

VU Research Portal

The contemporary career navigator

Fleisher, C.

2014

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Fleisher, C. (2014). *The contemporary career navigator: Individual and organizational outcomes of self-directed career management*. [PhD-Thesis - Research and graduation internal, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam]. ABRI.

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 providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades we have witnessed a significant shift in our understanding of employees' careers and related changes in the employee-employer relationship (Arthur, 2008; Cappelli, 2008). No longer is career success assumed to reflect hierarchical progression. Instead, scholars have identified contemporary careers as more dynamic and self-directed (Baruch, 2004a; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Consequently, the discourse on careers today is populated by concepts such as individual career management (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2009; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefvooghe, 2005; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002), employability (Forrier & Sels, 2003; Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004; Rothwell, Jewell, & Hardie, 2009; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), and career competencies (Colakoglu, 2011; Kuijpers & Scheerens, 2006), among others. The related research concerning these concepts helped both scholars and practitioners to generate needed knowledge on the consequences of contemporary employees' career attitudes and behaviors on individuals' outcomes, including their mobility, satisfaction, career progress, and well-being (e.g., Clarke, 2009; De Cuyper, Van der Heijden, & de Witte, 2011; DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Donnelly, 2009; Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011; McArdle, Waters, Briscoe, & Hall, 2007; McArdle et al., 2007; van Dam, 2004).

While the career concepts discussed in these studies may be significantly distinct, above all, they coined individual agency and the primacy of individuals' responsibility for self-managing their careers. As such, individuals are regarded as active agents who can affect their work environment through their career choices and behavior (Khapova & Arthur, 2011). These developments are important for both scholars and practitioners, as they highlight the interdependency between individuals and organizations. Thus, studying careers of

contemporary employees, as reflected in career self-management, provides opportunities to better understand the link between structure and behavior (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Barley, 1989; Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Van Maanen, 1977).

Career self-management refers to the proactive initiatives individuals take throughout the career while realizing ownership of their own development (King, 2004; Orpen, 1994; Stickland, 1996). It has been conceptualized as a dynamic process through which career agents collect information, gather feedback, and identify career goals and opportunities (Noe, 1996). The discourse describes it as strategic actions, however career self-management can be better understood as a set of co-occurring behaviors which “may be used continuously or sporadically, and in conjunction with one another or independently” (King, 2001, p. 67). While it may be planned or improvised, this set of behaviors concerns the achievement of one’s desired outcomes and involves the career investments people make in positioning (e.g., exploring and creating job opportunities), developing human capital (e.g., training and education), networking (e.g., influencing gatekeepers and visibility), and managing boundaries (e.g., work and non-work domains) (King, 2004; Sturges, 2008).

Given the transformation in the social structure that governs employee-employer relationship, several papers have conceptually and empirically studied this concept to understand the way people engage in managing their careers and how organizational change influence them (e.g., Chiaburu, Baker, & Pitariu, 2006; De Vos, Dewettinck, & Buyens, 2009; Sturges, Conway, & Liefoghe, 2010; Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998; Weng & McElroy, 2010). Furthermore, self-managing career behavior may also have, directly or indirectly, an impact on organizational consequences such as training practices, performance, effectiveness and turnover intentions (e.g., Gilbert, Sohi, & McEachern, 2008; King, 2004; Quigley & Tymon, 2006; Sturges, Guest, & Davey, 2000). However, as career self-management draws largely from the field of vocational psychology, it focuses on exploring

individual consequences and how changes in the work environment stimulate individual behavior (King, 2004). Thus far, very few career researchers have empirically addressed the consequences of self-managed behavior for organizations.

Furthermore, there are still debates on the relevancy of contemporary employees' careers to organizations, and some scholars have questioned their generalizability (Currie, Tempest, & Starkey, 2006; Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; King, 2004; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Sommerlund & Boutaiba, 2007). Given these theoretical and empirical challenges, the current thesis examines the consequences of employees' career self-management both for individuals and organizations. The focus is then on the effects of contemporary employees' career on organizations and vice versa. Below I outline two important and influential career theories, which have helped to shape the notions of self-management on the one hand, and the reciprocal link between individuals and organizations on the other.

