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THE ROLE OF CAREER COUNSELING IN THE NEW CAREER ERA

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tot het behalen van de graad
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door

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Daar de proefschriften in de reeks van de Faculteit Economie en Bedrijfswetenschappen het persoonlijke werk zijn van hun auteurs, zijn alleen deze laatsten daarvoor verantwoordelijk.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Career Counseling

Increasingly, policy makers and academics are becoming convinced of the need for lifelong access to career counseling (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005). Career counseling refers to a range of services, including one-to-one interviews, group discussions, telephone and on-line advice, that intend to assist people with educational, training and occupational choices and with developing the competencies to plan and manage their career (Cedefop, 2005; EU, 2004; OECD, 2004).

In the past, career counseling services were primarily concentrated on some selected groups, mostly the school leavers and the unemployed, and focused on help with immediate career decisions (OECD, 2004). This focus was linked with the rather predictable course of traditional careers. A traditional career generally unfolded within one or two organizations and progressed along a pre-described career path (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Savickas, 2000). The most important career decision for individuals was therefore the initial vocational and organizational choice and hence, career counseling mainly focused on facilitating this choice (Herr, 1997; Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; Savickas, 2000).

Due to increased competition and changing organizational forms, organizations today are decreasingly able to guarantee fixed career paths or lifelong employment to their employees (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher & Demarr, 1998; Savickas, 2000; Storey, 2000). Accordingly, careers become less predictable. Career decisions increasingly have to be made not only at the start of the career, but throughout one's entire working life (Watts, 2000; 2005). Moreover, as careers may unfold across multiple organizations, individuals become ultimately responsible for their own career (Kossek et al., 1998; Hall, 2004; King, 2004). For these reasons, it is argued, contemporary career counseling services need to be accessible to anyone at any point in life and they should widen their focus from help with immediate career decisions towards help with

developing career management competencies (Cedefop, 2005; Herr, 2003; King, 2001; OECD, 2004; Watts & Kidd, 2000).

In many countries, policy makers are willing to support the realization of lifelong access to career counseling (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Sultana, 2004; Watts, 2005). The rationale behind is the conviction that lifelong career counseling is a public and not only a private good (Watts, 2005). In particular, lifelong access to career counseling is believed to assist countries to achieve several common policy goals, such as an employable workforce, labor market efficiency and an increased employment participation of older people (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005).

- *Employability.* Employability refers to the ability of individuals to find or keep a job (Forrier, 2003; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005; OEDC, 2004). In today's labor market, employability is considered to be a prerequisite for employment security (Forrier, 2003; Watts, 2005). At macro level, an employable workforce is believed to go together with reduced unemployment and increased productivity (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Accordingly, in many countries, promoting employability is one of the cornerstones of labor market policy (McQuaid, Green & Danson, 2005; McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005). Career counseling can support employability by assessing people's competency deficiencies and training needs, by searching appropriate learning opportunities, by identifying their transferable skills and by helping them to develop career planning and career management competencies (Cedefop, 2005; EU, 2004; OECD, 2004).
- *Labor market efficiency.* It is believed that the labor market will function more efficiently when the workforce's work motivation and mobility increase, the overall time in job search decreases and the matching between people and working environments improves (Cedefop, 2005). Career counseling may contribute to these ends. For instance, career counseling can assist people to identify their strengths, interests and motivators and to find working environments that fit their characteristics (OECD, 2004; Watts, 1996). This may positively affect people's work motivation and their fit with the job and organization. Moreover, career counseling could instruct people how to handle

career transitions and how to improve their job search and job application skills (OECD, 2004; Watts, 1996). This may reduce time in job search and contribute to the counselees' labor market mobility.

- *Employment participation of older people.* In 2007, only 46% of the people of 55 years and older took part in paid work in the EU-15. In Flanders, this percentage was even as low as 34% (NIS-EAK). It is widely agreed that, in view of the aging and shrinking working population, this participation rate needs to increase (von Nordheim, 2004). In this respect, it is important to reduce early withdrawal from the labor market and to promote re-entry and re-employment of those who have left. Here, career counseling could play an important role (OECD, 2004). The service could help older people to detect problems of employability and to find ways to resolve them or even prevent them from happening. Career counseling could also assist older participants to find suitable jobs, to handle problems of age discrimination or to search for ways to make the transition to full-time retirement more gradually.

These three are only a subset of the public policy goals to which lifelong career counseling is believed to contribute. Other examples are social inclusion, social equity and economic development. For more information, the reader is referred to the publications of Cedefop (2005), the OECD (2004), Sels, Forrier, Bollens and Vandenbrande (2005) and Watts (2000, 2005).

Not only policy makers are convinced of the need for and benefits of lifelong access to career counseling. Academics have also elaborated on the new role of career counseling in book chapters and journal articles (e.g. Duys, Ward, Maxwell & Eaton-Comerford, 2008; Herr, 2003; McMahon, 2006; Savickas, 2000; 2001; Watts, 2000; 2005) and career counselors' associations have been searching for ways to adapt the counseling process to the new needs (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; IAEVG Conference 2005; McMahon, 2006).

However, the new vision on career counseling does not seem to have reached career counseling researchers yet. Some notable exceptions notwithstanding (e.g. Wnuk & Amundson, 2003), the empirical career counseling studies to date have rarely focused on questions related to the new role of career counseling. They rather examine

traditional career counseling issues (e.g. career indecision) using samples of students. Moreover, many empirical career counseling studies do not even mention the new role of career counseling (e.g. Greenwood, 2008; Mapples & Luzzo, 2005; McCarthy, Moller, & Beard, 2003; Osborn & Reardon, 2006).

This separation between theory and practice on the one hand and research on the other is quite striking. Important questions, such as whether career counseling services can indeed promote career self-management or which methods and interventions are best suited to this end, are simply underinvestigated. The same holds for the specific career counseling needs of adults. For example, it may be interesting to examine which groups of adults express a desire for career counseling, whether adults' career counseling needs can be addressed with interventions similar to those used in student guidance, and to which extent the counseling needs of employed adults need to be dealt with by external, i.e. employer-independent, career centers.

Aim and Structure of This Dissertation

The main research objective of this thesis is raising our understanding of contemporary career counseling. We address this objective through three empirical studies on contemporary career counseling using two samples adult employees. A first study focuses on the intention of employed adults to participate in external career counseling. Specifically, we examine how this intention is affected by organizational career support, career satisfaction and self-directed career behaviors. The second and the third study focus on counseling outcomes related to the counseling's new task of promoting career self-management. In the second study, we examine whether career counseling clients succeed to improve their career self-management competences, whether this competency improvement increases clients' career self-directedness attitude and whether this in turn leads to employer-independent behavior and career satisfaction. In a third and final study, we examine the combined effect of agentic influences and dispositional and environmental constraints on whether clients succeed to reach career satisfaction after the counseling. The latter study may point to boundaries to clients' agency after the career counseling.

The three studies allow us to address some important gaps in career counseling research. For instance, our focus on adult employees gives us the opportunity to introduce organizational psychology into the career counseling research. Many researchers have called for more rapprochement between both fields (e.g. Collin, 1998; Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001). Both domains are concerned with the study of careers, but apply a different focus. Career counseling research primarily focuses on the individual's perspective, whereas organizational psychology is concerned with more organization-related themes, such as turnover, commitment, mentoring and organizational career management (Collin, 1998; Lent, 2003; Savickas, 2001). To date, both research streams have been virtually distinct and non-overlapping. To cite Savickas (2001, pp. 284) on this topic: "Rarely do members of the two cultures visit the other island or even write to each other". Currently, however, career counseling researchers have started to recognize the potential synergies that get lost through this situation and, accordingly, they call for more rapprochement between both fields (Collin, 1998; Hackett, Lent & Greenhause, 1991; Lent, 2001; Leong, 1996; Savickas, 2001). This thesis aims to answer to these calls by relating career counseling to variables that have mainly been studied by organizational psychologists, in particular to organizational career support, career self-management and career satisfaction.

In sum, this study aims to contribute to the knowledge base of career counseling in general and of contemporary career counseling in particular. We will do so through six chapters. In a first chapter, we present a literature review on recent career counseling research. This chapter aims to identify the major gaps in career counseling research and to investigate how this study may address these gaps. In a second chapter, we describe the datasets that are used in the empirical studies. Chapter 3 to 5 report the 3 empirical studies mentioned above. A final chapter contains general conclusions, points of discussion and recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 1

Trends and gaps in career counseling research

INTRODUCTION

In this first chapter, we outline main trends and gaps in existing career counseling research. In that way, we hope to shed light on how the three empirical studies in this thesis may add to the career counseling research base in general. Accordingly, we focus on research on either the participation in or the effectiveness of career counseling.

Gaps in and possible ways forward for career counseling research have been frequently reflected upon in the past decade (e.g. Collin & Young, 2000; Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Herr, 2003; Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001; Tang, 2003). There have, for instance, been conferences (e.g. the IAEVG-conference 2005) and special journal issues on this topic (e.g. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59, 2 and *The Career Development Quarterly*, 52, 1). In addition, career counseling research has been the subject of several reviews, both qualitative (e.g. Bingham & Krantz, 2001; Klein, Wheaton & Wilson, 1997; Oliver, Lent & Zack, 1998; Spokane & Jacob, 1996; Whiston & Sexton, 1998) and quantitative (Brown & Krane, 2000; Whiston, Brecheisen & Stephens, 2003; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). In this chapter, we focus on the main conclusions from these discussions and reviews. We supplement these findings with a critical assessment of *recent* career counseling research because the earlier reviews were mainly based on career counseling research published in the previous century. Hence, the trends and gaps identified in earlier review articles may have been altered or tackled in the past few years. This chapter starts with a description of the criteria we used for selecting the articles of our own review. Then, we discuss the main characteristics, trends and gaps concerning career counseling participation and outcome research. We end by discussing how the three empirical studies in this dissertation may add to the existing research base.

METHOD

We manually screened all articles published between January 2000 and June 2008 in four leading journals on career development, i.e. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Career Development Quarterly* and *Journal of Career Development*, and in one top journal in counseling psychology, i.e. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*. As these journals are leading in the field, they are expected to be well suited for discovering trends in career counseling research. Since the five journals mentioned are standard included in reviews on career counseling, this selection allows to compare our assessment with previous reviews.

Articles were included if they were research-based and examined either the participation in or the outcomes of employer-independent career counseling. In line with previous reviews on career counseling (e.g. Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998), career interventions were defined broadly as treatments or efforts intended to help people with making career-related decisions or with developing and managing their career. Hence, we did not only include traditional interventions, such as individual and group counseling, but also workshops, classes, computer-assisted guidance and self-help tools. Also in line with previous reviews, we focused on employer-independent career help, hence excluding articles reporting interventions provided by or at the initiative of the counselee's employer. Furthermore, we did not include articles that were predominantly conceptual in nature or focused on a description of programs and interventions. Also, we did not include articles using a sample of career counseling clients for convenience reasons (i.e. to test the validity of a new measure; e.g. Gore & Leuwerke, 2000).

This selection resulted in 64 articles¹. Fourteen of them relate to the likelihood to participate in career counseling and 54 articles reported outcomes of a career

¹ All articles included in the review are mentioned in the reference list. Articles on the effectiveness of career counseling are preceded by one star (*); articles on career counseling participation by two stars (**). We remark that we did not include our own article on the intention to participate in career counseling (Verbruggen, Sels & Forrier, 2007) as this is part of this dissertation.

intervention². We first discuss our findings related to the 14 articles on participation, and subsequently focus on the 54 articles related to outcomes.

PARTICIPATION IN CAREER COUNSELING

People's likelihood to participate in career counseling is generally associated with people's need for career help. However, a need for help does not always lead to actual help-seeking behavior (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008). Both external (e.g. the cost of counseling) and internal factors (e.g. perceived stigma associated with counseling) may impact this relationship. We found 14 articles related to either one of these themes. Eight articles focused on the need for help, more specifically on the career problems which people seek career help for, and 6 articles examined factors that may hinder people's participation in career counseling.

In Need of Career Help – Types of Career Problems

We found 8 studies related to career problems which (may) induce people to seek career counseling. Like the bulk of research on career problems (Multon et al., 2007), most of the studies we found on the topic examined career indecision. Career indecision refers to factors hindering people to make career decisions. Examples of such factors are a lack of self- and occupational knowledge (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997, Gati et al., 1996; Kelly & Lee, 2002), choice anxiety (Chartrand & Robbins, 1997; Kelly & Lee, 2002) and inconsistent information (Gati et al., 1996). The 7 studies on career indecision examined whether undecided individuals express a higher need for career counseling (Argyropoulou, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou & Besevegis, 2007), which career decision making difficulties clients in counseling experience (Gati, Osipow, Krausz & Saka, 2000; Multon, Wood, Heppner & Gysbers, 2007; Rochlen, Milburn, Hill, 2004) and what clients expect from the career counseling with respect to career indecision (Carter, Scales, Juby, Collins & Wan, 2003; Niles & Cover, 2000; Osborn, Peterson, Sampson & Reardon, 2003). Only 2 of the 8 studies on career problems, both of Multon and her colleagues (2001; 2007), (additionally) searched for career issues other than indecision. Multon and her colleagues found that

² Four articles related to both the participation in and the outcomes of career counseling.

also psychological distress and people's psychological career resources in career transition (e.g. readiness to make a transition) may induce a need for career help.

Though the studies of Multon and colleagues are a good start, it seems important for future research to explore additional factors that may induce a need for career counseling. As the proportion of adults in career counseling is likely to increase, it may be worthwhile to turn to the organizational behavior literature for identifying career issues adults may be facing. Issues studied in this stream of literature include work-life conflicts, job insecurity and bullying – all issues which may incline people to seek career help though received little attention in career counseling research. Moreover, as individuals are increasingly expected to self-direct their career, career problems may be increasingly related to career self-management. Hence, it could be interesting to examine the impact of clients' (lack of) career competences, such as networking skills and adaptability, on the need for career counseling.

A second observation is that 3 of these 8 studies examined (and found) links between career problems and counseling outcomes (Multon et al., 2001; 2007; Rochlen et al., 2004). The finding that there are significant interactions between problems and outcomes, combined with the scarcity of studies on this topic (Heppner & Heppner, 2003), may encourage further efforts in this area. It may for instance be interesting to examine which treatments fit with which career problems and how the fit between treatment and problems impacts the counseling outcomes.

Finally, we found indications for an evolution in the employed research designs. Whereas past studies on career problems generally used a sample of students who were either non-clients or recruited ones (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Multon et al., 2007), 7 of the 8 studies we found examined *real* career counseling clients and 3 studies used a sample of non-students. These are important evolutions. Since clients' career problems may influence the counseling process and outcomes, it seems imperative to have knowledge of *real* clients' career issues. Moreover, the study of adults is important given the trend towards lifelong access to career counseling.

From Needing to Seeking – Factors of Influence

Though there is a bulk of research on career problems, only few studies have examined factors that hinder or facilitate help-seeking behavior (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008). We found 6 articles on this topic. Two examined factors affecting the actual participation in career counseling, 2 looked at influences on the participation intention and 2 investigated whether these intentions could be changed via a (video or message) intervention. The 6 studies were mainly attentive to internal influences, such as people's general anxiety or fear (Chronister, Linville & Palmer, 2008; Vignoli, Croity-Belz, Chapeland, de Fillipis & Garcia, 2005), attitudes toward career counseling (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008; Whitaker, Phillips & Tokas, 2004) and (faulty) expectations about the counseling process or outcomes (Fouad et al., 2004; Lepre, 2007). Only one study (i.e. Chronister, Linville & Palmer, 2008) also discussed external influences, such as time constraints and competing obligations. Further examination on external influences (e.g. financial resources, the family configuration or one's social network), as well as more research on barriers and facilitators in general seem important. Research on this topic may be useful for both career centers or policy makers trying to increase career counseling participation rates. Particular attention may be given to specific groups at risk for participating in career counseling, such as ethnic minorities.

Concerning the research design, 5 of the 6 studies used a sample of students and 4 examined non-clients. With the trend towards lifelong guidance, it seems important for future research to also examine factors affecting the help-seeking behavior of adults.

Summary

In sum, the number of studies on the likelihood to participate in career counseling is small, especially when compared to the bulk of research on career counseling outcomes. The studies on career problems we found were rather traditional in focus, though they increasingly used samples of non-students and actual counseling clients. In addition, we found a growing interest in factors affecting help-seeking behavior, though these studies were mainly conducted with a sample of students. Overall, the participation likelihood in career counseling seems an important topic for further

inquiry. These insights may not only be used for optimizing the counseling process, but also for increasing career counseling participation rates and reaching those in need of career help.

CAREER COUNSELING OUTCOMES

The career counseling's effectiveness has always been a very popular topic among vocational psychologists (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Swanson, 1995; Watts, 1999). This appears from the many meta-analyses that have been performed on career counseling outcome studies in the previous decades (Brown & Krane, 2000; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Prideaux, Creed, Muller & Patton, 2000; Ryan, 1999; Spokane & Oliver, 1983; Watts & Kidd, 1978; Whiston, Brecheisen & Stephens, 2003; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). Nevertheless, there have been identified several gaps in the career counseling outcome research. In particular, the outcome studies are said to mainly examine the *short-term learning* effects of career counseling in a *contrived setting* with a sample of *students*.

The interest in outcome studies does not seem to have diminished in the last decade. For this review, we found no less than 54 studies on the topic. We first discuss the most important characteristics of these 54 studies. Subsequently, we focus on the gaps mentioned above.

Studies' Characteristics

Methodology and design

The 54 studies in our review differed considerably in their methodology and design (see Table 1). The majority of the studies (n=47; 87%) collected data through questionnaires, though we also found 6 studies (11%) assessing counseling outcomes via interviews and 2 studies (4%) using observation. Most studies (n=36; 67%) examined the counseling's effectiveness by statistically measuring changes in clients' attitudes, skills and/or competences. In addition, 22 (41%) studies looked at reported or observed changes (e.g. "did you change jobs?" or "did you follow through on the counseling's recommendations?") and 18 (33%) evaluated reactions to the counseling

(e.g. perceived usefulness, satisfaction, evaluation of the working alliance). Twenty two studies (41%) combined several ways to examine the counseling's outcomes.

The studies involved a total of 11,537 participants (mean = 210; s.d. = 273), with 47% of the studies using a sample of more than 100 respondents, 38% a medium-size sample (50-100 respondents) and 15% a small one (<50). Half of the studies (n=27) used a quasi-experimental design (i.e. they compared counseling outcomes between at least two groups), whereas the other half were single-group studies. Of the 27 quasi-experimental studies, 14 (52%) examined equivalent (random assignment or matched groups) and 13 (48%) non-equivalent groups. Furthermore, 22 studies (81%) used a control group and 9 (33%) compared different types of treatment.

Table 1: Characteristics of the outcome studies under review (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	%
Data collection		
Questionnaires	47	87%
Interviews	6	11%
Observations	2	4%
Ways used to examine the counseling's outcomes		
Statistical changes	36	67%
Reported changes	22	41%
Reactions to the counseling	18	33%
Sample size		
> 100 participants	25	47%
50-100 participants	21	38%
< 50 participants	8	15%
Study design		
Quasi-experimental; equivalent groups	14	26%
Quasi-experimental; non-equivalent groups	13	24%
Single group	27	50%
Control group	22	41%

Several aspects of the studies' methodology and design are interrelated. For instance, data-collection through interviews was used more often in single-group studies, whereas questionnaires and observations were more frequently used in quasi-experimental studies ($\chi^2[2]=8.4$; $p=.015$). Also, the single-group studies tended to assess the counseling's effectiveness through a combination of statistical changes (n=12), reported changes (n=14) and reactions to the counseling (n=15). Quasi-experimental studies on the other hand dominantly examined statistical changes (n=24), with only a limited share of them also looking at reported changes (n=7) or reactions to the counseling (n=4). Finally, studies that collected data through

questionnaires tended to use larger samples (mean=239; s.d.=286) than studies using interviews or observations (mean=47; s.d.=28).

Career interventions

The studies under review examined a wide range of career interventions, with individual counseling (n=17; 32%), group counseling (n=11; 20%) and career courses (n=11; 20%) being the most frequently studied treatments (see Table 2). Nine studies were on very specific interventions, such as an intervention to crystallize entrepreneurial career interests or a workshop on networking.

The average intervention consisted of 5 sessions (s.d. = 4.4) and lasted 12 hours (s.d. = 11.2). Career courses and group counseling were significantly more intense, with an average length of 8 sessions and 17 hours. Finally, the interventions were generally guided by an experienced counselor (n=14; 26%), a course instructor (n=11; 20%) or a counselor-in-training (n=10; 19%).

Table 2: Characteristics of the career interventions studied (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	%
Type of intervention		
Individual counseling	17	32%
Group counseling	11	20%
Career courses	11	20%
Counselor free (e.g. test; computer)	7	13%
Workshops	4	7%
Other	4	7%
Counselor		
Experienced counselor	14	26%
Counselor-in-training	10	19%
Course instructor	11	20%
Counselor free	7	13%
Unclear	13	24%

Counseling's effectiveness

Like in previous reviews (Brown & Krane, 2000; Phillips, 1992; Swanson, 1995; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998), we found overwhelming evidence for the career interventions to be effective. All but 1 study in our review reported positive outcomes of the intervention(s) under study. The 36 studies examining statistical changes found that, on average, 81% of the variables under study had changed significantly (s.d. =

3.3). The studies that examined reported changes and/or reactions to the counseling all found positive mean changes and evaluation rates.

The 36 studies that examined statistical changes examined at least 1 and at most 13 counseling outcomes, with an average of 5 (s.d. = 3.3). The more variables a study examined, the lower the percentage of variables which had improved significantly ($\rho = -.348$; $p = .038$). We found indications for individual and group counseling to be the most effective interventions. The average study on individual counseling reported improvements in 91% of the variables examined (s.d. = 0.3). For studies on group counseling, this percentage was 85% (s.d. = 0.2). Career courses seemed to be the least effective, with changes in – on average – 68% of the variables examined (s.d. = 0.4). However, these treatment differences were not significant ($F[4,31]=0.89$; $p = .482$).

Have Recent Career Counseling Outcome Studies Tackled Earlier Identified Gaps?

We now examine whether the career counseling outcome studies in our review follow or rather alter the trends and gaps in earlier career counseling research. Consecutively, we examine whether the studies in our review still focus on learning outcomes, lack longitudinal designs, dominantly use samples of students and examine contrived counseling settings.

Learning outcomes

A first concern in career counseling outcome research is the strong emphasis on learning outcomes (Kidd & Killeen, 1992; OECD, 2004; Phillips, 1992; Swanson, 1995; see also Killeen & Kidd, 1991; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). Learning outcomes refer to skills, knowledge and attitudes that are believed to facilitate career decision making (Kidd & Killeen, 1992; OECD, 2004), such as self-awareness, opportunity awareness, certainty of decision, internal locus of control and (lack of) anxiety. Since they are often discernible at the end of the intervention and are therefore relatively easy and cheap to measure, the focus on learning outcomes is without doubt partly a pragmatic or even an opportunistic choice (Kidd, Jackson & Hirsh, 2003; Kidd & Killeen, 1992; OECD, 2004). Hence, this

feature is closely linked with the short-term focus in career counseling outcome studies, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. Consequently, longer term, often behavioral, outcomes are often neglected (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Moreover, also *career* outcomes have received meager attention in career counseling evaluations (Kidd, Jackson & Hirsh, 2003). Career outcomes include career attitudes, behaviors and states, such as job and career satisfaction, salary, performance, turnover, organizational commitment and career self-management. These outcomes are frequently studied in organizational psychology research (Kidd, Jackson & Hirsh, 2003; e.g. Dreher & Ash, 1990) and hence, their neglect in career counseling research can be linked to the more general lack of interaction between organizational and vocational psychology (Collin, 1998; Hackett, Lent & Greenhause, 1991; Lent, 2001; Leong, 1996; Savickas, 2001).

When we look at the 54 studies in our review, learning outcomes indeed seem to dominate (see Table 3). Learning outcomes were examined in 40 of the 54 studies (74%). Twenty four studies (44%) looked at learning outcomes exclusively and 16 (30%) also included other types of outcome (e.g. reaction to the counseling, behavioral outcomes). Measures on career (in)decision (n=12; 22%), career interests (n=12; 22%) and career decision making self-efficacy (n=11; 20%) were used most frequently.

