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CAREERS IN CONTEXT: HOW MACRO-ECONOMIC AND NONWORK  
FACTORS SHAPE INDIVIDUAL CAREERS

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## Summary

In the past decades, major developments in the world of work have substantially changed the way individuals pursue and experience their careers. As a result of these changes, a traditional career path that is characterized by linear upward progress within one single employer is no longer the default. To investigate contemporary careers, researchers have mostly focused on individual agency, self-direction and adaptation. Yet, individuals do not pursue their careers in a vacuum—instead, they are embedded in various contexts that can shape their opportunities, preferences, and other relevant aspects of their careers. This dissertation follows the call for a stronger contextualization of career research and aims to advance our knowledge of contextual influences on individual careers. To achieve this aim, I conducted three studies that addressed two overarching research questions: 1) Which contextual factors affect career-related outcomes? and 2) What are the mechanisms that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes?

In the three dissertation studies, I considered various contextual factors that pertain to different contexts, and investigated their influence on several relevant aspects of careers. The first dissertation study compared the effect of individual characteristics and the macro-economic context on three types of career mobility. Using a combination of survey data gathered from a sample of Swiss management program alumni and objective labor market statistics, we found that employees with a higher level of education were more likely to make career transitions across organizational and industrial boundaries compared to those who were less well-educated. Our cross-classified multilevel analysis further revealed that employees were more likely to cross organizational boundaries in times of an improving labor market. Against our assumptions, openness to experience had no effect on career mobility, and none of the predictors were related to occupational boundary crossing. These findings show the importance of investigating career mobility from a boundary-focused perspective, and demonstrate that both individual and contextual factors can exert influence on employees' career mobility.

In the second dissertation study, I explored how romantic relationships affect individuals' career goal attainment. Drawing on transactive goal dynamics theory, my co-authors and I developed a research model on the self-regulatory processes underlying career goal attainment in romantic relationships. To test the model, we gathered survey and objective data from German politicians at three measurement points. The results of

our regression analyses indicated that individuals are more successful in attaining their career goals when they are in a close romantic relationship that provides them with resources for goal pursuit, especially when their career goal is well coordinated with their partner's goals. This study identifies an individual's romantic relationship as an important determinant of career goal attainment and provides evidence for the underlying self-regulatory processes. Thereby, the study shows that the nonwork context can considerably affect individual careers.

Finally, the third dissertation study sheds light on the relationship between boundary management and subjective career success. Using data gathered in a three-wave online survey, we found that work-home integration acted as a double-edged sword for subjective career success. On the positive side, work-home integration facilitated the attainment of work goals, which resulted in an improved subjective career success. On the negative side, employees who integrated work and home were more exhausted, which related negatively to their subjective career success. We further found that perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work-home integration constrained the enactment of individuals' own boundary management preference, thus acting as a contextual moderator in this process. These findings indicate that the way individuals manage the interface between work and nonwork contexts can affect their experience of a successful career. Moreover, this study illustrates that the supervisor is an important source of social norms and, thus, affects employees' career-related behaviors and outcomes by shaping the work context in which they are embedded.

The findings of this dissertation provide evidence for the effect of various contextual factors on careers, and generate novel insights into the mechanisms that link these contextual factors with career mobility, career goal attainment, and subjective career success. These insights also yield useful practical implications for employees, organizations, and career counselors.

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## Zusammenfassung

In den vergangenen Jahrzehnten hat sich die Art und Weise, wie Individuen ihre Karriere gestalten und erleben, durch grössere Entwicklungen in der Arbeitswelt drastisch verändert. Dies hat unter anderem dazu geführt, dass ein traditioneller Karriereverlauf, der sich durch einen linearen Aufstieg innerhalb eines Unternehmens auszeichnet, nicht mehr die Norm ist. Um Karrieren in der heutigen Zeit zu untersuchen, haben sich Forscher vor allem auf individuelle Handlungsfähigkeit, Eigenverantwortung und Anpassungsfähigkeit fokussiert. Individuen verfolgen ihre Karriere jedoch nicht in einem Vakuum – sie sind vielmehr in verschiedene Kontexte eingebettet, die ihre Möglichkeiten, Präferenzen und andere relevante Karriereaspekte prägen können. Diese Dissertation folgt dem Aufruf nach einer stärkeren Kontextualisierung von Karriereforschung, um das Wissen über kontextuelle Einflüsse auf individuelle Karrieren voranzubringen. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, wurden drei Studien durchgeführt, in denen zwei übergeordnete Forschungsfragen untersucht wurden: 1) Welche kontextuellen Faktoren beeinflussen die Karriere? und 2) Welche Mechanismen liegen dem Effekt von kontextuellen Faktoren auf die Karriere zugrunde?

Die drei Dissertationsstudien adressierten verschiedene kontextuelle Faktoren, die sich jeweils unterschiedlichen Kontexten zuordnen lassen, und untersuchten deren Einfluss auf mehrere relevante Karriereaspekte. In der ersten Studie wurde der Effekt von individuellen Merkmalen auf drei Arten von Karrieremobilität mit dem Effekt des makroökonomischen Kontextes verglichen. Anhand einer Kombination von Fragebogendaten, die in einer Stichprobe von MBA Alumni in der Schweiz erhoben wurden, und objektiven Arbeitsmarktstatistiken fanden wir heraus, dass Mitarbeitende mit einem höheren Ausbildungsniveau eher über die Grenzen von Organisationen und Branchen hinweg wechselten als jene, die weniger gut ausgebildet waren. Unsere Multilevel-Analyse zeigte zudem, dass Mitarbeitende eher den Arbeitgeber wechselten, wenn der Arbeitsmarkt sich verbesserte. Entgegen unseren Erwartungen spielte die Offenheit für Erfahrungen keine Rolle in der Vorhersage von Karrieremobilität, und keiner der Prädiktoren hing mit Karrierewechseln über Berufe hinweg zusammen. Diese Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Karrieremobilität mit einem Fokus auf verschiedene karrierebezogene Grenzen untersucht werden sollte und dass sowohl individuelle als auch kontextuelle Faktoren einen Einfluss auf die Karrieremobilität von Mitarbeitenden ausüben können.

In der zweiten Studie wurde untersucht, wie die romantische Beziehung die Erreichung von individuellen Karrierezielen beeinflussen kann. Basierend auf der *Transactive Goal Dynamics Theory* entwickelte ich gemeinsam mit meinen Koautoren ein Forschungsmodell über die Selbstregulationsprozesse, die der Karrierezielerreichung in romantischen Beziehungen zugrunde liegen. Um das Modell zu testen, wurden zu drei Messzeitpunkten Fragebogen- und objektive Daten von deutschen Politikerinnen und Politikern erhoben. Die Ergebnisse unserer Regressionsanalysen wiesen darauf hin, dass Individuen erfolgreicher in der Erreichung ihrer Karriereziele waren, wenn sie in einer engen romantischen Beziehung waren, aus der sie Ressourcen schöpfen konnten, besonders wenn ihr Karriereziel gut mit den Zielen ihres Partners bzw. ihrer Partnerin koordiniert war. Diese Studie identifiziert die romantische Beziehung als einen bedeutsamen Einflussfaktor für die Karrierezielerreichung und liefert Evidenz für die zugrundeliegenden Selbstregulationsprozesse. Dadurch zeigt diese Studie, dass der ausserberufliche Kontext einen beträchtlichen Einfluss auf individuelle Karrieren haben kann.

In der dritten Studie ging es schliesslich darum, den Zusammenhang zwischen dem Umgang mit der Grenze zwischen Arbeit und Privatleben und subjektivem Karriereerfolg näher zu beleuchten. Die Analyse der Daten, die in einem Online-Fragebogen zu drei Messzeitpunkten gesammelt wurden, ergab, dass die Integration von Arbeit und Privatleben ein zweiseitiges Schwert für subjektiven Karriereerfolg darstellt. Einerseits unterstützte die Integration von Arbeit und Privatleben das Erreichen von Arbeitszielen, was sich positiv auf den subjektiven Karriereerfolg auswirkte. Andererseits waren Mitarbeitende, die Arbeit und Privatleben stärker integrierten, jedoch auch erschöpfter, was einen negativen Effekt auf ihren subjektiven Karriereerfolg hatte. Zudem fanden wir heraus, dass die wahrgenommene Erwartung der Führungsperson in Bezug auf die Integration von Arbeit und Privatleben bei den Mitarbeitenden die Ausführung ihrer eigenen Präferenzen einschränkte. Diese Ergebnisse zeigen, dass der Umgang mit der Grenze zwischen Arbeits- und nichtberuflichen Kontexten das Erleben einer erfolgreichen Karriere beeinflussen kann. Die Studie zeigt zudem, dass Vorgesetzte eine wichtige Quelle von sozialen Normen sind und dementsprechend die Karriere der Mitarbeitenden durch die Prägung des Arbeitskontextes, in dem diese sich bewegen, beeinflussen.



Die Resultate dieser Dissertation liefern Belege für den Effekt von verschiedenen kontextuellen Faktoren auf individuelle Karrieren. Zudem generieren sie neue Erkenntnisse in Bezug auf die Mechanismen, welche die kontextuellen Faktoren mit Karrieremobilität, der Erreichung von Karrierezielen und subjektivem Karriereerfolg verbinden. Aus diesen Erkenntnissen ergeben sich auch Implikationen für die Praxis, die sowohl für Mitarbeitende und Organisationen wie auch für Karriereberater/innen nützlich sind.



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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



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Most career scholars agree that in the past decades, major developments in the world of work have substantially changed the way how individuals pursue and experience their careers. These developments comprise, for instance, increasing globalization, the flexibilization of employment relationships, a growing prevalence of organizational restructuring and downsizing, a higher diversity of the workforce, and rapid technological advancements that enable a large part of the workforce to work anytime and anywhere (Guan et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2018; Spreitzer et al., 2017). Against the backdrop of these drastic changes and less stable employer-employee relationships, a traditional career path that is characterized by linear upward progress within one single employer is no longer the default (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). As a result, many employees are increasingly confronted with the demand to take the full responsibility for their career management and adapt to work-related changes in order to stay employable in the modern workplace (Forrier et al., 2015; Hall, 2004). To investigate contemporary careers, researchers have therefore predominantly used concepts that focus on individual agency, self-direction and adaptation, such as the boundaryless or protean career concepts (Wiernik & Kostal, 2019).

Being able to adapt to changing conditions and to engage in actions that serve one's own goals and values is certainly one of the cornerstones for successful career management (Hall et al., 2018). Putting the individual at the center of research on contemporary careers is thus appropriate and reasonable. Still, individuals do not pursue their careers in a vacuum—instead, they are embedded in various contexts that can shape their opportunities, preferences, and other relevant factors that ultimately affect their careers (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). For example, the national, cultural, and institutional context in which a career unfolds can considerably affect how individuals define career success (Mayrhofer et al., 2016). Moreover, other persons or groups in an individual's social context can affect their career, for instance by providing standards for how to evaluate their career-related outcomes (Grote & Hall, 2013). Nevertheless, the vast majority of empirical studies in the existing career literature has taken an overly agentic view and has neglected the influence of contextual factors on careers. This has evoked calls for a stronger contextualization of career research (e.g., Forrier et al., 2018; Grote & Hall, 2013; Gunz et al., 2011; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Tams & Arthur, 2010).

The overarching goal of this dissertation is to advance our knowledge of contextual influences on individual careers and thereby contribute to a stronger contextualization of

career research. To this end, I conducted three empirical studies that take into account various contextual factors that presumably have an effect on careers. In my first dissertation study, I compare the effects of individual characteristics (i.e., openness to experience and level of education) and the macro-economic context (i.e., yearly fluctuations in the labor market) on three different types of career mobility. Taking a boundary-focused perspective on career mobility, I investigate career transitions across organizational, industrial, and occupational boundaries. In my second dissertation study, the focus lies on the romantic relationship, which constitutes an essential part of an individual's nonwork context. Drawing on recent theorizing from self-regulation research, I shed light on the question of whether and how romantic relationships affect the attainment of individuals' career goals. In this paper, I argue that romantic relationships can facilitate career goal attainment by increasing the pool of resources available for goal pursuit, and that the partners' goal coordination is a crucial boundary condition of this process. Finally, in my third dissertation study I take a closer look at how employees manage the interface between the work and nonwork contexts. Drawing on boundary theory and conservation of resources theory, I argue that work-home integration can act as a double-edged sword for subjective career success by improving work goal attainment while also undermining well-being. Moreover, I investigate the role of perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work-home integration as a contextual moderator of these processes.

With this dissertation, I seek to contribute to the current career literature in several ways. First and foremost, I will provide empirical evidence regarding the effects of different contextual factors on career-related outcomes. Specifically, the three studies investigate how careers are affected by the macro-economic context as well as the work and nonwork contexts individuals are embedded in. By exploring how individual and contextual factors jointly affect individuals' careers, I follow the call for addressing contextual influences on individual careers (e.g., Gunz et al., 2011; Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Second, within this dissertation, I seek to shed light on the mechanisms that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes, and on the boundary conditions that might affect these processes. By generating insights into *how* and *under which conditions* contextual factors affect career-related outcomes, I go beyond a mere identification of relevant contextual determinants of career mobility and success. For the development of my research models in the three studies, I used established theoretical approaches that support our understanding of the processes

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underlying career mobility, career goal attainment, and subjective career success. Finally, the results reported within this dissertation will yield practical implications for employees' career management that are also relevant for organizations and career counselors. I hope that the insights gained in the three dissertation studies can support employees in making beneficial career transitions across different career-related boundaries, attaining their career-related goals and, ultimately, achieving a higher level of subjective career success. Organizations could use the insights gained in this dissertation to improve their organizational career management programs and their Human Resource Management strategies. Finally, career counselors could use these insights to better support and advise their clients in successfully managing their careers.

This dissertation is organized in seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction into the overarching topic of the dissertation and gives a first overview of the aim and contribution of the dissertation. In Chapter 2, I will summarize the relevant literature and present the theoretical approaches that I have used as a basis for this dissertation. Chapter 3 contains an overview of the methodological approaches I adopted and the main findings of the three dissertation studies. Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the scientific and practical implications of these findings, the limitations of the dissertation, and a presentation of potential avenues for future research. Finally, the three scientific papers that form the basis of this cumulative dissertation can be found in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.



## Chapter 2

# Theoretical Background

Organizational Behavior in Context

Contextual Influences on Careers

Theoretical Approaches





In the following chapter, I will present an overview of the relevant literature and summarize the core concepts and theoretical approaches that I use throughout this dissertation. First, I will elaborate on the meaning of context and why it is important to consider contextual factors when studying organizational behavior. Second, I will explain how context can affect individuals' careers and summarize existing literature that provides insight into the question how macro-economic and nonwork contextual factors as well as supervisors can affect individual careers. Finally, I will present the theoretical approaches that I used as a basis for my own theorizing about the processes linking contextual variables with career-related outcomes in the dissertation papers.

## **2.1 Organizational Behavior in Context**

In his seminal work on the impact of context on organizational behavior, Johns (2006) defines context as “situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behavior as well as functional relationships between variables” (p. 386). This general definition illustrates that context is regarded as tied to the situation—which basically means that contextual factors are located outside of the individual actor. Moreover, by framing context in terms of opportunities and constraints, the definition points to the fact that contextual factors can both enable and constrain individual behavior. Finally, the definition proposes that context can have a direct effect on organizational behavior, but also act as a moderator in established relationships between antecedents and behavior.

The idea that contextual factors can have a considerable effect on individuals has a long tradition in research on organizational behavior (Johns, 2006, 2018). For example, theories on person-environment fit propose that individual behavior can be best predicted when considering both the person and the environment in which that person is embedded, and that a high compatibility between personal characteristics (e.g., abilities) and environmental characteristics (e.g., demands) will result in desirable outcomes (van Vianen, 2018). Person-environment fit theories have been formulated and applied in various research areas, including stress and health (e.g., Edwards & Cooper, 1990), vocational choice (e.g., Holland, 1997), and in the prediction of job satisfaction and career success (e.g., Bretz & Judge, 1994). Another influential research stream that addresses the impact of contextual factors on individual behavior has been raised by Mischel (1977). He

proposed that the effect of individual attributes on behavior varies as a function of the strength of a situation, which is directly determined by contextual factors such as cultural norms or organizational policies. A strong situation represents a situation in which there is a social consensus about which behaviors are deemed appropriate and which are not. Consequently, the effect of individuals' own preferences on their behavior is attenuated as they aim to comply with these social norms to avoid punishment or rejection from others.

Due to the omnipresent influence that context has on individual behavior, Johns (2006, 2018) calls for a stronger consideration of contextual influences in research on organizational behavior. To this end, he encourages researchers to explicitly address contextual factors in their research models and study designs, and to include more details on the study context when reporting results. For instance, researchers could use more comparative research designs or investigate relationships across various levels of analysis (e.g., individuals, teams, organizations, and countries) to take into account the multilevel nature of organizations and the contexts they are embedded in. Some recently published studies have followed this approach to explore the impact of contextual factors on career-related behaviors and outcomes. For example, Andresen et al. (2019) used data gathered from 17,986 employees who were nested in 27 countries to study how career opportunities in different societal contexts affect the importance assigned to financial achievements and individuals' proactive career behaviors. Drawing on a similar dataset of 11,892 employees from 22 countries, Smale et al. (2018) found that cultural differences shaped the link between career proactivity and subjective career success. These studies illustrate that the broader context in which individuals are embedded can actually affect their careers.

## 2.2 Contextual Influences on Careers

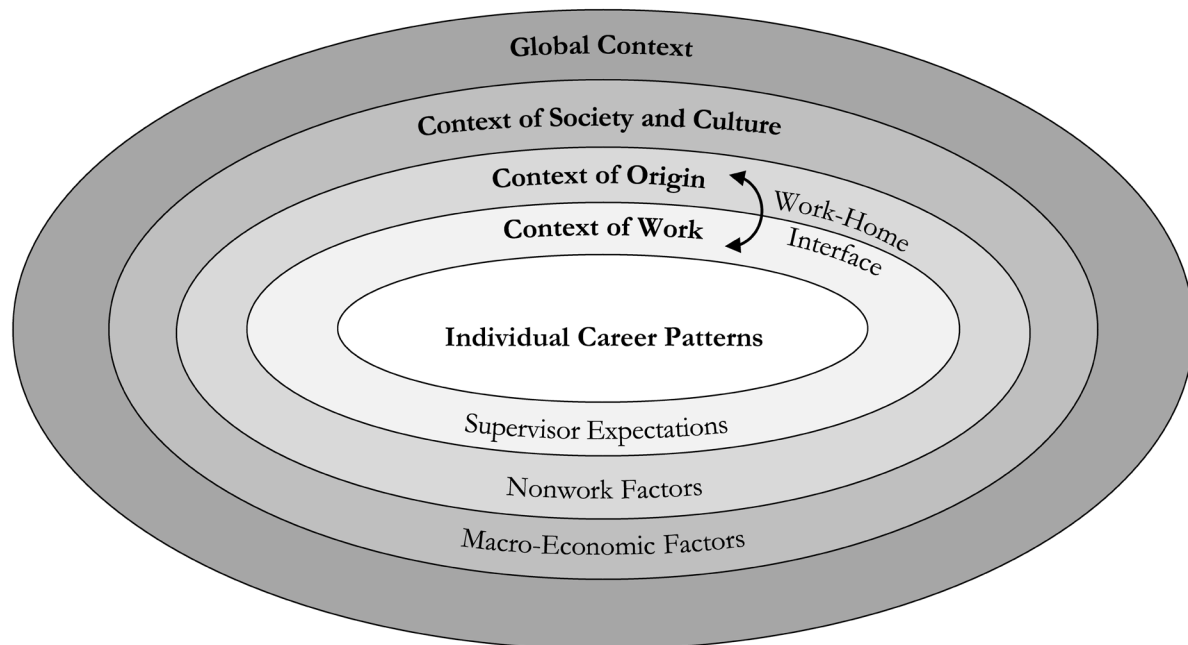
The term *career* has been defined in various ways, with one definition describing a career as “an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual's life span” (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1543). This definition illustrates that careers do not occur in a vacuum (King et al., 2005) and that they thus cannot be investigated holistically without addressing the context in which they evolve. For instance, the definition refers to experiences that are made inside and outside of organizations, which points to the fact that contexts other than the organization also shape career-related experiences. Accordingly, in

order to better understand careers, it is important to identify mutual relations between individual and contextual factors and to examine their relative importance for the prediction of individual behaviors and outcomes (e.g., Kattenbach et al., 2014).

In line with the general definition of context presented above, Mayrhofer and colleagues (2007) define contextual determinants of careers as “exogenous factors that influence careers of individuals and the organizations and ‘fields’ they are in” (p. 216). To enable a classification of the various contextual determinants of careers, Mayrhofer and colleagues (2007) propose a multi-layered model consisting of four different contextual layers in which individuals are embedded. These contextual layers are located at distinct levels of proximity to the individual and include—from proximal to distal—the context of work, origin, society and culture, and the global context. The authors further propose that each of these layers comprises several contextual factors that can affect individual careers. The context of work, which is the most proximal context, includes factors such as new forms of work, flexible work arrangements, and work-related relationships. Within the context of origin, the model proposes that factors related to an individual’s socio-economic background as well as their current life situation (e.g., their family situation) play a pivotal role. The context of society and culture is rather distal from the individual and includes higher-level factors such as the demographic composition of a country’s population or gender stereotypes on a societal level. Finally, the global context relates to factors such as the internationalization and virtualization of work experiences.

The model proposed by Mayrhofer et al. (2007) clarifies which contexts may be relevant for individual careers and enables a classification of contextual factors into the four different contextual layers. Within this dissertation, I focus on four different contextual factors that can be assigned to three of the four contextual layers in Mayrhofer et al.’s (2007) model (see Figure 2.1). First, I focus on macro-economic factors (i.e., fluctuations in the labor market), which describe the economic situation within a given country and, thus, pertain to the broader context of society and culture. These macro-economic factors can shape an individual’s career opportunities in external labor markets. Second, I consider nonwork factors (i.e., romantic relationships), which are closely linked to an individual’s current life situation and, thus, are related to the context of origin. Third, by investigating the way employees manage the work–home interface, I address the dynamics that evolve at the boundary between the context of work and the context of

origin. Finally, I consider supervisor expectations, which form part of the relationship between an employee and their supervisor and, consequently, pertain to the context of work.



**Figure 2.1.** Contextual factors that are addressed in this dissertation and how they are embedded within the four layers of context. Figure adapted from Mayrhofer et al. (2007, p. 217).

### 2.2.1 How Macro-Economic Factors Affect Individual Careers

For the scope of this dissertation, macro-economic factors are defined as those factors that are indicative of the economic situation in a given country, such as the national unemployment rate or the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country (Latzke et al., 2016). These factors are measured on the country-level and are thus ascribed to the context of society and culture in the model by Mayrhofer et al. (2007). They are directly related to the career opportunities individuals face on internal (i.e., within their current employer) and external (i.e., outside of their current employer) labor markets and thereby determine an individual's possibilities and motivation to engage in job changes. Consequently, macro-economic factors are often considered a determinant of career mobility.

