

A Very Economic Elite - The Case of the Danish Top CEOs

Ellersgaard, Christoph; Larsen, Anton Grau; Munk, Martin D.

Published in:
Sociology

DOI (link to publication from Publisher):
[10.1177/0038038512454349](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512454349)

Publication date:
2013

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript, peer reviewed version

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Ellersgaard, C., Larsen, A. G., & Munk, M. D. (2013). A Very Economic Elite - The Case of the Danish Top CEOs. *Sociology*, 47(6), 1051-1071. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512454349>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at vbn@aub.aau.dk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Sociology

<http://soc.sagepub.com/>

A Very Economic Elite: The Case of the Danish Top CEOs

Christoph Houman Ellersgaard, Anton Grau Larsen and Martin D Munk

Sociology published online 7 December 2012

DOI: 10.1177/0038038512454349

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://soc.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/12/05/0038038512454349>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



British Sociological Association

Additional services and information for *Sociology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://soc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://soc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Dec 7, 2012

[What is This?](#)



A Very Economic Elite: The Case of the Danish Top CEOs

Sociology

0(0) 1–21

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission: sagepub.

co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0038038512454349

soc.sagepub.com



Christoph Houman Ellersgaard

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Anton Grau Larsen

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Martin D Munk

Aalborg University, Denmark

Abstract

Although the business elites in western societies have a very privileged social background in common, there are substantial differences in the reproduction mechanisms and social trajectories leading to a position within this elite group. These differences are explored by comparing the career paths of the top 100 CEOs in Britain, France, Germany and Denmark. In France and Britain, this reproduction is mediated through degrees from elite universities. In Germany, the principle of admission is the incorporated cultural capital acquired through an exclusive bourgeois origin combined with any university degree. Elite universities also hold little importance for Danish top CEOs, partly due to the institutions' historic decline; instead, reproduction is mediated through time spent in the economic field, placing the case of the Danish CEOs between that of their British and German counterparts. Specific trajectories of Danish executives, in particular sales people, are identified using Multiple Correspondence Analysis and cluster analysis.

Keywords

Bourdieu, CEO, commercial capital, correspondence analysis, economic elite, field of power, organizational capital, symbolic capital

Corresponding author:

Christoph Houman Ellersgaard, Department of Sociology, University of Copenhagen, Østre Farimagsgade 5, Building 16.2.42, 1014 Copenhagen K, Denmark.

Email: che@soc.ku.dk

Business Elite Reproduction

We must understand the objective structure of opportunities as well as the personal traits which allow and encourage given men to exploit these objective opportunities which economic history provides them. Charles Wright Mills (1956: 97)

The career trajectory of CEOs in large corporations shows which forms of resources these men – for they are usually men – use to qualify for, and legitimize holding, a position of power and also allows us to view the relative strength of central societal institutions, such as the family, the educational field and the market that transmits resources, and the nature of the respective national economies. As Aron (1950: 141) argues, one of the most characteristic features of any society is how the elite is structured and reproduced. Through a comparative study of the leading 100 senior executives in large, industrial countries, primarily France, the UK, and a Scandinavian welfare state, Denmark, we explore the importance of families, educational system and economic organizations as institutions of elite reproduction.

While the relative importance of these institutions may differ in magnitude, the overall social origin of the top managerial elite is very similar, as shown in Table 1. At least four-fifths of senior executives originate from the top fifth of their respective society. The pathways are relatively heterogeneous, with diverse prevalences of exclusive secondary education, elite university diplomas and elite circulation. Following Hartmann (2007: 61–80) three models can be identified: 1) a French and Japanese model with high importance of elite universities – or *grandes écoles* – exclusive secondary education and high elite circulation; 2) a British and American model with high importance of elite universities and secondary education, but little elite circulation with low intersectoral mobility; and 3) a German model with little importance of elite universities and little elite circulation, with reproduction mediated through a ‘class-specific habitus’ – the incorporated cultural capital attained through upbringing in the bourgeois family (Hartmann, 2000: 243, see also Bourdieu, 1984: 66) – enabling individual mastery of the behavioural codes of the boardrooms. When looking at business elite reproduction, the question is to what degree the incorporated cultural capital of the business elite offspring can successfully be turned into institutionalized cultural capital in the form of diplomas from elite universities, enabling a ‘school-mediated mode of reproduction’ (cf. Bourdieu, 1986: 244, 1996: 285–90), or, alternatively, are reproduction strategies based in forms of capital acquired outside educational institutions? The mode of reproduction of a Scandinavian business elite, however, remains largely unresolved vis-a-vis Hartmann’s terminology.

The phenomenon left to be explained is the surprisingly stable pattern of reproduction of the managerial elites. This pattern is part of a general image of an extremely homogeneous business elite with regard to age, sex and ethnicity (Bauer and Bertin-Mouro, 1999: 16). Even though the reproduction rate of the business elite has decreased historically, the social background of this group has remained very exclusive over the last 250 years in the major industrialized nations (Kaelble, 1980: 415–16). Adding to this, Andrieu (2001) suggests that post-communist economic elites have a strong family linkage to the pre-communist bourgeoisie, emphasizing the strength of this particular type of reproduction mechanism. The closer to the top of the business hierarchy, the more important having a

Table 1. Social origin of top 100 CEOs

Year	Denmark 2007	France 1998	UK 1998
Upper class	33%	43%	35%
Upper-middle class	35%	34%	29%
Lower-middle class	25%	19%	25%
Lower class	8%	4%	11%
N (of known cases)	78	98	91

Note: The data on France and the UK are based on Maclean et al. (2006: 91), who identify origin in the upper class exclusively by being 'born into a family with substantial wealth and a large income based on inheritance or a parent occupying a leading position in society' (Maclean et al., 2006: 266). Source: France and UK, Maclean et al. (2006: 91); Denmark, authors' own research.

moneyed family background is (Hartmann, 2007: 92). In all the countries compared, the majority – approximately two-thirds – of the top CEOs are recruited from social groups within the top 20 per cent of society, as Maclean et al. (2006: 91) define the upper middle and upper class. Almost the same exclusive background can be identified among a less exclusive part of the economic elite in Norway (Gulbrandsen, 2005: 344). Along with cultural elites, economic elites have the most exclusive social background of all elites in the Scandinavian countries (Ruostetsaari, 2008: 164). The homogenous background of private corporate leaders is also seen in Germany (Hartmann, 2000), with estimates of 82 of the top 100 senior executives originating from the dominant classes in 1995, of whom 34 had fathers engaged as industrialists or bankers, while 11 originated from the middle and lower classes (Hartmann, 2000: 248), albeit the middle class includes only the CEOs with 'Lower-middle class' background in Table 1.