Table 3: Types of outcomes studied (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	%
Learning outcomes	40	76%
Reaction to the counseling	19	35%
Behavioral outcomes	13	24%
Evaluation of situation after counseling	4	7%
Mental health	6	11%
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Career outcomes	10	19%

The second most popular outcome type are counseling evaluations, with 19 studies (35%) looking at at least one reaction to the counseling and 8 studies (15%) focusing exclusively on this type of outcomes. Among the counseling evaluation measures, assessments of the counseling's usefulness (n= 9; 17%) and ratings of the counselor's characteristics (e.g. empathy) (n= 8; 15%) were most popular.

Learning outcomes together with counseling evaluations cover most of the outcomes studied. Only 4 studies did not examine either one of these outcome types. Despite the

dominance of learning and evaluation outcomes, other outcome types received attention as well. We found 13 studies (24%) that looked at behavioral effects. Two of these even exclusively examined behaviors. The behaviors studied were transitions (n=5), having followed through on the counseling recommendations (n=4), goal progress (n=2), networking (n=2) and job interview performance (n=1). Furthermore, 4 studies asked for clients' judgment about their situation after the counseling (e.g. satisfaction with and commitment to their career choice) and 6 studies looked at mental health (e.g. risk for depression, school burnout).

Some of the outcomes mentioned above can be considered as career outcomes. This is the case for networking, job interview performance, clients' judgment about their employment situation and for some transitions (e.g. having a job, changing employer). Also the learning outcomes of one study were categorized as career outcomes. It concerns the qualitative study of Wnuk and Amundson (2003) in which the participants reported improvements in their self-knowledge with respect to knowing why, how and whom – a categorization based on the Intelligent Career Theory of Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi (1995). In total, 10 studies (19%) looked at career constructs. However, these studies often looked at the career construct from a vocational perspective (e.g. satisfaction with *occupational choice* rather than job or career satisfaction) and/or they assessed the construct with a single, ad hoc question when there also exists a validated measure for the construct (e.g. Greenwood (2008) assessed career commitment with the single item “do you feel committed to your career choice?” instead of using the career commitment scale of Blau (1985)). Moreover, except for the study of Wnuk and Amundson (2003), none of the studies in this review were based on other than vocational psychology theories. Hence, the integration of vocational and organizational psychology still seems faraway.

To end, we shortly examine whether the use of both behavioral and career outcomes is related to characteristics of the study. We found no impact of the type of study, the sample size, the study's design or the intervention that is examined. However, behavioral outcomes tended to be examined more often in studies that used a control group and in longitudinal studies, i.e. studies that had collected data some time after the end of counseling. The latter relation is not surprising as behavioral outcomes often require some time to take place. Moreover, the former can be fully ascribed to

the latter as control groups were used twice as often in follow-up studies than in short-term studies. In the next paragraph, we further look into the use of longitudinal designs.

Longitudinal designs

Many researchers have expressed a concern about the lack of *longitudinal* designs in career counseling outcome studies (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Herr, 2003; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004a; Phillips, 1992; Savickas, 2001; Walsh, 2003; Watts, 1999). Only few career counseling evaluations follow up their participants after the intervention. This lack of longitudinal outcome studies has several drawbacks. First of all, little is known about the sustainability of the short-term effects found (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Secondly, some effects, e.g. behaviors, may only occur or become manifest after some time and hence remain undiscovered when the evaluation study is short-term (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004). A third result of this practice is that the *effects* that *are* studied have not yet been evaluated (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Phillips, 1992). Put otherwise, it has not yet been tested whether what career counseling succeeds to do needs to be done; or, whether what career counseling researchers assess needs to be assessed.

Also in our review, most studies (n=43; 80%) used a short-term design (see Table 4). Twenty eight short-term studies collected both pretest and posttest data and 15 administered posttest data only. Only 11 studies in our review (20%) were longitudinal. Of these, 4 exclusively collected follow-up data and 7 also collected pre- and posttest data. The former 4 contacted clients at, on average, 3 years after the counseling, whereas the latter 7 waited on average 5 months to collect additional data.

Table 4: Measurement moments used in the outcome studies (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	%
Short-term studies	43	80%
Post-test only	15	28%
Pretest; Posttest	28	52%
Longitudinal studies	11	20%
Follow-up only	4	7%
Pretest; Posttest; Follow-up	7	13%

Five of the 11 longitudinal studies in our review used their longitudinal design to examine the sustainability of the short-term effects. These studies found that in

general, the short-term learning outcomes were still present in the long run, though the improvements were often lower in magnitude and some effects had faded out. Furthermore, 10 of the 11 longitudinal studies looked at effects that are essentially long-term in nature, i.e. effects that need some time to take place. These 10 studies mainly examined transitions (n=4) and/or looked at whether clients had followed through on the counseling's recommendations (n=4). However, none of the studies in our review used their longitudinal design to evaluate the *short-term* outcome measures that were used.

Overall, the need for longitudinal designs remains high. Moreover, the few longitudinal studies may further increase the added value of their design by linking short-term effects to long-term benefits for the individual.

Sample of students

A third frequently mentioned gap in career counseling research is the dominant use of student samples (Spokane, Fouad & Swanson, 2003; Tang, 2003). As a result, little is known about the career counseling effectiveness for other groups of counsees (Hesketh, 2000; Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001; Whiston et al., 1998). Students are without doubt a convenient sample for academic researchers. Moreover, career theories have for a long time focused almost exclusively on educational and initial career choices and, hence, their use in career counseling was most appropriate for students (Swanson, 1995). In recent years, however, new career theories have been developed that are equally applicable to career counseling with adults (for an overview, see Brown and associates, 2004). Moreover, the thinking about career counseling has changed significantly with at present broad agreement about the need for lifelong access to career counseling (OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005).

The results of our review, however, indicate that recent career counseling outcome studies still dominantly use samples of students. No less than 80% of the studies we found had collected data with middle school, high school or college students. Samples of college students were the most frequently used. Only 9 studies (17%) in our review used a sample of adults. Six of them were with a general adult sample and 3 studies examined a very specific group of adults, i.e. a sample of battered women (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006), a sample of veterans (Krieshok, Ulven, Hecox & Wettersten,

2000) and a sample of prisoners (Fillella-Guiu & Blanch-Plana, 2002). Interestingly, we found that studies on adults more frequently examined career outcomes than studies with students ($\chi^2[1]=9.2$; $p=.002$). This suggests that examining career counseling with adults may open the door for rapprochement between vocational and organizational psychology. This finding, combined with the expectation that adults will increasingly participate in career counseling (OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005), may stimulate further research on the counseling's effectiveness for adults.

Table 5: Samples (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	%
Students	43	80%
Middle school	2	4%
High school	7	13%
College	34	63%
Adults	9	17%
General sample	6	11%
Specific group of adults	3	6%
Unclear	2	4%

Contrived counseling setting

A fourth critique on career counseling outcome studies is their focus on contrived counseling settings. Outcome studies tend to examine the effects of career interventions with *recruited* participants, rather than with real counseling clients (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Swanson, 1995). However, since real clients are likely to differ substantially from recruited participants (e.g. more severe career issues, more eager to make changes), the effects found for recruited participants may not be generalizable to actual career counseling clients. In addition, career counseling outcome studies are said to focus on *single interview* session, whereas most real career counseling interventions consists of *a set of* interviews (Swanson, 1995).

The results of our review show a more nuanced picture. We found 20 studies (37%) examining real counseling clients, i.e. clients who spontaneously came for career counseling (see Table 6). In addition, 12 studies (22%) were with students participating in a career course. Though students may follow career courses for a variety of reasons, most students doing so are undecided and expect the course to help them choose a major (Reese & Miller, 2006). If we consider these students as real career clients, the share of studies examining real clients becomes 59%. Nevertheless, we also found 15 studies (28%) that used recruited clients and 5 studies (9%) with

individuals who had no choice in participating in the intervention ('no choice'-participants, for example middle or high school students whose class participated in the study). Not surprisingly, the majority of the studies with recruited or no-choice clients were with students (n=19; 95%).

Table 6: Naturalistic versus contrived counselling setting (n=54)

	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Participants		
Clients, spontaneous	20	37%
Students in career course	12	22%
Clients, recruited	15	28%
No choice participants	5	9%
Unclear	2	4%
Number of sessions		
One	11	20%
More than one	31	57%
Unclear	14	26%

No less than 31 studies in our review (57%) examined interventions that lasted more than 1 session. However, most of these were on career courses or group counseling interventions and only 7 examined face-to-face interviews. Of the latter, 4 were with adults who had spontaneously sought counseling. Only 11 studies examined a single session intervention. In these studies, the treatments studied were generally individual counseling (n=5) or counselor-free interventions (n=3) and the sample usually consisted of students (n=10) who were recruited for the study (n=8).

Overall, the focus on contrived counseling settings seems to have altered in the past decade. Researchers increasingly examine series of counseling sessions using a sample of real clients. This trend is important for increasing our understanding of real counseling clients. However, we need to remark that naturalistic counseling settings often limit the possibilities of more complex and information-rich research designs. This also appears from our review. Quasi-experimental designs turned out to be used less often when a naturalistic counseling setting was examined ($\chi^2[1]=8.1$; $p=.004$).

Summary

In sum, recent career counseling outcome studies do not differ significantly from earlier counseling evaluations in design and focus. Most outcome studies in our review still focused on learning outcomes, were short-term evaluations and used a sample of students. However, we found an evolution in the research setting that was

examined. Most of the outcome studies in our review examined a naturalistic counseling setting rather than contrived ones. Overall, the call for more, but different outcome studies (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Spokane, Fouad & Swanson, 2003) still seems valid.

DISCUSSION

It may be clear from the discussion above that today's research base on career counseling is inadequate for understanding contemporary career counseling. Since contemporary career counseling focuses on helping people of all ages to take charge of their career, career counseling researchers should improve the knowledge base concerning adults and study career and behavioral variables, such as career self-management competencies and behaviors. Moreover, there is a need for more studies on the participation in career counseling and for outcome studies which use longitudinal designs.

The empirical studies in this thesis intend to meet several of the needs identified above. All three studies are with a sample of employed adults and relate career variables (e.g. career satisfaction) and behavioral variables (e.g. career self-management behaviors) to career counseling. In that way, the studies aim to contribute to the understanding of contemporary career counseling. Furthermore, the first study adds to the research on career counseling participation by examining novel influences on the desire for career counseling. In particular, this study examines how organizational career support, individual career management behaviors and career satisfaction impact adults' intention to participate in career counseling. The second and the third study respond to the call for more, but different outcome studies. Both studies use a longitudinal dataset on real counseling clients. In addition, both studies examine career and behavioral outcomes in addition to learning outcomes. In this way, we hope to improve the understanding of career counseling in general and of contemporary career counseling in particular.

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CHAPTER 2

Methodology

As we explained in the introduction, this dissertation aims to improve the knowledge base on contemporary career counseling and to tackle some gaps in career counseling research in general. We address these objectives through three empirical studies on contemporary career counseling. These studies are based on two datasets, both collected in Flanders with samples of employed adults. In this methodology chapter, we explain the choice for this research setting and describe the two datasets that are used in the empirical studies.

RESEARCH SETTING

Study in Flanders

We conducted the research in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. In January 2005, the Flemish government started with an entitlement to external career counseling for adult workers. The entitlement gives every worker with at least one year of working experience the opportunity to access external career counseling services at low cost and this multiple times in life (with minimum 6 years in between two trajectories). To this end, the government is subsidizing qualified external career services. In exchange, the counseling organizations are allowed to charge their counsees 150 euro at most (25 euro for risk groups). To qualify for subsidy, the career counseling services have to guarantee confidentiality and impartiality. Additionally, the government limits subsidies to trajectories with at least 6 hours and at most 18 hours (25 hours for risk groups) of individual face-to-face counseling. Hence, the subsidies do not cover telephone, internet or group counseling (Vlaamse Regering, 2004). With this entitlement, the Flemish government primarily aims to support individuals with managing their career and with making career transitions (Vandenbroucke, 2004; Vlaams Parlement, 2003).

As career counseling in Flanders is lifelong accessible and has to focus on help with career self-directedness, this research setting seemed extremely appropriate given the primary objective of this thesis, i.e. examining contemporary career counseling.

Sample of Employed Adults

We chose to conduct our study with a sample of *adults*. Although it is expected that adults' desire for career counseling and their actual participation rates will increase sharply, they are largely neglected in previous career counseling research.

We limited our sample to *employed* adults and hence excluded self-employed, unemployed and inactive people. We excluded the non-employed (i.e. the unemployed and inactive) because the Flemish entitlement to career counseling only applies to workers. We mention that the non-employed have the possibility to follow a more intense "job placement" trajectory. Like career counseling, job placement has a legal status and is free of charge for unemployed. However, job placement trajectories differ substantially from career counseling because of their higher level of intensity and their primary focus on job placement. Due to these differences, it is difficult to study both types of counseling in the same study with the same set of outcome variables. Given our aim to improve the knowledge base on *contemporary* career counseling (which focuses on career self-directedness rather than on job placement), we chose to study *career counseling* trajectories and, accordingly, to use a sample of working adults. Furthermore, we excluded the self-employed from our sample because they comprise only a very small portion of the participants in career counseling and because excluding them largely simplifies the development of the questionnaires. Moreover, a sample of employees offers the greatest possibilities for linking career counseling with organizational psychology research. For instance, investigating how organizational career support relates to external career counseling can only be done with a sample of employees.

DATASET 1

The first dataset was assembled in April 2004 for a study charged by the Flemish government. This study aimed at estimating the *need for* external career counseling in

Flanders and was carried out *prior* to the introduction of the entitlement to career counseling. We used this dataset for the first empirical paper (chapter 3).

Methodology

The population of the study consisted of Flemish employees (no career counseling clients) with at least one year of working experience. A proportionally stratified random sample was drawn from this population (Burns & Grove, 2001). We first divided the population into 9 groups based on the stratification variables age (3 levels, i.e., 20-34 year; 35-44 year; 45-64 year) and level of education (3 levels, i.e., no high school degree; at most a high school degree; college degree). These variables were chosen because research has shown that they both influence career outcomes such as career success (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz., 1995; Tharenou, 1997) and career strategies (Guthrie, Coate & Schwoerer, 1998). Then, we determined the aspired response for each stratum. We wanted the share of each subsample to represent the proportions of the corresponding group in the population (*proportional* stratified sample). This stratification strategy ensures a high degree of representativeness and decreases the risk of selection bias (Burns & Grove, 2001). In order for the subsamples to be sufficiently large to allow for comparisons between the groups, we set the aspired *total* response at 900. These decisions resulted in the sample plan shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Sampling plan: aspired response

	No high school degree	At most a high school degree	College degree	Total
20-34	n=54 6%	n=144 16%	n=126 14%	n=324 36%
35-45	n=81 9%	n=117 13%	n=99 11%	n=297 33%
45-64	n=108 12%	n=90 10%	n=81 9%	n=279 31%
Total	n=243 27%	n=351 39%	n=306 34%	n=900 100%

From each stratum, a random sample was drawn via the random walk method. In particular, 65 researchers from a private agency were sent out to contact potential respondents at their homes. If respondents agreed to participate, a standardized questionnaire constructed by the authors, was administered. Non-responses were

replaced by newly added units matching the same characteristics in terms of gender and age. This face-to-face administration was chosen to increase response rates, control consistent interpretation of the questions and safeguard the overall quality. To ensure these objectives, the interviewers from the private agency received a briefing on the content of the questionnaire and additional training by the researchers.

The standardized questionnaire contained sections about the current job, the past career, career aspirations, individual career management, organizational career support and the desire for and expectations about external career counseling. Before measuring the attitudes toward external career counseling, the interviewers explained thoroughly what should be understood by external career counseling (see Table 8). Doing so, we controlled for different interpretations of the concept ‘career counseling’.

Table 8: Explanation of career counseling given to the respondents

Career counseling is a service that intends to guide and advice people with career decisions. It helps people with questions such as:

- I have been doing the same job for years. I feel I am ready for something new. Which jobs fit me and how do I make this change?
- I want to reflect on my current work situation. Is it the right one for me?
- I don't feel happy in my job, and I can't think of a single career I want to pursue.
- I am 50 years old. I am tired of working, but I need the money.
- I want to start my own business. How do I handle this? What will change?
- How can I improve my work-life balance?

Career counseling entails a number of interviews with a professional career counselor. At the end of the trajectory, you develop a concrete action plan which stipulates your career goals and the actions you can undertake to reach them.

Some organizations offer career counseling to their employees. However, you can also follow career counseling independently from your employer in specialized career centers. This study is concerned with the latter kind of career counseling, i.e., career counseling independently from your employer.

Response

We realized a total sample of 957 employees. The average age of the respondents was 38 years, with 37% of the respondents younger than 35 years, 32.2% between 35 and 44, and 31% 45 years or older. In terms of education, 27% had no high school degree, 37% had a high school degree and 36% had a bachelor or master degree. The realized

proportions by age and level of education (Table 9) reflect the actual distribution of age and educational categories in the Flemish population of employees (see percentage in Table 7).

Table 9: Realized sample by age and level of education

	No high school Degree	At most a high school degree	College degree	Total
20-34	n=61 6%	n=144 15%	n=145 15%	n=350 37%
35-45	n=86 9%	n=114 12%	n=107 11%	n=307 32%
45-64	n=109 11%	n=97 10%	n=94 10%	n=300 31%
Total	n=256 27%	n=351 37%	n=346 36%	n=957 100%

Table 10 shows some additional descriptors of the sample. We had an equal proportion of males and females across the sample: 477 women (50%) and 480 men (50%). Furthermore, 36% of the respondents was blue-collar, 11% had a temporary contract, 18% worked part-time and 30% was employed in a small or medium-sized organization. All industrial, service and public sectors were represented in the sample. Concerning the family situation, the majority of the respondents had a working partner (54%) and was childless (51%).

Table 10: Additional sample characteristics dataset 1 (n=957)

	%
Women	49.8
Job characteristics	
Blue-collar work	35.5
Temporary contract	10.7
Part-time contract	18.2
Organizational size	
Small (<10 employees)	11.7
Medium-sized (10-49 employees)	18.2
Industry	
Education and government	21.6
Health care and welfare services	14.9
Retail and wholesales	13.9
Financial and business services	14.6
Construction	4.2
Transport. Logistics and telecommunications	10.3
Process industry	6.3
Other industry and agriculture	13.7
Partner	
Single	33.1
Partner has no job	13.3
Partner has a job	53.6
Children	
No children	50.9
1 or 2 children	39.9
More than 2	9.2

DATASET 2

The second dataset was collected especially for this thesis. It was designed for a longitudinal effect evaluation of contemporary career counseling in a naturalistic setting. This dataset is used in the second and third empirical paper (chapters 4 and 5).

Methodology

We collected data from actual clients in external career counseling through standardized questionnaires. We contacted all external and subsidized career services that were active in Flanders in 2005. Twelve of the 14 career counseling centers, representing 92% of the counsees, agreed to participate. In these career counseling centers, we collected data with real clients through self-administered standardized questionnaires. Only clients who were *employed* at the start of the counseling were included in the sample.

The survey design consisted of three measurements: (a) at the start of the first counseling session (T0), (b) at the end of the last counseling session (T1) and (c) six months after the end of the counseling trajectory (T2). For the first two measurements, the career counselors handed out the questionnaires and the respondents returned them to the researchers in a closed envelop. The questionnaires for the third measurement were sent to the home addresses of all wave 1-respondents. To be able to link data across waves, respondents were asked to indicate their initials and date of birth.

The questionnaire for the first assessment included questions on the counselee's demographics and expectations about the counseling as well as pretest measures of the outcome variables. We opted for a combination of learning, career and behavioral outcomes. At the end of the counseling, we again assessed the outcomes of interest and collected data on the career counseling process and on the counselee's personality. In the third measurement, the outcomes of interest were assessed for a third time. In addition, we asked for barriers that the counsees might have encountered while realizing their career plans.

The research design described above complies with several recommendations on career counseling research as reported in chapter 1. We collected *longitudinal* data with *real, adult* clients in a *naturalistic, contemporary* career counseling setting. We already highlighted most of the benefits of these design choices in Chapter 1. In addition, we can accentuate a number of more generic advantages of longitudinal research designs. Firstly, compared to cross-sectional data, longitudinal data are – thanks to information on the timing – more appropriate to assess the direction of a relationship between two variables (Bauer, 2004; Charlton, 1999). Indeed, if A occurred at time 1 and B at time 2, it is rather unlikely that B influenced A. Secondly, longitudinal research allows the concepts to be measured at the most appropriate time, which reduces the risk of bias due to unreliable memory (Charlton, 1999; Dulac, 2006). For instance, asking why a person started with career counseling may be best done at the start of the counseling rather than at the end, while questions on the career counseling process can be best asked immediately after the counseling rather than 6 months later.

Despite these advantages, some concerns need to be mentioned as well. Firstly, we did not collect data on a control group, i.e. people who resemble the counseling clients

but did not participate in career counseling. In naturalistic career counseling settings, control groups are extremely difficult and expensive to realize. This is because real clients in career counseling are likely to differ substantially from non-clients on career related attitudes (e.g. career satisfaction, turnover intention) and the occurrence of life and career events (e.g. lay-off). The control group should hence contain individuals with similar levels of career attitudes who experienced similar life and career events. It goes without saying such individuals are difficult to find. Due to the lack of a control group, we are not able to attribute changes in the participants to the career counseling intervention. Other events – or simply maturation – might affect the variables of interest (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Posavac & Carey, 1989). However, since our sample consists of employees working in different organizations and living in different regions of Flanders, the range of potential events applicable to all respondents is extremely limited.

A second remark relates to the specific risks of a longitudinal design. Longitudinal surveys often lose respondents *after* the first wave ('sample attrition'), which threatens the representativeness of the sample at later waves (Posavac & Carey, 1989). We checked whether this was the case via a dropout analysis (see further). Another risk is panel conditioning (Menard, 2002). Panel conditioning implies that panel members may become affected by participating in the research. For instance, counselees who filled out the questionnaire at the start of the counseling might be more focused on the attitudes that were measured and might, because of that focus, realize more improvement in them. Yet, we can assume that the career counseling trajectory was a more dominant intervention for our respondents than our questionnaires were.

Response

The first assessment (T0) took place between April and September 2006. During that period, 1709 employees started a career counseling trajectory in one of the co-operating 12 centers. 556 (32.5%) of them completed the first questionnaire. The second wave (T1) started in May 2006 and ended in March 2007, resulting in 273 (16.0%) questionnaires. Finally, between November 2006 and October 2007, we received 316 (18.5%) questionnaires for the third wave (T2).

Because the drop in respondents between T0 and T1 was rather substantial, we tried to examine its causes. We phoned and e-mailed all dropouts in February 2007 and reached 80% of them. The majority (41%) reported that their counselor had not given them a second questionnaire. Furthermore, 19% had not yet finished the counseling trajectory, another 19% had received the second questionnaire but had not responded to it ('true dropouts'), 11% said they had returned the second questionnaire ('lost in the mail') and the remaining 10% did not remember whether they had received the second questionnaire.

In a dropout analysis we compared the three waves-respondents on all key T0-variables (age, gender, educational level, career self-directedness, self-awareness, adaptability, goal self-efficacy) with participants who did not respond to the second and/or third wave. No significant differences were found. We also examined the dropout at T1 and T2 separately. The T1-respondents did not differ significantly from T1 non-respondents. However, when comparing T2 respondents with T2 non-respondents, we found the latter to have lower levels of adaptability at the start of the counseling ($p = 0.023$). Hence, the dropout is not completely random.

A total of 202 individuals completed the three questionnaires. Sixty (29.7%) were men. The average respondent was 36.4 years old, with 45.0% of the respondents younger than 35 years, 38.6% between 35 and 44 and 16.3% 45 years or older. In terms of education, 22.3% had at most a high school degree, 38.4% had a bachelor degree and 39.5% a master degree. One participant (0.5%) was non-European and 4 (2.0%) were disabled. Men, clients of 45 years and older and clients with at most a high school degree were slightly underrepresented in the sample. Corresponding shares in the population of clients who started counseling in one of the 12 co-operating career centers were 38.0%, 17.4% and 29.4% respectively.

All respondents were employed at the start of the counseling. Only 8% of the respondents was blue-collar (see Table 11). This is a substantially lower share than at the labor market at large. Furthermore, 17% of the respondents had a temporary contract, 26% worked part-time and 37% was employed in a small or medium-sized organization. Concerning the family situation, we see that most respondents have a working partner (67%) and no children (48%).

