Enemies at work: can they hinder your career?

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Abstract

This paper addresses the question to what extent foes deteriorate a person’s labor market position and block persons in their labor market position. We improve upon earlier research by explicitly focusing on the negative effects of social capital. A second way to improve upon earlier findings is to use a life-course approach. A third way to improve our knowledge regarding the influence of social capital on labor market careers is to focus explicitly on career immobility.

With this research we do not only show that foes matter in the occupational career. We elaborate upon earlier research by the inclusion of foes, and we also show to what extent foes matter, for whom they matter and under what conditions they are especially harmful.

Keywords: Social capital; Negative relationships; Labor market mobility; Modernization; Event history analysis

1. Introduction

In our contemporary western society, people obtain their place in the workforce on their own merits. Persons with the same education and work experience should have the same chance to obtain a certain job, regardless of individual characteristics that are not directly linked to a person’s performance on the labor market. This is encaptured in modernization theory, which predicts that in industrialized societies particularistic values will be replaced by universalistic values. In this paper, we argue that in spite of modernization, particularism still exists but that it has taken on a different form. Instead of a sort of particularism that just entails people inheriting the job or status of their fathers, particularism now exists in the form of the people we know and who help us.

The people a person knows, his or her social network, can be helpful or harmful for his or her labor market position. Through the people a person knows or the people that know...
this person, he or she can reach other people and their resources. Social resources and the resources reached through them can have a positive influence on a person’s labor market position and thus prove to be ‘sweet social capital’. They can also have a negative effect on a person’s labor market position: ‘sour social capital’. The theoretical idea of sour social capital, and the extent to which it explains a person’s occupational success or failure is the subject of this paper. We use the term foes to refer to a person’s sour social capital. The question we address in this paper is two-fold: to what extent does having foes (1) lead to a deterioration of a person’s labor market position and (2) block a person in improving his or her labor market position?

2. Previous research on social resources and mobility

How people attain their status and income, and how differences in status and income emerge have been central questions in sociology for a long time. Two factors known for causing differences in status and income in industrial societies are family background and education. In the transition from a pre-industrial society to an industrial one several things were presumed to change. Due to the rise of a demand for specialization on the labor market, education would become a more important factor for finding a job. Before the shift to industrialism, a son tended to inherit his father’s job, and was often trained by him personally. This changed as soon as more complicated machines were introduced into the production process, and the home ceased to be the major work place. Education has since then been claimed to be a necessary means to obtain a place in the labor market. (Collins, 1971, 1979). Accordingly, a transition from particularistic values to universalistic values was expected to occur (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Parsons, 1951).

In the Netherlands, the shift from a pre-industrial towards an industrial and later on a post-industrial society resulted in norms according to which everybody should have equal chances to get a good education and a good job, plus an equal chance at the same (type of) job given an equal level of education. Today, the Dutch state provides free education until the end of compulsory schooling. Further education is provided for a reduced prize. A grant and loan system is available for anyone wishing to pursue further studies. On the labor market people should officially be judged only on their own merits: on their education and work experience, and not on the basis of their social origin, gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

The ideology in our society is that persons with equal merits, expressed in their attained education and, where present, work experience, should have equal chances to a (certain) job. Thus, rather than saying that social capital can be considered a ‘merit’ it should be considered an individual characteristic, not directly linked to the labor market. From this point of view the widely accepted idea that people might profit from having friends on the labor market is rather puzzling, since it seems so close to favoritism. If universalistic values do indeed prevail one would not expect any additional profit from having friends on the labor market.

The idea that friends might be assets on the labor market has been studied thoroughly in sociology since the 1970s (Granovetter, 1973, 1974, 1982, 1992; Lin et al., 1981a,b; Lin, 1982; Lin and Dumin, 1986). The importance of social networks on the labor market has
been fully recognized since Granovetter’s research, and social capital research has generated two general findings. The first finding is that when a person finds a job through a contact person, this job will be more likely of a higher status if the status of the contact person is higher. The second finding is that when people have friends with higher status jobs, they themselves will have higher status jobs (Lin et al., 1981a,b; Lin and Dumin, 1986; De Graaf and Flap, 1988).

