



## Decoding The Networking Strategies of Asian and Black Workers in the London Insurance Market

Journal:	<i>Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal</i>
Manuscript ID	EDI-10-2023-0370.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	London Insurance Market, Bourdieu, networking strategies, workplace networks, Asian and Black knowledge workers, social capital
Methodologies:	Qualitative

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## 1.0 Introduction

The England and Wales 2021 Census recorded that 9.3% and 4% of the overall population were Asian and Black ethnic groups respectively, representing approximately 72% of the minority ethnic population in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2022b). This demographic composition has an impact on knowledge industries, which use existing information or generate new information to solve problems (Donnelly, 2009). In 2021, knowledge industries employed a quarter of the UK's total population but 33% of the Asian population and 25% of the Black population participated in them (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). Although the reasons for this pattern are unclear, a strong educational background is typically necessary for careers in knowledge industries. This aligns with research indicating that minority ethnic families in the UK prioritize formal education and professional credentials for high-status careers (Zwysen and Demireva, 2020).

There is, however, a discrepancy between the representation of Asian and Black groups in the broader knowledge workforce and senior leadership roles (Office for National Statistics, 2022a). This suggests that organizations are not fully leveraging the talents and perspectives of these growing demographic groups. Failure to do so can hinder an organization's ability to drive innovation and solve problems and maintain a competitive advantage in attracting diverse human capital (Kochan *et al.*, 2003; Richard *et al.*, 2013). Whilst several factors may

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3 contribute to the disparity between minority ethnic workers in the workforce and their  
4 ascension to leadership roles, one salient explanation is the lack of access to workplace  
5 networks that impedes career advancement for knowledge workers from minority ethnic  
6 backgrounds in the UK (McGregor-Smith, 2017; Parker and The Parker Review Committee,  
7 2022). Extant research has emphasized that a high attainment of education and skills alone  
8 is not sufficient for career advancement without substantial support derived from network  
9 connections (Burt, 2009). Career advancement is frequently gauged through promotions  
10 and earnings trajectories (Seibert *et al.*, 2001).  
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20 Although the literature recognizes that workplace networks are critical for everyone's  
21 career, it has not fully investigated the networking behaviors that knowledge workers from  
22 minority ethnic backgrounds adopt to build, sustain and harness their network relationships  
23 (Ibarra, 1993; Seidel *et al.*, 2000). This gap is particularly evident when considering research  
24 from the USA which indicates that the networking strategies used by individuals from  
25 majority ethnic groups to gain access to elite corporate positions may not be as effective  
26 when employed by individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds (Westphal and Stern,  
27 2007).  
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36 Using an individual-level analysis, this study focuses on knowledge workers drawn from  
37 Asian and Black ethnic groups in the London Insurance Market. These two demographic  
38 groups were chosen because they represent a substantial proportion of the minority ethnic  
39 population in England and Wales. Given that the trading activities of the London Insurance  
40 Market are underpinned by interdependent relations among its participants, reinforced by  
41 personal connections and sustained rapport (Barrett, 1999; Barrett and Walsham, 1999;  
42 Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Pillai, 2023; Smets *et al.*, 2015), it provides an appropriate  
43 context for examining the networking strategies adopted by Asian and Black workers to  
44 accelerate their careers. The London Insurance Market has placed a strong emphasis on  
45 cultivating a diverse workforce as a strategic priority (London Market Group, 2016).  
46 Understanding the experiences of these workers in the London Insurance Market is not only  
47 important from a diversity and inclusion perspective, but also has potential implications for  
48 the careers of these workers and their contributions to this domain. If minority ethnic  
49 workers perceive the London Insurance Market as an industry with limited opportunities for  
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3 growth and advancement, it can result in its organizations failing to attract and retain  
4 valuable talent from these demographics (Friedman and Craig, 2004; McGregor-Smith,  
5 2017; Otaye-Ebede, 2019).  
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10 This study poses two research questions:

- 11 • What motivates Asian and Black knowledge workers to adopt specific strategies to  
12 establish and leverage their workplace networks within the London Insurance  
13 Market?  
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- 15 • Which factors steer the success or failure of these network strategies?  
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20 This study is grounded in a relational view of network strategies, utilizing Bourdieu's  
21 concepts of field, capital, and habitus.  
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## 2.0 Literature

Workplace networks serve as the foundation for social capital, impacting career advancement by facilitating the flow of information and resources among members within the network and securing support from high-status individuals (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Corroborating this, industry reports in the UK highlight that minority ethnic workers emphasized the importance of networking as a critical strategy for career progression (CIPD, 2017; McGregor-Smith, 2017; Parker and The Parker Review Committee, 2022). In contrast, human capital—defined by qualities such as individual abilities and accomplishments (Cooke *et al.*, 2013)—appears to have a limited influence on the upward career mobility of Asian and Black knowledge workers in the UK and the USA (Archer, 2011; Witt Smith and Joseph, 2010).

The theory of network utilization posits that the extraction of social capital from networks is contingent on the effective leveraging of network contacts (Khattab *et al.*, 2020; Randel *et al.*, 2021). However, utilizing network relationships is not a standalone action to leverage social capital to progress careers; rather, it is shaped by the interplay between the structural and relational aspects of networks (Ibarra, 1993; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimensions of networks involve the types of networks available, the intended purpose and governing rules of each network, and the network positions granted to individual members. Relational dynamics within networks deal with cultivating or nurturing the underlying bonds that bind network members. Thus, an examination of these two aspects is essential to understanding how they contribute to observable differences in career advancement outcomes.

### 2.1 Structural dimensions

Two types of networks have been identified in the workplace: formal and informal networks. Both are considered determinants of career success (Mollica *et al.*, 2003; Roberson and Park, 2007) but have varying effects on the experiences of minority ethnic workers (McGuire, 2000). Formal networks are visible, sponsored by senior executives and designed to serve organizational or occupational goals (McGuire, 2000; Richard *et al.*, 2013). Employee resource groups (“ERGs”) dedicated to minority ethnic workers, along with

