

EMPLOYEES' MEANINGS OF WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

Svetlana N. Khapova¹
VU University Amsterdam

Michael B. Arthur²
Suffolk University

Chen Fliesher³
VU University Amsterdam

Abstract

This study posits that individual contribution to organizational learning depends greatly on the meanings people ascribe to their work. Our assumption is that organizations learn by drawing on employees' career competencies. The study examines in which ways different types of employees contribute to their employing organizations. The data analysis of 144 employees from 20 SMEs in the Netherlands showed that employees' career investments make significant contribution to their organizations. However, the most important finding of our research is that not every employee contributes to the organization in a similar way. Implications for contemporary HR and talent management practices are discussed.

Key words: Organizational learning, Career investments, Employee types.

¹ Svetlana N. Khapova, VU University Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Tel: +31 20 5986471, Email: skhapova@feweb.vu.nl

² Michael B. Arthur, Suffolk University, 8 Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108, USA. Tel: ++1 617 573 8357, Fax: ++1 617 994 4260, Email: marthur@suffolk.edu

³ Chen Fliesher, VU University Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Tel: +31 20 5986471, Email: cfliesher@feweb.vu.nl

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1. INTRODUCTION

Today more than ever, individuals pursue their subjective goals when making career decisions. Consequently, individuals' contemporary careers unfold beyond boundaries of any single employer (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Seen as "repositories of knowledge," such careers reflect "accumulation of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise, and relationship networks that are acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time" (Bird, 1996, p. 150). By accumulating knowledge through their career, individuals develop learning competencies. The knowledge, which individuals bring from outside their organization, as well as the access to further knowledge through outside contacts, is highly useful for organizational innovation and development (Chesbrough, 2003).

This study posits that individual contribution to organizational learning depends greatly on the *meanings people ascribe to their work*. Kim (1993) suggests that the fundamental concern in understanding how to create organizational learning relates to how individual learning is transferred to the organization. As knowledge systems, organizations are responsible for articulating and amplifying the knowledge residing in their employees (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Nonaka, 1994). However, facilitating organizational learning appears to be problematic (Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003). Our assumption is that organizations learn by drawing on employees' career competencies (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). By drawing on their individual members-learning competencies (including new methods and approaches, and a wider network of contacts), organizations can in turn learn, and thereby better adapt to the changing world (Weick, 1996).

However, career studies tend to generalize about the effectiveness of all employees. With the exception of studies that use personality as a predictor, we know little about the possible contribution of different types of employees to their jobs and their employing organizations in general. This study aims to examine in which ways different types of employees contribute to their employing organizations.

We begin this paper by suggesting a theoretical framework to examine people's career motivations, and the subjective careers underlying those motivations. We link from this framework to related ideas about both organizational and individual (career-centered) learning. We further introduce a typology of employee types around which alternative approaches toward individual learning might be considered. Next we offer a series of hypotheses, linking organizational and individual learning. We report on these hypotheses and discuss the implications of the findings obtained.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCEPT OF CAREER ENACTMENT

We draw on the concept of the *enactment* of careers (Weick, 1996) in our conceptualisation of individuals' contributions to their employing organizations. The basic assumption behind this

concept is that individuals contribute to the shaping of social systems around them through investing in their own career development. According to Weick (1996), career enactment is a highly relevant approach helping to understand the interaction between individual careers and employer organizations. The concept of enactment also appeals as a point of departure for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of careers (Khapova, Arthur and Wilderom, 2007).

From a psychological perspective, the concept of career enactment suggests that in the circumstances of the knowledge-driven, global economy individual careers have a more important role within organizations. Weick (1996, p. 40) argues that “as organizations become “weaker”—that is, more ambiguous, more unstructured, and with fewer salient guides for action, they dissolve “external guides for sequences of work experience, such as advancement in a hierarchy” (p. 40). The new situation obliges people to begin to rely more “on internal, self-generated guides, such as growth, learning, and integration” (p. 40) - that is on the subjective sides of their careers. Weick (1996, p. 41) further argues that employees "who are building subjective careers" have “more control over the design of the organization.”