Table 11: Sample characteristics dataset 2

	%
Women	70.3
Age	
20-34	45.0
35-44	38.6
45-64	16.3
Educational level	
No high school degree	3.4
At most a high school degree	18.7
College degree	77.9
Job characteristics	
Blue-collar work	8.3
Temporary contract	17.0
Part-time contract	25.5
Organizational size	
Small (< 10 employees)	12.3
Medium-sized (10-49 employees)	25.1
Partner	
Single	27.5
Partner has no job	5.4
Partner has a job	67.1
Children	
No children	51.3
1 or 2 children	41.2
More than 2 children	7.5

When starting with career counseling, the majority of the respondents (85.4%) were dissatisfied with their employment situation. Moreover, 25 participants (12.4%) had received a lay-off notice by their employer shortly before seeking counseling. Most respondents expected from the career counseling that it would help them to increase their self-awareness (93%) and their opportunity awareness (93%).

Counseling Intervention

The counseling interventions were partly standardized across career centers. All interventions started with an intake interview, in which the counselor provided information about the counseling procedure and learned about the main career concerns of the individual. The intake was followed by a number of counseling sessions of, on average, one to two hours in which the respondents were helped with a self-analysis and with the selection of career goals. Most clients wrote down their final career goals and worked out an action plan stipulating the actions they were planning to undertake for pursuing their goals.

The sessions were mainly holistic in nature, i.e. counselees discussed their career issues in relation to other life issues with their counselor. The counselors focused on helping clients to understand the interconnectedness between career and life. An often used technique was the lifeline exercise. This technique involves reflecting on key events in life and career and then charting good times and periods of distress. The visualization of positive and negative events in different areas of life is expected to increase clients' sense of wholeness and continuity (Amundson, 1998).

The length of the counseling trajectories was variable and mainly determined by the particular needs of the counselees. The shortest trajectory lasted 3 weeks and consisted of 3 sessions, whereas the longest trajectory consisted of 13 sessions spread over 31 weeks (7 months). An average counseling trajectory lasted 16.85 weeks (standard deviation: 1.66) and consisted of 5.75 sessions (standard deviation: 1.61).

Most career counselors had a bachelor or master degree in human sciences (most often in psychology). On average, they had been working as career counselors for two years, although some had up to 15 years of experience. The counselors developed their career counseling competences through external workshops, networking events and internal training. When the Flemish government started with the entitlement to career counseling, several workshops on specific career counseling methods (e.g. solution focused and holistic coaching) were organized by certified instructors. This was done because there is no specific education for career counselors in Flanders. Furthermore, career counselors of the different centers meet regularly in networking events in which they discuss and exchange counseling methods and experience with specific assessments tools. In addition to these external events, career centers foresee a period of apprenticeship for new counselors and offer external training opportunity to their employees.

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CHAPTER 3

Unraveling the Relationship between Organizational Career Management and the Desire for External Career Counseling³

ABSTRACT

This study unravels the relationship between organizational career management and the desire for external career counseling. We conducted a path analysis using data of 803 Flemish employees. Results indicate a three-way relationship between organizational career management and external career counseling. First, experiencing organizational career management partly reduces the desire for external career counseling through its enhancement of career satisfaction. Second, it also partly reinforces the desire for career counseling by encouraging employees to invest in their external employability. Finally, organizational career management and external career counseling are moreover complementing each other. Implications of the results and directions for future research are discussed.

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CHAPTER 3

Unraveling the Relationship Between Organizational Career Management And The Desire For External Career Counseling

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, governments are becoming convinced of the added value of external career counseling for employees (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005). Career counseling refers to services intended to assist people to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers (OECD, 2004). “External” indicates that the career counseling is conducted independently from the employer of the counselee and therefore has a high likelihood of being impartial. At present, most external career counseling services are only available to some specific groups, mostly school leavers and unemployed (OECD, 2004). However, since careers tend to become a lifelong construction process, career support might be needed by anyone at any point in life (Cedefop, 2005; Herr, 2003; OECD, 2004; Santos & Ferreira, 1998; Sultana, 2004; Watts, 2000). For employees, one could argue that employers may be in a better position than external career counseling services to offer career support on a substantial and sustained basis (Watts, 2000). Yet, research shows that organizational career management⁴, i.e. organizational practices concerned with the career development of employees (Orpen, 1994), is often confined to large organizations and mostly focusing on the high potentials and core employees (Dreher & Dougherty, 1997; Forrier, 2003; Maurer, Weiss & Barbeite, 2003; OECD, 2004; Watts & Kidd, 2000). Moreover, career support from organizations may not be truly impartial since organizations are likely to have an interest in its outcomes for the

⁴ In the remainder of this chapter, the terms ‘organizational career management’ and ‘organizational career support’ will be used interchangeably to refer to various forms of career support, i.e. support for competency development and career construction, offered by the organization (e.g. the provision of training, regular performance feedback, the assignment of interesting projects, possibilities for networking).

organization (OECD, 2004; Watts, 2000). These findings support the argument that employees may benefit from access to external career counseling.

The arguments in favor of external career counseling for employees reveal two assumptions about the relationship between organizational career support and external career counseling:

- A first assumption states that external career counseling functions as a *substitute* for organizational career management. This is reflected in the belief that external career counseling may function as a safety net for employees who experience little or no organizational career support. In other words, a lack of organizational career management is believed to induce a desire for external career counseling. Employees who experience little career support from the employer have been shown to be less satisfied with their career (Orpen, 1994) and low career satisfaction is likely to induce people to participate in career counseling (White & Killeen, 2002).
- A second assumption considers external career counseling to be a *complement* of organizational career management. Indeed, it is believed that employees who are looking for impartiality may participate in external career counseling *independently* of the career support they get from their employer. Employees may look for impartial career support when, for instance, exploring external career opportunities, desiring an unbiased check of their strengths and weaknesses or dealing with rather sensitive career-endangering issues, like illness.

Although these assumptions are widely accepted and substantiate the conviction that employees should have access to external career counseling (OECD, 2004; Watts, 2000; Watts, 2005), little or no empirical research has tested them.

Moreover, a third possible relationship between organizational career support and external career counseling has often been neglected in the discussion. For organizational career support may also *reinforce* the desire for external career counseling through its impact on individual career management, i.e. the personal effort made by individuals to advance their own career goals (Orpen, 1994). Organizational career management is believed to stimulate individuals to self-manage

their career (Hiltrop, 1995; Sturges, Guest, Conway & Mackenzie-Davey, 2002). Moreover, people who are actively engaged in career self-management are better able to recognize the value of new career investments (Van der Heijden, 2000) and may therefore be more likely to seek career counseling. If this scenario is valid, some people who would benefit from career counseling, but lack organizational career support, may not actually seek counseling, simply because they do not recognize its full value. Hence, governments might want to consider and examine the likelihood of this scenario.

Given the readiness of many western governments in expanding access to external career support (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004), insight into the relationship between organizational career support and external career counseling seems decisive. This paper focuses on this issue. The paper is structured as follows. First, we develop the research hypotheses. Then we present the methodology and the results. The paper concludes with a discussion on the key implications of the research.

HYPOTHESES

Figure 1 presents the research model tested in this article.

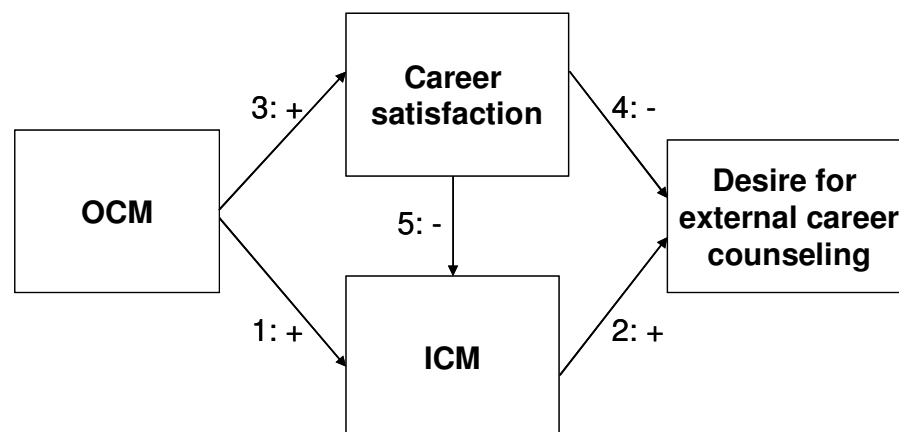


Figure 1: Hypothesized relationship between OCM and the desire for external career counseling

Following the reinforcement scenario, we assume individual career management (ICM) to strengthen the relationship between organizational career management (OCM) and the desire for external career counseling. In accordance with the substitute scenario, career satisfaction is believed to mediate the relationship between organizational career management and the desire for external career counseling. In line with the complement hypothesis, we presuppose no direct effect between

organizational career management and the desire for external career counseling. We opt for “the desire for external career counseling” as a dependent variable because the study was conducted *before* employees were given access to external career counseling.

1. The Relationship between OCM and ICM

Several authors (Hiltrop, 1995; Sturges et al., 2002) believe that organizational career management exerts a stimulating effect on individuals’ career initiative. Van Dam (2004) found that employees who experience organizational career support undertake more career initiative of their own accord. This may be caused by increasing career awareness. Previous research has shown organizational career management to enhance employees’ career awareness (Kidd, Jackson & Hirsch, 2003) and career awareness to positively influence individual career initiative (Anakwe, Hall & Schor, 2000). Organizational career management could also stimulate individual career management by enhancing employees’ career management self-efficacy, i.e. the belief that they are able to manage their own career. Most organizational career management activities require active participation of employees. For instance, in a training course, it is up to the employee to participate and learn new things; and developing a career action plan, employees are regularly asked to assist in determining their career goals and action steps. Active employee involvement in the organizational career management process may enhance employees’ career management self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), which in turn could stimulate individuals’ career self-management (Bandura, 1986; King, 2004).

Hypothesis 1: Organizational career management stimulates individual career management

2. The Relationship between ICM and the Desire for External Career Counseling

According to Van der Heijden (2002), individuals with a high degree of career initiative are convinced that participation in career activities “is an important asset and that [therefore] they themselves should be actively involved in undertaking and maintaining them” (pp. 60). So, compared to their less career active counterparts,

more career active individuals might view future career activities as more beneficial and might therefore express a higher desire for participation. Several studies found positive associations between prior participation in career activities and the perceived usefulness of similar new ones (Maurer et al., 2003) and between the perceived usefulness of a career activity and the intention to participate in it (Maurer & Tarulli, 1994; Maurer et al., 2003; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van Der Flier & Blonk, 2004). We therefore expect individual career management to be positively associated with the desire for career counseling.

Hypothesis 2: Individual career management is positively associated with the desire for external career counseling

3. The Relationship between OCM and Career Satisfaction

We expect that employees who experience organizational career management will feel more satisfied with their career. Prior research has found positive associations between career satisfaction and both organizational career management (Orpen, 1994) and separate organizational career activities, like mentoring (Joiner, Bartram & Garreffa, 2004; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). First, these positive associations could be explained through perceived organizational support. Experiencing organizational career management has been positively related to perceived organizational support (Kraimer, Seibert, Wayne & Liden, 2003), which in turn has been demonstrated to increase career satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Second, organizational career management could increase career satisfaction by narrowing the gap between the aspired and the actual career. Employees' career aspirations often remain unclear for the employer and therefore, gaps between actual and desired careers may persist. Through adequate organizational career management practices, this can be avoided (Jiang & Klein, 2002; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Closing the gap between actual and desired careers may increase career satisfaction (Jiang & Klein, 2002; Heslin, 2005).

Hypothesis 3: Organizational career management has a positive influence on career satisfaction

4. The Relationship between Career Satisfaction and the Desire for External Career Counseling

Career counseling aims at helping individuals to clarify their career aspirations and options, to develop a career plan and to solve career related problems (OECD, 2004; Swanson, 1995). Consequently, career counseling implicitly promises to tackle factors that may cause career dissatisfaction (for example gaps between the aspired and actual career). Therefore dissatisfied individuals might consider career counseling to be more advantageous and hence express a higher intention to participate in career counseling. This hypothesis is strengthened by previous studies revealing career *dissatisfaction* to be a frequent precursor of participation in career counseling (Killeen, 1986; White & Killeen, 2002).

Hypothesis 4: Career satisfaction has a negative influence on the desire for external career counseling

This direct negative effect might be strengthened by an indirect effect through individual career management. In particular, we expect career satisfaction to negatively influence individual career initiative. Dawis' (2002) theory of person-environment correspondence asserts that career *dissatisfaction* is an important stimulus to career initiative. Crites (1969) too supposed that frustration about the working conditions, related to career dissatisfaction, might be a stimulus to career initiative (King, 2004). This theoretical association is confirmed by several empirical studies, indicating that work dissatisfaction stimulates active career behavior such as job search (Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Rosse & Hulin, 1985) and attempts to change the job environment (Griffin & Heskett, 2003; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). More passive responses to career dissatisfaction were found as well, such as absenteeism or acceptance of the situation (Griffin & Heskett, 2003; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). In this paper, we focus on active career behavior. We expect career dissatisfaction to be positively related to individual career management, or, put otherwise, highly satisfied employees to feel less urge to undertake career initiative.

Hypothesis 5: Career satisfaction is negatively associated with individual career management

Since we expect career satisfaction to be negatively related to individual career management and individual career management, in turn, to be positively related to the desire for career counseling (hypothesis 2), we assume a negative indirect effect of career satisfaction on the desire for career counseling.

METHOD

Context

The research was conducted in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Flanders has autonomous legal authority on a range of regional matters, including employment. In that capacity, the Flemish government started, in January 2005, with an entitlement to external career counseling for employees with at least one year of working experience. The government is subsidizing qualified external career services to offer career counseling to employees. Consequently, these counseling organizations can offer their service at low costs to the participants (and at zero cost for specific groups at risk). To qualify for subsidy, the career counseling service has to guarantee confidentiality and impartiality. Additionally, the government limits subsidies to individual face-to-face counseling, hence excluding pure telephone, internet and group counseling.

This research was carried out prior to the start of the entitlement and investigated the desire for this external career counseling service.

Sample

The population of the study consisted of Flemish employees with at least one year of work experience. A proportionally stratified random sample of this population was drawn. We chose age and level of education as stratification variables since both variables influence career outcomes such as career success (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz., 1995; Tharenou, 1997) and career strategies (Guthrie, Coate & Schwoerer, 1998).

We collected the data in April 2004, using a standardized questionnaire. Respondents were interviewed by 65 professional interviewers from a private research office. We

opted for face-to-face interviews to increase the response rate, control consistent interpretations and safeguard the overall quality. All interviewers were experienced in conducting face-to-face interviews and were trained for this assignment by our academic staff. We organized a briefing on the content of the questionnaire for each individual interviewer in order to minimize the risk of interpretation errors.

The realized sample consisted of 957 employees of all economic industries. We have an equal proportion of males and females across the sample: 477 women (49.8%) and 480 man (50.2%). The average age of the respondents is 38 years, with 36.5% of the respondents younger than 35 years, 32.2% between 35 and 44, and 31.3% 45 years or older. In terms of education, 26.8% had no high school degree, 37.1% had a high school degree and 36.2% had a bachelor or master degree. The proportions by age and level of education reflect the actual distribution of age and educational categories in the Flemish population of employees (Labor Force Survey, 2002).

Measures⁵

Organizational career management was measured using 10 items developed by Sturges et al. (2002) (see also appendix A). Respondents had to indicate to what extent they had experienced different kinds of organizational career support. Hence, this scale does not measure the actual career activities undertaken by the organization, but the employee's *experience* of career management help. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items were, for instance, being given training to help develop their career and being introduced to people who might help their career development. Principal component factor analysis revealed two factors with eigenvalues higher than one. The scree plot indicated that one factor was sufficient. This factor has a good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .91).

Individual career management was measured with 16 items developed by Sturges et al. (2002) (see also Appendix A). The respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree) to what extent they had practiced a range of individual career management behaviors. After deleting the items 'I have built

⁵ Results of the factor analyses can be found in Appendix A.

contacts with people in areas where I would like to work' because of cross-loadings and 'I have refused to accept a new role because it would not help me develop new skills' because of low loadings, we found two reliable factors. The first factor, internal individual career management ($\alpha = .86$), combines seven items concerned with activities aimed at furthering the career inside the organization. Sample items include: 'I have pushed to be involved in high profile projects' and 'I have made my boss aware of my accomplishments'. The second factor, external individual career management ($\alpha = .86$), consists of seven items focusing on activities aimed at furthering the career outside the organization. They include activities such as gaining marketable knowledge and monitoring job advertisements.

Career satisfaction. To measure career satisfaction, we used the three items of Martins, Eddleston and Veiga (2002). Respondents had to indicate on a 7-point scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree) whether (1) in general, they were satisfied with their career status, (2) in general, they were satisfied with their present job and (3) they felt that their career progress was satisfactory. Factor analysis revealed a single factor ($\alpha = .89$).

For the three scales above, the original English version was translated into Dutch by the three authors. The translation was then reviewed for content validity and appropriateness in the Flemish context by three human resource management and four organizational behavior experts. Afterwards, nine non-academic employees of various educational levels filled in the questionnaire and discussed the clarity and their understanding of the items in an interview with one of the authors. Finally, the translated version was matched a last time with the original English version. Scale scores were computed by taking the mean of the scale items.

Desire for external career counseling. Before measuring the desire for external career counseling, the interviewers explained thoroughly what should be understood by external career counseling. In doing so, we controlled for different interpretations of the concept career counseling. It was also made clear to the respondents that the career counseling targeted employees, not unemployed people. The respondents were then asked to indicate the likelihood of participating in career counseling within five years if the government were to carry the full cost of the counseling. Answer categories ranged from 1 (I will definitely not seek counseling) to 4 (it is extremely

likely that I will seek counseling). We added a “don’t know”-category for respondents who were unable to estimate this probability. These respondents ($n = 124$) were excluded from the analysis, which is the most common way to deal with “don’t know”-data in survey research (Kroh, 2006).

Control variables. We controlled for age, gender, level of education, contract type and size of the organization because of known effects on career variables, like career support and career satisfaction (see, for instance, Guthrie et al., 1998; Forrier, 2003; Judge et al., 1995; Tharenou, 1997; Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe, 2005). Age was included as a continuous variable. The gender variable was dichotomous with 0 = male and 1 = female. We coded three educational levels: low (no high school degree), average (high school certification) and high (bachelor and master levels). Two contract types (temporary and permanent) and five organizational sizes (1-9, 10-49, 50-99, 100-499 and more than 500 employees) were distinguished. Dummy coding is an accepted way to control for nominal variables in path analysis (Hatcher, 1994).

Analysis

First, means, standard deviations and correlations were computed. Second, the model was tested using structural equation modeling (CALIS procedure in SAS Version 8). We opted for this technique because it allows simultaneous testing of multiple relationships. The analysis showed a good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. All fit-indices exceeded the recommended minimum values ($\chi^2[1] = 0.0003$ with $p = .99$; GFI = 1.00; AGFI = 1.00; CFI = 1.00; NFI = 1.00; NNFI = 1.05).

RESULTS

Table 12 shows basic statistics and the correlation matrix of the key variables. Noteworthy are the relatively low scores on all career management scales (OCM: $M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.95$; internal ICM: $M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.87$, external ICM: $M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.90$). Further, the respondents seemed quite satisfied with their careers ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.36$) and on average they expressed a modest desire for career counseling in the near future ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 0.93$). Table 12 further reveals that,

except for experiencing organizational career management and the desire for career counseling, all key variables significantly correlate, although some correlations are rather small (e.g. the correlation between OCM and external ICM = .12).

Table 12: Means, standard deviations and correlations among key variables

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>1. Career satisfaction</i>	832	5.39	1.36	-	-	-	-
<i>2. OCM^a</i>	829	2.59	0.95	.43***	-	-	-
<i>3. Internal ICM^b</i>	833	2.86	0.87	.22***	.55***	-	-
<i>4. External ICM^b</i>	833	2.16	0.90	-.20***	.12**	.47***	-
<i>5. Desire for external career counseling</i>	833	2.66	0.93	-.21***	-.01	.12**	.35***

^aOCM: Organizational Career Management. ^bICM: Individual Career Management.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Table 13 and 14 show the results of the path analysis. The explained variance (*R*²) of the dependent variables ranges from .16 for the desire for external career counseling (see Table 13, column 4) to .35 for internal individual career management (see Table 13, column 2).

Table 13: Results of the path analysis (standardized path coefficients; n=803)

	<i>1. Career satisfaction</i>	<i>2. Internal ICM^a</i>	<i>3. External ICM^a</i>	<i>4. Desire for external career counseling</i>
Age	.06	-.03	-.21***	-.10**
Female ^b	-.02	-.05	-.08**	.05
High school degree ^c	.06	.08*	.07	.04
Bachelor or master ^c	.09*	.22***	.28***	-.01
Permanent contract ^d	.13***	-.01	-.09**	-.03
1-9 employees ^e	-.00	.07*	.11***	-.04
10-49 employees ^e	.03	.07*	.17***	-.09*
50-199 employees ^e	.06	-.01*	.09**	.01
200-499 employees ^e	.02	.04	.05	-.01
OCM ^f	.44***	.55***	.21***	-
Career satisfaction	-	-.04	-.29***	-.16***
Internal ICM ^a	-	-	-	.03
External ICM ^a	-	-	-	.28***
<i>R</i> ²	.22	.35	.23	.16

^aICM: Individual Career Management. ^bReference category: male. ^cReference category: no high school degree. ^dReference category: temporary contract. ^eReference category: organizations with 500 employees or more. ^fOCM: Organizational Career Management.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 are related to the *reinforcement hypothesis*. Hypothesis 1, predicting a stimulating effect of organizational career management on individual career management, is fully supported. We find a significant positive relationship between experiencing organizational career management and both internal individual career management (standardized coefficient = .55, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 2) and external individual career management (standardized coefficient = .21, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 3). Hypothesis 2 concerns the association between individual career management and the desire for career counseling. We find a significant positive effect of external individual career management on the desire for career counseling (standardized coefficient = .28, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 4). The effect of internal individual career management is not significant (standardized coefficient = .03, $p = .47$; see Table 13, column 4). We can therefore only partially accept hypothesis 2.

Hypotheses 3, 4 and 5 are related to the *substitute hypothesis*. Experiencing organizational career management has a significant positive effect on career satisfaction (standardized coefficient = .44, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 1). This is consistent with hypothesis 3. Career satisfaction, in turn, negatively affects the desire for external career counseling (standardized coefficient = -.16, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 4). This confirms hypothesis 4. Further, career satisfaction has a negative effect on external individual career management (standardized coefficient = -.29, $p < .001$; see Table 13, column 3). The effect of career satisfaction on internal individual career management is not significant (standardized coefficient = -.04, $p = .26$; see Table 13, column 2). Hypothesis 5 is only partially supported.

The partial support for both hypotheses 2 and 5 implies that there is indeed a negative *indirect* effect of career satisfaction on the desire for career counseling, but only through *external* individual career management. The direct and indirect negative effects result in a strong negative total effect of career satisfaction on the desire for career counseling (total effect = -.24, $p < .001$; see Table 14).

Table 14: Total effects (n=803)

Total effect of...	<i>... on internal ICM^a</i>	<i>... on external ICM^a</i>	<i>... on the desire for external career counseling</i>
OCM ^b	.55***	.08***	-.05
Career satisfaction	-	-	-.24***

Note. The extent of significance of the total effects was determined using the method prescribed by Kline (1998). ^aICM: Individual Career Management. ^bOCM: Organizational Career Management.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Finally, we look at the effect of experiencing organizational career management on the desire for career counseling. As can be seen from Table 14, the total effect of experiencing organizational career support on the desire for career counseling is not significantly different from zero (total effect = $-.05$, $p = .83$). The positive influence via external individual career management is completely neutralized by the negative influence via career satisfaction. Moreover, the modification indices (not presented) show that the model would not improve by adding a direct relationship between experiencing organizational career management and the desire for career counseling (improvement in $\chi^2 = 0.0001$ with $p = 0.99$).

DISCUSSION

We unraveled the relationship between organizational career management and the desire for external career counseling. Our analyses revealed a complex relationship between both types of career support. In the first place, we found that experiencing organizational career management partly enhances the desire for external career counseling through its effect on external individual career management (reinforcement scenario). Organizational career support is likely to stimulate employees to invest in their external employability and the more experience employees have with these investments, the more interested they are in external career counseling. Secondly, experiencing organizational career management partly lowers the desire for external career counseling through its effect on career satisfaction (substitute scenario). Employees who experience career support from their employer are more satisfied with their career and, accordingly, feel less urge to participate in career counseling. This effect is strengthened by the impact of career satisfaction on

external individual career management. The more satisfied employees are with their career, the less initiative they undertake to enhance their external employability and consequently the less interest they show in external career counseling. Finally, the lack of a direct effect between experiencing organizational career management and the desire for external career counseling indicates that both forms of career support are also complementing each other (complement scenario). External career counseling and organizational career management seem to meet different needs. This scenario is moreover supported through internal individual career management: while experiencing organizational career management positively affects internal individual career management and encourages individuals to further their career within the current organization, the zero-effect of internal individual career management on the desire for career counseling shows that individuals do not expect a similar encouragement from external career counseling.

