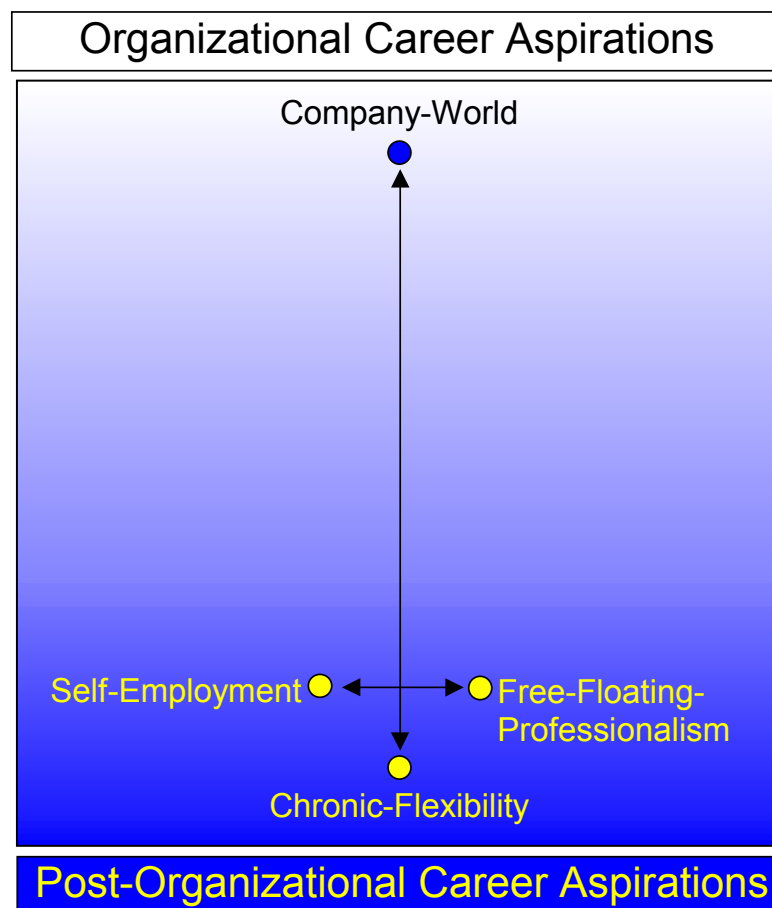


# How Career Tactics and Personality Influence Post-Organizational Career Aspirations

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## Introduction

Today's professional careers are more diverse than ever, empirically we know little about them and we do not have adequate theoretical concepts to describe and explain them.

Career research has been dealing with careers in general and with professional careers in specific for a long time. Researchers from a great number of disciplines, from various perspectives and focusing on different levels of analysis have contributed to the understanding of what happens when individuals travel through their professional lives on various routes (see, e.g., Hughes 1951; Becker/Strauss 1956; Super 1957; Glaser 1968; Dalton 1972; Holland 1973; Slocum 1974; Spilerman 1977; Van Maanen 1977; Schein 1980; Arthur et al. 1987; Hall 1987; Ornstein/Isabella 1993 for overviews and comprehensive views).

Implicitly or explicitly, organizations were the point of reference (e.g., Dyer 1976; Hall 1976; Schein 1978; Gunz 1989). As long as organizations can be regarded as one of the core characteristics of industrial societies, this was quite adequate. But things have changed. Since the 1980's the situation has become more complex. Change drivers like globalization, virtualization, demographic developments or value changes have led to new forms of organizations, new forms of organizing and new forms of private and professional life concepts of individuals (e.g., Sennett 1998; Ruigrok et al. 1999; Ohmae 2001).

These developments did not leave careers untouched. Several influential writers have proclaimed and analyzed a period of transition leading to new forms of careers (e.g., Arthur/Rousseau 1996; Hall 1996a). Even different in a number of claims, analyses and expectations, they have at least two things in common.

