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**THE ROLE OF CAREER-SELF-MANAGEMENT  
IN DETERMINING EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS  
AND EVALUATIONS OF THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT  
AND THEIR ESTEEMED VALUE OF  
CAREER ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE ORGANIZATION**

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## ABSTRACT

The development of a career is subject to an interaction and exchange process between employer and employee. In addition, the changing nature and meaning of a career in today's competitive labor market has stimulated researchers to relate this with the psychological contract theory (e.g. Herriot, 1998; Sparrow & Cooper, 1998). However, the research domain of career self-management and the potential influence on the perception and evaluation of the psychological contract and on career activities offered by the organization in particular, has not been explicitly explored yet. Studies of Kossek *et al.* (1998) and Sturges *et al.* (2000) show that employees who actively manage their own career, hold higher expectations towards their employer, since they develop a clear idea on what their career objectives are and on how they want to achieve them. Hence, hypotheses are formulated that address the relationship between career self-management and (1) the perception and evaluation of the psychological contract, (2) the esteemed value and perception of career activities offered by the employer. To test our hypotheses, a cross-sectional survey among 491 employees of six Belgian organizations has been conducted.

Our results suggest that the extent to which employees manage their own career has a significant impact on (1) the perception and evaluation of promises exchanged with their employer and (2) the importance they attach to career activities and the evaluation they make of the career activities offered by the company. First, employees who actively manage their own career, believe their employer has made more promises to them relating to different content domains of the psychological contract. Secondly, employees who actively manage their own career, are more positive on the fulfillment of their psychological contract. More specifically, this conclusion can be applied to the two dimensions of the psychological contract that are job-related, i.e. career development opportunities, job content. Thirdly, employees who actively manage their own career, attach more importance to the career activities offered by the company. In particular those career activities that consist of real guidance and steering from the organization. Furthermore, these employees also evaluate the provision of career management practices in the organization more positively. Our findings are discussed in view of the literature on career self-management and psychological contracts and they add new important insights.

## INTRODUCTION

The evaluations employees make of organizational career management practices are a major determinant of important work-related attitudes and behaviors like satisfaction, commitment and intention to stay. Yet, in today's organizations making a promotion is not a given for each employee. Over the past decades, opportunities for career development have become a domain of interest that covers a whole spectrum of varied approaches. While in some traditional and large organizations career development is still a synonym for making hierarchical promotions, in other organizations it means that employees can move laterally, or even that they can develop their competencies such that they increase their chances on the external labor market. This wide variety of meanings of "career development" has increased the risk of discrepancies between employees' and employers' views as to what career development opportunities within their organization specifically entail. In turn, this has increased feelings of unmet expectations or broken promises when employees are faced with the reality of the career management practices in their organization. This has led to an increased experience of psychological contract violations among many employees (Herriot, 1998; Sparrow & Cooper, 1998; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). In view of this evidence it is important for employers and for researchers to obtain a better understanding of those factors that contribute to a mutually shared view with their employees regarding the career development opportunities offered by the organization.

The development of a career is subject to an interaction and exchange process between employer and employee (Herriot, 1998; Herriot & Pemberton, 1996). This makes it relevant to study employees' perceptions and attitudes towards career management practices from a psychological contract perspective. Psychological contracts consist of individuals' beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of the exchange agreement between themselves and their organizations (Rousseau, 1989). They refer to the way the employment contract is interpreted, understood and enacted by employees at the interface between themselves and their employing organization (Millward & Brewerton, 1999). Psychological contracts emerge when individuals believe that their organization has promised to provide them with certain rewards in return for the contributions that they make to the organization (Turnley & Feldman, 2000).

Prior studies within the field of career management and psychological contracts have shown that both organizational and individual factors affect employees' views and evaluations of the career management practices offered to them as part of their employment deal (e.g. Martin, Staines & Pate, 1998; Sparrow, 1996). On the one hand, studies have shown that

organizations who develop an adequate policy for actively managing the careers of their employees in order to meet their expectations, increase amongst others the commitment and performance of their employees (Noe, 1996). By providing sufficient and accurate information on career opportunities in the organization, by clearly clarifying and recognizing one's career objectives and by developing strategies to ensure the accomplishment of these objectives, career management can be concretized. On the other hand, studies suggest that individual factors like work values, careerism or preferred career path also play a role. As well the individual employee as the employer is hence responsible for career management in the organization (Orpen, 1994). Orpen (1984) in this context traditionally defines 'organizational career management' and 'individual career management', the latter referring to the personal efforts an individual makes to accomplish its career objectives. The initiatives of both individual and organization should be sufficiently aligned.

However, there is still a great deal that needs to be learned about how employees come to develop their expectations about the career development opportunities offered by their employers. Therefore it is the objective of this study to contribute to our understanding of the factors affecting employees' expectations towards career management practices as part of their psychological contract.

