

CHAPTER 3

Ethnic Diversity and Social Capital in Upward Mobility Systems:

Problematizing The Permeability of Intra-organizational Career Boundaries

3.1. Introduction

Members of minority ethnic groups in contemporary society typically do not achieve equal levels of objective career success in terms of income and occupational attainment compared to similarly educated members of the dominant ethnic group (Avery, 2011; Carton & Rosette, 2011; Heath, Rethon, & Kilpi, 2008; Parks-Yancy, 2006). For minority ethnic professionals, career patterns of cumulative disadvantage have been observed in countries such as Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands (Heath et al., 2008).

Objective career success is positively influenced not only by human capital, but also by social capital (Ng & Burke, 2005). Social capital is featured in “knowing whom” (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2010), which is one of the pillars of boundaryless careers (De Fillippi & Arthur, 1994; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Raider & Burt, 1996). Differential access to social capital can thus impose boundaries on careers and ultimately on objective career success for members of different social groups. Minority ethnics may be less able to translate their human capital into social capital and improved career outcomes (Fang, Zikic, & Novicevic, 2009; Friedman & Krackhardt, 1997) than dominant ethnics. Ibarra (1993, 1995) argues that minority ethnics in managerial positions have less access to resources through social networks, resulting in less career advancement potential than dominant ethnics. In this sense, at least one of the drivers of boundaryless careers opens up a space for career boundary creation, which Inkson et al. (2012) regard relevant for further study. One of the few studies to establish a link between minority ethnic group membership, social capital, and career outcomes over time for the general

population of the United States was performed by Parks-Yancy (2006). Kenny and Briner (2007) state that further research should look into “what happens to minority ethnic employees after they join organizations”, especially for minority ethnic professionals (p. 449).

The process by which a relative lack of social capital results in less objective career success over time for minority ethnic managers and professionals has rarely been conceptualized or studied (see for an exception Bielby, 2012). Following up on Lin’s (1999) call for future research on the career consequences of differential access to social capital for specific social groups, we explore and model the relationship between social capital and objective career success for minority ethnics compared to dominant ethnics. We first establish a reciprocal and spiraling relationship between social capital and career success over time. Next, we describe how ethnic group membership affects this relationship, on account of the three mechanisms of the return deficit of social capital as defined by Lin (2001). We distinguish four previously established principles of social interaction that underlie these mechanisms. We illustrate how these principles act as filters, affecting the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries. Our explicit focus on ethnic group membership is not only based on observed patterns of cumulative disadvantage in managerial and professional careers, but also on the finding that dominant ethnics perceive minority ethnics to be more dissimilar compared to those who are dissimilar in terms of gender and/or age, but similar in terms of ethnicity (Guillaume, Brodbeck, & Riketta, 2011; Riordan, 2000). In individuals’ social networks, ethnicity appears to be the strongest divide (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). We explicitly position our conceptualization in the context of managerial and professional careers, as well as in the context of Western Europe with its history of colonization and recent immigration motivated by economic reasons. In the public debate in Western Europe, ethnicity is the “category of practice” rather than race,

which is why we have adopted ethnicity as the category of analysis here (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). It is in the particular context of managerial and professional careers in Western Europe that the generally observed relative lack of objective career success of minority ethnics compared to dominant ethnics appears to be exacerbated (Castilla, 2008; Heath et al., 2008; Kay & Gorman, 2012).

3.2. An Exploration of Key Concepts: Ethnic Group Membership, Objective Career Success, and Social Capital

We start with an explanation of key concepts (i.e., diversity in terms of ethnic group membership, (career and) objective career success, social capital) and the relationship between ethnic group membership with both social capital and objective career success. Thereafter, we will explore the relationships between social capital and objective career success and the role of ethnic group membership in this relationship over time.

3.2.1. Diversity in terms of ethnic group membership. Diversity refers to “dissimilarity or the extent to which an individual’s demographic or idiosyncratic attributes are shared by others in the unit” (Guillaume et al., 2011, p. 81). We follow this so-called relational approach to diversity, which focuses on the relative similarity between an individual’s attributes and the attributes of others in the individual’s organizational unit (Riordan, 2000). Diversity may affect work-related attitudes, behavior, processes, and outcomes as a function of people’s relative level of (dis)similarity (Guillaume et al., 2011). The individual attribute we choose to focus on in this conceptualization is ethnicity, which Eriksen (2002) defines as an aspect of the social relationship between groups whose members consider themselves as being culturally distinctive from other groups. Kenny and Briner (2007) define ethnicity as “denot[ing] group differences based on shared ancestry, traditions and categorizations by those within and external to the

group” (p. 439). Hence, we understand ethnic diversity in terms of relative (dis)similarities between individuals due to assigned or acclaimed group membership based on assumed similarities in culture, ancestry, traditions, and categorizations. As long as individuals of an organizational unit perceive equal status, limited salience of difference, an adequate role distribution, and a shared reason for cooperation, the categorical dissimilarity between them (e.g., on the grounds of ethnic group membership) will not be problematic in terms of social relations (DiTomaso, Post, & Parks-Yancy, 2007). However, categorical dissimilarity between organizational members becomes problematic when (self-) categorization leads to persistent inequality between individual members of different groups with respect to certain opportunities or outcomes (DiTomaso et al., 2007), such as promotion (Kirchmeyer, 1995). In societies with relatively large numbers of recent immigrants, such as the Netherlands, minority ethnics are often constructed as “absolute others” (i.e., not belonging to the nation and yet living inside it), informed by history (Ghorashi, 2010). This fits with the finding that minority ethnics are likely to be perceived as most dissimilar by dominant ethnics, in comparison to those who are similar in ethnicity, but dissimilar in terms of gender and/or age (Guillaume et al., 2011; Riordan, 2000).