The Boundaryless career

DeFillippi and Arthur defined boundaryless career as "a sequence of job opportunities that goes beyond the boundaries of any single employment setting" (1996, p. 116). Accordingly, the responsibility for managing one's career is a result of a psychological process, and thus individuals are seen as independent from any particular employer. Arthur and Rousseau (1996b) suggested that in order to cross boundaries, individuals seek for external validation and connectedness to external networks, separation from hierarchical reporting relationships, opportunity to pursue personal circumstances, and movement across different employers. The boundaryless career concept does not focus on one's motives to follow a particular career path (e.g., "calling" see, Hall & Chandler, 2005; Park, 2008). Rather, it emphasizes individual careers as employer-independent, individually driven, and subjectively assessed (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b; Khapova, Arthur, & Wilderom, 2007).

Acknowledged for its importance, the boundaryless career has received large coverage in academic work, both theoretical and empirical (Gubler, Arnold, & Coombs, 2014; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The acceptance of the boundaryless career has been mixed though, ranging from scholars who considered the concept to be a positive development that invites more possibilities for career customization (e.g., Benko & Weisberg, 2007b), to others who have suggested to look at the dramatic implications for organizations, including high employee turnover, and knowledge and skills outflow (e.g., Kacmar, Andrews, Van Rooy, Steilberg, & Cerrone, 2006; Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Shaw, Duffy, Johnson, & Lockhart, 2005; Sirmon, Hitt, & Ireland, 2007). Given that mobility is one of the most identified characteristics of the boundaryless career, academics have particularly questioned the overemphasis of the concept's boundary-crossing orientation (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Inkson et al., 2012; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that although physical mobility is a prominent aspect, the boundaryless concept encompasses one's perceived capacity to take upon and adapt to alternative career changes (Forret, Sullivan, & Mainiero, 2010). Accordingly, individuals who invest in a boundaryless career, highly engage in ongoing learning efforts to sustain their employability by developing professional identity, marketable skills and relationships that cross the boundaries of current or prospective employers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Despite the criticism, the concept appears to sustain its popularity. It is therefore not surprising that the boundaryless career has been used as an umbrella concept to describe contemporary careers (Ituma & Simpson, 2009). The current thesis follows up on the aforementioned premises, by employing the boundaryless career as a lens to further study employees' career self-management and their consequences for individuals and organizations. I do so by drawing on two related and influential conceptual frameworks, the "intelligent career" (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995) and "intelligent enterprise" (Quinn,

1992). While extensively explained in the subsequent chapters, below I nevertheless provide a brief introduction to the two frameworks and main concepts. I then continue with the research questions and a description of how I address each question in this thesis.

Intelligent career and intelligent enterprise

At the center of the intelligent career framework is the career actor who invests in developing transferable career competencies, the so-called “three ways of knowing” (P. Parker, Khapova, & Arthur, 2009), which are specific conceptualization of the broad concept *career capital*¹. Arthur et al (1995; 1999) proposed that such career investments broadly involve the development of one’s professional motivation and identity (knowing-why), skills and expertise (knowing-how), and relationships and reputation (knowing-whom). Career scholars have employed the three ways of knowing conceptualization to operationalize individual employability and career development during the past decade (e.g., Clarke, 2009; De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Dickmann & Mills, 2010; P. Parker, 2008; Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009; van den Born & van Witteloostuijn, 2013). Studies have showed that those who proactively invest in career capital development achieve higher career success (e.g., Eby et al., 2003; Kuijpers, Schyns, & Scheerens, 2006).

In addition to individual consequences, the three ways of knowing have become increasingly popular as a basis for capturing human capital for organizations (e.g., DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Kamoche, Pang, & Wong, 2011). This increased popularity is not surprising given that the intelligent career was developed as a response to Quinn’s (1992) work intelligent enterprise, which proposed that organizational core competencies consist of organizational culture, capabilities, and connections. As suggested by Arthur et al., through investing in their career capital development, individuals can potentially contribute to

¹ In the current thesis I use the terms three ways of knowing and career competencies interchangeably. As further explained below, career capital is used as an overarching concept to include these terms.

organizational development (Arthur, DeFillippi, & Lindsay, 2008; Arthur et al., 1999; DeFillippi, Arthur, & Lindsay, 2006). Accordingly, individuals contribute to an organization's culture (i.e., sense of purpose, mission, and core values) through knowing-why, an organization's capabilities (i.e., the knowledge and skills embodied in organizational activities) through knowing-how, and an organization's connections (i.e., supplier, customer, alliance partner, and other external contacts) through knowing-whom by enacting their careers (DeFillippi et al., 2006). While the two frameworks are often connected in the career literature, little empirical evidence exists to support the link between individual career capital development and organizational core competencies.