From a social-psychological perspective, the enactment of careers leads individuals to contribute to the shaping of social systems. People act as “agents of their own development [and] organize cooperatively in order to learn” (Weick, 1996, p. 45). In other words, internally driven careers lead to cooperative organizing.

Turning from a social-psychological toward a sociological perspective, as individuals organize, they organize structurally “weak” situations into stronger ones. As individuals work, they learn and make sense of uncertainty. They then “enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410). Learning processes become turned into scripts that impose structures around previously ambiguous situations. Cooperative behavior over time reshapes a weak situation according to people’s career preferences (Weick, 1996, p. 43 - 44). This argument transforms a social-psychological argument into a sociological one as we come to face the emergent structure of the organizations that self-designing careers have built.

Following Arthur’s (2008) call for more interdisciplinary approaches to career studies, in this study we examine how psychologically ascribed meanings of work shape individuals’ career development, and how in turn individual careers contribute to organizations. Following Weick’s (1996) assumptions about career enactment, we suggest a key hypothesis of this study: *Through the investments they make in their careers, individuals contribute to organizational learning in their distinct ways which reflect those individuals' work motivation, or the “why” they work.*

3. ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING

The dependent variable in this study is organizational learning. Organizational learning is critical to the continuing success of knowledge-driven organizations in general, and to professional service organizations in particular. DeFillippi, Arthur and Lindsay (2006) synthesize their own and a range of other scholars’ contributions to see organizational learning in terms of the organization’s unfolding culture (its sense of purpose, mission and core values), capabilities (the knowledge and skills embodied in organizational activities) and connections (supplier, customer, alliance partner and other external contacts). The authors suggest that all three elements of

organizational learning - culture, capabilities, and connections - unfold over time interdependently with one another.

Organizational learning may be conceptualized as occurring across four complementary levels: knowledge capture, knowledge development (or generation), knowledge sharing, and knowledge utilization (Lee & Hong, 2002). Individuals have and use their own strategies for accumulating and utilizing their knowledge on each level. Thus, for example, with respect to knowledge capturing, individuals are focusing on bringing external knowledge into their work (contributing to the overall mission and purpose), knowing where to get external information important for their work (contributing to know-how), and actively soliciting information from their clients (contributing to network of business relations).

Hypothesis 1. Three elements of organizational learning (culture, capabilities and connections) are interrelated.

4. INDIVIDUAL CAREER INVESTMENTS

According to DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) individuals develop their careers by investing in three “ways of knowing”: knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom. Knowing-why investments are concerned with individual motivation and identity (e.g., in earning recognition, or being valued as a professional). Knowing-how investments are concerned with skills and expertise (e.g., in becoming a better project manager or a subject-area specialist). Knowing-whom investments are focused on the people a person works with (e.g., mentors, protégés, or professional communities).

In line with the work of DeFillippi et al. (2006), we suggest that employee type predicts the type of investments individuals make in their careers (e.g., to develop occupation-specific knowledge, or broad professional knowledge; or professional contacts inside the organization, or contacts in a professional community outside the organization). In line with the same authors, and with earlier evidence from Eby et al (2003), we suggest that the three ways of knowing are interrelated. Interdependence occurs “through the interaction among the ways of knowing where.... knowing-why motivation influences a person’s choice of work, the knowing how experiences that come with the work, and the knowing-whom relationships that grow through the work” (Khapova, Arthur and Wilderom, 2007, p.123). Therefore, our second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2. Individual career investments in knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom are interrelated.

DeFillippi, Arthur and Lindsay (2006, pg. 228) suggest that organizations perform better when individual career objectives and organizational objectives are aligned. Alignment occurs when individual knowing-why investments (in motivation and identification) contribute to organizational culture, when individual knowing-how investments (in skills and knowledge) contribute to organizational capabilities and when individual knowing-whom investments (in relationships and reputation) contribute to organizational connections (DeFillippi, Arthur and Lindsay, 2006, pg. 228).

Hypothesis 3. There is a positive relationship between individual career investments in knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom and organizational learning in terms of culture, capabilities and connections.

