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What does your career mean to you?

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Summary

Changes in the employee-employer relationship and in the way work is organized have contributed to the emergence of contemporary careers that emphasize individual career agency and responsibility. Being self-directed in their nature, contemporary careers provide the opportunity for individuals to attend to the questions of meaning and purpose in their careers which many of today's workforce consider to be of great importance. Traditionally seen as functional descriptions only, careers nowadays have become a place of individuals' reflection on who they are in the work context and, thus, their internal compass guiding individuals in their career development. But what does career really mean to individuals in the contemporary work context? The importance of understanding individuals' career-related meanings has been well recognized in studies of individual career success. Yet our understanding of how these career-related meanings contribute to individuals' career and work behaviors, and, thus, of how individuals as powerful actors shape their careers and organizations remains incomplete.

Existing research comprehensively argues for the positive nature of individuals' career-related outcomes of the contemporary career. Yet the exact nature of its organizational outcomes appear to be somewhat debatable. I suggest that this matter can be addressed by attending to the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers (the meaning of career). By integrating the literature on careers, the meaning of work and calling, I investigate how the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers guide them in their career and work behaviors. In my search for an answer to this main question, I rely on the findings of the four empirical studies (three qualitative and one quantitative)

conducted on different samples and in diverse study settings. Looking through the prism of the meaning of career, these studies shed new light on individual career-related outcomes, innovation in organizations, and individuals coping with contextual uncertainty.

Chapter 2 begins with exploring the employees' willingness to engage in organizational change initiatives through the prism of the meaning of career. The findings of this qualitative case study of a planned "bottom-up" organizational change show that how individuals view their career and the values they rely on in the work context (i.e., career identity) inform their sensemaking about the organizational change and their willingness to engage in it. I found that employees with proactive career behavior and a focus on other-oriented work values also serve as champions and supporters in the organizational change (change-supportive behavior). In contrast, employees with passive career behavior and a focus on self-centered work values rather serve as loyal citizens and doubters in the organizational change (change-inactive behavior). These findings lay ground for a cyclical career identity model of employees' change-supportive behavior suggesting not only that career-related meanings inform change-supportive behavior but also that this behavior contributes to employees' careers, serving as their career-development experience.

Chapter 3 builds on the results of Chapter 2 by quantitatively examining the link between the meaning of career and work behaviors that aim to bring about change and innovation in organizations. In particular, I investigate whether seeing one's career as a calling contributes to individuals having high employability, engaging more in proactive professional development and innovative work behavior. The results of Study 1 conducted on two samples show no relation between calling and employability. In turn, the results of Study 2 conducted on one of the two samples suggest that professional development plays a partial mediating role in this relationship, making the calling-employability relationship

to be both positive (indirect path) and negative (direct path). Post-hoc analyses further show that the multidimensionality of calling (meaningful passion and ultimate choice components) might be an explanation for these unexpected findings. Based on the results of Study 2, I show that proactive professional development also explains why there is a positive relationship between calling and innovative work behavior. Thus, the findings of this chapter trigger further examination of the multidimensionality of calling and its implications for individual career and work behaviors.

Chapter 4 makes a step further by exploring how the founder's calling can influence the way founders of creative companies such as video game companies manage the tension between art for the art's sake and art for profit in innovative product development. Based on the findings from a qualitative case study of game companies, I show that founders of game companies have different degrees of calling toward the video game industry, which shapes the strategic intent their companies are focusing on in innovative game development. In particular, founders with a stronger calling towards the video game industry activate their professional rather than a company developer role identity and, thus, they focus more on creative strategic intent rather than business strategic intent. This, however, does not allow these founders to manage the creative-business tension in innovative game development. But what does is the co-activation of the two role identities through the integration and differentiation of the two strategic intents. These results illuminate how looking through the prism of the meaning of career can contribute to a better understanding of founders' strategic choices, and thus, of organizations.

Chapter 5 extends the findings from previous chapters by acknowledging that individuals' career-related meanings are grounded not only in the work context, but also in the non-work context and, thus, the people associated with it can shape these meanings. Using qualitative data gathered from managers who were in the final stage of their EMBA,

I explore the role the spouse plays in managers' career sensemaking. The findings show that managers recognize that their spouses provide career support (emotional, informational and instrumental) to them. A higher degree of spousal career support received and the importance of non-work identities in managers' career-related meanings contribute to a higher extent to which managers involve family considerations in their career sensemaking. Thus, managers' career-related meanings shape the degree of family-relatedness of career sensemaking.

Each chapter in its own way, and taken together, make important contributions to the scholarly conversations about careers, meaning of work, calling, positive organizational behavior as well as about the role of individuals in shaping their careers and their organizations. This dissertation offers unique and novel insights into how the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers guide their career development and career-related decision making, engagement in behaviors aimed at bringing about change and innovation in organizations, and management of the creative-business intent tension in innovative product development. By so doing, the findings of the thesis suggest several future research avenues aimed at further advancement of the relevant research fields. They also encourage organizations and practitioners to become more aware of and start accounting for the powerful role of the "meaning aspect" of employees' careers, help employees develop their careers and cope with the potential negative career-related consequences of having a calling, and create conditions for the pursuit of salient career-related meanings for employees in organizations.