In my dissertation I integrate ideas from the extant literature on boundaryless career, career self-management, and intelligent career and enterprise to focus on the bigger picture – the consequences of contemporary employees' careers for both individuals and organizations. By drawing on the boundaryless career theory, I acknowledge the independency and autonomy of people from their employers. The intelligent career framework assists in recognizing which career competencies are required in order to achieve this autonomy. By employing the career self-management concept, I recognize the career investments people make in turning these career competencies into career capital. Finally, the intelligent enterprise approach helps in identifying how the career capital individuals accumulate can be applied and used for the benefit of the organization. By bringing together these distinct, yet related, frameworks in my thesis, I provide evidence and deeper insight into how contemporary employees, through managing and developing their own careers (i.e. *career capital development*), play a vital part in shaping individual and organizational outcomes.

Research rationale

The boundaryless career discourse considers that organizations are no longer able (or willing) to offer workers job stability and career progression in exchange for loyalty and commitment.

Consequently, prospering in such “boundaryless” environment requires employees to continuously adapt and manage change in their work context (Fugate et al., 2004). Under these circumstances, individuals’ accumulate non-financial resources, which they own and can take with if they leave (Robertson & Swan, 2004). Career scholars describe these resources as individuals’ investments in career capital (Inkson & Arthur, 2001), embodied “in skills, expertise, and relationship networks that are acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time” (Bird, 1996, p. 150). In today’s knowledge-intensive economy, the development of career capital empowers contemporary workers to have a significant impact on one’s success, employers, industries and society (Arthur et al., 1999; Arthur, 2008). In this thesis, I therefore draw on career capital as a focal concept, to suggest that by developing distinct career capital contemporary employees can impact their own careers courses, as well as their employing organizations.

Both management and career scholars have emphasized the way contemporary employees’ career trajectories can influence organizational outcomes (e.g., K. H. Becker & Haunschild, 2003; Dokko, Wilk, & Rothbard, 2009; Higgins & Dillon, 2007; Hoang & Gimeno, 2010; Lam, 2007). Lately, we see growing evidence, particularly by management researchers, signaling that employees’ career development can benefit organizational outcomes, learning, knowledge transfer, and social capital (Furuya, Stevens, Bird, Oddou, & Mendenhall, 2009; Hocking, Brown, & Harzing, 2007; Somaya, Williamson, & Lorinkova, 2007; Zilber, 2002). While these developments are reassuring, career literature appears to fall behind. Although the link between individuals and organizations is central to career theory (Barley, 1989), a very limited number of empirical career scholars have addressed this link (Jones & Dunn, 2007; Tams & Arthur, 2010). However, a career perspective is essentially needed, as it can provide insights into the “evolution of relationships between organizational structure and strategy, and individual agency and behavior” (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 324).

Following these premises, the first objective of this dissertation is to investigate *how individuals, through their career capital development, contribute to organizations?*

To further gain insights into the relationship between individuals' career capital development and their contributions to organizations, I also study the mechanisms that may facilitate this relationship. Scholars studying boundaryless career have raised concerns with the possibility that the focus on agency in individuals careers may underplay the complex reciprocity in the relationship between individuals and institutional structures (Inkson & King, 2011). Therefore, career development cannot, and should not, be studied exclusively from only one perspective. As recently suggested, research should give closer consideration to both individual and organizational contexts, and their interdependence (Tams & Arthur, 2010). In my dissertation I employ this ontological duality (Dany, Mallon, & Arthur, 2003) to address the following three related sub-research questions.

First, I address the question *what is the impact of personal factors on career capital development?* This is in line with recent studies that call for research examining traits and other personal differences (Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy DeMuth, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), such as individual personality, subjective aspects of careers (e.g., career satisfaction) and other personal career experiences in relation to career development of contemporary employees (e.g., Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010; Chiaburu et al., 2006; Eby et al., 2003; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Khapova et al., 2007).

