Chapter VI

Discussion

6.1. Introduction

In this doctoral thesis, I set out to study individual career and work behavior through the prism of the meaning of career. In doing so, I discussed the need to employ the meaning of career perspective to enable a richer understanding of the outcomes of the contemporary career in Chapter 1 of this thesis. I also identified three key themes – the meaning of career and a) individual career-related outcomes, b) innovation in organizations, and c) coping with contextual uncertainty – which are the particular focus of the thesis. In the following Chapters 2-5, I presented four empirical studies that reflect one or more of the identified key themes. This concluding chapter focuses on discussing the main findings of the four empirical studies for each of the three key themes. In this chapter, I integrate the findings to illuminate the important theoretical implications for the literature that they suggest and related future research directions. Furthermore, I reflect on the main practical implications and the limitations of the findings of the current thesis.

6.2. Summary of Main Findings per Key Theme

This section is devoted to discussing the most important findings from the empirical chapters and how they relate to each of the three key themes that I have focused on in the thesis. Table 6.1 presents an overview of the main findings of each empirical chapter.
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<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Key findings</th>
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| 2       | How career identity informs employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change initiatives? | - Proactive career behavior (i.e., protean career orientation) and a focus on other-oriented work values inform change-supportive yet passive career behavior (i.e., rigid and dependent career orientations) and a focus on self-centered work values – change-inactive employee behavior.  
- Change-supportive employee behavior is manifested by change champions and supporters, while change-inactive behavior is manifested by loyal citizens and doubters.  
- Active engagement in the change is likely to serve as a “learning loop” informing individuals’ future career identity. |
| 3       | To what extent calling predicts employability and innovative work behavior, and what is the role of proactive professional development in this relationship? | - We found that there is no direct relationship between the two variables, while calling indirectly and positively relates to employability through proactive professional development. The latter, in turn, has a negative confounding or suppressing effect on the relationship, making the direct relation between calling and employability negative and indirect – positive. Post hoc analysis suggests that this result is due to calling consisting of two components – meaningful passion and the ultimate choice – which, respectively, positively and negative contribute to employability. This result suggests that calling is likely to reduce one’s employability.  
- Calling stimulates individuals to engage in proactive professional development.  
- Calling stimulates individuals to engage in innovative work behavior through engaging in proactive professional development. |
| 4       | How the founder’s calling influences the way founders of creative companies such as game companies manage the | - Founders in the video game industry experience their career as a calling but only to a certain degree (ranging from weak to strong). A founder’s calling encompasses the founder’s passion toward the video game industry combined with his or her persistent immersion in personally significant activities that are significant because of the meaning that founders ascribe to these activities. |
The degree of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry induces the activation of either his or her professional (in the case of a strong calling) or company developer (in the case of a weak calling) role identity, which respectively leads to creative or business strategic intent being prioritized by the founders of the game companies in innovative game development. Those game company founders that co-activate these two role identities while pursuing their calling find ways to manage these opposing strategic intents.

The findings reveal that founders utilize integration (bounded and secured creativity) and differentiation (spatial game development separation) of their creative and business strategic intents to manage the tension between these intents in innovative game development.

Managers engage in family-related career sensemaking that concerns an individual’s decision-making process and choice of action in the work domain as fostering a positive outcome for their family. Family-related sensemaking represent a continuum ranging from low to high and is manifested in the following three ways: career management for the family, time management for the family and improvement of the situation for the spouse.

Family-career salience (i.e., importance of the family incorporated in the career-related meaning), parent role identification and the degree of perceived spousal career support (emotional, instrumental, and informational) contribute to a higher degree of family-related sensemaking. The perceived provision of instrumental and informational career support by the spouse is most influential in shaping managers’ degree of family-related career sensemaking.
6.2.1. The Meaning of Career and Individual Career-Related Outcomes

The first key theme examined in this thesis concerns how the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers guide their career development and success. Existing research has shown that both meaning of work and the contemporary career are positively associated with important well-being-related career outcomes (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Briscoe & Hall, 2006). However, individual career-related behavioral outcomes of being able to find and pursue purpose and meaning in one’s career remain underexplored. To address this issue, this thesis focuses on examining individuals’ career development and career decision making through the prism of the meaning of career. This key theme is particularly reflected in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, the findings of which illuminate both positive and negative influences of the meaning of career on individual career-related outcomes.