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3 mentoring programs, have been recognized as the predominant formal networks that UK  
4 employers provide to further the careers of their minority ethnic employees (CIPD, 2017;  
5 McGregor-Smith, 2017). Employees' decisions to engage with ERGs are driven by the  
6 intention to use their social identities as a conduit to accumulate organizational and  
7 occupational resources (Friedman and Craig, 2004; Ng and Sears, 2010). However,  
8 individuals who actively participate in these groups face the risk of negative stereotyping  
9 which can arrest their move into leadership roles (Hekman *et al.*, 2017). Mentoring  
10 programs established through organizations serve as developmental networks for the  
11 careers of minority ethnic workers (Randel *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, knowledge workers  
12 from Black ethnic groups are reticent about actively participating in these programs. This  
13 stems from the scarcity of senior leaders from similar backgrounds who could serve as  
14 potential mentors (Giscombe and Mattis, 2002; Wingfield and Chavez, 2020).  
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27 Despite their substantial power, informal networks are often concealed from those outside  
28 their domains (Kamenou, 2007; McGuire, 2000). Several studies and industry reports reveal  
29 that Asian and Black knowledge workers in the UK face limited access to such networks (see  
30 Kele *et al.*, 2022). This uneven access could result in minority ethnic knowledge workers  
31 becoming members of potentially low-status networks (Ibarra, 1993; Nkomo, 1992). Several  
32 theories have been advanced to explain this structural barrier. One such factor is the  
33 societal positioning of minority ethnic groups in Western societies. Status construction  
34 theory suggests that minority ethnic knowledge workers encounter difficulties when trying  
35 to join informal networks because of societal perceptions that their ethnic groups lack  
36 covetable resources (McGuire, 2000). Related to this are instances where an ethnic identity  
37 is perceived to be incompatible with certain professional identities (Cook and Glass, 2015;  
38 Kenny and Briner, 2013; Mehra *et al.*, 1998). Another consideration is the hierarchical  
39 position occupied by minority ethnic workers within organizations, as this determines the  
40 types of informal networks to which they can gain entry. If minority ethnic workers are  
41 mostly relegated to less prestigious roles, they become invisible and unimportant to others  
42 (Cook and Glass, 2015; Vallas, 2003). Moreover, the underrepresentation of minority ethnic  
43 leaders in organizations implies that the networks held by minority ethnic professionals may  
44 be less influential than those maintained by their white counterparts (Ibarra, 1995).  
45 Restricted access to powerful informal networks can subsequently curtail opportunities to  
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3 interact with high-status individuals within these networks, thereby limiting the potential  
4 for career advancement (McGuire, 2000). Categorization theories even suggest that  
5 minority ethnic knowledge workers, aware of their societal and organizational status, might  
6 deliberately avoid engaging with influential individuals and groups due to a fear of rejection  
7 (Khattab *et al.*, 2020).  
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## 13 14 15 *2.2 Relational dynamics*

16 The formation of cross-ethnic relationships in professional settings is hindered by  
17 differences in status arising from individuals' demographic background (Phillips *et al.*,  
18 2009). Studies have shown that Asian and Black knowledge workers in the UK face  
19 challenges in negotiating their careers despite their advanced skills and salariat class  
20 membership. This is due to the prevalence of stereotypes in their interactions with  
21 colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds (Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Fernando and  
22 Kenny, 2018; Kele *et al.*, 2022; Kenny and Briner, 2010). Stereotyping affects different  
23 groups differently, resulting in varying degrees of social acceptance for these groups  
24 (Huang, 2021; Lu and Li, 2021). Moreover, White knowledge workers tend to gravitate  
25 toward and cultivate relationships with other White individuals due to their minimal or  
26 inconsequential interactions with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds outside of their  
27 professional settings (Kele *et al.*, 2022).  
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40 These difficulties can reinforce an individual's inherent tendency to connect with similar  
41 others (Ibarra, 1993; Mehra *et al.*, 1998), creating relational barriers between members of  
42 different ethnic groups in organizations. In particular, studies indicate that Black  
43 professionals face challenges in establishing strong cross-ethnic relationships, resulting in  
44 their networks being composed primarily of strong ties with individuals from their own  
45 ethnic backgrounds (James, 2000; Randel *et al.*, 2021). However, evidence from the UK and  
46 the USA shows that ethnically homogenous networks offer limited assistance in advancing  
47 the careers of minority ethnic workers (Huang, 2021; Zwysen and Longhi, 2018). Limited to  
48 forming only weak ties with white professionals, Black workers may perceive opportunistic  
49 behaviors directed towards them from their white counterparts (Burns and Granz, 2023;  
50 Hudson *et al.*, 2021). According to social closure theory, when an ethnic group perceives a  
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3 threat to its status, its members tend to strengthen their connections with each other  
4 rather than expand their networks with individuals from outside the group (Gibson, 2022).  
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9 While these challenges persist, it is also crucial to consider the agentic efforts of Asian and  
10 Black professionals to address relational barriers. This necessitates a deliberate identity  
11 management process. The term *relational labor* has been used to describe the efforts made  
12 by Black professionals to establish and maintain relationships with their majority ethnic co-  
13 workers (Franklin, 2022). Successful networking strategies for Asian and Black professionals  
14 aspiring to corporate board positions include nurturing non-confrontational interactions  
15 with existing board members (Westphal and Stern, 2007) and redirecting their social  
16 identities away from their ethnic origins towards other shared identities with incumbents  
17 (Zhu *et al.*, 2014). Leaders from minority ethnic backgrounds may adopt a strategy of  
18 conforming wherein they present carefully curated information about themselves to create  
19 a distance between their professional identities and the prevailing stereotypes associated  
20 with their demographic groups (Glass and Cook, 2020; Hekman *et al.*, 2017). Sometimes,  
21 this process of recategorization does not merely extend an individual's career. For example,  
22 British Black professionals are known to downplay their ethnic identity with the dual aim of  
23 enhancing their professional identity and improving the societal image of their ethnic group  
24 (Kenny and Briner, 2013).  
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40 In some scholarly investigations, identity management has emerged as a coping mechanism  
41 adopted by Asian knowledge workers to navigate the workplace dynamics. These workers  
42 adjusted their outlook and demeanour to align with workplace norms and conventions,  
43 resulting in the downplaying of discriminatory experiences or the avoidance of discussions  
44 about such incidents (Huang, 2021; Liu, 2017). This strategy is often employed due to the  
45 inherent belief that active interventions to address discrimination are futile (Cooke *et al.*,  
46 2013). However, Asian knowledge workers do not consistently maintain a separation  
47 between their sense of self and their ethnic identities. Their behaviors were possibly  
48 influenced by the societal perceptions of Asian groups being reproduced at the workplace  
49 (Pang, 1996; Rosette *et al.*, 2016). Asian knowledge workers in the UK and US professional  
50 settings drew upon their identities to build formal and informal workplace coalitions,  
51 capitalizing on the positive stereotypes of their specific or broader demographic groups  
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3 (Fernando and Kenny, 2018; Huang, 2021; Hwang and Beauregard, 2022). Others leveraged  
4 the value of their ethnicity or nationality within specific temporal and situational contexts to  
5 become sought-after members of various networks (Atewologun and Singh, 2010; Hwang  
6 and Beauregard, 2022; Wingfield and Chavez, 2020).  
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12 The success of Asian and Black knowledge workers' networking strategies may be influenced  
13 by the specific contexts in which they operate. In particular, the extent to which their  
14 organizations cultivate environments that encourage learning, knowledge sharing and  
15 integration across diverse groups can determine the effectiveness of these strategies  
16 (Kochan *et al.*, 2003). While minority ethnic workers may invest considerable energy in  
17 establishing common ground and forging connections with others, these relationships may  
18 not always be sufficiently robust to overcome the exclusionary barriers present in networks  
19 (Franklin, 2022). Even with moderating factors such as length of employment service and  
20 functional expertise, which are known to foster relations between professionals (Pelled *et*  
21 *al.*, 1999), minority workers with career aspirations find that they have to work  
22 exceptionally hard to prove their loyalty to existing and prospective network members  
23 (Brickson, 2000). Consequently, not everyone will persist with the strategies aimed at  
24 gaining the favor of their co-workers and high-status individuals, opting instead to  
25 discontinue their efforts (Kele *et al.*, 2022).  
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### 41 **3.0 Applying a Bourdieusian lens to the research setting**