However, one of the assumptions in this study is that not all individuals invest equally in each of the ways of knowing, thus their contribution into single elements of organizational learning will be also different. An employee, who focuses on developing his or her identity in the organization, may be omitting investing in developing his or her external reputation and network. Another employee, who possesses a wide network, but is less focused on who he or she is professionally, may add little to the culture of an organization. We now turn to exploring what makes employees career investments different.

5. EMPLOYEE TYPES

The last variable in our research model is that of employee types. As more and more nations become affluent, a growing number of people have the luxury of allowing work to fill a variety of roles in their lives. Recent research of Erickson, Dychtwald and Morison (reported Erickson and Gratton, 2007) suggest that work plays six general roles, which correspond to six types of employees. The six type or segments derived from a study of why and how people like to work. Each worker segment cares deeply about several aspects of the employee-employer relationship and little about the others. Some care deeply about the social connections and friendships formed in the workplace, for instance. Others just want to make as much money with as much flexibility and as little commitment as possible. Some have an appetite for risk. Others crave the steadiness of a well-structured, long-term climb up the career ladder (Erickson and Gratton, 2007).

In this study we use Erickson and Gratton’s (2007) employees' typology to examine how individual work motives shape individual career investments and consequently add to organizational learning. This approach is closely related to the concept of career anchors of Schein (1990). Career anchors represent one’s unique combination of perceived career competences, motives, and values. Considering that individual investments in developing their career competencies are at the center of our study, Erickson and Gratton’s (2007) employee typology which distinguishing between career motives and career competencies is more relevant in our study. It also offers a fresh perspective on what work may mean to people in the knowledge economy, and reflects recent ideas about careers of contemporary employees. These ideas address the opportunities for creativity, entrepreneurship, autonomy, team-work, flexibility, working in virtual space, and work and family balance.

Based on Erickson and Gratton’s (2007) assumptions of what work can mean to employees, we suggest that each of the six employee types make different investments in their careers. Table 1 summarizes employee types, the meanings they ascribe to work, and the work characteristics which appeal and engage this separate employee types. Below, we explain which career investments are most likely to associate with each type of employee.

Table 1. Erickson and Gratton’s (2007) employee types

<i>Employee Type</i>	<i>Expressive Legacy</i>	<i>Secure Progress</i>	<i>Individual Expertise and Team Success</i>	<i>Risk and Reward</i>	<i>Flexible Support</i>	<i>Low Obligation and Low Income</i>
<i>Role of Work</i>	Work is about creating something	Work is about improving one’s	Work is about being a valuable part of a	Work is one of multiple	Work is a source of likelihood but	Work is a source of immediate

	with lasting value.	lot in life and finding a predictable path.	winning team.	opportunities to live a life filled with change and excitement.	not yet (or not currently) a priority	economic gain.
<i>What Appeals and Engages</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Autonomy - Entrepreneurial opportunities - Creative opportunities - Stimulating tasks that enable continual learning and growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fair predictable rewards - Concrete compensation, solid benefits and retirement package - Stability - Structure and routine - Career training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration - Fun - Stability and structure - Opportunity to gain competence - Opportunity to leverage personal strengths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunity to improve personal finances - Flexibility - Opportunity to choose tasks and positions from a long menu of options - Open-ended tasks and approaches to getting work done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexibility - Well-defined vacation and family benefits - Well defined work routines- the ability to plug in and out of assignments with ease - Virtual, asynchronous tasks and assignments - Fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jobs that are relatively easy to come by - Well-defined work routines - Lucrative compensation and benefits packages - Stability and security - Recognition

For Expressive Legacy employees work is about creating something with a lasting value (Erickson & Gratton, 2007). Such employees prefer to have autonomy, entrepreneurial and creative opportunities in their work, and having stimulating tasks that enable continual learning and growth. The work motives of this employee type are likely to reflect a high level of employer independence in their careers. We thus expect that:

Hypothesis 4a. Expressive Legacy employees invest in all three ways of knowing.