Second, I further examine *what is the influence of organizational career management on employees' career capital development?* Research examining career development from an organizational perspective (Baruch, 2004a, 2004b), have suggested that careers are also dependent on employment settings (Inkson et al., 2012). Recent studies have called for more attention to the important role organizational career management (e.g., HR practices, career

support) may play in individuals career development (Baruch, 2006; Eby, Allen, & Brinley, 2005; Sturges et al., 2005).

Finally, studying career development from individual and organizational perspectives may also shed light on career consequences. A large body of literature has provided evidence for the association of career capital development with both objective and subjective career success (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Colakoglu, 2011; De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008; Eby et al., 2003; Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Nabi, 2003; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Raabe, Frese, & Beehr, 2007). Yet, this research is fairly limited, as it mainly employs cross-sectional designs, and thus cannot provide evidence for causal inferences. Furthermore, it is less clear whether this relationship would hold under certain conditions (Tams & Arthur, 2010), such as organizational career management (De Vos, Dewettinck, et al., 2009; Sturges et al., 2002). Therefore, I also examine *what is the interplay (i.e. causation) between career capital development and career outcomes?*

Overview of chapters

I address the aforementioned four core research questions by empirically testing research models that conceptualize the relationship between employees' career capital development and its consequences for individuals and organizations. To achieve these objectives, the thesis is organized around four main studies. Each of the four chapters represents a separate study and model, where one or more of the core questions will be addressed. As a result they include an in depth discussion of the relevance and conceptual background as well. However, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter, these chapters are strongly interconnected and based on the concepts mentioned before. Since each study can be regarded as a standalone piece, the concept of career capital is utilized in a specific way, and applied to the unique context of the relevant chapter. Nevertheless, I ensure to study this in a broad sense by

employing a mixed research design (quantitative and qualitative). Each chapter involves different methodology (cross-sectional, longitudinal, interviews), as well as unique study setting (multi-sector: public and private). Table 1.1 summarizes the main features of each study, and shows the main concepts under study.

Table 1.1 Overview of chapters and concepts

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5
Concepts				
<i>Career capital development</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Contribution to core competencies</i>	X	X		X
<i>Career satisfaction</i>		X	X	
<i>Personality</i>	X			
<i>Prior experience (i.e. volunteering)</i>				X
<i>Salary</i>			X	
<i>Organizational commitment</i>			X	
<i>Organizational career management/ support</i>	X		X	
Methodology	Cross sectional	Longitudinal (2 waves)	Longitudinal (3 waves)	Interviews

Chapter 2 discusses the first study in which the association between career capital development and individuals contributions to organizational core competencies is empirically examined. Using an original data set of employees' career development in two public organizations in the Netherlands, the chapter provides initial evidence for the intelligent career framework. Thus, it shows that investments in the three ways of knowing are positively associated with their perceived contributions to organizational culture, capabilities and connections. Furthermore, this is also the first attempt to investigate the role of career capital as a mediating factor between who people are (i.e. personality traits) and the career

support they get, and their contributions to organizations. Results confirm these assumptions, and suggest that in particular those who score high on extraversion invest more knowing-why and knowing-how, and consequently contribute to organizational culture and capabilities (respectively).

Chapter 3 builds on the findings of Chapter 2, and seeks to examine the causal relations between career capital development and organizational core competencies. To achieve this objective, I conducted a two-wave longitudinal analysis among alumni of a large public university. In order to investigate the factor that may shape this relationship, I further propose that employees' career satisfaction moderates this relationship. The results show that a direct relationship exists between each of the three ways of knowing and the relevant category of organizational core competencies, namely, between knowing-why and organizational culture, knowing-how and organizational capabilities, and knowing-whom and organizational connections. However, I also find that these links depend on the level of employees' perception of their career satisfaction. Hence, if employees are satisfied with their careers they contribute more to organizational culture, capabilities, and connections.