One type of individual-level variables that is considered as important in affecting employee attitudes and behaviors in the workplace is employee proactivity. This refers to the personal actions employees take in order to manage their behavior within the work setting. In this respect, career self- management is used as a term to refer to employees' actions relating to their career development opportunities within and outside the organization (Kossek *et al.*, 1998; Orpen, 1994). In this study we focus on career self-management as the central variable. We address the relationship between career self-management and (1) employees' perceptions and evaluations of their psychological contracts, and (2) employees' perceptions and evaluations of the career management practices employed by their organization.

## **THEORY**

### **Individual proactivity in the workplace**

Researchers generally agree that individual characteristics affect employees' attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. On the one hand these individual characteristics can refer to *what* employees value and *what* they want to attain during their career. Examples of such variables are work values, careerism, preferred career path (e.g. Chang, 1999; Driver, 1994;

Larwood, Wright, Desrochers & Dahir, 1998; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1990; Sparrow, 1996). On the other hand these individual characteristics refer to more general personality characteristics which affect *how* employees interact with their environment and *how* they adapt themselves to this environment. Examples are locus of control, self-confidence, self-efficacy (e.g Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Bono & Locke, 2000; Judge & Larsen, 2001). Both types of characteristics are assumed to affect employees' orientation towards and their behavior within the employment relationship.

In addition to these more stable individual characteristics, another individual-level characteristic that also receives attention as an antecedent of employee attitudes and behaviors is employee proactivity. This variable refers to the proactive role of employees in the workplace (e.g Louis, 1980). This variable receives substantial attention within the socialization literature. Socialization researchers no longer consider newcomers as passive participants to the socialization process, but instead as participants who actively participate in the process of adjusting themselves to their new work environment (e.g. Chan & Schmitt, 2000; Louis, 1980; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Empirical studies on socialization show that newcomer proactivity positively affects newcomers' performance and commitment and that it reduces role ambiguity, anxiety, intentions to leave and actual turnover (e.g. Ashford, 1986; Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Morrison, 1993a; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In addition, the results obtained by Chan & Schmitt (2000) & Morrison (1993a) suggest that newcomer proactivity has a positive impact on the newcomer's task mastery, role clarity and social integration. Recently this finding has also been applied to newcomers' perceptions and evaluations of their psychological contract (De Vos & Buyens, 2002). The results of this study show that newcomers who more proactively search for information about their psychological contract are more likely to believe that employer promises are being fulfilled and they generally have more positive attitudes towards their employment relationship. More specifically this relationship was significant for information seeking about the provision of employer inducements relating to career development opportunities, job content and social atmosphere. Together these findings suggest that employees' proactive behaviors during the socialization process enhance their adjustment to the organization.

## **Career self-management**

Career self-management refers to the proactivity employees show with respect to managing their own careers. Orpen (1994) defines career self-management as employees' personal efforts to realize their personal career objectives, that can or cannot correspond with the organizational objectives. Kossek *et al.* (1998) define career self-management as the extent to which an employee collects information about existing or possible career opportunities, solves career issues and takes career decisions. The construct as such is based on literature dealing with career exploration (e.g. Stumpf, Colarelli & Hartman, 1983) and dealing with an individual's perspective on career management (Hall, 1986). Kossek *et al.* (1998) state that employees involved in self-initiated career activities are anticipating opportunities for change in general and more particularly for changes in employment.

As a result of recent changes in the employment relationship between employee and employer and due to the fact that employees hold higher responsibilities for the development of their own careers, the concept of career self-management receives more attention in the literature (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Kossek *et al.* (1998) distinguish between two major categories of behavior as part of career self-management: the first category consists of behavior related to seeking feedback on the development of the own career and the second category consists of behavior reflecting a willingness to change jobs. Comparable to this interpretation, Orpen (1994) also deduces two dimensions in this concept: individual planning and individual tactics. The first dimension refers to the extent to which an employee seeks additional feedback on his performance and additional information on his current shortcomings to further develop his career. In this way, an individual can make a realistic self-assessment of the own talents, capabilities and hence career plans. The second dimension refers to the extent to which an employee looks out for internal vacancies, external career opportunities and the extent to which he is ready to face these internal or external career opportunities. Sturges *et al.* (2000) also investigated the construct of career self-management and concluded that four dimensions cover the concept. First, 'networking' refers to activities such as developing an extended network of professional connections, taking initiative to get introduced to persons of influence and trying to be involved in projects with high profile. Secondly, 'mobility' refers to behavior that aims at creating a positive atmosphere around a potential leaving of the company, if that would do any good for the career. A third dimension focusses on initiatives that bring the own performances to the notice of others in the company.

And the last dimension comprises practical activities in career development such as keeping the curriculum vitae up-to-date, reading relevant specialist journals, etc.

