7-3-2017

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Recommended Citation

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

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ABSTRACT

Today's competitive environment increasingly calls for organizations and their employees to align competencies and individual capabilities for ambidexterity. Ambidexterity is defined as the need to exploit competencies while allowing for innovative potential. The role of human capital development, and specifically understanding how existing human resources (HR) practices may limit ambidexterity, is central to career management. While career management spans both individual and organizational interests, we approach this issue from the question of how firms can manage careers to build organizational ambidexterity. We also explore what HR professionals can do to address this issue. As part of our approach, we focus on three central and interrelated issues: (a) the role of legacy effects in HR practices, which may over- or underestimate the respective competencies and capabilities needed for exploitation and exploration; we relate this issue to "goal displacement" and the "Peter Principle"; (b) the management of psychological contracts, and how implied expectations may compromise or facilitate ambidexterity; and finally, (c) the role of social networks. Our conceptual article reviews these challenges with recommendations for HR professionals and academics.

Why HR practitioners should care about ambidexterity building

Ambidexterity begins with this basic issue: how to balance quality control and efficiency with creativity and innovation (March, 1991). The concept of ambidexterity was introduced in the strategic management literature by Duncan (1976), and popularized by March (1991) as the exploitation of existing competencies combined with the exploration of, or search for, new knowledge. Scholars have since shown that ambidexterity leads to higher performance, affecting organizational survival and profitability; when ignored or mismanaged, it has bankrupted organizations from both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, as well as government-based agencies (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008).

Over the past four decades, a significant line of research has looked at ambidexterity from multiple levels of analysis (e.g., Crossan & Apaydin, 2010; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008; Simsek, 2009). The structural perspective,

initiated by Duncan in 1976, focuses on how firms allocate resources and practices to achieve both alignment and adaptation when tackling increasingly complex factors such as globalization, technological change, and consumer expectations. It remains dominant (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) provide a second perspective, referred to as contextual ambidexterity. It focuses on ambidexterity as a behavioral capacity and as a function of organizational context, through organizational values, the stretch and discipline of goals, and organizational trust and support dynamics. The third perspective, introduced by Tushman and O'Reilly (2008), examines the role of leaders and managers as enablers and builders of ambidextrous organizations. This final strand of research is called "managerial" or "leadership ambidexterity."

Ambidexterity has been primarily researched as an organizational-level construct. Researchers have focused on the role of structures and cultures in ambidexterity building. However, individual employees also play a critical role in building ambidexterity into their organizations (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Mom, Van Den Bosch,

& Volberda, 2009). Human and social capital development is central to ambidexterity building, both at the organizational and individual levels. Exploitation, for example, demands expertise in ensuring consistency and quality. Individuals who excel at exploitation are driven by the need to iron out discrepancies, build predictable outcomes, and incrementally improve existing products (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). At the opposite end of the spectrum, individuals attracted to exploration are interested in deviations and paradigm shifts. They challenge the status quo, and search for alternative or innovative concepts, services, and products to bring to market (Jasmand, Blazevic, & De Ruyter, 2012). Yet ambidexterity has been largely ignored by the career management literature, as well as underplayed in the context of human resources (HR) practice.

The ability or inability to build ambidextrous organizations has far-reaching consequences, not just on organizational profitability and survival, but on employees too. Careers do not function in isolation from organizational contexts. Ambidexterity has critical implications for career mobility and employability, both of which are central to career management (see Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Forrier, Verbruggen, & De Cuyper, 2015). In this article, we choose to focus on careers, not just employability. This stems from a recognition that ambidexterity needs to be addressed in career management. Ambidexterity is not just an employee-driven phenomenon, but also a core function of HR practice (Junni, Sarala, Tarba, Liu, & Cooper, 2015; Stokes et al., 2015; see also Van Dijik, 2004), and should be studied as such.

Historically, careers were framed as a search for fit between employees and organizations, and driven by the organizations themselves, as part of the industrial paradigm. However, once organizations moved away from the promise of lifelong employment within a single organization, and chose to prioritize flexibility and innovation, individual employees responded by embracing "new career" models of individual agency. To address changes in economic dependency, and careers that were no longer shaped and defined by a single organization, employees started to shift to boundaryless career paths (e.g., Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), or "protean careers," that is, careers that are "self-directed, proactively managed, and driven by personally meaningful values and goals" (Joseph, Boh, Fong, & Slaughter, 2012, p. 428; see also Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 1996). The career management literature acknowledged this and extensively researched the role of individual and self-agency, as well as the emergence of protean or boundaryless careers.