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43 This study uses Bourdieu's three key concepts—field, capital and habitus—to examine the  
44 networking strategies of Asian and Black knowledge workers in the London Insurance  
45 Market. These three concepts form Bourdieu's relational perspective and remain influential  
46 across various disciplines in uncovering the dynamics that shape different social worlds  
47 (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Kitchin and Howe, 2013).  
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54 The London Insurance Market can be considered a social field with its own set of norms,  
55 rules and practices, serving as a space where institutions and individuals strive to improve  
56 their positions (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Characterized by  
57 relationships among a diverse range of institutional participants such as capital providers,  
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3 underwriters, reinsurers, brokers and other service entities (London Market Group, 2022;  
4 Tischhauser *et al.*, 2014), it differs from conventional business approaches. Here, it is the  
5 customers—the global risk managers—who navigate their entry into the field (Tischhauser  
6 *et al.*, 2014), rather than the field’s participants seeking prospective customers (see Figure  
7 1). In this environment, underwriters wield significant influence as decision makers in  
8 accessing and pricing risks. This field model can be explained through Bourdieu’s notion of  
9 capital that field participants develop and accumulate to enhance their position (Bourdieu,  
10 1986). Bourdieu (1986, p. 241) characterized capital as “taking time to accumulate and  
11 having potential capacity to produce profits and reproduce itself in identical or expanded  
12 form”.

23 **Figure 1:** Simplified relational structure of the London Insurance Market

24 Adapted from London Market Group, 2022

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29 With a history spanning over 300 years, the London Insurance Market has established itself  
30 as a preeminent center for complex industrial and specialty risks (London Market Group,  
31 2022; Tischhauser *et al.*, 2014). The repository of knowledge that the field owns and  
32 generates is a form of cultural capital that has been accumulated and built over the last  
33 three centuries. This is combined with the economic capital provided by capital providers to  
34 produce symbolic capital and create a sense of trust and confidence among customers that  
35 they will be protected. Trust and prestige, in turn, generate further economic benefits for  
36 field participants. Concurrently, these forms of capital contribute to the symbolic power  
37 exerted by the London Insurance Market over other adjacent fields.

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47 Participants in a field maintain a habitus specific to the field, which involves reproducing  
48 intrinsic protocols and behaviors (Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). These  
49 meanings are internalized and reinforced through repeated interactions with other field  
50 participants over time, leading to the accumulation of different forms of capital valued in  
51 the field (Bourdieu, 1986). This field generates cultural, economic and symbolic capital  
52 through two primary means. First, the field’s subscription model is dependent on numerous  
53 insurers sharing the burden of underwriting complex risks (Pillai, 2023; PwC, 2002). The  
54 prevailing institutional norm emphasizes the significance of broker-underwriter interactions  
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3 in resolving the complex risk challenges faced by customers (Rafferty, 2023). To operate in  
4 this system, the field encourages its participants to have formal and informal networks and  
5 use their social capital from these networks to preserve or amass cultural, economic and  
6 symbolic capital. Second, the physical proximity of companies within the field (London  
7 Market Group, 2022) strengthens this habitus, enabling both institutional and individual  
8 participants to forge connections and leverage social capital to mutually generate other  
9 forms of capital. In essence, the cultural, economic and symbolic capital in the field are  
10 interwoven, and this symbiotic relationship conforms to the field's habitus, emphasizing the  
11 importance of institutions and individuals in cultivating relationships with one another. (see  
12 Figure 2). Efforts to alter this deeply ingrained habitus have encountered strong opposition  
13 at the micro-level, with individuals rejecting technological innovations to preserve face-to-  
14 face interactions and personal relations to price and underwrite complex risks (Barrett,  
15 1999; Barrett and Walsham, 1999; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Smets *et al.*, 2015).  
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29 **Figure 2:** Interconnected dynamics of capital in the London Insurance Market

30 Source: Created by author  
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34 The London Insurance Market, however, is not a static field but a dynamic entity that is  
35 influenced by evolving economic conditions, societal shifts and regulatory interventions  
36 (PwC, 2002; Tischhauser *et al.*, 2014). Recognizing this, industry leaders have placed strong  
37 emphasis on cultivating a diverse workforce as a strategic priority for growth and  
38 modernization (London Market Group, 2016). Within this context, diversity is seen as a form  
39 of capital, instrumental in enhancing the field's cultural and symbolic capital to maintain its  
40 competitive edge (London Market Group and KPMG, 2019). This leadership commitment is  
41 further reinforced by the enhanced regulatory oversight of the industry, compelling the  
42 field's institutional participants to implement explicit policies to diversify leadership  
43 structures (Prudential Regulation Authority, 2018). By integrating a broader range of  
44 backgrounds and experiences at leadership levels, the field not only adheres to compliance,  
45 but also redefines its symbolic capital. Considering this change and the fact that the field's  
46 social cosmos is anchored in interpersonal relations and interactions, it is imperative to  
47 investigate how Asian and Black workers navigate the field's professional habitus that could  
48 not be picked up from books but is essential for career advancement. This inquiry also sheds  
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light on whether their networking strategies have reinforced or disrupted the field's established dynamics.

## 4.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to collect data through semi-structured interviews using purposive, convenience and snowball sampling techniques to identify and engage with participants (King and Horrocks, 2010). All pseudonyms used in this study were chosen by participants. Table 1 displays the demographic profiles of the 24 participants included in this study. The sample size was determined based on two reasons. First, in-depth interviews with 24 individuals were deemed sufficient to address the research questions. Second, time constraints influenced the decision to limit the sample size.

While females constituted 45% of the industry workforce from 2015 to 2018 (Horton *et al.*, 2020), they represented 54% of the participants in this study. This overrepresentation may skew the findings towards issues more pertinent to this demographic group. To mitigate this potential bias, deliberate steps were taken to ensure a broader representation of participant diversity, including considerations such as age, length of employment and occupation. Due to the lack of available employee ethnicity data in the London Insurance Market, this study chose an equitable representation of Asian and Black ethnicities within the sample population. Had ethnicity breakdown data been accessible, the sample size would have been adjusted proportionately. The research cohort in this study was proportionally distributed between front-office and back-office roles. Front-office roles include underwriting and broking which drive revenue generation while back-office roles provide support, governance and administrative services such as IT, finance and claims (Pillai, 2023). By being directly involved in core business activities, front-office workers possess considerable authority as the industry's public face (Pillai, 2023; PwC, 2002). The London Insurance Market, as a field, structures its social hierarchy with distinct power differentials between front-office and back-office workers (Bourdieu, 1990).

