# Organizational versus external career support

Unraveling the Relationship between Organizational Career Management and the Need for External Career Counseling

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## Introduction

Governments are increasingly becoming convinced of the added value of external career counseling for employees (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004; Watts, 2005). Career counseling refers to services designed to assist people of any age, at any point in their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers (OECD, 2004). The notion "external" indicates that the career counseling is conducted independently from the counselee's employer and is therefore likely to be impartial. At present, most external career counseling services are only available to a number of specific groups, mostly school leavers and the unemployed (OECD, 2004). However, since careers tend to involve a lifelong construction process, anyone might need career support at any time (Cedefop, 2005; Herr, 2003; OECD, 2004; Santos & Ferreira, 1998; Sultana, 2004; Watts, 2000). For employees, it could be argued 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). However, research shows that organizational career management, i.e. organizational practices concerned with the career development of employees (Orpen, 1994), is often confined to large organizations and focuses chiefly on high-potential and core employees (Dreher & Dougherty, 1997; Forrier, 2003; Maurer, Weiss & Barbeite, 2003; OECD, 2004; Watts & Kidd, 2000). Moreover, career support provided by organizations may not be truly impartial, since the organizations in question are likely to have an interest in the outcome (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:

- The first assumption is that external career counseling functions as a *substitute* for organizational career management. This is reflected in the belief that external career counseling may act as a safety net for employees who feel they receive little or no career support from their employer. In other words, a lack of organizational career management is believed to induce a need for external career counseling. Employees who experience little career support from their 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).

- The 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 want to participate in external career counseling *independently* of the support they receive from their employer. Employees might look for impartial career support, for instance, when exploring external career opportunities, if they are seeking an unbiased assessment of their strengths and weaknesses or when dealing with sensitive career-endangering issues such as 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 been carried out to test them.

Moreover, discussions on this subject have often neglected a third possible relationship between organizational career support and external career counseling. In fact, organizational career support may also *reinforce* the need for external career counseling owing to 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 encourage individuals to self-manage their careers (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 additional career investment (Van der Heijden, 2000). Therefore they may be more likely to participate in career counseling. If this scenario is valid, universal access to external career counseling may widen the gap between those who do and those who do not receive career support and consequently heighten *un*equal opportunities. Governments might therefore want to examine the likelihood of this additional scenario.

Given the readiness of many western governments to expand access to external career support (Cedefop, 2005; OECD, 2004), an 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.

## 1. Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents the research model tested in this article. Adopting the reinforcement scenario, we assume that individual career management (ICM) strengthens the relationship between organizational career management (OCM) and the need for external career counseling. In accordance with the substitute scenario, career satisfaction is believed to mediate the relationship between organizational career management and the need for external career counseling. In line with the complement hypothesis, we presume that there is no direct link between organizational career management and the need for external career counseling. We opt for "the need for external career counseling" as dependent variable because the study was conducted *before* employees were given access to external career counseling.

**Figure 1.**     The research model
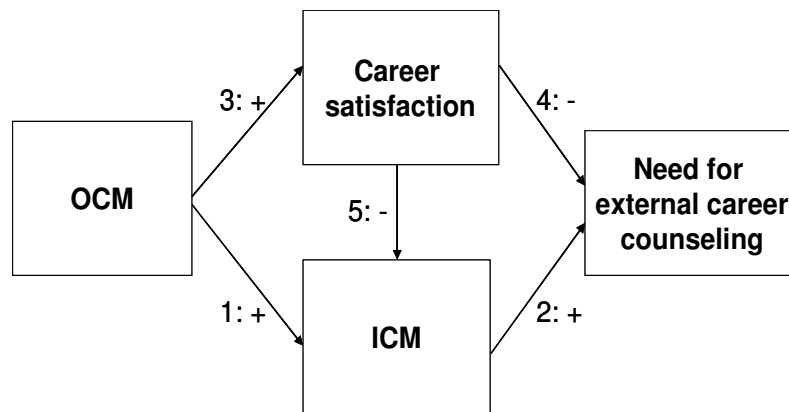


### 1.1     The Relationship between OCM and ICM

Several authors (Hiltrop, 1995; Sturges et al., 2002) believe that organizational career management exerts a stimulating effect on the career initiatives of individuals. Van Dam (2004) found that employees who experience organizational career support take more career initiatives of their own accord. This may be due to increasing career awareness. Previous research revealed that organizational career management enhances employees' career awareness (Kidd, Jackson &