In this chapter, our preferred terminology contrasts “minority ethnics” to “dominant ethnics” instead of majority ethnics, because we want to highlight the complex relationships and dependencies between diverse ethnic groups, which do not necessarily reflect the numerical representation of members of these groups in organizations or organizational units (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Yoder, 1994). Indeed, salient differences in status, power, role distribution, and access to opportunities among different ethnic groups are equally, if not more important than numbers (DiTomaso et al., 2007).

High status groups define what is considered legitimate, appropriate, valuable, and rational in terms of individuals' behaviors, tastes, and values (Amoroso, Loyd, & Hoobler, 2010). In reference to Bourdieu (1986), DiTomaso et al. (2007, p. 480) define status as "a way of life or mode of being that symbolically communicates whether a person deserves to be treated with deference or with honor". Status determines the distribution of power and prestige among societal and organizational members, reflected in a status hierarchy (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch Jr., 1972). According to Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, and Masson (1996), an "ethnic hierarchy" is a social representation of a status hierarchy on the basis of ethnicity. Even though criteria for assigning social status among members of different ethnic groups may differ, consensus between the different groups in society on the ethnic hierarchy often exists (Van de Vijver, 2009; Verkuyten et al., 1996), with dominant ethnics holding the highest status position.

The ethnic hierarchy in society is mirrored in most organizations, through the establishment and maintenance of unquestioned organizational norms and values based on habits, practices, and beliefs shared by dominant ethnics (Siebers, 2010). The norms of the dominant group are reproduced through formal and informal organizational policies and practices (Cox, 1994; Kirton, 2003).

3.2.2. Careers and objective career success. A career is generally understood as an "unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005, p. 178). Gunz, Peiperl, and Tzabbar (2007) argue that "a career, at the individual level of analysis, becomes a sequence of boundary-crossings that are largely responsible for giving it its form" (p. 475). The notion of individuals as proactive agents in creating and managing their careers across various subjective and objective, intra- and inter-organizational boundaries (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Cotton & Shen, 2013; Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012) has

become normalized in careers' research (Inkson et al., 2012). Even though a transformation from linear to multi-directional career paths has been suggested previously (Baruch, 2004), Arnold and Cohen (2013) claim that hierarchical advancement or upward mobility is not only evident but also central to our notion of careers, with matching metaphors such as "ladders, mountains and treetops" (p. 273). Certainly managerial and professional careers are still structured by means of hierarchical or upward mobility systems (Arnold & Cohen, 2013; Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988; Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012), in which mobility has to be understood in terms of moving "up the hierarchy" from one position to another (Arnold & Cohen, 2013; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009). Promotion in this kind of setting (managerial and professional careers) constitutes crossing an intra-organizational objective boundary, extending Gunz et al.'s (2007) conceptualization of boundaries. Career logics are shaped by organizational features, including hierarchical, functional, and power-based boundaries (Gunz, 1988; Gunz et al., 2007; Schein, 1971), which induce linearity (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012). Baruch (2004) describes the spiral development of careers across the various intra-organizational career boundaries within Schein's conical model of organizational careers (1971). Concrete examples of upward mobility systems in which these kinds of boundaries feature strongly are up-or-out promotion schemes culminating in partnership in consulting and law firms, performance-based compensation in the financial sector, and high potential or management trainee programs evident in various large scale profit and not-for-profit organizations (Ishida, Su, & Spilerman, 2002; Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries, & Pepermans, 2014). On the one hand, these systems strongly suggest meritocracy (Castilla & Benard, 2010) through their formal procedures and transparent criteria. On the other hand, the intra-organizational boundaries of these systems may (appear to) be less permeable for

minority ethnics regardless of their merit, effectively blocking or re-directing their careers (Inkson et al., 2012).

Career success is defined as the “accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person’s work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). Common definitions of career success typically distinguish between objective and subjective aspects (Heslin, 2005). Objective career success is understood in terms of externally observable achievements, such as job level, salary, and number of promotions (Arthur et al., 2005; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz Jr., 1995; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Subjective career success refers to the internal, personal experience of the career, such as career satisfaction, commitment, and engagement (Arthur et al., 2005; Ng et al., 2005). In a meta-analysis, Ng et al. (2005) found objective and subjective career success to be only moderately correlated. For the purpose of this article we focus on objective career success only, because we want to understand differences in career advancement in terms of promotion and salary between minority ethnics and dominant ethnics in upward mobility systems. Indeed, upward mobility still reflects the norm for evaluating career trajectories in most large-scale organizations (Baruch, 2006; Heslin, 2005; Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012).