However, careers also need to be managed for sustainability (see Newman, 2011). Human capital needs to be nurtured and enhanced to provide organizations with renewal capabilities. Van Der Heijde and Van Der Heijden (2006), for example, argue that careers are a two-sided coin and must be managed not just as a function of self-interest, but also as a form of organizational and market alignment in terms of employability. Firms' ability to adapt and compete depends on both economic dependency and employability. Shifting from industrial models of top-down, hierarchical organizations focused on control and exploitation to new, more flexible models of flatter organizations has major implications for human capital development. Organizations must recruit for creativity, flexibility, and adaptability (Kenton & Moody, 2003; Pritchard, 2010).

As a result, over the last 10 years, organizations have reassessed the role of human resources. HR professionals now wear multiple hats. On the one hand, operational tasks, such as recruitment, compliance, and performance assessment, are more critical than ever, as HR professionals compete for talent in the global marketplace. On the other hand, they have been allowed to break away from this mostly operational role focused on smoothing and safeguarding existing practices (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014), and to embrace a more strategic role through global talent management. In this role, they face the difficult challenge of balancing short-term goals, such as matching and aligning individuals for immediate fit, and long-term ones, including developing leaders (Solnet, Kralj, & Baum, 2015; Ulrich, Younger, & Brockbank, 2008), as well as balancing and realigning organizational and individual considerations for career development (e.g., Fullmer & Genson, 2006; Ulrich, Younger, Brockbank, & Ulrich, 2013).

As individuals became less reliant on organizations to manage their careers and employability, the process of aligning and matching individual careers and organizational goals became more complex. To build ambidextrous capabilities (i.e., capabilities for both exploitation and exploration), organizations and employees need to address both self-interest and individual concerns on the one hand, and macro environmental and organizational demands. To do so, they must adopt a systems perspective (Swanson & Holton, 2001; Van Dijk, 2004).

HR professionals play a critical role in the organization's ability to embrace this systems perspective. They can leverage systems that integrate market, organizational, and individual performance data to provide greater transparency and build awareness (e.g., Lawler, 2005; Liu, Combs, Ketchen, & Ireland, 2007; Ulrich et al., 2013). Ambidexterity affects both short-term

performance and longevity. As a result, HR professionals have the critical mission of building a workforce that can excel at exploitation to boost the bottom line in the short-term, while allowing for exploration to prepare the future of the organization and ensure its survival.

This is a challenging mission, as both the human resource management and career literatures have failed to properly address how careers can be built and aligned to support organizational ambidexterity at both the individual and systemic levels. There is a dearth of research on how existing HR practices can facilitate or hamper ambidexterity building, and how they should be adjusted to allow for the delicate balancing act between exploration and exploitation.

Our article seeks to open this discussion with HR practitioners and researchers. We identify three central problems in HR practice that affect this question of how existing HR practices impact ambidexterity building:

(1) The role of legacy systems, and how they can over- or underestimate the competencies and capabilities needed to build for both exploitation and exploration.
(2) The role of psychological contracts, and how implied expectations can influence ambidexterity building in career management.
(3) The role of social networks, and how they frame, constrain, or enable access to knowledge and talent when building for exploitation and exploration.

Focusing on these issues requires HR managers to play a proactive and strategic role in capability building and talent management, as has been highlighted by the HR literature (Becker, Huselid, & Ulrich, 2001; Conner & Ulrich, 1996; Garavan, Shanahan, Carbery, & Watson, 2016; Reilly & Williams, 2016; Ulrich, 1998). We begin with an examination of these three areas as potential obstacles, and follow with recommendations for adapting HR practice and framing future research.

Three major obstacles that compromise building for ambidexterity: HR legacy systems, psychological contracts, and social networks

Legacy systems as alignment traps

In human resource practice, career management plays a key role for performance consistency, as well as for organizational adaptation and survival (De Vos & Dries, 2013). In the industrial age, careers were aligned from the predominant viewpoint of how individuals fitted into the organizational archetype (Baruch, 2006). HR professionals were given the mission to shape and control employees' careers to achieve organizational goals, through hiring, performance assessment, training and promotion, and the like.

In the postindustrial era, though, the job of HR professionals has become more complex, due to greater demand for flexibility, adaptiveness, and choice from all quarters, but especially top management, consumers, and to some extent employees themselves (particularly among those with a higher education). They have less control over employees' careers, yet they still need to align workforce competencies with organizational goals. And now that ambidexterity has been widely recognized as critical to organizational performance (e.g., O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016), HR professionals face the new challenge of shifting resources, talent acquisition, and retention strategies toward ambidexterity building. However, they do so with built-in legacy HR systems that may over- or underemphasize exploitation or exploration, and therefore impact their ability to find a balance between the two.