The implicit assumption of social capital research that people without social capital more often fail in achieving their goals leads to new hypotheses. When people have forced relationships—for instance within a company—with others who are willing to block their attempts to find a better job, or who might even be capable of discharging them, this may lead to a decline in status. The inclusion of ties with others who are willing to block a person amounts to a far reaching amplification of social capital theory. People cannot only possess sweet social capital—through friends—but also sour social capital. With a little exaggeration one could call the people who provide someone with sour social capital foes. The notion that someone’s foes are of influence on their position on the labor market is relatively new (Moerbeek et al., 1995, 1996; Moerbeek, 2001). When people have more foes at the workplace, or when they have foes with a relatively high status, they might experience a decline in status since they will more likely accept a job with a lower status. In extreme cases sour social capital may even cause (in)voluntary unemployment. And, for instance, during reorganizations the lack of friends, and the possession of foes might heighten the chance of discharge. Whether people with bad personal relations at work lose their jobs sooner and/or apply for other (lower status) jobs is not the only question implied by including sour social capital. A second question is whether people without foes have more prosperous careers than people with foes.

This paper does not only focus on the influence of foes on occupational mobility. In the Netherlands, most people stay relatively immobile during their careers (De Graaf and Luijx, 1995). Granovetter pointed out that most research has been focused on mobility while the majority of people stay (close to) immobile during their entire professional life (Granovetter, 1974, 1986). Do these occupationally immobile people have less social capital than occupationally mobile people? Are they people without social capital in their organization or in other firms, or do they only have social relations at their own status level on the job? Having many friends working at the same level within an organization may even lead to a certain inertia: why leave a job when all your friends work on the same level, or within the same company?

An important deficit of social capital research until now has been that it was performed predominantly on cross-sectional data. The use of cross-sectional surveys makes it difficult to decide upon a causal sequence of events. The question whether foes prevent a person from obtaining a good social position or whether a badly performing person has more foes remains unanswered with a cross-sectional design. Using a longitudinal design can cure this flaw because it uses information about total careers. It can thus take into account the sequence of job changes and the role of social capital therein. A design like this can provide answers to questions like: is it true that having friends, family, and acquaintances with a higher position leads to more success with job applications, or should the causal sequence be turned around, in the sense that lack of social capital (having no such friends, family or acquaintances) causes people to be unable to sustain a high position?
In this paper, we will answer three specific questions about the influence of foes in the careers of Dutch employees. These questions are formulated as follows:

1. Will people who have foes at their work, especially foes with a higher job, more likely accept a job below their prestige level than people without foes at their work?
2. Will people who remain in their job for a long time have fewer foes at their work compared to upwardly and downwardly mobile persons?
3. Will people who have foes at their work more likely become unemployed and will they remain unemployed for a longer time compared to those without foes at their work?

The hypotheses we use to answer these questions will be derived in the next section.

3. Why would people want to harm each other?

As stated before, the inclusion of sour social capital in the explanation of a person’s achieved occupational prestige is relatively new. In some research there have been ‘hints’ towards a negative side of social capital (see for instance Rook, 1984; Granovetter, 1992; Burt and Celotto, 1992), but these are mostly concentrated on a negative outcome of a positive network-feature: friends. This section deals with the questions of who a person’s foes are and why people would obstruct each other’s careers.

We define foes as people who have blocked ego (in some way) in the past and/or may be willing to block ego in the future. We call foes and their resources sour social capital as opposed to the sweet social capital constituted by friends and the resources they give access to (Moerbeek et al., 1995; Moerbeek, 2001). The central questions this paper answers regarding foes are whether sour social capital leads to a deterioration of someone’s labor market position and whether foes block someone in improving their labor market position.

Granovetter implicitly gave an example of a form of sour social capital. He described a factory where a black man gets an internal promotion to a department with only whites. These white men do not intentionally obstruct the black man, but they decide not to help him with anything either. By not being helped by his colleagues, it becomes impossible for the black man to do his very specialized and hazardous work in a safe way (Granovetter, 1992, p. 252). This example shows that social networks on the labor market can have negative effects. In this case, the negative effect is caused by a denial of help, and the sour social capital is constituted by a lack of social capital. The idea that sour social capital is of influence on someone’s occupational career as it is presented in this paper entails more than just denial of help. Foes can block someone’s way up on the social ladder by mobilizing their resources, just like friends can help a person by doing so. By including the negative, or sour, side of social capital in this research we aim to increase our knowledge about the effects of informal networks on the labor market.