Career mobility is a multifaceted phenomenon that has been conceptualized in various ways in previous research. Generally, career mobility describes work-related transitions that involve a change in employment status or job content (Forrier et al., 2009). Feldman and Ng (2007) differentiate between changes within an organization (i.e., job

changes), changes in employer (i.e., organizational changes), and changes that involve the acquisition of fundamentally new skills and require further training or education (i.e., occupational changes). These work-related transitions can also be classified by considering three dimensions of mobility: status (upward vs. lateral vs. downward), employer (same vs. changed), and function (same vs. changed; Ng et al., 2007). Within this dissertation, career mobility will be conceptualized by focusing on the boundaries that separate career-related entities (e.g., organizations, occupations) from each other. A transition from one position to another involves crossing such career boundaries (Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012).

Existing theoretical models on career mobility acknowledge that macro-economic factors are an important determinant of mobility. For instance, Ng et al. (2007) propose that over the course of their careers, individuals alternate between phases of equilibrium, in which they see no necessity to change their job, and points of disequilibrium that trigger career mobility. The model further states that career mobility is a product of both micro-level individual and macro-level structural factors that may interrupt an individual's career equilibrium. These factors can be grouped into three categories: structural factors including macro-economic factors (e.g., the labor market situation), individual differences (e.g., personality traits), and decisional factors (e.g., intentions). The authors further propose that economic conditions are such a structural factor which has an impact on the availability of options for career mobility. In times of a growing economy, organizations expand both horizontally and vertically, thus creating new job opportunities for their workforce and for individuals from the external labor market. A favorable economic condition should also increase an individual's willingness to engage in career mobility, because concerns about job security that result in a tendency to avoid the risk of changing jobs are less salient.

Similarly, the framework proposed by Forrier et al. (2009) includes both individual and contextual factors as determinants of career mobility. The key aspect of individual agency in their model is movement capital, which comprises "the individual skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes influencing an individual's career mobility opportunities" (p. 742). Movement capital is a major determinant of career mobility, because it affects an individual's opportunities and motivation to engage in a career transition. Forrier et al. (2009) further recognize that an individual's opportunities and motivation for mobility not only depend on their individual attributes, but may also be constrained by contextual factors. Contextual factors that shape an individual's structure

of risks and opportunities include the demand in the internal and external labor markets and mechanisms that determine the match between supplies and demands in these labor markets. For instance, individual opportunities for career mobility are strongly dependent on the number of jobs that are available on internal and external labor markets. Likewise, the match between an individual's movement capital with the role requirements of the jobs that are currently available affect whether an individual meets the current demands in the labor market and, thus, may constrain their mobility opportunities (Forrier et al., 2009).

In line with these theoretical assumptions, existing studies have already provided some evidence that macro-economic factors can affect career mobility (e.g., Davis et al., 2015; DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Latzke et al., 2016). For instance, using a large German panel dataset, Kattenbach et al. (2014) found that job changes across organizational boundaries were more likely in times when the GDP was higher and, accordingly, when the economic situation was more prosperous. Taken together, theoretical work and previous studies suggest that macro-economic factors such as the unemployment rate or the national GDP are important determinants of career mobility, because they affect individuals' career opportunities in the labor market.

### **2.2.2 How Nonwork Factors Affect Individual Careers**

Within this dissertation, nonwork factors are defined as factors that pertain to an individual's life domains outside of work, such as the family or, more globally, the home domain. In Mayrhofer et al.'s (2007) model, nonwork factors are best ascribed to the context of origin, because they refer to an individual's current life situation. Greenhaus and Powell (2012) propose in their framework on the family-relatedness of work decisions that employees take their family situation into account when making work-related decisions. For example, a pregnancy and the birth of a child usually cause parents to make decisions regarding their future work engagement, such as taking parental leave or reducing working hours (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2019; Stertz et al., 2017). Other work-related decisions such as relocating for a new job, seeking a promotion or working overtime are also strongly affected by the family situation (Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014; Ullrich et al., 2015). Such work-related decisions can have a considerable impact on individuals' careers.

The romantic relationship is presumably one of the most influential factors from the nonwork context in general and the family situation specifically. For instance, Pluut et

al. (2018) found that employees whose spouses aspired them to be successful in their career had a higher motivation to pursue a managerial career path. Moreover, research shows that personal resources such as job-related self-efficacy or work engagement can cross over between relationship partners (Neff et al., 2013; Tian et al., 2017). Receiving partner support has further been shown to result in desirable career-related outcomes, such as reduced employee turnover (Huffman et al., 2014), and improved job satisfaction and career success (Ferguson et al., 2016; Ocampo et al., 2018). Taken together, these studies indicate that romantic relationships can exert a considerable influence on an individual's career-related decisions and outcomes.

In addition to investigating the effects of romantic relationships on individual careers, this dissertation also focuses on how employees manage the interface between the work and nonwork contexts. Historically, research on the work–home interface has focused on the negative interrelations and conflicts experienced between the two domains. Work–home conflict occurs when the demands from the work and home domains are incompatible with each other and, as a result, the involvement of an individual in one role hinders their performance in the other role (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Previous studies have provided evidence that these negative work–home interdependencies can have detrimental effects on individual careers. For instance, meta-analyses have shown that work–home conflict is negatively related to career satisfaction, and results in increased turnover intentions (Amstad et al., 2011). Employees who experience a high level of work–home conflict have consistently been shown to hit a so-called glass ceiling, which means that they face restricted opportunities for career progression (Hoobler et al., 2010; Hoobler et al., 2009).

On the contrary, research has also generated insights into the benefits for individuals' careers that can be drawn from work–home interdependencies. Taking a more positive view on the interface between work and home, researchers have investigated beneficial spillover effects between the two domains (i.e., work–home enrichment; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). When resources generated at home are transferred to the work domain, this should have a positive effect on one's career, because this resource spillover can facilitate performance in the work domain (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Accordingly, studies have found that employees with a higher family orientation are more satisfied with their career (Hirschi et al., 2016) and that employees who are more strongly

involved in their family role have better career prospects, because they can transfer resources generated in their family role to the work context (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016). Meta-analytical evidence further shows that work–home enrichment relates to several important precursors of subjective career success, such as increased job satisfaction and performance, and reduced turnover intentions (McNall et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018).

Taken together, previous research provides evidence that career-related outcomes can be strongly affected by the interdependencies that exist between the work and home domains. These findings show that “career experiences and home experiences are inextricably intertwined in many contemporary careers” (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014, p. 362) and thus highlight the importance of considering the interface between work and nonwork contexts in career research.

### **2.2.3 How Supervisors Affect Individual Careers**

Social relationships at work are an integral part of the work context an individual is embedded in (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). The relationship with the supervisor is one of the most important ones, and employees who have a high-quality relationship with their supervisor experience advantageous career outcomes, such as increased career satisfaction and higher salaries (Byrne et al., 2008; Raghuram et al., 2017). A vast amount of studies has already shown that supervisors can affect individual careers in multiple ways. For instance, the supervisor usually is an important part of an employee’s intra-organizational network and, thus, contributes to their social capital (Seibert et al., 2001). Social capital refers to the career-enhancing resources (e.g., information, emotional or instrumental support) an individual can draw from others in their social environment (Seibert et al., 2001). Supervisors can also act as mentors for employees by supporting their career development as well as by providing psychosocial support (Allen et al., 2004). Supervisor mentoring is related to several desirable career-related outcomes, such as lower rates of voluntary turnover (Lapointe & Vandenberghe, 2017), a higher level of career satisfaction (Pan et al., 2011), higher promotability ratings (Sun et al., 2014), and various indicators of objective career success (e.g., salary and promotion rates; Eby et al., 2008; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994). Finally, supervisors can be important gatekeepers for employees’ career advancement, because they decide about internal promotions and the access to developmental opportunities (Bosley et al., 2009).



In addition to exerting a direct effect on employees' careers (e.g., by providing mentoring), supervisors may also indirectly affect employees' career-related behaviors and outcomes by shaping the work environment in which employees are embedded. For instance, supervisors provide norms and standards that employees use as a behavioral guidance. Because the supervisor can be an important authority and role model, employees may imitate certain supervisor behaviors, such as boundary management behaviors or organizational citizenship behaviors (Koch & Binnewies, 2015; Yaffe & Kark, 2011). Supervisors also shape employees' behaviors by implicitly or explicitly communicating expectations for how to behave in a given situation. For example, supervisors can generate pressure to be constantly available and to prioritize work over family by communicating respective expectations (Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Derks et al., 2015). These expectations provide employees with a social norm how they should behave, which creates a strong situation in which the effect of individual preferences on behavior diminishes (Mischel, 1977). Taken together, the supervisor can be an important role model and source of social norms and, consequently, influence employees' work-related behaviors. Ultimately, this can also have a considerable effect on their careers.

In a nutshell, previous research shows that supervisors can affect employees' career-related behaviors and outcomes in various ways. In addition to having a direct effect on careers (e.g., through mentoring), they serve as an important source for work-related norms and standards and considerably shape the environment employees are working in. Within this dissertation, I address supervisor expectations as an important boundary condition that affects the enactment of individual preferences. In so doing, I consider supervisors as an important part of the work context that can have a substantial effect on careers.

### **2.3 Theoretical Approaches**

In this section, I will present the theoretical approaches that I used as a basis for my theorizing on the mechanisms that link contextual factors to career-related outcomes. In the first study, I used the theoretical models on career mobility presented above (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007) to investigate the effect of individual and contextual factors on career mobility. In the second study, I utilized transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). The theory makes propositions about self-regulation in social relationships, which made it especially adequate to explain how romantic relationships may facilitate

career goal attainment. In the third study, I used boundary theory to explore the linking mechanisms between work–home integration and subjective career success. In the following, I will provide a summary of transactive goal dynamics theory and boundary theory.

### **2.3.1 Transactive Goal Dynamics Theory**

Transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015) stems from self-regulation research and describes how self-regulation functions in social relationships. Based on existing empirical evidence on the influence of important others on individual goal pursuits (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Fitzsimons & vanDellen, 2015; Hofmann et al., 2015; Laurin et al., 2016), the main assumption of the theory is that two individuals in a relationship are to some degree interdependent in their self-regulation. When interdependency is high, there are strong links between the goals, pursuits, or outcomes of the two individuals in the relationship. Consequently, the individuals do not pursue their goals separately from one another, but rather build a self-regulatory unit—a transactive goal system. Basically, the theory proposes that goal outcomes improve when self-regulatory interdependency is high and when the two individuals in a relationship coordinate their goal pursuit well by effectively using the shared resources available for goal pursuit (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2018).

Generally, goals can be defined as mental representations of desirable end states (i.e., behaviors or outcomes, see Papies & Aarts, 2011). They drive action by enabling individuals to direct their activities towards the goal and to regulate the effort or energy they spend to achieve the goal, and by facilitating persistence (Latham & Locke, 1991). Transactive goal dynamics theory proposes that the goals in a transactive goal system are defined by three independent dimensions: 1) who possesses the goal (self, relationship partner, or both), 2) who is the target of the goal (self, relationship partner, or both), and 3) who pursues the goal (self, relationship partner, both, or neither). Thus, individuals in a relationship may possess and pursue goals that are not targeted at themselves, but rather at their relationship partner or at the relationship itself. Shared goals are defined as goals that have the same content and the same target (e.g., when both partners have the same goal for one partner). These goals are indicative of a high self-regulatory interdependency,

because both partners share a goal that is targeted at one of them, and both can contribute to goal attainment by allocating resources to the pursuit of the shared goal.

The theory further proposes that self-regulatory interdependency will be higher when the two partners have opportunities and a high motivation to develop interdependency. Opportunities comprise contextual factors that facilitate interdependency, such as the duration of the relationship or the quantity of interaction between the two partners. Motivation is related to the question of whether the two partners *want* to establish interdependency and is closely linked to the nature of the relationship. For instance, partners who are in a close relationship to which they are highly committed should be more willing to establish self-regulatory interdependency compared to those who are in a more distanced relationship to which they are only weakly committed. In a next step, the authors suggest that a high interdependency results in better goal outcomes by increasing the shared pool of resources available for goal pursuit, provided that the partners coordinate their goal pursuits successfully. According to self-regulation literature, goal coordination comprises two independent dimensions: goal conflict and goal facilitation (Riediger & Freund, 2004). Goal conflict occurs when the pursuit of one goal hinders the attainment of another goal, because both goals require the investment of the same resource or the behaviors involved in the pursuit of the two goals are incompatible. In contrast, goal facilitation occurs when the pursuit of one goal simultaneously promotes the attainment of another goal, because the two goals are instrumentally related to each other. Thus, both goal conflict and goal facilitation should affect the relationship between self-regulatory interdependency and goal outcomes.

Generally, transactive goal dynamics theory can be applied to various types of social relationships (e.g., romantic relationships, coworker dyads, or supervisor-employee dyads), and its propositions should hold true for the pursuit of various types of goals (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2018; Fitzsimons et al., 2016). Within this dissertation, the application of transactive goal dynamics theory was especially adequate to explore the effects of romantic relationships on the attainment of career goals. To develop my research model in the second dissertation study, I drew on the theory's definition of self-regulatory interdependency and on the propositions on the self-regulatory processes underlying goal pursuit in relationships.

### 2.3.2 Boundary Theory

Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) is one of the most prominent theories in work–home research. The theory is grounded in role theory and aims at understanding the role transitions that individuals make in their organizational life. These role transitions refer to “the psychological (and, where relevant, physical) movement between roles, including disengagement from one role (role exit) and engagement in another (role entry)” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472) and thus involve the crossing of boundaries, for instance between the work and home domains. Thus, boundary theory deals with the question how individuals manage the boundaries that define certain roles (e.g., parent, romantic partner, or employee) as distinct from one another.

According to Ashforth et al. (2000), the ease of role transitions is determined by two characteristics of the boundaries: flexibility and permeability. While boundary flexibility depends on whether a certain role (e.g., the role as an employee) can be enacted at different points in time and in different settings (e.g., at work and at home), boundary permeability refers to the extent to which an individual can be located in one role’s domain (e.g., at work), but at the same time be psychologically or behaviorally involved in another role (e.g., the role as a parent). Based on these definitions, the theory proposes that flexible and permeable boundaries facilitate frequent and effortless transitions between roles. To the extent that the transitions enable the individual to successfully deal with different role responsibilities, flexible and permeable boundaries can be a means to mitigate interrole conflict. At the same time, however, having very weak boundaries between different roles may lead to confusion about the respective role identities, thus increasing interrole conflict (Ashforth et al., 2000).

Based on the concepts of flexibility and permeability, as well as the contrast (i.e., the degree of difference) between roles, the theory further proposes that any pair of roles can be arranged on a continuum from segmentation to integration. Segmentation is characterized by inflexible and impermeable boundaries, combined with a high contrast between the two roles. Thus, segmented roles are highly differentiated and bound to a specific time and setting, and they allow for only few interruptions from other roles. Consequently, a high segmentation prevents role blurring, and transitions between segmented roles are more disruptive and less frequent. In contrast, integration is characterized by flexible and permeable boundaries, and a low contrast between roles. This

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means, integrated roles are weakly differentiated, can be enacted at various points in time and in various settings, and allow interruptions from other roles. As a result, transitions between integrated roles tend to occur on a regular basis, because they are less disruptive and easier to execute. Yet, role integration also increases the risk of role blurring. Importantly, the theory also suggests that individuals have a general preference for how to manage the boundaries between different life domains. This preference for rather integrating or segmenting roles is assumed to be relatively stable over time.

Finally, the theory proposes that although individuals usually have some impact on the extent to which they segment or integrate their roles, contextual factors may shape the way individuals manage boundaries between different life domains. Based on Mischel's work (1977), Ashforth et al. (2000) discuss the strength of a situation as a contextual factor that might impact boundary dynamics. In a strong situation, there is a social consensus about which behaviors are deemed appropriate and which behaviors are not, and the appropriate ones are reinforced by the social group. Consequently, when situational strength is high, the effect of individual preferences on behavior diminishes. In practice, this means that, for instance, organizational policies, practices, and norms may restrict individuals in managing their role boundaries according to their own preferences.

Boundary theory is especially adequate to explore dynamics that evolve at the intersection between work and home (Allen et al., 2014), and has therefore served as a basis for a large number of studies on work–home integration and role transitions at the work–home interface (e.g., Bulger et al., 2007; Capitano et al., 2017; Delanoeije et al., 2019; Kreiner, 2006; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Piszczek, 2017; Reyt & Wiesenfeld, 2015; Spieler et al., 2017; Wepfer et al., 2018). Within this dissertation, I apply boundary theory to generate insights into the question how the way employees manage the interface between the work and nonwork contexts can affect their experience of a successful career.



## Chapter 3

### The Present Thesis

Research Aims

Methodological Approach

Summary of Scientific Papers





### 3.1 Research Aims

As elaborated in the previous chapters, careers cannot be studied adequately without taking into account the context they evolve in, because these contexts can substantially affect individuals' career-related behaviors and outcomes (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Relevant contexts comprise, for instance, the context of work including work-related relationships, the nonwork context including the family situation and romantic relationships, and higher-level contexts such as the macro-economic context. Despite the importance of context for careers, the vast majority of the career literature has focused on individual agency in predicting career-related behaviors and outcomes, while only few empirical studies have addressed contextual influences on careers. Career researchers have therefore called for a stronger contextualization of career studies (e.g., Forrier et al., 2018; Grote & Hall, 2013; Gunz et al., 2011; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Mayrhofer et al., 2007).

To address this highly relevant issue, the main aim of this dissertation is to improve our understanding of contextual influences on careers. Specifically, I am interested in whether and how different contextual factors affect various career-related outcomes. With my dissertation, I aim to contribute to a stronger contextualization of career research, and to a better understanding of how contexts other than the proximal work context may shape careers. To achieve this, I consider the macro-economic context (i.e., fluctuations in the labor market), the nonwork context (i.e., romantic relationships), the dynamics at the interface between work and nonwork contexts (i.e., how employees manage the work-home interface), and the work context (i.e. supervisor expectations) as determinants of individual careers in my three dissertation studies. Moreover, this dissertation sets out to generate novel and relevant insights into the mechanisms that link contextual factors to career-related outcomes.

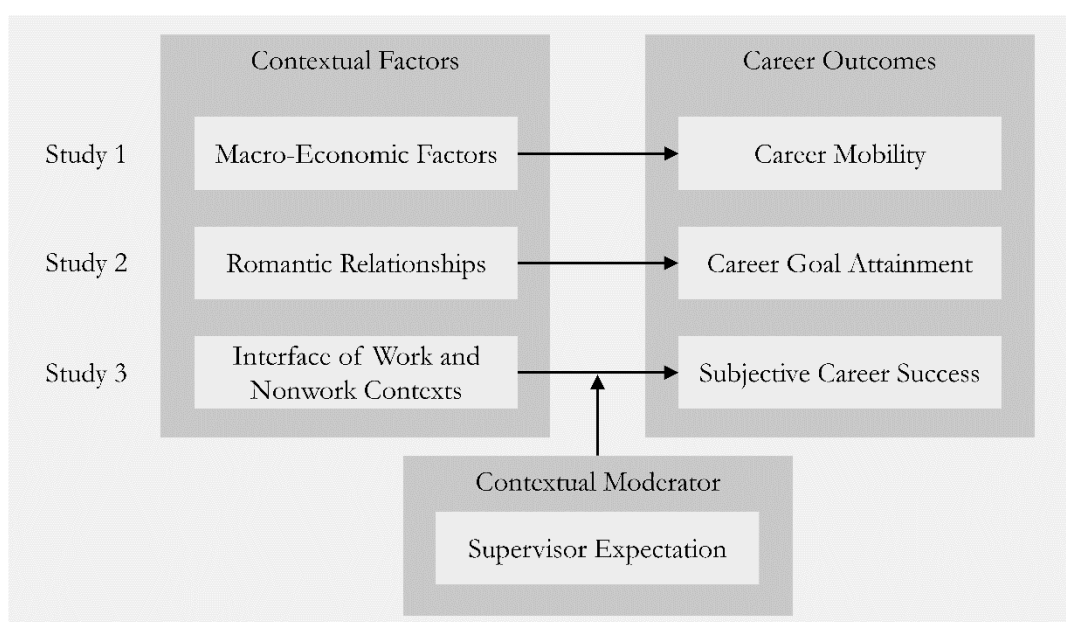
I further aim to investigate careers comprehensively by considering three different and highly relevant career-related outcomes: career mobility, career goal attainment, and subjective career success. First, career mobility is highly important for employees, because it can result in desirable outcomes, such as an improved employability and higher levels of subjective and objective career success (Chen et al., 2011; Forrier et al., 2015; Rigotti et al., 2014). It also affects organizations, because it is related to their human capital composition and their strategic HR management (De Vos & Dries, 2013). Second, the attainment of career goals—defined as desirable end states an individual strives to attain in their career—

is a crucial aspect of successful career management (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Greenhaus et al., 1995). Only if employees attain their career goals, will they feel successful regarding their career. Finally, achieving a high level of subjective career success is highly desirable for employees, because subjective career success relates to an individual's "evaluation and experience of achieving personally meaningful career outcomes" (Spurk et al., 2019, p. 36) and is linked to other beneficial outcomes, such as an improved health and self-esteem (Spurk et al., 2019). Taken together, this dissertation addresses the following two overarching research questions:

**Research Question 1:** Which contextual factors affect career-related outcomes?

**Research Question 2:** What are the mechanisms that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes?

I address these research questions in three scientific papers that form the basis of this dissertation. In Study 1, I investigated how individual and macro-economic factors jointly shape individuals' career mobility across the boundaries of organizations, industries, and occupations. Study 2 focused on the question whether and how romantic relationships affect the attainment of individuals' career goals. Finally, in Study 3, I explored the link between employees' boundary management at the interface between work and home contexts and their subjective career success. Moreover, I addressed the moderating role of perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work-home integration in this process. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the three dissertation studies.



**Figure 3.1.** Overview of the three dissertation studies.

## 3.2 Methodological Approach

The three dissertation studies made use of different methodological designs and were performed in different settings with each providing a unique perspective on the relationships under investigation. Table 3.1 provides an overview about the three dissertation studies including the study designs, samples, and data analysis approaches used.

### 3.2.1 Study Design

In Study 1, I used a combination of survey data and objective labor market statistics. In the survey, Swiss management program alumni provided information on their career histories and the jobs they held throughout their career. This sample was especially adequate for investigating career mobility, because the career trajectories of management program alumni are usually characterized by a high level of mobility across different career-related boundaries (Colakoglu, 2011; Dobrev & Merluzzi, 2018). Combining the individual-level data with country-level data on yearly fluctuations in the labor market enabled me to disentangle the effects of individual characteristics and the labor market situation on different types of career mobility.