Overestimation effects stem from an overreliance on existing HR systems geared to replicating success for talent acquisition and management based on past circumstances. Underestimation effects are the gaps that emerge over time in specific capabilities that historically were not necessary to the success of the organization, but are needed now or in the near future to address changing external or internal circumstances, such as shifting technologies, competition from new entrants, or the adaptation and growth of the organization itself.

Both over- and underestimation effects often emerge because HR professionals rely on legacy HR systems and analytics (such as measures of performance and promotion processes and criteria) that were designed for a previous era. They embed and reflect values, priorities, and choices that may no longer be relevant to the current needs of the organization. We argue that these systems can set the wrong tone and send outdated messages about priorities and criteria for recruitment, retention and promotions, and career management.

Unless their underlying assumptions about the capabilities needed by the organization are surfaced, reassessed, and updated to reflect current priorities, these legacy systems will promote the status quo: employees will assess the value and fit of their existing skills and capabilities based on what gets measured, and how, and on who gets promoted, recruited, or dismissed. Similarly, they will prioritize skill development based on what is measured and rewarded, and how these measures shape discussion with HR professionals and line bosses.

When building for ambidexterity, HR professionals should pay attention to the HR legacy effects that may contribute to prioritizing exploitation over exploration, or the reverse, and undermine the organization's ability to find a balance between the two. These legacy effects fall broadly into two major challenges, largely overlooked in human resource management. The first is the problem of goal displacement, or how individuals may misinterpret current organizational goals and priorities based on incentives and goal setting that still reflect yesterday's goals and priorities and have yet to be updated. The second is the classic problem of the "Peter Principle," or how individuals are often promoted to their highest levels of incompetence based on historical patterns of performance, rather than what is currently needed to ensure high performance in their next job.

The problem of goal displacement

The classic article by Kerr (1995), "On the Folly of Rewarding A While Hoping for B," identifies different scenarios through which goal displacement happens. Kerr's examples range from political to academic contexts, in which individuals misinterpret organizational goals on the basis of misaligned incentives. The mainstream media has also highlighted this problem, showing how misalignments between goals and incentives can lead to structural inefficiencies at the organizational level, and negatively impact individuals; they are found in day-to-day operations, but can also extend to organizational objectives and strategy (see, e.g., Smith, 2009).

In human resource management practice, being able to target the ancillary causes, behaviors, and consequences of goal displacement is critical for long-term performance both at the employee and organizational levels. This is especially true when identifying and managing talent (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Inherited values and goals are embedded in and reinforced by existing HR structures, such as performance assessment and promotion criteria, either implicitly or explicitly (Lewis & Heckman, 2006).

In the context of ambidexterity building, HR professionals need to reflect on whether existing HR systems are aligned with the new organizational goals. As organizations come to realize the importance of ambidexterity for performance, an overhaul of their legacy HR systems becomes essential to align recruitment, retention, promotion, and other HR policies to succeed in the organizational balancing act between exploration and exploitation. For example, mature organizations with an exploitative culture may lack incentives for exploration in legacy HR systems, from recruitment and onboarding, to performance assessments and promotion criteria. If innovation is encouraged verbally, but affects measured performance negatively (e.g., decreases quality or consistency, albeit temporarily), employees will only pay lip service for fear of damaging their chances of promotion. Conversely, when exploration-focused organizations recruit and promote on the ability to innovate and do not measure and reward effectiveness and efficiency, employees will tend to disregard the latter.

When the focus on ambidexterity is recent, and organizations are trying to remedy weaknesses in either exploration or exploitation, making sure that the criteria for recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion explicitly address both will be critical to supporting shifting organizational goals and priorities, and enabling ambidextrous careers. HR professionals need be aware of, willing, and empowered to introduce new, more relevant measures, update promotion criteria, and make sure both exploration and exploitation are addressed explicitly in performance and career development measures and discussions.

The problem of the "Peter principle"

Coined from Laurence Peter's work with Raymond Hull (Peter & Hull, 1969/2011) on the perceived incompetency found among employees and their managers, the "Peter Principle" centers on how organizations promote individuals to their highest levels of incompetence based on yesterday's capabilities rather than those needed for today's performance (exploitation) and tomorrow's survival (exploration). At its core, the "Peter Principle" surfaces a problem of historicity: skills are anchored in individuals' ability to exploit or build the competencies required in their previous job, which may no longer be relevant or sufficient for their current or future position. Classically, organizations tend to promote to team leader and line manager roles based on technical excellence, without always assessing the individual's leadership and people management skills.