**Table 1:** Participant profiles

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5 Using audio or video technologies, interviews with participants lasted an average of 96  
6 minutes. To ensure a thorough understanding of the data, the researcher listened to the  
7 recordings several times before transcribing each on a word-for-word basis (Silverman,  
8 2017). Moreover, immediate post-interview observations were promptly documented in a  
9 research journal. The researcher's eight years of work experience in this field were  
10 instrumental in guiding these records. Additionally, during the interview period, the  
11 researcher invested 15 hours in attending and recording observations at networking events  
12 designed for Asian and Black workers within the research field. Collectively, the notes and  
13 the researcher's industry knowledge contributed an additional layer of contextual data for  
14 this study. The interview transcripts were revisited multiple times and cross-referenced with  
15 field notes and research journal. The data were examined using thematic analysis (Braun  
16 and Clarke, 2006; Braun and Clarke, 2013). Data analysis was also informed by the  
17 researcher's seven years of prior industry experience, ensuring that the findings are relevant  
18 to the field. Additionally, employing a Bourdieusian framework to interpret the findings has  
19 enabled the researcher to minimize the risk of subjective interpretations. Figure 3  
20 represents the connections and progression from subthemes to themes and aggregate  
21 concepts. Tables 2 and 3 present the prevalent themes and subthemes identified within the  
22 front- office and back-office samples, respectively.  
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40 **Figure 3:** Thematic map of findings

41 Source: Created by author  
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45 **Table 2:** Themes and subthemes from front-office sample

46 Adapted from Crowley-Henry *et al.*, 2023  
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50 **Table 3:** Themes and subthemes from back-office sample

51 Adapted from Crowley-Henry *et al.*, 2023  
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## 5.0 Findings

Interpersonal connections influenced career progression and overshadowed educational attainments, prompting an inquiry into what motivates Asian and Black workers to adopt specific strategies to establish and leverage their workplace networks. The emphasis on networking also presents challenges for these individuals, affecting the success of their strategies.

### 5.1 Primacy of networks

First, the findings offer a context to illustrate how paramount networking was to participants in the field. This sets the stage to understand the subsequent challenges faced by Asian and Black workers in this environment before examining their strategies to respond to these changes.

#### 5.1.1 Making sense of the field

The London Insurance Market, characterized by its habitus, accords great importance to interpersonal dynamics and networking. Participants reported that the historical practice of “gentlemen’s agreements” not only forms a part of this field’s legacy but continues to perpetuate the centrality of networks in conducting business and advancing careers. Individuals emphasized the necessity of a close-knit community for the development of cultural and economic capital essential for their professional growth.

*“And I think it is one of the really unique parts of our industry, you know, that being able to go round and broker risks, talk to underwriters in the market and even on some really large claims, there will be like different claims handlers from different companies and they will all be working on them together. You have to go to people and you have to talk to people.”*  
(Heather)

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5 Some participants identified a disparity between the forms of capital prioritized by their  
6 families, such as education and motivation, and those influential in their professional field.  
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8 Social networks exerted a more substantial influence on career trajectories.  
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11 *“In Asian families, we are brought up with the mindset that education and*  
12 *professional qualifications carry weight. But when we enter the world of*  
13 *work, we find out that who you know, how you fit in with them and how*  
14 *you interact with them have much heavier weighting in terms of how your*  
15 *career will progress.” (Ravi)*  
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22 Participants drew comparisons between their field and others such as banking and  
23 consultancy where career advancement was perceived to be linked to extended working  
24 hours. In contrast, participants viewed success in the London Insurance Market as being  
25 more dependent on navigating its social fabric. Despite acknowledging the more attractive  
26 financial incentives in alternate fields, they expressed a preference for interpersonal  
27 dynamics as a means of growing their careers.  
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31 *“This market is actually based on relationships. Hard work isn’t just stuck*  
32 *in the office all day and night. It’s about the relationships you have with*  
33 *people. This is one of the things that has kept me in the insurance sector. It*  
34 *is not dehumanising like other places.” (Kwame)*  
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42 However, as the findings will illustrate below, participants faced distinct obstacles in  
43 effectively building and sustaining interpersonal networks, compelling them to develop  
44 tailored approaches to overcome these obstacles.  
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### 49 5.1.2 Controlling access to career opportunities

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51 In this close-knit setting, a critical issue identified spontaneously by every participant was  
52 the widespread presence of nepotism. Nepotism acted as an exclusionary mechanism,  
53 preventing individuals with limited social capital from securing front-office roles.  
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55 Participants pointed out that since front-office functions were dominated by white  
56 individuals, potential entrants from Asian and Black backgrounds would not have the same  
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3 access to informal networks that were often utilized through nepotistic practices. According  
4 to participants who had previously applied for jobs or worked in other sectors, nepotism  
5 was more pronounced in the London Insurance Market than in those other contexts.  
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9 *“Out of the underwriters and brokers who come in, they are almost*  
10 *exclusively brought in via family connections or by friends. So it is not easy*  
11 *for anyone new to break into these roles.” (Eddie)*  
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17 The impact of this nepotistic culture was not confined to the initial stages of participants’  
18 careers. It reverberated throughout various stages, resulting in persistent feelings of  
19 resentment due to the discriminatory influence this culture had on their professional  
20 advancement.  
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24  
25 *“Nepotism is rife in the industry. It is emotional to talk about this because I*  
26 *have been fighting for nearly four years. One of the girls here, she has only*  
27 *been here for two years and is now more senior than me. And she’s young.*  
28 *Her dad’s the head of a broking team at [a competitor firm]. And I am still*  
29 *on the same level I came in.” (Monica)*  
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35 Nepotism was also observed in the back-office but its impact was confined to a few  
36 functions. Some participants shared instances where “the girlfriends” of senior leaders were  
37 brought in to fill administrative or marketing positions in the back-office. However,  
38 nepotism was more pronounced as a dividing factor between front- and back-office roles,  
39 resulting in segregation.  
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44 *“If you want to see people who look like us, you go down to the basements*  
45 *where the IT teams are based. Not on the trading floors.” (Jolly)*  
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51 Nepotism intersected with protectionist behaviors ingrained in some high-status networks.  
52 Participants noted that certain underwriting classes such as financial lines, political and  
53 terrorism risks were held in higher regard within the field. Involvement in these areas was  
54 viewed as a pathway for significant economic capital. In the areas of political and terrorism  
55 risk, participants saw their ethnic backgrounds as potential assets that could enhance the  
56 field’s understanding of the needs of territories across Asia and Africa requiring coverage for  
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3 these specific risks. However, it was observed that the prestigious networks associated with  
4 these underwriting classes tended to exclusively grant access to individuals possessing  
5 substantial cultural, economic and social capital. The absence of Asian and Black  
6 professionals in these groups was specifically pointed out. Participants suggested that this  
7 lack of diversity was one factor contributing to the difficulties they faced when striving to  
8 break into these deep-rooted networks when aspiring to move into these high-profile  
9 underwriting classes.  
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16 *“I wanted to get into political and terrorism risk but I didn’t realise just*  
17 *what an elite club that was. It was very much people who went to which*  
18 *private schools, who had wealth and who was well-connected. I went to a*  
19 *private school too but there is a hierarchy. When I tried to meet some of*  
20 *the underwriters for a coffee to try and understand what I need to do to*  
21 *get into this area, they didn’t immediately shut me down but they were*  
22 *discouraging. They would meet me and have initial conversations with me*  
23 *but then nothing would happen.” (Heather)*  
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## 34 *5.2 Networking drivers and strategies*