The four dimensions of career self-management that are used in our study are based on Noe's study of the concept (1996) and partly overlap with the previous dimensions of Sturges *et al.* (2000). Nonetheless, they still differ in some aspects. Noe's first dimension covers behavior that creates career opportunities for the individual and refers to the extent to which an employee takes risk to explore unknown professional domains and acquires new skills and capabilities. The second dimension 'self-nomination' refers to efforts to emphasize the own results and performances to colleagues and superiors and to clearly state the career ambitions and – needs. The third dimension has to do with the extent to which an employee wants to be coached where career development is concerned. An employee looking for career support consults colleagues and superiors for career advice in order to take the right career move. 'Networking' as fourth dimension refers, as is the case for Sturges *et al.* (2000), to the development of an extended network of professional connections useful with respect to potential career moves.

One of the consequences of the changing nature of careers is an increased emphasis on individual responsibility for career management (e.g. Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999; Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; King, 2003). Since organization-based careers become less common, employees are supposed to take initiatives on their own to manage their careers. The more relevant information employees collect within their organization, the more realistic their notion of possible career possibilities will be and hence the more probable that their expectations on career management will match to reality.

Researchers on career self-management argue that people manage their careers by promoting themselves for career-enhancing opportunities in the organization and in networking, in order to become visible for seniors (Claes & Ruis-Quintanilla, 1998; Feij, Whitely, Peiro & Taris, 1995).

Studies in which career self-management was the subject suggest that career self-management induces higher expectations towards the career policies of the organization (Kossek *et al.*, 1998). Sturges, Guest & MacKenzie Davey (2000) concluded that career self-management negatively influences the commitment to the organization. These conclusions contrast with effects of career management by the organization that positively influences the commitment to the organization (Sturges *et al.*, 2000).



## HYPOTHESES

Given the results of previous studies, the concept of career self-management as antecedent of the psychological contract and the different types of employer inducements in the context of the psychological contract, needs more investigation. Specifically the perception and evaluation of career activities will be further researched.

Relationship between career self-management and employees' perceptions of their psychological contract and of organizational career management practices

Based upon the evidence for the relationship between career self-management and employees' expectations towards employer inducements (Kossek *et al.*, 1998; Sturges *et al.*, 2000) we expect that career self-management will be related to employees' psychological contracts. The attempts and steps they take to manage their careers, provides them with a very strong idea on what they want to achieve and how they want to achieve their career aspirations. Therefore it is expected that they will have higher expectations and will perceive more promises explicitly or implicitly made by the organization in terms of the psychological contract.

*Hypothesis 1: The higher the level of career self-management, the higher the level of perceived promises about organizational inducements*

We also expect career self-management to be related to employees' perceptions of career management opportunities offered by their employer. First, we expect that employees who show higher levels of career self-management will attach more importance to their employers' career management practices. This could be explained from an exchange relationship: employees who put a lot of effort and time to manage their careers, will also attach more importance to the fact whether or not the company is offering career management practices, that they can consequently further use to manage their careers.

*Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of career self-management, the more importance employees attach to organizational career management practices.*

Relationship between career self-management and employees' evaluations of their psychological contract and of organizational career management practices

Research on the concept of career self-management is still in its early stages. Results of previous research on career self-management did not focus unequivocally on the influence that career self-management can have on employees' evaluations of the explicit or implicit organizational inducements on the one hand and on the employees' perceptions of career management activities offered by the organization on the other hand. We expect that employees that take a lot of initiative to manage their careers, will be offered more possibilities and will be made more promises concerning all content dimensions of the psychological contract, as well in terms of job content, career development, financial rewards, personal support, respect for private life and social atmosphere.

*Hypothesis 3: The higher the level of career self-management, the higher the level of perceived fulfillment of promises about organizational inducements*

Sturges et. al (2000) deduce from their study that the relationship between career self-management and the employees' perception on the provision of organizational career management activities differs in function of the different subdimensions of career self-management and in function of organizational management in general. The authors discovered a positive correlation between networking and making known the own performances on the one hand and the perception of formal career management activities offered by the organization on the other hand. Conversely, they found a negative relation between the subdimension of career self-management referring to mobility and the perception of formal career management activities. Our hypothesis states that career self-management is positively correlated with the perception of employees on the provision of organizational career management practices. For employees actively managing their own careers, there is a higher chance that their initiatives will be noticed by the organization; they will hence receive more possibilities and more support by the organization to develop their careers.

*Hypothesis 4: The higher the level of career self-management, the more positive employees are about the provision of organizational career management practices*

## METHOD

### Sample and procedure

The respondent population for this study consisted of 809 employees from six large organizations located in Belgium. Of these, 491 employees were found willing to participate in the survey (i.e. 61% response rate). Respondents' mean age was 33.30 years and 58.2% of them were female. Within each organization, the respondent group belonged to one functional category of employees in order to enhance comparability of career management practices offered to these employees within each organization. The organizations have been selected according to the 'purposive sampling' technique of Cook & Campbell (1979) and differ in terms of size, industry, presence of unions, internal labor market mechanisms and the organizational culture (cfr. dimensions of Baruch & Peiperl, 2000, to differ organizations). Also, there was diversity between organizations in terms of target groups (engineers working in R&D, customer service employees, consultants, nurses). To ensure homogeneity of respondents that experience the same organizational career activities, employees within each organization all performed the same job. Since previous studies on HR practices, including career management practices, show that these practices are elaborated in function of the strategic importance of the target group of employees (Baron *et. al*, 1986; Sonnenfeld & Peiperl, 1988). By selecting a well-defined category of employees in each organization, it is possible to keep their perspectives on the organizational psychological contract and on career management practices steady.

