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WORKING PAPER

Organizational versus Individual Responsibility for Career Management: Complements or Substitutes?

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between organizational career management and career self-management and addresses their impact on employee outcomes. The results of a study among employees and linemanagers are presented, which partly support our hypotheses. The interaction between organizational and individual career management in explaining employee outcomes is discussed.

Practitioners and researchers generally agree that effective career management policies are important for organizations and for their employees (Baruch, 2004; Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Sullivan, 1999). Over the past decades, changes in the socio-economic environment have dramatically changed the concept of a career and have contributed to the development of new models for career management. The notion of the 'new career' differs from the traditional notion of a career in the sense that responsibility for managing one's career has shifted from the employer to the employee (Stickland, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). As a result, new career concepts such as the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and the protean career (Hall, 1996), which emphasize the role of the individual as primary actor in managing his or her own career, have emerged. These career concepts all include the notion of career self-management, which is considered important for objective and subjective career success (Eby *et al.*, 2003). Nevertheless, although recent literature emphasizes the role of the individual, career management also remains an important responsibility for organizations. Researchers and practitioners generally agree that career self-management and organizational career management are not mutually exclusive but that they should complement one another. However, as to date little empirical information exists that clarifies the complex relationship between both. A possible side-effect of stimulating career self-management might be that employees become more aware of the importance of their career development which in turn might also increase their expectations towards their employer's career management initiatives. Decreasing organizational initiatives would in that case result in reduced satisfaction and commitment.

The study reported in this paper investigates how career self-management affects employees' expectations towards organizational career management and how it affects the relationship between organizational career management and employee commitment and career success. It adds to the career management literature by addressing the relationship

between individual and organizational career management initiatives in several ways. First, both organizational career management and career self-management are addressed in one single study, which allows us to examine the relationship between both as well as their impact on employee outcomes (their direct impact and interaction effects). Second, this study uses outcome variables that also reflect the idea of joint responsibility for career management. The idea behind this notion of "joint responsibility" is that there should also be "joint benefits" resulting from it. Therefore we address outcomes relevant to the organization (commitment and satisfaction) as well as outcomes relevant to the individual (perceived career success and number of promotions). Third, this study makes a methodological contribution by using a multiple source design: while employees report on their expectations towards organizational career management practices, on self-management activities and on outcome variables, a sample of line managers is included to report on the career management practices existing within their organization for certain groups of employees.

Theory

The evaluations employees make of the career opportunities offered by their employer are a determinant of important work-related attitudes and behaviors like satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay (e.g. Arnold & Mackenzie Davey, 1999; Noe, 1996; Sturges, Guest, Conway & Mackenzie Davey, 2002; Sturges, Guest & Mackenzie Davey, 2000). Organizational career management refers to those activities undertaken by the organization, in order to plan and manage the careers of its employees (Sturges *et al.*, 2002). It may take the form of more or less formal activities ranging from training courses and assessment centres to mentoring and career advice. Whilst traditional practices mainly focused on advancing the individual throughout the different hierarchical layers of the organization, contemporary career management implies adapting career systems to changing needs of organizations and new types of psychological contracts (Baruch, 2004). Inherent in

this contemporary view is that both HR-professionals and line managers are responsible for organizational career management.

While organizational career management is largely planned and managed by the organization, career self-management is under the control of the individual. It involves behaviors that are related to improvement in one's current job as well as behaviors related to movement within or outside the company (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher & Demarr, 1998; Sturges *et al.*, 2002). In this study, we focus on career self-management focused at furthering one's career within the organization.

Relationship between career self-management and expectations towards organizational career management

Career self-management is generally described in terms of individual independence from organizational career management systems, and reliance on oneself. This might suggest that individuals deploying more career self-management activities would be less concerned with the career management initiatives provided by their organization. On the other hand, inherent to the notion of career self-management is a proactive attitude of the individual employee towards his or her career (Kossek *et al.*, 1998). It involves both self-analyses of talents, capabilities and career ambitions as well as concrete actions (e.g. networking, self-nomination, creating opportunities) undertaken to realize these ambitions (Noe, 1996; Sturges *et al.*, 2000; 2002). This means that, as a result, individuals who engage more in career self-management might develop a more elaborate idea on what they want to achieve and how they want to achieve their career aspirations. This in turn might result in a stronger concern about the support they receive from their employer in realizing their career goals. Therefore we expect that individuals who take more career self-management initiatives will have higher expectations about the practices set up to support their career development by HR and line management.