Chapter 2 mainly focuses on exploring individuals’ engagement in change-supportive behavior through the prism of the meaning of career. However, the chapter shows that it is not only that one’s career identity can inform employee engagement in change-supportive behavior but also that this engagement is likely to serve as a career-development opportunity or as a “learning loop” that informs individuals’ future career identity. In this way, Chapter 2 suggests that attending to the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers opens up interesting insights into how individuals’ experiences at work contribute to the development of their career. Chapter 3 extends these insights by examining how looking through the prism of the meaning of career contributes to a better understanding of individuals’ employability and of their engagement in proactive professional development. As expected, the results suggest that having a career calling is positively related to individual engagement in proactive professional development.
However, with regard to one’s employability, Chapter 3 reveals somewhat unexpected findings. When considered on its own, calling was not related to employability. It was, however, negatively related to employability when individual engagement in proactive professional development was accounted for. Further analyses reveal that the explanation for these findings lies in the multi-dimensional nature of the calling concept. While the meaningful passion component of calling facilitates engagement in proactive professional development and, as follows, contributes to one’s employability, the ultimate choice component of calling restricts individuals to a focus on the ultimate profession and thus limits one’s employability. Chapter 4 indirectly contributes to this finding in the following way. It shows that when game company founders pursue a calling toward the video game industry without thinking about the future of the company, the founders’ possibilities become limited with regard to a) having a job in the coming years and b) learning important skills (i.e., how to balance creative and business strategic intents in innovative game development) that could make them employable. Chapter 5 adds to the studies conducted in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 by broadening the focus of the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers from only the work domain to the non-work domain and by examining the implications these meanings have for the understanding of career-related decision making. In particular, it examines what career means to managers, how family considerations are involved in managers’ career sensemaking and what role managers’ spouses play in it. The findings show that while making sense of their career, managers account for the ways in which their career-related decisions are intended to foster a positive outcome for their families to various degrees. The degree of this family-related career sensemaking is then shaped by “family-career salience”, which captures the meaning of career and the perceived amount and type of career-related support that the managers receive from their spouses.
6.2.2. The Meaning of Career and Innovation in Organizations

The second key theme that I examine in this thesis refers to the role of the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers in contributing to a better understanding of innovation in organizations. Existing research increasingly emphasizes the importance of innovation for the survival of organizations and, thus, the need to know more about what drives employee and organizational-level innovation (Anderson, et al., 2004; Anderson et al., 2014). Little of this research, however, has acknowledged the role that the meanings that individuals ascribe to their work and career play in enabling innovation in organizations (i.e., innovation-related behavior and innovative product development). This thesis addresses this issue in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 by examining the relation of these career-related meanings to the innovation-related behaviors of employees (i.e., change-supportive employee behavior, innovative work behavior) and innovative product development in organizations.

Chapter 2 explores how career identity informs employees’ willingness to engage in change-supportive behavior. In doing so, it focuses on behavior that characterized is by not only active participation in and support for an organizational change but also active facilitation and contribution to the change. Thus, this behavior is concerned with bringing and realizing new ideas in organizations. The findings suggest that paying attention to what meanings that employees ascribe to their careers provides insight into how these employees make sense of organizational change and their willingness to engage in it. In particular, employees who take a more proactive approach towards their career development and who focus more on other-oriented work values are more engaged in change by serving as champions and supporters (change-supportive employee behavior). In turn, employees who take a more passive approach towards their career development and who focus more on self-centered work values are less engaged in change and serve as loyal
citizens and doubters (change-inactive employee behavior). Building on these findings, Chapter 2 proposes a career identity model of employees’ change-supportive behavior that captures the cyclical relationship between career identity and employees’ willingness to engage in organizational change initiatives. Chapter 3 further proceeds by testing the identified relation between the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers and their proactive work behavior by studying whether a career calling stimulates employee engagement in innovative work behavior. As the results show, calling is positively associated with innovative work behavior. In addition, this relationship happens through individuals’ engagement in proactive professional development. While Chapters 2 and 3 focus on investigating individual-level innovation through the prism of the meaning of career, Chapter 4 makes an attempt to address organizational-level innovation by examining the strategic choices that the founders of creative companies undertake to enable innovative product development. In particular, the chapter explores how the founder’s calling influences the way creative companies such as game companies manage the creative-business intent tension in the context of innovative product development. The findings reveal that depending on the degree of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry (strong or weak), a particular role identity (professional or company developer) becomes activated for the game company founder. Through the activation of this professional or company developer identity, either a creative or business strategic intent becomes prioritized by the game company with regard to the innovative game development, thus limiting the possibilities of successfully managing the creative-business intent tension. However, those founders who engaged in the co-activation of the two role identities pursued their calling while managing the creative-business intent tension by integrating and/or differentiating the two opposite strategic intents.
6.2.3. The Meaning of Career and Individuals Coping with Contextual Uncertainty

The third and final key theme examined in this thesis concerns the role of the meaning of career in contributing to a better understanding of how individuals cope with contextual uncertainty. The changing nature of the contemporary work environment and the greater individual responsibility for one’s own career development discussed in Chapter 1 of the thesis explains why in today’s work environment individuals often face uncertainty triggered by the contexts they operate in. One way to cope with this contextual uncertainty for individuals is to engage in sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Because sensemaking is grounded in identity construction and is viewed as central to the career concept (Mills, 2003, Weick et al., 2005; Savickas, 2000; Cohen et al., 2004), looking through the prism of the meaning of career is likely to enrich the understanding of how individuals make decisions and behave at work and by doing so cope with these uncertain contexts. All four of the empirical chapters in the thesis reflect on this theme. They do so by examining individuals coping with contextual uncertainty triggered by changes in their organizations (Chapter 2), a highly unstable, insecure and competitive work environment (Chapter 3), the rapidly changing nature of industry (Chapter 4), engagement in self-exploration (Chapter 5) and by illuminating the role of finding and pursuing one’s career-related meaning in this process. 