Drawing on the terminology of the field of power developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1996), the notion of forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is used as a strategy to identify the resources at stake among the most powerful economic agents. By analysing holders of the top 100 executive positions, we restrict ourselves to a particular subspace – the business elite – within the economic pole of the field of power. These agents acquire the organizational capital needed to enter the upper echelons of corporate management. The concept of the field of power is thus used as an epistemological tool, rather than as a grand theory that ties power tightly to economic and cultural capital (cf. Hjelldrekk and Korsnes, 2009: 44–5), to identify a multidimensional space of different forms of capital within the business elites through geometrical data analysis. The structure of the different forms of capital needed to enter the business elite is explored using geometrical data analysis. Using the Euclidian distances generated within this space, four distinct pathways to top management in Denmark are explored through hierarchical cluster analysis.

Within this framework, convincing comparisons have been made between career trajectories and the significance of educational institutions in large industrial societies (Bauer and Bertin-Mouro, 1999; Hartmann, 2007, 2010; Maclean et al., 2006); other studies have compared less exclusive elites (Useem and Karabel, 1986) or national elites alone (Bendix

and Howton, 1957; Flemmen, forthcoming). Although a study has described the business elite in Denmark (Christiansen and Tøgeby, 2007), the scope and methods received considerable criticism for their limitations (Andersen, 2005; Ellersgaard and Grau, 2008; Sørensen, 2004), which led to inaccurate characterization of the Danish business elite within contemporary literature (Hartmann, 2010: 314; Ruostetsaari, 2008: 147ff).

While comparing the Danish case with larger, industrialized societies, particularly France, Britain and Germany, we address the following two research questions:

- 1) To what extent is the institutionalized cultural capital of Danish top CEOs tied to elite universities or elite schools?
- 2) Through which forms of capital do Danish top CEOs acquire and legitimize their position?

Understanding Business Elites through the Terminology of Fields

Following Savage and Williams' (2008: 15) call to apply the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu as valuable guidance in the study of elite reproduction, we examine the symbolic elements of the economic field (Lebaron, 2000: 124) used to legitimize the positions of executives. CEOs reproduce their position through symbolic capital, which is the legitimate form of capital giving their dominance an 'innocence of natural phenomena' (Bourdieu and De Saint-Martin, 1978: 26). The legitimating value of these symbols is determined in the struggles in the field of power (Bourdieu, 1996: 264–5). The symbolic capital used in the economic field is also determined by other fields, such as the academic field. Accordingly, our empirical findings of the social biography, educational pathway and career pattern of top CEOs are not merely a description of qualifications. These social facts can be analysed as position takings by accumulating legitimate forms of capital in relation to the state of – and struggles in – three embedded fields: 1) the field of the firm; 2) the economic field; and 3) the field of power. The relative autonomy of the economic field from other fields, and thereby its position in the field of power, is therefore indicated in the reproduction of the CEOs.

The strategies of firms[...] depend also on the structure of power positions constitutive of the internal governance of the firm or, more exactly, on the (socially constituted) dispositions of the directors [dirigeants] acting under the constraints of the field of power within the firm and the field of the firm as a whole. (Bourdieu, 2005: 205)

Hence, executives produce 'the interest of the firm as *their interest within the firm*' (Bourdieu, 2005: 207, italics in original). Bourdieu (2005) notes that firms as fields tend to have homologous or isomorphic structures (cf. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 148–50; Fligstein, 1996: 657) and thus that the same type of strategies may be successful. Therefore, the population of CEOs examined here can be seen as agents capable of having success in the homologous fields of their respective firms.

We can understand the firm in which the top executives have succeeded as a field both of *force* and of *struggle* embedded within the economic field in general (Bourdieu, 2005:

69, 205–6). Due to the importance of economic capital, these fields are also related to the struggles within the field of power as a whole (Bourdieu, 1996: 264–72). A field of power is structured by particular compositions of capital, making the hierarchies of fields both multidimensional and relational (Hjellbrekke et al., 2007: 245–6). These structures are identified using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) (Lebaron, 2009).

Bourdieu (2005: 194–5) identifies a number of central forms of capital in the economic field. These include financial, cultural, technological, juridical and organizational, commercial, social and symbolic capital. ‘Capital’, Bourdieu (1986: 241) notes, ‘is accumulated labor’ thus acquired over time depending on the structure of distribution of the different forms of capital. Having access to the capital needed to occupy a dominant position thus enables the agent to influence both the ‘games of society’ through which these forms of capital are accumulated and the conversion rates between different forms of capital, which is the central stake in the struggles within the field of power (Bourdieu, 1996: 265).

The technological capital – ‘the portfolio of scientific resources (research potential) or technical resources (procedures, aptitudes, routines and unique and coherent know-how, capable of reducing expenditure in labour or capital [...])’ (Bourdieu, 2005: 194) – can be seen as an applied or field-specific component of cultural capital, while not necessarily requiring the same incorporated features as the mastery of a more generalized cultural capital. Therefore, we interpret university diplomas in economy or science, and particularly doctorates, as indicators of cultural-technical capital identifying experts rather than intellectuals. In our MCA, we limit our focus on the reproduction mechanism to organizational, cultural-technical, commercial and what can analytically be labelled as inherited capital. Available through ‘the Family Mode of Reproduction’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 278ff), inherited capital can consist of 1) financial capital, such as the heritage of the financial resources tied to ownership; 2) cultural capital in the incorporated form allowing the grace of the native within the social games of the dominant classes (cf. Bourdieu, 1984: 339); 3) social capital providing access to the network of the established family; and through this 4) symbolic capital tied to the family name and its ‘social investment strategies’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 273). Inherited capital thus enables the agents to understand the doxa (Bourdieu, 1996: 35, 272) of the firm as a field, and the economic field in general and gain mastery of the class-specific habitus (Hartmann, 2000), or what Mills (1956: 140) terms the ‘sound character’:

Those who have started from high have from their beginnings been formed by sound men and trained for soundness. They do not have to think of having to appear as sound men. They just are sound men; indeed, they embody the standards of soundness. (Mills, 1956: 142)

Data

The Danish data were collected using the prosopographical method (Broady, 2002), while using a wide array of sources to access biographical and corporate information. Data were systematically collected from the Danish equivalent of *Who’s Who?* (Kraks Blå Bog), Greens Erhvervsinformation (a private business information database), journalistic portrait articles, article search engines, bibliographic databases, financial reports

and public registers. The method used to identify forms of capital and relations is Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis, with support from a descriptive analysis of the various business elites.

CEOs from 82 corporations were selected according to their position as CEO in December 2007. We included 18 executives on other criteria, taking into account the magnitude of the corporations and issues regarding ownership and control, leaving us with a final population of 100 CEOs. These CEOs thus compose a business elite holding positions of command (Scott, 2003: 156–7). Inside this exclusive group of top corporations, there is a considerable difference in size. The turnover of the shipping giant A.P. Møller-Mærsk is 50 times higher than that of the company with the lowest turnover (EAC). The corporation with the most employees (ISS), with half a million employed, has more than a thousand times the number of employees than the state-controlled gambling monopoly (Danske Spil). Because of these major size differences between top Danish corporations, more than one senior executive from the largest companies have been included. Moreover, six owner-managers were included – all were both former CEOs and current chairmen within the corporation – as they could be seen as the *de facto* leaders of the firm, both internally and externally.