Hypothesis 1: The higher the level of career self-management, the higher the level of expectations towards organizational career management practices.

Relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes

Previous research has shown that employees' work experiences affect their commitment towards the organization (e.g. Arnold & MacKenzie Davey, 1999; Sturges *et al.*, 2002). Career management practices are one type of experiences that are relevant in this respect. Employees' perceptions of good career opportunities have been found to predict organizational commitment, while unmet expectations or broken promises relating to career progression have a strong negative impact on commitment (e.g. De Schamphelaere, De Vos & Buyens, 2004). Building on these findings, we expect that not only the expectation or experience of a promotion, but also the supporting activities undertaken by line managers or HR-managers to facilitate the individual's development will be positively related to organizational commitment. In addition, we expect that these practices will not only affect the employee's commitment to the organization, but also his or her career success.

Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of organizational career management practices, the higher the level of organizational commitment and career success.

Relationship between career self-management and employee outcomes

A third hypothesis addresses the relationship between career self-management and employee outcomes. In general, it is assumed that individuals who take more initiatives to manage their own career, will be more successful in their career. Seibert, Kraimer & Crant (2001) have provided empirical support for this idea. They found that individuals who took more initiative to develop their own careers, e.g. by seeking out career-oriented feedback, experienced a more satisfying level of career progression. Career self-management might not

only impact employee-centered outcomes, but also their commitment towards the organization. Individuals who are more active in managing their career, might be more likely to engage in career conversations with their line manager, to seek for advice and to engage in networking behaviors. These activities might make them better informed about their internal career prospects which in turn should enhance their commitment to the organization.

Hypothesis 3: The higher the level of career self-management, the higher the level of organizational commitment and career success.

Moderating role of career self-management in the relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes

In Hypothesis 1, we proposed that career self-management would be positively related to employees' expectations towards organizational career management practices. Building on this argumentation, we propose that career self-management will moderate the impact of organizational career management and employee outcomes. More specifically we expect that the relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes will be stronger for those employees engaging more in career self-management. Since these employees will be more concerned about their career goals and more active in realizing these goals, they will place greater value to the support they receive in their career development from their organization. This should in turn increase their feelings of commitment towards the organization as well as their personal career success.

Hypothesis 4: Career self-management moderates the relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes

Method

Procedure and Sample

The study took place within six large organizations representing four different industries (financial services, consulting, healthcare, and telecommunication). Within each organization, in cooperation with the HR-director one or two departments were selected to be involved in the study. For these departments, all employees with at least two years of seniority as well as their supervisors were invited by the researchers to participate in the study (i.e. employees at level *n* and supervisors at level *n+1*). In total 809 employees and 112 supervisors were invited to participate. They received the questionnaire by mail, together with a pre-stamped envelope addressed to the researchers. Of these, 491 employees and 69 supervisors were found willing to participate in the survey (i.e. both a 61% response rate). Respondents' average age was 34 years, the average seniority was 9,44. Fourty-five percent were male.

Measures

Career self-management (employees). Fourteen items, derived from Noe (1996), were used to assess career self-management. These items refer to four types of actions individuals can undertake to manage their career: creating opportunities, self-nomination, networking, and seeking career guidance. Respondents had to indicate to which extent they had engaged in each of the fourteen activities listed. Sample items are "to what extent have you built a network of friendships in your organization that could help you further in your career progression?" and "to what extent have you tried to develop skills and expertise in areas that are critical to your unit's operation?". A five-point response scale was used ranging from (1) = to a very small extent to (5) = to a very large extent. For the purpose of this study all items

were collapsed into one global career self-management scale. Alpha-reliability for this scale was .88.