The support for both the complement and the substitute scenario backs up the widespread assumption that access to external career counseling is beneficial to employees. At the same time, the support for the reinforcement scenario points to a potential negative side-effect of this universal access. We found that employees who receive little organizational career support undertake less external ICM activities and are therefore less likely to show an interest in external career counseling, even though they might benefit equally (of more) from career counseling. To avoid this side-effect, expanding access to external career counseling should be accompanied by stimulating measures for organizations to offer career support to all employees. Stimulating organizational career management may also be needed to avoid free rider behavior of organizations. Since external career counseling and organizational career counseling are partly substitutes, organizations might start underinvesting in organizational career management and lay the burden with external career counseling. Stimulating measures for organizations to offer career support could include legal stipulations for employers to spend a certain percentage of the payroll on employability investments, as has been done in Canada, or developing quality-mark schemes, as is the case in the Netherlands (OECD, 2004).

Our analyses further provide insights in the relationship between organizational career management and individual career initiative. The results suggest that the experience

of career support from the employer stimulates employees to enhance both their internal and external employability. Moreover, in this study, the effect of experiencing organizational career management on internal individual career management was sixfold the effect on external individual career management. Since (internally) employable employees are believed to increase the organization's flexibility and adaptability (Neault, 2000; van Dam, 2004), this result might stimulate organizations to enhance their career support.

Yet, the positive relationship between organizational career management and individual career management could also be explained differently. The method used (structural equation modeling on cross-sectional data) does not allow to determine the direction of the relationship. The causality could be reverse. For instance, internal individual career management could induce organizational career management. Internal individual career management includes activities such as making the boss aware of one's accomplishments and pushing to be involved in high profile projects. Employees doing so become more visible and may therefore be more likely to receive organizational career support. Also, individuals' career self-management could affect the *perception* of organizational career support. It may be that people who invest in their own career are more perceptive to career opportunities in general, including career support offered by the employer. Furthermore, both organizational career management and individual career management could be influenced by a similar third factor. For instance, individuals who are likely to receive promotion may undertake more career initiative to fasten the promotion process. Employers too may be more inclined to offer these employees career support, because it can help them to prepare for the promotion they are considered for.

The results further clarify the relationship between individual career management and external career counseling. The higher employees score on *external* individual career management, the more likely they are to express a wish for career counseling. This suggests that proactivity stimulates an attitude of openness towards other employability-enhancing activities. However, other factors could play a role. For instance, people expecting or planning a career transition (for example a change of employer) could be more likely to undertake external individual career management and at the same time display a higher interest in career counseling. *Internal* individual

career management did not have an effect on the desire for external career counseling. Employees enhancing their internal employability through individual career management are neither more, nor less interested in career counseling. Possibly, external career counseling is not associated with investments in the internal employability.

Finally, we look at the role of career (dis)satisfaction. Our results show a negative influence of career satisfaction on both external individual career management and on the desire for career counseling. Put differently, career dissatisfaction seems to trigger external career initiative. This suggests that career initiative is more reactive than proactive. Yet, in the contemporary career era, in which job insecurity increases, even satisfied employees may benefit from a more proactive career attitude and from investments in their external employability.

We did not find a relationship between internal individual career management and career satisfaction. This might indicate that dissatisfied employees do not increase their efforts to enhance their internal employability in response to their dissatisfaction. However, it could also be that career satisfaction and internal individual career management mutually affect each other. For instance, dissatisfied employees could take on internal individual career management activities, which could, in turn, positively affect their career satisfaction. However, with our cross-sectional dataset we cannot explore this possibility of mutual influence.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study has several limitations. First of all, the cross-sectional data do not allow studying the direction of causal relationships (e.g individual career management and career satisfaction). Studying the model using longitudinal data could help to overcome this weakness. Secondly, only a moderate part of the variance in the dependent variables is explained by our model. Future research might want to seek for adequate additional explanatory variables. Thirdly, we only have information about the “desire for” external career counseling. This is due to the fact that the data was collected in the startup phase of the entitlement to career counseling in Flanders. At that time, the population of actual participants was too small to use “actual participation in career counseling” as a dependent variable. Moreover, the general

familiarity with the initiatives of external career counseling was limited. Although we gave a thorough explanation of career counseling to the respondents prior to the survey, this may still have hindered them from accurately evaluating their likelihood of participation. Future research should collect additional information concerning the actual participation in career counseling. Fourthly, both individual and organizational career management were measured by looking at specific activities. These lists of activities are not exhaustive and, moreover, the usefulness of each activity may depend on the specific situation of the individual. Therefore activity-independent scales, like the recent protean-career attitude scale of Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006) to measure career self-management, may be more appropriate. Fifthly, we only measured the respondents' *experience* of organizational career management. This experience may differ from the actual initiatives the organization took to support the career development of its employees. Future research might want to investigate whether the actual organizational career support exerts similar effects. Finally, it remains unclear to what extent our results are accounted for by the specific features of the Flemish entitlement scheme, such as the choice for subsidizing (and not, for instance, employing) the external career counselors and the decision to limit subsidy to individual face-to-face career counseling. To clarify this, cross-national research is needed. Since many Western countries are looking for good ways to ensure access to external career counseling to employees (OECD, 2004; Santana, 2004), such research seems highly relevant.

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CHAPTER 4

Can Career Self-Directedness Be Improved Through Counseling?⁶

ABSTRACT

We examine the malleability, antecedents and outcomes of career self-directedness using a longitudinal dataset of Flemish career counseling clients. The results show that the career counseling clients improved their career self-directedness during the counseling and that this improvement lasted for at least six months. Furthermore, we found career self-directedness to be explained in a significant way by self-awareness and adaptability, two competences identified by Hall (1996; 2004) as crucial for steering one's career. Also, career self-directedness related positively to training participation, job mobility and career satisfaction. The main implications of our findings for the protean career and the career counseling literature are discussed.

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CHAPTER 4

Can Career Self-Directedness Be Improved Through Counseling?

INTRODUCTION

‘The career is dead – long live the career!’ With this resounding phrase, Hall (1996) indicated the emergence of a new career era in which the traditional, bounded career is gradually losing ground in favor of a more self-directed, protean career. The latter refers to a career of which the individual, not the organization, is in charge and where the main criteria for success are subjective rather than objective (Hall, 1996; 2004). Since organizations today decreasingly guarantee lifelong employment to their employees (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003), individuals need to take a more (employer-) independent role in managing their career (Anakwe, Hall & Schor, 2000; Hall, 1996). The degree of responsibility a person takes up for his or her own career development is called ‘career self-directedness’.

Despite the high importance attached to career self-directedness today, many individuals find it hard to steer their career and express a need for help with their new career responsibility (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; Watts, 2000). The question then arises whether people can improve and develop their career self-directedness. The career literature offers some answers. For instance, Hall (1996; 2004) states that the ability to steer one’s career is dependent upon the career competences self-awareness and adaptability, which can be enhanced through relational learning (Fletcher, 1996; Hall and Kahn, 2002). Relational learning refers to learning through relating to others and is most likely to occur in relationships in which the parties take a holistic view of each other and recognize that they both can benefit from the interaction (Fletcher, 1996; Kram, 1996). Furthermore, external career counseling – in fact a form of relational learning – is often proposed as an instrument to improve people’s career self-directedness (e.g. Cedefop, 2005; Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; OECD, 2004). External career counseling refers to a range of services, including one-to-one

interviews and group discussions, that are conducted independently from the counselee's employer and intend to assist individuals with career-related choices and with developing the competences to plan and manage their own career path (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004). Hence, supporting clients in developing the competences needed for self-directing their career is considered to be a major task of external career counseling.

The above shows that the career literature assumes career self-directedness to be malleable. However, this assumption is rarely made explicit or investigated empirically. This paper tries to fill that gap. We examined the hypothesis that career self-directedness can be improved through career counseling. In particular, we examined (1) whether career counseling clients manage to enhance their self-awareness and adaptability, and if so, (2) whether this career competence development improves clients' career self-directedness. Moreover, we investigated (3) the impact of the (potential) improvement in career self-directedness on two employer-independent career behaviors, i.e. participating in training and job mobility, and on career satisfaction. In this way, we aimed to improve the overall understanding of career self-directedness and so contribute to the protean career literature. To examine these research questions, we used a longitudinal dataset of adult career counseling clients who were all employed at the start of the counseling.

HYPOTHESES

Improving Career Competences through Career Counseling

We expect career counseling to have a positive impact on the career competences self-awareness and adaptability. Self-awareness means having an accurate view of one's strengths, weaknesses, motives and values and of whom one wants to become (Fugate & Asford, 2003; Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; Stickland, 1996). An important objective of career counseling is to promote self-exploration (Cedefop, 2005; Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; OECD, 2004; Sears, 1982). Through interviews, tests and assignments, career counselors support clients in exploring their strengths, weaknesses, interests, values and aspirations (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; OECD, 2004). Successful exploration of the self is likely to result in a better understanding

and thus in more self-awareness (Taveira & Moreno, 2003). Career counseling may also help people to enhance their adaptability. Adaptability refers to the individual's ability to adapt to changes without great difficulty (O'Connell, McNeely & Hall, 2008; Savickas, 1997) and includes both the competence and the motivation to change (Fugate & Ashforth, 2003; Morrison & Hall, 2002). Many clients in career counseling are undergoing some sort of change, for instance a lay-off or a voluntary career switch. Through assignments and interviews, the career counselor can help them to accept and handle the change. Experience with change and with handling change might improve the person's overall adaptability (Axtell et al., 2002; Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999). Moreover, during career counseling, counselees progress through a career decision process. During this process, they acquire insight into career alternatives and develop the competence to actually change their career's direction. The above considerations bring us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: After participation in career counseling, counselees have higher levels of self-awareness and adaptability.

Self-awareness and Adaptability as Drivers of Career Self-Directedness

Hall (2004) states that self-awareness and adaptability are critical for self-directing one's career. Individuals need self-awareness to find career direction, to feel motivated to invest in their career and to sense their learning needs. Adaptability helps people to stay flexible, handle the ever changing environment and be self-correcting in response to new demands from the environment (Hall, 1996; 2004; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Individuals possessing only one of these two competences might experience difficulties in steering their career. For instance, adaptability without self-awareness might cause blind reactivity. Individuals then risk changing in ways that are not consistent with their own values and goals. Self-awareness without adaptability might have a paralyzing effect. People who know what they want but are unable to handle unexpected events or set-backs, might get blocked and are therefore less likely to keep investing in their career. Finally, people with low self-awareness and low adaptability are rigid and might only be able to carry out orders in a stable environment (Hall, 2004).

This reasoning combined with our expectation that career counseling clients are likely to improve their self-awareness and adaptability lead us to expect that a client's improvement in self-awareness and adaptability will be accompanied by a higher level of career self-directedness.

Hypothesis 2: Improvements in self-awareness and adaptability result in a higher level of career self-directedness.

Impact on Training Participation, Job Mobility and Career Satisfaction

Since career self-directedness implies taking an independent stance in directing and developing one's career (Briscoe et al., 2006), we expect the increase in career self-directedness to stimulate people to take employer-independent career action. In particular, we examine the impact of the increase in career self-directedness on participation in training in pursuit of one's own career goals and on job mobility. Furthermore, as the protean career theory (Hall, 1996; 2004) predicts that people will self-direct their career in pursuit of psychological success, we hypothesize that a higher increase in career self-directedness will result in a higher level of psychological career success.

Hypothesis 3: The increase in career self-directedness is related positively to training participation, job mobility and career satisfaction.

METHOD

Procedure

The study was conducted in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern part of Belgium. In January 2005, the Flemish government started with subsidizing qualified external career services for counseling adult employees. We collected data from actual clients in external career counseling through standardized questionnaires. We contacted all external and subsidized career services that were active in Flanders in 2005. Twelve of the 14 career counseling centers, representing 92% of the counselees, agreed to participate. The survey design consists of three measurements: (a) at the start of the first counseling session (T0), (b) at the end of the last counseling session (T1) and (c)

six months after the end of the counseling trajectory (T2). For the first two measurements, the career counselors handed out the questionnaires and the respondents returned them to the researchers in a closed envelop. The questionnaires for the third measurement were sent to the home addresses of all wave 1-respondents. To be able to link data across waves, respondents were asked to indicate their initials and date of birth.

The first assessment (T0) took place between April and September 2006. During that period, 1709 employees started a career counseling trajectory in one of the co-operating 12 centers. 556 (32.5%) of them completed the first questionnaire. The second wave (T1) started in May 2006 and ended in March 2007, resulting in 273 (16.0%) questionnaires. Finally, between November 2006 and October 2007, we received 316 (18.5%) questionnaires for the third wave (T2).

Because the drop in respondents between T0 and T1 was rather substantial, we tried to examine its causes. We phoned and e-mailed all dropouts in February 2007 and reached 80% of them. The majority (41%) reported that their counselor had not given them a second questionnaire. Furthermore, 19% had not yet finished the counseling trajectory, another 19% had received the second questionnaire but had not responded to it ('true dropouts'), 11% said they had returned the second questionnaire ('lost in the mail') and the remaining 10% did not remember whether they had received the second questionnaire. In a dropout analysis we compared the three waves-respondents on all relevant T0-data (age, gender, educational level, career self-directedness, self-awareness, adaptability) with participants who did not respond to the second and/or third wave. No significant differences were found. We also examined the dropout at T1 and T2 separately. The T1-respondents did not differ significantly from T1 non-respondents. However, when comparing T2 respondents with T2 non-respondents, we found the latter to have lower levels of adaptability at the start of the counseling ($p = 0.023$). Hence, the dropout is not completely random.

Sample

A total of 202 individuals completed the three questionnaires. Sixty (29.7%) were men. The average respondent was 36.4 years old, with 45.0% of the respondents younger than 35 years, 38.6% between 35 and 44 and 16.3% 45 years or older. In

terms of education, 22.3% had at most a high school degree, 38.4% had a bachelor degree and 39.5% a master degree. One participant (0.5%) was non-European and 4 (2.0%) were disabled. Men, clients of 45 years and older and clients with at most a high school degree were slightly underrepresented in the sample. Corresponding shares in the population of clients who started counseling in one of the 12 co-operating career centers were 38.0%, 17.4% and 29.4% respectively.

All respondents were employed at the start of the counseling. The majority of the respondents worked full-time (73.1%), in the private sector (89.4%) and with a permanent contract (83.8%). When starting with career counseling, the majority of the respondents (85.4%) were dissatisfied with their employment situation. Moreover, 25 participants (12.4%) had received a lay-off notice by their employer shortly before seeking counseling.

Counseling Intervention

The counseling interventions were partly standardized across career centers. All interventions started with an intake interview, in which the counselor provided information about the counseling procedure and learned about the main career concerns of the individual. The intake was followed by a number of counseling sessions of, on average, one to two hours in which the respondents were helped with a self-analysis and with the selection of career goals. These sessions were holistic in nature, i.e., the counselees discussed their career issues in relation to other life issues with their counselor. The length of the counseling trajectory was variable and mainly determined by the particular needs of the counselees. The shortest trajectory lasted 3 weeks and consisted of 3 sessions, whereas the longest trajectory consisted of 13 sessions spread over 31 weeks (7 months). An average counseling trajectory lasted 16.85 weeks (standard deviation: 1.66) and consisted of 5.75 sessions (standard deviation: 1.61).

Most career counselors had a bachelor or master degree in human sciences (most often in psychology). On average, they had been working as career counselors for two years, although some had up to 15 years of experience. The counselors developed their career counseling competences through external workshops, networking events

and internal training. When the Flemish government started with the entitlement to career counseling, several workshops on specific career counseling methods (e.g. solution focused and holistic coaching) were organized by certified instructors. This was done because there is no specific education for career counselors in Flanders. Furthermore, career counselors of the different centers meet regularly in networking events in which they discuss and exchange counseling methods and experience with specific assessments tools. In addition to these external events, career centers foresee a period of apprenticeship for new counselors and offer external training opportunity to their employees.

In what follows, we discuss the analyses, measures and results for each hypothesis separately. This is because the measures and analyses differ substantially per hypothesis.

DO CLIENTS SUCCEED TO IMPROVE THEIR CAREER COMPETENCES?

Analysis

To examine whether career counseling clients improve their career competences in a durable way, we performed two repeated measurement multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs). The first examines changes during the counseling and the second checks for changes afterwards. By using a multivariate analysis method, we were able to examine multiple dependent variables simultaneously without enlarging the risk of Type I-errors (Sharma, 1996). Moreover, by using a repeated measurement method, we took into account correlations between observations related to the same person. If the MANOVAs indicated changes over time, we performed repeated measurement univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to find out which of the three competences had changed in which direction (Sharma, 1996).

Measures

Career self-directedness, self-awareness and adaptability were measured at Time 0 (T0), Time 1 (T1) and Time 2 (T2) on a five-point Likert scale. The measures at each measurement were submitted to exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation.

After excluding one item, belonging to the career self-directedness scale of Briscoe et al. (2006), we found three clearly separated factors at each of the three measurement moments. All items had factor loadings of .40 or higher on the intended construct and of less than .40 on the other constructs⁷.

Career self-directedness was measured with seven items of the self-directed career management scale developed and validated by Briscoe, Hall and DeMuth (2006). This scale was designed to measure the self-perceived degree of responsibility people take in managing their own career. Sample items are ‘Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forwards’ and ‘I am in charge of my career’. One item of the original scale, i.e., ‘Where my career is concerned, I am very much my own person’, was left out because the expression ‘being your own person’ has no Dutch equivalent. We replaced the item by an alternative one (i.e. Up till now, I have determined my career course mainly myself). However, the factor analyses yielded better results without this alternative item. The final seven item scale turned out to have a good internal consistency at each of the three measurement moments ($\alpha_{T0} = .77$; $\alpha_{T1} = .81$; $\alpha_{T2} = .82$).

Self-awareness was measured with six items that were developed for this study. The scale measures clients’ awareness of their strengths, weaknesses, values and motives. Sample items are ‘I know my strengths and weaknesses’ and ‘I am aware of what I value in my career and life’. The item formulation was based on definitions of self-awareness (Fugate & Asford, 2003; Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; Stickland, 1996) and inspired by existing scales of self-knowledge (Raabe, Frese & Beehr, 2007) and career insight (London, 1993). The authors originally developed a scale of five items, which was then discussed with career counselors of the 12 career centers that cooperated in this study. Based on these discussions, we adapted the formulation of some items and added an extra item (“I know how to cope with my weaknesses”). The reliability and validity of this six-item scale was tested with a sample of 155 management consultants (non-published study). The measure turned out to have a good internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = .84$) and to be statistically related to existing measures, such as the self-esteem scale of Rosenberg (1965) and the career self-management scales of Sturges, Guest, Conway and Mackenzie-Davey (2002). Also in

⁷ Results of the factor analyses can be found in Appendix B.

this study, we found the six items to belong to a single factor with good internal consistency at each of the three measurement moments ($\alpha_{T0} = .78$; $\alpha_{T1} = .80$; $\alpha_{T2} = .82$).

Adaptability was measured using a five-item scale of London (1993). The scale measures people's perceived competence and motivation to adapt to changing circumstances. Items include 'To what extent are you able to adapt to changes in your career?' and 'To what extent do you welcome changes in your career?'. Reported internal consistency ranged from .66 (London, 1993; study 2) to .82 (Chiaburu, Baker & Pitariu, 2006). In this study, we found cronbach α 's of .74 at T0, .79 at T1 and .78 at T2.

Results and Discussion

Table 15 shows basic statistics and a correlation matrix of the key variables. The means of career self-directedness, self-awareness and – to a lesser extent – adaptability turned out to be higher at T1 and T2 than at T0. This suggests that career counseling clients may have succeeded in enhancing their career competences.

Table 15: Basic statistics and Pearson's correlations of key variables (n=196)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-awareness T0	3.34	0.62	-							
2. Self-awareness T1	4.13	0.50	.42***	-						
3. Self-awareness T2	4.17	0.50	.38***	.58***	-					
4. Adaptability T0	3.56	0.59	.21**	.19***	.14*	-				
5. Adaptability T1	3.71	0.62	.24**	.29***	.23**	.59***	-			
6. Adaptability T2	3.58	0.64	.22**	.27***	.34***	.50***	.52***	-		
7. Career self-directedness T0	3.75	0.57	.19**	.15*	.11	.29***	.13	.16*	-	
8. Career self-directedness T1	4.05	0.55	.15*	.44***	.26***	.27***	.32***	.22**	.52***	-
9. Career self-directedness T2	4.05	0.52	.27***	.46***	.43***	.22**	.23**	.32***	.37***	.62***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

To find out whether these increases are statistically significant, we look at the results of the MANOVAs and ANOVAs. We first look at the changes during the career counseling. The multivariate analysis indicates that there have been significant changes over time (Pillai's Trace [195] = 0.63, $p < .001$). Thus, the counselees' career competence levels have changed during the career counseling. The univariate statistics indicate that this result is accounted for by an increase in each of the three competences (see also Figure 2). The mean increase in self-awareness ($d_{T1-T0} = +0.79$, $T[198] = 18.10$, $p < .001$) is far more pronounced than the increase in adaptability ($d_{T1-T0} = +.15$, $T[201] = 4.0$, $p < .001$). This might be caused by the fact that self-exploration is a core focus in most career counseling trajectories, whereas adaptability is only indirectly affected. The mean increase in career self-directedness ($d_{T1-T0} = +0.30$, $T[197] = 7.72$, $p < .001$) lies in between the increases in self-awareness and adaptability.

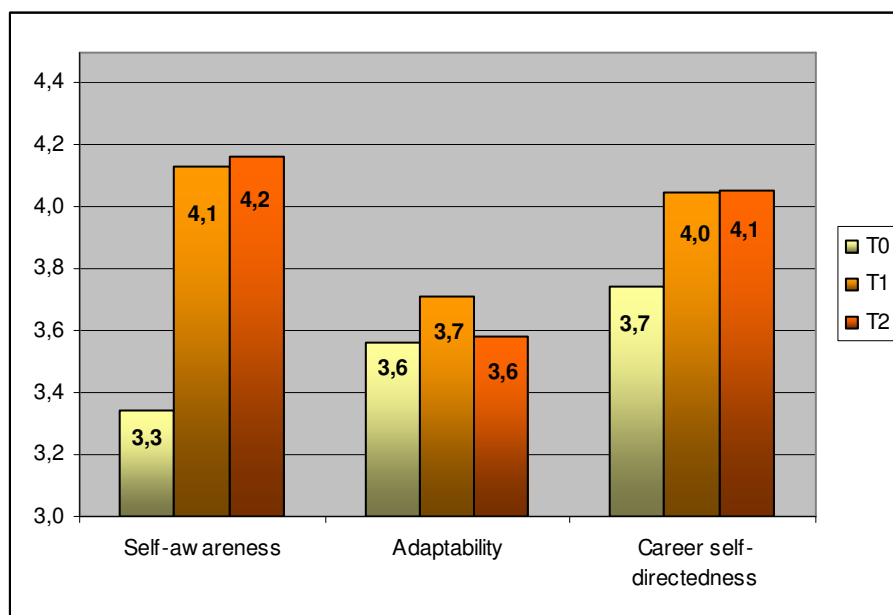


Figure 2: Changes in self-awareness, adaptability and career self-directedness in career counseling clients over time (n=196)

We now examine the changes after the career counseling. The multivariate analysis shows that six months after counseling, the level of at least one of the career competences was significantly different from its level at the end of the counseling (Pillai's Trace [197] = 9.91, $p < .01$). The univariate statistics indicate that this result can be fully ascribed to a significant decrease in adaptability ($d_{T2-T1} = -0.14$, $T[199] = -3.17$, $p = .002$). Six months after the end of counseling, the adaptability score had

almost dropped to its initial level (i.e. at the start of the counseling). Hence, the career counseling did not succeed in enhancing clients' adaptability in a sustainable way. Perhaps career counseling is not the best instrument to improve a person's adaptability in the long run. It is also possible that adaptability is not a (learnable) competence, but rather a fairly stable personality trait. About the nature of adaptability exists little consensus in the literature. On the one hand, specific advice has been offered on how people can improve their adaptability, assuming that adaptability is malleable (O'Connell, McNeely & Hall, 2008). On the other hand, several researchers treat adaptability as an inflexible personality trait (Chan, 2000; Griffin & Hesketh, 2003), arguing it has strong parallels with the Big Five trait 'openness' (Griffin & Hesketh, 2003). If adaptability is indeed a personality trait, the short-term increase we found immediately after the counseling might be a 'fake' effect, caused by an increase in self-confidence, rather than by a real improvement in the person's capacity to deal with changes. Finally, the relapse in adaptability might be explained by the T2 dropout, which was not fully random. In the method section, we noted that the T2 non-respondents had a lower mean level of adaptability at T0. However, people with lower initial levels of adaptability are able to make more progression. Indeed, the Pearson correlation coefficient between adaptability and its long-term change variable is significantly negative ($\rho = -.45$; $p < .001$), indicating that respondents with lower initial levels of adaptability made more progress in the long run. This phenomenon is called 'regression to the mean' (see further). If the wave 3 dropout had been more random, the average long-term increase in adaptability may have been more substantial than it is now.