Hirsch, 2003) and that career awareness positively influences individual career initiatives (Anakwe, Hall & Schor, 2000). Organizational career management could also stimulate individual career management by enhancing employees' career management self-efficacy. Most organizational career management activities require the active participation of employees. For instance, in a training course, it is up to the employee to participate and learn; and when developing a career action plan, employees are regularly asked to assist in determining their career goals and actions. 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*

## 1.2    The Relationship between ICM and the Need 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). Consequently, compared to their less career-active counterparts, more career-active individuals might view future career activities as more beneficial and might therefore express a greater need to participate. Several studies have found positive associations between prior participation in career activities and the perceived usefulness of similar activities (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 need for career counseling.

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

## 1.3    The Relationship between OCM and Career Satisfaction

We expect organizational career management to relate positively to career satisfaction. Prior research has found positive associations as regards experience with separate career management activities, such as mentoring (Joiner, Bartram & Garreffa, 2004; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005), and as regards experiencing organizational career management as a whole (Orpen, 1994). Firstly, 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 shown to increase career satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Stamper & Johlke, 2003). Secondly, organizational career management could increase career satisfaction by narrowing the gap between individuals' aspirations and their actual career. Employees' career aspirations often remain unclear for the employer and discrepancies between actual and desired careers may therefore persist. This can be avoided by means of adequate organizational career management practices (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*

### 1.4 The Relationship between Career Satisfaction and the Need for External Career Counseling

Career counseling aims to help individuals to clarify their career aspirations and options, develop a career plan and solve career-related problems (OECD, 2004; Swanson, 1995). Consequently, career counseling implicitly promises to tackle factors that may cause career dissatisfaction (for example, discrepancies between an individual's aspirations and actual career). Therefore dissatisfied individuals might consider career counseling to be more advantageous and hence express a stronger intention to participate in career counseling. This hypothesis is strengthened by previous studies revealing career *dis*satisfaction to be a frequent initiator of participation in career counseling (Killeen, 1986; White & Killeen, 2002).

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

This direct negative effect might be increased by an indirect effect due to individual career management. In particular, we expect career satisfaction to impact negatively on individual career initiatives. Dawis' (2002) theory of person-environment correspondence asserts that career *dis*satisfaction is a major stimulus for career initiative. Crites (1969), too, supposed that frustration with regard to working conditions, related to career dissatisfaction, might be a stimulus for career initiative (King, 2004). This theoretical association is confirmed by several empirical studies, indicating that work dissatisfaction stimulates active career behavior such as searching for jobs (Bretz, Boudreau & Judge, 1994; Griffeth, Hom & Gaertner, 2000; Rosse & Hulin, 1985) and attempts to change the working environment (Griffin & Hesket, 2003; Rosse & Hulin, 1985). More passive responses to career dissatisfaction were also found, such as absenteeism or acceptance of the situation (Griffin & Hesket, 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. In other words, we expect highly satisfied employees to feel less urge to take career initiatives.

*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 need for career counseling (hypothesis 2), we assume that career satisfaction will have a negative indirect effect on the need for career counseling.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Context

The research was conducted in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. Flanders has autonomous legal authority over a range of regional matters, including employment. In this capacity, in January 2005 the Flemish government introduced an entitlement to external career counseling for employees with at least one year's work experience. The government subsidizes qualified external career services offering career counseling for employees. Consequently, these counseling organizations can offer their service to participants at a low cost (and at no cost for specific risk groups). To qualify for subsidy, the career counseling service has to guarantee

confidentiality and impartiality. In addition, the government limits subsidies to individual face-to-face counseling, thereby excluding purely telephone, internet and group counseling.