The explanation why people would be willing to block each other can be argued by using exchange theory (see, for instance, Blau, 1964; Ekeh, 1974). Exchange theory states that we invest in our friends in order to obtain a certain profit in the future. Analogous, if I expect a person to be obstructive in the future, I will be willing to block this person in the
present. And if a person has obstructed me in the past, I will also be willing to take action to his or her disadvantage. Of course there are some conditions regarding this obstructive behavior: it is only possible to block someone if one does not need this person in the future. Moreover, it has to be in someone’s power to block the other person. In short, conditions for successful foeship are willingness and ability.

Similar to the assumption that friendship is a transitive good, we assume that transitivity applies to foeship. If someone does not like a certain person, their friends will also dislike that person. And if someone is willing to obstruct a person, their friends will show the same willingness. Taking the argument of transitivity a step further, it can be expected that people are willing to block a person if this person constitutes a threat for a friend. On the labor this may amount to unknown foes. Say, a person with certain friends applies for a job. These friends are then willing to help this person, and may while doing so obstruct another applicant in his or her way up, just to help their friend. This is a foeship without any negative feelings. People can be someone’s foe without knowing him or her. And of course someone can have foes without knowing them, or without knowing their negative intentions.¹

Now, who are foes? All kinds of people can be foes: acquaintances, colleagues and even family members. The only persons who cannot be foes are friends, at least not simultaneously. There is one major difference between friends and foes: people do not choose to have foes in their social network: relationships with foes will be involuntary relationships. The labor market is liable to force people into relationships with others and because of this, the labor market is the perfect environment to examine these negative relationships and the sour social capital they invoke.

In this research, we are not interested in the motives for foeship. People can obstruct each other for reasons of jealousy or competition, and for a variety of other reasons. In this paper, we are only interested in the outcome of such obstructive behavior. Therefore, the motives behind obstructive behavior are of no direct interest to us. It is important though, that in general an average employer will have more power and a higher status than an average employee. The next section describes some conditions that guarantee most harm from sour social capital.

### 3.1. Conditions that influence the importance and potential harm of foes

#### 3.1.1. Initial and current status

One can argue that when someone has a very high initial status, having friends will not give much profit (Lin, 1982). Likewise, when someone has a very low initial status, foes cannot cause a large fall in status.² Of course foes can block others considerably on their way up. For persons with a very high status, foes will be of low risk in the sense that their foes will probably be of lower or at most equal status. Moreover, persons with a high status will probably have friends with an equally high status. Their high position may be at risk due to the foes, but might be protected by the friends.

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¹ Foeship, like friendship, is not symmetrical. It is not necessary to be each other’s enemy.

² These are so-called ceiling- and floor-effects.
3.1.2. Status of a foe

A foe with a relatively high status will be of more influence than a foe with an equal or lower status than ego.

3.1.3. Network size

One basic condition to be able to block a person is that one does not need this person now or in the future. There have to be other contacts a person can turn to. This is related to the notion of network size. Moreover, when someone’s foes have many other foes who may be ‘higher in priority’, the chance of being disadvantaged by the former is smaller. Thus, sour social capital is more destructive when someone’s foes have few other foes.

3.1.4. Personal unemployment

For unemployed people, having foes may be the reason they got unemployed in the first place, but it can also be an explanation for unemployment duration. People who do have a job, but have many foes, may be at risk to lose their job because of these foes. This can occur, for instance, in case of a company’s reorganization. When jobs are on the line, people with many foes are at high risk to lose their jobs. Likewise, when someone has a temporary contract, which may or may not be prolonged, foes are a potential danger.3

To summarize, we have discussed the following hypotheses that specify the conditions under which sour social capital constitutes most potential harm to chances of getting ahead on the labor market:

1. High (but not the highest possible) initial or current status.
2. Foes with a relatively high status (as compared to someone’s own status).
3. Foes that have few other enemies.
4. Persons with many foes can be at higher risk for personal unemployment.
5. If unemployment was due to lack of social capital or due to foes in the first place, the risk of not finding a new job is high. So having foes may prolong unemployment duration.