Chapter 2 focuses on exploring how employees cope with the uncertainty triggered by a bottom-up organizational change. It shows that relying on their career identity not only helps employees make sense of the change and the situation of uncertainty that it creates, but it also clarifies the type of behavior that they engage in to cope with this contextual uncertainty (change-supportive versus change-inactive behavior). Chapter 3 further examines how individuals cope with contextual uncertainty triggered by the highly unstable, insecure and competitive nature of the contemporary work context. Taking a
proactive approach toward one’s career and organization is not only what the contemporary work context requires from individuals (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Grant & Ashforth, 2008) but is also what helps them cope with the demands of this context (Waters, Briscoe, Hall & Wang, 2014). This chapter examines whether one’s calling stimulates individuals to take proactive approach to their careers and their organizations and finds that calling enables individuals to engage in proactive professional development and innovative work behavior. In Chapter 4, the focus lies in investigating of the contextual uncertainty triggered by the nature of the industry in which an organization and the individuals associated with it operate. In particular, it explores how game company founders manage the creative-business intent tension in innovative game development in the video game industry, which is often characterized as a relatively young, constantly changing, highly competitive industry that lacks established support mechanisms. The findings reveal that innovative game development, strategies that support this development and game company founders’ efforts aimed at managing the tension between creative and business strategic intents are very much connected to the meanings that the founders ascribed to their careers in the video game industry. They show that these founders rely on the meaning that they ascribe to their work in the video game industry (i.e., the founder’s calling toward the video game industry) to make sense of how to manage their game company and the creative-business intent tension. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the context of an international EMBA program that triggers contextual uncertainty by facilitating managers’ engagement in self-exploration and experimentation. To cope with this uncertainty managers engage in career sensemaking in which they rely on the meanings that they ascribed to their careers including reflection on their work and non-work roles.
6.3. Theoretical Implications and Related Future Research Directions

In the previous section I provided an overview of the main findings of the four empirical chapters in such a way that I have highlighted their relation to each of the identified key themes examined in the thesis. Now, I turn to a discussion of the theoretical implications of the empirical studies and my thesis as a whole.

6.3.1. Outcomes of the Contemporary Career: It is Time to Look at the In-Depth Meanings That Individuals Ascribe to Their Careers

While scholars that study outcomes of the contemporary career generally view it as contributing to individuals’ well-being and career development (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; De Vos & Soens, 2008), they appear to disagree on the nature of the implications the contemporary career has for organizations (e.g., Çakmak-Otluoğlu, 2012; Baruch, 2014; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Rodrigues et al., 2015). This thesis adds to this ongoing scholarly conversation about the individual and organization-related consequences of the contemporary career by suggesting that instead of focusing only on a particular career orientation that individuals have (e.g., protean, boundaryless, etc.) in studying the outcomes of the contemporary career, scholars should rather explore the personal understanding of what the contemporary career means to individuals. In particular, Chapter 2 showed that it was a protean career orientation with other-oriented work values constituting one’s career identity that shaped employees’ engagement in change-supportive behavior. By engaging in this behavior employees contributed to the development of both their organization and their career. Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 took a step further by showing that one’s career can be viewed as a calling – one of the necessary conditions of having a protean career orientation (Hall & Chandler, 2005). On the one hand, calling stimulated individuals to take a proactive approach toward their careers as manifested in their engagement in proactive professional development and in innovative work behavior, but,
on the other hand, calling was also found to reduce one’s employability (Chapter 3). Calling also explained the preferences of the founders of game companies in prioritizing their focus on creative strategic intent over business strategic intent, thus limiting their chances of finding a way to manage the tension between the two to enable the innovative game development that is so important for the survival of game companies in a rapidly changing environment (Chapter 4). The latter specifically contributes to the scarce research on the link between one’s career and organizational outcomes (e.g., Becker & Haunschild, 2003; Lam, 2007; Dokko, Wilk, & Rothbard, 2009). By broadening the investigation of the consequences of the contemporary career to the non-work domain, Chapter 5 demonstrated the presence of different degrees of family considerations involved in the meanings that individuals ascribed to their careers and how these meanings shape individuals’ career-related decision making.

