

Diversity in Career Systems: The Role of Employee Work Values

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Different career systems foster dissimilar end states and opportunities. Since, work values are the standards by which employees discern the importance or establish preferences with regard to workplace outcomes it is proposed that employee work values could be a useful frame to understand the variations in the adoption of career system practices across organizations. Although the effects of work values on vocational choice making have been studied before, employee work values have not been linked to the career management systems in organizations. Two sets of higher order constructs of work values, viz. openness to change and self-transcendence are proposed to relate to internal career management systems whereas two others viz. conservatism and self-enhancement are proposed to relate to external career management systems.

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Introduction

Human resource management and in particular career management has been looked upon as a key strategic asset for far-sighted organizations (Huselid 1995, Miles & Snow 1984, Peck 1994, Sonnenfeld & Peiperl 1988). With the rapid growth in the last few years especially in emerging economies, opportunities to grow within have improved tremendously. At the same time, top management of organizations are concerned over people leaving for greener pastures outside and the resulting loss of talent. Potential shortage of employees in general and of talented employees in particular varies across industries, but the overall trend points to a crucial human resource management issue (Lewis & Heckman 2006). Career management is an important tool in determining whether an organization will have the skills and knowledge when it needs them (Adamson, Doherty & Viney 1998). Entry level recruitment and a planned sequence of employee moves managed through training and development, performance based promotion, succession

management and job rotation based on a logical sequence of work positions create an overall career structure by which organizations can maintain and develop the needed talent to satisfy organizational needs (Conaty & Charan 2010). Meyer and Smith (2000) found that career development practices were the best predictors of affective and normative commitment of employees. Perceptions of career development related employment practices such as internal mobility, training and employment security are significantly related to psychological commitment above and beyond that achieved by other workplace characteristics such as participation, communication and supervisory relations (Gaertner & Nollen 1989). Given this importance of career systems to both organizational and employee outcomes, it is no surprise that providing career support is one of the significant organizational activities (Baruch & Peiperl 2000).

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With the breakdown of trade barriers, globalization, and proliferation of well accepted management ideas such as TQM, JIT, Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM) & Lean Production (LP) technology, product or brand per se may not be a source of sustainable competitive advantage for organizations in the long run. The ability to learn quicker than the market or the competitor is going to be a key competitive differentiator in the long-run (Degeus 1988, Senge 1990).

Learning by individual employees is fundamental to organizational learning - organizations can learn independent of a specific individual but not independent of all individuals (Kim 1993). Learning is especially important for people occupying the 'A' positions. Hence, only those companies that are able to retain the best and brightest and are able to compete for human resources on a world wide basis, would have a distinct competitive advantage (Agarwala 2002, Lawler 2008). With the tightening economic situation, the need to be competitive has resulted in organizations introducing several measures of financial control including restructuring and layoffs (Coucke, Pennings, Sleuwaegen 2007, Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler 2000).

This situation has lead to a change in the psychological contract between organizations and employees (Herriot & Pamberton 1995, Sparrow 1996, Krishnan 2011, Sullivan Carden and David 1998). Under the old system, employees exchanged loyalty for job security, whereas, at present employees exchange performance for training so as to remain marketable. Further Sparrow (1996) in his analysis of the research done in Anglo-Saxon economies, argues that the old contract was forged in a period of full employment, stability, growth and predictability, wherein rewards and career advancement was based on hard work and loyalty, whereas the new contract is based on motivational factors of job enrichment and competency development. The fallout of the flexible work contracts and large scale restructuring is a decreased trust of management and

instead of the career being viewed as a series of progressive positions within the organisation the term has come to mean a negotiated deal with the employers (Herriott & Stickland 1996).