Ethnic group membership and objective career success. In a recent review, Avery (2011) explains how the playing field for management promotion remains uneven, resulting in an overrepresentation of dominant ethnic men in higher positions. Similarly, Gammie and Gammie (1997) discuss how situational factors, such as the social composition of groups in society, influence the distribution of career opportunities and power within traditionally patriarchal and masculine professions (e.g., accountancy) in favor of dominant ethnic men. While earlier theorizing mostly refers to gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977), more recent

work provides a similar explanation of the replication of the societal ethnic hierarchy in organizations (Acker, 2006). A small but growing number of empirical studies show that minority ethnics typically attain less objective career success than dominant ethnics across different contexts (Bielby, 2012; Castilla, 2008; Dronkers & Wanner, 2006; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Janssen, 2004; Kay & Gorman, 2012; Kirchmeyer, 2006; Maume, 2012; Parks-Yancy, 2006). This difference in objective career success, regardless of actual competence (Tomaskovic-Devey, Thomas, & Johnson, 2005), can be largely explained by the denial of rewards, resources, or opportunities as a result of group membership (James, 2000), also known as treatment discrimination (Levitin, Quinn, & Staines, 1971). Career success in upward mobility systems is to a large degree determined by performance evaluations and promotion decisions made by others (i.e., evaluators), in which bias plays a considerable role (Roberson, Galvin, & Charles, 2007; Vinkenburg et al., 2014). Roberson et al. (Roberson et al., 2007) describe stereotype fit and status construction as sources of bias in performance evaluations. We adopt these principles for our conceptualization, starting with the relationship between ethnic group membership and objective career success.

Stereotype fit. Stereotype fit models (Heilman, 2012) including role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) propose that evaluators base their judgment on the degree of fit between a ratee and stereotypical attributes thought necessary to successfully perform the job. Bias is predicted to occur when there is a lack of fit between the two (Roberson et al., 2007). According to role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), incongruity between the prototypical successful incumbent of a social role (e.g., top manager) and stereotypical beliefs about the ratee based on (ethnic) group membership will lead to a more negative evaluation of the ratee by the evaluator. Martell, Emrich, and Robison-Cox (2012) describe how lack of fit results in biased performance

ratings, and that even small differences in evaluation can adversely affect organizational mobility. Not only are minority ethnics confronted with smaller chances to attain the aspired role, they may also experience backlash or penalties for counter-stereotypical behavior when occupying the role (Cox & Blake, 1991; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Evaluators may engage in stereotype maintenance activities (Phelan & Rudman, 2010), such as sabotaging minority ethnics, when succeeding in counter-stereotypical domains, and thereby further prevent their future success.

Status construction. Evaluators infer competence with regard to a wide range of abilities from apparent status, such as prestige and economic success (Ridgeway, 2001). Status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2000) describes how inferences based on task-irrelevant personal attributes (e.g., ethnicity) lead to favoring members of one group compared to members of another group. By ascribing status characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class) to differences recognized among a certain population, shared status value beliefs lead to the association of “higher social evaluation and expectations for greater competence with one state of a characteristic than another” (Ridgeway, 2000, p. 84). Thus, bias is predicted to occur when status inferences based on task-irrelevant status characteristics are taken into consideration in evaluations (Roberson et al., 2007). In addition, status characteristics become a basis for stricter standards for the performance of lower status ratees (Foschi, 2000). According to system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), low status groups refrain from challenging the status quo, because the anticipated costs of doing so appear too high. Instead, social interaction among both high- and low-status groups maintains the consensually shared, socially valid, and accepted status value beliefs, which results in the finding that “low status groups justify the system of

inequality and come to believe that people get what they deserve” (DiTomaso et al., 2007, p. 479).

Next to gender, ethnicity appears to be a prime example of a diffuse status characteristic (Berger et al., 1972), from which general assumptions about status and competence in society are inferred (Ridgeway, 1991). As stereotypes about ethnicity contain beliefs about status position (Berger et al., 1972; Verkuyten et al., 1996), they serve to justify status hierarchies in organizations, with White men being viewed as more competent and qualified for higher positions than minority ethnics and women (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Ridgeway, 2001; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). In summary, the principles of stereotype fit and status construction help to explain that ethnic group membership affects objective career success. This relationship is represented in Figure 3.1.

3.2.3. Social capital. Social capital has been defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). We approach social capital on the individual level (Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004), representing valuable resources, such as access to specifically relevant information (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) postulate that social capital accumulates as a function of network *structure*, as it “inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” (Coleman, 1988, p. S98) (see for instance Borgatti and Foster (2003), Burt (1992), or Granovetter (1973)), as well as network *content* (e.g. shared norms and beliefs, abilities, friendship vs. work-related relationships: see Podolny and Baron (1997) or Adler and Kwon (2002)) embedded in the network.

Social capital has been identified as a predictor of objective career success (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Seibert et al., 2001), and as being beneficial for career entry as well as subsequent career advancement (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2010). Podolny and Baron (1997) show how, depending on the circumstances, both small and large networks may benefit career mobility. Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden's (2001) model of social capital and career success delineates how various aspects of social capital differentially contribute to both objective and subjective career success by means of a number of mediating variables (e.g., structure, content, and particular benefits).

Since we are interested in the relationship between social capital and objective career success, we embrace Lin's (2001) operationalization of social capital on the individual level in terms of the following dimensions: a) the (number of) network members in an individual's social network, b) the resources potentially becoming available through these network members, and c) the availability of the network members' resources to the individual. Next to the individual's ability to adequately use available social capital (Lin, 2000), availability in itself largely depends on the willingness of other network members to share their social capital with the individual (Van der Gaag and Snijders, 2004).