The findings emphasize the importance of looking for the in-depth personal meanings that individuals ascribed to their careers to obtain a better understanding of how individuals’ career- and work-related behaviors contribute to the success of one’s career and one’s organization. Bridging the discourses on work-related meaning and the contemporary career in this way will open up the horizons in the field of careers to other research fields (Baruch, Szűcs, & Gunz, 2015) and thus will enable further development of the career theory (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Gunz & Peiperl, 2007). With this thesis, I encourage scholars to employ the lens of the meaning of career in their studies of individuals in/and organizations. In particular, it appears to be worthwhile to study the processes and mechanisms through which the meaning of career enables individuals’ to engage in behaviors that are important for their career and their organizations.
6.3.2. Pursuing One’s Calling: Does It Benefit Individuals, Organizations or Both?

Two of the empirical chapters in this thesis (Chapter 3 and 4) specifically focus on the concept of calling in relation to one’s career as a way to capture the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers. Although the literature on the outcomes of calling is growing (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Elangovan et al., 2010; Duffy & Dik, 2013), our understanding of whether calling benefits individuals and/or their organizations remains incomplete. With regard to the individual outcomes of calling, many studies have advocated for positive influences of calling on such important individual outcomes as career development (e.g., Hall & Chandler, 2005; Hirschi and Hermann, 2013), well-related attitudes (e.g., Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011) and well-being (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Nevertheless, studies have also increasingly started to acknowledge the negative individual outcomes of calling (e.g., Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Cardador & Caza, 2012) and have even argued that it has the nature of a double-edged sword (e.g., Bunderson & Thomson, 2009; Dobrow Riza & Heller, 2015). In response to this scholarly debate, this thesis studied the relationship between calling, proactive professional development and employability (Chapter 3). The results indicated that calling is positively related to proactive professional development and is both positively (through proactive professional development) and negatively (directly) related to employability. The explanation for these conflicting findings was found in the multi-dimensional nature of the calling concept as including both positive and negative components (meaningful passion and ultimate choice), which supports the double-edged sword nature of the calling concept.

With regard to organization-related outcomes of calling, scarce evidence suggests that calling is likely to benefit organizations (e.g., Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Cardador et al., 2011; Elangovan et al., 2010), maybe even more than individuals (Bell 2012a, 2012b; as cited in Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). The findings of Chapter 3 showed
that calling stimulates innovative work behavior through individuals’ engagement in proactive professional development. Furthermore, Chapter 4 illuminated how the founders’ calling toward the video game industry fostered them to prioritize their company’s strategic focus more based on the founders’ creative ambitions in innovative product development (i.e., coming up with highly innovative and unique games that could change the market). However, a heavy focus on creative strategic intent while downplaying business strategic intent limits the possibilities of game company founders to successfully manage the creative-business tension in innovative game development, which could be detrimental to their survival. Although indirectly, these findings also suggest that blindly following one’s calling without building a sound foundation for the future could have negative implications for the founders’ employability. In this way, this thesis adheres to the need for more research on the individual and organizational outcomes of calling including individuals’ work-related behaviors (Elangovan et al., 2010; Duffy & Dik, 2013). In so doing, it shows that the implications of calling can spread beyond career and work-related attitudes towards work-related behaviors and strategic decision making.

The abovementioned findings suggest that because calling can relate both positively and negatively to important individual and organization-related outcomes, it is not so easy to answer the question of whether calling benefits individuals, organizations or both. In further search for an answer to this question, scholars should examine what calling means to individuals and thus to approach it as a multi-dimensional instead of a unidimensional concept. Furthermore, future research should examine the processes and mechanisms through which calling can influence individuals’ career and work-related behavior as well as the conditions that may account for different effects of calling on these outcomes. This approach, however, requires the development of the calling research field through theory development or by introducing theories from other research fields to remedy the nature of
the current calling literature as highly “atheoretical” (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014). This development of calling research field would also allow a broader applicability of the calling concept to different research fields.