The 82 corporations with formal ownership and management located in Denmark were selected through either financial capital, measured as having a turnover of over five billion DKK (€650 million), or organizational capital, defined as having a least 5000 employees; 34 corporations were included on both criteria, 45 on financial capital and three on organizational capital alone. To avoid including investors, rather than executives, a minimum of 500 employees was also required, excluding 12 firms. Companies acting only as subsidiaries were also excluded.

The Comparative Methodology

The historical differences between the nation-state-based business elites under comparison are considerable (cf. Scott, 1997: 16; Windolf, 1998: 321–2). The most significant is the difference in the size of the economy and, consequently, also the number of world-scale corporations. Likewise, the ownership structure varies, for example, with more dispersed shareholding in the UK and more family and state control in France (Maclean et al., 2006: 69) and Denmark. Following Hartmann (2010), a small number of Danish CEOs could be compared with the top 100 from large, industrialized countries. However, this would make it impossible to study elites of the same relational importance, reputation and size within the nation-states.

Apart from being cases of the three models of business elite reproduction, the reason we restrict our direct comparisons to certain studies of French, British (Maclean et al., 2006) and German business elites (Hartmann, 2000, 2007, 2010) is because these studies define the business elites with the same level of exclusiveness as our data: the top 100 senior executives, or the top decile of the dominant segment of the business elite as identified by Useem and McCormack (1981). Here, we present the most important discrepancies. The Danish data include executives only, whereas Maclean et al. (2006) also include non-executives with many top-board memberships. Compared with our selection criteria of either financial or organizational capital, Hartmann (2000) used turnover with the

predefined relation 5:3:2 of corporations from industry, commerce and finance. The solution used for Denmark gives a relative strength of 39:32:17 from industry, commerce and finance (the 12 executives from conglomerates excluded). This should be attributed to the distinctive trading culture that has shaped economic life in Denmark (Fellman, 2008), rather than to bias towards inclusion of commercial corporations in our analysis.

The Disappearance of the Elite School

Capital acquired through exclusive educational institutions has been given a pivotal role in studies of elite recruitment, with the importance of diplomas increasing with the size of the corporation (Bourdieu et al., 1973: 66–70). In this sense, elite universities are defined not so much by their ranking as by their ability to secure 1) a substantial number of alumni placed in the most powerful positions in society (Hartmann, 2000); and 2) an exclusive social selection, often probing the elite socialization through personal interviews (Karabel, 2005), thus enhancing elite consciousness. Consequently, this makes the sole selection criterion of Danish universities – grade-point average – a less efficient exclusion strategy because of the inability to examine, and thus legitimize, more personal traits gained through inherited capital (cf. Bourdieu, 1996: 295ff).

As Table 2 shows, the educational profile of Danish CEOs is similar to that of their British counterparts. A university diploma is certainly important to succeed in the upper echelons of management but is not a prerequisite in the same way as in Germany or France. Rarely do Danish CEOs have educations that are primarily connected with cultural capital, such as the arts, humanities and social sciences. Instead, it is diplomas in applicable business knowledge or technical competences that are required. Hartmann (2000: 252) describes the difference between German universities focusing on technological capital – ‘the transfer of subject knowledge’ – and French elite institutions reproducing and converting cultural capital: ‘abilities such as intellectual brilliance, rapid comprehension, responsibility, leadership drive, and a pronounced elite consciousness’.

No university programme or institution in Denmark can be seen as an elite university according to the first definition: in itself being so prestigious that a promising career leading to a highly powerful position is guaranteed. Most top CEOs (14) attended general business education at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS), the University of Copenhagen or the Technical University of Denmark (DTU); each institution has 12 alumni in top senior executive positions. Considering there are relatively few institutions offering university diplomas, the number of CEOs from each institution is low. Additionally, none of these institutions is important for the recruitment of other elite groups in Denmark.

While research clearly demonstrates that selection into tertiary education in Denmark is tied to parental social position and cultural reproduction (Munk and Thomsen, 2011; Thomsen, 2012), and the engineers and economists are generally recruited within the economic upper class, there is no indication in our Danish data of a strong linkage between parental background and the top CEOs’ elite education, as seen, for example, in the UK (Maclean et al., 2006: 119). Furthermore, no more than five of the top 100 CEOs qualified from among the top 25 programmes, measured by grade-point average minimum of enrolled students, in either 1979 (the median graduation year of the CEOs) or in

Table 2. Education profiles of top 100 CEOs

Year	Germany 1995	France 1998	UK 1998	Denmark 2007
<i>Education type</i>				
Arts, humanities or social sciences	27	2	12	7
Business, economics or administration	33	42	26	43
Science, engineering or medicine	22	44	27	25
Professional	6	4	29	23
School only	0	7	5	0
Not known	9	1	1	2
<i>Highest qualification</i>				
Doctorate	46	10	6	8
Higher degree	36	80	23	54
First degree	–	2	45	13
Professional qualification only	6	0	20	23
School	–	7	5	0
Not known	9	1	1	2
N	97	100	100	100

Note: Sources: Germany, Hartmann (2000: 248); France and UK, Maclean et al. (2006: 117); Denmark, authors' own research.

2007. Thus the institutionally validated personality gained through exclusive social selection of the student – as used in the second definition of elite universities – is in no way a common feature of the programmes followed by the Danish CEOs. However, through examinations, some programmes may contribute to a selection process and thus gain more exclusivity before individuals take up executive positions.

Despite Germany having no elite universities, the institutionalized cultural capital of a university or doctoral degree is important: almost 90 per cent of CEOs have a higher degree and almost half have a PhD (Hartmann, 2010: 303–4). In Germany, doctorates may also be gained much later in the career trajectory (Bauer and Bertin-Mouro, 1999: 26), tying holders of this title more to their organizational capital within the firm than to their inherited cultural capital. Nonetheless, the number of doctorates emphasizes the importance of scholarly capital compared with Denmark's less than two-thirds with master degrees and less than one in 10 with doctorates, as shown in Table 2. Thus, in Denmark, few exclusive university programmes, or academic merits in general, act as gatekeeper in legitimizing a potential elite member's social qualifications.

Adding to this result, we have not been able to identify Danish secondary equivalents of the British public schools, the American boarding schools or the prestigious French *Lycée* [the *khâgne*] so important for both recruitment and networks of future elite individuals

(Bourdieu, 1996: 84; Maclean et al., 2006: 96ff; Mills, 1956: 67). The most well-known Danish boarding school, Herlufsholm, has only one former student as a top CEO; the two most prestigious secondary schools situated in the most upscale Copenhagen suburbs have two former top CEOs as alumni. No evidence suggests that social or cultural capital gathered through the attendance at specific institutions of secondary education plays an important role in the qualification or selection process of Danish top CEOs. These findings appear to be general for the Scandinavian countries; Mastekaasa (2004: 223) describes the absence of elite institutions in Norway on both the secondary and the tertiary level.