After approval from the HR-directors in these organizations, employees were invited to participate in the survey by answering a number of questions about their own initiatives relating to their career management, about their psychological contract with the organization, and about the organizational career management practices.

### Measures

#### Career self-management

Career self-management is defined as the extent to which an employee actively takes initiatives to develop his career. The items that were used to make the construct operational are derived from Noe's (1996) scale consisting of four subscales: (1) creating career opportunities, (2) self-nomination, (3) networking and (4) career support. Since a factor analysis did not give clear evidence to distinguish between these four dimensions sufficiently,

we will conduct our analyses with a total scale as indicator for career self-management. As in Noe's (1996) research, a 5-point Likert scale was used. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent their organization is offering a spectrum of career management activities and could answer ranging from 'not at all', 'rather not', 'a little bit', 'to a certain extent' to 'to a very large extent'.

### **Psychological contract perceptions and evaluations**

Consistent with prior research in psychological contracts, we believe that promissory beliefs are made up of several content areas. Based on a review of psychological contract measurements (e.g. Freese & Schalk, 1999; Herriot *et al.*, 1997; Rousseau, 1998) six different content areas were captured, namely social atmosphere, opportunities for career development, job content, financial rewards, personal support and respect for private life.

Commensurate measures were used for assessing perceived employer promises and evaluations of promise fulfillment. More specifically 25 items were used tapping six content dimensions of the psychological contract. These items and the content dimensions to which they refer were selected based upon previous work by Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler (1998; 2000), Freese & Schalk (1996), Guest & Conway (1997; 1998), Herriot *et al.* (1997), and Rousseau (1990; 1998). Job content refers to the feeling of responsibility and ownership in the job, the possibility to take decisions on your own and the opportunity to apply skills and capabilities. It deals with providing challenging, varied and interesting work. Career development encompasses the possibility to be promoted, to deploy oneself and to grow in one way or the other within the organization. It hence deals with providing opportunities for promotion and development within the organization and the field of work. Social atmosphere refers to the relationships with colleagues and the extent to which colleagues cooperate and pull together. It encompasses the provision of a pleasant and cooperative work environment. Financial rewards is more than the pure increases in salary, it also refers to the kind of achievements that are rewarded and to other benefits and compensations. It refers to the provision of appropriate rewards. Personal support has to do with support by peers and superiors, follow-up of performance, the possibility to get advice, possibilities for training and development, hence with supportive human resource management procedures. Finally, work-life balance is about respect for the private situation of an employee, such as receiving flexibility to gear the private and professional life of an employee, showing respect and understanding for an employee's personal situation.

Perceived employer promises. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which their employer had made promises to them – implicitly or explicitly – at the moment they were hired about each of the 25 inducements listed. Answers were given on a five-point scale ranging from ‘not promised at all’ to ‘promised to a very great extent’.

Perceived fulfillment of employer promises. This was measured by asking participants to indicate the extent to which they believe their organization fulfills its initial promises using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘promise not at all fulfilled’ to ‘promise exceeded’.

As well the perceived employer promises as the perceived fulfillment of employer promises were measured with respect to the different content dimensions of the psychological contract construct. We did not ask for a global evaluation as this is most common in previous research (e.g. Guest *et al.*, 1999, Guzzo *et al.*, 1994), but reproduce Turnley & Feldman (1998, 1999, 2000) by asking the respondent to indicate for each item to which extent they can conclude that a promise is fulfilled by the organization.

### **Importance and evaluation of organizational career management practices**

Few scales are available in the literature to measure career management practices. Studies dealing with perception and evaluation of career management activities offered by organizations are rather scarce. In this study, we used Baruch & Peiperl’s (2000) measurement instrument since they based their selection of items on the items of Gutteridge *et al.* (1993). Baruch & Peiperl’s (2000) list of items consists of 17 possible career management activities an organization can offer to its employees. Since the reliabilities of the different subdimensions are rather low, we added some additional items from studies of Gutteridge *et al.* (1993) and Sturges *et al.* (2000).

Importance of organizational career management practices. Respondents were asked to indicate for each kind of career management activity to which extent it is important for them that this activity is offered by the organization. Again we used a 5-point Likert scale in which the answers ranged from ‘not important’ to ‘very important’.

Evaluation of organizational career management practices. Here respondents were asked to which extent they can confirm that the organization is actually offering these career management activities and to which extent this satisfies them. The 5-point Likert scale ranged from ‘not at all’ to ‘definitely’.