Similarly, if organizations have historically focused on exploitation or exploitation, they will inherit HR systems that inhibit the development of exploration capabilities, and vice versa. HR professionals' role when scaling the new organization and building for growth is to advocate for and embed measures and processes recognizing not only exploration, but also exploitation capabilities (such as quality control and consumer feedback) in new HR systems, and recruit accordingly. Examples here might include startups that may overreward and promote on exploration capabilities and fail to recognize the critical role played by exploitative capabilities in ensuring that products

match consumer expectations in terms of features, price, reliability, and consistency (see, e.g., the post-mortem analysis of Ardica's failure by Klopp & Tarcy, 2015).

In Table 1, we provide examples building from March's (1991) definitions of exploitation and exploration that show where organizations might lean more heavily on either exploration or exploitation capabilities and underestimate the need for employees who promote and advocate for the other "hand" in ambidexterity building.

To rectify this imbalance, we argue that HR practices should look beyond past performance that can adversely affect career management. While realistic job previews and value-based hiring are examples of practices seeking to correct for goal displacement along with performance improvement plans (Haden, 2012), the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) recommends, for example, that individuals engage in ongoing self-assessments with their managers and create individualized career maps that link self-interest

Table 1. Sample ways to define, see, or measure exploitation and exploration in organizations

Sample ways to define or see exploitation in organizational contexts:	Sample ways to define or see exploration in organizational contexts:
(1) Builds for consistency by emphasizing existing expertise	(1) Emphasizes the search for new products and services
(2) Creates quality for the customer, stability, and credibility in what one knows	(2) Creates a new "ah-ha" for the customer by being cited or referenced for their creativity
(3) Becomes part of a "brand identity" where they can create a loyal following based on historical performance and past interaction	(3) Becomes part of a "rogue" or "maverick" identity known for disrupting marketplaces, often challenging the status quo of existing products and services
(4) Creates a sense of trustworthiness, dependency, or guarantees in the performance of work (i.e., the person and/or organization can be relied upon to get things done)	(4) Creates a sense of risk, excitement, and defines what is cool (i.e., the person and/or organization is sought out to redesign and change products, services, even strategies)
Sample measures of exploitative outcomes:	**Sample measures of exploratory outcomes:**
(1) Number of quality products produced	(1) Number of new products and services investigated and percent produced
(2) Number of errors reduced in work	(2) Number of new patents filed
(3) Reduced learning time in similar skills or competencies	(3) Increased time or expenditure to learn radically different skills (both internal and external to the organization)
(4) Number of times the individual or organization is sought out as an expert or consultant for their expertise	(4) Number of times the individual or organization is sought out to change existing practices
(5) Number of times standards or formalized work practices are created from expertise to reduce cost, conserve resources, and/or increase compliance	(5) Number of times existing practices are expanded or changed to develop new revenue streams

with new career opportunities (SHRM, 2015). We go further and recommend that HR professionals explicitly map ambidextrous capabilities as part of this process; that they periodically reevaluate and update HR systems; and that they search for, assess, and track experience gaps and overemphasis in either exploration or exploitation when recruiting, developing, evaluating, and promoting employees.

Misaligned psychological contracts

Dealing with legacy HR systems is only the first part of the career ambidexterity challenge for HR professionals. Psychological contracts are a second area where ambidexterity building can get stuck in career management through misalignment between employee expectations and current organizational needs. Individuals interpret and filter work expectations based on previous work experience and their understanding of the goals, structures, and culture of potential employers. Rousseau's (1989) seminal work on psychological contracts and the literature that ensued has shown that workplace expectations can neither be grounded nor formally managed through written agreements alone. They often stem from personal, implicit interpretations of what is required to succeed in a specific organization.

Following in Rousseau's footsteps, scholars such as McGovern, Stiles, and Hope (1996) argued that the transition from industrial-based bureaucracies to flatter and more flexible organizations implies a shift away from criteria such as incremental changes in authority, job descriptions, and salary (Alcover, Rico, Turnley, & Bolino, 2017; Weber, 1948). It calls for new measures of performance and career success such as value creation that tap into the importance of psychological contracts. McGovern et al. (1996) argue that this particular view was reinforced by HR management (HRM) models in the 1980s that moved employees from the liability to the asset side of the organization and considered them as potential creators of firm value (see Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Quinn Mills, & Walton, 1984; Dabos & Rousseau, 2004).