First, the significance of organizations as the central arena for professional careers will decrease. Partly replacing the 'traditional' organizational career, new forms of careers 'outside' of organizations will develop. Whether deliberately or because of a lack of choice, people's careers will increasingly take place either entirely or to a great extent outside of organizations. Labels like 'newly self-employed', 'one-person-employer', 'dependent independents' or 'own account self-employed' have been coined to describe these phenomena (Mayrhofer/Meyer 2001).

Second, professional careers have become more diverse and this will be increasingly the case in the future. The 'traditional' model of 'one career' starting with a specific kind of training in one's early career stages leading to a quite stable career path in the same profession or area of expertise, sometimes even in the same (kind of) organizations for the rest of the life is currently being replaced. Substituted by more varied types of career that lead individuals to different professions in or outside of different organizations in different places in the world. Protean or patchwork careers are just two of many examples (Hall 1996b). Replaced, however, also by a greater variety of combinations of private and professional activities. Sabbaticals, new forms of work - non-work combinations, new forms of partnerships with one's spouse etc. lead to career patterns hitherto not well known (Auer 2000).

Compared to the body of empirical evidence about 'traditional' careers, our knowledge about such 'new careers' is rather limited. Only a small number of studies have gathered some empirical evidence about the new career landscape (e.g., Peiperl et al. 2000; Arthur et al. 1999).

## Four Fields of Career

Based on Bourdieu's capital, habitus and field concept, Mayrhofer et al. (2000) suggested four different fields of careers resulting from an interplay of the two dimensions: coupling and configuration between actors (Fig.1).

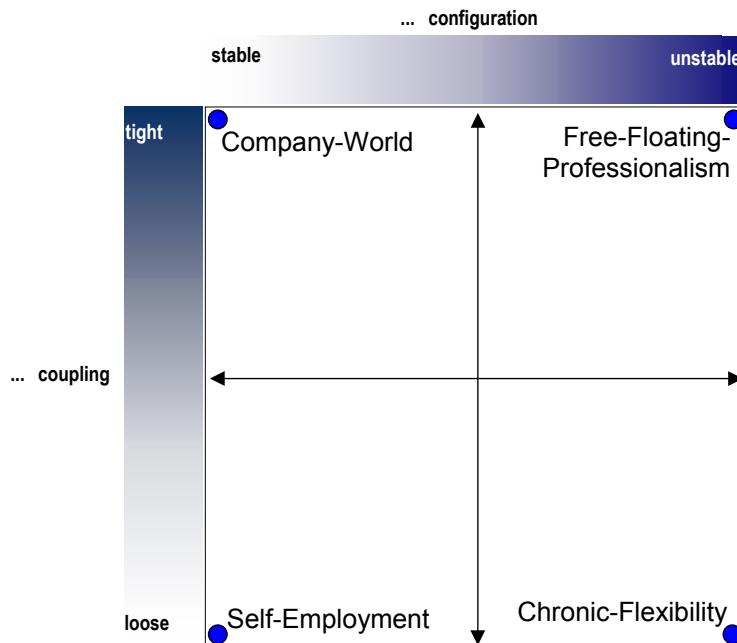


Figure 1: The fields of career

The *coupling dimension* focuses on the closeness of relationship and the degree of mutual influence between the focal actor and the other actor(s) in the configuration (e.g. Orton/Weick 1990; Staehle 1991; Weick 1969, 1976). Tight coupling indicates that the actors are closely intertwined in their decisions. On the other hand, loose coupling indicates a type of relationship where the decisions of one actor have very little consequence for the decisions of the other. Thus, in a tightly coupled relationship the decisions of one partner reduce the other's degrees of freedom much more than in a loosely coupled relationship.