A factor analysis on the items for career management activities reveals three main components, that are closely related to Orpen's (1994) three components of active planning and procedures, active development and providing information on career opportunities. The total list of items hence encompasses three main components of career management activities. First, planning and support of career development from an organizational point of view, fulfilling merely the organizational needs. These items refer to the practices that the organization initiates to meet the organizational objectives, formal or institutionalized procedures that aim at aligning an employee's potential to the organization's objectives (e.g. introduction activities, job rotation, follow-up meetings with supervisors). Second, planning and support of career development from an individual's point of view, fulfilling the needs of an individual employee. These items refer to activities offered by the organization but are mainly aiming at helping the employee to achieve his personal career ambitions (e.g. workshops on career opportunities, mentoring, follow-up of growth potential by the employee). And third, career support by which the organization offers some career development opportunities by e.g. announcing internal vacancies, financially supporting training and development. The initiative though is taken by the individual employee. In the analyses a total score for importance and evaluation of organizational career management practices is used.

### **Control variables**

In the data analyses, several additional variables were controlled for in order to rule out alternative explanations for the findings. Specifically the number of years of work experience was controlled for because this variable might influence both the independent and the dependent variables. Also, age (years) and internal labor mobility (number of internal job rotations or promotions) were entered into the regression equations as control variables since there were demographic differences across samples.

### **Analyses**

In order to examine the proposed relationships, hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. In step 1, all control variables were entered in the equation. In step 2, we entered the career self-management variable. In total, 14 sets of regressions were conducted to assess the relationship between career self-management and the perception and

evaluation of promises relating to the 6 content dimensions of the psychological contract and the importance and evaluation of career management practices.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between all the variables included in the study. In our sample, the average age of the respondent is 33,30 years, the average number of years working experience is 9,44 and the average number of internal job rotations or promotions is 1,17 (internal labor mobility). In general, participants have the strongest promissory beliefs with respect to the employer obligation to provide interesting work (perceived promise job content, mean = 3,11), while the perception of promised financial rewards has the weakest score (perceived promise financial rewards = 2,26). When the evaluation of promises is concerned, the promise of social atmosphere has the highest score (mean = 3,25) and the promise of financial rewards has the lowest score (mean = 2,45). The average respondent in our study has an average score of 2,81 on career self-management. The esteemed value of career management activities of the company has an average score of 2,87, the evaluation of the career management activities ends up with an average score of 2,57.

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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The results for the validity of the constructs in our study, show that for the perceived promises in the psychological contracts, the  $\alpha$ 's range from .89 for the perceived promises on career development to .77 for the perceived promises on personal support. The construct validity for the evaluation of the promises in the psychological contract range from .90 for the evaluation of the promises on social atmosphere to .72 for the evaluation of the promises on personal support. Overall, our measurement instrument provides us with internal consistences of at least .77. This confirms the results of previous studies in which the measurement instrument focussing on different dimensions of the psychological contract always led to internal consistences of at least .70 (De Vos, Buyens & Schalk, 2001a; 2001b). Career self-management has a scale-validity of .88. We used Noe's (1996) scale and factors, but we eliminated those items that were found to reduce the alpha coefficients of the factors.

As indicated earlier, literature only provides few instruments to measure career management practices. We used Baruch & Peiperl's (2000) list of 17 career activities. The  $\alpha$ 's

vary from .57 to .70 which is rather low. To compensate for low  $\alpha$ 's, some extra items were added defining other aspects of career activities. They are part of previous studies of e.g. Leibowitz *et al.* (1993) and Sturges *et al.* (2000). In our study, reliabilities on the scales proposed by Baruch & Peiperl (2000) remained low. A principal-components analysis of career activities revealed three factors mainly comparable to Orpen's (1994) three components. From the principal-components analysis, we stated that three items showed an  $\alpha$  lower than .40 on their primary factor and showed no theoretical meaningfulness. These two items were hence deleted in further analyses. 23 Out of the original 25 items were retained in the analyses, resulting in an  $\alpha$  of .62 for the overall importance of career management practices offered by the organization and an  $\alpha$  of .55 on the evaluation of career management practices.

### **Relationship between career self-management and employees' perceptions of their psychological contract and of organizational career management practices**

In order to investigate the relationship between the antecedent variable and the perceived content of promise-based employer inducements and between the importance of organizational career management practices, hierarchical regression analyses were used. The results are represented in Table 2 and Table 4.

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Insert Table 2 & 4 About Here

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Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a relationship between career self-management and the level of perceived promises about organizational inducements etailed in his or her psychological contract. As shown in Table 2, career self-management was significantly and positively related with the employer inducements on career development ( $\beta=.32$ ;  $p < .01$ ), on job content ( $\beta=.32$ ;  $p < .01$ ), on social atmosphere ( $\beta=.17$ ;  $p < .01$ ), on personal support ( $\beta=.15$ ;  $p < .01$ ), on financial rewards ( $\beta=.19$ ;  $p < .01$ ) and on work-life balance ( $\beta=.17$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Career self-management is hence a significant predictor of the mean score on all six components of perceived organizational inducements. Our first hypothesis regarding the relationship between career self-management and the perceived organizational inducements was confirmed.