Of course it is a bit artificial to specify disadvantages of sour social capital, without considering relative effects that may be caused by sweet social capital. When a person has only one foe, no matter how high in status, and many friends with a high position, it is pretty unlikely that this one foe will have much influence. The reverse is equally true: when a person has many foes, one high status friend will probably not be of much help. The relative effects of sweet and sour social capital, however, are not an issue in this paper.

4. Data, measurements and method of analysis

4.1. Data and measurements

To answer our research questions, we made use of the Family Survey of the Dutch Population (Ultee and Ganzeboom, 1993). This survey was conducted among a representative selection of Dutch adult population. Retrospective data regarding several life-events (includ-

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3. Only unemployment as being in search of a job is considered here. People who are just not in the labor force for one reason or another have been filtered out beforehand.
ing educational and occupational careers) as well as data regarding demographic characteristics were collected from 1000 respondents. The survey also collected information from the parents, siblings and spouses of the primary respondents. However, information about foes in the occupational career is only obtained from the primary respondents. Therefore, we restrict our analysis to the occupational careers of the 1000 primary respondents.

To test our hypotheses we created a so-called person–month data file. This file contains a record for each month of the selected respondents’ life between the time that they have left full-time education and the moment of interview. We made one further selection: a respondent needed to ever have had a job. Each record contains information about the occupational status for a given month: for instance whether a person was working and how the relationship with colleagues and work leader was in that job.

It is not possible to directly ask respondents who their foes are. Whether or not people perceive to have foes can be either overestimated or underestimated. Underestimation can occur because people may simply not know their foes in the working place, and people may not perceive someone who is willing to block their way up to be a foe. Second, it seemingly is a taboo to admit to having foes, even if it just means not getting along with your colleagues.

There are also reasons thinkable why the presence of foes would be overestimated. On face value one would think opponents to always be negative assets. But when employees get to a higher level in their careers, in spite of opposition, this may be considered a major accomplishment. At least it will be considered more of an accomplishment than is getting high on the status ladder through the help of friends. The general expectation seems to be that people at a higher level have more to endure, as the saying ‘high winds blow on high hills’ illustrates. Overestimation of the existence of foes can also occur due to frustration. For instance, when someone does not succeed in climbing the status ladder. He or she may then become discontent and create a sense of the outside world being against him or her. This will lead to an overestimation of foes in this type of research.

Of course the foregoing is all speculation, and that is exactly the problem with this type of research. Since research into negative relationships on the work floor, and their impacts (sour social capital) has not been performed that much before, there is no way of knowing how large the under- or overestimation may be. However, we also do not know how many friends to expect, although research into sweet social capital has been performed more widely.

We use many different indicators for foes in the analysis presented here. In this way, we try to minimize measurement errors. In the Family Survey of the Dutch Population, respondents were asked to answer a question about every job they had had (or still had at the time of the interview), namely, ‘what was the reason for leaving the job?’ The number of jobs a respondent could have had during his or her occupational career could amount to 12. To answer the question ‘what was the reason for leaving the job?’ Respondents could pick one out of sixteen categories. We considered the answer ‘problems with colleagues’ as having foes at the workplace. ‘Close company’, ‘discharge’, ‘retirement’, ‘temporal contract’, ‘discharge because of marriage’, ‘change job partner’, ‘care family’, ‘own health’, ‘health partner’, ‘better paid job’, ‘other suited job’, ‘closer by house’, ‘internal promotion’, ‘internal transfer’, and ‘other’ were all captured under ‘other reasons’. In total the respondents left their jobs in 2586 instances of which 44 (2%) were left because of foes and 2542 (98%)
because of different reasons. Admittedly the number of foes measured in this way is very
low, but, although the measurement is performed in the strictest possible way, we do find
foes in the data.