The *configuration dimension* focuses on changes over time in the configuration of relationships between the focal actor and other relevant actors. A stable configuration would mean that there is a low rate of change in the actor configuration and or work related tasks. Conversely, an unstable configuration implies that there is a frequent change in the configuration of actors and/or work related tasks. This dimension says more about the rate of change in the configuration than about the number of actors relevant for the focal actor. Combining these two dimensions into a matrix results in a simple typology with the following 'ideal-typical' extremities (see Mayrhofer et al. 2000):

- **Company-World (CW)** is the field of the traditional organizational career. It refers to the structure of jobs in an organization where there are few points of entry other than at the bottom. It is defined in terms of the two dimensions by a tight and stable coupling between an actor and a company.
- **Free-Floating-Professionalism (FFP)** can be defined as the field of specialists. Individuals have tightly coupled relations with one customer for a limited time. In course of that the coupling is tight but unstable.

- **Self-Employment (SE)** is the field of career with individuals working outside organizations. Typically, these are either self-employed professionals or entrepreneurs. This field of career is defined by a loose coupling between relevant actors within the field. But it is also a stable configuration with fewer changes in work related activities.
- **Chronic-Flexibility (CF)** may appear quite similar to Free-Floating-Professionalism, since careers are also characterized by frequent job changes. The fundamental difference lies in the disappearance of the boundaries of domain of expertise. This means that changing from one job to another may imply not only a change from one organization to another, but also from one industry to another, from being employed to self-employment, and so on. These loosely coupled unstable relations are the key definition of that field of career.

Overall changes that can be observed in the last decade indicate a movement in working life from tightly coupled stable configurations to loosely coupled unstable configurations. The increased significance of part-time-jobs, fixed-time-contracts, short-time circles of workforce reduction and increase in the same branch at nearly the same time, concepts of life-long learning and employability are only a few examples of such developments.

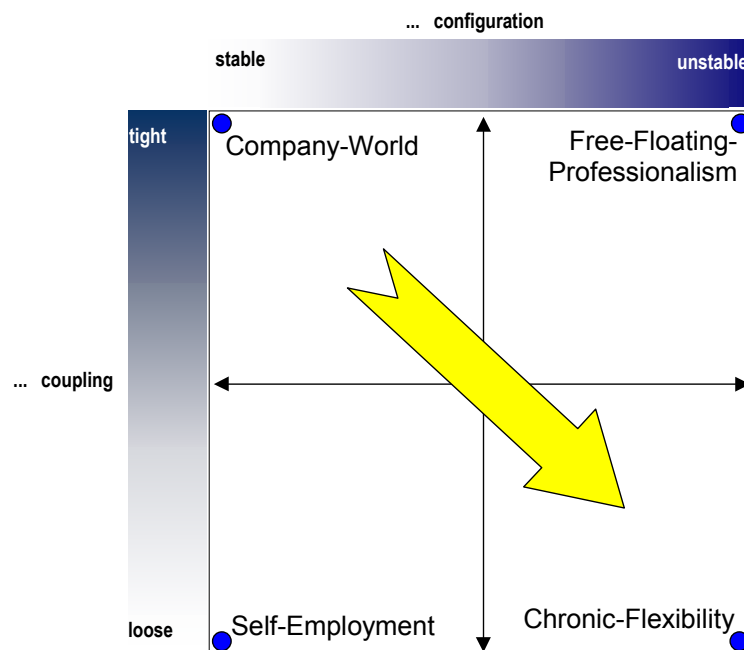


Figure 2: Development of Career Fields

## Vienna Career Panel Project (ViCaPP)

Careers are no longer well known pathways through the hierarchical positions of one firm. They are more and more changing into life-long unpredictable complex ways with a lot of movements from one company to another, times of self-employment or of being unemployed, and different project related jobs. The Vienna Career Panel Project (ViCaPP) started in 2000 to build up a panel of more than 600 business graduates in order to develop a longitudinal analysis of their working life experiences.

At the present stage of our panel study we have survey data about the Career Aspirations of more than 450 graduates as well as data about a lot of job-related personality traits and their social background.

