSF tools and methods with fresh input and feedback from clients (Morris & Empson, 1988). These findings suggest that junior professionals highly embedded with clients do not simply reproduce the human capital existent in the firm, but create knowledge themselves by interacting with clients and questioning their assumptions. It is therefore important for the knowledge management systems of the PSF's to benefit from the client learning these young professionals engage in.

From a human resource management perspective, our study is cautious with recommendations for managerial practice. Will the most client-devoted managers necessarily stay with their professional service firms for the long run? Our results suggest not necessarily. Some of our most client-focused respondents had relatively modest attachment to their employing firms, and a couple were actively pursuing job offers with their clients. These employees would probably be lost within a short time. However, it could be argued that they will serve, in the long term, to strengthening of the relationship between the service professional firm and the client now employing them.

Our study will continue to explore our data for further performance implications (e.g., what does it mean for a junior, pre-partnership professional to create value in their jobs?) and fine-tune the tensions we have found in the embeddedness of young professionals in developing their careers in professional service firms.

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TABLE 1
Typical Career Progression Timelines^a

Years	Audit	Law	Consulting
Entry Conditions	University Study (Undergraduate)	University Study (Undergraduate in Law) + 1 year of professional law school or University Study (non-Law degree) + 2 years of professional law school	University Study + some with advanced degrees or industry experience
1	Associate or Jr. Associate	Trainee / Clerk	Jr. Consultant
2			Consultant
3	Sr. Associate	Associate / Qualified	
4			Sr. Consultant
5-6	Project Manager		Project Manager
7			
8	Senior Manager	Sr. Associate	Assoc. Partner
9			
10 – 12	Partner	Partner	Partner

^a Typical case, although individual timelines will vary.

TABLE 2
Summary of Coding Results

	High SIC score respondents	Low SIC score respondents
Framing the client relationship	Advisory	Task fulfilment
	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“If you just know a small puzzle of the whole then it’s often very hard to make a presentation... Think of where the client needs are. What will your clients expect from you in 5 years time? What effect does this have on today’s business?” (Consultant)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“I think it is just delivering on what they want, just basically meeting the expectations or trying to exceed what the expectations are. Say for example we have got this work that has to be done by 31st March, get it done by 31st March. You build up their trust with that.” (Accountant)</p>
Technical interaction norms	Dialogue	Execution
a. With clients	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“When you’re on your job you always try to do as much as you can with your client from both a professional and a personal aspect. You show them that you’re technically competent, that you understand their business, that you’re willing to listen and ultimately not only provide the necessary services but bring some kind of value, some kind of ideas to them that they can take away.” (Accountant)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“Client lunches take away from your regular responsibilities. Strengthening client relationships, although it is a key part of your success, it’s not something that I’d do now. If I had to measure the importance of completing audit work against strengthening clients relationships, it’s finishing the job that is more important now.” (Accountant)</p>
b. With partners	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“Partners give me work, and before I pass it down, I’ll take out my chunk. In fact, it’s more like they’ll give me the global view, like ‘we need to think about this, this and this’. If we need to think about what difficulties the client will face, we’ll talk about it and certain questions will come up and I will be responsible for finding the answers.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“They just expect things to happen for them. So if we have a presentation and are taking the partner along, he expects to be informed, and if you don’t inform him beforehand that is a problem that I have, not what he has.” (Consultant)</p>
Relational strategies	Collegial	Hierarchical
a. With clients	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“I spend a lot of time with good existing clients to further develop a relationship with them. You don’t just call them when you’ve got to go in and finish their audit, you call them periodically during the year, try to communicate with them on a personal and social level.” (Accountant)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“Sometimes we have client meetings but most of our work, being more junior, is sitting in the office, working on the documents. We talk to the clients a lot on the phone, but the client contacts are mostly more senior people and then the partner is in touch with them, of course.” (Lawyer)</p>
b. With partners	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“You have to know what is in the pipeline and express your interests. I would not be afraid to speak up and talk to partners if something worries me. A lot of networking is done at firm parties, you have to make yourself known. It’s all about staying friends with all people.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“You initially need to have some exposure or experience with them from work. I don’t think you can just seek them out and try to establish a relationship with them, it would come through circumstances” (Accountant)</p>

Career logics	Client-driven	Partner-driven
	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“You want to be involved with the new clients, you want to be involved in the proposals, you want to be involved on the selling side of the business. The point of the job is to be on the selling side. If you’re involved in the selling side of the business, then you’re moving up in the firm, getting more recognition. The punters realize that you’re doing a good job.” (Accountant)</p>	<p><i>Strong evidence</i></p> <p>“And now I have these big clients I just want to prove to the partners that I am worthy of them. They see my work, and see what I am capable of.” (Accountant)</p>