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36 Participants strategically used their interactions to advance their careers. They employed  
37 various tactics to cultivate and use their informal networks. They also engaged with ERGs for  
38 their instrumental value in enhancing their career trajectories. Many believed that their  
39 careers had a better chance of progressing through informal networks than through formal  
40 channels such as Human Resources.  
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### 48 *5.2.1 Overcoming boundaries and hierarchies*

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50 Participants vying for leadership roles employed conciliatory methods and showed  
51 deference to establish and strengthen their bonds within these networks. This approach  
52 demanded skillful mobilization of cultural capital, necessitating a deep understanding of  
53 subtle cues and valued gestures integral to the field’s informal interactions. Mastering this  
54 required substantial time and experience in the field. This strategy stemmed from the lack  
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3 of role models within these networks who shared their ethnic backgrounds and who could  
4 guide and model the nuanced aspects of navigating these circles.  
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9 Gaining entry into influential networks necessitated advocacy from established members  
10 which was one reason some participants accumulated informal sponsors. In this context, all  
11 sponsors were white men. Participants also found that these relationships were mutually  
12 beneficial. Sponsors often sought recognition, a form of symbolic capital, from their peers  
13 for supporting minority ethnic individuals.  
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18 *“During an intense period of work, I worked very closely with my boss’*  
19 *boss. We never attached labels to our working relationship because*  
20 *nothing was formalised. He became a de facto sponsor. He made me*  
21 *visible to the other senior people. I started with little experience in this*  
22 *project but I ended up heading up a workstream team.” (Julia)*  
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29 Participants in low-status organizational positions used informal networks to transition to  
30 higher-status roles in the front office. They sought to improve their economic, cultural and  
31 symbolic capital by building relationships with front-office workers and by attending social  
32 events. However, they faced resistance from HR and peers in similar roles when trying to  
33 expand their networks beyond their immediate teams.  
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39 Leveraging ethnicity was a strategy Black participants in front-office roles used to  
40 circumvent structural barriers. This approach gained significant traction following the 2020  
41 Black Lives Matter protests in the UK. Despite the discomfort it caused them, they  
42 recognized the need to capitalize on the momentum of these protests to gain access to  
43 networks and opportunities that had previously been inaccessible to them.  
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49 *“The only reason why people started paying attention to Black people in*  
50 *the market was because of BLM. And they think ‘oh crap, we don’t have*  
51 *anyone Black in our x y z underwriting or broking teams’. There is a panic*  
52 *because their teams have now become more visible to everyone. When*  
53 *they are feeling the panic, we become visible to them too. Yeah, no one*  
54 *wants to use their race to their advantage but I don’t know how else we*  
55 *make inroads into these groups.” (Jerry)*  
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### 5.2.2 Instrumental value of ERGs

ERGs were the most frequently cited formal networks in interviews with participants' social identities largely driving their decisions to join such groups. Moreover, participants recognized that ERGs enhanced the legitimacy of leaders and institutions when efforts to diversify leadership teams were under increased regulatory scrutiny. ERGs were seen as crucial platforms for sharing knowledge and facilitating interactions with senior leaders across the field. Participants used these interactions as a strategic tool for career planning.

*"The speed mentoring events are good because I get face-time with the senior people and sometimes, they are happy for me to keep in touch with them afterwards. I ask them what opportunities are available at their companies." (Tien)*

However, ERGs were not without their drawbacks. Black participants demonstrated a degree of reservation towards active involvement in these groups, fearing that it could overshadow their professional identities. There was widespread sentiment among participants who were voluntarily running these groups that the social, cultural and symbolic capital they amassed through their efforts within these groups did not readily translate into tangible benefits to advance their careers.

*"I did think being involved and setting up [ERG] would open more doors for me. That some people will see that I had the initiative to set this group up and really promote it and establish it but this hasn't happened for me." (Anuj)*

Three reasons were offered to account for the limited conversion of capital from ERG participation into career advancement. First, leaders were seen attending ERG events as token gestures rather than genuine engagement. Second, there was a concern that biases against ERGs contributed to the underestimation of competencies gained through participation in these groups. Third, the perceived homogeneity within these groups was thought to limit the potential career progression benefits.

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3                   *“You look at the people at their events and you see women, you see brown*  
4                   *and Black faces. There is very little representation from white men in these*  
5                   *forums and that’s whom we need to engage with. Talking to each other is*  
6                   *all great but who that matters is not in the room.” (Rahul)*  
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### 10 11 12 13 *5.3 Differentiating*

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16 In the context of networking and career progression, some participants declined to engage  
17 in the commonly accepted practices for advancement. In this study, such refusal stemmed  
18 from the participants recognizing their potential inability to succeed within the established  
19 parameters. Instead, they sought other strategies to bolster their career and status in the  
20 field.  
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#### 26 27 *5.3.1 Diverging from the norm*

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29 A notable aspect of this dynamic to be different from others was the conscious rejection of  
30 nepotism by those who attained their front-office positions on merit. This approach was  
31 used to frame careers as defined by tenacity, in contrast to those who leveraged familial or  
32 other connections.  
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37                   *“I did not come into underwriting through connections. But I get asked a*  
38                   *lot how did I get here? My mentor told me to ask them the question back*  
39                   *rather than answering their questions. And you know when I asked them*  
40                   *the question, like ‘how did you get here?’, they got here through a family*  
41                   *relative. But I didn’t come through that traditional route. I came in because*  
42                   *I worked hard to come in and I deserved to get here.” (Alex)*  
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51 Participants who were unwilling or unable to establish deeper relationships with others  
52 pursued transient ties for career opportunities. This approach was grounded in their  
53 experiences of struggling to fit into informal groups. Transient ties, less demanding in terms  
54 of resource investment, provided a feasible alternative. Once their career needs were  
55 fulfilled, transient ties became dormant. This allowed individuals to look for new temporary  
56 connections.  
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### 5.3.2 Building and using specialist capital

Asian and Black workers also sought to distinguish themselves from others through their specialist expertise. In the London Insurance Market, back-office functions were where Asian and Black workers were to be found. These professionals developed and used their specialist expertise as a strategic tool to establish themselves on equal footing with the influential circles of front-office workers. Often, their niche expertise was a rare but indispensable asset to institutions within the field, especially during periods marked by regulatory changes. By aligning their skills with macro-level shifts, they amassed a form of specialist capital that got them noticed and sought after. This improved their chances of ascending to the upper echelons of their organizations.

In periods of disruption, the leaders in the London Insurance Market placed a premium on back-office specialist skills for their problem-solving and innovation potential. Participants saw this dynamic as an opportunity to demonstrate their value to front-office networks by highlighting their part in shaping the strategic direction of the institutional field.

*“When you join the innovation groups, you will see lots of Asians in the mix. They are mostly actuarial space because they are mathematically minded. I am stereotyping but that is what they are. People here know that they are not going to get any innovation done without the STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] people.” (Ramya)*

The evolving landscape of commercial risks presented opportunities, particularly for Black front-office workers in the sample, to become specialists in new areas. They identified emerging areas such as cyber, intangible assets, data and technology as attractive career propositions.