Importance of organizational career management (employees). Respondents were asked to what extent they felt it was important for their organization to offer a number of organizational career management practices. Twelve activities were chosen to reflect the range of career management practices that contemporary organizations might use and they are based on the list of items reported by Baruch & Peiperl (2000). A distinction was made between six practices executed by line management (e.g. discussion of career progress with line manager, performance feedback by you line manager) and six practices put in place by HR (e.g. assessment centers to evaluation you potential, career interviews with HR, workshops about career opportunities within the company). Responses were on a five-point scale, ranging from (1) = not at all important to (5) important to a very great extent. Alpha reliability was .76 for the importance of activities offered by line management and .79 for the importance of activities offered by HR.

Provision of organizational career management (managers). The same list of twelve items was used to assess managers' opinions on the extent to which career management practices were offered to their employees. Responses were given on a five-point scale, which ranged from (1) = not at all to (5) = to a great extent. Alpha reliability for the items assessing career management practices offered by line management was .80, and .72 for the items assessing career management practices offered by HR.

Organizational Commitment (employees). The nine-item version of the organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979) was used. Respondents had to indicate the extent to which they agree with each of the nine items listed, using a five-point scale ranging from (1) not at all to (5) to a great extent. Alpha-reliaiblity for this scale was .75.

Perceived career success (employees). Three items were used to assess respondents' subjective evaluations of their career success ("I feel satisfied about the progress I have made in my career so far", "I feel satisfied about the achievements I have made in my career so far", and "I feel satisfied about the income level I have reached at this stage in my career"). The response scale ranged from (1) = not at all agree to (5) agree to a very large extent. Alpha-reliability was .76.

Number of promotions (employees). A more objective assessment of career success was made by asking respondents to indicate the number of promotions they had received in their career.

Control variables. The following variables were controlled for in order to rule out alternative explanations: gender, age, degree, and tenure.

Analyses

After the reliability analyses, scales were calculated and hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the study hypothesis. Control variables were always entered in the first step. Hypothesis 1 was tested by entering career self-management in step 2, with organizational career management practices as the dependent variable. This was done separately for both subscales of organizational career management practices (line management and HR practices). Hypotheses 2-4 were tested through a number of regression analyses using commitment, perceived career success and number of promotions as the dependent variables. In step 2, organizational career management practices were entered into the equation. In step 3, career self-management was entered. Finally in step 4, the interaction term of organizational career management and career self-management was entered. Analyses were done separately for both subscales of organizational career management (line management and HR practices). All analyses were conducted using standardized values.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between all variables included in the study.

Relationship between career self-management and employees' expectations towards organizational career management

The results for Hypothesis 1 are shown in Table 2. As can be seen from this table, career self-management was positively and significantly related to the importance of organizational career management. This holds both for initiatives by line management (β = .42, p < .001) and for initiatives by HR (β = .30, p < .001). This means that Hypothesis 1 is confirmed by our data.

Relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes

The results for Hypothesis 2 to 4 are shown in Table 3. When entered separately into the equation (Step 2) the provision of organizational career management as reported by the line managers in our sample, has a positive and significant impact on commitment (β = .16, p < .05 for line management activities and β = .12, p < .05 for HR activities) and on the number of promotions (β = .28, p < .001 for line management activities and β = .24, p < .001 for HR activities). The impact on perceived career success is not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed.

Relationship between career self-management and employee outcomes

As expected in Hypothesis 3, career self-management was positively related to affective commitment (β = .29, p < .001), perceived career success (β = .17, p < .001), and promotions (β = .14, p < .001).

Interaction between organizational career management and career self-management

In Hypothesis 4 it was suggested that career self-management would moderate the relationship between organizational career management and employee outcomes, such that

this relationship would be stronger for employees scoring high on career self-management. This possibility was tested using Baron & Kenny's (1986) procedure for testing moderation. The product of the moderator variable (career self-management) and independent variable (organizational career management) was added to the regression equation in Step 4. Moderator effects are indicated by the significant effect of the interaction term while the other variables are controlled for. As shown in Table 3, the interaction terms were only significant for the dependent variable "perceived career success" (β = .16, p < .01 for linemanagement activities and β = -.13, p < .05 for HR activities). For linemanagement activities the interaction term is positive and in line with our hypothesis. As illustrated in Figure 1, for lower levels of career management activities provided by linemanagement employees deploying more career self-management activities were more positive about their career success compared to employees deploying less career self-management activities.