Recently careers from an individual perspective like those of the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur & Rousseau 1996, Sullivan, Carden & David 1998) and 'protean career' (Hall 2002) have been widely discussed. These concepts essentially reflect more internal and subjective career concerns and suggest that people take responsibility for their own career futures and an employee's growth is attached more to his/her occupation than to the organization. They are based on the assumption that traditional psychological/career contracts have undergone a change (Hall 2002, Sullivan, Carden & David 1998).

This study is based on the assumption that not only employees but also organizations need to care for the career development of its employees (Herriot & Pemberton 1996, Orpen 1994, Pazy 1988). In an extensive survey of the members of American Management Association, Gutteridge & Leibowitz (1993) state that the desire to promote from within and shortage of promotable talent are key drivers of organizational career development efforts and have not changed in the 90s as was in 1978 when the first survey to this effect was undertaken. There is sufficient research to argue that organizations have incentives to take an active interest in managing employee careers. Career management practices are especially useful in situa-

tions where productivity depends on the application of knowledge and creativity rather than just application of physical energy, and hence loyalty of employees becomes crucial for long-term retention (Baron & Kreps 1999, Gunz 1989, Hall 2002). Further career support leads to reduced turnover of employees (Stumpf 1988) and increased organizational commitment (Meyer & Smith 2000, Sturges et al 2001).

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A uniform model of career system practices may be too generic to capture the variations in career systems that may be based on variety of organizational factors like industry, size, market control, growth (Sonnenfeld & Peiperl 1988). Depending on the business conditions faced, an organization could go in for a human capital centric approach or a structure centric approach – an approach that is not designed to make human capital a source of competitive advantage (Lawler 2008). Even within human capital centric organizations Lawler differentiates two types – global centric and high involvement approach to management. Both high involvement and global centric approach to management puts people first and are practiced by well performing organizations, but they focus on different management practices and deliver different performances. While high involvement approach emphasizes

employment stability and developing talent within the organization, the global centric approach focuses on being agile and often 'buying' talent. In the similar vein, career system practices that have a greater reliance on the internal labour market are common in certain organizations while in some others, the reliance is on the external labour market. Different types of organizations may need different career systems to match the needs of both employees and their organizations (Baruch 2004). We argue here that understanding the match between work values and the type of career systems practiced by an organization could result in desired employee behaviours. Values are standards or criteria for choosing goals or actions and are relatively stable over time. They are thought to occupy a more central place in a person's cognitive system and are more closely linked to motivation (Dose 1997). Hence they play a significant role in the choice of jobs of individuals (Judge & Bretz 1992). We first briefly review the literature on career systems and work values and later on provide a conceptual link between these two constructs.

Understanding the match between work values and the type of career systems practiced by an organization could result in desired employee behaviours.

Career Systems

Career systems may be designed to meet disparate corporate objectives (Lepak & Snell 1999, Osterman 1987,

Sonnenfeld & Peiperl 1988) and cost-benefit considerations (Lepak & Snell 1999, Williamson 1985). Career management initially started off as a means to addressing individual employee's career needs, but slowly evolved into a mechanism where the organization provides the tools, resources and structure so that employees are able to assess and develop themselves and create plans within the context of organizational realities (Gutterdige et al. 1993, Baruch 2003). Presently there is increasing demand to find a balance between satisfying the individual and organizational needs. This outlook views career development as a key strategic asset for far-sighted organizations where the strategic direction of the business incorporates the individual expectations on career progress/development (Peck 1994, Huselid 1995, Sonnenfeld & Peiperl 1988, Baruch 2003). Cost-benefit considerations work on the idea of accuracy with which employee performance can be assessed by the organization and the degree of goal incongruity between the employee and the organization (Williamson 1985). When the employer can observe an individual's ability and effort more precisely and accurately than the market can, and goal incongruity between the employee and the organization is less, there are potential gains from minimizing reliance on the external labour market in hiring, limiting it to a few entry ports and then relying on internal promotions (Baron & Kreps 1999). On the other hand, if the goal incongruity between the employer and the employee is high and if performance can be more accurately ascertained by the market, market based

or external labour market orientation may be predominant (Ouchi 1980). Decisions on internalization or externalization of employment sourcing and employee development decisions could be based on the value-creating potential and uniqueness of human capital (Barney 1991, Lepak & Snell 1999). Rubery et al. (2002) also argue that the asset specificity of the network organizations especially in terms of acquiring and retaining valuable knowledge within the network, demands reliance on the internal employees.

