Careers in the Anthropocene:

A Bourdieusian Perspective on Climate Change Initiatives

and its Impact on Careers

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Past research acknowledges organizations' dual role in the Anthropocene (Dobusch et al., 2020). Building on Elkington's (1997) triple bottom line of 'people, planet and profit', organizations try to contribute to society by creating organizationally-led corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. However, these often 'sustain the unsustainable' (Blühdorn and Welsh, 2007), or "greenwash" unchanged corporate business (Desjardins, 2016). Sustainability initiatives that evolve separate from organizational CSR activities can challenge this. However, scholarly research on how workers' involvement in these initiatives may affect their work and career is still at the beginning (Girschik et al., 2022).

Particularly research on the dynamic interplay between the Anthropocene and organizational careers is still underdeveloped. Yet, investigating this is important as careers are central structuring mechanisms in organizations (cf. Hughes, 1937; Arthur et al., 1989) while people's career practices directly impact the climate (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020). Career scholars have begun to pay attention to the ecological environment (Tams and Marshall, 2011). However, in the context of individuals' career development, involvement in CSR activities and beyond remains at best contested (Bode et al., 2021; Girschik et al., 2022).

In this paper, we adopt a Bourdieusian perspective, to understand how professionals' involvement in organizational climate change initiatives (CCIs), i.e., initiatives separate from organisationally led CSR activities, shapes their career capital. Specifically, we draw on Bourdieu's concepts of fields and capitals. Fields are playgrounds or battlefields with specific "rules of the game" defined by a set of capital deemed valuable (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and contribute to the reproduction of the fields' structure (Bourdieu and Nice, 1977; Bourdieu, 1986). Capitals emerge in different forms (Bourdieu, 1986). This study focuses on social, cultural, and symbolic capital. Symbolic capital that is valued and deemed legitimate in the respective career field is considered essential to career progression (Iellatchitch, et al., 2003).

We situate our study in one Professional Service Firm (PSF) (e.g., Kipping et al., 2019). PSF career fields are 'characterized by masculine domination' (Bourdieu, 2001) and follow a strict stratification and validation hierarchy (Spence and Carter, 2014) that reproduces inequality (Ashley and Empson, 2017). In this social context, careers play an important role as they are construed around rigid hierarchical structures while the symbolic career capital seen as valid in career-terms is narrowly defined (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2011; Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

To explore the professionals' involvement, we draw on 52 qualitative semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in CCIs in one PSF in the UK and Germany (see table 1). We use thematic analysis to interrogate the empirical material (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The preliminary findings show that while participants expand their cultural and social capital through CCI involvement, the influence on their symbolic career capital valued in the PSF field is more ambiguous. We identify two different profiles: *Sustainability Integrators* and *Hidden Activists*.

The first group successfully integrated their involvement in CCIs in a way that allowed them to build symbolic capital. Sustainability became part of their everyday career practices, self-presentation, and personal brand. They did so by raising awareness for sustainability issues in the team or with clients. The involvement extended their network significantly and provided them with access to organizational leaders. The *sustainability integrators* reached out to partners and overcame hierarchical structures for their personal career development. Gaining cultural (e.g., sustainability knowledge, communication, project management skills) and social (e.g., visibility and exposure to senior leadership, extended network) capital in the CCIs, this group was able to transfer it into the symbolic career capital valued by the field (e.g., being driven, expressive, broad network, navigate within the firm).

The second group struggled to translate their involvement into symbolic capital. Their involvement was separated from their everyday career activities. Some even hid it, as they experienced it as hindering or even threatening to their career development. Their involvement was not recognized by their supervisors. This group mainly engaged in CCIs after work. It presented an 'underground struggle' that came with a mental and time toll. In contrast to the first group, *hidden activists* decided to 'play by the rules of the game' in the PSF field and intentionally hide their activist side.

Our paper makes the following contributions. First, it contributes to an ecologically routed understanding of careers, informed by concerns around climate change. It does so by shifting the focus to professionals' involvement in employee led CCIs. Second, utilising Bourdieu's theory of practice, we present two profiles showing the interplay between career capitals and climate change activities that either enhance or hinder individuals' career progression. As such, we offer empirical support of 'careers as results of practices for and with career-related capital within a career field' and show that careers are a 'serious game both for power – that is, capital accumulation and mobilization – and over power – that is, sustaining or challenging the social order' (Schneidhofer et al., 2015:30). Third, our study contributes empirically to PSF research adopting a Bourdieusian perspective (cf. Spence and Carter, 2014; Kipping et al., 2019).