6.3.3. From the Understanding of an Individual Toward the Understanding of Change and Innovation in Organizations

In addition to contributing to the understanding of individual outcomes based on individual meanings of career, this thesis also sheds light on how the career-related meanings contribute to the understanding of how organizations change and innovate. Thus, it speaks to the growing acknowledgement of the crucial role that individual actors and micro-foundations play in strategic organizations (Felin & Foss, 2005) and that founders play in shaping their ventures (e.g., Schein, 1992; Nelson, 2003; Baron, 2007). In response, many scholars have turned toward exploring the role of individuals and, in particular, individual differences in contributing to the understanding of how organizations change, create, and innovate. However, the majority of this research has looked at personality characteristics, motivations and single work experiences of individuals in this respect (e.g., Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Zhao et al., 2010). This thesis instead shows how the meanings that individuals ascribe to their work experiences accumulate over the span of their life (i.e., the meaning of career) guide individual behaviors aimed at bringing change and innovation in organizations. For example, Chapter 2 adds to the limited research that examines individuals’ careers in studies of organizational change (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). This empirical chapter reveals that employing a career perspective in the studies of change provides unique insights into the motivations of employees to engage in change-supportive behaviors that could contribute to the success of such changes.
Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 address a link between the career of an individual and innovation in organizations. Specifically, Chapter 3 shows that pursuing one’s career as a calling stimulates individuals to proactively engage in professional learning and development, which, in turn, facilitates their engagement in IWB. In this way, the chapter illuminates the role of the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers in explaining why individuals decide to proactively engage in their work environments and contribute to the innovative potential of their organizations. Chapter 4, in turn, shows that the pursuit of personally significant activities within the framework of one’s career influences how game company founders manage the creative-business tension in innovative game development. Thus, founder-related factors that shape their ventures can spread beyond the founders’ personalities, human capital or competencies (e.g., Delmar, & Shane, 2006) toward their careers (e.g., Sørensen, & Fassiotto, 2011) and specifically to the meanings that founders ascribe to their careers.

Although the abovementioned findings support the claim that individual actors and, thus, the differences that exist between them matter for the understanding of how organizations change and innovate, they also call for more research on this matter. In particular, scholars are encouraged to study context-related factors that could enable careers to contribute to employees’ behavior focused on bringing about change and innovation in organizations. Drawing on Mischel (1973), it can be expected that the understanding of individuals’ career and the meaning it has for them is likely to contribute more to the understanding of their change- and innovation-related behavior in “weaker” situations because in weak situations, few guidelines exist on the expected behaviors of employees, thus allowing their individual differences, such as their career-related meanings, to shape their engagement in behaviors aimed at contributing to change and innovation in organizations.
6.3.4. Understanding the Meaning of Career in Diverse Contexts

This thesis examines the contemporary career and the meaning that individuals ascribe to it in different contexts. Existing studies on work-related meaning, calling and the contemporary career tend to acknowledge the important role that context plays in the understanding of individuals’ experiences in the work domain. For example, research suggests that job design, work and non-work contexts contribute to individuals’ meaning of work (Rosso et al., 2010; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013), that individuals can pursue their calling in different occupational contexts (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) and that careers are constructed in a context representing both work and non-work domains (Young & Collin, 2004; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Nevertheless, we lack insights into the contextualized nature of careers and the meaning that individuals ascribe to them (Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007). The thesis addresses the issue of context in studies of careers by investigating the meaning of career in different contexts (i.e., non-profit organization, commercial sector, creative industries, an international EMBA program). It shows that context adds to the understanding of the meaning of career and how it influences individuals’ career and work behaviors. For example, Chapter 2 shows that when explored in a non-profit context, the meaning of career appears to be more concerned with other-oriented than self-centered work values. In turn, Chapter 5 demonstrates that the exploration of the meaning of career within the context of an international EMBA program highlights the blurred nature of individuals’ work and non-work identities.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 further contribute to this line of inquiry by examining how individuals pursue a calling in secular contexts. Given that this concept originates in religious and philosophical studies (Hardy, 1990), many scholars define calling as a sacred concept, namely, as meaningful or purposeful engagement in a work domain arising from a
sense of being “called” by God or some other external source (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). However, given the growing utilization of the calling concept in contexts other than religion, a more secular understanding of calling has developed. By studying calling in diverse contexts in this thesis, I further conceptualize calling as a secular concept. First of all, I show that calling should be understood as a multi-dimensional concept. Chapter 3, for example, suggests that calling might incorporate two components – meaningful passion and the ultimate choice – each of which have different implications for the understanding individuals at work. In turn, Chapter 4 provides a contextualized definition of the concept of the founder’s calling toward the video game industry consisting from three important elements: a) the founder’s passion toward the video game, b) the founder’s persistent immersion in personally significant activities, and c) the founder’s meaning ascribed to personally significant activities. These findings broaden the knowledge about the experiences of pursuing a calling in yet underexplored occupational contexts. Second, I build on and contextualize the existing definition of calling provided by Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas (2011) and concur with its continuum nature. Although the current thesis tried to address the need for more research on the conceptualization of calling (Wrzesniewski, 2012; Duffy & Dik, 2013), I encourage researchers to move further in this direction and explore the nature of calling in different contexts. In addition, scholars should test the quality of the measurements and their structure so that it reflects the contextualized understandings of calling. Furthermore, scholars should also consider examining the activities, goals or purposes within the work and/or non-work domains toward which individuals might have a calling. While previous research has made some first steps in this direction by suggesting that individuals can have a calling toward a particular domain (e.g., music, art, business and management) (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011), the term “domain” might be somewhat broad and too general. In turn, it would be interesting to know whether
someone can be called, for example, to “entertain”, “care about people”, or “educate” and whether such a person enacts his or her calling in the work domain.