In Study 2, I aimed to explore whether and how romantic relationships affect individuals' career goal attainment. To investigate this research question, I drew upon a sample of political candidates who pursued the career goal of having a successful political candidacy in German elections. In a two-wave online survey, I collected data from the candidates regarding their romantic relationship, the coordination of their career goal with their romantic partner, and their resources available for goal pursuit. To objectively assess career goal attainment, I added publicly available information on the candidates' election results at the third study wave. This study design enabled me to test the processes involved in the attainment of a particular and time-bound goal (i.e., to have a successful candidacy) that was highly relevant to all study participants within the scope of their political careers.

Finally, in Study 3, I aimed to explore the relationship between employees' boundary management and their subjective career success. To this end, I collected data in a three-wave online survey from a diverse sample of employees working in different occupations and industries in the United Kingdom. This approach increased the generalizability of the study results and enabled me to derive practical implications that are applicable to a broad

audience, given that in the face of recent technological advancements boundary management is an increasingly relevant topic for a large proportion of the workforce.

Taken together, in all three studies, I used quantitative data that were gathered in surveys, which allowed me to assess participants' subjective perceptions with—where available—previously validated scales, and to test my hypotheses using inferential statistics. To conduct a rigorous test of my research questions, I used a combination of multi-wave study designs and objective data in the three dissertation studies, which contributes to reducing biases that are caused by common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

### **3.2.2 Data Analysis Approach**

In all three studies, I employed advanced regression analyses for hypothesis testing. In Study 1, I aimed to predict whether participants made a career transition across certain career-related boundaries (e.g., across organizational boundaries) in any given year of their career history. The data had a nested structure, such that the data points (i.e., career transitions) were nested in both individuals and years. To adequately account for this data structure and to enable a comparison of individual and contextual predictors of career mobility, I conducted a cross-classified multilevel analysis (Hill & Goldstein, 1998; Rasbash & Goldstein, 1994). This multilevel analysis takes into account that the data points are nested in two different level-2 factors (i.e., individuals and years). Because the outcome variables were dichotomous, I used a multilevel generalized linear model that assumes a Bernoulli distributed outcome variable and uses a logit link function (Hox, 2010).

While Study 1 aimed at comparing individual and contextual determinants of career mobility, Study 2 and Study 3 focused on the processes and boundary conditions underlying the attainment of career goals and the achievement of subjective career success. Accordingly, the research models in both studies include mediation and moderation effects. To test the moderated mediation models, I conducted multiple regression analyses and performed bootstrapping for the conditional indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Notably, Study 3 includes a path analytical test of the research model, which yields information about how well the proposed model fits to the data.

**Table 3.1.** Study designs, samples, study variables and data analysis approach used in the three dissertation studies

Study	Study design	Sample	Study variables	Data analysis
1	Online survey, complemented with labor market statistics	$N = 9638$ data points, nested in $N = 503$ management program alumni and $N = 44$ years	Openness to experience Level of education Labor market change Organizational, industrial, and occupational boundary crossing	Cross-classified multilevel analysis with generalized linear models
2	Two-wave online survey, complemented with objective data on election results	$N = 108$ political candidates	Relationship closeness Relationship duration Shared career goal Shared resources Goal conflict Goal facilitation Career goal attainment	Multiple regression analyses, using bootstrapping to test the moderated mediation model
3	Three-wave online survey	$N = 371$ employees	Integration preference Home-to-work transitions Perceived supervisor expectation Work goal attainment Exhaustion Subjective career success	Path analysis, using bootstrapping to test the moderated mediation model

### 3.3 Summary of Scientific Papers

In the following, I will provide a summary of the key findings of the three scientific papers. All three papers were developed in collaboration with my co-authors who provided me with valuable advice in all phases of the research process. I was the main responsible person for the conceptualization of the studies, the data collection and analyses, as well as for writing and preparing the manuscripts for submission and publication. Table 3.2 provides an overview about the publication status and my contributions as an author for each of the three scientific papers.

**Table 3.2.** Publication status of the scientific papers and author contributions

Paper	Reference	Status	PhD candidate's contribution
1	Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2018). When do employees cross boundaries? Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility. <i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i> , 27(5), 657–668. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1488686">https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1488686</a>	Published	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualization of the paper</li> <li>• Collecting part of the data (labor market statistics)</li> <li>• Data management and analysis</li> <li>• Drafting and revising the paper</li> </ul>
2	Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (Revise and resubmit, <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i> ). How romantic relationships affect individual career goal attainment: A transactive goal dynamics perspective.	Revise and resubmit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualization and design of the study</li> <li>• Data collection, data management, and analysis</li> <li>• Drafting and revising the paper</li> </ul>
3	Kornblum, A., Unger, D., Grote, G., & Hirschi, A. (ready for submission). Boundaries for success? How work–home integration and perceived supervisor expectation affect individuals' careers.	Ready for submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualization and design of the study</li> <li>• Funding acquisition</li> <li>• Data collection, data management, and analysis</li> <li>• Drafting and revising the paper</li> </ul>

## **Paper 1: When do employees cross boundaries? Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility**

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The aim of the first study was to investigate and compare the effects of individual characteristics and macro-economic factors on three different types of career mobility. Understanding career mobility is crucial, because it is a key aspect of contemporary careers (Ng et al., 2007). Employees can benefit from successful career transitions because these transitions potentially increase their employability, and improve their career prospects (Forrier et al., 2015). For organizations, career mobility is relevant, because it affects their human capital composition and strategic HR management (De Vos & Dries, 2013). Although recent theoretical models about career mobility acknowledge that mobility is affected by both individual and contextual factors (Forrier et al., 2009; Grote & Hall, 2013; Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Ng et al., 2007), there are only few studies on career mobility that consider the influence of contextual predictors. As a result, we know little about the relative importance of individual and contextual determinants of mobility. To address this relevant gap in current research, we explored how individual characteristics (i.e., openness to experience and level of education) and macro-economic factors (i.e., fluctuations in the labor market) affect career mobility.

We adopted a boundary-focused perspective on career mobility, which centers on the distinct boundaries that separate career-related entities from one another (Gunz et al., 2000; Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012). Accordingly, we defined career mobility in terms of crossing career-related boundaries. Specifically, we aimed to predict the crossing of boundaries between organizations, industries, and occupations. Based on theoretical models describing the processes involved in career mobility (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007), we assumed that individuals who are more open to experience and who have a higher level of education are more likely to cross organizational, industrial, and occupational boundaries, because these individual characteristics should be related to the willingness to engage in career mobility and the individual opportunities in the labor market, respectively. Moreover, we assumed that all three types of career-related boundary

crossings should be more likely in times of a decreasing unemployment rate, because in phases of an improving labor market there are generally more jobs available, which increases individuals' opportunities and motivation for career mobility.

To test these hypotheses, we gathered data in an online survey from Swiss management program alumni ( $N = 503$ ) and complemented these survey data with objective labor market statistics. This approach allowed us to address both individual characteristics and macro-economic factors as determinants of career mobility. In the survey, the participants provided information about their career histories, their level of education, and their openness to experience. Additionally, we used the unemployment rate as an indicator for yearly fluctuations in the Swiss labor market. The main result of our cross-classified multilevel analysis was that both individual characteristics and the labor market are relevant determinants of career mobility. As expected, level of education had a positive effect on organizational and industrial boundary crossing, such that participants with a Master's degree or PhD were more likely to cross these boundaries compared to participants with a lower level of education. Regarding the impact of the macro-economic context on career mobility, the analysis indicated that labor market fluctuations had an effect on organizational boundary crossing. More specifically, our results showed that career mobility across organizational boundaries was more likely in times of an improving labor market. Against our assumptions, the personality trait openness to experience had no effect on any of the three types of career-related boundary crossing, and none of the predictors were related to occupational boundary crossing.

With regard to the first research question of this dissertation, these results indicate that whether individuals make a career transition or not likely depends on both individual and contextual factors. When comparing the standardized coefficients, we found similar effect sizes for both significant predictors (i.e., level of education, labor market fluctuation). This implies that individual and macro-economic factors seem to be equally relevant for the prediction of career-related boundary crossing. Our study results demonstrate the importance of investigating career mobility from a boundary-focused perspective, because we found differential effects for the three types of boundary crossings. This indicates that different career-related boundaries might vary in certain characteristics, for instance regarding their permeability. Hence, our study highlights the relevance of addressing not only organizational, but also other types of boundaries in the study of career mobility.



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## **Paper 2: How romantic relationships affect individual career goal attainment: A transactive goal dynamics perspective**

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The aim of the second paper was to explore whether and how romantic relationships affect career goal attainment. Although the attainment of one's own career goals is an essential part of career management and a crucial prerequisite for achieving a high level of subjective career success, there are only few studies addressing the predictors of career goal attainment (Greco & Kraimer, 2020). Based on extant research on work-home interdependencies and recent theorizing from self-regulation research, we assumed that romantic relationships have a considerable impact on career goal attainment.

To develop our research model, we drew upon transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015)—a theory that deals with self-regulation in close relationships. The theory proposes that the self-regulation of two partners in a relationship can be interdependent. When interdependency is high, the partners form a self-regulatory unit characterized by strong links between their goals, pursuits, and goal outcomes. Accordingly, a shared career goal is an indicator for a high interdependency, because it is targeted at one of the two relationship partners, and held by both relationship partners. Consequently, both partners can contribute to goal attainment by allocating resources to goal pursuit. Based on the theory's proposition that relationship characteristics determine the level of interdependence, we proposed that the partner should be more inclined to share an individual's career goal when relationship duration and closeness are high. Having a shared career goal, in turn, should increase the pool of shared resources available for goal pursuit, which should ultimately improve career goal attainment. Finally, we assumed that the coordination between the career goal and the partner's other personal goals would act as a boundary condition for the effect of shared resources on career goal attainment.

We tested our research model within the context of political elections in Germany, and gathered survey as well as objective data from 108 political candidates. This setting allowed us to focus on one particular and time-bound career goal, which was to be

successful in the elections by gaining a large proportion of votes. Moreover, it allowed us to objectively measure career goal attainment (i.e., proportion of votes achieved).

The results of our regression analyses revealed that the candidates' partners were more likely to share the candidates' career goal when relationship closeness was high. Having a shared career goal, in turn, increased the pool of available shared resources, which had a positive effect on career goal attainment. Using bootstrapping, we found evidence for an indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment through shared career goal and available shared resources. Against our assumptions, relationship duration had no effect on shared career goal. Consequently, we neither found evidence for an indirect effect of relationship duration on career goal attainment through shared career goal and available shared resources. As expected, our moderation analysis revealed that goal conflict weakened the positive effect of available shared resources on career goal attainment; this effect was significant when goal conflict was low, but not when it was high. In contrast, goal facilitation strengthened the positive effect of shared resources on career goal attainment; the effect was only significant when goal facilitation was high, but not when it was low. Looking at the conditional indirect effects showed that goal coordination also moderated the indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment; with increasing goal conflict and decreasing goal facilitation the indirect effect vanished.

Taken together, the paper addressed both the first and the second research question of this dissertation. The results provided first evidence for the relevance of romantic relationships in career goal attainment, and supported our theoretical assumptions about the underlying self-regulatory processes. Our findings imply that home-domain factors such as the romantic relationship can exert a considerable influence on career-related outcomes. Thereby, our study highlights the importance of integrating career research with research on the work–home interface in future studies (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Hirschi et al., 2016). Furthermore, our results were in line with a growing body of research on the interdependence of self-regulation in close relationships (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Fitzsimons & vanDellen, 2015; Hofmann et al., 2015). As most of our findings were consistent with the propositions made by transactive goal dynamics theory, we generated first empirical evidence on the theory's validity in the context of career goals.

### **Paper 3: Boundaries for success? How work–home integration and perceived supervisor expectation affect individuals' careers**

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In the third dissertation study, I aimed to investigate the link between employees' boundary management and their subjective career success. Managing the boundary between work and home has become increasingly important due to changes in the modern workplace, such as an increased availability of technology that enables employees to work anytime and anywhere and a higher number of employees who face high demands in both the work and home domains (Allen et al., 2014). Yet, although we know that careers are interrelated with the work–home interface and that individuals' work-related decisions are affected by family factors (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Greenhaus & Powell, 2012), there is virtually no research on the effects of boundary management on career-related outcomes (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016).

In this paper, we shed light on the relationship between work–home integration and subjective career success, and on the underlying processes and boundary conditions. Based on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), we assumed that individuals with a preference for work–home integration would engage more frequently in home-to-work transitions. These transitions capture how frequently employees shift physically or cognitively to work while at home (e.g., when answering work-related emails at home), and thus represent a type of integration enactment. Drawing from conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), we further proposed that home-to-work transitions would act as a double-edged sword for subjective career success. On the one hand, home-to-work transitions should improve subjective career success by facilitating the attainment of work goals. On the other hand, home-to-work transitions should affect subjective career success negatively by increasing exhaustion. Finally, we proposed that perceived supervisor expectation about employees' work–home integration would act as a contextual moderator of these processes. When employees perceive that their supervisor expects them to integrate work and home, this provides them with a social

norm about how they should manage the boundary between work and home. This may create a so-called strong situation in which the effect of employees' own preferences on their behavior diminishes (Ashforth et al., 2000; Mischel, 1977).

To test our research model, we collected data in a three-wave online survey from a sample of employees ( $N = 371$ ) through the online panel *Prolific*. Our path analysis revealed a satisfactory model fit according to multiple fit indices (i.e., chi-square, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR; see Hu & Bentler, 1999), which provided overall support for our research model. Regarding our main research question, the results showed that integrating work and home can have both positive and negative consequences for careers. On the positive side, we found that home-to-work transitions facilitated the attainment of work goals, which resulted in an improved subjective career success. On the negative side, employees who engaged more frequently in these transitions reported a higher level of exhaustion, which related negatively to their subjective career success. We also found that perceived supervisor expectation moderated these processes, such that the indirect effects of integration preference on subjective career success through home-to-work transitions and work goal attainment or exhaustion, respectively, were less pronounced when employees perceived that their supervisor expected them to integrate work and home. The moderation analysis further showed that perceived supervisor expectation constrained the enactment of individuals' own boundary management preference, because the positive effect of integration preference on home-to-work transitions was weaker when employees perceived a high supervisor expectation regarding their work–home integration.

This study provides first evidence on the mechanisms linking boundary management to subjective career success, and thus further highlights the usefulness of integrating career research with research on the work–home interface (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Hirschi et al., 2016). With boundary management, our study addresses an antecedent of subjective career success that is highly relevant in the modern workplace, yet has not been considered in career research so far (Spurk et al., 2019). Finally, we identified perceived supervisor expectation about employee work–home integration as a contextual moderator of these processes. Our findings showed that employees actually engage in a boundary management style that corresponds with their own preference, but that contextual factors such as perceived supervisor expectations can restrict the enactment of one's own boundary management preference.

## Chapter 4

### General Discussion

Findings and Theoretical Implications

Implications for Practice

Limitations

Future Research Avenues

Conclusion



In this chapter, I will first interpret the findings of the three dissertation studies in light of the overarching research questions that I address in this dissertation, and describe the theoretical implications of the findings for the career literature. Second, I will provide ideas on how individuals, organizations, and career counselors can translate the findings into practice. Third, I will discuss the main limitations of the dissertation studies and propose promising avenues for future research on contextual determinants of individual careers. Finally, this chapter closes with a short conclusion about the key insights that were generated within this dissertation.

## **4.1 Findings and Theoretical Implications**

The main aims of this dissertation are to improve our understanding of contextual influences on careers, and to generate insights into the mechanisms that link contextual factors to career-related outcomes. Accordingly, I investigated two overarching research questions within this dissertation. The first research question addressed which contextual factors affect career-related outcomes, while the second research question focused on identifying underlying mechanisms that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes. To investigate these research questions, I conducted three studies in which I considered different contextual determinants of careers, and identified several pathways linking the contextual factors with the career-related outcomes that we studied. Each of the three papers had a unique focus and thus contributed in its own way to answer the research questions of this dissertation. In the following, I will interpret the findings of the studies with regard to the research questions addressed in this dissertation, and discuss the theoretical implications of the findings for the career literature.

### **4.1.1 Contextual Determinants of Careers**

Concerning the first research question, the three dissertation studies provided broad evidence for the importance of various contextual factors in the study of individual careers. With regard to Mayrhofer et al.'s (2007) model, the contextual factors considered in this dissertation can be ascribed to the context of society and culture, the context of origin, and the context of work. Specifically, the first paper highlighted the relevance of macro-economic factors (i.e., the labor market situation) as an aspect of the context of society and culture an individual is embedded in. The second paper considered romantic relationships as an integral part of an individual's context of origin. By investigating work-home

integration as a determinant of subjective career success, the third paper addressed how employees manage the intersection between the context of work and the context of origin. Finally, the third paper also considered the moderating effect of perceived supervisor expectation, which is an important aspect of the context of work. By investigating the effect of different contextual factors on various relevant aspects of careers (i.e., career mobility, career goal attainment, and subjective career success), the dissertation contributes to a more holistic understanding of contextual influences on careers.

Specifically, the results of the first dissertation paper indicate that not only individual characteristics such as an employee's level of education, but also macro-economic factors such as the labor market situation are relevant determinants of career mobility—at least when it comes to crossing boundaries between organizations. Our finding that employees were more likely to cross organizational boundaries in times of an improving labor market is in line with theoretical models which suggest that career mobility is a product of both individual and contextual determinants (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007). This result also corresponds with previous research which shows that macro-economic factors such as the gross domestic product can affect individuals' career mobility (e.g., Davis et al., 2015; DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Latzke et al., 2016). Interestingly, we did not find an effect of the macro-economic context on industrial and occupational boundary crossing. One explanation for this pattern of results could be that the career-related boundaries we considered (i.e., organizational, industrial, and occupational boundaries) differ in certain characteristics, for instance regarding their permeability (Inkson et al., 2012). It is also conceivable that for extensive career transitions across industrial and occupational boundaries, contextual factors other than the general labor market situation might be more decisive, such as the existing career opportunities within a given industry or occupation. Regarding the dissertation's first research question, the findings of the first paper strengthen the position that researchers need to take into account more distal contexts such as the macro-economic context when studying individual careers (e.g., Kattenbach et al., 2014; Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Our study also illustrates the usefulness of conceptualizing career mobility from a boundary-focused perspective and the importance of considering various boundaries in the study of career mobility (Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012).



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In the second dissertation paper, I focused on the influence of the nonwork context on individual careers. This study provides evidence that an individual's romantic relationship—which represents an essential part of the nonwork context—can have a considerable effect on their career goal attainment. Specifically, we found that individuals were more successful in attaining their career goals when they were in a close relationship that provided them with resources for goal pursuit, especially when their career goal was well coordinated with their partner's other goals. These results imply that individuals do not act independently from their romantic partner in the pursuit of their career goals. With our study, we answered Greenhaus and Kossek's (2014) call for a stronger integration of work–home research with career research to improve our understanding of contemporary careers. Our findings are in line with previous research suggesting that factors related to the nonwork context can substantially affect individual careers (e.g., Hirschi et al., 2016; Hoobler et al., 2009). Specifically, the second dissertation paper highlights that romantic relationships are an important factor pertaining to the nonwork context which can have a strong impact on individuals' career goal attainment.

In the third dissertation paper, I explored how individuals' management of the interface between the work and nonwork contexts (i.e., the work and home domains) shapes their experience of a successful career. Our results provide first evidence that work–home integration affects subjective career success through two competing mechanisms, thus illustrating that boundary management is a relevant determinant of subjective career success that has not been addressed in career research so far (Spurk et al., 2019). Like the second dissertation paper, this study contributes to an integration of research on the work–home interface and career research (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). The results show that the way employees manage the intersection between different contexts in which they are embedded (i.e., the work and nonwork context) can be highly relevant for their careers. In addition to establishing the link between boundary management and subjective career success, we investigated perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration as a contextual moderator of this process. The results of our analyses showed that perceived supervisor expectation weakened the effect of employees' own boundary management preference on the enactment of this preference. Thereby, our study further illustrates that the supervisor can considerably affect employees' careers by

providing social norms about adequate behavior and thus shaping the work context in which employees are embedded.

#### **4.1.2 Mechanisms Linking Contextual Factors with Careers**

The second research question of this dissertation tackled the mechanisms that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes. While the first dissertation paper focused on comparing individual and contextual determinants of career mobility, the second and third dissertation paper considered the processes underlying career goal attainment and subjective career success, respectively. These two papers illustrate that utilizing established theoretical approaches can help to generate insights into the mechanisms that link contextual factors to career-related outcomes. By investigating the mechanisms that link contextual factors to individual careers, this dissertation further improves our understanding of how careers are affected by the different contexts in which individuals are embedded.

Specifically, the second dissertation paper aimed to shed light on the mechanisms that connect romantic relationships with career goal attainment. Drawing on transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015), we developed and tested a research model about the self-regulatory processes linking relationship characteristics (i.e., relationship duration and closeness) with career goal attainment. In line with our research model, we found evidence for an indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment through shared career goal and available shared resources. Our analyses further showed that goal coordination moderated this process, such that the indirect effect was more pronounced when goal conflict was low and goal facilitation was high, respectively. These findings provide evidence for the self-regulatory processes that link romantic relationships with career goal attainment, and highlight the relevance of self-regulatory interdependency and goal coordination in romantic relationships for a successful career goal attainment. By integrating career research with self-regulation research, the paper contributes to answering the question of *how* nonwork factors such as romantic relationships exert their influence on career-related outcomes.

In the third dissertation paper, I aimed to explore how boundary management influences subjective career success. Based on boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), I established a research model that

includes two pathways linking work–home integration with career success: a career-enhancing path through improved work goal attainment and a career-impairing path through an increased level of exhaustion. Overall, the analyses provided support for the proposed research model; we found that work–home integration acted as a double-edged sword for subjective career success by improving work goal attainment while at the same time impairing employees' well-being. These results suggest that taking a resource-based view which draws on theoretical approaches such as conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) or the work–home resources model (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) helps in understanding the processes that link the interface between work and nonwork contexts to individual careers.

Taken together, the dissertation studies highlight that individuals' careers are in fact strongly affected by various factors outside of the individual—that is, by contextual factors. By providing evidence for contextual influences on career mobility, career goal attainment, and subjective career success this dissertation takes a nuanced and comprehensive view on individual careers. The three dissertation papers generate novel insights into the contextual determinants of careers and also advance our understanding of how and under which conditions context exerts its influence on careers. In accordance with Mayrhofer et al.'s (2007) model, the three papers illustrate that it is not only the proximal work context that affects how individuals manage and experience their careers—instead, the insights generated in this dissertation illustrate that the influence of context on careers is manifold and omnipresent. To conclude, this dissertation answers the call for a stronger contextualization of career research (e.g., Forrier et al., 2018; Grote & Hall, 2013; Gunz et al., 2011; Kattenbach et al., 2014; Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Tams & Arthur, 2010) and provides evidence that it is crucial to consider the different contexts in which individuals are embedded when investigating individual careers.