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Table 1: Overview of Interviewees

	Name	Level	External/ Internal	Country of Employment	Tenure	CCI	Sex
Participants	Taranpreet	Manager	Client-facing	UK	7 yrs 5 months	CCI I D&I lead	Female
	Nadja	Senior	Core Support Service (CSS)	Germany	5 yrs 6 months	Former CCI II lead	Female
	Emma	Senior Manager	CSS	Malaysia	11 yrs 4 months	CCI I	Female
	Danielle	Senior Manager	Client-facing	UK	7 yrs 6 months	CCI I founder	Female
	Beatrice	Senior	Client-facing	Switzerland	2 yrs 7 months	CCI II lead	Female
	Silvia	Supervising	CSS	Germany	8 yrs	CCI/ CCI II	Female
	Eloise	Senior Manager	CSS	UK	5 yrs	CCI I	Female
	Chris	Senior (Left the firm)	Client-facing	USA	4 yrs 10 months	Former CCI I lead	Male
	Chantal	Senior	Client-facing	Switzerland	3 yrs 7 months	Former CCI II lead	Female
	Jamie	Senior	CSS	UK	6 yrs	CCI I	Male
	Frank	Senior	Client-facing	Hong Kong	5 months	CCI I	Male
	Anastasia	Senior	Client-facing	UK	2 yrs 8 months	CCI I	Female
	Matt	Manager	CSS	UK	1 yr 3 months	CCI I	Male
	Elton	Associate/ Staff	Client-facing	UK	7 months	CCI I	Male
	Deepak	Consultant	Client-facing	Singapore	6 months	CCI I	Male
	Laura	Manager	CSS	USA	3 yrs 6 months	CCI I	Female
	Brian	Consultant/ Staff 2	Client-facing	USA	1 yr 9 months	CCI I	Male
	Roxanne	Consultant	Client-facing	Ireland	4 months	CCI I	Female
	Eric	Manager	Client-facing	Canada	4 yrs 2 months	CCI I	Male
	Sanjay	Senior/ Assistant Manager	Client-facing	UK	2 yrs 4 months	CCI I	Male
	Greg	Senior	Client-facing	UK	5 yrs 9 months	CCI I	Male
	Maryn	Senior Manager/ Associate Director	CSS	USA	22 yrs 4 months	CCI I	Female
	Charly	Senior	Client-facing	Ireland	9 months	CCI I	Female
	Sabrina	Senior/ Supervising Associate	CSS	USA	2 yrs 5 months	CCI I	Female
	James	Consultant	Client-facing	USA	9 months	CCI I	Male
	Cindy	Manager	CSS	UK	2 yrs 10 months	CCI I	Female
	Tom	Senior	CSS	USA	3 yrs	CCI I	Male
	Hamza	Consultant	Client-facing	UK	1 yr 7months	CCI I	Male
	Arjun	Associate Consultant		India	1 yr	CCI I	Non-binary
	Selena	Senior Executive Assistant		USA	6yrs 4 months	CCI I	Female
	Akshay	Manager	Client-facing	Ireland	2 months	CCI I	Male
	Matthew	Manager		USA	5 months	CCI I	Male
	Dave	Senior	Client-facing	USA	3 yrs	CCI I	Male
	Malcom	Manager	CSS	UK		CCI I	Male
	Andrew			UK		CCI I	Male
	Steffen	Manager	CSS	Switzerland	10 yrs 8 months	CCI II	Male
	Shannon	Senior (Left the firm, one month after the interview)	CSS	Canada	5 yrs 5 months	CCI I	Female
	Vishnu	Associate	Client-facing	India	10 months	CCI I	Male
	Michaela	Senior	Client-facing	Germany	2 yrs 3 months	CCI II	Female
	Simone					CCI II	Female
	Carissa	Consultant		UK	1 yr	CCI I	Female
	François					CCI II	Male
	Dan	Manager		UK	5 yrs 1 month	CCI I	Male
	Claire	Director	Client-facing	UK	14 yrs	CCI I	Female
	Kevin	Assistant	Client-facing	Germany	1 yr 4 months	CCI II	Male
	Lena	Intern/ Working Student	CSS	Germany	10 months	CCI II	Female
Non-Participants	Maria	Senior Manager	CSS	USA	15 yrs 5 months	CSR	Female
	Zena	Supervising Associate	CSS	Switzerland	7 yrs	CSR	Female
	Kemal	Manager	Client-facing	UK	3 yrs 6 months	CCI I	Male
	Walter	Director	Client-facing	UK	37 yrs	CCI I	Male
	Sookie	Senior	CSS	USA	9 months	CCI I	Female
	Hitomi	Administrative Contractor	CSS	Japan	3 months	CCI I	Female