Also hypothesis 2 was confirmed by the data. Career self-management is significantly and positively related to the importance that the employee attaches to organizational career management practices ( $\beta=.27$ ;  $p < .01$ ). As proposed in our hypothesis an employee that actively manages its own career, attaches more importance to career management activities offered by his or her organization. The esteemed value of career management practices is higher.

### **Relationship between career self-management and employees' evaluations of their psychological contract and of organizational career management practices**

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the level of career self-management would be positively related to the level of perceived fulfillment of promises about organizational inducements. As shown in Table 3, this hypothesis was not confirmed for all six kinds of organizational inducements. First, career self-management is positively related to the evaluation of the employer inducement with respect to career development, referring to the extent to which the employer provides opportunities for promotion and development within the organization or field of work ( $\beta=.23$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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Secondly, career self-management is positively related to the evaluation of the employer inducement with respect to job content, referring to the employer obligation to provide challenging, varied and interesting work ( $\beta=.17$ ;  $p < .01$ ). And thirdly, there is a positive relation between career self-management and the employer inducement of a pleasant and cooperative work environment (social atmosphere,  $\beta=.14$ ;  $p < .01$ ). The proposed relationships between career self-management and the evaluation of employer inducements with respect to personal support, financial rewards and work-life balance are not significant. The predictor of career self-management explains only six percent of variance in case of personal support ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .06$ ), only five percent of variance in case of financial rewards ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .05$ ) and only twelve percent in case of work-life balance ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = .12$ ). Important conclusion though is that an employee that actively manages its own career, has a more positive evaluation on the fulfillment of employer inducements with respect to career development, job content and social atmosphere.

Not only the evaluations of the employer inducements with respect to career development, job content and social atmosphere are positively related with career self-management. As hypothesis 4 suggested and as shown in Table 4, the level of career self-management is also positively related with the evaluation about the provision of organizational career management practices ( $\beta=.33$ ;  $p < .01$ ). A significant relationship was found between career self-management and the evaluation of career management practices. An employee actively managing the own career, more positively evaluates the provision of career management practices in the company. This may indicate that employees explicitly giving proof of initiative to manage the own career, get rewarded by the company by being offered more career management opportunities.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examined the relationship between the concept of career self-management and the perception and evaluation of promissory beliefs entailed in employees' psychological contracts on the one hand and the esteemed value and evaluation of organizational management practices on the other hand. Departing from the conceptualization of career self-management as the extent to which employees take individual initiative to manage their career and the psychological contract as subjects' mental model of the terms of their employment relationship, we first proposed that career self-management would influence the extent to which employees would perceive that promises were made when being hired and would influence the extent to which employees would evaluate to which extent these promises are fulfilled. Secondly, we proposed that career self-management would influence the importance or esteemed value of career activities offered by the company and the evaluation an employee makes of the career management activities offered by the organization. We hence investigated career self-management as predictor of individuals' perceptions of psychological contract inducements and individuals' evaluations of psychological contract fulfillment. We also investigated career self-management as predictor of individuals' esteemed value and evaluations of career management practices. Previous studies demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between career self-management and the expectations with regard to organizational career management (Sturges et. al, 1999). It was our objective to extend these findings with regard to the perceptive and evaluative facet of the psychological contract (i.e. its perceived fulfillment) and to add new insights in terms of importance and evaluation of career activities offered by the company.

Our results show that career self-management has significant predictive value when perception and evaluation of most dimensions of the psychological contract are concerned, as well as when importance and evaluation of career activities is concerned. Employees that actively manage their own career by individual initiative, in global perceive more promises made by the organization at the moment they are hired, and this on all six content dimensions of the psychological contract. Employees that actively manage their own career by individual initiative, also perceive more fulfillment of the inducements entailed in the psychological contract with respect to career development, job content and social atmosphere. Besides that, career self-management positively influences the importance employees attach to the presence of career management practices in the organization and also influences the evaluation these employees will have on the presence of these practices.

There is no previous research in which the relationship between career self-management and the psychological contract has been examined. Therefore, our study adds value to existing literature in two ways. In the first place, our results widen the existing relationship between career self-management and expectations vis-à-vis organizational career management, as was suggested by Sturges *et al.* (1999), to a broader relationship with the psychological contract. Employees taking own responsibility for their careers, expect from their organization an active contribution as well, not only when their careers are involved, but also for other domains of their psychological contracts, such as job content. In the second place, our results provide further confirmation for the conceptualization of the psychological contract as a construct of exchange between employer and employee (Rousseau, 1995). Earlier research has pointed out that employees attune their contributions to the organization to what they get in return by the organization (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2001b; 2001c). When career self-management is regarded, one does not explicitly consider the employees' contributions towards the organization, but rather contributions to the development of the own career. But also here we notice an exchange relationship between employer and employee: employees making individual efforts to develop the own career, expect something in return from the organization. The overall image an employee has on the development of his own career, hence influences his perception with regard to the different dimensions of the psychological contract.