TABLE 3
Technical Interaction Norms Evidence

High SIC: Dialogue approach	
<p><i>With clients</i></p> <p>“My challenge is to get to know the client well enough that they come to me with their problems right away. If I’m in a new relationship with a client, you get a lot more info from them and also they are a little more forgiving when you make mistakes.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“He is the one who asks most questions. I will read, talk to somebody, and get back to him. He is happy to hear that I have heard it beforehand, and will jump on it. It helps you to understand what is happening.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“It’s quite good how you can practically run a client by understanding its people and what they are doing. Our audit approach has changed, we try and find out what our clients do in terms of controls over their work.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“If you get a question from a client, you analyze it in a legal way and also look at it from a more commercial standpoint. This comes with experience and from being in this environment where you get a feeling of commercial reality as well as the legal side.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>With partners</i></p> <p>“I tell them, these are the important things. I am identifying the critical issues, and the opportunities, because they care about risk and opportunities. I say look, these are the risks, these are the opportunities, this is what you need to focus your time on in order to clear our deliverables.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“I don’t like partners very hands off, where the transport of knowledge isn’t there. I like partners where I can go into their office, ask questions, and feel comfortable.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“It is more really involving them by exception, or when you just want to position something. We used to work on a series of projects, so we intuitively can organise the work between us and just involve each other when there is an issue to be resolved and all the rest is really mutual understanding.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“I spend more time with partners than before, but it’s different, I don’t necessarily have to prepare for them. They ask my opinion, it’s like a dialogue.” (Lawyer)</p>
Low SIC: Execution approach	
<p><i>With clients</i></p> <p>“Meet client expectations, meet client deadlines, do a better quality audit and do it in a more efficient manner. I think on an engagement by engagement basis that is my goal.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“You have to show him that you know what you’re talking about. Obviously he knows that the partner’s on top of you but when he’s asking you questions he expects you to know certain things and it’s no use saying, ‘I don’t know, I’ve got to research it.’” (Accountant)</p> <p>“I call these the JW factors: adhere to milestones, to deadlines, deliver the expected results and the expected depth of analysis and so on, that I’d consider the formal stuff.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“My involvement is with checking the documents and it will come relatively late in terms of my personal involvement on a job. Most of what I do will be going to meetings and advising on particular points to enable the structure to be worked out.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>With partners</i></p> <p>“I have a direct line of communications with them and to the extent that they need something they will call me.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“Partners depend on the work that comes from underneath and they like very much to have the information on the results broken down to easily digestible pieces, that they can directly transmit to their customers, the clients. They don’t want to spend much time understanding what the issue is, they just want to have everything very well prepared.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“The project manager is somebody who takes care of a subject for the partner... You are always thinking about supporting partner’s acquisitions.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“I would not say that I had any particular tactic. Probably all of my contacts with the partners follow quite a similar sort of path, and they will probably all get to know me in the same sort of way, seeing my work.” (Lawyer)</p>

TABLE 4
Relational Strategies Evidence

High SIC: Collegial approach	
<p><i>With clients</i></p> <p>“It’s a client service business so the job is to do the audit but the best way to get that done is to have a good relationship with the client, be buddies with him... Make social dates, show your face, chat, inquire about their family and kids.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“I am fairly good with my personal skills, I know when someone’s uncomfortable or agitated, and I think I just approached it in a slightly different way” (Accountant)</p> <p>“I met with one client every morning to run together.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“I have spoken to him a couple of times on the phone and we will probably go to a sports event, I will go with him and the partner will go with his opposite number from the firm, so at each level there is someone from the firm as a point of contact.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>With partners</i></p> <p>“I would call them up, and meet with them prior to the engagement to introduce myself and understand expectations.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“Because I was promoted so fast I have good contacts to partners, but I think I am promoted so fast because I have the contacts. It’s a circle. I think it’s very important to make the first step to people who are above you.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“A lot of people are technically gifted, but if no people skills, no partnership. You have to get all guns blazing for you to get recognition, partnership. You need both technical and social skills.” (Lawyer)</p> <p>“You have to know what is in the pipeline and express your interests. I would not be afraid to speak up and talk to partners if something worries me. A lot of networking is done at firm parties, you have to make yourself known. It’s all about staying friends with all people.” (Lawyer)</p>
Low SIC: Hierarchical approach	
<p><i>With clients</i></p> <p>“Since I have mostly new clients, to develop a good working relationship with my key client contacts, I meet with them on a formal basis a couple of times a year and then informally as things go on.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“You don’t touch top management... strictly from the competence perspective, you could do that, but not from the relation management perspective. You don’t have the contacts, you don’t have the trust. How does the client see somebody in your position? He does not want to talk with a second or third level professional.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“Well there’s no general rule within the firm, there’s no official rule saying, you as project managers should do this with your contacts. I don’t do much actually because it is new to me. At my level we don’t think about this too much yet. We know its important but we don’t have set rules.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“We tend to have less direct client contact than the finance team, who are sort of the project managers, if you like. There will be a lot of email, correspondence about specific technical points and that could go on for at least a couple of months.” (Lawyer)</p>	<p><i>With partners</i></p> <p>“You initially need to have some exposure or experience with them from work. I don’t think you can just seek them out and try to establish a relationship with them, it would come through circumstances.” (Accountant)</p> <p>“You cannot be too open about your perspectives.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“This associate partner was very pushy on his own career and his style was kind of friendly, but up to where his own interests were touched. So whenever problems occurred where he would need to stand up for me against other partners, he would always leave me in the rain.” (Consultant)</p> <p>“I’m spending more time with partners now to make myself known and try and build up my profile. You can acquire a certain amount of knowledge from your peers, and from associates who are more senior, but basically you don’t build up your profile except through what the partners think, so you probably are more partner-oriented.” (Lawyer)</p>

APPENDIX

Social Integration with Clients Questionnaire Items

The items had this stem and response format: “Below is a list of questions on various facets of your job and social context. Most questions are of the type where you either agree or disagree with a statement. Please circle the appropriate number that represents your answer, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree.”

1. I feel comfortable around my clients.
2. My clients seem to accept me as one of them.
3. I feel little attachment to my clients. (R)
4. With my clients I would be easily identified as ‘one of the gang.’
5. I feel well integrated with my clients.
6. I feel ‘at home’ amongst my clients.

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