This research was carried out prior to the introduction of the entitlement and looked at the need for this external career counseling service.

## 2.2 Sample

The population of the study consisted of Flemish employees with at least one year's 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, ensure consistent interpretation 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 sample produced consisted of 957 employees from all sectors of the economy and included an equal proportion of males and females: 477 women (49.8%) and 480 man (50.2%). The average age of the respondents was 38, 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's or master's degree. The proportions in terms of age and level of education reflected the actual distribution of age and educational categories in the Flemish employee population (Labor Force Survey, 2002).

## 2.3 Measures

*Organizational career management* was measured using 10 items developed by Sturges et al. (2002). Respondents had to indicate to what extent they had experienced different kinds of organizational career support. Consequently, 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 included: 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 using 16 items developed by Sturges et al. (2002). The respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree) to what extent they had engaged in a range of individual career management behaviors. After deleting the items 'I have built 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 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 referred to above, the original English version was translated into Dutch by the three authors. The translation was then reviewed by three human resource management and four organizational behavior experts to assure content validity and to check that it was appropriate in the Flemish context. 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 compared with the original English version once again. Scale scores were computed by taking the mean of the scale items.

*Need for external career counseling.* Before measuring the need for external career counseling, the interviewers explained thoroughly what should be understood by external career counseling. In doing so, we checked for different interpretations of the concept of career counseling. It was also made clear to the respondents that the career counseling targeted employees, not the unemployed. The respondents were then asked to indicate the likelihood of participating in career counseling within the next five years if the government were to bear the full cost of the counseling. Answer categories ranged from (1) it will not happen to (4) it is extremely likely. 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 their known effects on career variables, such as career support and career satisfaction (see, for instance, Guthrie et al., 1998; Forrier, 2003; Judge et al., 1995; Tharenou, 1997; Sturges, Conway, Guest & Liefooghe, 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 certificate) and high (bachelor and master levels). We made a distinction between two contract types (temporary and permanent) and five company sizes (1-9, 10-49, 50-99, 100-499 and more than 500 employees). Dummy coding is an accepted way to control for nominal variables in path analysis (Hatcher, 1994).

## 2.4    Analysis

First of all, means, standard deviations and correlations were computed. After this, the model was tested using structural equation modeling (CALIS procedure in SAS Version 8). We opted for this technique because it enables 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 ($\chi^2[1]$ = 0.0001 with *p* = .99; GFI = 1.00; AGFI = 1.00; CFI = 1.00; NFI = 1.00; NNFI = 1.05).

## 3.    Results

Table 1 shows basic statistics and the correlation matrix of the key variables. It is worth noting 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). Furthermore, the respondents seemed

quite satisfied with their careers (m = 5.39, sd = 1.36) and on average they expressed a modest need for career counseling in the near future (m = 2.66, sd = .93). Table 1 further reveals that, except for experiencing organizational career management and the need for career counseling, all key variables significantly correlate, although some correlations are fairly small (e.g. the correlation between OCM and external ICM = .12).

**Table 1.**     Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations among Key Variables

| Variable | n | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Career satisfaction | 832 | 5.39 | 1.36 | - | - | - | - |
| 2. OCM[a] | 829 | 2.59 | 0.95 | .43*** | - | - | - |
| 3. Internal ICM[b] | 829 | 2.86 | 0.87 | .22*** | .55*** | - | - |
| 4. External ICM[b] | 831 | 2.16 | 0.90 | -.20*** | .12*** | .47*** | - |
| 5. Need for external career counseling | 833 | 2.66 | 0.93 | -.21*** | -.01 | .12*** | .35*** |

[a]OCM: Organizational Career Management.        [b]ICM: Individual Career Management.

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

Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the path analysis.