The importance of other's willingness to share their social capital with the individual becomes explicit in Adler and Kwon's definition of social capital: "Social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and the content of the actor's relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor" (2002, p. 23). Goodwill is defined as "the sympathy, trust, and forgiveness offered to us by friends and acquaintances" (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 18). This definition underlines the fact that social capital exists in the relationship of individuals with others who can grant access to

beneficial resources (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 1998). Portes (1998) discusses consummatory and instrumental motivations for other network members or “donors” to share their social capital with individuals or “recipients”. The consummatory motivation arises from internalized norms within one community, prescribing certain ways of interaction between community members (Portes, 1998). We interpret the consequence of these internalized norms in terms of the creation of mutual understanding and interpersonal trust among community members, which gives the opportunity to share resources without fear of (personal) disadvantage. The instrumental motivation originates from the norm of reciprocity, motivating donors to share their social capital based on their expectation of a future return on their investment (Portes, 1998). Below, we discuss the principles of homophily and reciprocity in more detail, as these play an important role in terms of a donor’s motivation to grant others access to specific social capital.

Homophily. Generally, homophily can be understood in terms of the tendency for individuals to form connections with and share the opinions and behaviors of others who are similar in terms of demographic or other attributes (Bruggeman, 2008; Kilduff & Brass, 2010). In their original conceptualization of homophily, Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) differentiate between status homophily, in which similarity is based on (in)formal or ascribed status, and value homophily, in which similarity is based on values, attitudes, and beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Individuals seek similar others, because a high degree of similarity in status and/or values offers advantages in interaction, such as facilitating communication and sharing of tacit knowledge, enhancing feelings of predictability and trust, as well as easing coordination and reducing the possibility of conflicts (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; DiTomaso et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1995). Relating this general tendency of “birds of a feather to flock together”

(McPherson et al., 2001) to our understanding of the consummatory motivation to share one's social capital, we see how a specific salient attribute can determine individual access to a specific social network (Ibarra, 1995), and thereby individual access to specific social capital.

Reciprocity. According to social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the success of social networks depends on the mutual exchange of valuable commodities of social interaction, such as support, resources and/or information. Following Adler and Kwon (2002), the norm of reciprocity in the context of social capital can be compared to general returns on investments: Both the building of the network of relationships itself and the investment and maintenance in established relationships leads to individual and collective benefits (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Ideally, all members of a network participate in the network as donors (investing in relationships and sharing information) and recipients (benefitting from relationships and receiving information) to a similar extent. Under such conditions, Portes (1998) argues that the instrumental motivation for sharing one's social capital with others will result in optimal returns on investment for all involved. However, the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) can also lead to social closure or the exclusion of outsiders (see Portes, 1998), when not all network members appear to be able to give and take in equal measure. Indeed, high status donors are reluctant to share social capital with a potential recipient belonging to a lower status group, because they fear "a cost rather than a prize for their investment in the candidate" (Lin, 2000, p. 791). Under such circumstances, individuals can be included in or excluded from specific social networks based on the anticipated value of their social capital by high status network members (Kanter, 1977). These gatekeepers (Kanter, 1977), who typically represent the dominant organizational elite, thus decide which individuals gain access to specific social capital.

Ethnic group membership and social capital. Regarding the effect of social group membership on social capital, Lin (2000) considers both differences in investments as well as opportunities based on individual social group membership as the main reasons for differences in social capital between members of social groups. Lin labels these differences in social capital as “capital deficit” and defines it as “the relative shortage (in quantity or quality) of social capital for one group as compared with another” (2000, pp. 790-791). Families transmit social capital from one generation to the next (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). Inequalities between different ethnic groups are passed on across different generations through the transfer of (under-) privileged opportunities in education and relations to the labor market (Loury, 1977, 1981). The previous generation’s socio-economic position and social capital are the starting point for the establishment of the next generation’s socio-economic position and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Loury, 1977). In addition, related to their under-privileged position within organizations (Siebers, 2009), minority ethnics are likely to be excluded from relevant organizational networks as well as broader career enhancing and developing relationships (James, 2000). As a possible consequence of homophily (Ibarra, 1995) and/or the norm of reciprocity (Portes, 1998), gatekeepers are expected to be more inclined to grant network access to dominant ethnics than to minority ethnics, leading to less opportunity to acquire social capital for the latter compared to the former (Lin, 1999). Parks-Yancy, DiTomaso, and Post (2006) findings support the idea that “early (dis)advantages generally contribute to later (dis)advantages” (Parks-Yancy et al., 2006, p. 111), in that restricted access to social capital early in an individual’s career is likely to impede the individual’s career even later on. In summary, the principles of homophily and reciprocity help to explain that ethnic group

membership affects the accumulation of social capital. This relationship is represented in Figure 3.1.

3.3. Building a Conceptual Model between Key Concepts

Situating the previously described key concepts in our analysis of careers in upward mobility systems, we propose a reciprocal relationship between social capital and career success over time, which we understand as an upward career spiral evolving throughout the course of the individual career. Based on the proposed effect of ethnic group membership on the upward career spiral, through mechanisms and underlying principles of social interaction (i.e., stereotype fit, status construction, homophily, reciprocity) that act as filters, affecting the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries, we conclude with our final assumption of not only greater, but also exponentially faster career advancement for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics. Figure 3.1 can be considered as both a roadmap for as well as the result of the subsequent conceptualization.