While this shift increasingly focuses on individuals being instrumental toward the creation of firm value, the literature on psychological contracts remains silent as to how psychological contracts can constrain or further ambidextrous careers and their alignment to organizational goals. For example, employees assess their desirability and market value based on a perceived match between their skills and capabilities and those valued by organizations at a specific moment in time, beginning from employees' recruitment into their

tenure with the organization. HR professionals can play a critical role in surfacing implicit psychological contracts, discussing how they may hamper or support ambidexterity building, and leading new initiatives to reshape existing and potential employees' perception of what it takes to succeed in their organization. In this sense, psychological contracts might be approached as an ongoing process that seeks to constantly reassess and discuss employees' perception of the organization's willingness and ability to build for ambidexterity. Paying attention to assumptions about whether, and how much, the organization values exploitation and exploration may increase alignment between individual effort and organizational goals.

Mapping social networks

Finally, ambidexterity building is also enhanced or hampered by the nature of employees' social and professional networks. Networks serve as sources of information and knowledge (Ozgen & Baron, 2007). Connections may act as brokers and mediators in situations of conflict and uncertainty (e.g., Knight & Lightowler, 2010). They are also a valued source of trusted experts for evaluation, mentoring, and references (Chow & Chan, 2008). Finally, networks may validate individual goals and skill assessments, but also sanction them through exclusion for those who breach the rules and conventions of the network (Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997).

Employees use personal networks to reinforce existing capabilities for either exploration, exploitation, or a mix of both. Strong ties reinforce existing competencies, while weak ties promote access to new knowledge (Granovetter, 1983) and can act as bridges for exploration. Employees need to enable "near" learning to fit current job or career dynamics for exploitation, but also engage in "far" learning to stretch and expand capabilities and resources over time as part of the exploration process (see Forret & Sullivan, 2002). Near-learning transfer focuses on the core competencies required to exploit existing knowledge and resources (Lindgren, Stenmark, & Ljungberg, 2003), while far-learning transfer enables the exploration of new ideas or resources (Junni et al., 2015). Both can also play an instrumental role in the affirmation of work identity. Networks allow employees to build or challenge reputations, with a focus on exploitation, exploration, or a mix of both.

While personal networks are shaped by individual employees, HR professionals may play a critical role in mapping networks. Applied to ambidexterity building, HR professionals can incite, encourage, and support employees to balance the building of strong ties for exploitation and the search for new, weaker connections for exploration purposes based on their understanding of organizational goals and existing resources. For example, existing research on HR professionals shows how they can reshape social networks through formal processes such as job rotation and external training, and informal processes such as brown-bag lunches and networking events. Thus, HR professionals can incentivize employees to prioritize the strengthening of existing ties for exploitation, or the building of new, weaker ties for exploration, depending on organizational needs.

Recommendations for HR when aligning careers around ambidexterity

In this section, we formulate hypotheses on how HR professionals can align careers for ambidexterity, ending with how they can coordinate these recommendations with line managers. We also suggest further areas of research to test these initial propositions.

Recommendations to overcome legacy effects

To overcome legacy effects, HR professionals need to take stock of the competencies valued by the organization, and specifically, how they reside in either polarity of ambidexterity. We advocate that HR professionals assess on an ongoing basis how employees perceive, articulate, and quantify (a) their own ability to pursue exploitation and exploration simultaneously; (b) current and potential employers' appetite for exploration capabilities versus exploitation capabilities, or a balance of both; and (c) the benefits gained from enhancing skills in their less comfortable dimension of either exploration or exploitation.

They can do so by asking the following three questions of their employees through short surveys or brainstorming sessions: (a) what matters most to me as an employee? (b) what matters most to my organization? (c) what matters most to other stakeholders, such as consumers and regulators? Answers can be given on a 5-point Likert scale defining the polarity of exploitation or exploration (see Table 1 for sample metrics and definitions at the organizational level).

As a next step, HR professionals can review and analyze responses to (a) assess how much employees' profile align with organizational goals and current capabilities; (b) identify major gaps for ambidexterity building; and (c) adjust HR systems to promote valuable, yet missing, capabilities while continuing to reward existing capabilities.

Following March's (1991) definition of exploitation as incremental builds, and exploration as the search for more radical innovation, we provide sample areas in individual performance and career relevant to ambidexterity in Table 2, which can be used as examples of successful practice to overcome legacy effects and shift HR priorities to the other polarity.