Interestingly, the lack of an elite university or programme is not because none has been established. In the 1950s, DTU was one of two institutions with admission criteria other than a secondary diploma. The DTU had an explicit focus on developing tomorrow's leaders (Reinholdt Hansen, 2000). In 1999 almost one-third of the top 250 Danish CEOs were engineers (Christiansen et al., 2001: 153), whereas only 17 engineers are included in our population of 2007, eight years later. Of these, 10 were born before 1950 compared to only 27 of the CEOs in total, adding to the image of a declining engineering profession. While similar tendencies are found in Norway (Gulbrandsen et al., 2002: 59), the strength of the French engineers leads us to believe that the diminishing numbers of engineers may be due to the lack of exclusiveness. The decline of DTU's prestige may have been due to its relocation in 1974 from the centre of Copenhagen to the suburbs, Kgs. Lyngby, and a subsequent restructuring, resulting in a substantial increase in enrolment. Accordingly, the alumni lost both the symbolic benefits and the *esprit du corps* that a potential French executive gains from the *numerus clausus* at, for example, the École Nationale d'Administration with an annual intake of around 175 students from more than 2000 applicants.

The structural homology between the field of elite universities and the field of economic power found by Bourdieu (1996) in France thus plays a subordinate role in the reproduction of the business elite in Denmark. As our correspondence analysis shows, we can therefore interpret the university diplomas of Danish top CEOs as principally being indicators of technical capital, as in Germany. However, as in Britain, this technical capital is not a prerequisite for a successful managerial career. In this sense, Denmark is placed between the German and the British positions, with elite universities being of little importance, as in Germany, but, as in Britain, academic qualifications in general being of less importance.

Reproduction through the Economic Field

Without the selection mechanism of elite universities, how are the cohesion, homogeneity and exclusive social background of CEOs possible? As Table 3 shows, it is necessary to have a career in the economic field. The degree of elite circulation in Denmark resembles the low circulation found in Britain and Germany (Hartmann, 2010: 304) without the French tradition of *pantouflage* from higher civil service to a managerial career (Bourdieu, 1996: 329). However, loyalty towards one firm, an important component of organizational capital, seems more important in the larger industrial societies. More than half the German CEOs have spent their entire career within one corporation (Hartmann, 2010), whereas this holds true for a quarter of the Danish top CEOs.

Table 3. Career profile and characteristics of top 100 CEOs

	France	UK	Denmark
Year	1998	1998	2007
Corporate	41	84	57
Enterprise to corporate	9	2	30
Public administration or organizations to corporate	49	3	7
Law to corporate	0	6	1
Media, politics, academia or sports to corporate	1	5	2
Not known	0	0	3
N	100	100	100
Age at first appointment as top CEO	40.5	44.1	44.4
(Standard deviation)	(6.0)	(5.8)	(7.3)
Number of companies to first top 100 directorships	2.2	2.1	2.9
(Standard deviation)	(1.2)	(1.2)	(1.8)

Note: Source: Career profile, age as top CEO and number of companies in France and UK (Maclean et al., 2006: 127, 117, 139), Denmark, authors' own research.

Another important finding shown in Table 3 is that it seems much easier to change path from enterprise to corporate careers in Denmark than in both France and the UK. This suggests that capital and merits gained from the economic field in general, rather than purely the space of top corporations, qualify potential top CEOs. Likewise, Danish top CEOs have had, on average, almost one more corporation as an employer than have their French and British counterparts.

An important characteristic of Danish top CEOs in a comparative perspective is the importance of their corporate career and thus their organizational capital. The relatively high number of 16 CEOs with no educational diplomas, apart from being trainees in large corporations, points to the importance of some corporations, particularly A.P. Møller-Mærsk, as being academies (cf. Cappelli and Hamori, 2005: 25) within a corporation-based mode of reproduction. This organizational capital is not a prerequisite, as the trajectories of several Danish top senior executives point to more irregular careers based in enterprises in the economic field, but outside the hierarchies of large corporations.

Identifying Relations between Forms of Capital: Multiple Correspondence Analysis

Correspondence analysis, Bourdieu (2005: 102, *italics in original*) notes, can be used 'to bring to light the structure of positions or – and this amounts to the same thing – the structure of distribution of specific interest and powers that determines and *explains* the strategies of the agent'. Through this method, we visualise the opposite positions

Table 4. Contribution of active variables

Heading	Variable	Modalities	Dim.1 (25%)	Dim.2 (18%)	Dim.3 (14%)
<i>Career</i>	Career start	2	7.9	4.8	0.8
	Years from education to executive	4	12.3	3.7	5.6
	Years in corporation until CEO	5	17.8	6.2	4.1
	Age as CEO	4	8.0	0.3	10.8
	Career changes	3	8.4	8.6	4.1
	MBA	3	4.3	1.6	2.6
	Business diploma	2	3.5	0.0	0.0
	Abroad	3	1.1	2.0	8.2
<i>Total</i>		26	63.3	27.2	36.2
<i>Education</i>	PhD	2	0.8	7.5	1.6
	Education	9	17.1	16.9	8.9
	Author	2	1.9	12.1	2.4
	Career foundation	5	5.6	12.1	5.6
<i>Total</i>		18	25.4	48.6	18.5
<i>Family</i>	Place of birth	5	5.0	13	10.3
	Social background	7	5.1	9.0	20.4
	In-laws in <i>Who's Who</i>	2	0.7	0.5	2.0
	Family in <i>Who's Who</i>	2	0.3	1.6	12.5
<i>Total</i>		16	11.1	24.1	45.2
<i>All headings</i>		60	100	100	100

generative of practice by graphically identifying the distribution of 'objective positions' within the business elite.

A Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis, which allows us to ignore missing or redundant categories when determining the Euclidian distance between the individuals by which the principal axes are determined (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2004, 2010), was conducted on indicators of organizational, technical-cultural and inherited capital (Table 4). Note that these indicators cover the career trajectory only until the first appointment as a CEO at one of the 82 selected corporations. It is difficult to separate the institutionalized cultural capital tied to academic diplomas from the more work-related and applicable technical capital when no valid indicators of either social or economic capital before appointment are available.