The overall positive influence that career self-management has on the evaluation of promises in the psychological contract (more specifically those that relate to career development and job content) and the evaluation of career management practices in the organization, allows to conclude that employees that initiate own efforts to manage their

careers, not only expect more from the organization, but also receive more from the organization. Or at least have a more positive view on what the organization is offering them.

### **Limitations**

First, we only investigated the perceptions and evaluations of employees. Since the psychological contract is an exchange construct between employee and employer, our results do not allow to draw conclusions from an organizational point of view. Secondly, a longitudinal study is required to provide a more complete insight in the individual components of the psychological contract, in which the measurement of the antecedent of career self-management is organized on another moment in time than the measurement of the psychological contract itself. The use of cross-sectional research does not allow to draw conclusions on potential causal relationships between career self-management and the psychological contract. Thirdly, although we used existing measurement instruments, the measurement instrument of career management activities needs further investigation in order to increase the validity of the different components in the construct of career management activities.

### **Implications and directions for future research**

A first methodological implication is deduced from the results in our study. The results show that it can be relevant to distinguish between different content dimensions of the psychological contract. A multi-dimensional perspective on the psychological contract, allows to differentiate conclusions between antecedents and the psychological contract, allowing to indicate the relative importance of the conclusions on the different content dimensions of the psychological contract. Furthermore, our study adds value by not only measuring the psychological contract with its different components, but by also measuring the importance and evaluation of career management activities in particular. In this way, research on both topics are integrated in one study, which allowed us to draw comparative conclusions.

Besides methodological implications, our study has a number of practical implications. The findings suggest that employers should attempt to estimate the level of career self-management an employee strives for and to what extent a new hire values the importance of career management activities. First, a new hire that has a history of high-level career self-management and that wishes to continue this development in career-path, will hold higher expectations on all content dimensions of the psychological contract. In order to avoid

psychological contract breach, more attention will have to be paid to the fulfillment of this employee's expectations, not only with regard to career development, but also with regard to job content. Second, depending on the level of career self-management, an employee will attach more importance to the provision of career management activities. Again, a company will have to differentiate its career management practices, in order to fulfill the needs of those employees that express the highest need (expressing them by taking individual initiative to manage the career). Organizations will have to establish differentiated career development paths, answering the varied needs of career management activities among employees. Those employees showing that they often take own initiative to manage their career, will expect extra impulses from their employer, supporting their career development. Thirdly, our results suggest that organizational practices indeed focus on this positive relationship. Since employees with high levels of career self-management have more positive evaluations of the career management practices offered by the company and have more positive evaluations of fulfillment of the psychological contract in terms of career development, job content and social atmosphere, they will most probably be confronted with more efforts from their employer to offer them more access to career management practices and to more interesting work experiences.

Given that the psychological contract is an individual level construct and given its perceptual and idiosyncratic nature, it is necessary to more fully explore what factors differentiate how employees view the terms of their psychological contract and evaluate it.

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**TABLE 1 :**

**Means, Standarddeviations and intercorrelations between variables included in the study, Alpha-coefficients**

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
1. Age	33,80	7,79																			
2. Years Experience	9,44	8,25	.79**																		
3. Internal labor mobility	1,17	1,06	.22**	.21**																	
4. Career Self-management	2,81	,70	-.23**	-.27**	.25**	<b>0,88</b>															
5. Perception promise career development	2,84	1,18	-.31**	-.39**	.22**	.46**	<b>.89</b>														
6. Perception promise job content	3,11	,99	-.37**	-.46**	.02	.42**	.67**	<b>.80</b>													
7. Perception promise social atmosphere	3,01	1,09	-.25**	-.25**	-.03	.22**	.43**	.59**	<b>.89</b>												
8. Perception promise personal support	2,99	.94	-.30**	-.39**	.15**	.31**	.62**	.60**	.54**	<b>.77</b>											
9. Perception promise financial rewards	2,26	1,07	-.25**	-.36**	.18**	.33**	.66**	.47**	.31**	.55**	<b>.78</b>										
10. Perception promise work-life balance	2,68	1,04	-.31**	-.39**	.02	.28**	.50**	.56**	.50**	.54**	.60**	<b>.81</b>									
11. Evaluation promise career development	2,62	.91	-.06	-.11*	.29**	.32**	.36**	.29**	.19**	.26**	.21**	.18**	<b>.88</b>								
12. Evaluation promise job content	3,04	.80	-.17**	-.24**	.20**	.29**	.34**	.51**	.26**	.29**	.26**	.27**	.70**	<b>.81</b>							
13. Evaluation promise social atmosphere	3,25	.82	-.24**	-.25**	.14**	.24**	.29**	.35**	.35**	.30**	.24**	.25**	.48**	.58**	<b>.90</b>						
14. Evaluation promise personal support	2,72	.77	-.14**	-.17**	.13**	.16**	.21**	.23**	.18**	.24**	.14**	.19**	.63**	.60**	.57**	<b>.72</b>					
15. Evaluation promise financial rewards	2,45	.99	-.02	-.11*	.16**	.15**	.21**	.19**	.20**	.20**	.28**	.23**	.63**	.53**	.40**	.57**	<b>.82</b>				
16. Evaluation promise work-life balance	2,96	.91	-.11*	-.17**	.25**	.22**	.31**	.25**	.20**	.30**	.36**	.37**	.53**	.52**	.56**	.55**	.59**	<b>.86</b>			
17. Importance career management practices	2,87	.79	-.36**	-.44**	.11*	.42**	.79**	.83**	.73**	.81**	.74**	.79**	.31**	.40**	.37**	.25**	.28**	.36**	<b>.62</b>		
18. Evaluation career management practices	2,57	.61	-.17**	-.20**	.28**	.43**	.47**	.36**	.28**	.43**	.39**	.27**	.46**	.44**	.37**	.44**	.35**	.40**	.46**	<b>.55</b>	