Contrary to our expectations, the interaction term for organizational career management practices executed by HR was negative. As illustrated in Figure 2 for lower levels of HR-practices, employees deploying more career self-management activities were more positive about their career success compared to employees deploying less career self-management activities.

To further analyze the interaction effects, the regression equations were rearranged into simple regressions of perceived career success on organizational career management, given conditional values of career self-management (M-1SD; M+1SD) (see Aikin & West, 1991). For career management practices executed by linemanagement the simple regressions showed no significant interaction effects with self-management on perceived career success. Organizational career management practices executed by HR in interaction with lower self-management appeared to be positively related to perceived career success (β = .24, p < .05). For employees deploying more self-management, activities by HR were not significantly

related to perceived career success (β = -.04, *ns*). Taken together, these results provide only limited support for Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

It was the objective of this study to explicate the relationship between organizational career management and career self-management and to assess their impact on organization-centered and person-centered employee outcomes. Although recent career management literature increasingly stresses the importance of individual responsibility for career development, our results confirm prior research indicating that initiatives taken by both parties (individual and organization) are important in explaining employee commitment to the organization and objective career success (e.g. Orpen, 1994; Sturges *et al.*, 2000; 2002). Subjective career success, on the other hand, is mainly affected by individuals' career self-management initiatives rather than by organizational career management. Moreover, evidence is provided for the idea that career self-management cannot be considered as a substitute for organizational career management. Individuals taking responsibility for managing their own careers also expect an active contribution from their employer. Both complement one another and they are positively related. The latter implies that organizations who stimulate the personal initiative of their employees should be aware that this might increase, instead of decrease, the expectations these employees have towards the career management activities undertaken by the organization. It also means that stimulating career self-management thus not automatically create a risk of employees looking for advancement outside the boundaries of the organization. Our results also indicate that the positive impact of career-related experiences on employee outcomes not only holds for experiences related to career progression, as shown in previous studies, but for a broader range of supportive career management activities put in place by HR and by line management.

We expected that employees' subjective feelings of career success would be affected by the interaction between organizational career management and career self-management. In contrast with our expectations, however, although some of the interaction terms were significant, career self-management did not have the moderating role we had predicted. There were no consistent findings showing that organizational career management has a stronger impact on employee outcomes for those employees who are more active in career self-management. Thus, even though organizational career management practices might be more important to those employees who are more active in managing their own careers, the provision of these practices does not have a stronger impact on outcome variables among "self-managing" employees than among employees less active in career self-management.

Limitations

This study has a number of limitations that should be noted and that should be addressed in subsequent research. First, this study investigated cross-sectional relationships and therefore should be complemented by a longitudinal investigation of the relationship between career self-management, organizational career management and outcomes. Second, by using line managers to report on organizational career management practices an independent source was used which reduces common method bias. However, common method bias might still have confounded the relationship between respondents' descriptions of their self-management initiatives and the assessment of employee outcomes. Third, future research should include objective outcome variables (e.g. objective measures of career success) in order to explain objective career success in terms of both individual and organizational career management initiatives.

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Figure 1. The moderating influence of career self-management on the relationship between OCM (linemanagement practices) and perceived career success.