We identified a multidimensional Euclidian space consisting of three interpretable axes accounting for 57 per cent of the total adjusted inertia (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2004: 209). The interpretation of the axes is inferred by the modalities with a contribution value above average (Jambu, 1991: 286).¹ Figures 1 and 2 map the geometrical representation of the axes' principal components. When interpreting these, distances between modalities above 0.5 are considered 'notable', while distances above 1.0 are deemed to be 'large' (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2010: 71). As shown in Figure 1, the first axis, explaining

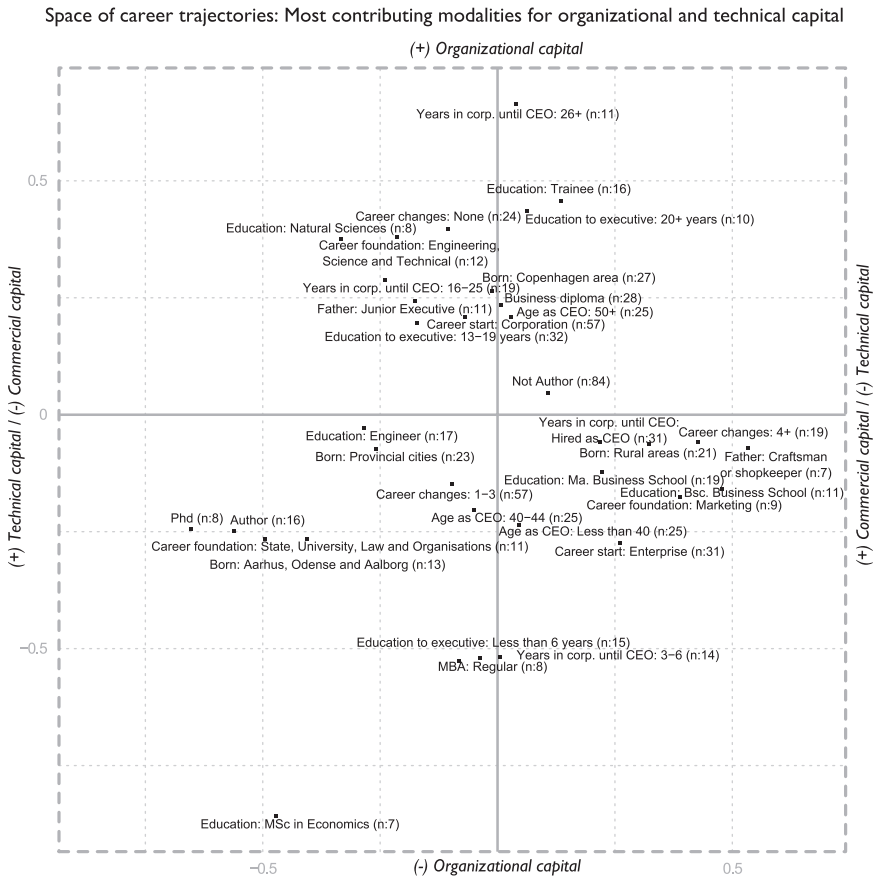


Figure 1. Modalities with above average contributions to axis 1 and 2

25 per cent of the total inertia, captures a contrast between agents holding large amounts of organizational capital (typically, trainees with long careers within the corporation and no company changes throughout their career) and those who succeeded through other forms of capital, usually with a much shorter career length.

The left side of the second axis, representing 18 per cent of the total inertia, shows CEOs with high amounts of technical or cultural capital before appointment; for example, having authored a book, a doctoral degree and being born in a provincial town. The right side shows CEOs with large amounts of commercial capital. Characteristics of CEOs with commercial capital are a high number of career changes; rural upbringing; father being a farmer, craftsman or shopkeeper; career start in enterprises; and having a BSc and an MSc in Business from the Copenhagen Business School. All modalities of university education are placed on the left side of the second axis of technical and commercial capital, while trainees and those with vocational training are placed with the business school graduates on the right side. Thus it seems that the distinctive features on

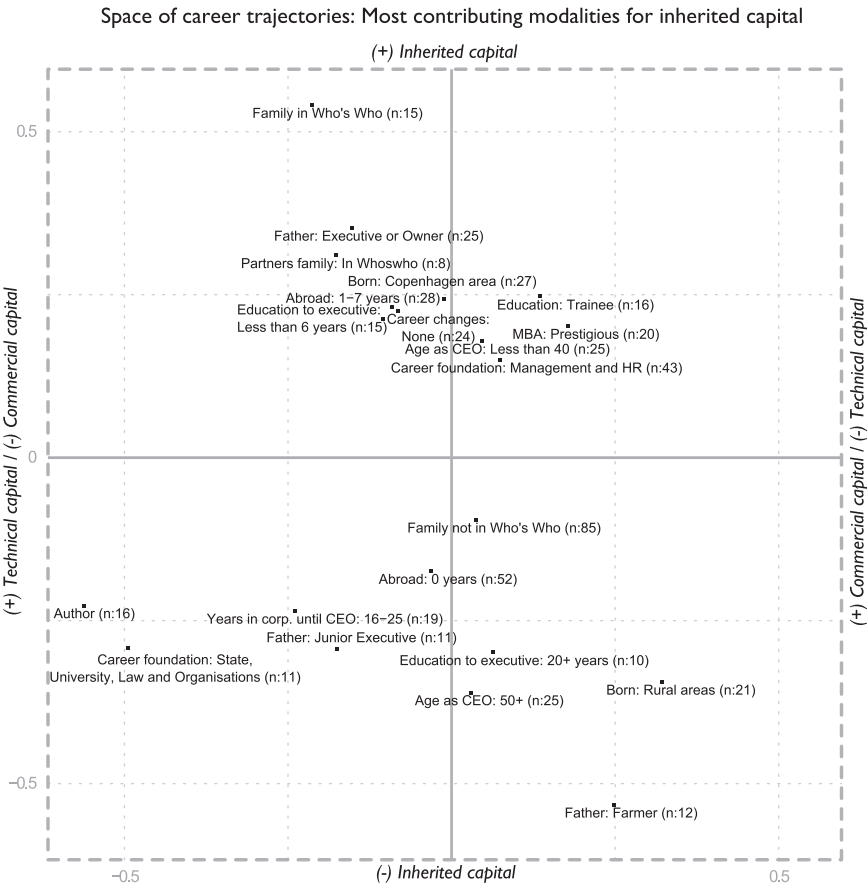


Figure 2. Modalities with above average contributions to axis 3

the Danish CEOs shown in Tables 2 and 3 are closely tied to a career path dependent on high amounts of commercial capital.

When interpreting the third axis, accounting for 14 per cent of the total inertia (Figure 2), a clear division in amount of inherited capital is seen, with top CEOs with parents (or parents-in-law) mentioned in the Danish equivalent of *Who's Who*, parents who were executives or owners, and CEOs born in the Copenhagen area opposed principally to CEOs with rural backgrounds. Those associated with high levels of inherited capital are seen as managerial potential from the start of their career and therefore achieve their first executive position shortly after finishing their education, reaching the top managerial elite before their 40th birthday. Those with a low level of inherited capital reach the top after they turn 50 years and, logically, have longer careers.