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

**TABLE 2:**

**Hierarchical Regressions for the Impact of Career Self-Management on the Perception of Employer Promises<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Outcomes:</b>	Perceived Promise Career Development		Perceived Promise Job Content		Perceived Promise Social Atmosphere		Perceived Promise Personal Support		Perceived Promise Financial Rewards		Perceived Promise Work-life Balance	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>Predictors:</b>												
<u>Step 1:</u>												
Age	-.07	-.03	-.74	-.04	-.13	-.11	-.03	-.02	.05	.07	-.02	-.00
Seniority	-.41**	-.32**	-.42**	-.34**	-.16*	-.12	-.42**	-.37**	-.46**	-.41**	-.40**	-.36**
Internal mobility	.33**	.23**	.13**	.02	.04	-.02	.25**	.19**	.28**	.22**	.12**	.06
<u>Step 2:</u>												
Self-management		.32**		.32**		.17**		.15**		.19**		.17**
<i>F</i>	54.78**	60.63**	45.86**	52.50**	12.09**	12.29**	42.04**	35.10**	40.96**	36.05**	32.24**	28.31**
Change in <i>F</i>		58.38**		56.40**		12.01**		11.48**		17.11**		13.87**
Adj. <i>R</i> -Sq.	.25	.33	.22	.30	.07	.09	.20	.22	.20	.23	.16	.19
<i>R</i> -Sq Change	.26	.081	.22	.08	.07	.02	.21	.02	.20	.03	.17	.02

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

<sup>1</sup> Standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients are used

**TABLE 3:**

**Hierarchical Regressions for the Impact of Career Self-Management on the Evaluation of Employer Promises<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Outcomes:</b>	Evaluation Promise Career Development		Evaluation Promise Job Content		Evaluation Promise Social Atmosphere		Evaluation Promise Personal Support		Evaluation Promise Financial Rewards		Evaluation Promise Work-life Balance	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<b>Predictors:</b>												
<u>Step 1:</u>												
Age	.04	.06	.04	.05	-.14	-.13	-.02	-.01	.15	.15	.06	.07
Seniority	-.22**	-.17*	-.33**	-.28**	-.18*	-.15	-.20*	-.18*	-.28**	-.26**	-.29**	-.27**
Internal mobility	.33**	.25**	.26**	.20**	.20**	.16**	.18**	.15**	.20**	.17**	.30**	.27**
<u>Step 2:</u>												
Self-management		.23**		.17**		.14**		.09		.07		.08
<i>F</i>	17.74**	18.97**	19.75**	18.02**	16.04**	13.96**	8.99**	7.46**	7.59**	6.08**	18.85**	14.77**
Change in <i>F</i>		20.10**		11.31**		6.97**		2.74		1.52		2.31
Adj. <i>R</i> -Sq.	.11	.15	.12	.14	.12	.12	.05	.06	.05	.05	.12	.12
<i>R</i> -Sq Change	.12	.04	.13	.02	.11	.02	.06	.01	.06	.00	.13	.01

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

<sup>1</sup> Standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients are used

**TABLE 4:**

**Hierarchical Regressions for the Impact of Career Self-Management on the Importance and Evaluation of Career Management Practices<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Outcomes:</b>	Importance Career Management Practices		Evaluation Career Management Practices	
	1	2	1	2
<b>Predictors:</b>				
<u>Step 1:</u>				
Age	-.06	-.04	-.07	-.04
Seniority	-.44**	-.37**	-.22**	-.13
Internal mobility	.22**	.13**	.34**	.23**
<u>Step 2:</u>				
Self-management		.27**		.33**
<i>F</i>	52.60**	53.54**	27.82**	36.62**
Change in <i>F</i>		42.58**		53.63**
Adj. <i>R</i> -Sq.	.24	.30	.15	.23
<i>R</i> -Sq Change	.25	.06	.15	.09

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

<sup>1</sup> Standardized  $\beta$ -coefficients are used