## **4.2 Implications for Practice**

The insights generated in the three dissertation studies also yield useful practical implications for organizations, career counselors, and individuals. The key message that can be concluded from the studies is that practitioners should be aware that employees are embedded in various contexts that shape their career-related behaviors and outcomes. This means that career-related behaviors and outcomes are not only affected by individual

attributes such as general mental abilities (e.g., Judge et al., 2010), career orientations (e.g., Gerber et al., 2009), vocational interests or personality traits (e.g., Wille et al., 2010), but also by contextual factors such as the labor market situation or romantic relationships. Thus, although employees are required to assume responsibility for managing their own careers (Hall et al., 2018), their careers are also shaped by the context in which they are embedded—including not only the proximal work context, but also the nonwork context and the broader macro-economic context. Consequently, for supporting individuals in their career management it is crucial to gain a holistic picture of the individual and the context in which that individual's career is evolving.

Specifically, the first dissertation paper informs us about individual and contextual factors that enable employees' career-related boundary crossings. These boundary crossings can be beneficial for employees, because they can improve their employability and facilitate further advantageous career transitions (Forrier et al., 2015). Regarding individual determinants of career mobility, the study findings suggest that employees should invest resources in their education, because a higher level of education facilitates the crossing of career-related boundaries. At the same time, we found that the macro-economic context can constrain individuals' career opportunities. The results imply that employees should align the timing of their career-related behavior with fluctuations in the labor market, for instance by taking further education in times when the labor market does not offer many attractive career opportunities. For organizations, these findings highlight the importance of investing resources in career management programs. Such programs are a key determinant of employee retention, because employees are more likely to stay with their current employer when they have better internal career opportunities (De Vos & Meganck, 2008). According to our results, this might be especially relevant in times of a favorable labor market, when talented employees have many attractive external career opportunities available and are thus more likely to cross organizational boundaries. Finally, career counselors should consider both the labor market situation and their clients' educational background when advising them whether and how to engage in advantageous career transitions across organizational boundaries.

The second dissertation paper showed that being in a close romantic relationship can be beneficial for individuals' career goal attainment—at least when the career goal is well coordinated with their partner's goals. For employees in a romantic relationship, these

findings imply that they should achieve their partner's support for their career goals and ensure good goal coordination with their partner to facilitate career goal attainment. As a means to improve goal coordination, partners should communicate openly and frequently about their goals in order to identify potential conflicts and instrumental relationships between their goals. In order to avoid conflicts between their career goals, partners could further use a trading-off strategy, in which the priority of the partners' career goals alternates over time within the couple in response to the partners' existing career opportunities (Becker & Moen, 1999). In the course of time, this will allow both partners to be more successful in attaining their career goals. Organizations could also use these insights to improve their career management, which includes setting specific career goals and identifying strategies for goal pursuit (Vuori et al., 2012). Based on our findings, organizations should recognize the importance of their employees' romantic relationships when they establish personal development plans with them. Specifically, they should make their employees aware about the relevance of coordinating their career goals well with their partners' goals in order to facilitate career goal attainment. Similarly, career counselors should consider the influence of their clients' romantic relationship when guiding them in the setting and pursuit of career goals.

Finally, the third dissertation paper revealed that integrating work and home by engaging in home-to-work transitions can have both positive and negative consequences for employees' subjective career success. For employees, the findings imply that they should be aware of the potential negative side effects when they engage in home-to-work transitions. Although these transitions might help them in attaining their work goals and thereby improve their subjective career success, the transitions also have the potential to impair their well-being, which can ultimately undermine their subjective career success. After engaging in home-to-work transitions, employees should therefore use strategies that promote their well-being, for instance by engaging in recovery activities such as social or physical activities (Sonnentag, 2001). Moreover, we found that the effect of employees' boundary management preference on their work-home integration diminishes when they perceive that their supervisor expects them to integrate work and home. This indicates that the supervisor provides employees with a social norm they aim to comply with. To avoid negative consequences of work-home integration for employees' well-being, organizations and particularly supervisors should refrain from communicating a high expectation

regarding work–home integration. Instead, supervisors should act as work–home friendly role models for their employees and set a good example for a reasonable extent of work–home integration (Koch & Binnewies, 2015). Taken together, organizations and supervisors should recognize the impact they have on their employees’ career-related behaviors and outcomes, because they substantially shape the work context their employees are embedded in.

### 4.3 Limitations

Like every empirical study, each of the studies included in this dissertation has its own limitations, and some of these limitations apply to all three studies. In this chapter, I will discuss three major limitations that are shared by all three dissertation studies and may restrict the interpretability of the results presented. I will also make some suggestions how researchers could address these limitations in future studies.

First, it is possible that the estimates we found in the three studies are biased due to common method variance. To counteract these biases, we used a combination of self-report and objective data in the dissertation studies, and gathered our data at multiple measurement points. In the first paper, we added objective data about yearly fluctuations in the labor market to the self-report data about employees’ career histories and personality traits. In the second paper, we collected the data at three measurement points which were separated by a time lag of four weeks each. In addition to the self-report data gathered in the online survey, we collected objective data on participants’ career goal attainment (i.e., election results). Finally, in the third paper, we collected the survey data at three measurement points that were separated by a time lag of four weeks each. Overall, the inclusion of objective data such as labor market statistics and the temporal separation of measurement points are useful measures to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Nevertheless, in all three studies, several variables were measured using self-reports and some of these variables were still assessed at the same measurement point. To further reduce common method bias in future studies, researchers could gather data from additional sources such as supervisors or romantic partners, and measure all predictors, mediators, and outcomes at different points in time.

Second, the correlative design that was used in the three dissertation studies did not allow us to draw inferences about the causal direction of the identified effects. As a

result, we cannot rule out reversed causality or reciprocal effects between the study variables in each of the three dissertation papers. For instance, in the second dissertation paper we found that relationship duration had a positive effect on shared career goal, which was in turn positively related to shared resources available for career goal pursuit. Finally, shared resources had a positive effect on career goal attainment. In line with our research model, these results could indicate that a high relationship closeness causes the partner to share an individual's career goal, which in turn increases the pool of shared resources available for goal pursuit and finally leads to an improved career goal attainment. However, we cannot rule out reversed causality; it is also conceivable that the partner is more willing to allocate resources to the pursuit of an individual's goals when that individual is more successful in attaining their career goals and, as a result, the closeness of the relationship is enhanced. To improve our understanding of the causal relationships underlying career-related outcomes, future research could use experiments or longitudinal study designs that span a longer time period in individuals' careers (i.e., several years) and thus allow for an investigation of changes in career-related outcomes over time (see Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Selig & Preacher, 2009).

Finally, the generalizability of the findings that were presented in this dissertation might be restricted, because the three studies were each conducted in a specific setting using a specific sample. For example, in the first dissertation study, we tested our hypotheses using a sample of management program alumni, because we expected this group of employees to frequently make career transitions across various types of career boundaries (Colakoglu, 2011; Dobrev & Merluzzi, 2018). Moreover, the study was conducted in Switzerland, which is one of the countries with the most favorable and most stable labor markets in the world. Although this setting was especially adequate to investigate our research questions, the generalizability of our findings to other settings and other samples might be restricted. For instance, the effects of the labor market situation on career mobility might be even stronger in countries that have a more turbulent labor market. Likewise, employees who are less well-educated compared to our sample might be more strongly affected by a deteriorating labor market that offers only few career opportunities. To ensure generalizability, the findings that were presented in this dissertation should be replicated in other settings (e.g., in other countries) and with other samples (e.g., with blue-collar workers).

#### 4.4 Future Research Avenues

Building on the insights gained in this dissertation, future research might generate empirical evidence on additional contextual determinants of careers and further improve our understanding of the processes linking contextual determinants with career-related outcomes. In the following, I will discuss possible avenues for future research.

This dissertation showed that various factors pertaining to the context of work, the context of origin, and the context of society and culture can have a substantial influence on career-related outcomes. While I considered a broad range of different contextual determinants of careers in this dissertation, there are still many other influential contextual factors that have not yet been addressed. To enhance our understanding of contextual influences on careers, it will be worthwhile to address the effect of additional contextual variables on career-related behaviors and outcomes in future research. Based on the model proposed by Mayrhofer et al. (2007), future research could identify potentially influential factors from different contextual layers and systematically test their influence on individual careers. For instance, to gain further insight into the understudied question of how more distal contexts (e.g., the macro-economic or the cultural context) affect individual careers, conducting multi-country studies seems a promising avenue for future research. Cross-cultural research projects such as the 5C project enable a comparison of relevant career aspects between countries, for example regarding the individual meaning of career success or the causes for career mobility (Chudzikowski et al., 2009; Mayrhofer et al., 2016). Gathering quantitative data from employees in various countries at a large scale also enables researchers to test direct and moderating effects of country-level variables such as unemployment rates or labor market regulations on individuals' career-related behaviors (Andresen et al., 2019; Smale et al., 2018). Particularly interesting and relevant insights could be generated by looking at the interplay between contextual factors that pertain to different contexts at varying levels of proximity to the individual. For instance, future research might explore how higher-level factors that pertain to the more distal context of society and culture (e.g., labor market regulations) affect more proximal contextual variables that have a direct effect on individuals' career-related behaviors and outcomes (e.g., internal and external career opportunities).

The second research question of this dissertation addressed the mechanisms linking contextual factors with career-related outcomes. Expanding on the insights gained within



this dissertation, future research could generate further evidence on the processes that explain *how* contextual factors affect career-related outcomes. For instance, in the first dissertation study, we found that employees were more likely to cross organizational boundaries in times of an improving labor market, yet we could not test the underlying causal mechanisms of this effect. Existing theoretical models suggest that macro-economic factors such as the labor market exert their influence on individuals' career mobility by affecting both individuals' opportunities on the labor market and their willingness to engage in career transitions (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007). In future studies, researchers could test these theoretical assumptions by gathering data on the intervening variables that link contextual factors with career-related outcomes such as employees' willingness to engage in career transitions or their perceived opportunities in the labor market. Where there is no suitable theory to explain how certain contextual factors may affect career-related outcomes, using qualitative research methods to generate ideas on the causal mechanisms seems particularly promising (Bluhm et al., 2011; Pratt, 2009). By using such study designs, the role of contextual variables and the processes that explain how these factors translate into career-related outcomes can be investigated in depth.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

With this dissertation, I aimed to contribute to a stronger contextualization of career research. While most of the existing career literature has focused on individual agency and has thus highlighted employees' responsibility for managing their own careers, this dissertation shows that contextual factors can have a considerable impact on individuals' careers. The three dissertation studies provide evidence that various factors pertaining to different contexts can affect a wide array of career-related outcomes, including career mobility, career goal attainment and subjective career success. Thereby, this dissertation takes a step towards bringing context into career research and hopefully paves the way for more research that sheds light on contextual determinants of careers. Ultimately, I hope that the insights gained in this dissertation will help employees to successfully manage their careers and support employers in designing more effective career management programs and HR strategies.



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## Chapter 5

### Scientific Paper 1

When do employees cross boundaries?  
Individual and contextual determinants  
of career mobility

Angelika Kornblum, Dana Unger, &  
Gudela Grote



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## Scientific Paper 1

### When do employees cross boundaries? Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility

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#### Abstract

This study investigates the joint effects of individual characteristics and the labour market on career mobility. We propose that level of education, openness to experience, and a favourable labour market relate positively to employees crossing organisational, industrial, and occupational boundaries. Management program alumni ( $N = 503$ ) provided information through an online survey about their career histories, their level of education, and their openness to experience. Additionally, we used the unemployment rate as an indicator for yearly changes in the labour market. The results of our cross-classified multilevel analysis indicate that both individual characteristics and the labour market are determinants of career mobility. Level of education had a positive effect on organisational and industrial boundary crossing, and changes in the labour market related to organisational boundary crossing. Against our assumptions, openness to experience had no effect on career mobility, and none of the predictors were related to occupational boundary crossing. Our results demonstrate the importance of investigating career mobility from a boundary perspective combined with a focus on both individual and contextual characteristics. The dominance of education compared to personality and the difficulty of explaining occupational mobility open new research avenues and yield practical implications for employees, career counsellors, and organisations.

*Keywords:* career boundaries; career mobility; labour market situation; education level; openness to experience; cross-classified multilevel model

Over the past few decades, employees' careers have substantially changed; a long-term employment relationship with a single employer is no longer the default career path (Biemann et al., 2012; Sullivan, 1999). Mobility has become a key aspect of careers, impacting both organisations and employees (Ng et al., 2007). For organisations, career mobility is important because it relates to their strategic HR management (De Vos & Dries, 2013); it affects their human and social capital composition and their success in attracting and retaining talented employees. Mobility is also relevant to employees: every successful career transition potentially increases employability and subsequent opportunities for career advancement (Forrier et al., 2015). Accordingly, mobility is positively related to indicators of objective and subjective career success (Chen et al., 2011; Chudzikowski, 2012; Rigotti et al., 2014).

Thus, career mobility is crucial for both organisations and employees due to its potential to create desirable outcomes. Yet, individuals cannot change jobs freely, because making a career transition requires favourable external conditions (Inkson et al., 2012; King et al., 2005). Various theoretical models acknowledge that career mobility depends on both individual attributes and contextual factors (Forrier et al., 2009; Grote & Hall, 2013; Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Ng et al., 2007). Yet, we know little about the extent to which contextual factors actually constrain career mobility, because few empirical studies investigate contextual determinants of mobility. Moreover, the relative importance of individual and contextual determinants for different kinds of career mobility is unclear (Kattenbach et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2007).

To address these shortcomings, our study analyses and compares the effects of individual characteristics and the economic context on career mobility. Taking a boundary-focused perspective on career mobility (Gunz et al., 2000; Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012), we define career mobility in terms of transitions across organisational, industry, and/or occupational boundaries. Drawing on recent theoretical models (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007), we investigate the effect of two individual characteristics on career-related boundary crossing: openness to experience and level of education. Furthermore, we investigate the labour market as a contextual determinant of career mobility because it constrains available mobility options (DiPrete et al., 1997; Feldman & Ng, 2007).

The contributions of our study to existing career research are threefold. First, by analysing factors involved in the crossing of distinct career-related boundaries we respond

to the call to “bring back boundaries” to career research (Inkson et al., 2012, p. 335). Analysing organisational, industrial, and occupational boundaries separately enables us to detect possible divergent effects and, thus, to clarify the importance of distinguishing various career-related boundaries. Consequently, our study also has important implications for boundaryless career theory (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)—a research stream that has thus far mainly focused on career moves across organisational boundaries.

Second, our study provides an empirical test of core propositions articulated in the theoretical models by Ng et al. (2007) and Forrier et al. (2009) and may contribute to their synthesis and further development. Our study adds insights to work identifying the relative importance of individual and contextual determinants of career mobility because it enables a direct comparison of the respective effects. These comparisons also yield immediate practical implications by improving our understanding of opportunities and hindrances for different kinds of career mobility. Employees who aim to advance their careers by crossing organisational, industrial, or occupational boundaries may gain helpful insights about factors involved in these distinct types of mobility. For organisations, our results can provide implications about the relevance of investing resources in career management programs for employee retention. Career counsellors could use the insights about the relevance of different predictors of career mobility to help their clients successfully plan career moves.

Third, we make a methodological contribution by applying a cross-classified multilevel model (Fielding & Goldstein, 2006; Goldstein, 1994; Rasbash & Goldstein, 1994), which makes it possible to take into account that career transitions are simultaneously nested in individuals and their respective years of transition. This method allows us to estimate the effect of individual characteristics independently of contextual predictors, permitting us to adequately compare these effects.

### **A Boundary-Focused Perspective on Career Mobility**

There are many definitions of career mobility, because career mobility is a manifold phenomenon that can be conceptualised in various ways, such as by changes in employer, job function, or occupation (e.g. Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007). In our study, we investigate career mobility from a boundary-focused perspective. In response to career researchers’ emphasis on the boundaryless career concept (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996),

several authors have emphasised that boundaries continue to be of relevance for understanding career paths (Gunz et al., 2000; Gunz et al., 2007; Inkson et al., 2012). In general, boundaries “refer to the physical, temporal, emotional, cognitive, and/or relational limits that define entities as separate from one another” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474), and a transition between these entities means crossing the boundary between them. Correspondingly, career-related boundaries separate career-related entities from each other (e.g., organisations). Thus, we define a career transition, the basic element of career mobility, as the crossing of one or more career-related boundaries.

To date, the career literature has concentrated mostly on crossing organisational boundaries; that is, career moves “across the boundaries of separate employers” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 6). Organisational boundaries separate organisations from their environment (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005) and are presumably the most salient career-related boundaries. Gunz et al. (2007) discuss industry as another career-related boundary, arguing that individual knowledge and skills are often not fully transferable among industries. Consequently, it is easier for employees to find a new job in their current industry rather than in another (Gunz et al., 2000). Furthermore, occupation constitutes a career-related boundary. Every occupation is characterised by a specific set of work role requirements that define the tasks to be executed and the capabilities needed to perform well in the work role (Dierdorff et al., 2009). When crossing occupational boundaries (e.g., when an engineer becomes a marketer), individuals usually have to acquire fundamentally new skills and knowledge through vocational or professional education and training (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Feldman & Ng, 2007). They also have to adapt to an unfamiliar work environment and redefine their identities (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). In line with recent calls to empirically investigate a broader set of boundaries (Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010), our study examines the determinants of crossing organisational, industrial, and/or occupational boundaries.

### **Determinants of Career Mobility**

Whether individuals make a career transition depends undoubtedly on a range of factors. Several authors (e.g., Forrier et al., 2009; Inkson et al., 2012) have argued that the current career literature with its focus on boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and protean careers (Hall, 1996) has mostly concentrated on individual agency while neglecting

to address the influence of structural factors on career mobility. In line with this criticism, recent theoretical models (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007) acknowledge that the determinants of career mobility comprise both individual agency—determined, for instance, by personality traits—and structural variables in a larger context—for instance, the labour market situation.

Ng et al. (2007) assume that in the course of individuals' careers, they alternate between periods of equilibrium, in which they feel comfortable with their current job, and moments of disequilibrium that lead to career mobility. Ng et al. argue that career mobility is a product of both micro-level individual and macro-level structural factors that have the potential to interrupt an individual's career equilibrium. The macro-level structural factors define available mobility options and include, for instance, economic conditions or societal characteristics. In terms of micro-level individual factors, the model suggests that individual differences, such as personality traits or attachment styles, relate to individuals' preferences for career mobility—an important precursor of actual career mobility. Lastly, intention to change jobs also depends on decisional factors, such as an individual's readiness for change.

Likewise, Forrier et al. (2009) present a model that includes individual agency and structural factors as determinants of career mobility. The central individual agency component in their model is movement capital, which they define as “the individual skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes influencing an individual's career mobility opportunities” (p. 742). Movement capital consists of several aspects—for instance, human and social capital—and is a major determinant of career mobility because it influences individuals' perceived options and motivation for mobility. Moreover, Forrier et al. (2009) argue that career mobility depends on the structure of risks and opportunities, because contextual factors (e.g., the demand in the external labour market) also influence employees' career mobility options and motivation.

The central proposition articulated in the theoretical models by Ng et al. (2007) and Forrier et al. (2009) is that individual characteristics and structural factors jointly influence career mobility. Our study aims to investigate and compare the effects of individual and contextual determinants of career mobility, using the theoretical models presented above to identify relevant predictors. Concerning individual predictors of career mobility, the models highlight different constructs. Forrier et al. (2009) propose movement capital as

the central individual determinant of career mobility opportunities, whereas Ng et al. (2007) focus on individual differences relating to one's career mobility preferences. In our study, we account for both opportunities and preferences to address the major individual determinants of career mobility. First, we include an individual's level of education as a predictor, because this element of movement capital directly affects his/her opportunities for mobility (Forrier et al., 2015). Second, in line with Ng et al.'s (2007) theoretical model, we use the well-established taxonomy of the Big Five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) to address individuals' preferences for mobility. We include openness to experience as a predictor because this personality trait should most pertinently reflect individuals' preferences for career mobility. Finally, both models propose that the availability of mobility options is a major contextual determinant of career mobility. To address the availability of mobility options, our study includes the labour market as a contextual predictor of career mobility because it is directly linked to available job alternatives (DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997). In the following section, we describe our hypotheses regarding the three predictors of career-related boundary crossings.

### ***Openness to experience***

Individuals who are most open to new experiences show a high level of curiosity and desire for variety (e.g. Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1997), which results in a tendency to pursue new activities and search for new experiences. Accordingly, Ng et al. (2007) propose in their theoretical model that open individuals should have a higher preference for career mobility because crossing career boundaries satisfies their desire for variety. In line with this proposition, recent meta-analytical findings about the antecedents of turnover show that open individuals are more likely to voluntarily leave their organisation (Rubenstein et al., 2018), and there is also empirical evidence showing that openness to experience relates positively to changing one's occupation (Carless & Arnup, 2011). When changing their organisation, individuals must identify with a new social group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), encounter new experiences in an unfamiliar work environment, and frequently perform new work tasks. Similarly, when individuals change the industry they work in, they enter a new work environment and must acquire novel, industry-specific knowledge (Gunz et al., 2000). Finally, changing one's occupation is associated with redefining one's identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), acquiring new skills and knowledge, and adjusting to a different work environment (Feldman & Ng, 2007). Thus, career



mobility should be attractive for open individuals because it usually goes along with willingness to participate in a range of new experiences. Hence, we state that:

**Hypothesis 1:** Openness to experience is positively related to the probability of crossing (a) organisational, (b) industrial, and (c) occupational boundaries.

### ***Level of education***

According to Forrier et al.'s (2009) theoretical model, career mobility depends on an individual's available opportunities for mobility. Level of education is an important aspect of human capital that determines an individual's value in the labour market and consequently shapes his/her career opportunities (Forrier et al., 2009; Fugate et al., 2004). Individuals with a higher level of education are attractive to employers because they possess valuable declarative and procedural knowledge resulting in a higher level of task performance (Alessandri et al., 2015; Ng & Feldman, 2009). They also show more organisational citizenship behaviour and less counterproductive work behaviour (Ng & Feldman, 2009). Accordingly, organisations use level of education as an essential criterion for personnel selection (Ng & Feldman, 2009), and employees with a higher level of education often indicate higher confidence in finding a new job on the internal or external labour market (Wittekind et al., 2010). Thus, a higher level of education should result in more career opportunities in different organisations. Although the increase in educational specialisation that usually results from earning a higher educational degree might strengthen the boundaries surrounding one's occupation, we assume that individuals with a higher level of education have more career opportunities across occupations and industries as well. As described earlier, crossing occupational or industrial boundaries requires adaptation to a new work environment and acquisition of fundamentally new skills and knowledge (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Gunz et al., 2000). Individuals with a higher level of education possess higher cognitive abilities (Avolio & Waldman, 1994; Berry et al., 2006) that should enable them to acquire new knowledge and skills more easily. Moreover, earning a graduate degree involves learning useful meta-skills (e.g., planning and motivational persistence) that can be applied in different industries and occupations. Hence, well-educated individuals are presumably more capable of successfully adapting to a new environment because they possess facilitating cognitive abilities and meta-skills. This should make it easier for them to cross industrial and occupational boundaries and,

consequently, offers them career opportunities in different industries and occupations. Thus, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 2:** Level of education is positively related to the probability of crossing (a) organisational, (b) industrial, and (c) occupational boundaries.