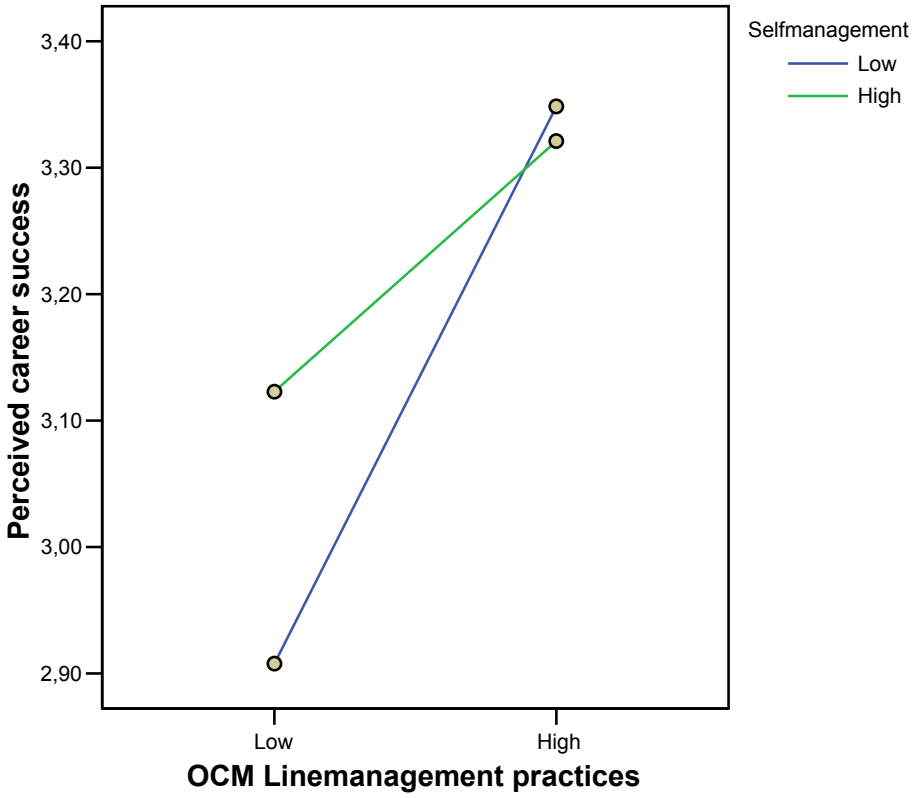

Figure 2. The moderating influence of career self-management on the relationship between OCM (HRpractices) and perceived career success.

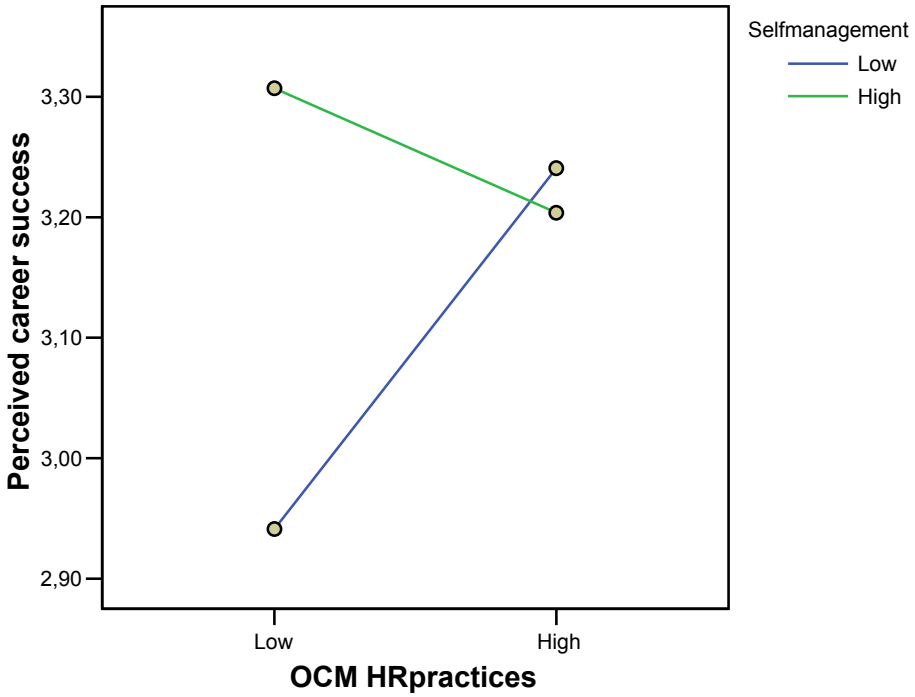

Table 1. Means, standarddeviations and intercorrelations between variables included in the study[a]