For Secure Progress employees work is about improving one's lot in life and finding a predictable path (Erickson & Gratton, 2007). These employees prefer fair and predictable rewards, concrete compensations, solid benefits and retirement package, stability, structure and routine, and career training. This employee type resembles what is stereotypically described as an "organization man" (Whyte, 2002), who willingly subordinates personal goals and desires to conform to the demands of the employer organization. He or she hopes to gain loyalty, security and "belongingness" in exchange. We thus expect that this employee type will not invest in developing an employer independent identity, neither he or she will invest in developing inter- and intra-organizational developmental networks. Such employee is likely to invest in being a good employee that is also to acquire relevant skills for his or her job. Thus we expect that:

Hypothesis 4b. Secure Progress employees invest more in knowing-how.

For Individual Expertise and Team Success employees work is about being a valuable part of a winning team. Such employees seek at work: collaboration, fun, stability and structure, opportunity to gain competence, opportunity to leverage personal strengths. We therefore believe that such employees will be less prompted to develop their personal (professional) identity. Instead, we expect that such employees are likely to invest in developing their expertise, and in business and professional contacts. We therefore expect that:

Hypothesis 4c. Individual Expertise and Team Success employees invest more in knowing-how and knowing-whom.

For Risk and Reward employees work is one of multiple opportunities to live a life filled with change and excitement. Such employees prefer: opportunity to improve personal finances, flexibility, opportunity to choose tasks and positions from a long menu of options, open-ended tasks and approaches to getting work done. This employee type does not seem to be committed to any single employer, but is rather committed to his or her personal aspirations. Such an employee has clarity about why he or she works, although investing in developing skills and networks that may contribute to future employability may not be considered important. Various jobs may be undertaken as long as they contribute to fulfilling personal goals. We therefore expect that:

Hypothesis 4d. Risk and Reward employees invest more in knowing-why.

For Flexible Support employees work is a source of likelihood but not yet (or not currently) a priority. Such employees prefer: flexibility, well-defined vacation and family benefits, well defined work routines- the ability to plug in and out of assignments with ease, virtual, asynchronous tasks and assignments, and fun. Among such employees may be many young parents who take care of young kids and thus cannot due to their personal situations dedicate much time in the development of their careers. Considering that work and career are not among priorities of such employees we expect that Flexible Support employees do not make any significant investments in their career competencies.

Hypothesis 4e. Flexible Support employees do not invest significantly in any of the three ways of knowing.

For Low-Obligation and Low-Income employees work is a source of immediate economic gain. Such employees are attracted by jobs that are relatively easy to come by, well-defined work routines, lucrative compensation and benefits packages, stability and security, recognition. Such employees appear to be less committed to their organizations, neither have they a particular interest in developing independently of their employers. However, to be employed, we expect that this employee type will invest in developing career related (or job finding) contacts. We therefore expect that:

Hypothesis 4f. Low-Obligation and Low-Income employees invest more in knowing-whom.

6. METHODS

To test our hypotheses we sent our online questionnaire to more than twenty different professional services organizations (consulting companies, real estate agencies, etc.) in the Netherlands in the area of Amsterdam. The online questionnaire was opened on the 19th of July 2007 and closed on the 27th of August 2007. Besides the online questionnaire we also used traditional paper questionnaires. About 70% of data came from the online questionnaire and the remaining 30% came from the paper versions. The originally developed questionnaires in English were back-translated and present to the respondents in the Dutch language. The number of organizations involved was 20, the number of responses per organization varied from 5 to 20.

Considering Erickson & Gratton's (2007) about organizational "signature experiences," which attract specific employee type to work in single organizations, we opted for a large number of organizations in our study, so that this signature experience or organizational culture can be neutralized, and provide us a large number of employee types variety. Opting for less

organizations would probably result in an over representation of a certain employee type, thus prohibiting us from testing hypotheses regarding different employee types.

During the data collection period we reached a total of 144 respondents. To analyze some demographics we asked the participants to fill in their gender, age, contract form and finally their highest education followed.