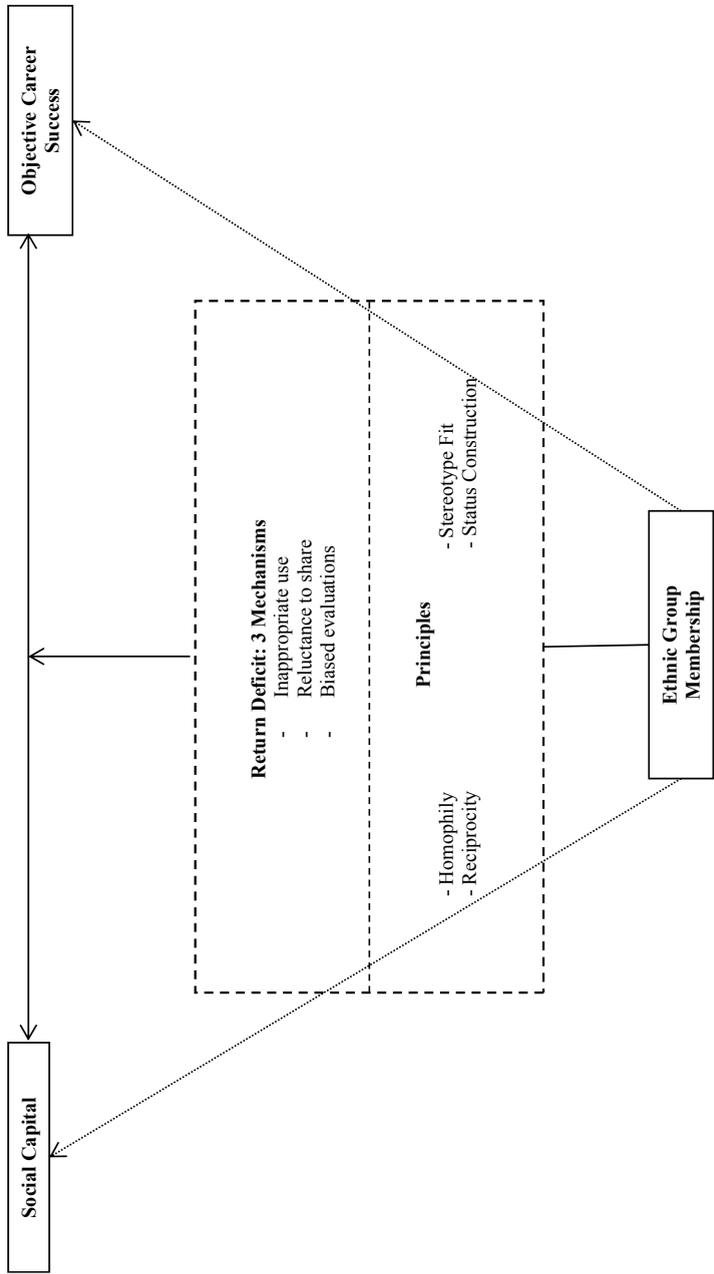


Figure 3.1: Visualization of the conceptualization of how ethnic group membership affects the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success over time through three mechanisms of return deficit and underlying principles.

Our conceptualization starts from a holistic view of social capital and its relationship with objective career success. In discussing causality in their review of the network-paradigm in organizational research, Borgatti and Foster (2003) state that the antecedents of networks are rarely studied. However, success has been suggested to be a predictor of social capital at the organizational level: Leenders and Gabby (1999) found that, with enhanced performance, firms become more attractive networking partners and increase their social capital. On the individual level, Forret and Dougherty (2001) argue in favor of reversed causation between social capital and (objective) career success, as they found that the degree of influence associated with an organizational position determines the attractiveness of a potential networking partner. Building on this idea, we expect social capital to increase after attaining objective career success. A promotion (or similar increase in objective career success) is bound to lead to changes in both the structure and content of an individual's social network. These changes follow from contacts with others in a similar position, on the grounds of both homophily and reciprocity. Indeed, Podolny and Baron (1997) show that an individual's organizational position to a large extent predefines the group of people the individual could possibly connect with, by, for instance, creating "salient social borders between organizational members" leading to group formation based on shared organizational interests and experiences (Seibert et al., 2001, p. 222). By interacting with equally successful others, the individual's social capital is enhanced (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Following Granovetter (1973), Parks-Yancy et al. (2006) also suggest that each position brings along opportunities for new contacts with relevant others who might hold new information on future job opportunities.

Lazarova and Taylor (2009, p. 124) argue that "careers in organizations both shape and are shaped by social capital". While Gabbay and Leenders (2001) discuss how organizational

social networks change over time, the relationship between social capital and objective career success over the course of an individual's career has not been previously conceptualized, to the best of our knowledge. In moving beyond causality, we suggest a reciprocal relationship between social capital and career success over time. Hall's model of career development as a psychological success cycle (1971; Hall & Foster, 1977) involving continuous goal setting and performance success serves as an inspiration. We propose a similar continuous relationship between social capital and objective career success over the course of an individual career: Available social capital offers a new opportunity for objective career success (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Seibert et al., 2001), while objective career success offers new opportunities to gain more social capital (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997), which then affects objective career success etcetera. In this manner, a pattern of mutual influence between social capital and objective career success emerges over the course of an individual's career, implying reciprocal causation.