Advancement opportunities within the organization is one of the significant contributors to the new employment relationship.

Based on the belief of consistency in human resource practices (Baron & Kreps 1999, Miles & Snow 1984), we expect that organizational career systems would have either a 'buy' or 'external' orientation, or a 'build' or an 'internal' orientation. These orientations represent the archetypal extremes and provide a clear contrast. Both internalization and externalization of employment have their pros and cons (Lepak & Snell 1999, Pfeffer & Baron 1988). Internalization with its emphasis on long-term employment provides for internal promotion reducing transaction costs, promotes trustworthiness, ensures greater stability and predictability of the organization's stock of skills and capabilities, and facilitates better coordination and control (Lepak & Snell 1999). Further Lado & Wilson (1994) arguing from the resource based

perspective of the firm note that firm specific human resources enhance the productive capacity of the organization, it's not widely available in the external labour market and a viable substitute is not available without incurring high costs (Lado & Wilson 1994). Externalization enables organizations to decrease overhead and administrative costs, balance workforce requirements, and enhance organizational flexibility (Lawler 2008, Lepak & Snell 1999).

The employee's perception of career development/success is more often than not subjective and individually determined (Hall 2002, Baruch 2003). Career effectiveness is determined in relation to achievement of personal goals, a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment, giving it a more pluralistic characteristic (Hall 2002). However, career mobility of an individual has been regarded as a valid indicator of one's career progress (Hall 2002, Grusky 1966). Roehling et al (2000) through an analysis of academic and practitioner journals found that advancement opportunities within the organization is one of the significant contributors to the new employment relationship. Mobility many a times is accompanied by skill development, increased authority and monetary rewards. Career mobility represents a way of deferred gratification by the organization (Gunz 1989). The implication is that employees need to put their trust in the ideologies and systems implemented by the management for managing their careers, even if these are not in conformity with their expectations now, with the hope that opportunities in future would pay off in the long-term.

Grusky (1966) found that those employees who had the highest mobility within the organization also had the highest commitment to the organization.

In order to have a more objective and at the same time accepted view of careers at the organizational level of analysis, we have used the idea of 'career systems', as suggested by Krishnan and Maheshwari (2011). Their conceptualization is similar to those of Sonnenfeld & Peiperl (1988) and Gunz & Jalland (1996). As per Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988: 588) "Career systems are the collections of policies, priorities and actions that organizations use to manage the flow of their members into, through, and out of the organizations over time". The rationale is that workplace is a social system with a flow of people and an open system having exchanges with the environment. As per Sonnenfeld (1984) career systems comprise human resource management systems that drive the flow of employees reflected in the way people are recruited, chosen for advancement, developed by lateral moves, etc. Flows may be in different directions, may be vertically up through clearly defined hierarchies or more complex because of different kinds of lateral moves. As per this view, numerous human resource functions are involved in the management and development of employee careers (Von Glinow et al. 1983). Career systems form an integral part of the broader human resource management system. "When viewed from a systemic perspective, management of careers is just

not another human resource function operating independently of other HR functions, instead management of careers is seen as a process involving organizational and human resource functions that collectively compose a system of interacting parts" (Von Glinow et al 1983: 24). Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) have identified entry, development and exit as three components of the career systems. In line with the idea of Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) and Gunz & Jalland (1996), Krishnan and Maheshwari (2011:710) have conceptualized career systems as those practices and processes that aid flow of human resources: "Career systems capture the set of interrelated human resource policies and practices that organizations use to manage the flow of employees".