6.4. Practical Implications

In addition to the theoretical implications discussed in the previous section, this thesis also offers important practical implications. Because organizations in today’s knowledge-based economy greatly depend on human capital as a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1994; Barney & Wright, 1998), it is important for them to understand what drives individuals to engage in career- and work-related behaviors that can contribute to organizational performance and, thus, how these behaviors can be facilitated. Based on the findings of this thesis, I would like to encourage organizations and practitioners to a) become aware of and start accounting for the powerful role of the “meaning aspect” of employees’ careers in organizations, b) help employees develop their careers and cope with the negative career-related consequences of calling, and c) create conditions for the pursuit of salient career-related meanings for employees in organizations. Below, I discuss each of these practical recommendations.

**Become aware of and start accounting for the powerful role of the “meaning aspect” of employees’ careers in organizations.** The thesis draws the attention of organizations and consultants to the meaning that employees ascribe to their careers as a factor in guiding how employees engage in their work environments through their work-related behaviors. As Chapters 2 and 3 show, when striving to achieve (pro-)active employee involvement in organizational change and in innovation-related processes, managers and consultants (internal or external) need to account for individuals’ meaningful (i.e., that have a particular meaning) work experiences accumulated over the span of their life. Acquiring knowledge about employees’ in-depth career-related meanings through, for
example, face-to-face conversations between employees and their managers, is important for several reasons. First, it allows managers to ascertain which employees will take a proactive approach towards their engagement in the organizations and thus require minimal stimulation from the organization, except perhaps for general organizational social support (e.g., autonomy, managers’ support for innovation) (Grant & Ashforth, 2008; Anderson et al., 2014). These are employees that the organizations can rely upon to be champions in change- and innovation-related organizational initiatives. Second, because not all employees want or should (pro-)actively engage in organizational processes and initiatives, understanding what meanings that these employees ascribe to their careers enables managers to identify those employees who require more organizational stimulation to trigger any form of engagement in these processes and initiatives (i.e., change-inactive employee behavior). Chapter 4 further suggests that founders of game companies need to also be aware of how the meanings that they attach to the video game industry influence their strategic decision making concerning innovative game development. For example, founders of game companies need to know that when listening only to their heart while downplaying the “voice” of the market, they are risking finding a way to manage the creative-business intent tension. Game company founders are encouraged to take a more realistic approach toward innovative game development in the sense that they need to understand that the games that they develop will not always necessarily be the games that they want to develop. Such founders should also take a more professional approach toward how they run their ventures. If they decide to really develop their company rather than just pursuing their hobby (“hobby-company”), the founders need to acknowledge that being a company developer is also one of the important roles that they need to activate in addition to their professional role. However, it is important to be realistic in this respect because the likelihood that all founders in the video game industry can achieve this balance is low.
According to Van Seventer (2014), the majority of start-ups in the Dutch video game industry (80%) are art school start-ups, which suggests that the founding teams mainly involve creative professionals and lack professionals with business administration skills. Those founders who do not have the necessary competencies and talents to take responsibility for developing a hobby-company into a venture in the creative industry should delegate such tasks to other members of the founding team or recruit additional members when the founding team in its current form does not include such members. In turn, the findings from Chapter 5 suggest that organizations need to be aware that the meanings that employees ascribe to their careers can involve considerations of not only their work but also their non-work roles, so they should acknowledge the role of significant others. This blurring of the work and non-work domains contributes to the complexity of understanding the decision-making process of these individuals in the work domain. Knowing which employees have the tendency to make decision in the work domain that is intended to foster a positive outcome for their family domain can help organizations develop customized HR practices (e.g., work-family friendly policies) and thus contribute to the retention of valuable and talented employees. The development of these HR practices seems to be particularly relevant for organizations that have to manage a global workforce because such organizations often face issues of expatriation and repatriation of their employees (e.g., international assignments), in which the role of significant others is especially prominent (e.g., Van der Velde, Bossink, & Jansen, 2005; Lauring & Selmer, 2010).

Help employees develop their careers and cope with the negative career-related consequences of calling. While the contemporary discourse on careers suggests an overpowering role of individuals over organizations in managing individuals’ careers (King, 2004; Sturges et al., 2005), the findings of this thesis suggest that not all employees...
are able to be the agents of their career development. Thus, these employees require the active role of an organization in their careers, and if managers want to facilitate the engagement of all or the majority of these employees in work behaviors that contribute to change and innovation, the managers need to help these employees develop their careers. Chapter 2 reveals that engagement in change-inactive behavior by some employees can be explained by their inability to proactively approach their career and to find meaning in their work and career. Thus, organizations can facilitate their change and innovation-related initiatives by “activating” the employees who have a passive approach to their careers by stimulating their career development. For example, managers can stimulate passive employees by changing their job (i.e., increased job demands) as well as by providing support to them when the employees are confronted with high job demands. This approach is in line with Dikkers, Jansen, de Lange, Vinkenburg, and Kooij (2010), who showed that passive employees benefit from high job demands, resulting in higher levels of work engagement. Moreover, employees, who are not able to independently cope with their career challenges (i.e., find meaning and purpose in their career) can also profit from organizational initiatives aimed at their career counseling, which was found to improve career self-directedness (Verbruggen & Sels, 2008). Chapter 5 broadens the understanding of individual career development and those involved in it by suggesting that spouses serve as a powerful resource in managers’ exploration of their career trajectories. Thus, career counselors and those responsible for career development in organizations should consider involving spouses in the process of career coaching and guidance.