*“These are the hot tickets at the moment and there are boundless opportunities. You can be creative. You can drive change, you can drive innovation. You can make a name for yourself. There are fewer barriers. It*

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3 *is where Black underwriters or brokers are wanting to be involved in.”*

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5 *(Falcon)*  
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9 Individuals who identified themselves as generalists in the back-office voiced their concerns  
10 about not having specialty capital as a lever to surpass career barriers.  
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13 *“It is difficult to sell yourself if you are a generalist and Asian or Black.*

14 *What is it that you have that they don't? I wish someone had told me this*

15 *when I was at school. I could have become an accountant. Instead, I feel*

16 *stuck because the white people in Marketing are only going to promote*

17 *each other.” (Tara)*  
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## 26 **6.0 Discussion**

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28 This study addresses a research gap identified by scholars regarding the limited  
29 understanding of how minority ethnic organizational workers develop and utilize their  
30 workplace networks (Ibarra, 1993; *et al.*, 2000). Specifically, it examines the motivations  
31 behind Asian and Black workers' networking strategies in the London Insurance Market and  
32 the factors that influence their success or failure. The findings of this study corroborate  
33 those of prior studies on the critical role of networking in the London Insurance Market for  
34 both individuals' careers and institutions' trading activities (Barrett, 1999; Barrett and  
35 Walsham, 1999; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001; Pillai, 2023; Smets *et al.*, 2015).  
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45 The current study validates existing theories and contributes to the understanding of  
46 minority ethnic individuals' careers, network theory and workplace diversity. The  
47 significance of workplace networks for organizational careers has been well-documented in  
48 the literature (Burt, 2009; Seibert *et al.*, 2001). Studies have demonstrated that social  
49 capital takes precedence over human capital in determining the career trajectories of Asian  
50 and Black workers in knowledge sectors (Archer, 2011; Witt Smith and Joseph, 2010).  
51 Furthermore, the literature posits that the extraction of social capital from networks is  
52 achieved through the effective leveraging of network contacts (Khattab *et al.*, 2020; Randel  
53 *et al.*, 2021). However, the interplay between the structural and relational aspects of  
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3 networks also determines how individuals go about doing so (Ibarra, 1993; Tsai and  
4 Ghoshal, 1998).  
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9 The present study adds to the existing literature by delving into how networking functions  
10 within the London Insurance Market—a field that is characterized by its own norms,  
11 practices and power structure. This exploration reveals that effective networking is  
12 contingent on specific contextual factors. The findings reveal that, in the London Insurance  
13 Market, Asian and Black workers actively pursue inclusion in informal networks to  
14 compensate for the inadequacies of formal organizational structures in supporting their  
15 career progression. While concurring with prior research on the instrumental value of ERGs  
16 for minority ethnic professionals (Friedman and Craig, 2004; Ng and Sears, 2010), this study  
17 suggests that the involvement of employers and senior stakeholders in ERGs may be largely  
18 perfunctory or tokenistic in nature. This could explain the observed disconnection between  
19 the accumulation of social and cultural capital in these formal networks and their  
20 subsequent lack of conversion into quantifiable career advancement. The apparent inability  
21 to effectively harness the resources gained from formal networking endeavors may also  
22 account for the heightened emphasis that Asian and Black participants ascribed to  
23 leveraging informal networks within the London Insurance Market.  
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38 This study presents an analysis of how networking intersects with front- and back-office  
39 occupations, highlighting the salience of functional roles. Given the field's profound reliance  
40 on a network-centric model, one of the most significant barriers faced by Asian and Black  
41 workers is the pervasive practice of nepotism. Deeply woven into the field's habitus, it  
42 enforces the continued dominance of white employees in influential front-office positions.  
43 This study contends that the recruitment of candidates into the industry via word-of-mouth  
44 channels for front-office roles resembles the manner in which customers access the field  
45 (see Figure 1). By prioritizing social connections over merit in the allocation of front-office  
46 roles, the entrenched nepotistic structures of the field produce and reinforce a cycle of  
47 occupational stratification in the field. This practice markedly exacerbates disparities as it  
48 disproportionately affects Asian and Black individuals, owing to their often-limited social  
49 networks in front-office roles within this sector. Furthermore, this lack of diversity could  
50 lead to organizations missing out on the skills and perspectives that Asian and Black workers  
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3 can bring to the table, thereby limiting the industry's ability to innovate and adapt to  
4 changing macro-level conditions (Kochan *et al.*, 2003; London Market Group and KPMG,  
5 2019; Richard *et al.*, 2013).  
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10 The persistent challenges Asian and Black professionals face in gaining access to influential  
11 networks have been a prominent theme in the literature (Ibarra, 1993; Kele *et al.*, 2022;  
12 Nkomo, 1992). At the same time, the literature also recognizes that individuals employ  
13 agency to overcome obstacles. Studies have shown that Asian and Black workers frequently  
14 adopt non-confrontational modes of interaction to integrate into their professional  
15 environments and create easier pathways for career advancement (Huang, 2021; Liu, 2017;  
16 Westphal and Stern, 2007). The importance of networking in the London Insurance Market,  
17 combined with the challenges encountered by Asian and Black workers in networking,  
18 significantly influenced their strategies. The success of their approaches depended on  
19 circumventing exclusionary practices and leveraging their connections to access  
20 opportunities that were unavailable to them. Although the literature implies that minority  
21 ethnic individuals seeking elite positions shift their social identities from their ethnic  
22 backgrounds towards shared identities with the high-status incumbents they want to  
23 connect with (Zhu *et al.*, 2014), this study uncovers persistent hurdles even when they  
24 adopt this strategy.  
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40 When networking strategies fail to yield favorable and consistent outcomes, Asian and Black  
41 professionals may redirect their efforts and resources away from engaging with others  
42 (Franklin, 2022; Kele *et al.*, 2022) towards other avenues for career advancement. However,  
43 existing literature offers limited insight into the nature of these alternate avenues. This  
44 study reveals that the development and utilization of specialist capital serve as a strategic  
45 counterbalance to relying on acceptance into existing networks, offering a pathway for  
46 recognition and progression. Individuals build specialist capital to overcome career barriers.  
47 Moreover, constructing specialist capital in emerging areas, for which there is no  
48 established order of practices to adhere to yet, appears to facilitate the creation of new  
49 professional identities and the opportunity for individuals to position themselves as the next  
50 generation of power players. Additionally, there is potential for the emergence of new  
51 networks that transcend the boundaries of established networks. The shift towards new  
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3 specialisms could potentially bring about a change in the composition and focus of the  
4 industry's influential social groups.  
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## 10 7. Conclusion