The systems perspective indicates a set of interdependent parts working towards achievement of organizational goals. Further, career systems capture the dynamic nature of human resource policies and practices, which makes it a narrower part of the human resource system to the exclusion of cross-sectional concerns such as stakeholder relations (labour relations, government relations, and community relations), reward systems and work design. Those human resources and organization related factors that affect the direction or the rate of movement of employees are of particular concern. Also the idea of flow provides a more holistic rather than normative notion of career management. Krishnan and Maheshwari (2011) have identified three broad dimensions of career system prac-

tices based on supply flow, support for employee advancement and extent of lateral movement, named as labour market orientation, employee advancement orientation and employee lateral movement. The first corresponds to the 'entry' practices and the second and the third to the 'development' practices of Sonnenfeld & Peiperl's (1988) career system model.

Internal Labour Market Orientation

Labour market orientation indicates the openness of the career system to the labour market at other than entry levels. High internal labour market orientation exhibits limited and designated ports of entry, limiting job competition to current employees and then relying on internal promotions (Baron & Kreps 1999, Bamberger & Meshoulam 2000, Osterman 1987). Career systems having a high internal labour market orientation would emphasize attraction and selection of entry level candidates who are then provided extensive socialization, training and developmental experiences. Organizations characterized by the low internal labour market orientation (external labour market orientation) would have larger number of entry points spread across the hierarchy, increasing the pool from which potential candidates are drawn.

Employee Advancement Orientation

Employee advancement orientation refers to the extent of support provided by the organization for employee advancement within the organization. As

per Meyer & Smith (2000: 328), "Organizations that take an active role in helping employees to prepare themselves for advancement in the organization, and do so in a way that creates a perception of support, might foster a stronger bond to the organization among employees than those that do not". Roehling et al (2000) found that more than a quarter of the journals viewed advancement opportunities within the organization as one of the significant contributors to the new employment relationship. Efforts by the organization to create routes for internal advancement in the form of internal job postings, training support, counselling and succession planning were found to be significant organizational career management practices by Baruch & Peiperl (2000) in their empirical work.

Career system practices that help in building up a perception of support for the employee for advancement within the organization can be quite broad ranging. It may describe the administrative as opposed to market based labour allocating systems (Bamberger & Meshoulam 2000). Among others, it may cover promotion from within along some predetermined career path on the basis of either merit or seniority, rewards based on organization specific knowledge and job training, and extensive specifications governing employment relations. Pazy (1988) and Orpen (1994) have come out with two dimensions: "employee career development" which concerns the degree to which employees feel that the organization provides the sort of support, actions, and climate that facilitates the realization of em-

employee potential in the organization and “career information” which is the degree to which the organization is perceived to provide accurate and comprehensive data about present opportunities and future plans to employees. Creation and maintenance of an organization’s membership would involve providing opportunities for development through career counselling, succession planning, socialization, training support and career related information sharing.

Employee Lateral Movement

Employee lateral movement refers to job rotation and/or job transfers. There can be different objectives in employee transfer: It could be for nurturing leadership talent or as a mechanism for value based integration (Nohria & Ghoshal 1994), through socialization (Edstrom & Galbraith 1977). Firm specific knowledge and networks are especially enhanced by lateral movement.

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Work Values

The concept of personal values has a strong tradition in psychological as well as management research. The concept has been increasingly useful in explaining individual level attitudes and behaviours (Elizur 1984, Ravlin & Meglino 1987, Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss 1999, Sagie et al 1996). The construct has also been found useful in explaining

group level and organizational level phenomena. Value has been variously described as beliefs, needs, goals, criteria for choosing goals and attitudes (Dose 1997, Fields 2002). In spite of considerable literature on values, there has been a persistent concern over the general lack of consensus over the nature of values (Gahan & Abeysekera 2009). Values seem difficult to define because of the potential overlaps with attitudes, preferences, norms, or views. However values are often differentiated based on the degree to which they appear stable over time. Compared to attitudes, values are believed to occupy a more central place in a person’s cognitive system and hence more related to motivation (Dose 1997). Though values are considered fairly stable, they are not immutable and in fact may change over time (Sagie et al 1996).