In the context of upward mobility systems, Rosenbaum describes the development of career patterns as a "sequence of competitions, *each* of which has implications for an individual's mobility chances in all subsequent selections" (1979, pp. 222-223; original emphasis). According to tournament theory (Rosenbaum, 1979), careers are understood as a continuous and accumulating process of individual successes in each competition over time. In dynamic tournament models, promotion is determined by the cumulative result of a large number of competitions, and those who do not win a competition remain in the tournament (Vinkenburg et al., 2014). In a similar vein, Parks-Yancy (2006) shows that both social capital and objective career success accumulate over time. Combining this line of thought with our assumption of an

ongoing reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success over time, we come to the following propositions:

Proposition 1: 1.a) There is a reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success, which over time *1.b)* evolves in the form of an upward career spiral.

3.3.1. Ethnic group membership and the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success. We deduce our rationale for the effect of ethnic group membership on the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success from Lin's idea of "return deficit", which is defined as "the consequence of a process by which a given quality or quantity of [social] capital generates differential returns or outcomes for members of different social groups" (Lin, 2000, p. 791). The effect of the "return deficit" goes above and beyond the assumed "capital deficit" described earlier (Lin, 2000), in that this process is expected to operate even under conditions of equal social capital. Similarly, we subsequently argue that under conditions of equal measures of objective career success, the return deficit may be responsible for lower returns in terms of social capital for minority ethnics compared to dominant ethnics.

According to Lin (2000), the return deficit is the consequence of (a combination of) three possible mechanisms: 1) the inappropriate use of available social capital by disadvantaged groups compared to the advantaged group, 2) the reluctance of relevant others to share their social capital with members belonging to specific social groups, and/or 3) the different evaluations of identical social capital by others depending on an individual's social group membership. In this section, we explore how the return deficit by means of these three mechanisms affects the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success for members of different ethnic groups. Our approach is in line with McDonald and

Day's (2010) request to further examine the nature of and differentiation between these three processes.

First mechanism: Inappropriate use of social capital. Lin's first mechanism, the inappropriate use of available social capital (Lin, 2000), introduces a behavioral component as a possible reason for the return deficit. In our specific context, we understand this behavioral component in terms of networking, which has been defined as "behaviors that are aimed at building, maintaining, and using informal relationships that possess the (potential) benefit of facilitating work-related activities of individuals by voluntarily granting access to resources and maximizing common advantages" (Wolff & Moser, 2009, pp. 196-197). By engaging in proactive networking, an individual shapes the immediate social environment for the benefit of attaining personal goals (Ibarra, 1993). Networking has been identified as an antecedent to social capital (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, 2004; Wolff & Moser, 2009; Wolff, Moser, & Grau, 2008), and functions as one of the crucial competencies regarding personal career management (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). This is reflected in a careful selection of, and active engagement in, social relations with the aim of enhancing individual career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2001). One of the beneficial outcomes of explicitly building network contacts is acquiring knowledge of the informal organizational habits and practices (Kim, 2013). As networking is more expected and more common at higher organizational levels (Michael & Yukl, 1993; Wolff & Moser, 2009), networking is considered prototypical of successful incumbents of high positions (Roberts, 2005).

According to the principle of homophily (McPherson et al., 2001) it is less likely for minority ethnics to interact with dominant ethnic others at a similar level of objective career success in order to enhance their proficiency in "adequate" networking, than for dominant

ethnics. Kim (2013) would argue that this is a likely outcome of building contacts: Minority ethnics are disadvantaged in acquiring knowledge of “the unwritten rules of the game by having built contacts with alters and/or potential career sponsors” (p. 127). In addition, following Phelan and Rudman (2010), we propose that minority ethnics who feel threatened by backlash for counter-stereotypical behavior or success may defer from certain types of “adequate” networking in ways that bolster ethnic stereotypes.

Combined, the principles of homophily and stereotype fit explain why minority ethnics in comparison to dominant ethnics will be less likely to engage in and to benefit from adequate networking. “Inadequate” networking may be the reason for failing to turn social capital into opportunities for objective career success, but also for failing to accumulate more social capital as a direct consequence of one’s objective career achievements. Thus, we see that Lin’s first mechanism (2000) of the inappropriate use of social capital serves as a possible explanation for the effect of ethnic group membership on the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success through homophily and stereotype fit.

Second mechanism: Reluctance to share social capital. Lin’s second mechanism underlying return deficit refers to donors’ reluctance to share inherent social capital with recipients belonging to a lower status group (Lin, 2000). Considering the notion of status hierarchy based on ethnicity and the construction of minority ethnics as “absolute others” (Ghorashi, 2010), we expect this pattern to be true within the context of ethnicity. Reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) combined with status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991, 2000) explains why high status donors prefer to share their social capital with similar status recipients rather than low status recipients. The decision not to share social capital results in exclusion or social closure (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Lin, 2001). McDonald and Day (2010) argue that social

closure based on networks and social closure based on ethnicity are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing, as network exclusion might serve as justification for further stereotyping. Thus, even under conditions of initially similar social capital, minority ethnics might suffer from return deficit, on account of donors' reluctance to share their social capital.