### ***Changes in the labour market***

The labour market is the key contextual determinant of career mobility because it affects career mobility in at least two respects (Feldman & Ng, 2007). First, the labour market reflects the availability of alternative employment and thus enables or constrains career mobility. This assumption is consistent with research on turnover that identifies accessible job alternatives and the unemployment rate as determinants of voluntary turnover (e.g. Davis et al., 2015; Heavey et al., 2013; Trevor, 2001). When the labour market improves, there are greater opportunities for career mobility in different organisations, industries, and occupations. Thus, we hypothesize that an improvement in the labour market relates to not only a greater number of organisational boundary crossings, but also to a higher probability of industrial and occupational boundary crossings.

Second, the labour market influences individuals' willingness to take risks and evaluate new employment options (Ng et al., 2007). When the unemployment rate increases and there are relatively few open positions available, employees are presumably risk-averse and reluctant to quit their current jobs. In contrast, if employees perceive that the labour market situation is improving and organisations are seeking employees, they presumably worry less about job security. They should be more willing to resign from their current positions to risk seeking alternative employment with other organisations (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Ng et al., 2007) because they should easily find a new position; even if the new job does not fit their expectations, there should still be others available. In an improving labour market, employees should be more ready to take risks and explore different career options (Ng et al., 2007), resulting also in more extensive career transitions across industrial or occupational boundaries. Therefore, we assume that:

**Hypothesis 3:** An improvement in the labour market is positively related to the probability of (a) organisational, (b) industrial, and (c) occupational boundary crossings.

## Method

### Sample and Procedures

We conducted an online survey with alumni of 10 part-time management programs (e.g., executive MBA programs) in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. These programs aim to qualify individuals with diverse occupational and educational backgrounds for management positions, thus enabling advancement in their students' careers. To take part in these programs, individuals should have several years of work experience. Typically, the participants of these programs belong to different age groups and work in various occupations (e.g., engineer, medical doctor) and industries (e.g., manufacturing, finance). Because the career paths of management program graduates are usually quite dynamic (Dobrev & Merluzzi, 2018) and involve a relatively high level of mobility across industries and occupations (Colakoglu, 2011), we expected to observe a fair amount of career-related boundary crossings in this sample. This was a necessary precondition for establishing sufficient variance in our outcomes and testing our hypotheses.

The alumni organisations of the various programs sent the potential participants an email with a link to the survey. In total, 1,024 individuals clicked on the link, and 610 (59.6%) individuals completed the questionnaire. For our final sample, we solely considered individuals who reported their age and gender and provided enough data to calculate a mean for the scales (Newman, 2014). Our final sample comprised 503 participants, yielding a response rate of 49.1%. The participants were predominantly male (87.7%) and were 43.3 years old on average ( $SD = 7.8$ ). The majority of the participants held a university degree (84.7%; bachelor's degree: 49.7%, master's degree: 28.8%, PhD: 6.2%). The participants' average tenure at their current position was 3.8 years ( $SD = 4.0$ ). At the time of data collection, the majority of the participants had a position in lower (23.8%), middle (28.8%), or upper (22.2%) management. They mostly worked full time (90.0%) and 61% of the sample were employed in large companies, defined as having at least 250 employees. The participants worked in more than 20 different industries, of which the most common were manufacturing (9.7%), services industry (9.5%), and finance and banking (9.1%).

Using the survey, we gathered information about the participants' career histories. They provided detailed information about their current job positions and up to 10 previous

positions, including the start and end year of each position. On average, the participants reported 19.1 years of career history ( $SD = 8.4$ ) with an average of 5.2 positions ( $SD = 2.2$ ).

## The Economic Context of Switzerland

In our study, we investigate the effect of yearly fluctuations in the labour market on career mobility within one country—namely, Switzerland. Therefore, it seems important to provide some information about the economic context of Switzerland. The Swiss economy is one of the most stable and competitive worldwide, with the third highest gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (OECD, 2018). The largest part of the Swiss GDP is generated by the service sector, in which the majority of the workforce (75%) is employed (International Labour Office, 2018a). Switzerland has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the world and a very strong labour market: during the last 20 years, the unemployment rate as calculated by the International Labour Office was consistently below 5% (International Labour Office, 2018b). Compared to other European countries, the Swiss labour market is highly flexible due to liberal employment laws that enable quick termination of work contracts by both employees and employers, with a notice period of one week to three months. This flexibility enables organisations to react quickly to economic fluctuations and provides employees with career mobility opportunities, thus making the Swiss labour market an interesting context for our study's purpose. Table 5.1 provides an overview about job statistics for Switzerland provided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

## Measures

### *Predictors*

*Openness to experience.* We measured openness to experience with the respective subscale of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991) as provided in the German version by Rammstedt and John (2005). A sample item is, “I see myself as someone who is curious about many different things”. The subscale consists of five items and uses a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *very inaccurate* to 5 = *very accurate*, and Cronbach's alpha was .67.

**Table 5.1.** Job statistics for Switzerland and OECD countries

	Switzerland	OECD countries
Employment rate (males/females) in % of working age population	78.3 (84.0/72.5)	64.8 (72.9/56.7)
Employment rate by education level (below upper secondary/upper secondary/tertiary) in % of working age population	66.6/81.5/87.9	55.1/73.5/83.2
Part-time employment rate (males/females) in %	25.9 (9.5/45.4)	16.8 (9.2/26.4)
Proportion of temporary employment (males/females) in %	12.9 (12.6/13.3)	12.0 (11.5/12.5)
Unemployment rate in %	4.4	7.9
Average tenure in years	9.0	10.0
Average usual weekly hours worked on the main job	34.7	36.7

*Note.* All statistics are retrieved from the OECD employment database and refer to 2011 (i.e., the year in which we collected our data). The average of the OECD countries is displayed for comparison purposes and involves the 35 member countries of the OECD.

***Level of education.*** We collected information about the participants' educational degrees to assess their level of education. Participants chose one out of five categories indicating educational degrees that can be earned in the Swiss educational system at different levels, ranging from vocational education to PhD degrees. In Switzerland, the bachelor's degree provides only basic education; many occupations list a master's or PhD degree as required or desirable. Thus, we defined a higher level of education as having a master's or PhD degree (0 = neither master's degree nor PhD; 1 = master's degree or PhD).

***Changes in the labour market.*** We operationalised changes in the labour market with the unemployment rate, which is "the most informative labour market indicator reflecting the general performance of the labour market" (International Labour Office, 2016, p. 89). The unemployment rate, as provided by the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, indicates the proportion of the labour force that is currently registered as unemployed and searching for a job. On average, the Swiss unemployment rate during the study period was 1.80% ( $SD = 1.66$ ). To capture yearly changes in the labour market, we subtracted the unemployment rate of the focal year from that of the previous year. Positive change values indicate an increasing unemployment rate and a deteriorating labour

market, whereas negative values indicate a decreasing unemployment rate and an improving labour market. The average yearly change in the unemployment rate over the study period was 0.06 percentage points ( $SD = 0.61$ ).

## **Outcomes**

We used the participants' career histories as a basis for coding the outcome variables.

***Organisational boundary crossing.*** The participants provided the name of their organisation for each reported position. Organisational boundary crossings were coded by comparing participants' current organisation with that of their previous position (0 = no organisational boundary crossing; 1 = organisational boundary crossing).

***Industrial boundary crossing.*** For each of their positions, the participants chose their corresponding industry from a general classification of economic activities (NOGA; Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2008) corresponding to the Swiss implementation of the United Nations' International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC; United Nations, 2008), which defines 21 industry codes (e.g., information and communication, manufacturing). We assessed the crossing of industrial boundaries by comparing the code of an individual's current position with that of his/her previous position (0 = no industrial boundary crossing; 1 = industrial boundary crossing).

***Occupational boundary crossing.*** For each position held, the participants indicated their occupation (e.g., product manager). We assigned codes to the reported occupations by applying the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08; International Labour Office, 2012). The ISCO-08 codes consist of four digits representing different levels of specification. Because we were interested in major transitions (e.g., from an academic profession to a supervisory function), we coded occupational boundary crossings by comparing the first digit of the ISCO-08 code of the current position with that of the previous position (0 = no occupational boundary crossing; 1 = occupational boundary crossing).

## **Control Variables**

There is evidence for a significant gender effect on career mobility, although the direction of the effect seems to depend on the type of mobility studied. For instance,

Kattenbach et al. (2014) found that women were more likely to change jobs, especially within organisations, whereas Carless and Arnup (2011) observed a lower probability for occupation changes in women compared to men. Furthermore, older employees perceive themselves as being less employable than their younger counterparts (Wittekind et al., 2010) and report having fewer career opportunities (van Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008). Accordingly, previous studies have found that age is negatively related to occupational and organisational boundary crossings (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Kattenbach et al., 2014). Thus, consistent with previous studies investigating career mobility, we included gender and age as control variables. We asked participants to indicate their gender as male or female. Moreover, based on their indicated year of birth, we calculated participants' age in years for each year of their career history.

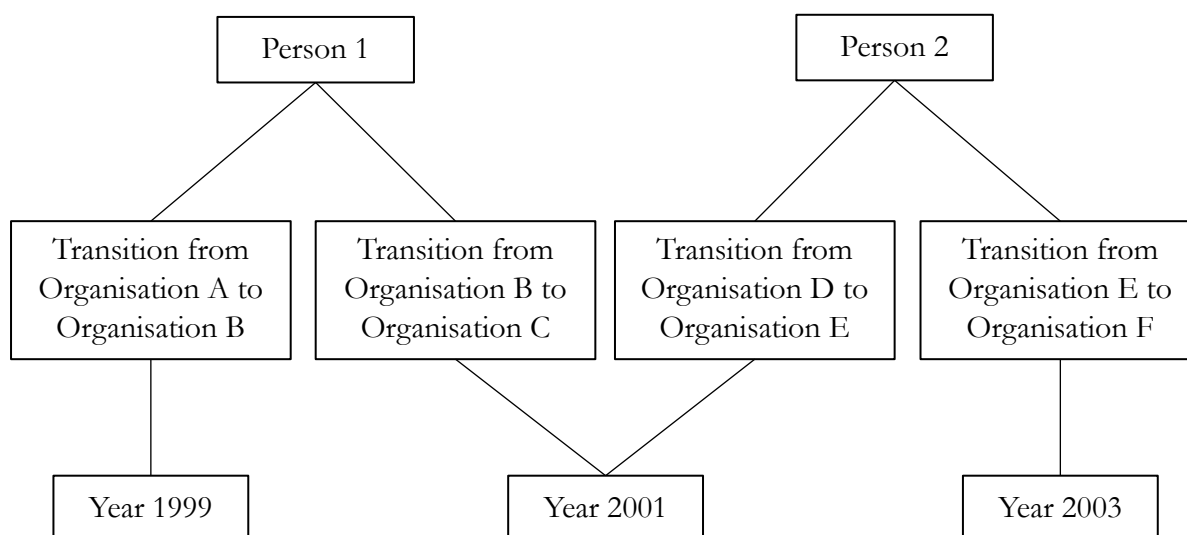
## Data Analysis

Because organisational, industrial, and occupational boundary crossings are nested in individuals and in transition years, our data have a multilevel structure that is not purely hierarchical. Rather, career transitions are cross-classified by individuals and years. Figure 5.1 illustrates this data structure with organisational boundary crossings simultaneously nested in individuals and years.

Cross-classified multilevel models are appropriate models for this data structure (e.g. Hill & Goldstein, 1998; Rasbash & Goldstein, 1994). Researchers have previously applied such multilevel models in other contexts (see Sampson et al., 2008, for an example), and these models can also be applied to data with multiple measurement occasions (Hill & Goldstein, 1998; Hox, 2010). Given the structure of our data, the main advantage of the cross-classified multilevel model is that it considers individuals and years as two distinct nesting factors. That is, the cross-classified model takes into account that the outcome (e.g., crossing an organisational boundary) is independently nested in years and individuals.

We analysed three dichotomous outcome variables indicating organisational, industrial, or occupational boundary crossings, respectively. Thus, we used a multilevel generalised linear model that assumes a Bernoulli distributed outcome variable and uses a logit link function (Hox, 2010). Multilevel analyses were performed with the package `lme4` (Bates et al., 2015) in R. To enable comparability between the coefficients, we scaled all predictors prior to the analysis to a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one (Hox,

2010; Menard, 2004) using grand mean centring (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). In our model, the outcome variables are located at Level 1 (i.e., boundary crossing) and predicted by Level 2-predictors related to the individual (i.e., gender, openness to experience, level of education) and to the year (i.e., changes in the unemployment rate), respectively. To control for age effects, we included the respective ages of the participants each year as a control variable at Level 1.



**Figure 5.1.** Example illustrating the data structure of organisational boundary crossings nested in individuals and years.

Altogether, our data comprise 9,638 data points nested in 503 individuals and 44 years. Of these, 9,483 data points (97.9%) include valid information on organisational boundary crossings, 9,575 (99.3%) on industrial boundary crossings, and 9,509 (98.7%) on occupational boundary crossings. In 13.7% of the data points, the participants crossed an organisational boundary; in 7.1% of the data points, they crossed an industrial boundary; and in 8.0% of the data points, they crossed an occupational boundary.

## Results

Table 5.2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables. In the following section, we present evidence regarding our hypotheses. We estimated three models for each of the three outcome variables. First, we calculated a null model as a baseline and Model 1, including the control variables. Next, in Model 2, we added individual-level predictors (i.e., openness to experience and level of education) as well as the year-level predictor (i.e., changes in the labour market) to test our hypotheses.



**Table 5.2.** Descriptive statistics and correlations between study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Openness	3.72	0.65	-					
2. Level of education <sup>a</sup>	0.35	-	.05	-				
3. Gender <sup>b</sup>	0.12	-	.10*	.12**	-			
4. Age	43.33	7.79	.13**	-.02	-.01	-		
5. Organisational boundary crossing	0.14	0.09	.11*	.08	.10*	-.08	-	
6. Industrial boundary crossing	0.08	0.08	.03	.05	.03	-.09*	.55***	-
7. Occupational boundary crossing	0.09	0.08	-.01	-.00	-.01	-.27***	.34***	.18***

*Note.*  $483 \leq N \leq 503$ . For organisational, industrial, and occupational boundary crossings, the correlations are based on the aggregated person-level mean (0 = no boundary crossing, 1 = boundary crossing).

<sup>a</sup>0 = Neither Master's degree nor PhD, 1 = Master's degree or PhD. <sup>b</sup>0 = Male, 1 = Female.

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

Table 5.3 shows our estimates for the prediction of organisational boundary crossing. In Model 1, age ( $\beta = -0.18, p < .001$ ) and gender ( $\beta = 0.09, p = .003$ ) were significantly related to the outcome; younger employees and women were more likely to cross organisational boundaries than older employees and men, respectively. In Model 2, we did not find a significant effect of openness to experience on the probability of crossing organisational boundaries ( $\beta = 0.06, p = .052$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1a received no support. As postulated in Hypothesis 2a, level of education was positively related to crossing organisational boundaries ( $\beta = 0.07, p = .019$ ). Moreover, we found a significant effect of labour market change on the probability of organisational boundary crossing ( $\beta = 0.07, p = .043$ ): individuals crossed organisational boundaries more frequently during time periods with declining unemployment rates than during less prosperous periods, which supports Hypothesis 3a.

Table 5.4 depicts our estimates for the prediction of industrial boundary crossing. Inspecting Model 1, we found that age was negatively related to industrial boundary crossing ( $\beta = -0.22, p < .001$ ); as age increased, the probability of changing one's industry decreased. Gender was not related to the outcome ( $\beta = 0.06, p = .191$ ). In Model 2, contrary to Hypothesis 1b, we found no significant relationship between openness to experience

**Table 5.3.** Estimates for organisational boundary crossing

	Null Model				Model 1				Model 2						
	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	$p$	OR	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	$p$	OR	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	$p$	OR
Intercept	-1.84	0.05	-38.82	<.001	0.16	-1.87	0.04	-45.88	<.001	0.15	-1.87	0.04	-49.18	<.001	0.15
Level 1															
Age at transition						-0.18	0.03	-5.31	<.001	0.83	-0.20	0.03	-5.82	<.001	0.82
Level 2: Subjects															
Gender <sup>a</sup>						0.09	0.03	3.00	.003	1.09	0.08	0.03	2.52	.012	1.08
Level of education <sup>b</sup>											0.07	0.03	2.36	.019	1.08
Openness											0.06	0.03	1.94	.052	1.06
Level 2: Years															
Labor market change											-0.07	0.03	-2.02	.043	0.93
Var. between subjects	0.06					0.05					0.04				
Var. between years	0.03					0.01					0.01				

*Note.*  $N = 9483$  data points nested in 497 individuals and 44 years.  $P$  values are based on two-sided tests. Est. = Standardized estimate; OR = Odds ratio; Var. = Variance.

<sup>a</sup>0 = Male, 1 = Female. <sup>b</sup>0 = Neither Master nor PhD, 1 = Master or PhD.

**Table 5.4.** Estimates for industrial boundary crossing

	Null Model			Model 1			Model 2								
	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	$p$	OR	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	$p$	OR					
Intercept	-2.67	0.07	-39.71	<.001	0.07	-2.73	0.06	-43.02	<.001	0.07	-2.73	0.06	-43.27	<.001	0.07
Level 1															
Age at transition						-0.22	0.05	-4.75	<.001	0.80	-0.23	0.05	-4.76	<.001	0.80
Level 2: Subjects															
Gender <sup>a</sup>						0.06	0.05	1.31	.191	1.06	0.05	0.05	0.98	.325	1.05
Level of education <sup>b</sup>											0.11	0.05	2.38	.017	1.12
Openness											0.03	0.05	0.52	.605	1.03
Level 2: Years															
Labor market change											-0.02	0.05	-0.38	.705	0.98
Var. between subjects	0.33					0.32					0.30				
Var. between years	0.04					0.02					0.02				

*Note.*  $N = 9575$  data points nested in 502 individuals and 44 years.  $P$  values are based on two-sided tests. Est. = Standardized estimate; OR = Odds ratio; Var. = Variance.

<sup>a</sup>0 = Male, 1 = Female. <sup>b</sup>0 = Neither Master's degree nor PhD, 1 = Master's degree or PhD.

and industrial boundary crossing ( $\beta = 0.03, p = .605$ ). Consistent with Hypothesis 2b, level of education had a significant and positive effect on industrial boundary crossing ( $\beta = 0.11, p = .017$ ). We found no significant effect of labour market change ( $\beta = -0.02, p = .705$ ), causing us to reject Hypothesis 3b.

Table 5.5 shows our estimates for occupational boundary crossing. Model 1 reveals that age was negatively related to the outcome ( $\beta = -0.39, p < .001$ ); employees were less likely to change their occupations as their age increased. We found no gender differences in the probability of occupational boundary crossing ( $\beta = 0.01, p = .752$ ). In Model 2, none of the predictors were found to be significantly related to occupational boundary crossing (openness to experience:  $\beta = -0.03, p = .521$ ; level of education:  $\beta = 0.04, p = .271$ ; labour market change:  $\beta = -0.05, p = .209$ ). Thus, we rejected Hypotheses 1c, 2c, and 3c.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to compare the effects of individual characteristics and the labour market on career mobility. Taking a boundary-focused perspective on career mobility, we investigated three predictors of crossing organisational, industrial, and occupational boundaries. We applied a cross-classified multilevel model to analyse the effects of two individual characteristics (openness to experience and level of education) and a contextual predictor (changes in the labour market) on career-related boundary crossing.

Our main result is that both individual and contextual factors influence career mobility. Regarding the effect of individual attributes on career mobility, we found that individuals with a higher level of education were more likely to make career transitions across organisational and industrial boundaries compared to those with a lower level of education, which supports Forrier et al.'s (2009) model of career mobility. Contrary to our expectations, which were based on Ng et al.'s (2007) theorising, we did not find a significant effect of openness to experience on career-related boundary crossing.

Concerning the effect of the economic context, our analysis revealed that only organisational boundaries were more frequently crossed when the unemployment rate decreased. However, our estimates for the effect of the labour market on career mobility are likely conservative because we conducted our study in Switzerland, which has one of the most favourable and stable labour markets in the world (OECD, 2016). According to

**Table 5.5.** Estimates for occupational boundary crossing

	Null Model			Model 1			Model 2								
	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	OR	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	OR	Est.	SE	$\zeta$	OR			
Intercept	-2.47	0.05	-49.05	<.001	0.08	-2.52	0.05	-55.29	<.001	0.08	-2.52	0.05	-55.29	<.001	0.08
Level 1															
Age at transition															
Level 2: Subjects															
Gender <sup>a</sup>															
Level of education <sup>b</sup>															
Openness															
Level 2: Years															
Labor market change															
Var. between subjects	0.12				0.05				0.05						
Var. between years	0.01				0.00				0.00						

*Note.*  $N = 9509$  data points nested in 500 individuals and 44 years.  $P$  values are based on two-sided tests. Est. = Standardized estimate; OR = Odds ratio; Var. = Variance.

<sup>a</sup>0 = Male, 1 = Female. <sup>b</sup>0 = Neither Master's degree nor PhD, 1 = Master's degree or PhD.

statistics provided by the International Labour Office (2018b), Switzerland's unemployment rate is one of the lowest worldwide, and has been consistently below 5% in the last 20 years. This might have restricted the variance in our predictor and thus would have made it difficult to detect the effect of the labour market on career mobility in our study's context. Accordingly, our study should be replicated in countries with a less favourable and more volatile labour market to gain further empirical evidence about the influence of the labour market situation on crossing career-related boundaries.

In line with theoretical models of career mobility (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007), we conclude that whether individuals make a career transition or not likely depends on both individual and contextual factors. A comparison of the standardised coefficients shows furthermore that the effect sizes were similar for all significant predictors. Hence, individual and contextual factors seem to be equally relevant for the prediction of career-related boundary crossing.