Scores for self-awareness and career self-directedness six months after the counseling did not differ significantly from the levels at the end of the counseling (self-awareness: $d_{T2-T1} = +0.04$, $T[201] = 1.10$, $p = .271$; career self-directedness: $d_{T2-T1} = +0.01$, $T[199] = 0.18$, $p = .861$). So, the short-term increase in both competences lasted for at least six months. These results suggest that self-awareness and career self-directedness are indeed competences which can be improved in a sustainable way. Since our study did not include a control group, we have to be careful in fully ascribing this improvement to the career counseling.

Overall, hypothesis 1 is partially confirmed. We found evidence of a significant short-term effect. However, the data only partially confirmed the hypothesized long-term effects.

ARE SELF-AWARENESS AND ADAPTABILITY DRIVERS OF CAREER SELF-DIRECTEDNESS?

Analysis

To examine whether self-awareness and adaptability contribute to career self-directedness, we carried out two conditional change regression analyses. This type of regression takes the form $\Delta Y = \beta_1 Y_{t_0} + \beta_2 X_{t_0} + \beta_3 \Delta X$ (Finkel, 1995). The dependent variable is a change variable ('change') and one of the explanatory variables is the baseline value of the dependent variable ('conditional'). In the first regression, we looked at the short term changes (i.e. T1-T0), while in the second regression, we examined the long-term changes (i.e. T2-T0).

In both regressions, we modeled 'change in career self-directedness' as the dependent variable and 'change in self-awareness', 'change in adaptability' and the baseline values of self-awareness, adaptability and career self-directedness as the explanatory variables. By including the baseline value of career self-directedness we accounted for 'regression to the mean', i.e. the tendency of change scores to be negatively correlated with their initial scores (Bonate, 2000; Finkel, 1995). Without controlling for this phenomenon, the change regression would produce biased results if the baseline value is related with the dependent variable (Finkel, 1995) – which is likely to be the case in our regression. In addition, we included the baseline values of the explanatory change variables, because this is less restricting than examining the effect of the change variables alone. As Edwards (1995) points out, the latter assumes an equal impact of the X on Y over time, which is often not the case. Moreover, inclusion in the model of both ΔX and X_0 poses no serious problems for estimation aside from the possibility of multicollinearity when the X-variables are extremely stable (Finkel, 1995). We therefore checked for multicollinearity using the instructions of Hair, Anderson and Tatham (1998). Hair and his colleagues state that there is a multicollinearity risk if the Pearson's correlation between two variables is higher than .90, if a variable's

tolerance is lower than .10 or if a variable's VIF is 1.00 or higher. This was not the case in our analysis.

Following the normal procedure in conditional change regressions (Finkel, 1995), we did not include time-constant control variables, i.e., control variables that are unlikely to change during the time interval that is examined (such as gender, age and level of education). This implies that we assume the impact of these variables on career self-directedness to be stable over time. To make sure whether this assumption is acceptable, we also performed the analyses with gender, age and level of education and found their impact to be non-significant.

We did include four time-variant control variables. First, we controlled for the level of career satisfaction at the start of the counseling and for whether the respondent had received a lay-off notice shortly before seeking counseling. This is done because both aspects may impact clients' motivation and necessity to change (White & Killeen, 2002). In addition, because the length of the intervention may influence the counseling outcomes (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000), we controlled for the number of counseling sessions and for the duration of the counseling trajectory.

Measures

Control variables. Career satisfaction was measured at T0 using a single item. Given the complex nature of subjective career success, a single item is believed to capture its essence more effectively than facet scores (Heslin, 2003; Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson & Paul, 1989). Respondents were asked to indicate their overall level of career satisfaction on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (0: extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (10: extremely satisfied). To measure lay-off, we asked the respondents at T0 whether they had received a lay-off notice by their employer shortly before seeking counseling (1: yes; 0: no). The number of counseling sessions and the duration of the trajectory were self-reported by the respondents at T1 (immediately after the counseling).

Results and Discussion

Table 16 shows the results of both the short-term and the long-term regression analysis. In both analyses, the change in self-awareness (short-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.47, $p < .001$; long-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.31, $p < .001$) and the change in adaptability (short-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.19, $p = .004$; long-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.18, $p = .004$) turn out to be significantly and positively related to the change in career self-directedness. This is in line with our second hypothesis.

Table 16: Standardized regression coefficients of the regressions with change in career self-directedness as dependent variable

	Change in career self-directedness	
	Short term (T1-T0) (n=181)	Long term (T2-T0) (n=181)
Career self-directedness T0	-.57***	-.66***
Career satisfaction T0	+.05	-.07
Being laid-off at T0	+.08	+.08
Number of counseling sessions (T1)	+.05	+.04
Length of the trajectory (in weeks) (T1)	-.02	+.03
R^2	.29***	.39***
Self-awareness T0	+.37***	+.40***
Change in self-awareness		
Short-term (T1-T0)	+.47***	
Long-term (T2-T0)		+.31***
Adaptability T0	+.17*	+.13*
Change in adaptability		
Short-term (T1-T0)	+.19**	
Long-term (T2-T0)		+.18**
<i>Change in R²</i>	.19***	.14***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

We further see that – in both regressions – the baseline value of career self-directedness has a significant negative effect on the dependent variable (short-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = -.57, $p < .001$; long-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = -.66, $p < .001$). Hence, the lower the initial level

of career self-directedness, the higher the probability that this competence has improved. This result shows that regression to the mean indeed occurred.

Also the baseline values of self-awareness (short-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.37, $p < .001$; long-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.40, $p < .001$) and adaptability (short-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.17, $p = .011$; long-term regression: standardized regression coefficient = +.13, $p = .036$) have a significant, positive impact on the change in career self-directedness. Thus, the higher the levels of self-awareness and adaptability a person expressed at the start of the counseling, the higher the increase in career self-directedness (*ceteris paribus*). This suggests that improving career self-directedness will be easier for individuals already possessing a certain level of self-awareness and adaptability before the intervention. However, this interpretation does not take into account the negative correlation between the baseline values and the change scores (regression to the mean). Indeed, most clients have either a high baseline value and a low change score or a low baseline value and a high change score. Hence, for most individuals, one of these two variables will dominate the impact on the change in career self-directedness. The regression coefficients of the baseline values and the change scores are (more or less) of the same magnitude, indicating that it is the final level of self-awareness and adaptability that is of influence and not how a person achieved this level.

None of the control variables turns out to influence the change in career self-directedness. This may be due to the specific setting of our study. In a naturalistic career counseling setting, the counseling characteristics (including the length) are largely determined by the needs of the client. Hence, respondents were likely to receive additional counseling until the aspired outcomes were realized.

Finally, we look at the explanatory power of the model. In the short-term regression, the model accounts for 48% of the change in career self-directedness ($F[9,172] = 17.71$; $p < .001$). The baseline value of career self-directedness and the control variables explain 29% ($p < .001$) of the change score, whereas self-awareness and adaptability additionally explain 19% ($p < .001$). In the long-term regression, the explanatory value of the model is slightly higher (total $R^2 = 53\%$; $F[9,172] = 21.34$; $p < .001$). The baseline value of career self-directedness and the control variables

account for 39% ($p < .001$) of the variance in the long-term change score and self-awareness and adaptability for an additional 14% ($p < .001$). These results provide strong support for our second hypothesis that self-awareness and adaptability contribute to career self-directedness.

IMPACT ON TRAINING, JOB MOBILITY AND CAREER SATISFACTION

Analysis

Finally, we examine the impact of career self-directedness on training participation (1: yes; 0: no), job mobility (1: yes; 0: no) and career satisfaction. These three outcome variables were all measured at T2. We performed two logistic regressions (for training participation and for job mobility) and one linear regression (for career satisfaction). We included the long-term increase in career self-directedness as explanatory variable and controlled for the baseline level of career self-directedness, age, gender (1: female; 0: male), educational level (1: at most high school degree; 0: bachelor or master degree), career satisfaction at the start of the counseling, being laid-off before the start of the counseling (1: yes; 0: no), the number of counseling sessions and the length of the trajectory.

Measures

For training participation, we asked the respondents to indicate whether they had started with a career-related training course in pursuit of their career goals set during the career counseling (1: yes; 0: no). Job mobility was measured using the question: “Are you still employed with the same employer as the one at the beginning of the career counseling?”. Answer categories were (1) Yes, (2) Yes, but I have also started working in another company, (3) Yes, but I have also started my own business (4) No, I work with another company, (5) No, I am self-employed and (6) No, I am unemployed. People who indicated that they were unemployed (10%; $n=20$) were excluded from the analyses. We recoded the other answer categories into a job mobility dummy, with 0: “still in the same employment situation as at the start of the counseling” (former answer category 1) and 1: “at work, but in a different situation than at the start of the counseling” (former answer categories 2 to 5). Career

satisfaction was measured with the single item: “Overall, how satisfied are you with your career up till now?”. The respondents could answer on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (0: extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (10: extremely satisfied).

Training, Job Mobility and Satisfaction after Career Counseling

Thirty seven percent of the respondents said they had actively searched for and started with a career-related training course in pursuit of the career goals they had set during the career counseling. With 37%, the training participation rate among our respondents is considerably higher than on the Flemish labor market, where annually 9% of the adults between 25 and 59 participate in training on their own accord (Steunpunt WSE, 2006). We need to remark that these percentages may not be fully comparable.

Job mobility is also high among our respondents. Six months after the end of the career counseling, 35% had changed employer, 4% combined his or her previous job with a new one and 2% were full-time self-employed. For comparison: the annual job mobility rate on the Flemish labor market is only 5% (Steunpunt WSE, 2004). However, career counseling did not imply job mobility for all clients. Indeed, at T2 the largest group of respondents (49%) was still with the same employer as the one at the start of the counseling. The remaining 10% was – as we already mentioned – unemployed at T2.

Finally, six months after the counseling, the average respondent was moderately satisfied with his or her career ($m_{T2} = 6.80/10$; s.d. = 1.83). This is an improvement compared to the average level of career satisfaction at the start of the counseling ($m_{T0} = 5.11/10$; s.d. = 2.07). Respondents who changed employer were on average more satisfied with their career ($m_{T2} = 7.52/10$; s.d. = 1.30) than employees who stayed in their initial employment situation ($m_{T2} = 6.26/10$; s.d. = 1.97).

Impact of Career Self-Directedness

To examine whether the increase in career self-directedness helps to explain training participation, job mobility and career satisfaction six months after the counseling, we look at the regression results presented in Table 17. For the logistic regressions

(training participation and job mobility), table 17 reports the odds ratios. An odds ratio higher than one implies that the variable has a positive influence on the possibility that the counselee participated in training or made a job transition. An odds ratio lower than one indicates the opposite. For the linear regression (career satisfaction), table 17 reports the standardized beta-coefficients.

Table 17: The odds ratios of the logistic regressions explaining training participation and job mobility and the standardized coefficients of the linear regression explaining career satisfaction

	<i>Training participation</i> (<i>n=168</i>)	<i>Job mobility</i> (<i>n=154</i>)	<i>Career satisfaction</i> (<i>n=167</i>)
Woman ^a	1.40	0.80	-.04
Age	1.00	0.93**	-.03
Low educated ^b	2.70*	0.56	-.32***
Career satisfaction T0	1.13	0.99	.20**
Laid-off at T0	1.40	21.24**	+.10
Number of counseling sessions	0.88	0.98	+.10
Length of the trajectory	1.01	0.99	+.04
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Career self-directedness T0	1.24	3.81**	+.26**
Change in career self-directedness (T2-T0)	2.47*	3.71**	+.44***
<i>Nagelkerke R²/R²</i>	.12	.30	.27

^a Reference category: man. ^b Reference category: higher educated.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As we expected (see hypothesis 3), the long-term change in career self-directedness has a significant positive impact on training participation (odds ratio = 2.47, $p = .011$), job mobility (odds ratio = 3.71, $p = .002$) and career satisfaction six months after the career counseling (standardized coefficient = 0.44; $p < .001$). So, the more counsees increased their career self-directedness during or after the career counseling, the higher the likelihood that they started a training course or changed employer and the higher the expected level of career satisfaction.

We then look at the impact of the baseline value of career self-directedness. In the training participation regression, we found no significant impact of the baseline value (odds ratio = 1.24, $p = 0.328$). Perhaps, counselees who scored high on career self-directedness at the start of the counseling had invested in their competence development in the near past and were, as a result, less in need of participating in a(nother) course. In both the job mobility (odds ratio = 3.81; $p = 0.003$) and the career satisfaction regression (standardized coefficient = +0.26, $p = 0.003$), the baseline value of career self-directedness exerts a significant positive influence. Hence, not only counselees who increased their career self-directedness, but also those who already self-directed their career at the start of the counseling are more likely to have changed employer and to be more satisfied with their career six months after the counseling.

Also some control variables exert a significant impact. First, we see a significant negative impact of age on the job mobility likelihood (odds ratio = 0.93, $p = 0.005$), indicating that older participants are less likely to have changed employer. This finding is in line with results from other studies on age differences in labor market mobility (e.g. Groot & Verberne, 1999). Furthermore, low-educated people showed a higher training participation likelihood (odds ratio = 2.70, $p = 0.024$) and lower levels of career satisfaction (standardized coefficient = -.32, $p < 0.001$). Perhaps, low-educated people encounter more difficulties in pursuing their career goals, which may stimulate them to invest in further formal training. For the same reason, people with a low educational degree may have made less progress towards their career goals six months after the counseling, which may affect their career satisfaction negatively (Lent & Brown, 2008). Thirdly, we found a significant positive effect of career satisfaction at T0 on career satisfaction at T2 (standardized coefficient = +.20, $p = 0.005$). This implies that counselees who were less satisfied with their career at the start of the counseling are likely to be still less satisfied with their career six months after the counseling. Perhaps, a period of six months is too short to overcome strong career dissatisfaction; or, career satisfaction levels across time may be influenced by individual characteristics, such as personality (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002). Finally, we found a significant positive impact of being laid-off at T0 on job mobility (odds ratio = 21.24; $p = 0.005$). As counselees who were fired before the start of the

counseling were unable to stay with their initial employer, they have evidently a higher likelihood of changing employer.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The main contribution of this article lies in its improvement of the overall understanding of career self-directedness, a core feature of the protean career. In this way, this study primarily contributes to the protean career literature. Our results first of all showed that career self-directedness is a competence that can be improved in a sustainable way. This result is extremely important given the high value contemporary scholars put on self-directing one's career (e.g. Hall, 2004; Stickland, 1996). Furthermore, it suggests that "being protean" is not an innate trait, but (at least partly) malleable. Second, we found career self-directedness to be explained in a significant way by self-awareness and adaptability, two competences identified by Hall (1996; 2004) as crucial for being protean. However, our model also left a considerable part of the variance in career self-directedness unexplained, indicating that other factors, likely both individual and contextual, play a role. It seems interesting for future research to identify those factors in order to increase our understanding of career self-directedness. Inspiration might be sought in social-cognitive career models (e.g. Lent & Brown, 2008). Like the protean career notion, these models stress individual agency. However, they emphasize another competence, i.e. self-efficacy, and account for contextual and situational influences. A third contribution of this study relates to the outcomes of career self-directedness that we examined. We found career self-directedness to relate positively to training participation and job mobility. Hence, individuals who take an independent stance in their career tend to translate this competence into actual employer-independent behavior. This finding confirms the value of the concept of career self-directedness itself. Furthermore, we found career self-directedness to relate positively to career satisfaction. This is in line with the protean career theory's assumption that people will self-direct their career in pursuit of psychological success (Hall, 2004).

Besides contributing to the protean career literature, this paper provides insights on self-awareness and adaptability. We found that self-awareness – like career self-directedness – can be improved in a sustainable way. Also adaptability was found to

have increased during the counseling. However, during the first six months after the counseling, it dropped back to its initial level. We suspect this to be due to either the type of the intervention or the nature of adaptability. Either career counseling may not be the best instrument to affect people's adaptability because it is not its core focus; or adaptability may be a personality trait, making it much harder to change than if it were a regular competence. As we discussed earlier, there is little consensus about the nature of adaptability (i.e. trait versus state) in the literature. At the same time, adaptability is considered to be highly important in today's labor market and, moreover, constitutes a core construct in several career theories, such as the career construction theory (Savickas, 2002). It therefore seems imperative for future research to examine the construct's nature in more depth. For instance, researchers could examine the relationship between adaptability and the Big Five personality traits or investigate the impact of intervention designed to improve people's adaptability.

This study also adds to the career counseling literature. First, we examined a naturalistic career counseling setting rather than a contrived one, as has mostly been done (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). We believe that our study's setting can explain why we – contrary to previous studies (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000) – found no impact of the length of the counseling. A study's setting (i.e. naturalistic versus contrived) might also affect the impact of other process variables, because counselors in a naturalistic counseling setting may adapt the counseling process to the needs of the counselee. Given the call for more studies on the career counseling process (Heppner & Heppner, 2003), it therefore seems important to carefully consider the study's setting when interpreting findings on process variables. Second, our results stress the importance of following up career counseling clients longitudinally, which is far from common practice in career counseling research (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Herr, 2001; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004). Longitudinal studies do not only allow to examine the sustainability of the short-term improvements, which is – as our results indicate – not evident, but more importantly, they allow to focus on outcomes other than learning effects, such as behaviors and career satisfaction (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004; Walsh, 2003). Only by linking learning effects to longer term benefits for the individual can we evaluate whether what is assessed and learned was important to be done (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). A third contribution of our study lies in the use of a non-traditional

sample. By using a sample of employed adults instead of the traditional college and high school students (Spokane, Fouad & Swanson, 2003; Tang, 2003), we showed that people of various ages and at different points in their life may benefit from external career counseling, as is increasingly expected (OECD, 2004). Finally, the finding that our respondents succeeded in improving their career self-directedness in a sustainable way suggests that career counseling may indeed be a good instrument to help people with steering their career, the widely accepted new task of career counseling (Hiebert & Bezanson, 1999; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2000). However, since we did not collect data on a control group, we cannot fully ascribe the changes in the participants to the career counseling intervention. In naturalistic career counseling settings, control groups are extremely difficult to realize. This is because real clients are likely to differ substantially from non-clients on career related attitudes (e.g. career satisfaction) and on the occurrence of life and career events (e.g. lay-off). Although we controlled for career satisfaction at the start of the counseling and for being laid off before the counseling in the regression analyses, our results may still be influenced by other variables. For instance, we collected our data at a moment when the entitlement to career counseling in Flanders was still rather new and hence unfamiliar to most employees. Accordingly, the early participants, including our respondents, may have had above average motivation to seek employer-independent career help. Part of the improvement they made in their competences might hence be attributable to this motivation. It may be interesting for future research to examine whether similar results are found at a later point in time in Flanders or in another context where employer-independent career counseling is already firmly established.

Overall, we can conclude that the value of career self-directedness seems high. This may encourage researchers to further explore the construct's antecedents, to examine its boundaries and to design and test interventions specifically aiming at developing this competence.

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CHAPTER 5

Social-cognitive factors affecting clients' career and life satisfaction after counseling

ABSTRACT

This study examines factors affecting clients' career and life satisfaction in the first six months after the career counseling. In particular, we tested a large subset of Lent and Brown's recent social-cognitive model of work satisfaction using a longitudinal dataset of 195 former counseling clients. Our results show that clients' goal self-efficacy at the end of the career counseling had a positive impact on their career satisfaction six months later. This relationship turned out to be fully mediated by external barriers, goal progress and subsequent goal self-efficacy. The level of career satisfaction six months after the counseling had in turn a significant positive impact on clients' life satisfaction. Also personality traits had an influence on clients' career and life satisfaction, though only indirectly via goal self-efficacy.

CHAPTER 5

Social-cognitive factors affecting clients' career and life satisfaction after counseling

INTRODUCTION

There is no shortage of studies evaluating the immediate outcomes of career counseling (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Swanson, 1995; Watts, 1999). This appears from the many meta-analyses that have been performed on this subject in the past few decades (e.g. Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; Oliver & Spokane, 1988; Whiston, Brecheisen & Stephens, 2003). The evidence deriving from these studies is fairly conclusive: what happens during career counseling is effective (Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). Knowing that the meta-analyses used only partially overlapping datasets and employed different methodologies (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Walsh, 2003), this evidence is quite convincing.

In sharp contrast, little is known about what happens after the career counseling (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000; Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Walsh, 2003; Whiston et al., 1998). In particular, the very critical implementation phase of career counseling has been largely neglected (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Phillips, 1992). For instance, it has rarely been investigated whether clients succeed in implementing the goals they have set in the intervening period or whether they benefit from the competences they developed. A significant issue in this respect is whether career counseling helps clients to attain career and life satisfaction in the long run. This issue has been largely ignored in career counseling research (Walsh, 2003; Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000), which is particularly striking given the overall aim of counseling psychology to help people improve their well-being (Lent & Brown, 2008; Society of Counseling Psychology, 2006), with career and life satisfaction being important indicators of well-being in the work domain (Lent & Brown, 2008).

The neglect of this period after the career counseling is largely due to the scarcity of follow-up studies with career counseling clients (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Herr, 2001; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004; Phillips, 1992; Savickas, 2001; Walsh, 2003; Watts, 1999). Moreover, the effect evaluations that were longitudinal in nature (e.g. Bernaud, Gaudron & Lemoine, 2006; Multon, Wood, Heppner & Gysbers, 2007) focused primarily on the sustainability of the short-term learning effects, rather than on the value of these specific competences for the individual's career and life after the intervention. Of course, it is hoped that the short-term effects realized during the counseling contribute to longer-term benefits for the individual. However, as research on educational and training interventions shows (e.g. Burke & Baldwin, 1999), this is not at all evident. Environmental, situational and dispositional factors may hinder transfer (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000; Baldwin & Ford, 1988), skills may fade (Laufer, 2008) or decisions may turn out to be less sound than originally expected. To improve our understanding of the career counseling effectiveness, it seems therefore imperative to examine what happens with career counseling clients after the intervention.

With this study, we aim to shed light on this period after the career counseling. In particular, we examine factors affecting clients' career and life satisfaction in the first six months after the career intervention using a longitudinal dataset of actual career counseling clients who were all employed at the start of the counseling. Insights in factors affecting clients' well-being after the counseling could reveal issues worth focusing on in the counseling program. Moreover, since understanding the antecedents of an experience and its outcome may improve people's control over that outcome (Burke & Baldwin, 1999), they could also be used to stimulate clients' agency over their long-term well-being.

To examine pathways to career and life satisfaction after the career counseling, we test a model based on Lent and Brown's (2006; 2008) social-cognitive model of well-being in the work domain (see Figure 3). Lent and Brown's model combines cognitive (self-efficacy), behavioral (goal progress), environmental (barriers/support) and dispositional influences on well-being and hence allows for both personal agency over and internal and external 'constraints' to well-being. Moreover, it links a potential

short-term learning effect of career counseling, i.e. self-efficacy, with longer term benefits for the individual (goal progress, work and life satisfaction). For these reasons, the model seemed extremely suited for this study. Furthermore, only few published studies have examined (subsets of) this model to date (i.e. Lent et al., 2005; Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt & Schmidt, 2007) and they all focused on explaining academic satisfaction of students using cross-sectional datasets (Lent et al., 2007). Thanks to our longitudinal dataset of employed career counseling clients, we can also respond to the calls for further study of this model with employed workers and using longitudinal designs (Lent et al., 2006; 2007).