7. MEASUREMENTS

Employee Types were measured by a newly developed questionnaire based on the assumptions behind different employee types described by Erickson and Gratton (2007). The six types: expressive legacy, secure progress, individual expertise and team success, risk and reward, flexible support, and low-obligation and low-income showed Cronbach's alphas of respectively 0.909, 0.873, 0.824, 0.803, 0.712 and 0.846. All items were measured on a 5 point Likert-scale ranging from 1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree.

Individual Career Investment was measured with a three-scale questionnaire developed by Khapova (2006). In this questionnaire, one scale is measuring individual career investments in knowing-why, one is measuring individual career investments in knowing-how and finally one scale is measuring individual career investments in knowing-whom. The knowing-why scale consisting of 12 items showed an alpha of 0.78, knowing-how, with a scale of 12 items, showed an alpha of 0.76 and knowing-whom showed an alpha of 0.80 and consisted of 13 items. Again, all items were measured on a 5 point Likert-scale ranging from 1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree.

Individual Contribution to Organizational Learning was also measured with a three-scale questionnaire developed by Khapova (2006). Like the former measurement instrument, this questionnaire aimed at measuring three aspects; individual contribution to organizational culture (its mission and purpose), individual contribution to organizational capabilities (its embedded skills and knowledge) and individual contribution to knowing-whom (its network of business relations). These scales consisted respectively 7, 9 and 7 items, with alpha's of 0.87, 0.91 and 0.90. Like the former two scales all items were measured on a 5 point Likert-scale ranging from 1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree.

8. RESULTS

The initial data analysis showed that our sample is male dominated: 70.8 % (n=102) of all respondents are male, with only 29.2 % (n=42) female respondents. The age distribution ranged from 18 to 59 years of age with a mean age 34 year old (std. dev.=10.97 years). Of all participants, 73.6 % (n=106) had a full-time contract while 26.4 % (n=38) worked on a part-time contract. Among 144 participants, 24.3 % (n=35) of participants had academic education, 42.4 % (n=61) - higher vocational education, 22.2 % (n=32) – had intermediate vocational education, 10.4 % (n=15) – had secondary education and only 1 participant had lower vocational education.

The correlation analysis shown in Table 2 provides support for Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. That is, we found that:

- (a) the three elements of organizational learning (culture, capabilities and connections) are interrelated

- (b) individual career investments in knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom are interrelated, and
- (c) there is a positive relationship between individual career investments in knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom and organizational learning in terms of culture, capabilities and connections.

These data are self-reported, but reflect responses to separate scales intended to measure separate constructs. They confirm the fundamentals of both the organizational learning and individual learning frameworks introduced earlier. Moreover, they suggest we can put to rest any fear of people investing in their own careers at the expense of their own organizations. Our data strongly suggests that people do not see their own career investments as incompatible with the organization's continuing learning. Rather, there are high correlations between knowing-why and organizational culture (.63), knowing-how and organizational capabilities (.73) and between knowing-whom and organizational connections (.62).

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables (N=144)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1. Expressive Legacy											
2. Secure Progress	.43**										
3. Individual Expertise and Team Success	.55**	.82**									
4. Risk and Reward	.51**	.44**	.50**								
5. Flexible Support	.62**	.53**	.64**	.79**							
6. Low-Obligation and Low-Income	.36**	.77**	.69**	.44**	.55**						
7. Individual Knowing-Why	.45**	.26**	.40**	.55**	.43**	.22**					
8. Individual Knowing-How	.48**	.22**	.47**	.28**	.41**	.19*	.49**				
9. Individual Knowing-Whom	.38**	.13	.29**	.18*	.25**	.06	.31**	.56**			
10. Individual Contribution to Organizational Culture	.38**	.15	.24**	.43**	.23**	.05	.63**	.35**	.29**		
11. Individual Contribution to Organizational Capabilities	.49**	.29**	.47**	.22**	.31**	.24**	.39**	.73**	.49**	.47**	
12. Individual Contribution to Organizational Connections	.35**	.14	.33**	.14	.21*	.04	.29**	.49**	.62**	.36**	.39**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

8.1 Employee Types and Individual Career Investments

In order to test hypotheses 4a-f, we carried our regression analysis for each hypothesis. Multiple regression analysis was adopted to examine how each of the separate employee types related to each way of knowing. Below, we first present each regression table, and then discuss whether our initial hypotheses are supported.