Similarly, minority ethnics benefit less from similar objective career success in terms of increasing their social capital compared to dominant ethnics. Based on status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991; 2000), minority ethnic recipients can be expected to be considered less attractive as a potential network partner by donors compared to dominant ethnic recipients due to inferences related to the ethnic hierarchy (Verkuyten et al., 1996), for instance. These inferences, in turn, can be a driver for the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) to result in social closure and exclusion (Portes, 1998) for some (i.e. low status recipients, thus, minority ethnics) compared to others (i.e. high status recipients, thus, dominant ethnics).

Lin's second mechanism of reluctance to share social capital (Lin, 2000) serves as a further possible explanation for the effect of ethnic group membership on the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success through status construction and the norm of reciprocity.

Third mechanism: Biased evaluations. On the societal level, biased reactions from the labor market regarding potential entrants belonging to different social groups in spite of similar social capital is the basis of Lin's third mechanism leading to return deficit (Lin, 2000). Incongruity or lack of fit between evaluators' stereotypical beliefs about minority ethnics and the prototypical successful employee who is modelled after dominant ethnics, will lead to biased and often negative evaluations of the individual belonging to the minority ethnic group (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Rosette et al., 2008), regardless of the

individual's social capital. Evaluators thus function as gatekeepers for career advancement (Gunz et al., 2007): They can choose whom (not) to support or select for promotion, on the basis of their perception of an individual's suitability for a particular role (Inkson et al., 2012). The occurrence of bias in performance evaluations, even if small (Martell et al., 2012), is an important reason why the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success over time plays out differently for minority ethnics compared to dominant ethnics.

On the one hand, minority ethnics are expected to be less able to turn their social capital into opportunities for career success, if their performance is evaluated less positively and if they are held to stricter standards of competence for promotion (Shore et al., 2011) solely on the basis of their ethnic group membership. On the other hand, biased evaluations may result in smaller increases of social capital for minority ethnics as a consequence of attained objective career success, as dominant ethnics will be less likely to share their social capital with those whose performance is viewed in a less favorable light. Furthermore, defending the status or ethnic hierarchy can motivate backlash and penalties for status violations and counter-stereotypical behavior of upwardly mobile minority ethnics (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Bias in evaluations may thus result in return deficit in terms of both social capital and objective career success for minority ethnics, even if the initial levels of social capital and/or objective career success were similar to those of dominant ethnics.

Lin's third mechanism (Lin, 2000) therefore serves as an additional explanation of the effect of ethnic group membership on the proposed reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success through stereotype fit and status construction.

In summary, the three mechanisms that underlie the return deficit according to Lin (2001) offer a useful framework for explaining the effect of ethnic group membership on the reciprocal

relationship between social capital and objective career success. Comparable social capital does not necessarily lead to a comparable increase or accumulation of advantage in objective career success, and similar objective career success does not necessarily lead to a similar increase or accumulation of advantage in social capital for members of different ethnic groups. As outlined above, ethnic group membership affects the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success through the principles of stereotype fit (Heilman, 2012), status construction (Ridgeway, 1991; 2000), homophily (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987), and reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). As we have seen, these principles underlie the return deficit of social capital (Lin, 2000), and through three unique mechanisms affect the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries. Therefore, we come to the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Ethnic group membership affects the reciprocal relationship between social capital and objective career success through 2.a) the principles of stereotype fit, status construction, homophily, and reciprocity, which 2.b) affect the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries.

Combining the notion of a career as a sequence of boundary-crossings (Gunz et al., 2007) and the mechanisms that shape the return deficit of social capital (Lin, 2000) in light of ethnic group membership, intra-organizational career boundaries are less permeable for those who do not fit the stereotype, who do not hold legitimized status characteristics, who are dissimilar to relevant gatekeepers, and who cannot guarantee a return on investment. Thus, we come to the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Following from proposition 2, intra-organizational career boundaries are more permeable for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics.

3.3.2. Ethnic group membership and the career spiral. Again, situating the previous proposition in the context of upward mobility systems, we now explore how an individual's career pattern most likely evolves depending on the individual's ethnic group membership. Similar to the accumulation of social capital and (objective) career success (Parks-Yancy, 2006; Rosenbaum, 1979) over time, the accumulation of advantages and disadvantages also plays out over time (Bourdieu, 1977). Merton (1968, p. 62) and McClelland (1990) describe patterns of cumulative (dis)advantage in career attainments over time, known as the Matthew effect, in which "the rich get richer" and the discrepancy between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is enlarged over time. On account of the effects of ethnic group membership on social capital, objective career success, and the reciprocal relationship between them, we expect a similar pattern of cumulative advantage for dominant ethnics, in which they continuously achieve more social capital and greater objective career success compared to minority ethnics over time.