This three-dimensional structure, and particularly the important role of commercial capital in recruitment of Danish CEOs, could be a result of the larger commercial sector in this sample and in the Danish economy. This would hold if the sector of the corporation

as a supplementary variable were placed distinctively within the three-dimensional space. However, this is not the case. Industry, commerce, and finance are not distanced from each other by more than a 0.5 distance on the principal axis, allowing no valid interpretation of this deviation.

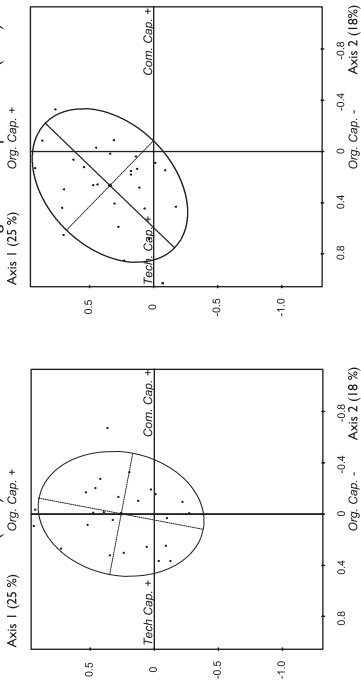
Cluster Analysis: The Pathway of Inheritors, the Organizational Personnel, Experts, and Salespeople

With the general structure of capital constructed, subgroups of distinct pathways can be constructed by cluster analysis to construct a typology (cf. Denord et al., 2011) of pathways to the top management in Denmark. Clusters of individuals have been identified by way of ascending hierarchical clustering of Euclidian distances within the three-dimensional space of individual career trajectories constructed through the SMCA (Le Roux and Rouanet, 2004: 106–15) identifying the partition with four clusters as the best fit. The four clusters are shown in Figure 3 and can be described ideally as follows:

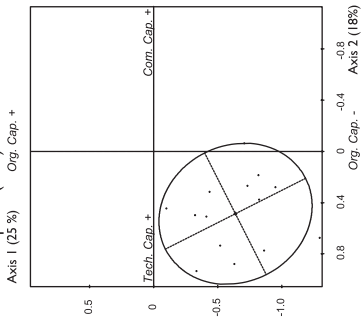
- 1 *The inheritors (C1)* are characterized by high levels of organizational and inherited capital and relatively quick careers within a single corporation. Often sons of executives, born near the centre of the national field of power in Copenhagen, with a trainee background, a career start in management and foreign experience – typically less than seven years, but enough to acquire cosmopolitan capital (cf. Weenink, 2008), these men symbolize a sound character. A quarter (25) of the top CEOs are placed in this cluster. The inherited path is not uniquely characterized by the owners who inherited their position through financial control of the firm. Only seven (28%) of the CEOs in the inheritors' cluster are owners, and these seven account for half the total number of owners (14) in the study. Thus the majority of the inheritors do not follow this path as a result of material inheritance of ownership; instead, it is due to their ability to master the class-specific habitus.
- 2 *The organizational personnel (C2)* also have a high level of organizational capital but very little inherited capital. These men have worked their way to the top within one corporation and are, on average, seven years older than their peers before their appointment as top CEOs and have a significantly lower number of career changes. On average, their capital structure is slightly more tied to technical than commercial capital, both in general and in comparison with the inheritors. The label 'the organizational personnel' applies to 27 top CEOs.
- 3 *The experts (C3)* have high levels of technical capital, quick careers, authorships and PhDs. These men have been able to benefit from their merits in scholarly fields. It is also among these agents that we find the few career patterns that involve positions in the state bureaucracy or organizations and an educational background in economics in common with top politicians and bureaucrats – the characteristics of *pantouflage*. With parents without a particularly prestigious background, and with partners in academic jobs, it appears that this relatively rare trajectory – followed by only 14 CEOs – is similar to the path trodden by the highly scholarly qualified German CEOs and the elitist French CEOs.

4 Clusters by organizational and technical vs. commercial capital

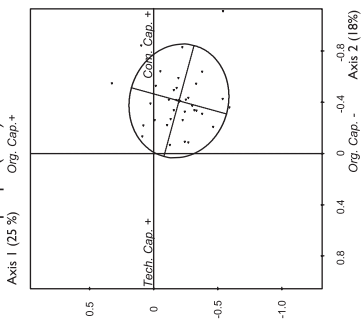
C1: Inheritors (n:25)
Axis 1 (25%) Org. Cap. +



C3: Experts (n:14)
Axis 1 (25%) Org. Cap. +

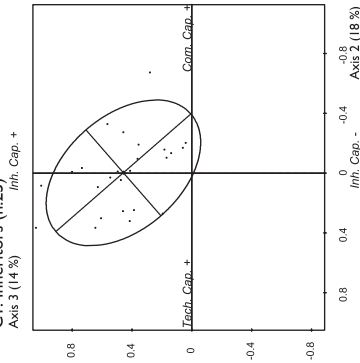


C4: Salespeople (n:34)
Axis 1 (25%) Org. Cap. +

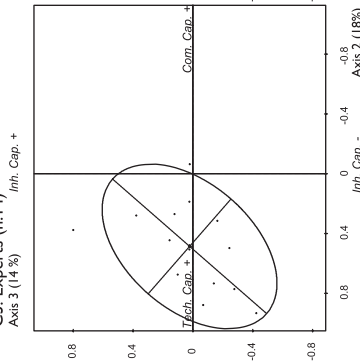


4 Clusters by inherited and technical vs. commercial capital

C1: Inheritors (n:25)
Axis 3 (14%) Inh. Cap. +



C3: Experts (n:14)
Axis 3 (14%) Inh. Cap. +



C4: Salespeople (n:34)
Axis 3 (14%) Inh. Cap. +

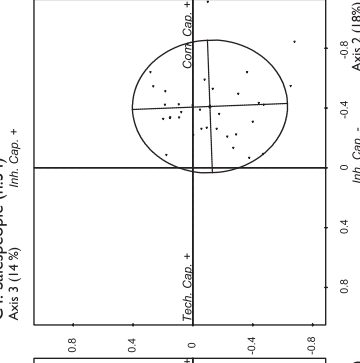


Figure 3. Cluster analysis, concentration ellipses of the four identified clusters

- 4 *The salespeople (C4)* seem to have the most homogenous trajectory when looking at the concentration ellipses in Figure 3. It is also the most common of the four trajectories, followed by more than a third (34) of the top CEOs. Typically, these men have high levels of commercial capital, with a career start in enterprises, many career changes and a rural upbringing. Like the experts, these men have not spent many years in their current firm accumulating capital. However, they have spent their entire career in private businesses, usually without prestigious diplomas to catapult them to a certain level of the organizational hierarchy. Instead, they started their career in sales or marketing and gradually worked their way up through different enterprises and corporations. CEOs qualified by their commercial capital work in firms that are younger – the average age of their firms being 51 years – than the average of 82 years for all corporations included here. The firms managed by salespeople are also less profitable and less prestigious than the other firms, as seen by the lack of publicity, both in the number of press articles and books about the firm. These characteristics are correlated to other indicators of firm prestige such as members of other sub-elites on the board of directors and sheer economic size. In many ways these organizations offer a trajectory more compatible with the strategy of a newcomer to the field with dispositions from an upbringing in a self-employed milieu.