Like personal values, work values are beliefs pertaining to desirable end states (e.g. autonomy at work) or behaviours (e.g. working with people) (Ros, Schwartz & Surkiss 1999). Work values are developed through the influence of culture, society and personality (Gahan & Abeysekera 2009). Work values are seen as important in shaping both individual expectations of work, their response to specific work situations and likely performance in a work role (Black 1994). Work values are also viewed as standards or criteria for choosing goals or to guide actions with respect to their vocational choices (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek 2007, Judge & Bretz 1992). Judge & Bretz (1992) found that people are more likely to choose particular jobs whose content is similar to their value

orientation. Generally speaking most researchers have viewed values attached to each life domain independent of others (Gahan & Abeysekera 2009). Recent developments have however sought to specify an explicit link between values at work and values in other life domain (e.g. Ros et al 1999, Sagie et al 1996)

Various measures of work values have been used in literature. Early measures such as those of Manhardt (1972) and Rokeach (1973) have sought to distinguish between 'instrumental' and 'terminal' values where 'instrumental values' represent the modes of behaviour and the 'terminal values' the end state. Manhardt (1972) used three dimensions of work values inventory namely comfort and security, competence and growth, status and independence. Later on, others like Schwartz (1992) distinguish various values based on motivational attributes. Ten motivationally distinct types of values are postulated to be recognized by members of most societies (Ros et al 1999). Recently Elizur (1984) and Sagie et al (1996) have distinguished values based on the relative importance of the life domain to which it relates. They use 'value modality' to distinguish between instrumental values, affective values and cognitive values and 'performance contingency': whether the outcomes are contingent on performance or upon membership in the organization.

For the purpose of this study we focus on two bipolar sets of higher order values as described by Ros et al (1999) to define four types of work values. Their conceptualization of work values has

several advantages for our research. Firstly, the strength of this conceptualization is that it integrates older conceptions of work values namely - intrinsic or self actualization values, extrinsic / security of material values and social / relational values. Secondly, it holds the promise of grounding the theory of work values in the broader theory of values. Thirdly, since the theory proposed by them holds across cultures, it may be useful for integrating cross-cultural research on work values. Fourthly, it suggests a structure of compatibility and opposition amongst work values and not merely a typology and specifies what this structure is likely to be.

The first set, 'openness to change' *versus* 'conservation' contrasts values that stress independence and change (self-direction and stimulation) with values that stress self-preservation and stability (security, conformity, tradition). The second set, 'self-transcendence' *versus* 'self-enhancement' focuses on equality and acceptance of other (universalism and benevolence) values which emphasize concern for self (power and achievement).

Career Systems & Work Values

Research studies have shown that there are differences in orientation of career management systems across organizations in terms of whether these practices are based externally or internally for the supply and maintenance of organizational membership (Baron & Kreps 1999, Baruch & Peiperl 2000, Budhwar & Baruch 2003, Pfeiffer &

Baron 1988, Peck 1994). While some organizations may be oriented towards the external labour market, others rely heavily on the existing organizational members by providing extensive career support practices (Baron & Kreps 1999, Budhwar & Baruch 2003, Pfeffer & Baron 1988, Peck 1994). Given that career support provided by organizations has important organizational consequences (Gunz 1989, Orpen 1994, Pazy 1987, Peck 1994, Sonnenfeld 1984, Sturges et al 2001), it is important to understand the prevalence of diverse career management systems and its acceptability by employees. The existence of these different career types might be because of the desirable end states or opportunities that both the career types offer.