Of course the problem of under- or overestimating foes is not resolved by just ask-
ing people why they left their job. We, therefore, included some more or less objective
‘foe-generating’ questions. For every job, the respondents were asked how they got along
with their work leader, how they got along with their colleagues and how the atmosphere at
the job was. We recoded the answers ‘very bad’ and ‘bad’ into ‘bad’. The answers ‘pretty
well’, ‘well’ and ‘very well’ were considered as ‘good’. Summed up over all possible jobs
that the respondents have had, in 231 (8%) occasions the contacts with the work leader were
considered to be ‘bad’ as opposed to 2801 (92%) occasions of ‘good’ contacts. A total of
109 (4%) of the contacts with colleagues were ‘bad’, while 2953 (96%) were considered
as ‘good’. The atmosphere at the job was found ‘bad’ in 145 (5%) of the cases, and ‘good’
3122 (95%) times. We measured the existence of foes in a conservative way. Nevertheless,
as the frequencies above show, we do observe respondents who have foes.

Respondents were asked for their father’s highest completed education and his occupation
at the time the respondent was 15 years old. The respondents were also asked to report their
own complete educational and occupational careers. To use the variables in the analyses we
recoded them into the following ordinal level scales.

4.1.1. Level of education

For this the Standard Educational Index from 1978 (Central Bureau of Statistics) was
used: (1) primary; (2) low vocational, extended primary; (3) middle vocational, grammar;
(4) higher vocational; (5) university.

4.1.2. Occupational prestige

The Ultee–Sixma prestige scale was used here (Sixma and Ultee, 1983). This scale takes
on values from 13 (garbage collector) to 87 (surgeon).

4.2. Method of analysis

To test our hypotheses we made use of event history analysis. The event under study is
in our case finding or leaving a job. The occurrence of an event assumes a prior situation
in which the event has not yet happened (Yamaguchi, 1991). For each analysis we selected
the months in the lives of the respondents in which they were ‘at risk’ for a certain event.
For a person to be at risk to become unemployed, he or she of course has to have an
occupation. In the analysis of becoming unemployed we thus selected respondent-months
in which respondents are either employed, or experience the event of becoming unemployed.
Similarly, in the analysis of finding a job after a spell of unemployment respondents have
to be unemployed or experienced the event of finding a job. When we analyze finding
another job, we again make a selection of respondent-months in which respondents have an
occupation or have just found another job. In each analysis, we thus made specific selections
of respondent-months from the person–month data file.

Event history models hazard rates. A hazard rate, $h(t)$, expresses the conditional prob-
ability that a person will find (or quit) a job at time $t$, given that he or she is unemployed
(or in occupation) at time \( t \). The hazard rate has the following function:

\[
h(t) = \frac{P(T = t_i | T \geq t_i)}{1 - P(T = t_i | T \geq t_i)}
\]  
(1)

In the discrete-time logit model we model the odds of the conditional probabilities. The following function expresses this model.

\[
\ln \left( \frac{h(t)}{1 - h(t)} \right) = a_i + \sum_k b_k X_{kt}
\]

(2)

In formula 2, \( a_i \) is the baseline hazard function for an individual with covariate vector \( X = 0 \). The parameters \( b_k \) indicate the effect of covariate \( X_{kt} \) on the odds that a person will make the transition from being unemployed to being employed (or the other way around). Eq. (2) can be estimated by using logistic regression on the selected records from the person–month file. The advantage of using event history analysis is twofold. First, it is possible to examine events in their causal order: are foes capable of harming someone’s career, or do people who performed badly in their job have foes wherever they work. By examining the events in their actual causal order, we avoid the entanglement of these two factors. Thus, we solely examine whether and to what extent foes are capable of harming someone’s career. Second, it is possible to model so-called duration effects. By incorporating these duration effects we can answer the question whether people who have foes at work remain unemployed for a longer period of time than people without such foes.

5. Analysis

5.1. Formulating of hypotheses

In Section 2, we formulated three research questions as a test of our hypotheses regarding the influence of sour social capital on the labor market: (1) will people who have foes at their work, especially foes with a higher job, more likely accept a job below their prestige level than people without foes at their work? (2) Will people who remain in their job for a long time have fewer foes at their work compared to upwardly and downwardly mobile persons? (3) Will people who have foes at their work more likely become unemployed and will they remain unemployed for a longer time compared to those without foes at their work? In the analyses that follow we answer these questions.

Since we are only studying people who ever had a job, there are three possible transitions we can examine. The first transition is the one from a situation of having a job to finding (or accepting) another job. By examining this transition it is possible to answer our first research question. We formulate the following hypothesis with regard to having foes and occupational mobility: people who have foes, especially if these foes have a relatively high status, are more likely to (a) accept another job below their level, or (b) less likely to find another job (at a higher prestige level).