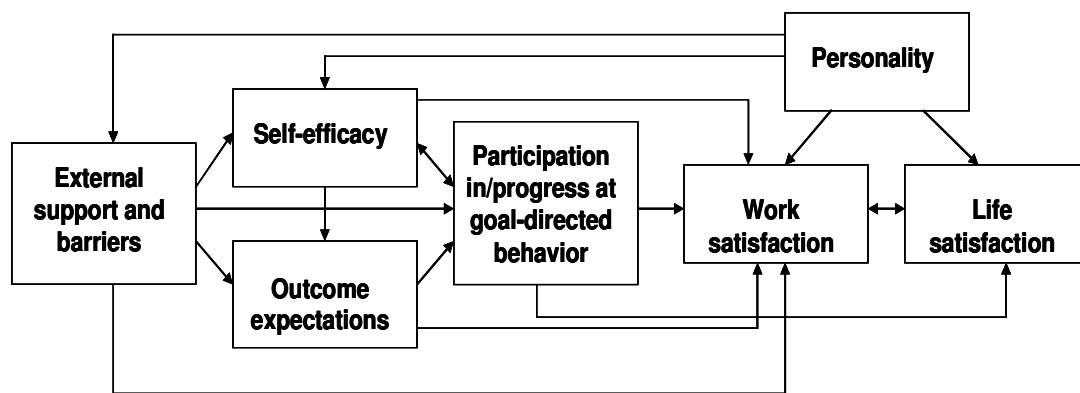


Figure 3: Lent and Brown's (2006; 2008) social cognitive model of well-being in the work domain

The paper is structured as follows. First, we develop the research hypotheses. Then we present the methodology and the results. The paper concludes with a discussion on the key implications of the research.

EXPLAINING LONG-TERM CAREER AND LIFE SATISFACTION

Following Lent and Brown's (2006; 2008) social cognitive theory of work satisfaction, we expect career and life satisfaction to be dependent on social, cognitive and behavioral factors as well as on personality traits (see Figure 4). All linkages in the model are proposed by Lent and Brown (2006; 2008). Compared to Lent and Brown's full model, only antecedents concerning "outcome expectations" are missing in our model. Like in the second study reported in Lent and Brown's article of 2005,

our respondents differed in the goals they were trying to accomplish and hence it did not seem feasible to create a comprehensive list of outcome expectations applicable to all goals. In what follows, we formulate hypotheses concerning each of the proposed arrows.

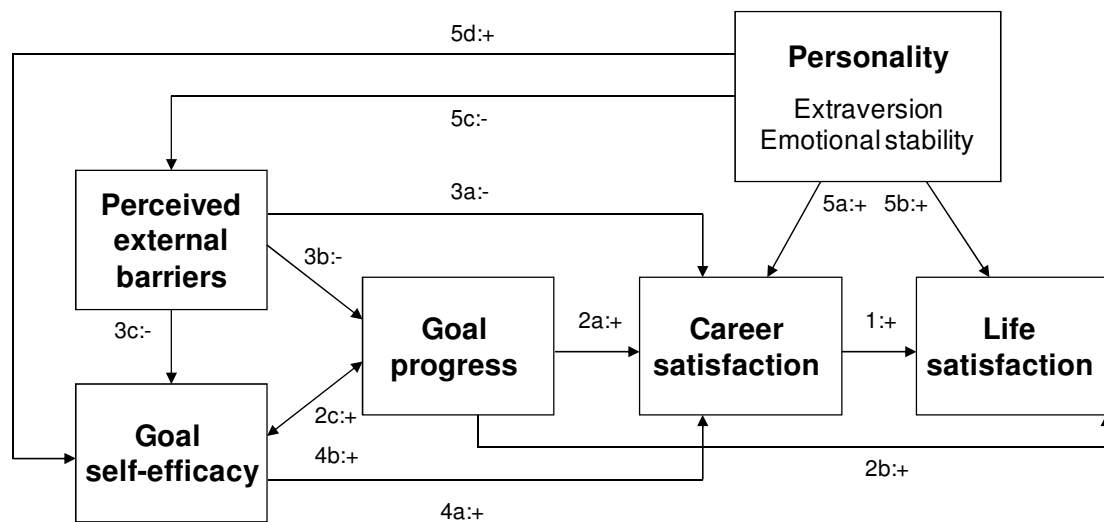


Figure 4: Hypothesized path model of career and life satisfaction

Career and Life Satisfaction

Career satisfaction refers to an individual's overall evaluation of his or her unfolding career experience (Heslin, 2005). Similarly, life satisfaction is described as people's global evaluations of their unfolding life (Lent, 2004). Empirical research has shown that there is a substantial correlation between career and life satisfaction (Lounsbury, Loveland, Sundstrom, Gibson, Drost & Hamrick, 2003; Tait, Padgett, & Baldwin, 1989). However, there is little agreement about the causal nature of this relationship (Lent & Brown, 2008). It might be that career satisfaction impacts life satisfaction, i.e. that people's satisfaction in the work domain extends into their non-work life spheres (e.g. Lounsbury et al., 2003), or that life satisfaction impacts career satisfaction, implying that people's satisfaction with their lives tend to 'spill over' to other life domains (Lent, 2004; e.g. Diener, Luh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Though, when people are confronted with substantial career issues, such as job loss (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989), career transition (Roborgh & Stacey, 1987; Subich, 1998) or

retirement (Rowen & Wilks, 1987), it is generally expected that the career sphere impacts the life sphere rather than vice versa. Because this is likely to be the case for most clients seeking career counseling, we posit a pathway from career to life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1: Career satisfaction has a positive impact on life satisfaction.

Goal Progress

A variety of goal properties, including having goals, goal commitment and goal progress, have been found to relate to well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Of these, goal progress seems to be a particular reliable predictor of satisfaction (Lent, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The perception that one is making progress toward one's goals has been found to be even more satisfying than actually attaining one's goals (Lent, 2004). In this paper, we therefore focused on the impact of goal progress, in particular on clients' perceived progress toward their career-related goals.

Following Lent and Brown (2006; 2008), we first of all expected a direct impact of goal progress on career and life satisfaction. Since making progress toward one's career goals can be regarded as a positive career-related experience, it seems straightforward that goal progress promotes career satisfaction directly. Moreover, to the extent that career goals involve self-actualization, career goal progress may also exert a direct impact on a person's overall satisfaction with his or her life.

Hypothesis 2a: Goal progress positively influences career satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2b: Goal progress influences life satisfaction positively.

Secondly, when success in goal pursuit is attributed to personal ability, goal progress may enhance that person's goal self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Lent & Brown, 2006). This may in turn impact career satisfaction (see further; hypothesis 4b). In that way, goal progress may also affect career and life satisfaction indirectly via goal self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2c: Goal progress positively affects goal self-efficacy.

External Barriers

External barriers refer to environmental obstacles impeding an individual's goal progress. Examples of external barriers are a lack of support from significant others, limited financial resources and unfavorable labor market conditions (Chi-Cheng, 1992; Healy & Woodward, 1998; Krumboltz, 1994; Perrone, Sedlacek & Alexander, 2001). Since the effect of a particular contextual obstacle largely depends on the individual's appraisal of it (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; Vondracek et al., 1986), social-cognitive career research mostly examines perceptions of external barriers.

Following Lent and Brown (2006; 2008) and in line with previous research findings (Chi-Cheng, 1992; Lent & Brown, 2006), we first of all foresee a direct impact of perceived external barriers on career satisfaction. Since career satisfaction refers to an individual's reaction to his or her unfolding career experience (Heslin, 2005) and the perception of environmental career obstacles is part of this experience, perceived external barriers are likely to influence career satisfaction directly and negatively.

Hypothesis 3a: Perceived external barriers exert a direct, negative impact on career satisfaction.

Furthermore, perceived external barriers may affect career and life satisfaction indirectly via goal progress and goal self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 2006; 2008). People experiencing external barriers to their goal pursuit may have more difficulties in turning career action into goal realization (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994; Perrone, Sedlacek & Alexander, 2001) and are hence likely to have made less progress toward their career goals. Moreover, people who encounter external barriers may have more doubts about their capability to realize their goals successfully, which may deflate their goal self-efficacy (Lent et al., 2005; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Indeed, previous studies have found perceived environmental barriers to negatively affect both goal progress (e.g. Lent et al., 2005; Lent et al., 2007) and career-related self-

efficacy beliefs (e.g. Creed, Patton & Bartrum, 2004; Lent et al., 2005; Lent et al., 2007).

Hypothesis 3b: Perceived external barriers affect goal progress negatively.

Hypothesis 3c: Perceived external barriers negatively affect subsequent goal self-efficacy.

Goal Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to people's judgments of their capabilities to execute the actions required to attain certain outcomes (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Accordingly, goal self-efficacy refers to the individual's belief that he or she is able to realize his or her goals (Boersma, Maes, Joekes & Dusseldorp, 2006; Lent et al., 2005).

According to Lent and his colleagues (Lent et al., 2005; Lent & Brown, 2006), feeling efficacious is inherently satisfying and therefore, career goal self-efficacy is believed to affect career satisfaction in a direct way. Furthermore, goal self-efficacy is assumed to have an indirect effect on satisfaction through goal progress (Lent & Brown, 2006). Since the feeling of being competent can motivate people to intensify effort and to persevere (Bandura, 1986; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994), goal self-efficacy is likely to enhance goal progress. These hypotheses are strengthened by two studies by Lent and his colleagues (2005; 2007) which found self-efficacy to explain academic satisfaction both directly and indirectly via goal progress.

Hypothesis 4a: Goal self-efficacy influences career satisfaction positively.

Hypothesis 4b: Goal self-efficacy influences goal progress positively.

We note that hypotheses 4b and 2c imply a reciprocal relationship between goal progress and goal self-efficacy. In order to test this hypothesized reciprocity, our model will include goal self-efficacy measured at two different moments in time. Because previous studies have found self-efficacy levels to be related over time

(Gerhardt & Brown, 2006; Mathieu & Martineau, 1993), we also hypothesize self-efficacy at t1 to affect self-efficacy at t2.

Hypothesis 4c: Goal self-efficacy affects subsequent goal self-efficacy.

Personality Traits

Finally, we expect that well-being is influenced by the personality traits extraversion and emotional stability. The trait extraversion refers to an individual's preference for social interaction. Extravert individuals tend to be enthusiastic, talkative and assertive. Emotional stability means a tendency to experience positive emotions and cognitions. High scorers tend to be calm, even under stressful situations (McCrae & Costa, 1990).

Extraversion and emotional stability have been found to be consistently related to work satisfaction (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2007) and life satisfaction (Heller, Watson & Ilies, 2004; Hills & Argyle, 2001). Following Lent and Brown (2006), we expect this influence to be partly direct and partly indirect via perceived goal barriers (e.g. Healy & Woodward, 1998) and goal self-efficacy (e.g. Hartman & Betz, 2007). Personality traits generally incline people to evaluate situations, themselves and their environment in a specific way (Lent & Brown, 2006). As both extraversion and emotional stability are related to having positive emotions (McCrae & Costa, 1990), we expect individuals who are extravert and emotional stable to evaluate their career and life as well as their competences, in particular their goal self-efficacy, and their environment, in particular the external influences affecting their goal progress, in a more positive way.

Hypothesis 5a: Extraversion and emotional stability positively affect career satisfaction

Hypothesis 5b: Extraversion and emotional stability positively affects life satisfaction

Hypothesis 5c: Extraversion and emotional stability negatively affect perceived external barriers

Hypothesis 5d: Extraversion and emotional stability positively affect goal self-efficacy

METHOD

Procedure

To test our model, we used a longitudinal dataset of Flemish career counseling clients. In January 2005, the Flemish government started with subsidizing qualified external career services for counseling adult employees. To qualify for subsidy, the career service should guarantee confidentiality and impartiality. Additionally, the government limits subsidies to counseling trajectories which comprise individual face-to-face counseling, hence excluding pure telephone, internet and group counseling.

We collected data from adult career counseling clients through standardized questionnaires. We contacted all external and subsidized career services that were active in Flanders in 2005. Twelve of the 14 career counseling centers, representing 92% of the counselees, agreed upon participating. The survey design consists of three measurements: (a) at the start of the first counseling session (T0), (b) at the end of the last counseling session (T1) and (c) six months after the end of the counseling trajectory (T2). For the first two waves, the career counselors handed out the questionnaires and the respondents sent them back to the researchers in a closed envelop. The questionnaires for the third wave were sent to the home addresses of the respondents of either or both the previous waves. To be able to link data across waves, we asked the respondents to indicate their initials and date of birth.

The first assessment took place between April and September 2006. During that period, 1709 employees started a career counseling trajectory in one of the 12 co-operating centers. A total of 556 completed the first questionnaire. The second wave started in May 2006 and ended in March 2007, resulting in 273 questionnaires. Finally, between November 2006 and October 2007, we received 316 questionnaires for the third assessment. A dropout analysis revealed that respondents at wave two

and three did not differ from the corresponding non-respondents in gender, age, level of education or on any of the key variables of this study.

Participants

For this study, we used the data of respondents who participated in both the second and the third assessment and had no missings on any of the study's variables (n=195). Male participants made up 31.8% of this sample. The average age was 37.2 years, with 40.5% of the respondents between 20 and 35 years, 40.0% between 35 and 44, and 19.5% of 45 years or older. In terms of education, 20.1% had at most a high school degree, 40.3% had a bachelor degree and 39.6% a master degree. One participant (0.5%) was of allochtonous origin and 4 (2.0%) were disabled. All respondents were employed at the start of the counseling and had been working for at least 1 year. The majority worked full-time (74.0%), in the private sector (89.3%) and with a permanent contract (83.8%). Men, clients of 45 years and older and the least educated ones were slightly underrepresented in the sample. Corresponding shares in the population of clients who started counseling in one of the 12 co-operating career centers were 38.0%, 17.4% and 29.4% respectively.

The counseling interventions were partly standardized across career centers. All interventions started with an intake interview, in which the counselor provided information about the counseling procedure and learned about the main career concerns of the individual. The intake was followed by a number of counseling sessions of, on average, one to two hours in which the respondents were helped with a self-analysis and with the selection of career goals. These sessions were holistic in nature, i.e., the counselees discussed their career issues in relation to other life issues with their counselor. The length of the counseling trajectory was variable and mainly determined by the particular needs of the counselees. The number of career counseling sessions (the initial intake interview not included) ranged from 3 to 13, with an average counseling trajectory consisting of 5.63 sessions (standard deviation: 1.66).

Most career counselors had a bachelor or master degree in human sciences (most often in psychology). On average, they had been working as career counselors for two years, although some had up to 15 years of experience. The counselors developed their career counseling competences through external workshops, networking events and internal training. When the Flemish government started with subsidizing external career centers, several workshops on specific career counseling methods (e.g. solution focused and holistic coaching) were organized by certified instructors. This was done because there is no specific education for career counselors in Flanders. Furthermore, career counselors of the different centers meet regularly in networking events in which they discuss and exchange counseling methods and experience with specific assessments tools. In addition to these external events, career centers foresee a period of apprenticeship for new counselors and offer external training opportunity to their employees.

Measures

Life satisfaction. In line with Jürges (2007) and Lukas and Donnellan (2007), we assessed life satisfaction at T2 using a single item. Respondents were asked to indicate their overall level of life satisfaction on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (0: extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (10: extremely satisfied).

Career satisfaction. Also career satisfaction was measured at T2 using a single item. Given the complex nature of subjective career success, a single item is believed to capture its essence more effectively than facet scores (Heslin, 2003; Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson & Paul, 1989). The respondents were asked to indicate their overall level of career satisfaction on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (0: extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (10: extremely satisfied).

Goal progress. During the final counseling session (T1), participants were given a list of 12 goals, with the instruction to indicate for each goal whether they had set this goal for themselves during the counseling. The list of career goals was based on an earlier exploratory study with adult career counseling clients in Flanders (Albertijn & Bruyninckx, 2004). Sample items included: “changing the working conditions in your

current job”, “following a training course” and “starting your own business”. At follow up (T2), participants were instructed to identify the progress they had made toward their T1-goals by endorsing one of the three response options: 1 (haven’t tried or stopped trying), 2 (in progress) and 3 (achieved goal). Following Chronister and McWhirter (2006), we assigned points to each option (0 points for option 1, 0.5 point for option 2 and 1 point for option 3) and aggregated these points. As the participants in our study differed in the number of goals they had planned to realize (with the number of planned goals ranging from 1 to 10), we divided this sum by the number of goals and multiplied it by 100 to calculate a percentage. This percentage was used as an estimate of progress toward career goals.

External barriers. At T2, the participants were given a list of five potential external barriers and were asked to indicate the extent to which each of these barriers had hindered them in pursuing their career goals (1: not at all – 5: extremely). The listed barriers were: (a) lack of time, (b) lack of support (e.g. from family, colleagues or superior), (c) limited social network, (d) unfavorable economic conditions in preferred sector and (e) limited personal finances. The barriers listed were derived from previous literature on barriers (Healy & Woodward, 1998; McWhirter, 1997; Perrone et al., 2001). The scores on the five items were aggregated to create an index.

Goal self-efficacy. Self-efficacy with respect to attaining one’s career goals was assessed at both T1 and T2. This allowed us to test the hypothesized reciprocal relationship between goal self-efficacy and goal progress. Respondents had to evaluate six items (e.g. ‘I believe I will be able to realize my career goals’ and ‘I am confident that I can take the steps necessary to realize my career choice’) on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Factor analysis⁸ revealed a single factor, which turned out to have a good internal consistency at both the measurement moments (Cronbach alpha at T1: .86 and at T2: .86). Two scale scores, one for each measurement moment, were computed by taking the mean of the scale items. We also assessed goal self-efficacy at the start of the counseling (T0). At that moment, a considerable number of respondents indicated an

⁸ Results of the factor analyses can be found in Appendix C.

escape-option answer category, i.e., that they could not evaluate the items because they had no career goals. For the 142 cases with valid responses, we found the six items to belong to a reliable factor (Cronbach alpha of .75).

Personality traits. We measured extraversion and emotional stability at T1 using a Dutch, nine-point bipolar scale developed by Mervielde (1992). This scale is a short measure of the 'big five' factors of personality and consists of five bipolar adjectives for each personality trait. The scales of both extraversion ($\alpha = .86$) and emotional stability ($\alpha = .84$) turned out to have a good internal consistency.

Control variables. We controlled for the number of counseling sessions and for the perceived usefulness of the career counseling. Without controlling for the influence of the counseling, we risked to find spurious relationships, that is: we might have found two variables to be related only because they were both influenced by the counseling intervention and not because they influenced each other. The number of counseling sessions was assessed at T1 by asking the respondents how many counseling sessions they had received after the initial intake. Also the perceived usefulness of the counseling was assessed at T1. We asked the respondents to rate how useful the career counseling had been for them on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all useful) to 10 (extremely useful).

Analyses

First, means, standard deviations and correlations of the key variables and the effect size of the change in goal self-efficacy were computed. Then, we tested the model using path analysis (procedure CALIS in SAS version 12). As we mentioned above, we included both goal self-efficacy at T1 and goal self-efficacy at T2 in the model in order to enable a test of the reciprocal relationship between goal self-efficacy and goal progress. Because previous studies have found self-efficacy levels to be related over time (Gerhard & Brown, 2006; Mathieu & Martineau, 1993), we additionally modeled a relationship between self-efficacy at T1 and self-efficacy at T2. Although some fit indices suggested a good fit between this model and the data (GFI = .99; AGFI = .87; CFI = .98; NFI = .96), the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistic ($\chi^2[7] = 14.41, p = .04$),

the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA = .07) and the non-normed fit index (NNFI = .86) showed that the fit of the model was only moderate (Hatcher, 1994; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In order to improve the fit, we additionally allowed goal self-efficacy at T1 to impact external barriers. This change was suggested by the modification indices (Hatcher, 1994) and is in fact still consistent with the original social-cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). After this change, all fit indices turned out to be highly satisfactory ($\chi^2[6] = 5.53, p = .48$; RMSEA = .00; GFI = .99; AGFI = .95; CFI = 1.00; NFI = .99; NNFI = 1.01). The presented results are those of the final model.

RESULTS

Table 18 shows the basic statistics and the correlation matrix of the key variables. We see that six months after the end of the career counseling, the average respondent had realized 49% of the goals set during the career counseling. Respondents were also moderately satisfied with their career ($m = 6.9/10$) and life ($m = 7.6/10$). Furthermore, the correlations among the key variables turned out to be all significantly different from zero, except for the correlation between emotional stability and goal progress.

For the 142 respondents who completed the goal self-efficacy measure at T0 (start of the counseling), we computed the effect size (Cohen d for repeated measures – Morris & DeShon, 2002) and significance level (paired t -tests) of the change in this competence. We found that both the short-term change during the counseling (Cohen $d_{T1-T0} = +0.67$; $t = 7.84$; $p < 0.001$) and the long-term change (Cohen $d_{T2-T0} = +0.41$; $t = 4.87$; $p < .001$) were substantial and significant. Our respondents thus seem to have improved their goal self-efficacy in a sustainable way. However, since our study did not include a control group, we have to be careful in fully ascribing this improvement to the career counseling.

Table 18: Basic statistics and correlations between the key variables (n=195)

	m	sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Goal progress T2	48.9	22.5	-							
2.External barriersT2	11.3	4.10	-.27***	-						
3.Goal self-efficacy T0	3.54	0.59	.21*	-.06	-					
4.Goal self-efficacy T1	3.94	0.60	.23**	-.30***	.43***	-				
5.Goal self-efficacy T2	3.79	0.66	.42***	-.26***	.37***	.58***	-			
6.Extraversion T1	6.39	1.42	.18*	-.14(*)	.41***	.34***	.30***	-		
7.Emotional stability T1	6.20	1.35	.10	-.12(*)	.22**	.37***	.20**	.25***	-	
8.Career satisfaction T2	6.88	1.95	.41***	-.30***	.14	.27***	.48***	.22**	.16*	-
9.Life satisfactionT2	7.61	1.44	.24***	-.17*	-.00	.21**	.34***	.20**	.20**	.46***

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05 (*) p < .10

Figure 5 shows the results of the path analysis. For clarity reasons, we left out all non-significant paths from the control variables and from the personality traits. The control variable ‘perceived usefulness of the career counseling’ affected only one of the key variables significantly, i.e. goal self-efficacy at T1. The perception of usefulness of the counseling thus seems to affect the other variables only indirectly through goal self-efficacy. Furthermore, none of the key variables was related with the number of counseling sessions received. This may be because we examined a naturalistic career counseling setting in which the number of counseling sessions was determined by the needs of the client. Hence, respondents were likely to receive additional sessions until the aspired outcomes were realized.

As hypothesized (hypothesis 1) and in line with previous research findings (e.g. Lounsbury et al., 2004), we found that clients’ level of life satisfaction six months after the counseling was explained in a significant way by their satisfaction with their career. Also as expected, goal progress (hypothesis 2a), external barriers (hypothesis 3a) and goal self-efficacy at T2 (hypothesis 4a) each produced significant direct paths to career satisfaction. So, the more progress clients had made towards their career goals six months after the counseling, the more competent they then felt at realizing

their career goals and the less environmental barriers they had encountered when pursuing their goals, the more satisfied they felt with their career.

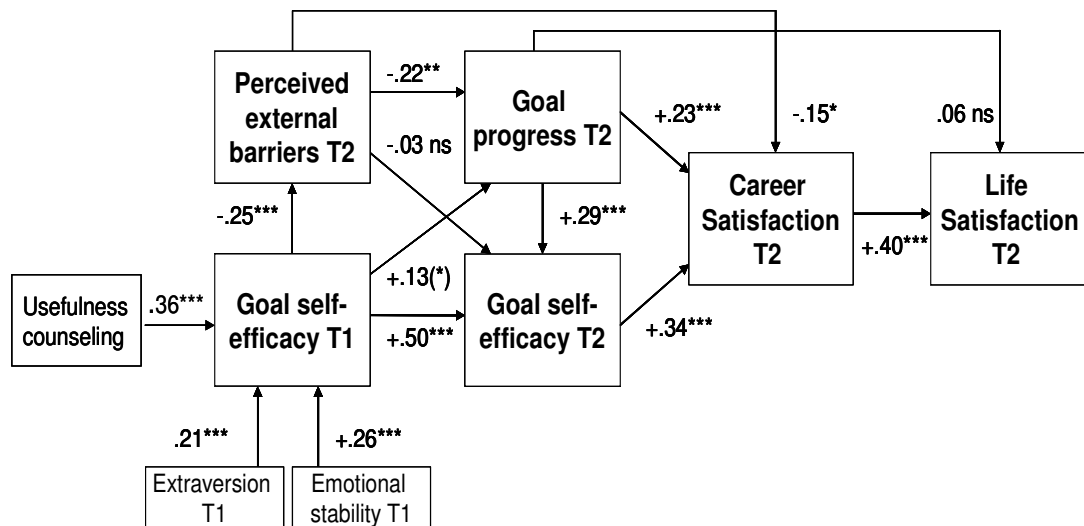


Figure 5: Standardized path coefficients for the model of career and life satisfaction

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ (*) $p < .10$ ns = non significant

Contrary to our expectations (hypothesis 2b), though in line with the findings of Lent and his colleagues (2005) on academic satisfaction, we found no confirmation for a direct path from goal progress to life satisfaction ($p = .39$). We did find confirmation for the direct impact of goal progress on subsequent goal self-efficacy (hypothesis 2c), i.e., clients who had made more progress towards their goals six months after the counseling felt subsequently more competent about their ability to realize their goals.