11 Numerous studies, including this one, have consistently demonstrated that social capital is  
12 an essential antecedent to harnessing cultural, economic and symbolic capital. This  
13 recurrent empirical finding requires a concerted effort from both employers and academic  
14 institutions to educate minority ethnic workers and students on the pivotal role of networks  
15 as well as how to build and utilize them effectively. It is also incumbent upon employers to  
16 be open to discussing this with all new hires and to establish supportive channels where  
17 new employees can share the networking challenges they encounter. **If, as the findings  
18 indicate, the lack of access to influential networks hinders Asian and Black knowledge  
19 workers from advancing into leadership roles, organizations risk incurring significant losses  
20 in human capital that could otherwise drive business success.**  
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31 While prior literature has examined networking behaviors across various contexts, this  
32 study's noteworthy contribution lies in its contextualized analysis of the distinct field of the  
33 London Insurance Market. The pervasiveness of nepotism unveiled by this study calls for  
34 urgent attention from employers to address systemic biases, particularly in the recruitment  
35 process for front-office roles. Eradicating nepotism requires collective and coordinated  
36 efforts across the industry to develop and promote merit-based hiring practices across all  
37 organizational functions. This is necessary to reduce the impact of personal connections  
38 which currently determine who has access to the field. Monitoring mechanisms also need to  
39 be implemented to ensure a sustained commitment to combating nepotism.  
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50 One strategic approach to curtailing nepotism entails substantially enhancing the sector's  
51 appeal to external talent pools. This can be achieved by explaining and promoting the  
52 industry's significance in the contemporary world, emphasizing the variety of careers and  
53 diverse skillsets it fosters to address global challenges and facilitate societies to function.  
54 Moreover, the findings suggest that there is a need for targeted initiatives to address the  
55 underrepresentation of minority ethnic workers in front-office positions. Formal mentorship  
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3 programs and the creation of pathways for back-office employees to transition to front-  
4 office roles could serve as viable interventions. However, the successful integration of  
5 employees from the back-office to the front-office requires a foundational period of support  
6 to ensure that appropriate resources are available to nurture their growth in their new  
7 positions.  
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14 Although this study aimed for a representative mix of occupational and demographic  
15 backgrounds, its findings cannot be assumed to reflect the experiences of all Asian and Black  
16 workers in the London Insurance Market. The overrepresentation of female participants  
17 may have overshadowed the specific challenges encountered by minority ethnic males in  
18 the sector. Furthermore, the small sample size of 24 limits the extent to which these  
19 findings can be generalized to a broader population across all knowledge industries.  
20 Nevertheless, the research findings have implications for organizations, considering the  
21 complexities of networking and their impact on the career trajectories of minority ethnic  
22 knowledge workers.  
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32 The present study highlights that contextual factors shape networking strategies and their  
33 outcomes. Comparative investigations across other industries can determine whether the  
34 patterns observed in the London Insurance Market are replicated elsewhere. Additionally,  
35 conducting an in-depth analysis to scrutinize the stark and nuanced differences between  
36 front-office and back-office roles across different knowledge sectors is an inquiry that could  
37 further our understanding of occupational segregation, power asymmetries and networking  
38 patterns that manifest between Asian and Black workers and their majority counterparts. A  
39 critical area warranting scholarly attention is the widespread influence of nepotism within  
40 professional environments. Research across multiple sectors could yield a more holistic  
41 understanding of how nepotism affects career opportunities and advancement, particularly  
42 among minority ethnic workers. Finally, the intersection of other social categories with  
43 Asian and Black ethnicities was beyond the scope of this study. Future studies could address  
44 this gap by examining the networking challenges and opportunities for individuals with  
45 intersecting social identities.  
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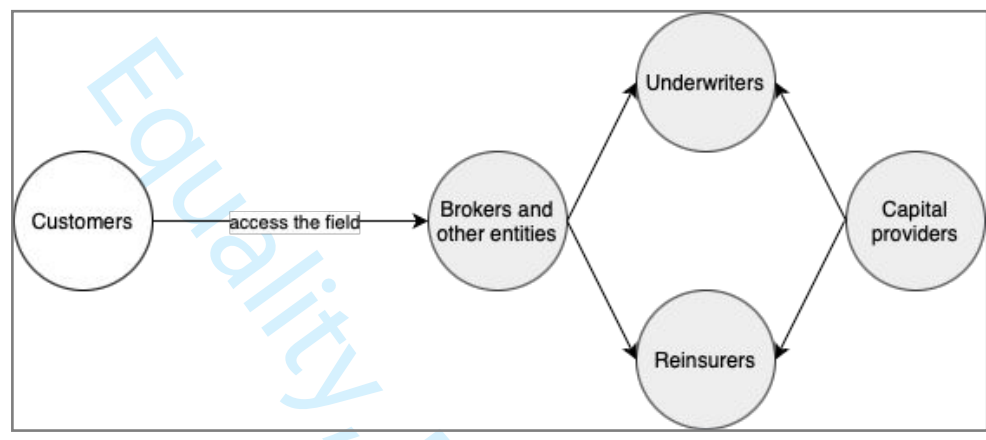
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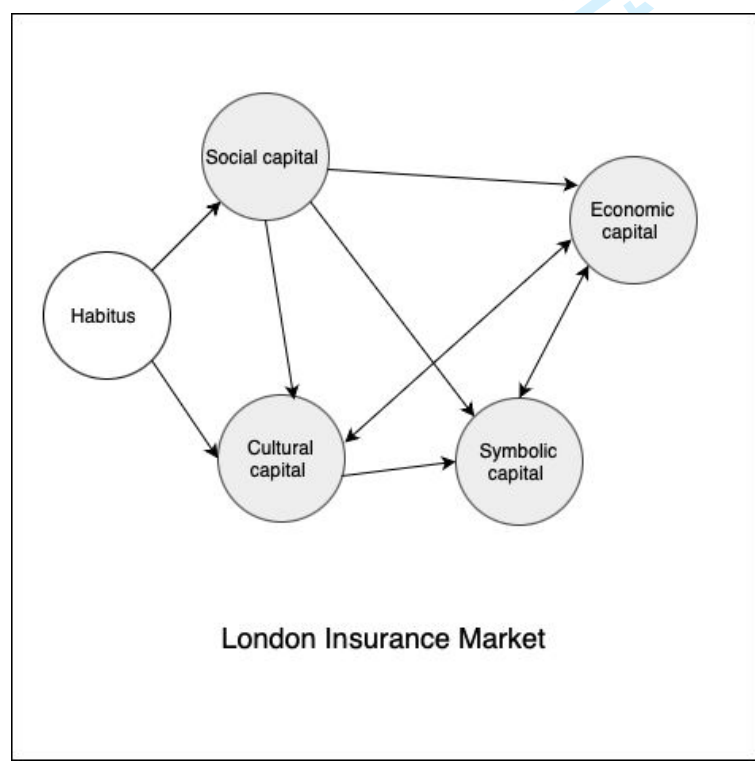
**Figure 1:** Simplified relational structure of the London Insurance Market