To answer the second research question we need to examine a kind of ‘non-event’, namely, the time that a person stays in the same job (immobility). To analyze the duration in a certain job, we again examine the transition from one job to another. This leads to the following immobility-hypothesis: people who have foes (especially foes with a relatively
high prestige) in their jobs remain in these jobs for a shorter duration than people without such foes.

To answer the third research question, we need to examine two other transitions. The first of these transitions a person can make is the one from having a job to a situation of being unemployed. We test the following hypothesis regarding unemployment: people who have foes in their job (especially foes with a relatively high prestige) are more likely to become unemployed than people without foes in their job. The next transition that should be examined to answer the third question is the one from being unemployed to the event of finding a job. The hypothesis with regard to sour social capital in this respect is: people who had foes in the job they held before they became unemployed (especially foes with a relatively high prestige) remain unemployed for a longer period than people who did not have foes in their previous job.

Before we answer our research questions, we will reformulate the hypotheses stated above in terms of actual variables.

5.2. Operationalization of hypotheses

In the previous subsections, we formulated hypotheses about the effect of foes on the careers of persons. However, the survey we use does not contain information about the status of the foes. We, therefore, use several different indicators instead of a direct measurement for the status of a foe. The hypothesis that people who have foes, especially if these foes have a relatively high prestige, are more likely to accept another job below their level, or less likely to find another job (at a higher prestige level) translates into: people who declare to have left their former job because of problems with colleagues, who had a bad contact with their colleagues in their previous job, perceived the atmosphere in their former job to be bad or who had a bad contact with their work leader in their previous job have jobs with a lower prestige than people without such foes. Moreover, we expect the effect of the work leader to be the strongest one, since he or she has a relatively higher prestige.

The hypothesis that people who have foes at their work remain in their jobs for a shorter duration than people without such foes, especially if these foes have a relatively high prestige, translates into: people who declare to have left their former job because of problems with colleagues, who had a bad contact with their colleagues in their previous job, perceived the atmosphere in their former job to be bad or who had a bad contact with their work leader in their previous job, will remain in their job for a shorter duration than people without such foes. Again, we expect the effect of the work leader to be the strongest one.

The hypothesis regarding the likelihood of becoming unemployed is simply: people who claim to have left their job because of foes, who have bad contact with their colleagues in their job, perceive the atmosphere at their job to be bad or who have a bad contact with their work leader are more likely to become unemployed than are people without such foes. To this hypothesis we add that we again expect the effect of the work leader to be strongest, since he or she is believed to have the highest status.

The last hypothesis, that when people had foes in the job they held before they became unemployed they remain unemployed for a longer period, translates into: people who claim to have had bad contact with their colleagues and/or work leader in their previous job, or...
Table 1
Regression analysis of the prestige in a job ($N = 1866$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige previous job</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours worked</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit previous job because of foes</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact work leader former job</td>
<td>-6.81</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact colleagues former job</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad atmosphere former job</td>
<td>-3.04</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$R^2$ = 0.30

who perceived the atmosphere in their previous job to be bad remain unemployed for a longer period than people without such foes.

5.3. Testing of hypotheses

The first step in our analysis is to examine the prestige of the jobs that a person finds after leaving a job. We hypothesized that people with foes in a job accept lower-prestige jobs as compared to people without such foes. In Table 1, this hypothesis is tested. To perform the analysis presented in this table, we selected from our person–month file all months in which respondents started a new job. The analysis, therefore, does not concern the first jobs of respondents. The number of cases in the analysis is 1866, which is almost twice the number of respondents in the survey. It is important to note that the units of analysis are not respondents but ‘new jobs started by respondents’. Those respondents who have had more than two jobs thus appear more than once in the analysis. Because the characteristics of the independent variables that refer to characteristics of the previous job differ for individuals from job to job, this procedure does not lead to bias in our estimates (Blossfeld, 1986). Note that this analysis is not an event history analysis. It is a regression of prestige of the job on characteristics of the previous job.

We performed a regression analysis of the prestige of the job on a number of independent variables. These concern a number of control variables, such as gender and education, and the variables that indicate the presence of foes in the previous job.