Additionally, HR professionals can leverage their position as intermediaries between individual employees and top management, and drive conversations with top management on strategic HR priorities for present and future needs. Is the organization over- or under-estimating core competencies and capabilities as part of its legacy structures? Which competencies will be most needed in the future to reinforce exploitation while allowing for exploration? These conversations help measure the nature, extent, and impact of legacy effects and allow for a reset of HR systems to promote ambidexterity building at the individual and organizational levels of career management.

Table 2. Examples of how to define career and individual performance as exploitation and exploration

Sample competencies and capabilities that support exploitation in career as well as in hiring and performance: The employee:	Sample competencies and capabilities that support exploration in career as well as in hiring and performance: The employee:
(1) Values paying attention to details (i.e., conscientiousness) and error reduction	(1) Values being resourceful and creative
(2) Enjoys reviewing and refining existing practices that add to rather than significantly shake up knowledge bases	(2) Enjoys challenging the status quo and playing devil's advocate to existing practices; often seen as combative in meetings or pushing people to think differently
(3) Seeks to become a critic or connoisseur of knowledge as a subject-matter expert; has a career ladder that is purposely built and reinforces an existing domain of expertise (i.e., incremental steps within a functional area of expertise)	(3) Seeks to become first to market or the first person with a new idea or service (i.e., the idea generator); has a career ladder that is purposely built to be diffuse (i.e., often perceived as job and career hopping) and/or contains a portfolio of skills and different projects spanning both within and across areas of functional expertise
(4) Values building a career through professional associations defined to protect and safeguard specific and existing areas of expertise; might be criticized by exploratory supervisors and teams as being too narrowly focused (i.e., having all skills or knowledge in one basket); or might be perceived as difficult to work with and/or fired from a job for "being stubborn" by not willing to learn something new	(4) Values building a career by acquiring different skills from different sources that does not necessarily create a coherent story of expertise in one domain; might be criticized by exploitative supervisors and teams as being too scatter-brained (i.e., lack of focus) and is seen as difficult to work with because he or she won't buy into a commonly cited practice (i.e., too much of the "creative type"); or fired repeatedly for lack of conformity to standards

Recommendations for managing psychological contracts

While we advocate repositioning HR systems around exploitation and exploration, we recognize that systems comprise only one facet of the "legacy issue." Another key concern is the impact of misaligned psychological contracts and how they can tacitly and implicitly perpetuate biases in favor of exploitation or exploration, even after HR systems have been adjusted to enable ambidexterity building. Psychological contracts often fail to address ambidexterity because they tend to look backward rather than forward, and, per the "Peter Principle," promote outdated goals and skills.

A major challenge with psychological contracts is that these expectations are often embedded and not surfaced explicitly. To surface these assumptions, we recommend that HR professionals lead audits of how existing and potential employees assess the value placed by the organization on exploration versus exploitation activities, capabilities, and results. To surface these assumptions, we recommend a general audit of recruitment, communication media, and training programs tied with focus groups of current employees. As part of this process, HR should also gather data from incumbents and job candidates to understand how expectations are matched internally. Surveys of potential employees' pre and post recruitment help surface mismatches between the organization's external image and the perception by employees of how the organization currently values and rewards exploration and exploitation, at both the organizational and personal levels.

Data may also highlight how HR, operational, and response requirements should be redesigned and accounted for in ambidexterity as part of a job analysis; how they are subsequently represented and signaled in the recruitment life cycle, such as in job descriptions, sourcing strategies, and interview questions; and finally, how they are reinforced in onboarding and performance management systems.

In-depth interviews of employees, together with data gathering on actual behavior (e.g., how much time employees actually spend on exploration and exploitation, as opposed to intentions) and the respective weight of exploration versus exploitation metrics when deciding for promotion, can pave the way to a deeper understanding of how closely organizational goals and practices can be aligned with the organizational goal of balancing exploitation with exploration in career management.

Recommendations for mapping social networks

With respect to mapping social networks, HR professionals can begin with leveraging data on the nature of

employees' social networks. They may wish to promote a balance between strong network ties that encourage effectiveness and quality control, and weaker ties that may provide access to new knowledge and open new opportunities. In their review of social networks and ambidexterity, Heavey, Simsek, and Fox (2015) chart how extensive networks and explicit commitment to innovation affect ambidexterity. They suggest that exploitation is associated with dense networks and strong links that reinforce existing competencies, whereas weak ties and loose networks enable exploration and access to new knowledge. This is consistent with Tiwana's (2008) finding that in alliances, weak and strong ties are equally needed for ambidexterity building.