First of all we developed a Career Aspiration Scale that differentiates between Company-World-, Free-Floating-Professionalism-, Self-Employment-, and Chronic-Flexibility-Aspirations. The question we try to answer is: In which fields of career do graduates like to enter? How many of the graduates still intend to get into the predictable life of the company-world and how many of them want to make their living by entering a post-organizational career field?

Further more we are interested in differences of social experiences and job related personality traits which are leading to different Career Aspirations. A Career Tactics Questionnaire was developed to measure purposeful behavior within the career context (e. g. Networking). Scales from the NEO-FFI, the Self-Monitoring-Questionnaire and the BOCHUMER Inventory of Job-Related Personality Description (BIP) were used to measure personal predispositions. Furthermore data about the social origin of the graduates were entered into the survey.

## **Career Aspirations**

Our questionnaire about Career Aspirations consists of overall 43 Items for four dimensions (Company-World-Aspiration, Free-Floating-Professionalism-Aspiration, Self-Employment-Aspiration, and Chronic-Flexibility-Aspiration). The reliability of the scales are sufficiently high ( $\alpha_{\text{(CW-Aspiration)}} = 0.86$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{(FFP-Aspiration)}} = 0.71$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{(SE-Aspiration)}} = 0.81$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{(CF-Aspiration)}} = 0.82$ ) but the scales are highly intercorrelated which leads us to deal with one final factor which poles can be named as Organizational-Career-Aspiration vs. Post-Organizational-Career-Aspiration. In detail we found highly positive correlations (above 0.7) between the aspirations for Free-Floating-Professionalism, Self-Employment, and Chronic-Flexibility. The other way round all of them are highly negatively correlated with the Company-World-Aspiration scale (see figure 3). The Organizational vs. Post-Organizational – Aspiration scale uses 34 Items and leads to a reliability of  $\alpha_{\text{(Organizational vs. Post-Organizational-Aspiration)}} = 0.86$ .

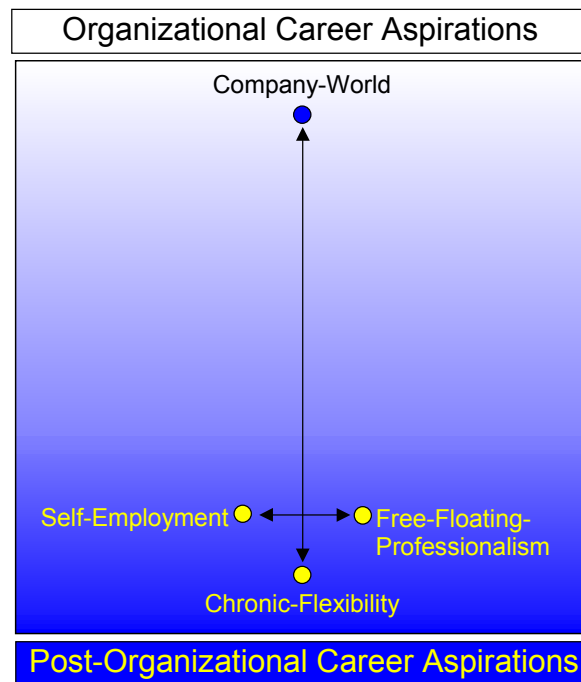


Figure 3: Empirical findings of only one Career Aspiration Factor

The following table shows the number of persons who show their highest scores for one of the four fields of Career Aspiration.

With regard to the dimensions coupling and configuration, there is an almost equal number of persons expressing preference for working in fields that are tightly and loosely coupled. However, a count across the fields shows an accumulation of participants tending towards either Company-World (43%), or Chronic-Flexibility (28%).