Adapted from London Market Group, 2022



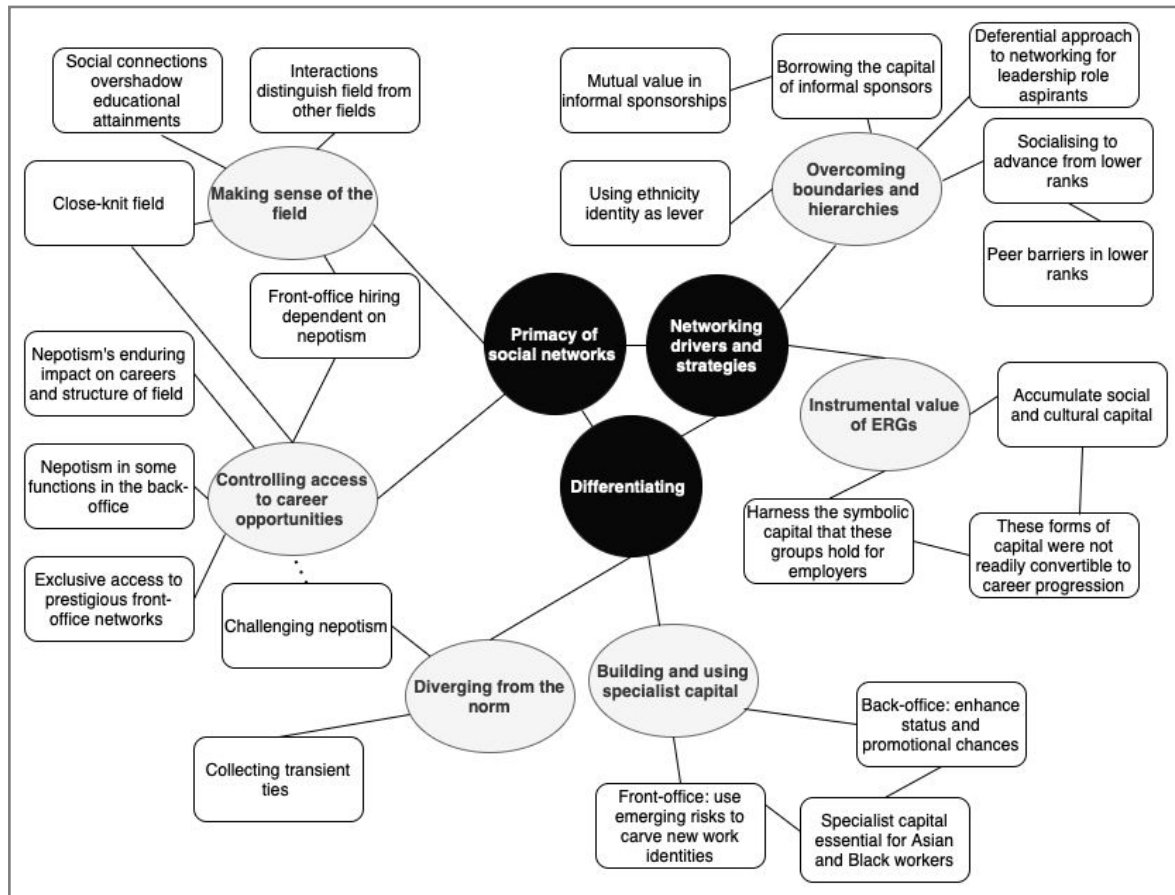
**Figure 2:** Interconnected dynamics of capital in the London Insurance Market

Source: Created by author



**Figure 3:** Thematic map of findings

Source: Created by author



and Inclusion

**Table 1:** Participant profile

Source: Created by author

No	Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Occupation	Years in sector
<b>Participants in front-office roles</b>						
1.	Heather	Early 40s	Female	South Asian	Underwriting	14
2.	Rahul	Early 40s	Male	South Asian	Underwriting	13
3.	Basanti	Early 40s	Female	South Asian	Underwriting	10
4.	Ravi	Mid 30s	Male	South Asian	Broking	10
5.	Alex	Late 20s	Male	Black African	Underwriting	6
6.	Falcon	Mid 30s	Female	Black	Broking	5
7.	Anuj	Mid 20s	Male	South Asian	Broking	4
8.	Monica	Late 30s	Female	Black African	Broking	4
9.	Nala	Early 20s	Female	Black African	Underwriting	3
10.	Jerry	Late 20s	Male	Black	Underwriting	3
11.	Micki	Early 20s	Female	Black African	Broking	2
12.	Tien	Mid 20s	Male	East Asian	Broking	2
<b>Participants in back-office roles</b>						
13.	Olivia	Early 40s	Female	Black African	Legal	20
14.	Louise	Mid 40s	Female	Black	Operations	16
15.	Eddie	Early 40s	Male	South Asian	Executive	14
16.	Ramya	Late 30s	Female	South Asian	Finance	10
17.	Kwame	Mid 40s	Male	Black African	Finance	9
18.	Jolly	Early 40s	Male	Black African	Risk management	8
19.	Tara	Early 50s	Female	Asian	Marketing	8
20.	Angela	Late 40s	Female	Black African	Legal	5
21.	Julia	Early 30s	Female	South Asian	Finance	5
22.	Seb	Early 30s	Male	East Asian	Operations	5
23.	Gillian	Mid 50s	Female	South Asian	IT	4
24.	Stella	Early 30s	Male	Black	Legal	3

**Table 2:** Themes and subthemes from front-office sampleAdapted from Crowley-Henry *et al.*, 2023

Themes and subthemes	Heather	Rahul	Basanti	Ravi	Alex	Falcon	Anuj	Monica	Nala	Jerry	Micki	Tien
Making sense of field												
Field is closely knit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social connections overshadow educational attainments	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Interactions distinguish field from others	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controlling access to opportunities												
Nepotism role in front office	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nepotism impact on career paths	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Exclusive access to prestigious front-office networks	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓		
Overcoming boundaries and hierarchies												
Deferential approach to networking for leadership role aspirants	✓			✓								
Informal sponsorships	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Socialising to advance from lower ranks								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Using ethnic identity as a lever				✓	✓					✓		✓
ERGs												
Collect social / cultural capital	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Themes and subthemes	Heather	Rahul	Basanti	Ravi	Alex	Falcon	Anuj	Monica	Nala	Jerry	Micki	Tien
Harness ERG’s symbolic capital	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Diverging from the norm												
Challenging nepotism					✓			✓		✓		✓
Collecting transient ties		✓								✓	✓	✓
Building /using specialist capital												
Using emerging risks to carve new work identities					✓	✓		✓		✓		✓

**Table 3:** Themes and subthemes from back-office sample

Adapted from Crowley-Henry *et al.*, 2023

Themes and subthemes	Olivia	Louise	Eddie	Ramya	Kwame	Jolly	Tara	Angela	Julia	Seb	Gillian	Stella
Making sense of field												
Field is closely knit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social connections overshadow educational attainments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interactions distinguish field from others	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Controlling access to opportunities												
Nepotism role in front-office		✓	✓		✓	✓						
Nepotism in back-office	✓						✓				✓	
Nepotism impact on career paths		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					
Exclusive access to prestigious front-office networks		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓					
Overcoming boundaries and hierarchies												



Themes and subthemes	Olivia	Louise	Eddie	Ramya	Kwame	Jolly	Tara	Angela	Julia	Seb	Gillian	Stella
Deferential approach to networking for leadership role aspirants	✓	✓						✓	✓			
Informal sponsorships	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Socialising to advance from lower ranks	✓							✓		✓		✓
Using ethnic identity as a lever			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
<b>ERGs</b>												
Collect social / cultural capital	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Harness ERG's symbolic capital	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Diverging from the norm</b>												
Challenging nepotism			✓		✓	✓	✓					
Collecting transient ties	✓					✓						
<b>Building /using specialist capital</b>												
Using specialist capital to enhance status and for promotions			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			