Table 1 shows that most of our control variables have a significant impact on the prestige of a job. The prestige of the previous job, the number of hours worked, a person’s education and the education of his or her father all significantly affect the prestige of a job. Gender has no direct effect on prestige. All effects that refer to having foes in the previous job have a negative effect on the prestige of a job. This indicated that bad contacts in a previous job lead people to accept lower-prestige jobs. However, only one of these variables has a significant effect. Regarding the prestige of a job, a ‘bad’ contact with the work leader in the previous job results in a significantly lower prestige in the present job. Bad contacts
Table 2
Logistic regression analysis of the likelihood of finding another job, given that one has a job \((N = 101,931)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(\beta)</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>−2.44</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige current job</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours worked</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit job because of foes</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact work leader</td>
<td>−0.54</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact colleagues</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad atmosphere</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of job (months)</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit job because of foes (\times) duration of job</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact work leader (\times) duration of job</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact colleagues (\times) duration of job</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad atmosphere (\times) duration of job</td>
<td>−0.00</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(\chi^2\) (d.f.) 1660

with people at the same level of hierarchy in a previous job had no significant impact on the prestige of the current job.

Table 2 shows the result of a logistic regression analysis of the likelihood to find another job. Note that this is an event history analysis. In this analysis we test the second part of our first hypothesis that people who have foes are less likely to find another job than people without foes, and our immobility hypothesis regarding the duration of a job. In order to test these hypotheses, we selected those respondents who were working. This means that we selected from our person–month file all months in which respondents are working after they started their first jobs, up until the month that they find a new job. The people who are ‘at risk’ for the event of finding a job are in this case those who have ever had a job. The number of cases in this analysis is 101,931. The unit of analysis in Table 2 is not respondents but ‘respondent-months’.

We performed a logistic analysis of the likelihood of finding another job on a number of independent variables. These concern a number of control variables, such as gender and education, the variables that indicate the presence of foes in the job, and interactions of the duration in the job with the ‘foes in the job’ variables. A positive interaction effect indicated that people who have foes in their job stay longer in this job than people without such foes. On the other hand, an negative interaction effect indicates that people who have foes in their job leave the job sooner than persons without foes.

The positive effect of education in Table 2 indicates that people with a higher education are more likely to find another job. The effect of the education of the father is in the same direction. From the effect of the variable female we conclude that women are less likely to find another job than men. The number of hours worked has a negative impact on the likelihood of finding another job. This means that people who have full-time jobs are less
likely to move to another job than people with part-time jobs. Job-prestige has no significant
effect on the likelihood of finding another job. Older people are less likely to find another
job than younger people.

Having a bad contact with the work leader diminishes the likelihood of finding another
job, and lengthens the duration of the job. The atmosphere also has a significant effect: a bad
atmosphere improves the likelihood to leave a job and causes a shorter job-duration. The
same can be concluded for the reason for leaving the job and its interaction with job-duration.
From these results we conclude that a higher-status foe lowers a person’s chances to find
another job, and that people with same-status foes in their job are more likely to leave their
job. This partly conforms to what we hypothesized: having foes does indeed shorten the
duration of a job. What is contrary to what we expected is that a high-prestige foe lengthens
job-duration.

Whether people who have foes in their jobs more likely become unemployed compared
to people who have no such foes can be seen from the analysis presented in Table 3. This
table presents the parameter estimates of a logistic regression analysis of the risk to become
unemployed, given that this has not yet happened. We selected from our person–month data
file those person–months in which respondents either had a job, or had just experienced the
event of becoming unemployed. The number of cases in the analysis is 101,931.