Discussion

Adding to Hartmann's (2007) three models of reproduction, we place the Danish business elite as being tied to the German case of both low elite circulation and low importance of elite universities or public schools. The cultural-technical capital acquired through university diplomas in general and postgraduate studies in particular appears to be specific for the German and French case rather than the Danish case. Like the British case, capital acquired through the economic field in Denmark is more important, with the important distinction that not only organizational capital, but also commercial capital qualifies for a position in top management. On the basis of a Specific Multiple Correspondence Analysis, it is possible to identify four clusters of career trajectories: the inheritors, the organizational personnel, the experts, and the salespeople.

Of these groups, only the 14 experts can be seen as legitimizing their power through capital acquired in the educational system. The lack of an institution of elite education thus implies a weaker position of cultural capital – and institutions that distribute it – within the business elite and perhaps within the Danish power elite as a whole. It is possible that the lack of elite schools can be attributed to the egalitarian ethos of the decommodifying, social-democratic Scandinavian welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Nevertheless, it may also be a function of the relatively small size of the Danish elite, which is therefore unable to sustain an elite school.

These findings emphasize the need for the use of Pierre Bourdieu's terminology of the social stratification of the elite in an economic and cultural fraction as a model of the logic behind 'the organic solidarity of the genuine division of the labor of domination' (Bourdieu, 1996: 263) rather than as a theory of the social ontology of elites in all

western nation-states. Thus the analysis follows Hjellbrekke et al. (2007) in showing how the forms of capital structuring the field of power vary across different nation-states depending on the particular strength of different institutions of reproduction. The integration of the corporate, political and military elite into a power elite in C. Wright Mills' (1956) analysis should likewise be interpreted as a theory on the effects of elite cohesion and not as a description of the paramount elite fractions across historical and national boundaries.

However, the reproduction strategies of the business elites tied to nation-state institutions are under considerable pressure because of the rise of transnational corporations and the ensuing integration of corporate elites into transnational communities, demonstrated by Carroll (2010). Even though the vast majority of the included corporations have some – or even all – of their activities located outside Denmark, only five CEOs were not born in Denmark. Of these, all have been tied to the Danish economic field for many years. Two started their career in Danish corporations or in Denmark more than 20 years prior to their current appointment. One married the heiress to the corporation he now heads. Two are Swedes and are thus familiar with the particular social games of the Scandinavian boardrooms. These findings follow the pattern found by Hartmann (2010: 315–16) in Germany and France. Furthermore, fewer than half the Danish CEOs have worked abroad, and, of the 47 who have, 36 were stationed abroad by their Danish parent corporation. While 24 of the 26 MBA degrees of Danish CEOs were acquired from business schools outside Denmark, which confirms that an international market for exclusive executive degrees taken during a corporate career has been established (see also Marceau, 1989), only six of the Danish-born CEOs have their university diploma, or parts of it, from abroad. While networks of corporate power, and the culture of business elites (cf. Sklair, 2001: 255–94), have gone global, access to them is still tied to local dynamics within the reproduction strategies of national business elites.

The exclusive social background of Danish CEOs and the specific trajectories of recruitment question the picture of the open nature of Scandinavian elites, cited below using the analysis of the Danish Power Study. A very particular and strong form of character still has to be formed to be considered top managerial material.

The social exclusivity of elites increases according to the size of the respective country [while] there are also specific national traditions and balances of power [...]. In the Scandinavian countries with their comparably egalitarian basic attitude and their relatively open educational system the social composition of elites is on average less exclusive than in countries with explicit institutions of elite education, a classical upper class, or a tradition as a great power. Hartmann (2010: 222)

The importance of this character can be seen by the fact that the reproduction of business elites is not tied solely to exclusive social background. Women also form a minority. In the Scandinavian countries, there are no more than 5 per cent of women in any of the business elites (Ruostetsaari, 2008: 163). Moreover, there are no more than two women amongst the 100 top managers in France, Britain (Maclean et al., 2006: 7) and Denmark. This suggests that explanations focusing on the more bodily acquired skills (such as mastery of the natural tone of voice, gesture and body language) that enable an individual to play the power games within the firms and the business elites (Bourdieu, 1996;

Hartmann, 2000; Mills, 1956; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1998) can have great explanatory value for the stable reproduction of business elites.

The world economy was shaken by the financial crisis, and questions were raised about managerial legitimacy in the transnational corporations. When viewed from a national perspective, the qualifications and traits of the CEOs seem functional necessities of the managerial position. However, when compared across countries, the arbitrary nature of these requirements becomes apparent. If there were a universal requirement, it would be to have the established social background, which does not resonate well within a meritocratic ethos. A critical perspective on the historically established character of the CEO and its consequences for the quality and ethics of corporate governance is therefore required.

Acknowledgements

For valuable comments on the manuscript and during our research, we thank Stefan B. Andrade, Trygve Gulbrandsen, Johs. Hjellbrekke, Kristoffer Kropp and Jens-Peter Thomsen. An earlier version of this article was presented at the working group 'Elites in modern societies' of the 25th Conference of Nordic Sociological Association in August 2011. We thank all participants for their contribution while discussing our paper. Furthermore we are thankful to Gads Forlag, publishers of *Kraks Blå Bog*, and Greens Erhvervsinformation for providing access to their data. The quality and precision of this article have been immensely enhanced by the insightful comments of the two anonymous referees of *Sociology*.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Note

- 1 Available through our website: <http://www.soc.ku.dk/dokumenter/additionaldata.pdf>