Chapters 3 and 4 draw attention to the potential negative implications of having a career calling, and both directly or indirectly address employability as an important career outcome. The findings from Chapter 3 reveal, first, the absence and then the negative direct effect of calling on employability, which can be explained by the fact that calling
incorporates both positive (i.e., the meaningful passion) and negative (i.e., the ultimate choice) components. In turn, the findings from Chapter 4 provide a good empirical and theoretical basis to expect that when focusing too much on the pursuit of their calling toward the video game industry at the expense of building a sustainable company, founders do not build a basis for their employability. These findings thus draw the attention of career counseling specialists both within and outside of organizations to the necessity of not only helping individuals find their calling but also stimulating them to develop the competencies necessary to be employable. As Newport (2012) suggests, the search for a calling should start with competency building rather than one’s passion.

Create conditions for the pursuit of salient career-related meanings for employees in organizations. In addition to being aware of whether and which employees have a career calling, managers and organizations should ensure that they provide the necessary conditions for these employees to continue pursuing their calling within this particular organization and thus contribute to the organization through their proactive engagement in important work behaviors. Prior research shows that when pursuing a sacred calling (Dik & Duffy, 2013) or a calling in a certain profession or an occupation with limited opportunities for job mobility (e.g., zookeepers) (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), employees are likely to be very closely attached to a particular organization. Similarly, Cardador et al. (2011) suggest that employees with a secular calling tend to form a strong attachment to their employing organizations. Nevertheless, I suggest that in the case of a secular calling employees could also be more open to pursuing their calling outside of their current employing organization. One of the reasons could be that the current organizational context entails great stressors, challenges and demands that can weaken the sense of a calling for these employees, especially those with a rigid work-related identity (Cardador & Caza, 2012). Losing the sense of a calling or no longer seeing
the possibility to pursue one’s calling within a particular organization may trigger employees to search for alternative (organizational) contexts where this pursuit will be possible. For instance, in discussing their career choices several founders provided examples of leaving companies and/or starting their own firms to enable the pursuit of their calling. One way to facilitate employees’ experiences of intrinsic motivation and, thus, of calling, is to further contribute to satisfying employees’ needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gagné & Deci, 2005). For example, managers should delegate tasks that are high in decision-making autonomy, invest in building a climate of support and empowerment and provide performance feedback to ensure that the three psychological needs are satisfied. Prior research suggests that these practices among others are important contextual enablers to satify these three psychological needs (Spreitzer & Porath, 2013).

6.5. Limitations and Related Suggestions for Future Research

Every study has limitations, and I have discussed the limitations of my research has at the end of each empirical chapter. In this section, I devote attention to the overarching limitations that run through the thesis, namely a) *the generality of utilizing the prism of the meaning of career*, b) *the overpowering focus on the individual*, and c) *the potential bias in the qualitative data and the lack of causal inference in the quantitative data*.

*The generality of utilizing the prism of the meaning of career.* Although utilizing the prism of the meaning of career allows me to integrate the insights from the meaning of work and calling research fields into the discourse on the contemporary career, I acknowledge that on its own the concept is rather general and abstract. By simply defining it as what career means to people, I limit my opportunity to focus on developing rich and detailed conceptualizations of the concepts (i.e., career identity, calling, family-career
salience) studied in the empirical chapters. For this reason, it requires more effort to defend the appropriateness and necessity of referring to these concepts rather than others in examining individuals’ career and work behaviors. Furthermore, knowing what career means to an individual does not necessarily signify that the work is meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010). In this thesis, I try to capture the meaningfulness of the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers only when I refer to the concept of calling (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). By focusing exclusively on the meanings that individuals ascribe to their work and career, I only account for the meanings constructed in non-work domains to the limited extent (with the exception of Chapter 5), which may contribute to and shape the meaning that individuals ascribe to their careers (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). Therefore, future research should focus on specifying a detailed understanding of the elements that the concept of the meaning of career includes so that it can also capture the meaningfulness of the meanings that individuals ascribe to their careers. To further enrich the understanding of what career means to people scholars should account for the continuous blurring of the work and non-work domains (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2008; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010) and thus explore how these different domains co-construct one’s career-related meanings.