Table 3. Regression analysis of employee types on individual knowing-why

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.27**	.04	
Expressive Legacy	.17**	.07	.23
Secure Progress	-.14	.10	-.18
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.27**	.10	.37
Risk and Reward	.44**	.08	.58
Flexible Support	-.20	.10	-.26
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	-.08	.09	-.10

R² = .39
**p<.01

Table 4. Regression analysis of employee types on individual knowing-how

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.35**	.04	
Expressive Legacy	.19**	.06	.28
Secure Progress	-.30**	.10	-.42
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.47**	.09	.67
Risk and Reward	-.07	.08	-.10
Flexible Support	.11	.09	.16
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	-.07	.08	-.10

R² = .38
**p<.01

Table 5. Regression analysis of employee types on individual knowing-whom

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.27**	.06	
Expressive Legacy	.26**	.09	.30
Secure Progress	-.19	.14	-.21
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.37**	.13	.43
Risk and Reward	-.02**	.11	-.03
Flexible Support	.01	.13	.02
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	-.16	.12	-.18

R² = .20
**p<.01

Hypothesis 4a suggested that Expressive Legacy employees invest in all three ways of knowing. Regression analysis showed that there are significant relationships between this employee type and all three ways of knowing, supporting hypothesis 4a.

Hypothesis 4b suggested that Secure Progress employees invest more in knowing-how. Both correlation and regression analyses confirm a significant relationship between Secure Progress employees and their individual investments in knowing-how. However, regression analysis shows that this relationship is negative. People concerned with secure progress within the organization do not report that their career investments are making a difference to organizational learning. They appear to do what the organization asks, without believing that they contribute to any learning outcomes.

Hypothesis 4c suggested that Individual Expertise and Team Success employees invest more in knowing-how and knowing-whom. Correlation and regression analyses confirmed the hypothesis. Additionally, regression analysis showed that individual expertise and team success employees also invest in developing their knowing-why investments.

Hypothesis 4d suggested that Risk and Reward employees invest more in knowing-why. Regression analysis confirmed this assumption.

Hypothesis 4e suggested that Flexible Support employees do not invest in any of three ways of knowing. Regression analysis confirmed our hypothesis and showed that this employee type makes no significant career investments.

Hypothesis 4f suggested that Low-Obligation and Low-Income employees invest more in knowing-whom. Regression analysis showed that these employee types make no significant career investments, thus supporting our hypothesis.

8.2 Employee Types and their Individual Contribution to Organizational Learning through Individual Career Investments

Next we examine to what extent individual career investments contribute to organizational learning. For this purpose we ran regression analysis on each organizational learning component, considering intervening role of separate individual career investments. Tables 6-8 summarize our findings.

Table 6. Regression analysis of employee types on organizational culture via individual career investments in knowing-why

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.10	.07	
Expressive Legacy	.17**	.09	.18
Secure Progress	.01	.13	.01
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.00	.13	.00
Risk and Reward	.41**	.12	.41

Flexible Support	-.40**	.12	-.41
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	-.18	.11	-.17

R² = .49

**p<.01

Table 7. Regression analysis of employee types on organizational capabilities via individual career investments in knowing-how

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.04	.60	
Expressive Legacy	.18**	.07	.20
Secure Progress	.00	.11	.00
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.15	.11	.16
Risk and Reward	-.01	.10	-.01
Flexible Support	-.19	.11	-.02
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	.05	.09	.05

R² = .39

**p<.01

Table 8. Regression analysis of employee types on organizational connections via individual career investments in knowing-whom

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Constant	.01	.08	
Expressive Legacy	.08	.10	.07
Secure Progress	-.07	.15	-.06
Individual Expertise and Team Success	.34**	.16	.30
Risk and Reward	-.07	.14	-.06
Flexible Support	-.02	.15	-.02
Low-Obligation and Low- Income	-.21	.13	-.17

R² = .39

**p<.01

Regression analysis of employee types on organizational learning components with consideration of relevant individual career investments showed that:

- Only individual career investments in knowing-why made by Expressive Legacy and Risk and Reward employees are significantly related to organizational culture.
- The relationship between Flexible Support employees and organizational culture is negative.
- Only individual career investments in knowing-how made by Expressive Legacy employees were significantly related to organizational capabilities.
- Only the individual career investments in knowing-whom made by Individual Expertise and Team Success employees were significantly related to organizational connections.

9. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide support to our key hypothesis that: by investing in their careers individuals contribute to their organizations in distinct ways which reflect the motivations behind why those individuals work. Across a sample of 144 employees from more than twenty professional service organizations in the Netherlands, we found that only some employee types invest in developing their career competencies, and only a further subset of employee types report that they contribute to organizational learning through their individual career investments. In particular, we found that only Expressive Legacy, Individual Expertise and Team Success, and Risk and Reward employee types invest in individual knowing-why. Expressive Legacy, and Individual Expertise and Team Success employees invest in knowing-how. At the same time the relationship between the Secure Progress employee type and knowing-how is negative, suggesting that Secure Progress employees invest in more employer related skills (rather than employer-independent skills). Expressive Legacy, and Individual Expertise and Team Success employee types invest significantly in knowing-whom. At the same time the relationship between Risk and Reward employee type and knowing-whom is negative suggesting that these employees do not invest in developing career-relevant networks.

We further found that among those who invest in developing their career competencies, only certain employee types report that they contribute to organizational learning. In particular, we found that Expressive Legacy, and Risk and Reward employee types report that their career investments have a significant effect on organizational culture. Flexible Support employee types report that their career investments have a negative effect on organizational culture. Expressive Legacy employee types report that they make a significant contribution to organizational capabilities. Finally, Individual Expertise and Team Success employee types report that they make a significant contribution to organizational connections.

The results of this study offer original findings which have implications for future research on careers and in particular for research on boundaryless careers. The study has also significant implication for the investments in career development made by both individuals and organizations. In the following subsections we discuss these implications.

9.1 Employee Types

To our knowledge, our study offers an original operationalization of Erickson and Gratton's (2007) employee types and examines their distinct contributions to organizational learning. Factor analysis also confirmed the six employee types, thus providing support to the theoretical assumptions of Erickson and Gratton (2007). When relating employee types to their individual career investments, and consequently their contribution to organizational learning, we found that among the six employee types – Expressive Legacy, Secure Progress, Individual Expertise and Team Success, Risk and Reward, Flexible Support, and Low-Obligation and Low-Income – only certain types reported that they made any significant career investments. Moreover, only two employee types - Expressive Legacy, and Individual Expertise and Team Success – reported that they contributed to companies' organizational learning. These findings suggest important implications for future career research and practices. Below we address a few of such implications.

First, there is much bigger variety of career orientations than most recent career studies suggest. Contemporary employees do not only pursue boundaryless or organizational careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Baruch, 2006). There are people for whom work is also about being a valuable part of a winning team (Individual Expertise and Team Success), a source of opportunities to live a life filled with change and excitement (Risk and Reward); a source of likelihood but not yet a priority (Flexible Support), or a source of immediate economic gain (Low Obligation and Low Income type). Considering an increasing focus on the phenomenon of the subjective career this distinction of employee types offers a better understanding of what motivates people at work.

Next our findings draw attention to the Expressive Legacy employee type. Expressive Legacy employees are described as employees for whom “work is about creating something with lasting value”, and who are appealed by autonomy, entrepreneurial opportunities, creative opportunities, and stimulating tasks that enable continual learning and growth (Erickson & Gratton, 2007). The description of this employee type is close to what describes the “boundaryless employee” who pursues a more employer-independent career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Our finding is that the Expressive Legacy employee type not only reports making employer-independent career investments, but also reports making a relevant contribution to organizational learning.