	M.	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Sex (0=male; 1=female)	n.a.	n.a.											
2. Age	34.04	7.82	-0,01										
3. Degree	n.a.	n.a.	-0,24	-0,21									
4. Seniority	9.60	8.27	0,12	0,79	-0,32								
5. Self-management	2.81	.71	-0,28	-0,24	0,36	-0,27							
6. Importance OCM line	3.62	.66	-0,15	-0,22	0,26	-0,25	0,48						
7. Importance OCM HR	3.07	.76	-0,18	-0,09	0,11	-0,12	0,33	0,68					
8. OCM line (supervisor)	3.08	.61	-0,54	-0,14	0,43	-0,31	0,41	0,33	0,23				
9. OCM HR (supervisor)	1.99	.71	-0,53	0,08	0,14	-0,01	0,20	0,09	0,14	0,61			
10. Affective commitmitment	3.56	.58	-.0,08	0,21	0,05	0,18	0,24	0,13	0,05	0,16	0,19		
11. Perceived career success	3.02	.62	0,01	-0,01	0,06	-0,03	0,15	0,05	-0,10	0,07	0,06	0,28	
12. Promotions	.58	1.11	-0,42	0,18	0,11	0,18	0,25	0,13	0,14	0,42	0,50	0,18	0,11

[a] Employees: $N = 491$; Supervisors: $N = 69$. Entries on the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas. Correlations > .11, $p < .05$; correlations > .14, $p < .001$

Table 2. Hierarchical regressions for the impact of career self-management on the importance of organizational career management[1]

Outcomes:	Importance OCM line		Importance OCM HR	
	1	2	1	2
Predictors:				
Step 1:				
Sex (dummy)	-.10*	-.02	-.17*	-.11
Age	-.13	-.07	-.05	-.01
Degree	.19**	.07	.05	-.04
Seniority	-.07	-.06	-.05	-.04
Step 2:				
Career Self-management		.42**		.30**
F	13.84**	29.53**	5.19**	11.47**
Change in *F*		82.02**		34.95**
Adjusted R^2.	.10	.24	.04	.11
R^2 Change		.14		.07

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

[1] Standardized β-coefficients are used

Table 3. Hierarchical regressions for the impact of organizational career management, career self-management and the interaction between both on employee outcomes[1]

Outcomes:	Affective Commitment				Perceived career success				Number of promotions			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Predictors:												
Step 1:												
Sex (dummy)	-.06	.07	.10	.09	.05	.11	.13	.10	-.43**	-.18**	-.17**	-.17**
Age	.16*	.14	.18*	.18*	.08	.07	.09	.08	-.03	-.08	-.06	-.06
Degree	.09	.05	-.01	-.01	.07	.05	.02	.01	.08	.00	-.03	-.03
Seniority	.09	.13	.12	.13	-.08	-.07	-.07	-.07	.29**	.36**	.35**	.34**
Step 2:												
OCM Linemgmt		.16*	.07	.06		.05	-.01	-.03		.28**	.23**	.23**
OCM HRmgmt		.12*	.14*	.16*		.07	.08	.11		.24**	.25**	.24**
Step 3:												
Self-management			.29**	.28**			.17**	.16**			.14**	.15**
Step 4:												
OCM line x selfmgmt				.05				.16**				.02
OCM HR x selfmgmt				-.07				-.13*				.03
F	6.97**	7.81**	11.82**	9.38**	.88	1.31	2.37*	2.86**	34.25**	43.03**	39.35**	30.68**
Change in *F*		8.98**	32.58**	.86		1.62	9.66**	4.45*		46.68**	11.31**	.60
Adjusted R^2.	.05	.08	.14	.14	.00	.00	.04	.06	.23	.37	.38	.38
R^2 Change		.04	.06	.00		.01	.02	.02		.13	.02	.00

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

[1] Standardized β-coefficients are use