A noteworthy finding is that, contrary to our expectations and previous research (Carless & Arnup, 2011), we were not able to explain occupational boundary crossing. There are several possible explanations for this result. First, the power of our data analysis might be limited because occupational boundary crossings are extensive career transitions that occur rarely, which makes it difficult to detect the hypothesized effects on the dichotomous outcome variable (Osborne, 2017). Second, concerning the non-significant relationship between level of education and occupational boundary crossing, it is possible that a higher level of education not always results in manifold opportunities across occupations. A higher educational degree is often associated with acquiring specific knowledge and skills that qualify an individual to perform well in a certain occupation, which could limit one's career opportunities across different occupations. Moreover, even when facing diverse career opportunities, individuals with higher levels of education might not be willing to cross occupational boundaries due to their investments in occupation-specific human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences) that would need to be sacrificed when changing an occupation (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Sturman et al., 2008). Therefore, although a higher educational degree should generally relate positively to mobility because it increases individuals' career opportunities (Forrier et al., 2015), these relationships are probably more complex for occupational boundary crossings. Future research investigating occupational mobility might draw on theoretical models that

specifically focus on explaining why employees change their occupation (Rhodes & Doering, 1983) and use qualitative methods to generate in-depth insights into the processes underlying occupational boundary crossings.

Consistent with previous studies (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Kattenbach et al., 2014), we found that the control variable of age had a negative effect on all forms of career mobility. Our findings with respect to the control variable of gender contradict previous research. We found that women were more likely to cross organisational boundaries, whereas Kattenbach et al. (2014) do not report a significant gender effect on inter-organisational transitions. Moreover, previous studies found that women showed less occupational mobility than men did (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Dlouhy & Biemann, 2018), but our analyses revealed no significant gender differences in crossing occupational or industrial boundaries. These diverging findings may be due to different operationalisations of career mobility or sample specificities and deserve further attention in future research.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical implications of our study for career research are threefold. First, our findings underscore the usefulness of taking a boundary-focused perspective on career mobility (Inkson et al., 2012). We found different patterns of results in our analysis of organisational, industrial, and occupational boundaries. Most notably, while we found significant effects on organisational and industrial boundary crossing, none of our predictors were related to occupational boundary crossing. This implies that boundaries differ in specific characteristics—for example, in their permeability (Inkson et al., 2012)—and that it is reasonable to investigate them separately. Based on our study results, we agree with other authors (Gunz et al., 2000; Inkson et al., 2012; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010) who proposed that researchers using the boundaryless career concept should investigate a broader set of boundaries. We also believe that switching the focus to the investigation of the boundaries themselves might generate important research questions that add to the current understanding of contemporary careers (e.g., which specific processes lead to crossing certain boundaries?).

Second, our study contributes to empirically testing the theoretical models about career mobility we used as a basis for this study (Forrier et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2007). Our analysis revealed, at least for organisational and industrial boundary crossings, effects that

are mostly consistent with the core theoretical propositions. We encourage future research to test additional assumptions of the models we did not cover in our study to generate insights about the most relevant predictors of career mobility. For instance, Ng et al. (2007) propose several other individual characteristics (e.g., values) and structural factors (e.g., organisational staffing policies) that might influence career mobility and deserve attention in future studies. The accumulated empirical evidence could be used to adjust the models and, ultimately, synthesise them into an overarching theoretical framework. Moreover, although both models imply that individual and contextual factors influence career mobility both directly and interactively, they do not provide concrete propositions about these interactive effects. We thus suggest improving the two models further by including concrete theoretical predictions about the interplay of individual characteristics and contextual factors.

Finally, our findings strengthen the position that researchers need to take into account the context individuals are embedded in when studying careers (Gunz et al., 2011; Inkson et al., 2012; Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Most studies that investigate boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) or protean careers (Hall, 1996) have focused on individual agency and neglected possible contextual determinants of careers. Yet, according to our results, individual and contextual predictors are both relevant for the prediction of career mobility. We thus encourage researchers to acknowledge and directly investigate the influence of the context in which individuals are embedded. Johns (2006) provides recommendations how researchers can take context into account. For instance, because individuals are embedded in multiple contexts at different degrees of proximity to them (Mayrhofer et al., 2007), thinking about context usually involves multiple levels of analysis. Thus, researchers should acknowledge the potentially nested nature of their data and consider formulating hypotheses about cross-level effects (Johns, 2006). Moreover, researchers should provide more detailed information about the context in which their data was collected, answering the questions of “who was studied, where were they studied, when were they studied, and why were they studied?” (Johns, 2006, p. 403). Thus, we believe that for the conceptualisation of contemporary careers, it is crucial to recognise and directly investigate the effect context can have on careers.



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## Practical Implications

Additionally, our study has practical implications for employees, career counsellors, and organisations. For employees, previous research has shown that different types of career mobility can result in desirable outcomes, such as career advancement (Chen et al., 2011), higher salaries (Chudzikowski, 2012), and increased job and career satisfaction (Latzke et al., 2016; Rigotti et al., 2014). Our results suggest that it is crucial for employees to invest resources in education, because a higher level of education is related to greater career opportunities and enables the crossing of career-related boundaries which, in turn, can have a positive effect on individuals' employability and enable further advantageous career transitions (Forrier et al., 2015). Nevertheless, structural factors such as fluctuations in the labour market might still constrain individual career mobility. Thus, our findings strengthen the recommendation for employees to align the timing of their career-related behaviour with fluctuations in the labour market, especially by undertaking further education in times when the labour market does not offer many attractive job alternatives. The differing pattern of results for organisational, industrial, and occupational boundary crossings also indicates that employees might need to prepare differently for distinct types of career mobility. The relevance of investing resources in education and simultaneously paying attention to changes in the labour market situation might be especially relevant for crossing organisational boundaries. In contrast, for crossing occupational boundaries, our findings suggest that the general performance of the labour market and the hierarchical level of one's educational degree are not decisive. It is possible that employees who aim to have career opportunities across different occupational fields should instead invest in general knowledge and skills that are applicable across different occupations and industries, as well as observe the availability of jobs in specific occupations. These considerations are also relevant for career counsellors when advising their clients in career planning. For instance, when clients aim to make advantageous career transitions across organisational boundaries, career counsellors should pay attention to both the labour market situation and their clients' education, whereas personality might not be a relevant factor.

For organisations, our results strengthen the importance of investing resources in career management programs. Career development is a central aspect of employee retention management because the evaluation of internal career opportunities fundamentally affects employees' decisions to stay with or leave their current employers

(De Vos & Meganck, 2008). Moreover, organisations that invest in their employees' development of competence are probably more successful in retaining employees, because the resulting increase in employees' internal employability can reduce their job search behaviour on the external labour market (De Vos et al., 2017). Investments in employees' internal employability and intra-organisational career opportunities might especially pay off in times of a favourable external labour market, when talented employees have many attractive job alternatives available and are more likely to cross organisational boundaries.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our study has several limitations. First, our information about career transitions might be restricted by retrospective bias, because the accuracy of recalling autobiographical events decreases over time (Spreng & Levine, 2006). However, we believe that the retrospective bias in our data is insubstantial because a career history consists of major life events that are well established in autobiographical memory. Nevertheless, future research could employ longitudinal designs, panel data (e.g., Biemann et al., 2012; Kattenbach et al., 2014), or archival data (e.g., Dokko et al., 2009) to eliminate the influence of retrospective bias and, consequently, assess career histories more reliably.

Second, we used a sample of white-collar workers with relatively high educational degrees that were predominantly male. Thus, the generalisability of our findings might be limited to this group of employees. We focused on management program alumni, based on the assumption that boundary crossing is more likely for this group. Compared with highly educated individuals pursuing managerial careers, less educated workers might be more highly affected by structural constraints such as an unfavourable labour market (DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997). Thus, we encourage future research to analyse the impact of individual characteristics and contextual factors on career mobility in other samples, such as with blue-collar workers.

Furthermore, our analysis is limited to the labour market as the contextual determinant of career mobility. Mayrhofer et al. (2007) provide a model that describes four contextual factors with increasing distance to the individual that influence career patterns. In addition to the context of work, including the labour market, these factors comprise the context of origin, society, and culture, as well as the global context. Our study enabled us to compare the effect of individual characteristics and yearly fluctuations in the labour

market situation on career-related boundary crossing within one country (Switzerland). Future research might use multi-country studies to compare the effect of the economic context on career mobility across several countries with varying degrees of stability regarding their labour market situation. Furthermore, this type of study would allow for the addressing of additional contextual factors at different degrees of proximity to the individual that influence his/her career choices, including country-level or cultural variables (Johns, 2006).

Lastly, our study does not take into account the motivational or decisional mechanisms underlying career mobility, because a comprehensive test of such processes was beyond the scope of this article. In their theoretical model, Forrier et al. (2009) propose that an individual's movement capital relates to career mobility not only through individual opportunities for mobility, but also through the individual's willingness to move (i.e., the motivation to make a career transition). Likewise, Ng et al. (2007) propose that motivational and decisional factors, such as the desirability of mobility or readiness to make a career transition, affect actual career mobility. To enable rigorous testing of these propositions, we encourage future research to conduct longitudinal studies that allow for the following of individuals over a longer time period through the processes leading to career mobility.

## **Conclusion**

Our study contributes to the identification of individual and contextual determinants of career mobility. We found that individuals with a higher level of education were more likely to cross organisational and industrial boundaries, and that individuals crossed organisational boundaries more frequently in times of an improving labour market. Future research should incorporate samples with a higher proportion of less-educated employees to further investigate the relative influence of individual and contextual determinants on career mobility. Moreover, we encourage future research to address further career-related boundaries and include additional individual and contextual determinants in the prediction of career-related boundary crossings.

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## Chapter 6

### Scientific Paper 2

How romantic relationships affect  
individual career goal attainment:  
A transactive goal dynamics perspective

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## Scientific Paper 2

### How romantic relationships affect individual career goal attainment: A transactive goal dynamics perspective

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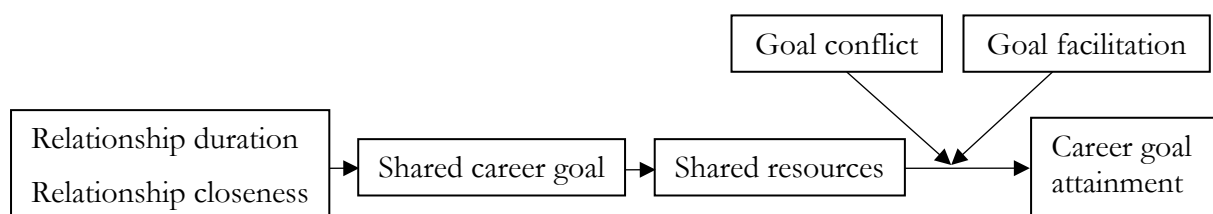
#### Abstract

Despite the importance of career goals for career management, we know little about the self-regulatory processes underlying career goal attainment. In this study, we draw on transactive goal dynamics theory to investigate whether and how romantic relationships facilitate career goal attainment. For testing our research model, we focused on the career goal of being successful in a political election, and gathered survey and objective data from politicians at three measurement points ( $N = 108$ ). Applying multiple regression analyses and bootstrapping, we found no support for our assumption that relationship duration positively affects shared career goals and career goal attainment. However, as hypothesized, relationship closeness facilitated career goal attainment through shared career goals and an increase in available shared resources. Goal coordination with the partner moderated this indirect effect; with increasing goal conflict and decreasing goal facilitation the indirect effect vanished. These findings indicate that romantic relationships promote career goal attainment, and thus highlight the value of integrating career research and work–home research in future studies. Practically, our results imply that employees should align their career goals with their partner's goals, and that organizations should recognize the relevance of employees' romantic relationships when developing career management programs.

*Keywords:* career goal attainment, romantic relationships, shared career goals, shared resources, goal coordination, transactive goal dynamics

Margaret Thatcher served eleven years as UK Prime Minister and was one of the most powerful politicians in the 20th century. Despite being nicknamed the Iron Lady, she publicly highlighted the importance of her husband Denis for her political career: “I couldn’t have done it without Denis. He was a fund of shrewd advice and penetrating comment” (McKittrick, 2013). Thus, it seems that Thatcher’s husband contributed considerably to the attainment of her career goals. Career goals define the “desirable end states” a person is striving for in their career (Papies & Aarts, 2011, p. 127). They provide specific aims, trigger the development of action plans and career strategies, and facilitate the monitoring of one’s progress (Greenhaus et al., 1995). While there is broad evidence about the predictors of career success, few studies investigate the setting and pursuit of career goals (Greco & Kraimer, 2020). Consequently, we know little about the processes underlying the attainment of career goals and how they are influenced by home-domain factors, such as the romantic relationship.

This study aims to answer the question of whether and how the romantic relationship affects career goal attainment. To this end, we draw on theorizing about self-regulatory processes in social relationships. Transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015) postulates that two individuals in a relationship may be interdependent in their goal pursuit, and that this interdependence can promote goal attainment. Based on the theory’s proposition that relationship characteristics affect the level of interdependence, we examine the effects of relationship duration and closeness on career goal attainment, as well as mechanisms underlying these effects. More precisely, we investigate two mediators: the extent to which a partner shares an individual’s career goal and the available shared resources. Moreover, we test if the coordination of one’s own career goal with the partner’s goals moderates this process. Figure 6.1 displays our study model.



**Figure 6.1.** Study model

To investigate our research questions, we gathered survey and objective data from politicians at three measurement points. This setting enabled us to focus on a particular



and time-bound career goal that is highly relevant to all participants, which is the goal to be successful in an election (i.e., to achieve a large proportion of votes). Moreover, this approach allowed us to objectively assess and meaningfully compare career goal attainment.

Our study makes three important contributions. First, we address the determinants of career goal attainment, an understudied topic which is highly relevant for career development (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Greenhaus et al., 1995). Until now, most researchers have examined career goal attainment on a more global level (e.g., when measuring career satisfaction) whereas we identify the factors that affect the attainment of a particular career goal. Our research model is based on theorizing from self-regulation research (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Thus, we generate novel insights about the self-regulatory processes underlying career goal attainment and contribute to the integration of career and self-regulation research.

Second, we explore how romantic relationships—an essential part of an individual's home domain—affect career goal attainment. Thereby, we shed light on the overarching question of how nonwork factors shape individual careers, and advance the investigation of individual careers from a work–home perspective (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Hirschi et al., 2016). Our results will inform us about the relevance of coordinating one's own career goals with a romantic partner's goals for successful goal attainment. Thereby, the insights gained in our study can also generate useful practical implications for individuals' career management.

Finally, we provide an empirical test of the core propositions of transactive goal dynamics theory. The theory can be adopted in various contexts that shape organizational behavior, such as dyads of supervisors and employees or dyads of colleagues (Fitzsimons et al., 2016). Yet, so far there has been no attempt to empirically test its propositions. We assess the theory's validity within the context of career goal attainment and thus provide a first indication for the usefulness of adopting the theory in applied contexts.

### **How Romantic Relationships Affect Individual Careers**

Previous research on the work–home interface has provided evidence that home-domain factors can have both negative and positive consequences for careers. On the negative side, work–home conflict occurs when the demands from the work and home

domains are incompatible with each other, for instance when strain experienced at home impairs an employee's work performance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Studies have shown that experiencing a high level of work–home conflict can restrict employees' career prospects (Hoobler et al., 2010; Hoobler et al., 2009), and result in a lower level of career satisfaction (Amstad et al., 2011). On the positive side, work–home enrichment describes the spillover of positive experiences between the home and work domains, for instance when resources (e.g., skills or positive emotions) generated at home are carried over to the work domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). This spillover should positively affect career-related outcomes by facilitating employee performance (Ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). Meta-analyses have shown that work–home enrichment is related to desirable outcomes, such as reduced turnover intentions, increased job satisfaction, and higher job performance (McNall et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018).

These studies highlight the relevance of the home domain for career-related outcomes. Given that the romantic relationship constitutes an essential part of the home domain, it should be evident that it can affect employees' work experiences and careers. For instance, crossover research has found that work engagement and personal resources such as job-related self-efficacy can cross over from one partner to the other (Neff et al., 2013; Tian et al., 2017). Moreover, receiving partner support can reduce employee turnover (Huffman et al., 2014), and enhance job satisfaction and career success (Ferguson et al., 2016; Ocampo et al., 2018). Finally, employees' career-related decision making can be strongly affected by their family situation (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2012). For instance, Pluut et al. (2018) showed that employees whose spouse aspired them to advance in their careers had a higher preference for following a managerial career path. Taken together, these findings suggest that an individual's romantic relationship shapes their work experiences and plays an important role in their career. Yet, it remains unclear how romantic relationships affect the self-regulatory processes underlying the attainment of career goals. In the following, we draw on theorizing from self-regulation research to develop our research model.

### **The Interdependence of Self-Regulation in Romantic Relationships**

Self-regulation research has shown that other individuals within the social environment, such as romantic partners, can influence individual self-regulation and goal

attainment (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010). Transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015) provides a useful theoretical framework for explicating the self-regulatory processes occurring within social relationships. The theory's main assumption is that the self-regulatory systems of two individuals in a social relationship are interlinked. The theory further proposes that dyads differ in the extent to which the self-regulatory systems of partners are interdependent, with higher interdependence referring to "numerous and strong links among members' goals, pursuits, and outcomes" (Fitzsimons et al., 2015, p. 650). When two individuals in a relationship are highly interdependent, they do not pursue their goals separately from each other, but rather build a self-regulatory unit (i.e., a transactive goal system). Consequently, individuals may not only pursue goals that are self-oriented, but also goals that are related to their partner or related to the goal system as a whole. When both partners in a relationship have one specific goal for one of the two partners, this constitutes a shared target-oriented goal (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). In our study we focus on shared career goals as shared target-oriented goals, which we define as career goals that are targeted at one partner, and are held by both partners. Having a shared career goal signals high self-regulatory interdependence, because both partners hold the same goal for one of them, and both can contribute to career goal attainment by allocating resources to the pursuit of the goal (Fitzsimons et al., 2015).

According to transactive goal dynamics theory, shared goals emerge in a relationship if partners have opportunities and motivation to develop a high goal interdependence. Time spent together in a relationship is postulated to be a major determinant of opportunities: The longer two partners have been in a relationship together, the higher the quantity of interaction (Adams et al., 2001). Consequently, long-term partners have had more opportunities to learn about each other's goals and to develop shared goals (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Moreover, the motivation to share a partner's goal should be strongly related to relationship closeness (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Relationship closeness is conceptualized as the degree of inclusion of other in the self, meaning that, in a close relationship, the partner is part of one's self-concept and the partner's perspectives and characteristics are adopted as one's own (Aron et al., 1991). Individuals who are in a close relationship usually indicate high identity overlap with their partner and show a high level of cognitive interdependence (Agnew et al., 1998). Consequently, in a close relationship,

the partners should be more aware of each other's goals and more willing to adopt these goals as their own (Shah, 2003). This reasoning leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Relationship duration (H1a) and relationship closeness (H1b) are positively associated with shared career goals.

### **The Role of Available Shared Resources**

Transactive goal dynamics theory proposes that if one partner shares the other partner's goal, they should make more personal resources available for the pursuit of the shared goal, thus increasing the shared pool of resources. Resources are broadly defined as "anything perceived by the individual to help attain his or her goals" (Halbesleben et al., 2014, p. 1338) and can comprise objects (e.g., a car), conditions (e.g., employment), personal characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy), and energies (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In their work-home resources model, Ten Brummelhuis and Bakker (2012) propose that in addition to their personal resources, individuals may also benefit from resources that originate from the social context they are embedded in. For instance, when partners offer volatile resources such as time, energy, or money, the individual receives social support—a key contextual resource that can contribute to successful goal attainment. In our study, we focus on available shared resources—consisting of an individual's own resources and the resources allocated by their partner to the pursuit of the shared career goal—because these resources are crucial for the self-regulatory process underlying career goal attainment (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). If there is a high degree of overlap between romantic partners, individuals will more likely experience their partner's success as their own (Lockwood et al., 2004) and be more willing to invest their own personal resources for the pursuit of the shared career goal. Thereby, the pool of available shared resources will increase. Consequently, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2:** Shared career goals are positively related to available shared resources.

Resources have been linked to goal attainment in various theoretical models. The basic assumption underlying conservation of resources theory is that resources are instrumental for goal attainment (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Similarly, Hirschi and colleagues (2019) propose in their action regulation model that allocating, activating, and changing resources are central action strategies that help to attain goals related to the work

and family domains. Accordingly, having a large pool of available shared resources should result in an improved goal outcome. As a result, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 3:** Available shared resources are positively related to career goal attainment.

### **Goal Coordination as Boundary Condition for Career Goal Attainment**

Transactive goal dynamics theory further proposes that the positive effect of available shared resources on goal attainment depends on the couple's goal coordination (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Partners in romantic relationships pursue multiple goals and vary in the degree of coordination between them (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). Riediger and Freund (2004) identified two dimensions of goal coordination: goal conflict and goal facilitation. Goal conflict occurs when the pursuit of one goal impedes the attainment of another goal, because both goals compete for the same resource or the behaviors involved in the respective goal pursuits are incompatible. Goal facilitation occurs when the pursuit of one goal simultaneously promotes the attainment of another goal, because they are instrumentally related to each other.

Low goal conflict and high goal facilitation *within* individuals promote goal attainment and better well-being (Tomasik et al., 2017). Likewise, studies focusing on goal coordination *in couples* have found that engaging in activities that facilitate both partners' goals is linked to an improved well-being (Gere et al., 2011). In contrast, goal conflict in couples reduces the motivation to help one's partner (Kindt et al., 2017) and relates to higher strain and negative mood as well as decreased relationship quality (Gere & Schimmack, 2013; Righetti et al., 2016). Thus, the coordination of an individual's career goal with their partner's other goals should play a central role in the processes underlying career goal attainment. More precisely, good goal coordination in terms of low goal conflict and high goal facilitation should strengthen the positive effect of available shared resources on career goal attainment (Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Only if the two partners coordinate their goals well can they effectively use their shared resources for goal pursuit, resulting in a better career goal attainment. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** Goal coordination moderates the positive relationship of available shared resources and career goal attainment: The relationship is stronger for

partners who have lower (vs. higher) goal conflict (H4a) and higher (vs. lower) goal facilitation (H4b).

Taken together, drawing on transactive goal dynamics theory we propose that in longer-term and closer relationships, the partner is more inclined to share an individual's career goals and, as a consequence, there are more shared resources available for goal pursuit. These shared resources should improve career goal attainment, especially if the partners coordinate their goals well (i.e., there is low goal conflict and high goal facilitation). Our research model thus describes a moderated serial mediation for which we propose the following two hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 5:** Goal coordination moderates the serial mediation of relationship duration on career goal attainment through shared career goals and available shared resources: The indirect effect is stronger for partners with lower (vs. higher) goal conflict (H5a) and for partners with higher (vs. lower) goal facilitation (H5b).