As predicted (hypothesis 3b), external barriers produced a significant negative influence on goal progress. Hence, clients who encountered stronger external barriers in the first six months after the counseling had, on average, fulfilled fewer career goals. External barriers also influenced goal self-efficacy six months after the counseling (hypothesis 3c), though only indirectly via goal progress (standardized total effect = $.09$). So, counsees who had encountered more external barriers had made less progress towards their goals and as a result, they felt less efficacious about their ability to realize their goal. Furthermore, we found indications for an unpredicted pathway from goal self-efficacy immediately after the intervention to subsequent external barriers, that is, the more competent clients felt at realizing their career goals immediately after the counseling, the fewer external barriers they had encountered in

the following six months. Hence, the relationship between goal self-efficacy and external barriers seems to be reciprocal.

Furthermore, clients' level of goal self-efficacy immediately after the counseling was related positively with the progress they had made towards their career goals six months later (hypothesis 4b). This relationship was both direct (though only marginally significant) and indirect via external barriers. As we also found goal progress to enhance subsequent goal self-efficacy, we found support for the hypothesized reciprocal relationship between goal self-efficacy and goal progress. Moreover, the impact of goal progress on goal self-efficacy (standardized path coefficient = .29) turned out to be stronger than the impact of goal self-efficacy on goal progress (standardized *total* effect = .19). Also hypothesis 4c was confirmed: clients' goal self-efficacy immediately after the career intervention (T1) was related significantly with their goal self-efficacy six months later (T2). Thus, like other forms of self-efficacy, also goal self-efficacy levels are related over time.

Contrary to our expectations, we found no direct paths from personality to career satisfaction (hypothesis 5a), life satisfaction (hypothesis 5b), external barriers (hypothesis 5c) or goal self-efficacy at T2. Only goal self-efficacy at T1 (hypothesis 5d) turned out to be influenced directly by extraversion and emotional stability. Hence, the impact of personality traits on counsees' career and life satisfaction six months after the counseling seems to be only indirect via goal self-efficacy.

Finally, we look at the explanatory power of the model. The model turned out to be fairly predictive for the core dependent variables, career ($R^2 = .31$) and life satisfaction ($R^2 = .24$). This was for most part accounted for by the social-cognitive variables, rather than by the dispositional ones. Indeed, the amount of explained variance in career and life satisfaction was only slightly reduced when personality traits were partialled out ($R^2_{\text{part}} = .27$ for career satisfaction and $R^2_{\text{part}} = .19$ for life satisfaction). Furthermore, our model explained a substantial amount of the variation in goal self-efficacy (at T1: $R^2 = .33$; at T2: $R^2 = .43$). The two other main constructs, external barriers ($R^2 = .10$) and goal progress ($R^2 = .11$), were only moderately explained by the model.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to shed light on what happens *after* the career intervention. In particular, we examined social-cognitive factors affecting career counseling clients' career and life satisfaction in the first six months after the intervention. Our results showed that clients' goal self-efficacy at the end of the career counseling had a positive impact on their career satisfaction six months later. Hence, clients with higher levels of goal self-efficacy at the end of the counseling are likely to be more satisfied with their career six months later compared to clients with lower goal self-efficacy levels. This relationship turned out to be mediated by external barriers, goal progress and subsequent goal self-efficacy. When career counseling clients expressed a higher confidence in their ability to realize their career goals at the end of the counseling, they – on average – encountered less external barriers, made more progress toward their career goals and had higher goal self-efficacy beliefs six months after the counseling, which all contributed to a higher level of career satisfaction. The level of career satisfaction six months after the counseling had in turn a significant positive impact on clients' life satisfaction.

These findings support the use of goal self-efficacy as a short-term learning outcome of career counseling. Also, we found goal self-efficacy at the end of the counseling to be predictive of various longer term benefits for the individual, i.e., goal progress, career satisfaction and life satisfaction six months after the counseling. In that way, our study can be seen as an evaluation of this short term learning outcome – even if we did not evaluate the impact of career counseling on goal self-efficacy as such. Though we found that our respondents had improved their goal self-efficacy during the counseling, we cannot rule out that other events – or simply maturation – have caused this increase (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

Our analyses further shed light on some factors that may undermine – or, in contrast, promote – the sustainability of goal self-efficacy beliefs. We found that when people encounter environmental barriers and/or make little progress toward their career goals, their goal self-efficacy may decrease again after the career counseling. This may in turn deflate their career and life satisfaction. Career counselors may try to prevent this

from happening by, for instance, scheduling follow-up sessions to help clients with monitoring their goal progress.

Our study further provides additional insights in the relationship between personality and career and life satisfaction. Contrary to previous research findings (e.g. Lounsbury et al., 2003), we found the impact of personality traits on career and life satisfaction to be fairly limited. Extraversion and emotional stability together accounted for merely 4% and 5% of the variance in career and life satisfaction, respectively. We assume that this finding might be related to the nature of our sample, i.e., actual career counseling clients. These individuals voluntarily came for career counseling, often after a major career crisis or out of strong dissatisfaction with their current work situation. Since such major life events are believed to exert large influences on individuals' subjective well-being (Pavot & Diener, 2004), it seems possible that them happening diminishes the dispositional impact on well-being temporarily. If this is indeed the case, it augments the relevance of personal agency and corresponding career interventions immediately after career crises.

In addition to contributing to the career counseling literature, this study aimed to respond to the recent calls of Lent and his colleagues (2006; 2007) to test (subsets of) their integrative model of well-being in the work context, in particular with a sample of employed workers and using a longitudinal design. With our longitudinal dataset of adult, employed career counseling clients, we were in the position to answer this call. Overall, we found very similar relationships between environmental influences, self-efficacy, goal progress, domain and life satisfaction in the work context as has been found earlier for the academic sphere (Lent et al., 2005; 2007). In addition, thanks to our longitudinal research design, we were able to test the causal direction of some of the relationships with more accuracy than has been done in previous studies, resulting in two additional insights. First, we found the positive relationship between self-efficacy and goal progress to be reciprocal. Although this reciprocity has been suggested by social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Lent & Brown, 2006), most empirical studies only allowed for a unidirectional impact of self-efficacy on goal progress (e.g. Lent et al., 2005; Lent et al., 2007). Our findings suggest that the reverse relationship might be equally or even more important. If there is indeed

reciprocity, the size of self-efficacy's impact on goal progress found in previous cross-sectional studies is likely to be overestimated. Second, our findings extend the insight into the relationship between self-efficacy and external barriers. Based on social-cognitive theory and in line with previous cross-sectional studies (e.g. Creed et al., 2004; Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumberg & Ponterotto, 2007), we only expected external barriers to impact goal self-efficacy. However, we also found indications for the reverse relationship, that is, for goal self-efficacy to impact subsequent external barriers. Perhaps, people with low self-efficacy beliefs may be more susceptible to external barriers. Or, expectations about future barriers are taken into account when evaluating one's ability to realize career goals. Anyway, it seems important for future research to acknowledge that also the relationship between self-efficacy and external barriers may be reciprocal.

Finally, we need to mention that we were unable to test Lent and Brown's *full* model. Indeed, one core construct, i.e., outcome expectations, is missing in our model. Future research might therefore want to examine Lent and Brown's *full* model of well-being in the work context by including outcome expectations. Although the two empirical studies on academic satisfaction of Lent and his colleagues (2005; 2007) suggest that outcome expectations are unimportant as predictors of satisfaction, it seems worthwhile to examine whether the same result holds for work and career satisfaction.

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CHAPTER 6

Epilogue

The primary objective of this thesis was to improve our understanding of the *contemporary* role of employer-independent career counseling. Whereas traditional career counseling services mainly focused on supporting students and unemployed people with making short-term career decisions, contemporary career centers are expected to be available to people in any stage of their career and to include help with developing the competences necessary to self-direct one's career (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005). Though there is large agreement on this new task of career counseling, empirical career counseling studies keep focusing on variables related to the traditional goal of career counseling, i.e., help with immediate career decisions (see, for instance, chapter 1). Hence, issues concerning the new role of career counseling have rarely been examined empirically. With this thesis, we aimed to tackle this gap.

In addition, this thesis sought to contribute to the career counseling literature in general and this in two ways. Firstly, we addressed several methodological gaps in existing career counseling research. Secondly, we simultaneously studied career constructs from vocational and organizational psychology. Though these two research domains are concerned with the study of careers, they rarely interact with each other and spillovers remain scarce. By answering the calls for rapprochement between both disciplines, we add to a more integrated understanding of careers.

To these ends, we performed three empirical studies. The first study examined how the desire for external, employer-independent career counseling is affected by organizational career support, career satisfaction and career self-management. In the second study, we investigated whether career counseling clients succeeded to improve their career self-directedness during the counseling and what this improvement led to.

In the third study, we looked at environmental and dispositional influences on clients' agency after the career counseling.

In this epilogue, we discuss how the findings of these three studies add to the objectives of this thesis. We also identify interesting areas for future research. Finally, this epilogue reflects on the implications of our findings for public policy and career practitioners.

EXAMINING THE CONTEMPARY ROLE OF CAREER COUNSELING

We start by discussing our main findings on the new role of career counseling. As this new role includes helping people to develop the competences necessary to self-direct one's career (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005), we put career counseling and its relationship with career self-directedness central to the discussion.

The relationship between career counseling and career self-directedness is a very complex one. Firstly, there are many different aspects to career self-directedness. In chapter 4, we defined career self-directedness as the degree of responsibility a person takes up for his or her career construction. Accordingly, individuals who self-direct their career take initiative, with or without the help of others, in performing their career construction tasks (e.g. setting goals, monitoring goal progress, adapting goals when necessary, maintaining employable). Hence, to assess career self-directedness, one could look at both the responsibility people accept for their career and at the career initiative they take; and one could focus on the career in general or on specific career construction tasks. In addition, since career counseling is expected to affect the *competences* necessary to take responsibility for and initiative in the career, we could also concentrate on specific career competences. Again, both general competences and competences related to specific career construction tasks could be examined.

Secondly, the various aspects of career self-directedness (accepting career responsibility, taking career initiative and possessing career competences) likely relate in a complex way both to each other and to career counseling. In particular, they may be antecedents as well as outcomes of each other and they may moderate or mediate

the relationships between the other constructs. For instance, career responsibility may both impact and be impacted by career competences. Accepting responsibility for one's career may encourage people to further develop their career competences; while at the same time, people may need specific career competences for being able to take up career responsibility. Also career self-directedness and career counseling participation may be both antecedents and outcomes of each other. Career counseling participation may stimulate people to accept more responsibility for their career; however, some minimum degree of career responsibility may be necessary for people to seek counseling. In addition, career self-directedness may moderate the impact of career counseling on career competences. That is, it could be that some minimum level of career self-directedness is necessary for career counseling to be effective in enhancing clients' career competences.

The results of this thesis help to unravel this complexity. Across the three empirical studies, we looked at different aspects of career self-directedness and examined various possible relationships between the career self-directedness variables and career counseling. Discussing our main findings on career counseling's new role may therefore help to clarify the complex relationships between career counseling and the various aspects of career self-directedness.

The remainder of this section is structured as follows. First, we discuss our main findings on career counseling's effectiveness in its new role. Then, we examine two possible limitations to this effectiveness, i.e. selective career counseling participation and limitations to personal agency. In each section, we identify interesting areas for future research.

Is Career Counseling Effective in its New Role?

The results of this thesis are first of all informative about the impact of career counseling on clients' career self-directedness. Although we focused in this thesis on *external* career counseling, we also found indications for an impact of *organizational* career support. In what follows, we discuss our findings with respect to both forms of career support subsequently.

External career counseling and career self-directedness

The results of our second and third empirical study suggest that external career counseling services may be effective in their new role. That is, career counseling participation seemed to help people develop the competences necessary to self-direct their career. In the second study (chapter 4), we looked at two career competences put forward by Hall (2004) as important for steering one's career, i.e. self-awareness and adaptability. We found that career counseling clients had improved their self-awareness and their adaptability during the counseling (though the improvement in adaptability had leveled out six months later) and that clients who had made more improvement in these competences were more likely to have increased the degree of responsibility they accepted for their career. In the third empirical study (chapter 5), we looked at goal self-efficacy. This competence was expected to be important for pursuing one's goals, a key career construction task (Noe, 1996; Orpen, 1994). The results showed that career counseling clients had improved their goal self-efficacy during the counseling and that clients' goal self-efficacy after the counseling contributed to the progress they had made towards their career goals afterwards. Hence, the findings of these two studies provide support for career counseling's effectiveness in its new role. However, as we explained earlier in this thesis (see chapter 2 and 4), we cannot fully ascribe the changes in the career competences to the career counseling since we did not collect data from a control group.

Our results also suggest that improvements in career self-directedness are simultaneously an important leverage of individual well-being. In particular, we found that both the increase in clients' career self-directedness in the second study and clients' goal self-efficacy after the counseling in the third study had a positive effect on clients' career satisfaction six months after the counseling. Hence, the new role of career counseling seems to contribute to the overall aim of counseling psychology, i.e., helping people to improve their well-being (Lent & Brown, 2008).

The question then rises *how* career counseling can impact clients' career self-directedness. Unfortunately, the results of this study do not allow us to answer this question. Overall, very little is known about how career counseling brings about its

effects (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). Meta-analyses have consistently failed to identify process characteristics that moderate the effects of the counseling (Brown et al., 2003). Important exceptions are the studies by Ryan (1999) and Brown & Ryan Krane (2000). These meta-analyses suggest that it is likely more useful to look at what is done within career interventions than to examine the impact of a general counseling format (e.g. group versus individual counseling). Brown and Ryan Krane (2000) found for instance that career *choice* interventions are more effective when they include one or more of the following ‘five critical ingredients’: modeling, attention to building support, written exercises, individualized interpretations and world of work information. It might be interesting to examine whether these specific ingredients also contribute to enhancing clients’ career self-directedness. In addition, researchers could examine the influence of the topics that are discussed (see, for instance, e.g. Bimrose, Barnes, Hughes and Orton, 2004), the quality of the counselee-counselor relationship (e.g. Multon et al., 2001) or of specific strategies counselors employ. Concerning the latter, researchers could for instance explore whether clients’ self-directedness can be enhanced through leverages that also strengthen people’s self-efficacy, i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and anxiety reduction (Bandura, 1977). Hence, counselors could try to enhance clients’ career self-directedness by providing counsees with opportunities to perform career self-management tasks, by using role models who successfully steer their own career, by providing positive and encouraging feedback, and by calming counsees’ fears and anxiety about career self-management.

In addition, it seems important to examine *under which conditions* career counseling affects clients’ career self-directedness. Of particular interest is the influence of clients’ baseline characteristics. These may impact clients’ ability, motivation as well as their necessity to change. For instance, people’s implicit theory of ability (Dweck, 1999) may be of influence. The implicit theory of ability refers to people’s implicit beliefs about the malleability of their capacities. It can be expected that people who are convinced that their capacities can be increased through effort (incremental theorists) can make more improvement than people who believe that capacity is a stable factor that cannot be altered (entity theorists). Also, it can be that a minimum

level of career self-directedness is necessary for being able to make any improvement at all. If people feel no responsibility at all for their career development, they may simply not see the necessity to change. Although we did control for the baseline value of career self-directedness in the second empirical study, we were not able to examine this specific possibility. This is because almost all our respondents had at least a moderate level of career self-directedness at the start of the career counseling. In this respect, it remains to be seen whether career counseling will be equally effective if the participation rate in career counseling increases and less self-directed individuals start participating.

Stimulating career self-directedness through other forms of career support

Career counseling in external, i.e. employer independent, career centers is only one type of career support that may enhance individuals' career self-directedness (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004). Also career support provided by other actors, such as organizations or schools, may impact the responsibility people accept for their career. In the first empirical study of this thesis (chapter 3), we found indications for organizational career support to impact employees' career initiative. In particular, we found that employees who experienced career support from their employer invested more in their internal and external employability. By offering career support, employers may simultaneously improve employees' opportunities for career self-management and their awareness of the value of career investments (Bollérot, 2001; Stickland, 1996; Sturges, Guest & Mackenzie-Davey, 2000).

However, career support from different providers may not have fully equivalent effects. For instance, we found that organizational career support had a much stronger impact on internal than on external career initiatives (study 1), whereas an improvement in career self-directedness through external career counseling was strongly related with employer-independent career initiatives (study 2). Possibly, employees who experienced career support from their employer feel to some extent obliged to reciprocate (Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefoghe, 2005). By focusing on internal career self-management behaviors they may expect to give the employer more immediate advantage than through investments in their external career. Employees

who participate in career counseling outside their employing organization may perceive such obligations to a far lesser extent. Also, it could be that employees only turn to external career counseling when they do not see a possible solution for their situation within their present organization.

Future research may further explore functional (dis)similarities between different forms of career support. It may not only be interesting to search for variations in the effects of career support from different providers, but also to examine differences in effective ingredients (e.g. performance feedback) and process characteristics (e.g. establishing a positive working alliance).

Limitations to Career Counseling's Effectiveness in its New Role

Overall, external career counseling seems up to its new role. However, we also identified some factors potentially limiting career counseling's effectiveness. First of all, our results point to a risk of selective participation in career counseling. In particular, a low initial level of career self-directedness seems to be an important impediment. Secondly, our findings show that clients' agency after the counseling (and thus career counseling's effectiveness in its new role) may be limited by dispositional and contextual factors. In what follows, we discuss both types of obstacles in more detail.

Selective career counseling participation

Career counseling's effectiveness in its new role may first of all be limited due to a selective participation in career counseling. In particular, our results suggest that people with low levels of career self-directedness may not find their way to career counseling even though they are likely in most need of support. For instance, in our first study (chapter 3), we found that employees' investments in their external employability positively affected their interest in career counseling. Hence, employees who had little experience with external career investments had a significantly lower intention to participate in employer-independent career counseling. Also investments in the internal employability were positively related to the perceived relevance of

external career counseling, though this relationship was no longer significant after controlling for external career self-management. Hence, these findings suggest that people may need some minimum level of career self-directedness for willing to participate in career counseling. This presumption is strengthened by the results of the second empirical study (chapter 4). In that study, we saw that almost all respondents had at least a moderate level of responsibility when they started with career counseling. Hence, career counseling risks overlooking people with low career self-directedness. If people who take little responsibility for their career do not find their way to career counseling, counselors will be unable to help these employees with taking charge of their career even though they might be in most need of such help.

Future research may further examine factors that inhibit people from participating in career counseling. As we explained in chapter 1 of this thesis, barriers to career counseling participation have received limited attention in career counseling research (Di Fabio & Bernaud, 2008). A better understanding of these factors is necessary if we want to increase the participation rate among groups currently underrepresented in career counseling (e.g. older and low educated employees) and to strengthen career counselors' capacity to reach all individuals in acute need of career help.

For studying participation barriers, career counseling research may build upon research in the field of adult education. In this research stream, 'barriers to participation' is one of the most studied topics (Blunt & Yang, 2002). The studies on participation in adult education have revealed four types of barriers, i.e., institutional (e.g. location, schedules, fee structures), situational (e.g. home responsibility, lack of money, lack of child care, transportation), informational (e.g. knowing who provides which training) and psychosocial barriers (e.g. attitudes, opinions of others, past experiences as a student) (Aiken, Cervero & Johnson-Bailey; 2001; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Similar barriers may affect adults' participation in career counseling. Institutional, situational and informational barriers may be very alike for adult education and external career counseling. Psychosocial barriers to career counseling participation may include people's attitude towards career counseling (Rochlen, 1999), their work centrality and their career self-directedness.

In addition to identifying barriers to participation, research on adult education may help us in understanding the processes through which these barriers impact participation. In particular, the theoretical models which have proved to be useful for explaining training participation could be applied to career counseling. Overviews of these theories can be found in, for instance, Silva, Cahalan & Lacireno-Paquet (1998) and in Merriam & Caffarella (1991).

Limitations to career self-directedness

Secondly, the results of this thesis suggest that career counseling's effectiveness in its new role may be confined due to limitations to personal agency. In particular, we found that both internal and external factors may affect clients' career competences, the type of initiatives people undertake and the effectiveness of these initiatives. For instance, in study 2, we found that older clients were less likely to change employer after the career counseling and that low educated people showed a higher likelihood to participate in training. Probably, these findings are related to the labor market conditions that older and lower educated individuals currently experience. For instance, employers are often reluctant to hire older candidates, in that way restricting their employment opportunities or 'ease of movement' (Gringart, Helmes & Speelman, 2005). Lower educated people may be compelled to invest in further training for achieving their career goals because of the increasing relevance of continuous learning. In addition, the results of study 3 revealed an influence of personality traits and external barriers on the career self-directedness variables. In particular, we found that introvert and neurotic individuals had on average less confidence in their ability to realize their career goals (goal self-efficacy) and that external barriers limited the progress clients had made towards their goals.

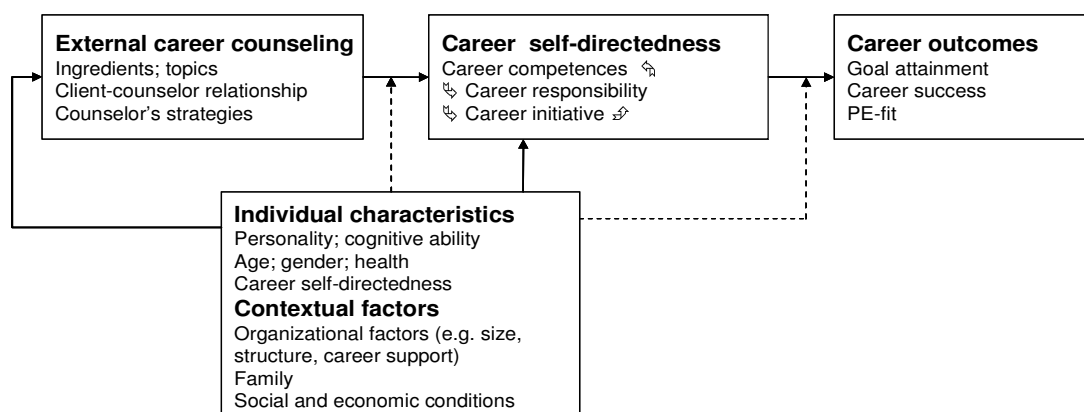
Overall, these findings suggest that dispositional and contextual factors may set boundaries to the clients' potential for improvement in career self-directedness and thus to career counseling's effectiveness in its new role. Future research needs to further explore limitations to individual agency. This is particularly important given the tendency in 'new career' literature to *overemphasize* individual choice and agency (Inkson, Roper & Ganesh, 2008; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). As careers arise from the

interaction of individuals with organizations and society (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), they will never be under the complete control of the individual. A broad range of internal and external factors, such as social and economic conditions, cognitive ability, culture, gender, personality, interests and disability or health, likely interact (in a positively or negatively way) with people’s own agency in affecting the nature and range of people’s career possibilities (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2002).

Finally, it is important to recognize that career self-directedness efforts do not necessarily result in positive outcomes. For instance, due to imperfect information or limited individual ability, people may invest in rather useless or ineffective career activities. Also, encountering obstacles or setbacks may discourage and frustrate people and deflate their feeling of self-worth (e.g. Rivera, Chen, Flores, Blumber, Ponterotto, 2007). Therefore it seems imperative that career counselors not only focus on stimulating clients’ career self-directedness, but also increase clients’ awareness of potential barriers and strengthen their resilience. At the same time, policy makers may try to reduce structural labor market barriers, especially those for disadvantaged groups (e.g. older and low educated individuals).

Conclusion

In sum, external career counseling seems to have potential to help people with developing competences necessary for self-directing their career; however, selective participation in career counseling and internal and external limitations to people’s agency may limit career counseling’s effectiveness. We could summarize the main results of this thesis and the various considerations for future research in the following research model:



This model contains the various aspects of career self-directedness we focused on in this thesis (career competences, responsibility accepted for career construction and career initiatives) and allows for complex relationship between these aspects. In addition, the model takes into account possible internal and external factors affecting participation in career counseling, individuals' career self-directedness and the effectiveness of people's career initiatives. We believe that this model may be useful to both research on contemporary career counseling and to studies on career self-directedness.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CAREER COUNSELING RESEARCH IN GENERAL

Besides improving our understanding of the contemporary role of career counseling, this thesis also aimed to contribute to the career counseling literature in general. In particular, we aimed to answer the calls for rapprochement between vocational and organizational psychology (Collin, 1998; Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001) and to address some methodological gaps in career counseling studies. In this section, we discuss the contributions of this thesis with respect to these objectives.

