

Rethinking Career Studies

Careers are studied across many disciplines – particularly from the social sciences – but there is little conversation between them. Many scholars are studying the same thing in different ways, too often missing opportunities to learn from one another and draw on each other’s ideas and findings to enrich their own. Gunz and Mayrhofer bridge these scholarly discourses as they explore the meaning of ‘career’ and answer the question: What is it that career scholars do when they study careers? The framework that emerges from this answer – the Social Chronology Framework (SCF) – vitally facilitates valuable conversations between scholars in different intellectual traditions. Building on the SCF framework, this comprehensive introduction to career studies encourages students, researchers and practitioners to identify commonalities between the topics that they are studying and those examined in other fields, such as organization studies, drawing together interdisciplinary insights into career outcomes and their influencing factors.

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*Facilitating Conversation across Boundaries
with the Social Chronology Framework*

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This book addresses some deceptively simple questions: what is career, what do those of us who study career actually do, and why do we find it so hard to talk to each other about our work? Books about careers take many forms, from academic monographs through edited collections of academic writing to a vast array of books intended to be helpful to people who actually have careers. This one falls into the first camp: it targets anyone who is interested in research on careers. That is a much wider audience than it at first appears. One of our themes, and it is not an original one, is that career puts in an appearance almost anywhere you look. There are certainly scholars whose primary interest is career (or an obvious synonym for it), but they are in some ways a minority. Social scientists and scholars of the humanities, of almost any imaginable kind, may at one time or another find themselves reflecting on what happens as people pass through life. Our aim here is not quite as broad as this: we are addressing anyone who does research on career, whether or not it is their primary interest, with a specific focus on colleagues working in the broad field of organization studies. At the moment few of us in these disparate areas of enquiry talk to each other about our mutual if varying interest in career; what we hope to do in this book is suggest an approach to stimulating this kind of conversation.

Because we are addressing what, for us at least, are fairly basic questions about career scholarship, there are places in this book, especially in Part II, where we get caught up in the weeds about basic issues. What we are trying to do is be as precise as we can about the ideas we are working with. We are pretty sure that this will interest some readers and irritate others. Some of the latter won't understand why we have to analyze every syllable and punctuation mark, so to speak, and some will regard our efforts as perhaps not bad for beginners but really needing an awful lot more work to be credible. We are signaling ahead on this point because our expectation is that different parts of this book will appeal to different readers and that by no means all of it will interest everyone. This means that anyone who has the endurance to read it all might find certain ideas coming back at them more times than they might wish. We apologize in advance for this. But there are some points that we do not want the

reader to miss, in particular that we think of the Social Chronology Framework (SCF) as a facilitator of conversation, *not* as a straightjacket for all thinking about career; that the studies we discuss are excellent pieces of scholarship on which it has been our pleasure to try to build; and that the SCF is by no means the only possible way of generating the ideas we claim for it.

It is very hard to be sure where an idea comes from. We – the authors – have been collaborating for a good many years on a number of projects, typically to do with conferences of one kind and another. Over that time we discovered a shared interest in a deceptively simple question: what on earth is career research all about? One of us (Hugh Gunz) had just finished coediting, with Maury Peiperl, a handbook that purported to define the field and where it might be heading. But at the end of that lengthy process he found himself as uncertain as ever about just what comprises the field of career studies (assuming that there is one). The other (Wolfgang Mayrhofer) was getting increasingly startled about what he had got himself into after setting up a longitudinal study on business school graduates' careers and the discussions about what a career "is" that were raging when doing this in an interdisciplinary team.

One of the ideas that emerged from the handbook, to which proper reference will be made when we get down to business in Chapter 1, was of career studies not being so much a field as a perspective on social enquiry. Whether that really was the origin of the idea for this book is hard to be sure because conversations ramble in many directions and ideas pop up out of them unexpectedly and randomly. We certainly had plenty of conversations like that. But the key point to be made here is that neither of us individually is the originator of the notion of the Social Chronology Framework: it has been a genuinely collaborative effort. Of course, this means that we carry equal blame, too.

The plan originally was for a journal article, which kept us going for longer than we prefer to remember. Gradually the structure of the argument took shape, and the clearer the shape became, the longer the article grew. We did submit it to a couple of journals (as well as present the ideas to a variety of meetings), and the reaction was constructive but pointed. There is too much here, they said, for a single article. One editor said quite bluntly that it looked to them as if we had the outline of a book manuscript, which was good to hear because by then Cambridge University Press had accepted our proposal for a monograph.

If it is hard in retrospect to identify where the idea for this book comes from, it is easy to identify friends and colleagues who have supported us along the way with their thoughtful and constructive criticisms and suggestions. Among them are John Arnold, Michael Arthur, Silvia Bagdadli, Joel Baum, Matthew Bidwell, Laurie Cohen, Audrey Collin, Gina Dokko, Nicky Dries, Jo Duberley, Daniel Feldman, Jeffrey Greenhaus, David Guest, Peter Heslin, Kerr Inkson, Candace Jones, Maria Kraimer, Kathy Kram, Mila Lazarova, Barbara

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We also thank Renate Gellner-Bächer and Gisela Ullrich-Rosner who dealt with a number of editing issues. As well we are most grateful to Valerie Appleby, James Gregory, and David Moore of Cambridge University Press and Paula Parish, formerly of Cambridge (who commissioned this book), whose enthusiastic support of the project from the initial submission of the book proposal to getting the first copies to our desks has been greatly appreciated.

The fun and stimulation accompanying writing the manuscript happened during a great many writing sessions, almost all of which took place at the home of one or the other of us. That required great tolerance on the part of our wives, Elizabeth Badley and Andrea Mayrhofer, both successful professionals in their own areas of expertise, who we are sure were convinced that all this endless talk was never going to go anywhere. We thank them for their unfailing hospitality and support and for not throwing us out of their respective homes as the SCF rolled over everything else in seemingly endless repetition. Finally, we are grateful to the distillers of numerous fine whiskeys and bourbons, whose support for morale at the end of a long day's writing was always appreciated.