**Hypothesis 6:** Goal coordination moderates the serial mediation of relationship closeness on career goal attainment through shared career goals and available shared resources: The indirect effect is stronger for partners with lower (vs. higher) goal conflict (H6a) and for partners with higher (vs. lower) goal facilitation (H6b).

## Method

### Procedure

We tested our research model within the context of political elections in Germany and conducted a two-wave online survey with politicians who ran for the federal parliament or for a state parliament (in Bavaria, Hesse, and Lower Saxony). Furthermore, we gathered objective data on election results at the third wave. With this approach, we not only reduced a potential common-method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), but we could also make sure that results were comparable as participants held the same goal at the same time for their political career (i.e., achieving a large proportion of votes).

Three months prior to the respective elections, we recruited candidates running for the six largest German parties for our study ( $N = 274$ ). After providing informed consent to participate in the study, the candidates received a link to a survey eight weeks (T1) and four weeks (T2) prior to the election (T3). At T1, we measured relationship duration,

relationship closeness, and shared career goals. At T2, we assessed shared resources as well as goal coordination. Lastly, we added objective data about the candidates' election results to assess career goal attainment at T3.

## Sample

At T1, 237 candidates (i.e., 86.5%) filled in the survey, and at T2, 208 candidates (i.e., 75.9%) filled in the survey. For our analyses, we considered candidates who indicated that they were in a romantic relationship and provided data for all study variables ( $N = 115$ , corresponding to 42.0% of those who registered for the study). Following Aguinis et al. (2013), we checked our data for outliers applying multiple criteria (i.e., Mahalanobi's distance, studentized deleted residuals, DFFITS, DFBETAS, Cook's D) and excluded seven cases that were consistently identified as outliers, resulting in a final sample of 108 candidates.

The candidates were on average 43.94 years old ( $SD = 12.42$ ), the majority of whom were male (69.4%). Most candidates were employed (54.7%) or self-employed (25.5%). In total, 64.9% of the candidates were married and 85.0% co-habited with their partner. The majority of them had at least one child (62.0%) and 40.7% of the candidates were living with at least one child in the same household. For most of the candidates, it was their first candidacy (77.8%), and they had an average campaign team size of 6.37 persons ( $SD = 4.12$ ). Our sample includes politicians from the six largest German parties (i.e., 25.9% greens, 25.0% liberals, 23.1% social-democrats, 12.0% far-left, 8.3% far-right, and 5.6% conservatives).

## Measures

**Relationship duration.** At T1, we assessed relationship duration in years with one item (i.e., "How long have you been in a relationship with your partner?").

**Relationship closeness.** We used Lockwood et al.'s scale (2004) to measure relationship closeness at T1 consisting of four items (e.g., "I feel very interconnected with my partner"). We used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's Alpha was .72.

**Shared career goals.** Because there was no scale available, we used the item "My partner and I share the goal that my candidacy will be successful" to assess shared career

goals at T1. Single items can be a reliable way to measure constructs on a general level (Nagy, 2002; Robins et al., 2001), and are frequently used to assess goal appraisals (e.g., Nurmi et al., 2002; Righetti et al., 2014). The item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

***Shared resources.*** Based on ten Brummelhuis and Bakker's resource taxonomy (2012), we assessed time, energy, and money available for the candidacy to serve as causal indicators for shared resources at T2 (see Bollen & Bauldry, 2011). The candidates rated three respective items (e.g., "How much energy do you and your partner have for your candidacy?") on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*very much*). We then built an index for shared resources. In contrast to reflective effect indicators, causal indicators are seen as the cause of the latent variable they are intended to measure (i.e., shared resources). Therefore, the indicators do not necessarily correlate with each other, and composite reliability estimates such as Cronbach's Alpha are not meaningful (Bollen & Bauldry, 2011).

***Goal coordination.*** To assess goal conflict and goal facilitation at T2, we adapted the Intergoal Relations Questionnaire (Riediger & Freund, 2004). First, we asked the candidates to identify one or more goals their partner was currently pursuing. Next, the candidates rated four items indicating how much these goals overall conflicted with their candidacy (e.g., "How often can it happen that, because of your partner's goals, you do not invest as much time into your candidacy as you would like to?"), and two items indicating how much these goals overall facilitated their candidacy (e.g., "The pursuit of my partner's goals sets the stage for the realization of my goal of a successful candidacy"). The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*) and from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) respectively. Cronbach's Alpha was .63 for goal conflict and .74 for goal facilitation.

***Career goal attainment.*** At T3, we gathered publicly available data on the results of each election from the German federal statistical office and the respective state statistical offices. The German electoral system uses a mixed-member-proportional system, in which voters cast two votes: a primary vote for a direct candidate in their electoral district, and a secondary vote for a party list (Manow, 2015). We focus on direct candidates who were up for election in an electoral district (as opposed to candidates on the party lists), because these candidates are elected directly by the citizens. For each direct candidate, we added



information about the percentage of votes they achieved in their electoral district to the survey data to assess career goal attainment<sup>1</sup>.

### **Control Variables**

We controlled for several variables that potentially affect the relationships under study: candidates' age in years, their gender (0 = male, 1 = female), as well as the average of votes their party received in the respective election. First, age should be related to relationship duration while at the same time affecting election success. Voters may perceive older candidates more favorably because political experience increases with age, and older individuals score higher on personality traits that are related to maturity, such as emotional stability and conscientiousness (Caspi et al., 2005). Furthermore, gender stereotypes ascribe males more agentic characteristics, such as a higher assertiveness and decisiveness (e.g., Heilman, 2012). These stereotypes might lead voters to consider males as more suitable candidates, resulting in a higher career goal attainment compared to females. Likewise, these stereotypes might increase the probability that their partner will respond to their needs and provide them with resources for goal pursuit. Finally, to investigate the candidates' goal attainment independently from the election success of their party, we controlled for the average percentage of votes the candidate's party achieved in their federal state excluding the electoral district of the respective candidate.

### **Construct Validity**

To ensure that the constructs we measured at the same points in time showed discriminant validity, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). For the constructs assessed at T1 we did not conduct a CFA, because relationship closeness was the only multi-item scale, while relationship duration was a manifest variable and shared career goal was measured with one item. Conducting a CFA with single-item measures is not feasible, because at least two indicators

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<sup>1</sup> We used the percentage of votes achieved rather than the dichotomous variable of being elected or not because in the German electoral system, candidates of smaller parties are very rarely elected directly into the parliament. Consequently, being elected is strongly confounded with party membership. Moreover, this approach ensured that we had a sufficient amount of variance in our outcome to test our hypotheses.

per factor are required (Marsh et al., 1998). For T2, we included goal conflict and goal facilitation in the CFA, which revealed that the two-factor model ( $\chi^2(df = 8) = 10.90, p = .208, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06$ ) fit the data significantly better than a single-factor solution ( $\chi^2(df = 9) = 53.12, p < .001, CFI = 0.66, RMSEA = 0.22, SRMR = 0.14; \Delta\chi^2(\Delta df = 1) = 42.22, p < .001$ ). We therefore concluded that goal conflict and goal facilitation showed sufficient discriminant validity. At T3, we measured only career goal attainment. Therefore, there was no need to conduct a CFA for T3.

## Results

Table 6.1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations between the study variables. To test Hypotheses 1 to 4, we conducted multiple regression analyses in SPSS. Using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2017), we computed bootstrapped confidence intervals with 10,000 bootstrap samples for the indirect effects formulated in Hypotheses 5 and 6 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Table 6.2 displays our results for the prediction of the shared career goal. In Model 1, we regressed shared career goal on the control variables gender and age. Neither gender ( $b = 0.10, p = .627$ ) nor age ( $b = 0.00, p = .580$ ) had an effect on having a shared career goal. In Model 2, we added the predictors relationship duration and relationship closeness to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Against our assumptions, relationship duration was not related to having a shared career goal ( $b = 0.00, p = .930$ ), thus we rejected Hypothesis 1a. In support of Hypothesis 1b, we found a positive effect of relationship closeness on having a shared career goal ( $b = 0.49, p < .001$ ); the closer the relationship, the more the partner shared the candidate's career goal.

Table 6.3 displays our results for the prediction of shared resources. In Model 1, we regressed shared resources on the control variables gender and age. Neither gender ( $b = -0.20, p = .184$ ) nor age ( $b = 0.01, p = .107$ ) were related to available shared resources. In Model 2, we added the predictor of having a shared career goal. In line with Hypothesis 2, we found a positive effect of having a shared career goal on shared resources ( $b = 0.34, p < .001$ ), such that candidates with partners who shared their career goal indicated having more shared resources.

**Table 6.1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.31	-	-								
2. Age	43.94	12.42	-0.14	-							
3. Relationship duration (T1)	15.38	11.34	.01	.69	-						
4. Relationship closeness (T1)	3.57	0.74	-0.31	.09	.09	-					
5. Shared career goal (T1)	4.00	1.00	.04	.05	.07	.32	-				
6. Shared resources (T2)	2.82	0.73	-0.15	.17	.20	.35	.47	-			
7. Goal conflict (T2)	2.03	0.63	-0.11	-0.14	-0.25	.06	-0.37	-0.31	-		
8. Goal facilitation (T2)	2.93	1.16	-0.19	.12	.16	.25	.36	.40	-0.14	-	
9. Party average of votes	12.39	8.34	.07	.07	.12	.07	.08	.14	-0.05	.00	-
10. Career goal attainment (T3)	11.84	9.31	.07	.12	.14	.04	.10	.25	-0.11	.09	.94

*Note:*  $N = 108$ . T1, T2, and T3 refer to the three measurement time points. Correlations  $r \geq |.19|$  are significant at  $p < .05$ , correlations  $r \geq |.31|$  are significant at  $p < .01$ , using two-sided tests.

<sup>a</sup>0 = male, 1 = female.

**Table 6.2.** Multiple regression analysis results for shared career goal

	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	3.77	0.38	10.00	<.001	2.02	0.63	3.22	.002
Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.10	0.21	0.49	.627	0.34	0.22	1.58	.116
Age	0.00	0.01	0.56	.580	0.00	0.01	0.24	.814
Relationship duration					0.00	0.01	0.09	.930
Relationship closeness					0.49	0.13	3.71	<.001
	$R^2 = .01$				$R^2 = .12$			
	$F_{(2, 105)} = 0.24, p = .787$				$F_{(4, 103)} = 3.62, p = .008$			

Note.  $N = 108$ .  $P$ -Values are based on two-sided tests.

<sup>a</sup>0 = male, 1 = female.

**Table 6.3.** Multiple regression analysis results for shared resources

	Model 1				Model 2			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Intercept	2.48	0.27	9.28	<.001	1.19	0.33	3.63	<.001
Gender <sup>a</sup>	-0.20	0.15	-1.34	.184	-0.24	0.13	-1.78	.078
Age	0.01	0.01	1.62	.107	0.01	0.01	1.54	.127
Shared career goal					0.34	0.06	5.60	<.001
	$R^2 = .05$				$R^2 = .27$			
	$F_{(2, 105)} = 2.57, p = .081$				$F_{(3, 104)} = 12.66, p < .001$			

Note.  $N = 108$ .  $P$ -Values are based on two-sided tests.

<sup>a</sup>0 = male, 1 = female.

Table 6.4 displays our results for the prediction of career goal attainment. In Model 1, we regressed career goal attainment on the control variables gender, age, and average of votes the candidates' political party received. Career goal attainment was not related to gender ( $b = 0.18, p = .792$ ) or age ( $b = 0.04, p = .140$ ). The party average of votes was positively related to the percentage of votes the candidates achieved ( $b = 1.04, p < .001$ ). In Model 2, we added shared resources as predictor. In line with Hypothesis 3, shared resources were positively related to career goal attainment ( $b = 1.45, p = .001$ ). In Models 3 and 4, we tested our moderation hypotheses. In both models, we controlled for the main effect of the other moderator when including the interaction term, and mean-centered the

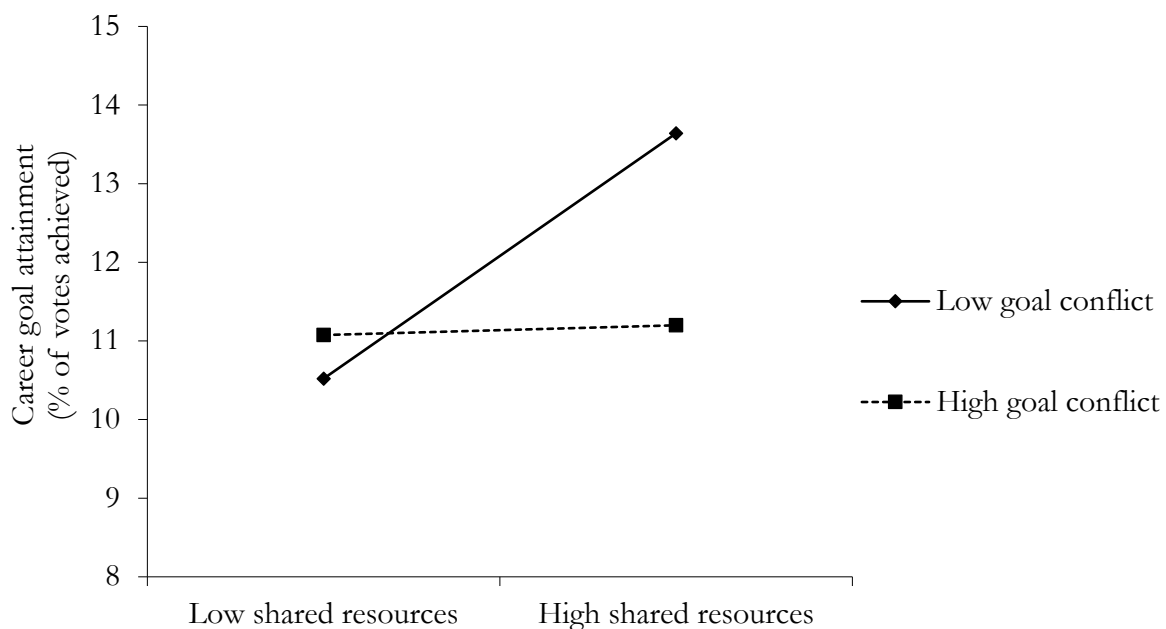
**Table 6.4.** Multiple regression analysis results for career goal attainment

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4						
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>				
Intercept	-2.81	1.27	-2.21	.030	-6.24	1.58	-3.95	<.001	-3.27	1.47	-2.23	.028	-0.87	1.69	-0.52	.608
Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.18	0.69	0.27	.792	0.51	0.67	0.76	.451	0.35	0.67	0.52	.601	0.41	0.68	0.60	.547
Age	0.04	0.03	1.49	.140	0.03	0.03	1.05	.297	0.02	0.02	0.87	.387	0.02	0.03	0.88	.383
Party average of votes	1.04	0.04	27.27	<.001	1.02	0.04	27.83	<.001	1.01	0.04	27.99	<.001	1.02	0.04	28.11	<.001
Shared resources					1.45	0.43	3.39	.001	0.81	0.34	2.38	.019	0.71	0.35	2.04	.044
Goal conflict									-0.47	0.33	-1.45	.151	-0.61	0.51	-1.19	.237
Goal facilitation									0.43	0.28	1.54	.127	0.46	0.33	1.41	.162
Shared resources X Goal conflict									-1.63	0.68	-2.41	.018				
Shared resources X Goal facilitation													0.66	0.33	2.02	.046
	$R^2 = .88$				$R^2 = .89$				$R^2 = .90$				$R^2 = .90$			
	$F_{(3,104)} = 253.98, p < .001$				$F_{(4,103)} = 212.55, p < .001$				$F_{(7,100)} = 129.10, p < .001$				$F_{(7,100)} = 126.75, p < .001$			

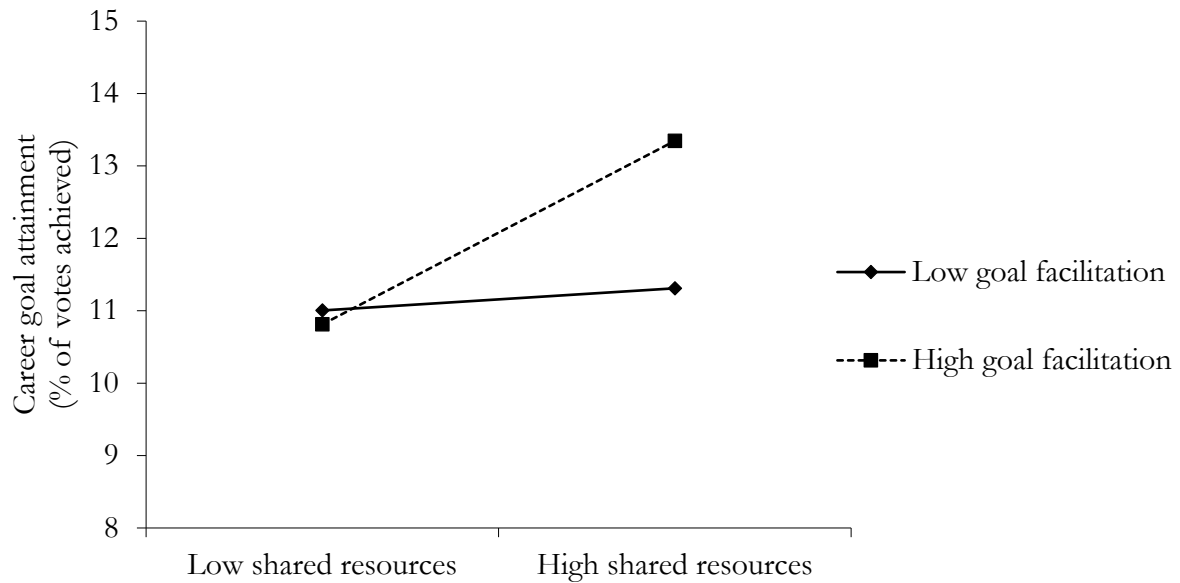
*Note.*  $N = 108$ . In Model 3, shared resources and goal conflict are mean-centered, in Model 4 shared resources and goal facilitation are mean-centered. *P*-Values are based on two-sided tests.

<sup>a</sup>0 = male, 1 = female.

predictor and the moderator (Dawson, 2014). In line with Hypotheses 4a and 4b, we found significant interactions between shared resources and both goal conflict ( $b = -1.63, p = .018$ ) and goal facilitation ( $b = 0.66, p = .046$ ). Figure 6.2 shows that goal conflict buffered the positive effect of shared resources on career goal attainment. In contrast, goal facilitation intensified the effect of shared resources on career goal attainment (see Figure 6.3). Using the R package *pequod* (Mirisola & Seta, 2016), we conducted simple slopes analyses to reveal at which values of the moderators the positive effect of available shared resources on career goal attainment was significant (Dawson, 2014). We found that the simple slope of available shared resources on career goal attainment was significant for low goal conflict (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean;  $b = 2.14, SE = 0.64, t_{(100)} = 3.37, p = .001$ ), and not significant for high goal conflict (i.e., 1 *SD* above the mean;  $b = 0.09, SE = 0.63, t_{(100)} = 0.14, p = .892$ ). For goal facilitation, we found that the simple slope of available shared resources on career goal attainment was not significant for low goal facilitation ( $b = 0.21, SE = 0.65, t_{(100)} = 0.32, p = .747$ ) but was significant for high goal facilitation ( $b = 1.74, SE = 0.57, t_{(100)} = 3.07, p = .003$ ).



**Figure 6.2.** Moderating effect of goal conflict on the relationship between shared resources and career goal attainment



**Figure 6.3.** Moderating effect of goal facilitation on the relationship between shared resources and career goal attainment.

To test Hypotheses 5a and 5b, we first analyzed whether the indirect effect of relationship duration on career goal attainment through shared career goal and shared resources was significant. Due to the non-significant effect of relationship duration on shared career goal, we did not find a significant indirect effect of relationship duration on career goal attainment ( $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01]) when controlling for relationship closeness. We then calculated conditional indirect effects for low, medium, and high goal conflict and facilitation, respectively. Our analysis revealed that the indirect effect was not significant for all levels of both goal conflict (low:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.02, 0.03], medium:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.02], high:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.00$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01]) and goal facilitation (low:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.00$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01], medium:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01], high:  $b = 0.00$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.01, 0.02]). Therefore, we rejected Hypotheses 5a and 5b.

To test Hypotheses 6a and 6b, we first analyzed whether the indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment through shared career goal and available shared resources was significant. Controlling for relationship duration, our analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment ( $b = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.58]). Next, we calculated conditional indirect effects for low, medium, and high goal conflict and facilitation, respectively. Our analysis revealed

that the indirect effect was significant for low ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.62]) and medium ( $b = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI [0.03, 0.37]) levels of goal conflict. However, this effect was not significant when goal conflict was high ( $b = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , 95% CI [-0.07, 0.21]). For goal facilitation, the indirect effect was not significant when goal facilitation was low ( $b = 0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.04, 0.32]), but it was significant for medium ( $b = 0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% CI [0.05, 0.37]) and high ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.52]) levels of goal facilitation. These results supported Hypothesis 6a and 6b.

## Discussion

The main result of our study is that romantic relationships can facilitate the attainment of individuals' career goals. In line with our hypotheses, participants were more likely to indicate that their partner shared their career goal when relationship closeness was high. Having a shared career goal, in turn, increased the pool of shared resources available for goal pursuit, which had a positive effect on career goal attainment. Our mediation analysis further revealed a significant indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment through shared career goal and shared resources, which provided support for the hypothesized process linking relationship closeness to career goal attainment. These findings show that characteristics of romantic relationships are relevant predictors of career goal attainment and underscore the importance of including home-domain factors in the study of individual careers (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Our results are also in line with a growing body of research showing that significant others can affect individual self-regulation (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010) and provide empirical evidence for the processes underlying self-regulation in relationships as proposed by transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015).

Yet, being in a close relationship and having a partner who shares one's own career goal does not always result in an improved goal attainment. In line with transactive goal dynamics theory, our moderation analyses revealed that goal coordination with the partner is a critical boundary condition for successful career goal attainment. Specifically, we found that high goal conflict and low goal facilitation weakened the effect of shared resources on career goal attainment, thus also undermining the indirect effect of relationship closeness on career goal attainment. According to these findings, a high conflict between the partners' goals seems to impede an efficient use of the resources available for goal pursuit.



When goal conflict is high, the career goal and the partner's other goals compete for the same scarce resources within the couple, which should result in a reduced likelihood of allocating the resources to the pursuit of the career goal. In contrast, high goal facilitation seems to enable partners to use their available resources in an efficient way that improves goal attainment. When goals facilitate each other, the likelihood of allocating resources to the career goal should increase, because the investment of resources in the career goal simultaneously promotes the pursuit of the partner's other goals.