There are few variables that meet the criteria of significance in Table 3. Older people
and women are more likely to become unemployed. None of the other control variables
significantly affects the likelihood to lose one’s job. There is only one of the ‘foes-in-the-job’
variables that has a significant effect on the likelihood of becoming unemployed (although
it is significant at \( \alpha = 0.06 \)): people who experience a bad atmosphere in a job are more
likely to become unemployed than people who do not experience a bad atmosphere.
Table 4
Logistic regression of the likelihood of finding a job, given that one is unemployed \( (N = 2489) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Father’s education</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit previous job because of foes</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact work leader former job</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact colleagues former job</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad atmosphere former job</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of unemployment (months)</td>
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<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit previous job because of foes ( \times ) duration of unemployment</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>0.82</td>
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<td>Bad contact work leader former job ( \times ) duration of unemployment</td>
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<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad contact colleagues former job ( \times ) duration of unemployment</td>
<td>-5.61</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad atmosphere former job ( \times ) duration of unemployment</td>
<td>-3.16</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 \) (d.f.) 212

The final step in our analysis is to examine the duration of unemployment. We have just seen that foes in a job affect the likelihood to move to another job, but not so much on the likelihood to become unemployed. It might be that foes in a job do not affect whether or not a person loses his or her job, but that they do affect how soon a person finds a new job after becoming unemployed. To find out whether this is the case is the purpose of the present analysis. Table 4 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis of the event of finding a job, given that a person is unemployed.

We selected from our person–month data file those person–months in which respondents were either unemployed, or had just experienced the event of starting a new job. The number of cases in this analysis is 2489. Compared to the previous analyses the number of cases is small. There are few respondents who have experienced a spell of unemployment, and even fewer who have experienced more than one spell of unemployment. Moreover, people are usually unemployed for a limited number of months. It will therefore be difficult to find significant effects with so few cases.

Table 4 clearly shows that none of the ‘foe-variables’ affect the likelihood of finding a job, given that a person is unemployed. Moreover, they also do not affect the time it takes before someone finds a new job. None of these variables has an effect that comes close to being significant, so we will not discuss their effects. Few of the other control variables affect the likelihood of finding a new job: older people are less likely to find a new job after becoming unemployed. Also, the longer a person has been out of a job, the more difficult it is to find a new one.

6. Conclusions and discussion

This paper addressed the questions to what extent having foes leads to a deterioration of someone’s labor market position and to what extent foes can block people in their occu-
pational careers. We improve upon earlier research by explicitly focusing on the negative effects of social capital. A second way to improve upon earlier findings is to use a life-course approach. By using a longitudinal design we more adequately specify the causal order of events than we would by using a cross-sectional design. Whether people who have foes will more likely become unemployed or whether someone who is unemployed perceives more foes can be disentangled in such a longitudinal approach. A third way to improve our knowledge regarding the influence of social capital on labor market careers is to focus explicitly on career immobility.

We have answered three specific research questions that enable us to test specific hypotheses. The first question is whether people who have foes at their work, especially foes with a higher job, more likely accept another job with a lower prestige than people without such foes. Our analysis showed that if someone who had a bad contact with his or her work leader finally succeeds in finding another job, this is a lower-prestige job. Foes, especially high status foes can thus be very successful in harming someone’s career.

The second question was whether people who remain in their job for a longer period have fewer foes at their work as compared to upwardly or downwardly mobile people. We found that people who experience a bad atmosphere at the job stay shorter in this job than people who experience a good atmosphere. A bad contact with the work leader lengthens the duration of a job. Our results show that people who, in general, have foes in their job, are more likely to leave their job than people without such foes. Having a foe with a higher prestige, as measured by having a bad contact with the work leader, however, makes it less likely to move to another job. Apparently, having a high-status foe in a job is a barrier to finding another job. This can be due to the fact that the work leader is less likely to give a good reference to a prospective future boss. Moreover, within the company the work leader makes decisions about internal promotions and demotions. Furthermore, one works more closely with colleagues on one’s own level than with a work leader, which makes it more likely to leave because of bad contacts. We, therefore, conclude that having foes in general shortens job-duration, but that having high status foes in a job lengthens job-duration.

The third question is whether people who have foes at their work are more likely to become unemployed and to remain unemployed for a longer time as compared to people without foes at their work. This question proved difficult to answer because few respondents ever experienced unemployment, and if they did, they found a new job fairly soon. All hypotheses that we derived about the likelihood of becoming unemployed and about unemployment duration had to be rejected.

With this research we have clearly shown the importance of including sour social capital in the explanation of occupational careers. Not only have we improved upon previous research, we have also added the very interesting aspect of a negative side to informal networks within organizations. Just as friends are helpful on the labor market, foes proved to have a harmful effect. And that harmful effect certainly deserves a more thorough exploration.

Acknowledgements

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References