**Table 2.**     Results of the Path Analysis (Standardized Path Coefficients; n=803)

| Variable | 1. Career satisfaction | 2. Internal ICM[a] | 3. External ICM[a] | 4. Need for external career counseling |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .06* | -.03 | -.20*** | -.10** |
| Female [b] | -.02 | -.05 | -.08** | .05 |
| High school degree [c] | .07 | .08* | .08 | .04 |
| Bachelor or master [c] | .09* | .22*** | .28*** | -.01 |
| Permanent contract [d] | .13*** | -.01 | -.10** | -.03 |
| 1-9 employees [e] | -.00 | .07* | .12*** | -.04 |
| 10-49 employees [e] | .03 | .08* | .17*** | -.09* |
| 50-199 employees [e] | .07* | -.00 | .09** | .00 |
| 200-499 employees [e] | .02 | .04 | .05 | -.01 |
| OCM[f] | .44*** | .55*** | .21*** | - |
| Career satisfaction | - | -.04 | -.29*** | -.15*** |
| Internal ICM[a] | - | - | - | .03 |
| External ICM[a] | - | - | - | .28*** |
| R² | .22 | .34 | .24 | .16 |

[a]ICM: Individual Career Management. [b]Reference category: male. [c]Reference category: no high school degree. [d]Reference category: temporary contract. [e]Reference category: organizations with 500 employees or more. [f]OCM: Organizational Career Management.

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

**Table 3.** Total Effects (n=803)

| | Total effect on… | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Internal ICM[a] | External ICM[a] | Need for external career counseling |
| OCM[b] | .55*** | .08*** | -.04 |
| Career satisfaction | - | - | -.23*** |

*Note.* The extent of significance of the total effects was determined using the method prescribed by Kline (1998).

[a]ICM: Individual Career Management.    [b]OCM: Organizational Career Management.

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

Hypotheses 1 and 2 are related to the *reinforcement hypothesis*. Hypothesis 1, predicting that organizational career management tends to encourage 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 2, column 2) and external individual career management (standardized coefficient = .21, $p <$ .001; see Table 2, column 3). Hypothesis 2 concerns the association between individual career management and the need for external career counseling. We find that external individual career management has a significant positive effect on the need for external career counseling (standardized coefficient = .28, $p <$ .001; see Table 2, column 4). The effect of internal individual career management is not significant (standardized coefficient = .03, $p = .47$; see Table 2, 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 2, column 1). This is consistent with hypothesis 3. Career satisfaction, in turn, impacts negatively on the need for external career counseling (standardized coefficient = -.15, $p <$ .001; see Table 2, column 4). This confirms hypothesis 4. Moreover, career satisfaction has a negative effect on external individual career management (standardized coefficient = -.29, $p <$ .001; see Table 2, column 3). The effect of career satisfaction on internal individual career management is not significant (standardized coefficient = -.04, $p = .26$; see Table 2, column 2). Hypothesis 5 is only partially supported.

The partial support for both hypotheses 2 and 5 implies that career satisfaction does indeed have an *indirect* negative effect on the need 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 need for external career counseling (total effect = -.23, $p <$ .001; see Table 3).

We then look at the effect of experiencing organizational career management on the need for external career counseling. As can be seen from Table 3, the total effect of experiencing organizational career support on the need for career counseling is not significantly different from zero (total effect = .04, $p = .83$). The positive influence via external individual career management is completely offset by the negative influence via career satisfaction. Moreover, the modification indices (not presented) show that the addition of a direct relationship between experiencing organizational career management and the need for career counseling would not improve the model (improvement in $\chi^2$ = 0.0001 with $p = 0.99$).

Finally, we note that the explained variance ($R^2$) of the dependent variables ranges from .16 for the need for external career counseling (see Table 2, column 4) to .34 for internal individual career management (see Table 2, column 2).