Chapter 4 aims to test the consequences of career self-management for individuals' career outcomes (e.g., career satisfaction, salary and commitment), and what role organizational career management plays in this relationship. To do so, it examines (1) the causal direction of the relationship between career capital development and indicators of career outcomes (i.e. career satisfaction, salary and organizational commitment), and (b) whether these relationships differ across career choices, by comparing the results for those employees who make use of a newly implemented organizational career support practice. The results for a large professional service in the Netherlands reveal significant continuous effects between the three ways of knowing and career outcomes only for the cross-sectional relationships. The longitudinal research design (3 waves) reveals a potential reciprocal

nature of the relationships, suggesting that over time career satisfaction and organizational commitment play role in shaping employees' career capital. Furthermore, significant differences are found with regard to organizational career support, in the level of career capital development, career satisfaction and salary, both across time as well as in the cross-lagged effects. Thus, the implementation of the career support practice positively influences the relationship between three ways of knowing, career satisfaction and salary.

Finally, *Chapter 5* aims to explore other ways in which organizations can facilitate employees' career self-management, and their consequences for both individuals and organizations. This chapter presents a particular case of career capital development through corporate volunteering experiences. As this is the first study to address this topic, the chapter is based on exploratory design using interviews with twenty-two volunteering employees from a large Dutch financial institution. The findings reveal that participation in corporate volunteering helps individuals to develop their career capital. They also unravel how employees bring and use this career capital upon their return from volunteering.

The research findings have implications for literature on career self-management in general, and boundaryless career in particular, as well for the strategic (human resource) management research. The contributions of the individual studies are extensively discussed in chapters 2 to 5. Implications that cut across the studies are presented in the concluding chapter 6.

Presentations and publications

Table 1.2 provides an overview of the research output from my dissertation, including submissions, proceedings, conference presentations, and press releases. Since all empirical chapters have been either submitted or in preparation for submission, and presented in academic conferences, they are written in the first-personal plural, reflecting the number of co-authors involved.

Table 1.2 Output of dissertation

Chapter	Paper title, authors and current status
2	<p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., Jansen, P.G.W., & Huysman M. (2010, July). Career investments: The unfolding relationship between employees' self-managed career behavior and organizational learning. Lisbon, European Group & Organizational Studies Colloquium, Paper Presentation</p> <p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., & Engel, Y. (2010, August). Employees' self-managed career behavior and organizational learning: An empirical examination. Montreal, Academy of Management Conference, Paper Presentation</p>
3	<p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., Jansen, P.G.W. (2013, December). Employable and satisfied: Organizational consequences of employees' career investments. Under review in <i>Career Development International</i> Special Issue (Revise and Resubmit received April 2014)</p> <p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., & Arsenopoulou, S.N. (2013, October). Gaining the talented individual. <i>LoopbaanVisie</i>, 4: 14-21, Publication</p> <p>Fleisher, C. (2011, December). Career and employees' contribution at work and in the community. <i>VUurwek</i>, 11, Press Release</p> <p>Fleisher, C. & Khapova, S. N., de Mol, E. (2011, October). What makes people proactively involved at work and outside of their work? The mediating role of career satisfaction. Philadelphia, Annual People and Organizations Conference, Paper Presentation</p> <p>Fleisher, C. (2011, June). Coping with a changing world: A study of graduates' career development. <i>VUurwek</i> (Online edition), Press Release</p>
4	<p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., Jansen, P.G.W. & van Kleef, M. (2014, January). On the relationship between career self-management and career outcomes: Do career choices matter? In preparation for submission to <i>Journal of Career Development</i></p> <p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., Jansen, P.G.W. & van Kleef, M. (2012, September). Making career investments visible: The effects of Mass Career Customization on career outcomes. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i> Paper Development Workshop, Paper Presentation</p> <p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., Jansen, P.G.W. & van Kleef, M. (2011, November). Self-managed careers and career success: The Moderating role of career interventions. Dutch HRM Network International Conference, Paper proceedings (not published)</p>
5	<p>Fleisher, C., Khapova, S.N., & Schipper, M. (2014, Forthcoming). Career capital acquisition through corporate volunteering experiences. In A. de Vos & B. I. J. M. van der Heijden (Eds.), <i>Handbook of research on sustainable careers</i>: Edward Elgar</p> <p>Fleisher, C. (2013, October). Invited speaker at University of Queensland Business School. Brisbane</p> <p>Fleisher, C. & Khapova, S.N., (2013, August). What employees' volunteering offer to organizations? Exploring the link between career resources acquired during volunteering experiences and organizational learning. Boston, Academy of Management Conference, Paper Presentation</p>