HR professionals may tap into network theory and the differentiated roles individuals play in networks. Cross and Prusak (2002), in a classic article in the *Harvard Business Review*, split employees in four categories: central connectors, who have ties to most people within a given network and bring them together; information brokers, who spearhead subgroups with stronger ties within a given network; boundary spanners, who act as intermediaries and brokers between separate networks; and peripheral specialists, who hold recognized and valued expertise but minimize interaction with other network members, apart from contributing knowledge in a few specific instances that require deep, rather than broad, expertise.

We formulate the hypothesis that HR managers can leverage these categories to support ambidexterity building in career management. For example, central connectors and information brokers might unwittingly promote exploitation by building consensus across the organization or in a specific division, and undermine exploration through groupthink. Conversely, peripheral specialists and boundary spanners may be predisposed to challenge the status quo and promote exploration, but may lack the credibility, legitimacy, and shared culture inherent in strong ties, to legitimize their position.

We therefore encourage HR professionals to map the roles individuals gravitate to in existing networks, and reflect on how they can be leveraged to promote ambidexterity. This can be done through a mix of self-assessment (employees can answer questions on the nature of their networks and the role they each play within it) and 360 evaluation from peers, superiors, and direct reports.

HR professionals can start by asking their employees four basic questions. First, based on my understanding of my social network, what are its strengths for accessing knowledge, mentoring and support for either exploitation or exploration? Second, am I playing more of a central role (i.e., are people coming to me) in being the expert or being the innovator? Third, might my fellow employees and colleagues offer a different answer to this question, and why? And fourth, what are the opportunities and traps specific to my role in social networks, and how can I address them?

All four questions could be folded into performance reviews and ongoing assessments. Results can help employees reflect on opportunities to build a more balanced network to support an ambidextrous career and can encourage a more proactive approach on building both exploitative and explorative competencies at the individual level. HR professionals can also use them to reflect on how they themselves can incentivize existing employees to build networks that support both exploitation and exploration at the individual level, and reach new employees who could restore a balance between exploration and exploitation at the organizational level.

Coordinating recommendations with line managers

Finally, when coordinating our recommendations with line managers, HR managers can provide them with examples of exploitation and exploration capabilities that follow what we document in Table 2, but are also informed by the data collected on employee incumbents that we highlight as part of our recommendations. As a way of ensuring transference of these capabilities into everyday assessments, performance management reviews, and job descriptions, HR managers should engage in discussion and audits with line managers to show how both current and future positions may need to manage or accommodate for exploitation and exploration differently.

We recommend that this process begin with brainstorming sessions with line managers to document how exploitation and exploration are found in current positions in everyday tasks and general assignments. Conclusions can be discussed with current job incumbents in order to identify additional imbalances and ways to rectify them, especially if only one polarity (exploitation or exploration) is currently emphasized.

Given that a major challenge with building for ambidexterity involves ongoing alignment, we also suggest that HR managers meet with line managers at least biannually to conduct these reviews, or at any point in time when restructuring a role or hiring for a new position. We also recommend that HR managers review with line managers how the current organizational environment and competitors' benchmarks may further opportunities or pose challenges toward building ambidextrous careers. Additionally, they can work

across departmental lines to clarify what is expected as part of exploration and exploration in specific work units, especially if cross-functional work is valued.

In summary, we advocate for greater awareness of the obstacles and opportunities for building ambidexterity into individual careers. HR professionals, working with line managers, can lead the way. We conclude this article with a set of recommendations for building an effective research agenda.

Implications for future academic research

Legacy systems, psychological contracts, the role of social networks, and their coordination with line managers are key areas that can affect ambidexterity building in career management and organizational alignment. As part of managing careers for ambidexterity, HR professionals need to understand and surface how individuals and organizations anchor competencies and capabilities along the exploration–exploitation continuum. They can either over- or underestimate the balance between exploiting historical areas of expertise, and pathways to non-incremental innovation (i.e., exploration).

In all these areas, HR professionals can surface existing work and career assumptions that may inhibit ambidexterity building at the organizational level and in individual careers. As we argue, the issue of ambidexterity building rests upon the fundamental assertion that exploitation or exploration can be either over- or underemphasized in existing HRM systems, psychological contracts, and networks. This can shape or hamper the building of exploitative competencies and exploratory potential. As with any set of recommendations, a key consideration is to understand when they may or may not work. We offer three key research considerations in this regard.