		... configuration					
		stable		unstable			
... coupling	tight	<b>Career Aspiration</b> Company-World  <i>People who score high on this scale ... strive for a position of responsibility and influence and a long-term career within one organization.</i>		<b>Career Aspiration</b> Free-Floating-Professionalism  <i>People who score high on this scale ... want to be under contract to one or a few organizations for special and challenging tasks, staying with the same organization only for a limited time.</i>		Sum	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		
		185	42.6%	33	7.6%	218 / 50.2%	
	loose	<b>Career Aspiration</b> Self-Employment  <i>People who score high on this scale ... seek "traditional" self-employment, i.e. offering a range of quite standardized products and/or services to a relatively stable clientele.</i>		<b>Career Aspiration</b> Chronic-Flexibility  <i>People who score high on this scale ... aspire to a "freelance" career with different projects for various clients and ever-changing work contents.</i>			
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		
		95	21.9%	121	27.9%	216 / 49.8%	
		<b>Sum</b>	280	64.5%	154	35.5%	434 / 100%

Table 1: Number of actors aspiring to one of the four career fields

## **Career Aspirations and Job Related Personality**

We define Career Aspirations as a cluster of needs, motives and behavioral intentions which individuals articulate with respect to the individual career fields. Thus Career Aspirations measure the strength of an actor's intention to be active in a particular career field. Our term "Career Aspiration" shows similarities with the term "career anchors" from Schein (Schein 1977; Schein 1994), who differentiates between managerial competence, technical functional competence, security, creativity, and autonomy/independence. However, our understanding of Career Aspiration is narrower, with the target of measuring the intention of actors to become active in the four career fields developed by us.

Furthermore, Career Aspirations represent a type of mental self selection. Actors anticipate the success prerequisites in each of the fields and select those fields where they assume the largest probability of success, estimating their personal strengths/weaknesses. This assumption is supported by the so-called Person-Job-Fit-Theory, relying on the hypothesis of a "congruence between person and working environment" (Weinert 1998), according to which there is an agreement between the expectations, needs and values of the individual actor on the one hand and the circumstances, opportunities and chances, with which certain career fields can fulfill these aspirations on the other hand. Holland builds his theory of "vocational choice" (Holland 1973, 1985) on a similar premise: that there is an interaction between personality and behavioral traits and one's vocational choices, so that people tend to move into career fields that are congruent with their personal qualities. But which personal qualities are leading to an Organizational Career Aspiration and which of them to a Post-Organizational Career Aspiration?

## **Measurements on Job Related Personality**

The following table contains the scales that refer to personality and/or behavioral traits and were entered into the analyses as independent variables. The left column shows where the respective scale has been taken from and gives additional information about the source, literature, norms, and number of items. The right, larger column gives the name of the scale, a short description of the content and the internal consistency.

The Career Tactics questionnaire (KATA) was developed especially for ViCaPP to measure purposeful behavior within the job context. The scales were extracted by means of factor analysis from a pool of 236 items (distributed among 201 working people) based on various theoretical constructs, such as impression management, influence tactics, networking, career insight efforts etc. Then they were optimized with regard to internal scale consistency, normal-distribution-fit and scale range. The descriptions of the separate scales are presented in table 2.





N = 453		Correlation with Organizational Career Aspiration
<b>Career Tactics Questionnaire</b>	Networking	-0.203 **
	Demonstrating Power and Status	0.028
	Self-Promotion and Self-Assertion	-0.177 **
<b>NEO Five-Factor Inventory</b>	Emotional Stability (Neuroticism)	-0.216 **
	Conscientiousness	0.124 **
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	Self-Monitoring	-0.269 **
<b>Bochumer Inventory of Job-Related Personality Description</b>	Achievement Motivation	-0.243 **
	Leadership Motivation	-0.221 **
	Flexibility	-0.442 **
	Openness for Social Contacts	-0.266 **

\*\* 2-tailed significance at 0,01

Table 3: Scales and Measurements – H5 to H8

As can be taken from table 3 only the career tactic Demonstrating Power and Status has no effect on the Career Aspirations. All other correlations are highly significant at a level of 0.01. With only one exception all of them are correlated negatively, so all persons who score high on the presented scales tend more toward a Post-Organizational Career. Only high scores at the NEO-FFI scale Conscientiousness go together with an Organizational Career Aspiration. Most important for a Post-Organizational Career is job-related flexibility.