_The overpowering focus on the individual._ The thesis set out to pay tribute to individuals as powerful actors in their careers and their organizations. However, I acknowledge that this approach creates an overpowering focus of my studies on the individual while downplaying the important role of the context in shaping one’s career and work behaviors. For example, prior research on proactive work behavior (e.g., Grant & Ashforth, 2008; Parker et al., 2010) suggests that in addition to individual-level factors, there are contextual or situation-related factors that also contribute to the understanding of the antecedents of proactive work behaviors. Similarly, career development has been found to be subject to contextual influences (e.g., Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Sullivan & Baruch,
2009). Nevertheless, I try to indirectly account for the role of context when studying the meaning of career in diverse samples and contexts. I also indirectly account for the context in Chapter 4 by showing how situational influences reinforce the creative-business strategic tension in the video game industry and in Chapter 5 by showing how being in the context of following an EMBA program, managers referred to the influential role of perceived spousal career support in their career sensemaking. Acknowledging this limited attention to the contextual factors in addition to the career-related meanings when examining the career and work behaviors of individuals, I encourage future research to study the interplay between the individual-related and contextual determinants of these behaviors. The need for more research on this interplay has been well acknowledged in the literature on careers (Tams & Arthur, 2010) and proactive behavior (Chiaburu, Smith, Wang & Zimmerman, 2014).

**Potential bias in the qualitative data and the lack of causal inferences in the quantitative data.** Given that in this thesis I was interested in studying the meanings that individuals ascribe to careers, the majority of my studies utilized qualitative research methods and used interviews as the primary source of data. Although interviews are a widely accepted method of gathering data in qualitative studies, they also provide a space for individuals to construct their own valued and coherent experiences that are not necessarily true, and interviews can also be biased by the expectations and interests of the researcher (Alvesson, 2003). Consequently, interviewees can provide accounts of experiences that are socially desirable. In this thesis, I tried to address potential biases during the data collection in the following ways. First, I avoided mentioning any concepts or terms that could have directed the interviewees to the purpose of my studies. Second, I engaged in reframing, repetition or expansion of questions during the interviews and contrasted conflicting narratives (Krefting, 1990). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that there
could have been some potential bias in my qualitative data, especially with regard to individuals’ reflections on their career and work behavior. Future research should consider triangulating interview accounts with data derived from other methods (i.e., observations) and from other sources (i.e., interviews with spouses, managers, colleagues) (Krefting, 1990), which was not possible due to access limitations within the framework of this thesis. In addition, while Chapter 3 diversifies the methodology of the thesis by reporting a quantitative study, it tests the proposed model based on cross-sectional data. Thus, I cannot draw any causal inferences about the relationship between calling and individuals’ taking a proactive approach to their careers and their organizations. Future research should replicate this study using a longitudinal sample.

6.6. Concluding remarks

With this doctoral thesis, I paid tribute to individuals as powerful actors in their career and their organizations by showing how the meanings that they ascribe to their careers (i.e., the meaning of career) guide their career and work behaviors. In so doing, I drew on the discourse in the careers literature on contemporary careers as being subjectively defined and self-directed and bridged it with insights from the meaning of work and calling research fields.

Utilizing mainly qualitative research methods with the exception of one empirical chapter, I shed fresh light on individual career-related outcomes, innovation in organizations and individual coping with contextual uncertainty. In the first chapter, I showed that career identity incorporating a protean career orientation perspective and work-related values informs whether employees engage in change-supportive or change-inactive behavior during an organizational change. In the second chapter, which was structured around two studies, I found that calling as one of the meanings that individuals
can ascribe to their careers stimulated them to proactively engage in professional development and innovative work behavior but failed to make them employable. In the third chapter, I brought the examination of the meaning of career to the video game industry, showing that founders’ calling can shed unique light on their strategic decision making in the context of innovative game development and constrains founders in their attempts to manage the creative-business tension. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I illuminated the influential role of spouses in managers’ career sensemaking by shaping this sensemaking in such a way that it accounted for greater concern that career-related decisions have positive outcomes for the family.

Concurring with Dostoevsky’s quote regarding the importance for an individual to do the work that has a meaning and purpose, I use the four abovementioned chapters and my thesis as a whole to show that there is a meaning and purpose for scholars studying careers, positive organizational behavior and entrepreneurship in creative industries to attend to the meanings that individual actors ascribe to their careers to better understand their career and work behaviors. Thus, I sincerely hope that my thesis succeeded in achieving this purpose and that the findings from it will make an important contribution to the development of the relevant research fields. Because this thesis also provides interesting practical recommendations based on the results of the study, I also hope that it achieves the purpose of making practitioners (i.e., organizations, line managers, HR managers, policy makers, and consultants) aware of the importance of trying to understand employees in organizations as humans with diverse and influential career-related meanings instead of simply treating them as one of the organization’s resources.