First, researchers should explore the role of the institutional environment. The ability for organizations and individuals to acknowledge and enact ambidexterity is shaped not only by the occupational environment, but also by the institutional environment. O'Reilly and Tushman (2013) acknowledge that ambidexterity should be looked at in a broader ecosystem of interactions, including institutional contexts. Extending on this perspective, industries and occupations such as those in financial services or health care often have tighter institutional and governance controls. These can affect how organizations perceive their ability to explore and build new capabilities, as opposed to building on existing competencies (i.e., exploitation), and how they recruit and reward their workforce.

This may differ dramatically from careers in less regulated environments, such as high tech firms. There, HR professionals will encounter a greater expectation for exploration, to develop newer lines of products and services, unencumbered by regulation; however, because of their emphasis on newness, they can compromise forms of legitimacy that often support and reinforce existing competencies (i.e., exploitation). Aldrich and Fiol (1994) pose this question in a study of entrepreneurs and their implications on careers when individuals decide to join a new organizational venture (i.e., what is the risk when competencies are so new and have not been defined or validated by an institutional context?). We call for more research in this area.

A second, and interrelated, question is how exposure to previous work experiences may create imprints and whether these imprints can be reset over time to allow for flexible careers (Wright, Coff, & Moliterno, 2014). Marquis and Tilcsik (2013, p. 198) cite, for example, how early-career experiences exert a lasting influence on people's later careers (e.g., Azoulay, Liu, & Stuart, 2011; Tilcsik, 2014) and how individuals carry these imprints with them as they move across organizational boundaries (e.g., Higgins, 2005; Tortoriello et al., 2012). These early experiences can signal whether exploitation or exploration should be emphasized in career development. Part of this is bounded by previous HRM systems and practices, but is also what individuals understand as important. We call for more longitudinal research to address this question of how ambidexterity may be positively or negatively influenced by previous imprints, and whether they can be shifted or even changed over the course of a career.

Third, and finally, is the degree to which individuals perceive they have agency in their careers. The literature on protean and boundaryless careers suggests some level of agency, but an equally important element is how much freedom versus economic dependency individuals may truly have in their career development (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). Scholars in the field of career management examine to what extent individuals can self-regulate and how they perceive specific jobs and/or organizational fit. Career construction theory is one theory that investigates agency and how individuals adapt careers through self-regulation and perception of priorities (e.g., Jiang, 2016; Savickas, 2005, 2002, 1997). While our take on ambidextrous career management begins with issues of employability and a "systems" perspective, further research needs to look at the level of agency that individuals have to self-guide their own careers toward ambidexterity (Baruch, 2006).

We argue that levels of perceived agency, institutional norms, and imprints can moderate and mediate the ability for individuals and their organizations to both recognize and achieve an ambidextrous career and align with their organizations. Can careers ever be truly aligned to achieve ambidexterity? And how? These questions need to be explored and answered by HR practitioners and career scholars in future work.

The contributions of our work highlight newer areas of research that may help deepen our knowledge of ambidextrous careers within the context of building ambidextrous organizations and provide much-needed answers to research questions that have thus far been neglected.

Conclusion

A long trajectory of research on career management highlights how complex environments, better access to information, increased choices for individuals, and economic dependency affect individual careers. HR professionals now face the challenge of managing careers that have moved away from well-defined and normed paths. They grapple with how to realign individual goals in these more fluid careers with the goals of the organization, and how to build ambidextrous careers and align them for organizational ambidexterity. As we highlighted, ambidexterity (i.e., the need to balance exploitation and exploration) is critical for both organizational performance and long-term career viability. A central aspect of career management involves employability, and specifically the ability to understand how organizational and market demands affect careers, not just individual preferences.

To date, current methods and techniques around ambidexterity remain mostly framed as a form of organizational strategy and at the theoretical level; there is less practical advice on how HR professional can establish these connections to help employees manage ambidextrous careers and align for organizational ambidexterity.

As the basis for our work, we reviewed the existing literature and identified important gaps. Scholars have a unique opportunity to address (a) how legacy effects, psychological contracts, and social networks affect ambidexterity at the individual, career, level; (b) how they impact HR practice and the ability of organizations to align individual and organizational goals; and (c) how firms can coordinate ambidexterity building through HR practices and through closer cooperation between HR and line managers. We focus specifically on HR

professionals because they have the greatest access to market, organizational, and individual data. They are better positioned to understand and explore these issues than individuals who may suffer from information asymmetry. As part of their role, HR professionals increasingly face the need to wear "multiple hats." They inform and can guide the strategic direction of their organization around exploitation and exploration, as well as managing employees around ambidexterity building (Farndale & Sanders, 2017; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). We offer three broader areas (i.e., examination of legacy effects, psychological contracts, and social networks) for consideration in this regard.

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