References

- Andersen H (2005) Den danske magtudredning: Maveplasker i en osteklokke? [A critique of the Danish power study]. *Dansk Sociologi* 15(1): 115–23.
- Andrle V (2001) The buoyant class: Bourgeois family lineage in the life stories of Czech business elite persons. *Sociology* 35(4): 815–33.
- Aron R (1950) Social structure and the ruling class: Part 1. *British Journal of Sociology* 1(2): 126–43.
- Bauer M and Bertin-Mouro B (1999) National models for making and legitimating elites. A comparative analysis of the 200 top executives in France, Germany and Great Britain. *European Societies* 1(1): 9–31.
- Bendix R and Howton FW (1957) Social mobility and the American business elite. *British Journal of Sociology* 8(4): 357–69.
- Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction – A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu P (1986) The forms of capital. In: Richardson JG (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press, 241–58.
- Bourdieu P (1996) *State Nobility – Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bourdieu P (2005) *The Social Structures of the Economy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu P and De Saint Martin M (1978) Le patronat. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 20(1): 3–82.
- Bourdieu P, Boltanski L and De Saint Martin M (1973) Les strategies de reconversion: Les classes sociales et le systeme d'enseignement. *Social Science Information* 12(6): 61–113.
- Broadly D (2002) French prosopography: Definition and suggested readings. *Poetics* 30(5–6): 381–5.
- Cappelli P and Hamori M (2005) The new road to the top. *Harvard Business Review* 83(1): 25–32.
- Carroll WK (2010) *The Making of a Transnational Capitalist Class: Corporate Power in the 21st Century*. London: Zed Books.
- Christiansen PM and Togeby L (2007) Elite transformation in Denmark 1932–1999. *Comparative Social Research* 23: 35–54.
- Christiansen PM, Møller B and Togeby L (2001) *Den Danske Elite* [The Danish elite]. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels.
- Denord F, Hjellbrekke J, Korsnes O, Lebaron F and Le Roux B (2011) Social capital in the field of power: The case of Norway. *The Sociological Review* 59(1): 86–108.
- DiMaggio PJ and Powell WW (1983) The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147–60.
- Ellersgaard CH and Grau A (2008) *De autonome Eliter? – En kritisk korrespondanceanalyse af data fra 'Den Danske Elite'* [Autonomous élites? A critical correspondence analysis of 'Den danske elite']. Paper presented at the 24th Conference of the Nordic Sociological Association.
- Esping-Andersen G (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Fellman S (2008) *Creating the Nordic model of Capitalism: The Development of Comparative Periphery*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flemmen M (forthcoming) The structure of the upper class: A social space approach. *Sociology*.
- Fligstein N (1996) Markets as politics: A political-cultural approach to market institutions. *American Sociological Review* 61(4): 656–73.
- Gulbrandsen T (2005) Ideological integration and variation within the private business elite in Norway. *European Sociological Review* 21(4): 329–44.
- Gulbrandsen T, Engelstad F, Klausen TB, Skjeie H, Teigen M and Østerud Ø (2002) *Norske makteliter* [Norwegian power elites]. Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Hartmann M (2000) Class-specific habitus and the social reproduction of the business elite in Germany and France. *The Sociological Review* 48(2): 241–62.
- Hartmann M (2007) *The Sociology of Elites*. London: Routledge.
- Hartmann M (2010) Elites and power structure. In: Immerfall S and Therborn G (eds) *Handbook of European Societies*. New York: Springer, 291–323.
- Hjellbrekke J and Korsnes O (2009) Quantifying the field of power in Norway. In: Robson K and Sanders C (eds) *Quantifying Theory: Pierre Bourdieu*. Dordrecht: Springer, 31–45.
- Hjellbrekke J, Le Roux B, Korsnes O, Lebaron F, Rosenlund L and Rouanet H (2007) The Norwegian field of power anno 2000. *European Societies* 9(2): 245–73.
- Jambu M (1991) *Exploratory and Multivariate Data Analysis*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Kaelble H (1980) Long-term changes in the recruitment of the business elite: Germany compared to the US, Great Britain, and France since the Industrial Revolution. *Journal of Social History* 13(3): 404–23.
- Karabel J (2005) *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lebaron F (2000) Toward a new critique of economic discourse. *Theory, Culture & Society* 18(5): 123–9.

- Lebaron F (2009) How Bourdieu 'quantified' Bourdieu: The geometric modelling of data. In: Robson K and Sanders C (eds) *Quantifying Theory: Pierre Bourdieu*. Dordrecht: Springer, 11–30.
- Le Roux B and Rouanet H (2004) *Geometric Data Analysis from Correspondence Analysis to Structured Data Analysis*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Le Roux B and Rouanet H (2010) *Multiple Correspondence Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Maclean M, Harvey C and Press J (2006) *Business Elites and Corporate Governance in France and the UK*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marceau J (1989) *A Family Business? The Making of an International Business Élite*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mastekaasa A (2004) Social origins and recruitment to Norwegian business and public sector elites. *European Sociological Review* 20(3): 221–35.
- Mills CW (1956) *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Munk MD and Thomsen JP (2011) *Widened Participation and Unequal Access to the System of Higher Education in Denmark: What Drives this Double Pattern?* Paper presented at the 25th Conference of the Nordic Sociological Association.
- Reinholdt Hansen D (2000) Ingeniørprofessionens udvikling siden 1945 [The development of the engineering profession since 1945]. In: Rostgaard M and Wagner MF (eds) *Lederskab i dansk industri og samfund 1880–1960*. Aalborg: Aalborg University, 239–68.
- Ruostetsaari I (2008) Nordic elites in comparative perspective. *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology* 107: 143–74.
- Savage M and Williams K (2008) Elites: Remembered in capitalism and forgotten by social sciences. *The Sociological Review* 56: 1–24.
- Scott J (1997) *Corporate Business and Capitalist Classes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scott J (2003) Transformations in the British economic elite. *Comparative Sociology* 2(1): 155–73.
- Sklair L (2001) *The Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sørensen C (2004) Magt og demokrati på norsk og dansk [Power and democracy in Norwegian and Danish]. *Grus* 71: 103–18.
- Thomsen JP (2012) Exploring the heterogeneity of class in higher education: Social and cultural differentiation in Danish university programmes. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* forthcoming.
- Useem M and Karabel J (1986) Pathways to top corporate management. *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 184–200.
- Useem M and McCormack A (1981) The dominant segment of the British business elite. *Sociology* 15(3): 381–406.
- Weenink D (2008) Cosmopolitanism as a form of capital: Parents preparing their children for a globalizing world. *Sociology* 42(6): 1089–106.
- Windolf P (1998) Elite networks in Germany and Britain. *Sociology* 32(2): 321–51.
- Zweigenhaft RL and Domhoff GW (1998) *Diversity in the Power Elite: Have Women and Minorities Reached the Top?* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Christoph Houman Ellersgaard is a Phd Fellow with research interests in class and power elites studied using geometric data analysis and social network analysis.

Anton Grau Larsen is a Phd Fellow studying power elites in Denmark. Other research interests include correspondence analysis and social network analysis. Anton is co-author of the coming r-package for Multiple Correspondence Analysis called 'soc.ca'.

Martin D Munk is a Professor of Sociology at the Department of Political Science, Aalborg University (AAU) and Director of Centre for Mobility Research in the Copenhagen Campus of AAU. While a doctoral fellow in the 1990s he attended Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris and learned a lot from French scholars within sociology and statistics. His research focuses on the explanation of educational attainment and choices, intergenerational mobility and reproduction, strategies of reconversions, migration, elites, and well-being of children, health and sport. He has published papers in sociological, economic, educational and medical journals and books, and together with James McIntosh he recently published two critical papers in *European Economic Review*: 'Social class, family background and intergenerational mobility' and 'Testing mobility models: A rejoinder to Erikson and Goldthorpe'.

Date submitted January 2012

Date accepted June 2012