Linking Vocational and Organizational Psychology

In recent years, several researchers have called for rapprochement between vocational and organizational psychology (Collin, 1998; Lent, 2001; Savickas, 2001). Although both vocational and organizational psychologists are concerned with the study of careers, they rarely seek interaction or collaboration with each other (Collin, 1998). Currently, however, career counseling researchers have started to recognize the potential synergies that get lost through this situation. Accordingly, they called for rapprochement between both domains (Collin, 1998; Hackett, Lent & Greenhouse, 1991; Lent, 2001; Leong, 1996; Savickas, 2001).

Our results first of all indicate that rapprochement with organizational psychology may broaden vocational psychologists' perspective on career problems. The study of career problems has been a major concern of vocational psychologists for many years

(Multon, Wood, Heppner & Gysbers, 2007). However, as we saw in chapter 1, these studies focused almost exclusively on internal factors hindering the decision making process (e.g. career indecision). Yet, individuals' career problems may also root in the environment with which people interact. For employed adults, the employing organization is likely an important source of career issues. For a fuller understanding of individuals' career problems, vocational psychologists may hence benefit from studying organizational psychology constructs. In our first empirical study, we linked two career constructs from organizational psychology (i.e. organizational career support and career satisfaction) with the intention to participate in career counseling. The results indicate that the organizational environment may indeed give rise to career issues. In particular, we saw that a lack of organizational career support may negatively affect employees' career satisfaction, which in turn seemed to enhance people's desire for external career counseling. These findings may encourage further incorporation of organizational constructs in research on career problems. Other interesting constructs from organizational psychology could be work-life conflict, job insecurity, turnover intentions and bullying.

Secondly, rapprochement to organizational psychology may add to the understanding of career counseling's effectiveness. As we saw in chapter 1, career counseling evaluations tend to focus on learning outcomes. How valuable career counseling or the newly learned competences are for the individual's career or life after the counseling has rarely been examined. Rapprochement to organizational psychology could help to tackle these gaps. Not only do organizational psychologists often study career constructs other than competences (e.g. wages, career satisfaction), many organizational career constructs can also be seen as evaluations of the working situation (e.g. wages, career satisfaction) and may hence be used to evaluate the real-life value of the career counseling or of the competences developed during the counseling. In our second and third empirical study, we for instance assessed clients' career satisfaction, a construct mainly studied in organizational psychology, and evaluated the learning effects of the career counseling by linking them to this variable. Other possibly interesting outcome measures from 'organizational psychology' are job embeddedness, organizational commitment, salary and organizational citizenship

behavior. The use of these constructs in career counseling evaluations may not only broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of career counseling, it would also facilitate comparisons between employer-independent and organizational forms of career support.

Integrating organizational and vocational psychology may also be beneficial for organizational psychologists. For instance, organizational psychologists may further their understanding of organizational behavior by studying key drivers of vocational behavior, such as self-efficacy. In our third empirical study, we saw for instance that goal self-efficacy explained unique variance of career satisfaction over and above the variance explained by traditional organizational psychology antecedents of career satisfaction, i.e. dispositional and environmental influences. Other interesting constructs from vocational psychology are outcome expectations, interests and values. In addition, organizational psychologists may benefit from applying theories from vocational psychology. For instance, Holland's RIASEC theory may add to organizational psychologists' understanding of career satisfaction and Dawis' person-environment correspondence theory could help explain various individual strategies for handling organizational change.

So, both organizational and vocational psychologists may benefit from further rapprochement between the fields. To stimulate this rapprochement process and enhance its efficiency, it might be beneficial to first explore similarities and dissimilarities in assumptions, theories and constructs (Collin, 1998). For instance, it may be looked into how Savickas' career construction theory and Hall's protean career theory differ from each other; to which extent interests and personality traits overlap (Staggs, Larson & Borgen, 2007); when and how organizational career counseling differs from external career counseling; etc. A better insight into the similarities and dissimilarities would help to determine where vocational and organizational psychology can learn from and supplement each other. This could pave the way for an improved and more integrated understanding of careers overall.

Our understanding of careers may also benefit from convergence with other disciplines. Indeed, as careers arise from the interaction of individuals with

organizations and society, careers are not only a concern of psychologists, but also of – among others – sociologists, labor economists and management researchers (Collin, 1998). Each of these disciplines has its own specific focus and thus may potentially broaden psychologists' understanding of careers. For instance, psychological career researchers may turn to the sociological (career) literature for a better understanding of the interplay between structure and agency, a central issue in the sociological study of careers. Also, they could use economic theories, such as human agency and signaling theory, to understand the link between individual competences and behavior on the one hand and organizational and macro-level outcomes on the other. Finally, research on HRM-practices (e.g. selection, compensation practices) may improve vocational psychologists' understanding of organizational influences on careers. This research could also help counselors to assist clients in the development of realistic goals and action plans. In turn, sociologists, labor economists and management researchers may turn to the psychology literature for a better understanding of the individual side of careers. The psychological view on careers may also help researchers from other disciplines to better allow for individuals' agentic power in shaping their career.

In sum, the various disciplines studying the topic of careers may improve their understanding of careers by seeking rapprochement to each other. We showed this in this thesis by bringing together vocational and organizational psychologists' perspectives on careers. Future research may further take advantages of the vast untapped potential and bring together career constructs and theories from multiple disciplines.

Another, Yet Different Career Counseling Outcome Study

A third objective of this thesis was to address several methodological gaps in career counseling research. First of all, our three empirical studies used a sample of employed adults, whereas most career counseling research is conducted with students (Spokane, Fouad & Swanson, 2003; Tang, 2003). By using this non-traditional sample, we were able to show that people may benefit from external career counseling

at different points in their life, as is increasingly expected (OECD, 2004). Moreover, this sample allowed us to forge links between vocational and organizational psychology, as we explained above.

Whereas most counseling outcome studies examine contrived situations (Heppner & Heppner, 2003), our two outcome studies (chapter 4 and 5) explored career counseling in a naturalistic setting. As we explained in chapter 4, counselors in a naturalistic setting may adapt the counseling process to the needs of the counselee. For instance, they may add additional sessions until the aspired outcomes are achieved. Therefore, it may be less likely to find an influence of process variables on the counseling outcomes in a naturalistic setting. It hence seems important to carefully consider the study's setting when interpreting findings on process variables.

Our results also stress the importance of following up career counseling clients longitudinally, which is far from common practice in career counseling research (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004). Longitudinal studies allow not only to examine the sustainability of short-term improvements, but also to focus on outcomes other than learning effects, such as behaviors and career satisfaction (Heppner & Heppner, 2003; Maguire & Killeen, 2003; OECD, 2004; Walsh, 2003). Only by linking learning effects to longer term benefits for the individual, it can be evaluated whether what is assessed and learned was important to be done (Heppner & Heppner, 2003).

However, though we applied a longitudinal design in our effect evaluation, the question "what afterwards?" remains. For instance, we found indications for career counseling to be effective in helping clients with developing career competences. Yet, it seems naïve to assume that the improvements in skill and the changes in attitude will not partially fade out in the years following the counseling trajectory. Of particular interest is whether career counseling clients will continue investing in their career when they have attained their short-term career goals and how they will handle new career setbacks or shock events. Answering these questions is essential if one wants to fully understand the effectiveness of career counseling in its new role. To this end, career counseling clients may be followed up for several years after the

career counseling. However, this may be hard to realize given the dropout risk in follow-up studies (Posavac & Carey, 1989) and the relative smallness of most career counseling samples (Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998). Alternatively, future research may examine the long-term impact of career competences in general samples, i.e., samples that are not related to career counseling. For general samples, the pool of potential respondents is larger. Moreover, they may include individuals who are not or only to a limited extent represented in career counseling (e.g. migrants; people with no high school degree). Analyses on general samples may allow to examine whether career competences are equally beneficial for less privileged groups and to draw more general conclusions concerning the career competences that are beneficial in today's labor market. This would contribute to the understanding of contemporary careers overall.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

So far, we related our main findings to the initial objectives of this thesis. We also identified several areas for future research. In this final section, we reflect on the practical implications of our findings both for policy makers and for career practitioners.

Implications for Policy Makers

Throughout this thesis, we looked at career counseling from an individual perspective. However, as we explained in the introduction, career counseling is not only a private, but also a *public* good. In particular, it is expected that lifelong access to career counseling contributes to several public policy goals, such as supporting citizens' employability, increasing the employment participation of older people and enhancing labor market efficiency (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005). Accordingly, governments of many western countries intervene in the provision of impartial and equally accessible career counseling (Cedefop, 2008; OECD, 2004).

Also the Flemish career counseling system, which formed the setting for our study, is largely shaped by public policy. The Flemish government does not only subsidize the career counseling centers, but also sets the goals for career counselors, outlines the type of intervention that is provided and formulates standards for service quality assessment. As career counseling in Flanders is so deeply embedded in public policy, it is important to reflect on the policy implications of our study. We first examine whether our findings support the Flemish entitlement to career counseling. Subsequently, we explore to which extent this study may add to the evaluation of career counseling as a labor market instrument.

Career counseling's ability to correct for market failures

First of all, our findings provide support for the government's involvement in the provision of career counseling to employees. Not only did we observe that employees indeed may benefit from external career counseling, we also found that external career counseling may fill gaps in the provision of career support which would likely occur if organizations were the only providers ('market failure'). Firstly, we found that employees may express a desire to participate in external career counseling when they lack organizational career support. Hence, external career counseling may function as a safety net for employees who experience little or no organizational career support. This is important because research shows that organizational career support is often confined to large organizations and to high-potentials and core employees (Cedefop, 2008; OECD, 2004). At the same time, we found that employees may express a desire for external career counseling *independently* of the career support they get from their employer. This finding indicates that external career counseling and organizational career support address partly different needs; or, that organizational career support may not be able to answer all the career help desires of employees. These two findings support the relevance of entitling employees to employer-independent career counseling.

However, it seems important that the entitlement to career counseling is accompanied by measures that stimulate organizations to offer career support to their employees. These measures are needed to avoid free-rider behavior of organizations. When

employees can turn to external career counseling for career support, organizations might start underinvesting in organizational career management, in that way shifting the burden to external career counseling. Stimulating organizations to offer career support could include legal stipulations for employers to spend a certain percentage of the payroll on employability investments, as has been done in Canada, developing quality-mark schemes, as is the case in the Netherlands or simply informing organizations about their benefits in providing organizational career support (Cedefop, 2008; OECD, 2004). For the small and medium-sized organizations, which often lack the resources to provide organizational career support, government could create opportunities for establishing partnerships with external career counseling centers, as has been done in Sweden and Austria (Cedefop, 2008).

Career counseling's impact on the labor market at large

We also examine to which extent our second and third empirical study, which evaluated career counseling at the individual level, are informative about the macro-level effectiveness of career counseling. When, as in Flanders, career counseling is largely shaped by public policy, it is important to assess how career counseling contributes to the labor market at large (Bysshe, Hughes & Bowes, 2002; Mayston, 2003). Insight into career counseling's macro-level benefits is relevant for justifying government's funding of and overall involvement in the provision of career counseling. In addition, it may be useful for adjusting the career counseling policy and for setting targets for counseling providers (Bysshe, Hughes & Bowes, 2002).

Micro-level evaluations are generally considered to be an important and necessary first step towards macro-level assessments of career counseling outcomes (Bysshe, Hughes & Bowes, 2002). That is because any macro-level impact is believed to occur via the individuals who participated in the service (Killeen, White & Watts, 1992). For instance, it is expected that when people – via career counseling – can learn to take charge of their own career, they will keep updating their skills, which at a macro level may result in a higher skilled labor force and in that way to the realization of a knowledge economy (Cedefop, 2008).

However, micro-level evaluations are only informative about macro-level effectiveness if the micro-outcomes measured are relevant to higher-level objectives. In the case of career counseling for employees, macro level outcomes are mainly expected through career self-management skills, competence development (in particular training participation of the lower-educated employees) and well-being (Cedefop, 2008; Vandebroucke, 2004). The results of this thesis indicate that external career counseling can contribute successfully to these objectives. In particular, we found that career counseling clients succeeded to improve their career self-directedness in a sustainable way, that a considerable number of the low-educated participants had started a training course after the counseling and that career counseling clients were more satisfied with their career and life after the counseling than before. Hence, if the assumed links between the micro and the macro level are valid, our findings provide support for the macro-level effectiveness of career counseling.

However, the validity of the assumed links is not self-evident (Killeen, White & Watts, 1992; Schmid, O'Reilly & Schömann, 1996). This is mainly because of the large distance between micro- and macro-level outcomes. Many factors, such as other labor market programs, political influences and organizational policies, may disturb the contribution of lower-level to higher-level outcomes. Furthermore, career counseling may have unintended side-effects, which may not be discovered via an evaluation at the individual level. For instance, a micro-level evaluation may find that career counseling is successful in improving the participants' employment opportunities. However, this success may be at the cost of a decline in the job opportunities of non-participants (i.e. displacement or substitution effects), which would imply a zero aggregate effect (Schmid, O'Reilly & Schömann, 1996).

Hence, it is important to supplement micro-level evaluations of career counseling with analyses at the macro-level. Yet, it seems hard or even impossible to identify the unique macro-level effect of career counseling. That is because career counseling is only one of the many policy instruments affecting a country's labor market (Herr, 2003). In addition, in the specific case of Flanders, the career counseling participation rate might be too small for discovering a significant macro-level impact. At present,

around 5,000 Flemish workers or 0.2% of the target group participate in career counseling each year. This participation rate is likely to increase somewhat in the coming years since the entitlement to career counseling is still fairly young and not yet that well-known. However, even if the participation rate would double to 10,000 or 0.5% of the Flemish employees each year, it would still be a relatively small reach, especially when compared to the scope of other policy instruments such as training vouchers ('opleidingscheques') and paid career breaks ('loopbaanonderbreking' and 'tijdskrediet'), which both reach around 6% of their target group (being the Flemish workers in the case of training vouchers and the Belgian workers in the case of the paid career breaks) annually.

For these reasons, it may be more sensible to adapt a target-oriented rather than a program-oriented approach for evaluating macro-level effectiveness (Schmid, O'Reilly & Schömann, 1996). Whereas a program-oriented approach tries to link labor market outcomes to a specific program, the target-oriented approach examines to which extent *specific policy targets* are reached by the totality of the labor market programs. A macro-level evaluation of career counseling would then include examining the progress in tackling unemployment and increasing the labor market participation of older employees. This target-oriented evaluation approach could be supplemented by multi-level cross-national research. Such studies could examine to which extent the competences through which a macro-level impact of career counseling is expected (e.g. career self-directedness) affect macro-level statistics, such as the unemployment rate.

In conclusion, our micro-level evaluation can be considered as a first step in the evaluation of career counseling as an instrument of active labor market policies. However, in order to inform public policy, it seems important to complement this study with analyses at the macro-level.

Implications for Career Practitioners

Finally, we briefly reflect on the implications for career practitioners. First of all, our findings suggest that it may be beneficial for career practitioners to focus on

improving clients' career self-directedness. We found for instance positive associations between the various indicators of career self-directedness and career satisfaction. At the same time, however, we saw that dispositional and contextual factors may impact clients' level of career self-directedness, the type of efforts they undertake and the effectiveness of these efforts. Hence, the sky is not the limit.

In order to avoid unrealistic expectations and improve transfer to day-to-day work and career contexts, career counselors should help clients to be aware of boundaries to personal agency. Career counselors could for instance base their counseling on one of the recently developed career theories that take contextual influences on careers into account (Brown and associates, 2002). Examples of these theories are the chaos theory of careers (Bloch, 2005; Bright & Pryor, 2005), the career construction theory of Savickas (2002), the person-environment correspondence theory of Dawis (2002), the system theory of careers (McMahon & Patton, 1999) and Lent, Brown and Hackett's (2002) social-cognitive career theory. Each of these theories has been worked out in concrete guidelines for career counseling (see, for instance, Brown and associates, 2002). For instance, Lent, Brown and Hackett (2002) recommend counselors to make clients consider potential barriers to their career pursuit, analyze the likelihood of encountering these barriers and prepare strategies to prevent or manage likely barriers. These guidelines show similarities with the so-called relapse prevention trainings in (various kinds of) interventions. Relapse prevention (RP) training implies that individuals are trained to become aware of environmental and intrapersonal threats to competency maintenance and transfer, or in a career counseling setting: to goal-directed behavior, so that they can anticipate and recover from potential setbacks and ultimately prevent failure (Burke & Baldwin, 1999). For career counseling, Marx' (1986) seven-step RP training model for enhancing transfer of corporate trainings could perhaps be useful. This RP training includes explicating advantages and disadvantages of the goal(s) set, learning 14 specific maintenance strategies, considering potential barriers, predicting the first barrier and working out how this barrier could be handled. It might be examined to which extent this model could be used in career counseling.

Finally, the results of our study showed that it could be useful for career counselors to schedule follow-up sessions some months after the end of the counseling. We found that clients who had made little progress towards their career goals six months after the counseling had lower levels of goal self-efficacy, which deflated their career and life satisfaction. Scheduling a follow-up session could be an extra stimulus for clients to strive for their goals. Moreover, it is an opportunity for clients to receive additional feedback, support and help with monitoring their goal progress. This may impact clients' subsequent goal progress, which could promote their well-being. In that way, follow-up sessions may help counselors to reach the ultimate goal of career counseling, i.e. to restore and promote well-being (Lent & Brown, 2008).

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APPENDIX A: FACTORANALYSIS OF STUDY 1

Table 19: Results of the factor analysis with the organizational and individual career management items (n=946)

	<i>OCM</i>	<i>Internal ICM</i>	<i>External ICM</i>
1. I have been given training to help develop my career	,745	,140	-,016
2. My boss has made sure I get the training I need for my career	,739	,199	-,139
3. I have been taught things I need to know to get on in this organization	,735	,244	-,078
4. I have been given a personal development plan	,699	,065	,118
5. I have been given work which has developed my skills for the future	,632	,380	-,010
6. My boss has give me clear feedback on my performance	,638	,321	-,073
7. I have been given impartial career advice when I needed it	,759	,227	-,026
8. I have been introduced to people at work who are prepared to help me develop my career	,767	,194	,130
9. I have been given a mentor to help my career development	,715	-,007	,181
10. My boss has introduced me to people who will help my career	,729	,104	,162
11. I have made sure I get credit for the work I do	,110	,770	,105
12. I have made my boss aware of my accomplishments	,092	,784	,163
13. I have got myself introduced to people who can influence my career	,226	,554	,366
14. I have talked to senior management of my company	,306	,600	,136
15. I have pushed to be involved in high profile projects	,279	,656	,250
16. I have asked for career advice from people even when it is has not been offered	,357	,441	,331
17. I have asked for feedback on my performance when it was not given	,311	,549	,242
18. I have made plans to leave this organization once I have the skills and the experience to move on	-,043	,002	,754
19. I have made plans to leave this organization if it cannot offer me a rewarding career	,013	,119	,735
20. I have kept my CV up-to-date	,051	,266	,668
21. I have monitored job advertisements to see what is available outside the organization	-,122	,094	,698
22. I read work-related journals and books in my spare time	,115	,241	,574
23. I have looked outside the organization for career related training and qualifications	,090	,105	,773
24. I have taken on extra activities which will look good on my cv	,081	,231	,698

APPENDIX B: FACTORANALYSES OF STUDY 2

Table 20: Results of the factor analysis with the self-awareness, adaptability and career self-directedness items as measured at Time 0 (start of the counselling) (n=185)

	<i>Self-awareness</i>	<i>Adaptability</i>	<i>Self-directedness</i>
1. I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses	,623	,106	,083
2. I am aware of how I can cope with my weaknesses	,588	-,045	,094
3. I am aware of what I value in my career and life	,724	-,004	,045
4. I am aware of what gives me energy and motivates me in life	,698	,078	,094
5. I am aware of what I value and find important in a job	,672	-,028	,055
6. I have reflected on positive and negative aspects of my career development	,581	,084	,061
7. To which extent are you able to adapt to changes in your career?	,087	,742	,131
8. To which extent are you able to deal with career problems?	-,030	,584	,123
9. To which extent are you willing to take risks in your career?	,035	,790	,102
10. To which extent do you welcomed changes in your career?	,425	,453	,244
11. To which extent do you look forward to working with new and different people?	,028	,782	-,036
12. Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career	,137	,205	,471
13. I am responsible for my success or failure in my career	,040	,176	,651
14. Freedom to choose my own career path is one of my most important values	,116	,105	,577
15. I am in charge of my own career	,099	-,010	,727
16. Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward	-,029	-,021	,707
17. I rely more on myself than on others to find a new job when necessary	,086	,045	,770
18. When development opportunities are not offered by my company, I seek them out on my own	,094	,057	,542

Table 21: Results of the factor analysis with the self-awareness, adaptability and career self-directedness items as measured at Time 1 (end of the counselling) (n=195)

	<i>Self-awareness</i>	<i>Adaptability</i>	<i>Self-directedness</i>
1. I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses	,699	,119	,121
2. I am aware of how I can cope with my weaknesses	,611	,068	,092
3. I am aware of what I value in my career and life	,681	,082	,245
4. I am aware of what gives me energy and motivates me in life	,743	,147	,168
5. I am aware of what I value and find important in a job	,718	,090	,168
6. I have reflected on positive and negative aspects of my career development	,689	,022	,070
7. To which extent are you able to adapt to changes in your career?	,109	,758	,077
8. To which extent are you able to deal with career problems?	-,002	,758	,068
9. To which extent are you willing to take risks in your career?	,004	,822	,108
10. To which extent do you welcome changes in your career?	,223	,552	,233
11. To which extent do you look forward to working with new and different people?	,177	,747	-,017
12. Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career	,055	-,079	,671
13. I am responsible for my success or failure in my career	,156	,101	,696
14. Freedom to choose my own career path is one of my most important values	,170	,115	,684
15. I am in charge of my own career	,321	,212	,603
16. Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward	,060	,068	,747
17. I rely more on myself than on others to find a new job when necessary	,166	,109	,793
18. When development opportunities are not offered by my company, I seek them out on my own	,292	,305	,417

Table 22: Factor analysis results with the self-awareness, adaptability and career self-directedness items as measured at Time 2 (six months after the end of the counselling) (n=197)

	<i>Self-awareness</i>	<i>Adaptability</i>	<i>Self-directedness</i>
1. I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses	,656	,069	,193
2. I am aware of how I can cope with my weaknesses	,462	,195	,319
3. I am aware of what I value in my career and life	,708	,087	,135
4. I am aware of what gives me energy and motivates me in life	,713	,073	,209
5. I am aware of what I value and find important in a job	,785	,167	,034
6. I have reflected on positive and negative aspects of my career development	,712	,050	,091
7. To which extent are you able to adapt to changes in your career?	,206	,700	,137
8. To which extent are you able to deal with career problems?	,177	,723	,093
9. To which extent are you willing to take risks in your career?	,020	,791	,115
10. To which extent do you welcomed changes in your career?	,356	,513	,121
11. To which extent do you look forward to working with new and different people?	-,058	,788	,004
12. Overall, I have a very independent, self-directed career	,019	,011	,593
13. I am responsible for my success or failure in my career	,161	-,010	,710
14. Freedom to choose my own career path is one of my most important values	,123	,077	,548
15. I am in charge of my own career	,232	,048	,688
16. Ultimately, I depend upon myself to move my career forward	,095	,121	,719
17. I rely more on myself than on others to find a new job when necessary	,180	,172	,759
18. When development opportunities are not offered by my company, I seek them out on my own	,154	,370	,529

APPENDIX C: FACTORANALYSES OF STUDY 3

Table 23: Results of the factor analysis results with the goal self-efficacy items

	<i>Time 0</i> (<i>n=142</i>)	<i>Time 1</i> (<i>n=220</i>)	<i>Time 2</i> (<i>n=210</i>)
1. I have confidence in my ability to work towards my career goals	,755	,828	,808
2. I am confident that I can adapt my career plans to changing circumstances and new opportunities	,745	,798	,748
3. I am confident that I can get myself introduced to people who can help me develop my career	,790	,811	,781
4. I am confident that I can appeal to my acquaintances for help with my career	,81	,768	,773
5. I believe that my career goals are realistic	,326	,648	,706
6. I believe that I am competent to realize my career goals	,467	,757	,825

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