A stepwise linear regression model with the significant variables shows a solution with five of the nine scales and results in a R-square of 0.24. Apart from this explanation of variance the five scales in the model make a significant difference for Organizational- and Post-Organizational Aspirations. The five scales are:

1. Flexibility
2. Self-Monitoring
3. Conscientiousness
4. Self-Promotion
5. Leadership-Motivation

In contrast to this bivariate correlation Leadership-Motivation shows a positive regression weight. This effect can be explained by a high positive intercorrelation between Leadership-Motivation and Self-Monitoring ( $r = 0.52$ ). Graduates scoring high at the Self-Monitoring scale are also high at Leadership-Motivation. But the part of variance in Leadership-Motivation that can not be explained by Self-Monitoring (which can maybe named as social desirability) is positively related to Organizational Aspirations.

## Discussion

Our findings show quite clearly a polarization between two groups of individuals, with one having a preference for 'traditional career patterns' (41 per cent of the sample) and the other for 'post-organizational career patterns' (59 per cent). Those with a preference for traditional career patterns clearly try to avoid 'old' and 'new' forms of self-employment and do not want

to be part of any kind of contingent workforce. They highly value stability, predictability and long-term commitment to organizations over flexibility, autonomy and independence. In addition, the more they prefer the traditional career field Company-World, the less they show Flexibility, Self-Monitoring, Self-Promotion and Leadership-Motivation and the higher they score on conscientiousness. For individuals preferring a post-organizational career pattern, inverse relationships apply. These results have a number of implications.

- First, and most general, organizations recruiting graduates from business schools might be forced to rethink some of their recruitment strategies and career related incentive systems in the light of the ‘dichotomous’ types of career fields and their related personal qualities.
- Second, and more provocative and controversial, one could argue that organizations recruiting individuals preferring a Company-World career do not get the ‘best’ people. ‘Best’ in this sense means that those individuals score lower on a number of ‘desirable’ behavioral and personality attributes than persons with Post-Organizational Career Aspirations. The more individuals prefer a long-term commitment to the Company-World career field, the less they have a matching success potential. If organizations want to get the ‘best’, they have to search for individuals that originally do not want to join this career field. These individuals score higher in terms of adaptability, power and politics motive pattern, sociability, and need for achievement.
- Third, one explanation for the observed types of Career Aspirations could be based on psychological compensation as a primary mechanism. Individuals, who are less active in their communicative and social behavior, who show lower emotional stability and less dominance/assertiveness, look for a close link to organizations. By choosing tight coupling and stable configuration they want to compensate comparatively low ‘internal’ security and low ‘external’ openness for social contacts and ability to influence others. Regarding conscientiousness, similar arguments seem plausible. The lower ‘internal’ security and ‘external’ openness for social contacts and ability to influence others, the more these deficits are compensated by high conscientiousness.
- Fourth, the development of Career Aspirations over time seems to be interesting. For example, it would be challenging to study whether these results are typical for a specific time span immediately after completing one’s degree at university or whether these characteristics are stable in the long run. There are arguments for both sides. From the theory’s point of view, ‘true’ elements of the career habitus (according to Bourdieu, 1986) will not change within a very short time span. On the other hand, the high proportion of individuals opting for Chronic-Flexibility (28 per cent) might be a result of the specific situation at the end of one’s studies. Ideally, all options should be kept open at that time, the graduates have not yet decided upon a future career path. Likewise, personality traits or behavioral dispositions might change over time. Working in the more stable context of Company-World, for example, could lead to increased inner stability.

In summary, the results might be interpreted as an indicator of an eroding attractiveness of ‘traditional’ careers especially for those people that – according to current research – have the highest potential.

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