Our findings about organizational contributions by the individual employee types also make important contribution to the practice of career management by individuals and organizations. For individuals, our findings clarify the consequences of individual work motives for organizations, and thus suggest possible limitations of some of the motivations for employees’ future employability. The measurement instrument we developed to measure individual employee types can offer organizations a useful coaching tool to identify and address employees’ individual motivations considering the consequent implications individual motivations have for organizations in general. Organizations can use our measurement tool that typifies employees according to their work motives to measure which employee types prevail in their organizations, and what factors need to be addressed to engage their employees.

9.2 Individual Career Investments

Several findings in this study with respect to the individual career investments are important for future research. First, the study supported earlier evidence (Eby et al, 2003) that three ways of knowing are interrelated. This means that investing in one way of knowing can provide extra resources that contribute to the development of other ways of knowing. For example, a colleague or mentor (knowing-whom) may affect one’s career choice (knowing-why). Or, a person pursuing a course of study (knowing-how) may become connected to new personal and professional relationships.

Our study also showed that each of the employee types is associated with a distinct combination of career investments, and also that not all employee types of employees invest in developing their career competencies. This finding suggests that organizations learn through the collective individual learning of employees, although contributions of single employees to organizational learning depend on the meaning employees ascribe to their work.

9.3 Organizational Learning

Several findings in this study with respect to organizational learning are important for future research. First, this study provides evidence of the interrelation between organizational culture, capabilities and connections (DeFillippi, Arthur & Lindsey, 2006). Correlation analysis showed that all three elements of organizational learning are significantly correlated. These findings confirm DeFillippi et al's (2006) assertion that an organization's culture and capabilities each have an effect on the other, that capabilities and connections each have an effect on the other, and finally that connections and culture each have an effect on the other.

Next, this study provides evidence that individual career investments are significantly related to organizational culture, capabilities and connections. Thus, individual investments in knowing-why relate to organizational culture. Individual investments in knowing-how relate to organizational capabilities. Moreover, individual investments in knowing-whom relate to organizational connections. This finding offers direct support to the concept of career enactment, inasmuch as it suggests that through the development of their careers individuals contribute to shaping the larger structure of their employer organizations, and perhaps of society at large.

Finally, the study offered evidence that individual career investments and organizational learning elements are interrelated, and that some types of employees make significant contributions to organizational learning through their career investments. That is, we found support for our key hypothesis that individuals contribute to their organizations in distinct ways through the career investments that they make, as reflected in their career motivations, that is in "why" they work.

9.4 Research Limitations

This research examined the original topic and tested an original set of hypothesis, and therefore offering valuable findings for career studies. However, like any research, our study is constrained by some limitations. First our sample included more than 70 percent males. Therefore, our findings may be affected by how male employees invest in their careers, and what work means to them. The sample was also limited to the Dutch nationals, since the companies, which participated in the research, were all Dutch. Moreover, our sample consisted of professional service organizations, and thus may imply that the findings cannot be generalized to public sector. Next, translation and back-translation of the originally English questionnaire may have harmed some of the meanings in items. Finally, our entire questionnaire was made up of self-reported 5-point Likert scales. This approach often creates bias in response, offering higher scores than they would be otherwise evaluated by others.

10. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the data from 144 employees from professional service organizations in the Netherlands showed that separate employee types make distinct career investments and consequently provide different value to organizational learning. In particular, we found that Expressive Legacy, and Individual Expertise and Team Success employees invest in all three ways of knowing. Risk and Reward employee type invests in knowing-why. At the same time,

we found that Flexible Support and Low-Obligation and Low-Income employees do not make any significant career investment in any of the three ways of knowing. This is probably caused by the fact that this employee type considers work primarily just as a source of economic gain, and therefore is not really committed to the job (Erickson and Gratton, 2007).

We also found support for the hypothesized relationship between individual career investments and organizational learning, albeit that certain employee types' career investments do not predict organizational learning. Individual career investments in knowing-why were found to be related significantly to organizational culture. Individual career investments in knowing-how were found to be significantly related to organizational capabilities. Finally, individual career investments in knowing-whom were found to be significantly related to the organization's network of connections.

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