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The study by Sturges et al (2001) found that even though there is a contemporaneous relationship between organizational career management practices and organisational commitment, the lagged relationship between the above does not hold, suggesting that the career management is not a direct antecedent of organisational commitment. One of the reasons could be the perception whether the career management help provided by the organisation fulfils valued end-states of the employees. Hence, the understanding of perception of work values is important because, this is likely to medi-

ate the relationship between the effects of differences in the career management systems and individual outcomes. Dose (1997) had suggested that work values are the standards by which employees discern the importance, or in other words, work values establish preferences. In our context, to the extent that employees prefer one type of the career management system to another, the presence or absence of these in their organizations would have individual level consequences.

Considering the importance of increased commitment to the organisation and also the concern of the employees in using work values as guiding principles for evaluating work settings and outcomes (Ros et al 1999), our endeavour is to understand the link between career systems and work values and also to comprehend how does the preference for career system practices vary as per the work value of employees.

‘Conservation’ versus ‘Open to Change’

Career system practices providing for internal growth and development foster a culture of trustworthiness that facilitates collaboration and sharing of information (Whitener et al 1998). It includes an extended consideration of the employees’ well being and investment in an employee’s career within a firm (Tsui et al 1997). Internalization of employment provides for a social exchange relationship (Blau 1964) apart from an economic exchange, where the inducement goes beyond short-term monetary rewards and

tries to develop his/her internal social network. By having cohorts of entry level recruitments the peer group exerts social comparison and more potent form of social control that emphasizes self-restriction and conformity. Conformance to the larger group is likely to be highly valued in these kinds of set-ups.

In contrast, employees from outside are likely to have higher and more diverse set of ties in their external social network (i.e. social ties outside the organization) leading to potentially more diverse and novel information (Burt 1982 as in Collins & Clark 2003) for decision making. Added to this employees from outside having been exposed to different set of experiences, encourage new ways of considering opportunities and hence favour more independent thought and action that favour change.

Work Value: ‘Self-transcendence’ versus ‘Self-enhancement’

To the extent that career system practices such as internal staffing and promotion, counselling, succession planning, career related information sharing, socialization, training & development and job rotation encourage long-term growth and development of employees in the organization, employees would be motivated to act in the best interests of the business/organization rather than on narrow self-interests (Rousseau 1995). Higher level positions typically require deeper knowledge of the firm and its environment. Having a clear hierarchy of jobs with promotion rights typically struc-

tured along seniority line, helps ensure that senior workers do not have to fear imparting their accumulated wisdom and skill to their junior counterparts (Baron & Kreps 1999). Good and equitable treatment of employees with opportunities for internal growth resembles a gift from the employer, causing employees to reciprocate with greater concern for the welfare of the firm. Relational contracts are formed where open ended long-term relationships involving considerable investment by both the employees (company specific skills and loyalty) and employers (extensive training and development) are fostered in these environments (Rousseau 1995). In contrast, career systems focused externally reflect transactional obligations and these foster a climate of self-enhancement at the cost of overall organizational welfare. With no special ties to, or identity with the organization, employees may not even have enough of an emotional stake in long-term organizational outcomes.

Conclusions

In the foregoing discussion, we have tried to integrate two broad streams of research on career systems and work values. Career management research has laid lesser emphasis on looking at careers from an organizational perspective. Considering that career management has significant positive outcomes for the organization we find that in reality organizations do vary in their career system practices. While some organizations have elaborate career support practice others do not. The existence of these different career types might be because of the

desirable end states or opportunities that both the career types offer. To the extent that work values act as guiding principles for evaluating work outcomes and settings and for choosing among different alternatives, this construct may provide useful leads to the prevalence of these different career practices which have not been explored in previous research. Hence our endeavour in this study has been to establish this relationship between work values of employees and organisation career management systems to understand how does the preference for career system practices vary as per the work value of employees. Further, this study would help in the theoretical development of the career management literature considering that very few have been done from an organisational perspective.

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