## 4. Discussion

We unraveled the relationship between organizational career management and the need 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 need for external career counseling through its effect on external individual career management (reinforcement scenario). Organizational career support is likely to encourage employees to invest in their external employability and the more experience employees have of such investments, the more interested they are in external career counseling. Secondly, experiencing organizational career management partly reduces the need for external career counseling through its effect on career satisfaction (substitute scenario). Employees who experience getting career support from their employer are more satisfied with their career and, consequently, are less inclined to participate in external career counseling. This effect is increased by the impact of career satisfaction on external individual career management. The more satisfied employees are with their career, the fewer initiatives they take 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 need for external career counseling indicates that both forms of career support also complement one another (complement scenario). External career counseling and organizational career management seem to meet different needs. Moreover, the complement scenario is supported looking at the effect of internal individual career management: while experiencing organizational career management impacts positively on 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 need for career counseling shows that individuals do not expect to receive 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. Since organizational career management stimulates external individual career management which in turn increases interest in external career counseling, universal access to external career counseling might widen the gap between employees who do and employees who do not receive organizational career support. To avoid this side-effect, wider access to external career counseling should be accompanied by measures designed to encourage organizations to offer career support to all employees. Encouraging organizational career management may also be needed to avoid free rider behavior on the part of organizations. Since external career counseling and organizational career counseling are partly substitutes, organizations might start under-investing in organizational career management and lay the burden upon external career counseling. Measures designed to encourage organizations to offer career support could include legal stipulations for employers to spend a certain percentage of the payroll on investment in employability, as has been done in Canada, or the development of quality-mark schemes, as is the case in the Netherlands (OECD, 2004).

In addition, our analyses provide insights into the relationship between experiencing organizational career management and individual career initiatives. The results suggest that career support from the employer encourages employees to improve both their internal and external employability. Moreover, the effect of organizational career management on internal individual career management is six times as great as the effect on external individual career management. Since (internally) employable employees are believed to increase an organization's flexibility and adaptability (Neault, 2000; van Dam, 2004), this result might encourage organizations to improve their career support.

However, the positive relationship between organizational career management and individual career management could also be explained differently. The method applied (structural equation modeling using cross-sectional data) does not enable the direction of the relationship to be determined. The causality could be reversed. For instance, 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 who adopt such behavior become more visible and may therefore be more likely to receive organizational career support. 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 take more career initiatives to speed up 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 for which they are being considered.

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 need for career counseling. This suggests that a proactive approach stimulates an attitude of openness towards other employability-enhancing activities. However, other factors could play a role here. 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 greater interest in career counseling. *Internal* individual career management does not have an effect on the need for external career counseling. Employees enhancing their internal employability through individual career management are neither more, nor less interested in counseling. This may be because external career counseling is not associated with investments in internal employability.

Finally, we look at the role of career (dis)satisfaction. Our results show that career satisfaction has a negative impact on both external individual career management and on the need for career counseling. In other words, career dissatisfaction seems to trigger external career initiatives. This suggests that career initiative is more reactive than proactive. However, in the contemporary career era, in which organizations can no longer guarantee lifelong employment for every employee, even satisfied employees may benefit from a more proactive career attitude and from investment 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 undertake internal individual career management activities which, in turn, could positively affect their career satisfaction. However, given our cross-sectional dataset, we are not in a position to explore this possibility of mutual influence.

*Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

Our study has several limitations. First of all, the cross-sectional data cannot be used to study 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, our model only explains a moderate proportion of the variance in the dependent variables. Future research might want to seek adequate additional explanatory variables. Thirdly, we only have information about the "need for" external career counseling. This is due to the fact that the data was collected in the start-up 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 external career counseling initiatives was limited. Although we gave the respondents a thorough explanation of career counseling prior to the survey, this may still have prevented them from accurately evaluating the likelihood that they may participate. Future research would need to collect additional information concerning actual participation in career counseling. Fourthly, both individual and organizational career management were measured by looking at specific activities. This list of activities is not exhaustive and, moreover, the usefulness of each activity may depend on the specific situation of the individual. Therefore activity-independent scales, such as the recent protean-career attitude scale of Briscoe, Arthur 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 provided 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 decision to subsidize (and not, for instance, to employ) the external career counselors and the decision to limit subsidies to individual face-to-face career counseling. Cross-national research is needed to clarify this. Since many Western countries are looking for effective ways of ensuring access to external career counseling to employees (OECD, 2004; Santana, 2004), such research seems highly relevant.

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