The effect of ethnic group membership on the continuous accumulation and creation of advantages and objective career success over time (Merton, 1968; Rosenbaum, 1979) has been alluded to by Parks-Yancy (2006), in that dominant ethnics are expected to "advance faster and further" than minority ethnics (Parks-Yancy, 2006, p. 542). Also, DiMaggio and Garip (2012) suggest that network effects can increase inequality between different social groups over time, even though initial differences between the groups in terms of human capital were negligible. Since advantages and successes add up (Rosenbaum, 1979), leading to even more advantages and successes (Merton, 1968) over time, we expect dominant ethnics to accumulate more advantages and to succeed more easily compared to minority ethnics over time. This relative ease is a direct result of the principles of stereotype fit (Heilman, 2012), status construction (Ridgeway, 1991; 2000), homophily (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987), and reciprocity

(Gouldner, 1960), making boundaries more permeable for dominant ethnics than for minority ethnics. In terms of the upward career spiral (see proposition 1b), we posit that both the accumulation of advantages and the self-enhancing effect of advantages do not only increase, but also accelerate the progression of the career spiral for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics. Thus, we conclude with the following proposition:

Proposition 4: As intra-organizational career boundaries are more permeable for dominant ethnics compared to minority ethnics, dominant ethnics do not only achieve more social capital and greater objective career success compared to minority ethnics, but they also advance exponentially faster in their careers compared to minority ethnics.

As a last remark we would like to stress that, in general, the development of the career spiral over time can be influenced by any attribute of diversity (e.g., gender, age etc.). However, one could argue that the influence of ethnic group membership on the career spiral as an attribute of diversity in organizations is more profound on account of status inferences based on the prevalent and persistent ethnic hierarchy in society (Verkuyten et al., 1996) and in organizations. Through the likely perception of minority ethnics as most dissimilar by dominant ethnics, compared to those who are dissimilar in terms of other demographic attributes (e.g., gender and/or age), but similar in terms of ethnicity (Guillaume et al., 2011; Riordan, 2000), the ethnic hierarchy (Verkuyten et al., 1996) is reproduced in the construction of minority ethnics as “absolute others” (Ghorashi, 2010). Furthermore, as minority ethnics in the European context are typically also in the numerical minority, the perceived degree of dissimilarity will be even larger (DiTomaso et al., 2007), with matching consequences for the career spiral.

3.4. Conclusion

The constraining effect for minority ethnics on the crucial reciprocal relationship between social capital or “knowing whom” and career success, resulting in a stunted career spiral, constitutes a considerable but previously unexplored influence on the permeability of intra-organizational career boundaries. Even if many managerial and professional careers in upward mobility systems are shaped by both old and new boundaries that induce linearity (Vinkenburg & Weber, 2012), our final proposition begs further empirical exploration as to how exactly ethnic group membership in such contexts affects intra- and inter-organizational boundary crossing and career success invoking potential of social capital.

3.5. Limitations and Future Research.

It was our aim to be as comprehensive as possible when conceptually elaborating the effect of ethnic group membership on the relationship between social capital and objective career success over time. However, our elaboration is not without its limitations.

We decided to approach this conceptualization quite generally, despite our awareness that each of our core constructs (i.e. ethnicity, social capital, and objective career success) are “container vessels” that are inherently complex and perhaps even problematic. Although acknowledging the common differentiation with respect to objective and subjective career success, we only addressed objective career success, without further considering subjective career success, elaborating possible differences between these different kinds of career success and possible resulting consequences. We posit that including subjective career success adds another important dimension to the argumentation and we certainly encourage further theoretical elaborations. In addition, we limit ourselves to minority ethnics in managerial and professional careers in upward mobility systems in the Western European context here, in which promotion is

the predominant form of crossing intra-organizational boundaries. Other social groups, contexts, mobility systems, careers, and boundaries may require different conceptualizations and may not necessarily fit our propositions. The notion of the upward career spiral of growing social capital and career success, while inspired by the psychological success cycle proposed by Hall and Foster (1977), needs further elaboration and delineation, even without relating the shape, growth, and speed of the spiral to ethnic group membership. Questions as to what happens to those being blocked by a career boundary when moving up the career spiral, or whether the spiral can also take a negative or downward turn are interesting to consider in the future. Even though these questions are hard to answer, we can most certainly think of conditions related to boundaries under which the spiral would slow down or stop evolving.

For the same reason, we also did not further elaborate the very complex relationship between ethnic group membership and the suggested mediating variables in the relationship between social capital and career success as suggested by Seibert et al. (2001). Future conceptual refinement and empirical research is needed to consider these specific aspects in order to advance and further specify our understanding concerning the effect of ethnic group membership on the relationship between social capital and objective career success over time.

Furthermore, we did not provide an extensive elaboration of the meaning and possible career consequences of network structure and characteristics, which is necessary for further refinement of our understanding of the discussed relationships. We also refrained from considering the complex interplay between inter- and intragroup differences (intersectionality) emerging once other differentiating attributes are taken into consideration next to ethnicity; instead we focused on ethnicity as the central differentiating attribute only. However, it is

certainly both interesting and relevant to further refine the notion of the career spiral by taking additional attributes and their subsequent interplay into account.

Throughout the article, we formulated a number of propositions. Some of them are supported by existing empirical research; others are based on our conceptual elaboration only. Future research is needed to empirically test the formulated propositions.

Despite the limitations, we believe that we contribute to a better understanding of the complex interplay between ethnic group membership, social capital, and objective career success in upward mobility systems over time, and that we offer inspiration for future conceptualization and empirical research on the consequences of ethnic diversity for career spirals and for the permeability of various intra- and inter-organizational, subjective and objective boundaries in organizational careers.

3.6. References

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