Contrary to our theoretical reasoning, we did not find a significant effect of relationship duration on shared career goal. Consequently, we neither found evidence for an indirect effect of relationship duration on career goal attainment through shared career goal and shared resources. One reason for this could be that the duration of a relationship is only one of many factors determining if two individuals know each other well (Starzyk et al., 2006). Although being in a long-term relationship should increase the opportunities to develop a high interdependency with the partner (Fitzsimons et al., 2015), it does not necessarily go along with a high frequency and a high quality of interaction between the partners. Consequently, for establishing a high overlap in the partners' self-regulatory systems it might not be sufficient to know each other for a long time. Instead, according to our results the intimacy of the relationship seems to be a more crucial determinant of developing shared career goals.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The theoretical implications of our study are threefold. First, our study provides first evidence about the self-regulatory processes that link romantic relationships to career goal attainment, and thereby contributes to a more holistic understanding of the determinants of career goal attainment. Our results imply that individuals are more successful in attaining their career goals when they are in a close romantic relationship that provides them with resources for goal pursuit, at least to the extent that their career goal is well coordinated with their partner's goals. Setting, pursuing, and achieving career goals is a crucial aspect of career management and a prerequisite for a positive evaluation of one's own career success (Greco & Kraimer, 2020; Greenhaus et al., 1995). Thus, by exploring the processes underlying career goal attainment this study also improves our understanding of how employees can eventually achieve a high level of career success.

Second, our study emphasizes that it is important to take the home domain into account when studying career-related outcomes. According to our results, individuals do not operate independently from their romantic partner when pursuing their career goals. In line with previous research (e.g., Hirschi et al., 2016; Hoobler et al., 2009), these results show that home-domain factors can have a considerable influence on career-related outcomes. With our study, we thus answered Greenhaus and Kossek's (2014, p. 362) call for a stronger integration of work–home research with career research, because “career experiences and home experiences are inextricably intertwined”.

Third, we provide first empirical evidence for the validity of transactive goal dynamics theory (Fitzsimons et al., 2015) in the context of career goals. Our findings support the theory's proposition that individuals in a social relationship are interdependent in their self-regulation, and that this interdependence can enhance goal attainment by increasing the shared resources available for goal pursuit. We also found support for the assumption that goal coordination is a boundary condition of this effect. As most of our findings support the theory's propositions, our study highlights the usefulness of the theory in the explanation of career goal attainment.

Our study also yields useful practical implications for individuals and organizational career management. We demonstrate the importance of goal coordination between partners for an effective career goal pursuit. Our results imply that individuals in a romantic relationship should try to gain their partner's support for their career goals, and align these goals with their partner's personal goals to promote goal attainment. To this end, partners should avoid pursuing goals that compete for the same scarce resources or goals that are incompatible with each other. Instead, they could benefit from establishing a system of interrelated goals in which the pursuit of one partner's goals promotes the pursuit of the other partner's goals. Partners might improve their goal coordination by communicating openly about their goals, which might help them to identify potential conflicts and instrumental relationships between their goals. When it comes to avoiding conflicts between their career goals, partners could use a trading-off strategy, in which the priority of the partners' career goals alternates over time in the couple according to existing career opportunities (Becker & Moen, 1999). Over time, this strategy will allow both partners to realize their career goals with the support of their partner.

These insights can also be useful for organizations. Even though long-term employment within a single organization is no longer the default career path, organizations continue to be responsible for their employees' career management (De Vos et al., 2009). An important part of career management includes setting specific career goals and strategies for goal pursuit (Vuori et al., 2012). Our results imply that when establishing personal development plans with their employees, organizations should recognize the importance of their employees' romantic relationships. Specifically, they should increase employees' awareness about the relevance of aligning their career goals with their partners' goals in order to promote the attainment of these career goals.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our study has three main limitations. First, the generalizability of our results might be limited, because we focused on candidates in political elections to test our hypotheses. This approach ensured that all participants had the same career goal (i.e., to achieve a large proportion of votes), and enabled us to objectively assess career goal attainment. Still, the candidates' career goal might differ from the career goals pursued by (white- and blue-collar) employees as well as entrepreneurs, particularly regarding appraisals about goal importance or control over goal attainment. To ensure the generalizability of our results, the validity of our research model needs to be tested in other samples.

Second, we cannot completely rule out that some of our estimates are biased due to common method variance. Although we surveyed our study participants at two points in time and measured career goal attainment objectively, most constructs in our model were assessed by the same source (i.e., the candidates), which can lead to biased estimates due to common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Related to that, we used self-report measures for some constructs for which it would be beneficial to also have partner ratings (e.g., shared career goal, shared resources). Although our participants were presumably well aware of the extent to which their partner shared their goal of a successful candidacy, it would be useful to additionally have the partner's rating for a more valid assessment of shared career goals in future studies. Likewise, although the focal actor's perception of having shared resources available is most likely the key factor affecting their career goal attainment, it would be worthwhile to have the partner's indication of how many resources they allocate to the pursuit of the focal actor's career goal as a benchmark for testing the

validity of our measure. Moreover, gathering data from both partners would enable the investigation of dyadic effects with the use of the actor-partner interdependence model (Kenny et al., 2006; Kenny & Ledermann, 2010).

Third, we cannot rule out reversed causality or reciprocal effects between the study variables, because our study design does not enable us to draw conclusions about the causal direction of the effects. In line with our theorizing, our results might imply that a high relationship closeness causes the partner to share an individual's career goals, which in turn increases the pool of shared resources available for goal pursuit and ultimately results in an improved career goal attainment. Yet, it is also possible that the partner is more willing to allocate resources to the pursuit of an individual's goals when that individual is more successful in attaining their career goals and, as a result, the closeness of the relationship improves. The causal relationships that are suggested in our research model could be more rigorously tested with the use of experiments or longitudinal study designs that span a longer time period in individuals' careers. Using longitudinal designs would allow for an investigation of changes in career goal attainment over time, which can improve our understanding of the causal relationships in our study model (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Selig & Preacher, 2009).

To further enhance our understanding of career goal attainment in romantic relationships, we encourage future research to investigate the role of individual career goals in the couple's goal system more extensively. Goal systems are complex and involve hierarchically organized goals from various life domains (Kruglanski et al., 2002). For instance, one partner could have the career goal to finish a vocational training program, while the other partner has the personal goal to have a child in the near future. How these goals are prioritized in the couple presumably not only affects goal attainment, but also the long-term functioning of the romantic relationship. Yet, we know little about complex goal systems in romantic relationships involving goals from different life domains. Thus, having a closer look at these goal systems would provide novel insights that are of a high practical relevance. Particularly dual-career couples could benefit from these insights, because these couples most likely face issues related to career goal coordination and resource allocation in their everyday lives (Unger et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

Our study illustrates that individuals are affected by their romantic relationship when pursuing their career goals. By integrating theory from the self-regulation literature, we have found evidence that a close romantic relationship can facilitate career goal attainment, and that goal coordination is a crucial boundary condition of this effect. Regarding the underlying mechanisms, our results show that in close relationships, the partner is more inclined to share an individual's career goals, which increases the shared pool of resources available for goal pursuit and, ultimately, improves career goal attainment. We hope that our study stimulates research on the effect of other nonwork factors on career-related outcomes, and that the results of this research will help individuals learn more about how to successfully pursue their career goals.

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## Chapter 7

### Scientific Paper 3

Boundaries for success? How work–  
home integration and perceived  
supervisor expectation affect  
individuals' careers

Angelika Kornblum, Dana Unger,  
Gudela Grote, & Andreas Hirschi



### Scientific Paper 3

## Boundaries for success? How work–home integration and perceived supervisor expectation affect individuals' careers

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### Abstract

Despite the increasing relevance of employees' boundary management, we know little about its effect on individual careers. This study explores the relationship between work–home integration and subjective career success, and sheds light on the underlying processes. Moreover, we investigate perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration as a contextual moderator of these processes. To test our hypotheses, we conducted a three-wave online survey with a working sample ( $N = 371$ ). Our path analysis revealed that work–home integration acted as a double-edged sword for subjective career success. On the positive side, work–home integration facilitated the attainment of work goals, which resulted in an improved subjective career success. On the negative side, employees who integrated work and home were more exhausted, which related negatively to their subjective career success. We also found that perceived supervisor expectation moderated these processes, such that the indirect effects were less pronounced when employees perceived that their supervisor expected them to integrate work and home. Specifically, our moderation analysis showed that perceived supervisor expectation constrained the enactment of individuals' own boundary management preference. These findings suggest that work–home integration can have both positive and negative consequences for careers, and that contextual factors shape the enactment of boundary management preferences.

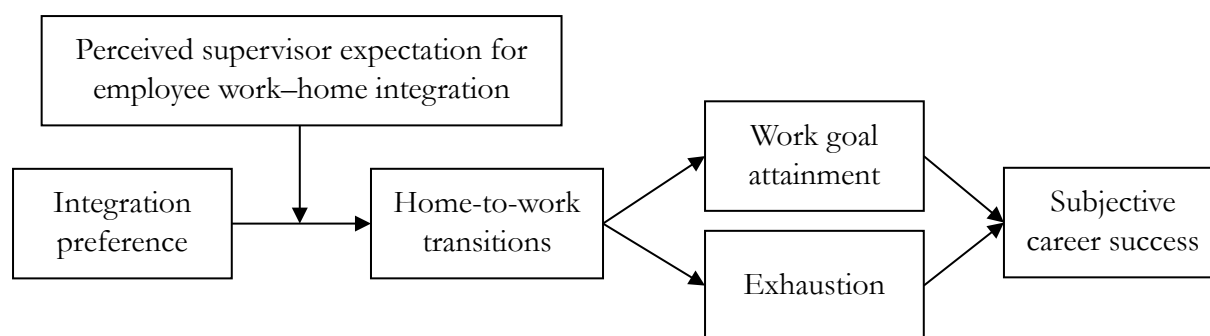
*Keywords:* subjective career success; work–home integration; role transitions; well-being; work goal attainment

Widely available technology that enables employees to work anytime and anywhere and a rising number of employees with high work and family demands have resulted in a growing interrelatedness of work and home and a necessity to actively manage the boundaries between these domains (Allen et al., 2014). Consequently, individuals' career development is considerably affected by the work–home interface (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). Studies have shown, for instance, that employees who experience work–home conflict face restricted career opportunities (Hoobler et al., 2010), but also that employees who place relatively high importance on their family are more satisfied with their career (Hirschi et al., 2016). However, we know little about how employees' boundary management (i.e., the extent to which they integrate work and home) affects their experience of a successful career (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016; Spurk et al., 2019).

Identifying antecedents of career success is crucial, because it is highly desirable for employees to feel successful regarding their work experiences over the course of their career. Subjective career success is also linked to important outcomes such as career-related self-efficacy, reduced turnover intentions, and organizational performance (Ng et al., 2005; Spurk et al., 2019). In our study, we shed light on the relationship between work–home integration and subjective career success. Using data gathered in a three-wave online survey, we also explore two mediators of this relationship: work goal attainment and exhaustion.

Furthermore, we aim to advance our understanding of the contextual factors involved in employees' boundary management. Boundary theory proposes that contextual factors such as organizational policies or cultural norms can affect individual boundary management (Ashforth et al., 2000). Nevertheless, only few studies address the contextual determinants of boundary management (Piszczek & Berg, 2014). Some studies have shown that the supervisor—who is an essential part of the social context an employee is embedded in at work—can affect employees' boundary management (Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Derks et al., 2015; Koch & Binnewies, 2015). Our study adds to this research stream by exploring how supervisors' expectation about employee work–home integration affects the enactment of employees' boundary management preference. Figure 7.1 displays our research model.





**Figure 7.1.** Study model

Our study makes three contributions to the literature. First, by exploring the consequences of employees’ boundary management for their subjective career success we follow the call for a stronger integration of research on careers and the work–home interface (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Hirschi et al., 2016). Drawing on conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), we expect that work–home integration acts as a double-edged sword for subjective career success by enhancing the attainment of work goals while at the same time impairing well-being. Thereby, we paint a nuanced picture of potential positive and negative consequences of boundary management for individual careers, and contribute to a more thorough understanding of the processes involved in the experience of a successful career.

Second, we advance the literature on subjective career success by using a validated scale that accounts for the multi-faceted nature of this construct (Shockley et al., 2016). Subjective career success is defined as an individual’s “evaluation and experience of achieving personally meaningful career outcomes” (Spurk et al., 2019, p. 36) and has mostly been operationalized as career satisfaction or as a global assessment of one’s own success. These approaches have been criticized for neglecting relevant aspects, because subjective career success entails more than being overall satisfied with one’s career progression (Heslin, 2005; Shockley et al., 2016). We aim to address this issue and go beyond the study of mere career satisfaction by using a comprehensive conceptualization of subjective career success, which includes additional relevant aspects such as the meaningfulness or the quality of the work an individual has performed throughout his/her career (Shockley et al., 2016).

Finally, we investigate the role of perceived supervisor expectation about employee work–home integration as a crucial contextual moderator in the relationship between

boundary management preferences and enactment. Thereby, we add to previous research investigating the role of the supervisor in employees' boundary management (e.g., Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Koch & Binnewies, 2015) and generate insights that are of high practical relevance. Our results can inform leaders about how their expectation regarding employees' work–home integration may shape employees' boundary management and, consequently, their well-being and careers.

### **How the Work–Home Interface Affects Individual Careers**

We base our study on the proposition that subjective career success is affected by the work–home interface, because “career experiences and home experiences are inextricably intertwined in many contemporary careers” (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014, p. 362). Greenhaus and Powell (2012), for instance, suggest that employees take their family situation into account when making work decisions, such as accepting or declining a promotion. Obviously, these work decisions can have a considerable effect on individuals' careers. In line with these assumptions, Pluut et al. (2018) found that employees whose spouses aspired them to be successful in their career were more motivated to obtain a managerial position, which shows that the spouse can affect decision making that ultimately shapes an individual's career path.

Studies that focused on the effects of work–home conflict on career-related outcomes have demonstrated that the interrelatedness of work and home can be harmful for individual careers. When individuals experience work–home conflict, the involvement in one role hinders the performance in another role, because the respective demands are incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Employees who experience a high level of work–home conflict have consistently been shown to hit a so-called glass ceiling, which means that they face restricted opportunities for career advancement (Hoobler et al., 2010; Hoobler et al., 2009). Accordingly, meta-analytical evidence shows that work–home conflict relates negatively to career satisfaction, and results in higher turnover intentions (Amstad et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, individuals can also derive benefits for their careers from a high work–home interrelatedness. Work–home enrichment occurs when positive experiences spill over between roles, for instance when resources generated at home are transferred to the work domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). These resource transfers should positively

affect an individual's career, because they can facilitate his/her performance in the work domain (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012). For instance, Hirschi et al. (2016) found that employees with a high family orientation were more satisfied with their career, which indicates that being strongly involved in the family role can actually have positive consequences for subjective career success. Meta-analytical evidence also shows that work–home enrichment relates to several precursors of subjective career success, such as increased job satisfaction and performance, and reduced turnover intentions (McNall et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2018).

Whereas conflict and enrichment describe the work–home interface as negative or positive, boundary theory provides a neutral view on the question how individuals manage the boundary between work and home (Ashforth et al., 2000). Against the backdrop of blurring boundaries between domains, boundary management (i.e., the extent to which individuals integrate work and home or keep the two domains separate) has become increasingly important (Allen et al., 2014). Although boundary management is highly relevant in today's world of work, evidence on its effect on individual careers remains scarce. Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2016) found that employees' family involvement was positively related to home-to-work enrichment, which in turn enhanced their career prospects as indicated by supervisor-rated promotability. Interestingly, boundary management moderated these effects, such that a preference for work–home integration strengthened the effect of family involvement on enrichment, but weakened the effect of enrichment on promotability. While these results provide first evidence that boundary management matters for individual careers, it remains unclear whether and how it affects subjective career success. In the following, we will present our research model, beginning with the relationship between boundary management preferences and enactment.

### **Boundary Management Preferences and Enactment**

Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) posits that there are cognitive, physical, and behavioral boundaries between the work and home domain, and that individuals make transitions across these boundaries in their everyday life. Importantly, individuals hold different preferences for managing work–home boundaries which lie on a continuum from integration (i.e., a preference for flexible and permeable boundaries) to segmentation (i.e., a striving for strong and impermeable boundaries). These preferences need to be

distinguished from the enactment of integration and segmentation, which describes the extent to which “individuals actually keep work and family domains separate as part of an active attempt to manage work and nonwork roles” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 106).

Cross-domain transitions, which are defined as boundary-crossing activities “where one exits and enters roles by surmounting boundaries” (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 472), represent a type of integration enactment. When individuals make a cross-domain transition, they exit the role they fulfil in one domain (e.g., the role as a parent in the home domain) and enter the role they fulfil in another domain (e.g., the role as an employee in the work domain). In our study, we focus on home-to-work transitions, which capture the number of physical and cognitive transitions made from the home domain to the work domain, as an indicator for actual work–home integration (Matthews et al., 2010). For example, an employee who goes to work on a free weekend or answers work-related emails from home engages in a home-to-work transition. Because cross-domain transitions are facilitated by permeable and flexible boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000; Matthews et al., 2010), we assume that individuals with a preference to integrate work and home engage in home-to-work transitions more frequently.

**Hypothesis 1:** Integration preference is positively related to home-to-work transitions.

Boundary theory suggests that not only individual characteristics, but also contextual factors shape the boundaries created by individuals and the transitions across these boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000). According to the theory, contextual factors can create so-called strong situations in which the impact of individual preferences on behavior diminishes, because there is a social consensus about which behavior is appropriate and expected in a given situation (see also Mischel, 1977). Although most studies investigating boundary management focus on individual-level variables, there are some conceptual papers that advocate the inclusion of contextual factors in the study of boundary management (Kreiner et al., 2006; Piszczek & Berg, 2014), and some empirical studies that have looked at the interplay between individual boundary management preferences and contextual factors, such as organizational policies or expectations (e.g., Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Kreiner, 2006; Piszczek, 2017).

The supervisor is an essential part of the social context an employee is embedded in at work and can exert a considerable influence on an employee's behavior because s/he is an important authority and role model (Derks et al., 2015). By providing a norm for adequate boundary management behavior, the supervisor can create a strong situation which affects employees' work–home integration (Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Derks et al., 2015; Koch & Binnewies, 2015). When employees perceive that their supervisor expects them to engage in home-to-work transitions, this provides them with a social norm about how they should manage the boundary between work and home. Because individuals aim to comply with norms to avoid social punishment (Cialdini & Trost, 1998), this creates a strong situation in which the effect of individual preferences on behavior diminishes. Hence, we argue that the positive relationship between integration preference and home-to-work transitions should be weaker when employees perceive a high level of supervisor expectation regarding their work–home integration.

**Hypothesis 2:** Perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration moderates the relationship between integration preference and home-to-work transitions, such that the effect is weaker when perceived supervisor expectation for integration is high (vs. low).

### **Linking Boundary Management to Career Success**

Drawing from conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), we further hypothesize that home-to-work transitions act as a double-edged sword for career success through their effect on work goal attainment and well-being. A central assumption of conservation of resources theory is that individuals aim to obtain, retain, foster, and protect resources because they are instrumental for goal attainment and facilitate the achievement of valued ends (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Similarly, Hirschi et al. (2019) describe in their action regulation model that allocating, activating, and changing resources are key action strategies that help individuals to attain goals in the work and home domains. When individuals engage in home-to-work transitions, such as when answering work-related emails after the end of the workday, they re-allocate personal resources (e.g., time and energy) from the pursuit of private goals to the pursuit of work goals. Because personal resources facilitate goal attainment, we assume that employees should be more successful

in attaining their work goals when they engage in home-to-work transitions more frequently.

**Hypothesis 3:** Home-to-work transitions are positively related to work goal attainment.

We further argue that home-to-work transitions also have the potential to undermine employees' well-being. The effort-recovery model (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) proposes that the expenditure of resources at work requires restoring one's capacities after work to prevent negative effects on well-being and performance. When employees invest personal resources such as time or energy in the pursuit of work goals while they are at home, they have fewer possibilities to restore their capacities and gain new resources. Additionally, the work demands they encounter at home continue to cause strain before the affected body function could get back to the baseline level (Meijman & Mulder, 1998), which can impair well-being. Previous studies have supported this proposition by showing that work-home integration can undermine psychological detachment from work and thereby result in a higher level of emotional exhaustion (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Wepfer et al., 2018). Therefore, we expect that engaging frequently in home-to-work transitions results in a deteriorated psychological well-being, as indicated by a higher level of exhaustion.

**Hypothesis 4:** Home-to-work transitions are positively related to exhaustion.

Finally, we hypothesize that both work goal attainment and exhaustion are antecedents of subjective career success. The attainment of work goals that create value for the organization is an essential part of fulfilling one's job role and successfully performing on the job (Motowidlo & Kell, 2013). Achieving one's work goals means to meet the standards as defined in the job description. Thus, work goal attainment is closely related to providing high-quality work—a central determinant of subjective career success (Shockley et al., 2016). Furthermore, based on the tenet that goals are “valued or desirable outcomes” (Latham & Locke, 1991, p. 231) one can conclude that individuals are more satisfied when they achieve their goals. In accordance with this argument, previous research has shown that goal attainment is linked to higher levels of job and life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2005; Maier & Brunstein, 2001). We propose that this satisfaction also translates to

the employee's subjective evaluation of their career in such a way that employees who attain their work goals are more satisfied with their career success.

**Hypothesis 5:** Work goal attainment is positively related to subjective career success.

We further argue that exhaustion, which is an indicator of a poor psychological well-being, is negatively related to subjective career success. Spurk et al. (2019) found in their literature review on career success that only few studies address the relationship between well-being and subjective career success, and that in these studies, well-being has mostly been looked at as an outcome rather than an antecedent of career success. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that psychological well-being and subjective career success are positively interrelated (Leung et al., 2011; Volmer et al., 2016). Exhaustion is defined as “a consequence of intensive physical, affective and cognitive strain” and goes along with a lower level of intrinsic energetic resources (Demerouti et al., 2010, p. 210). Because exhausted individuals are faced with a loss of their personal resources, they will try to prevent further resource losses and negative health outcomes (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Hobfoll, 1989). This can result in employee withdrawal attitudes, such as lower levels of work engagement and work motivation (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007), as well as higher turnover intentions (Lapointe et al., 2011). We assume that these withdrawal attitudes which are caused by employees' resource depletion will also negatively affect how they evaluate their careers. Furthermore, because well-being is a highly valued resource (Hobfoll et al., 2018), employees will likely incorporate their well-being in the subjective evaluation of their career success. Therefore, we propose that exhausted employees experience a lower level of subjective career success.

**Hypothesis 6:** Exhaustion is negatively related to subjective career success.

Taken together, we propose two competing mechanisms that link integration preference and home-to-work transitions to subjective career success: one career-enhancing and one career-impairing path. On the positive side, we argue that integration preference is positively related to home-to-work transitions which, in turn, should improve subjective career success through their positive effect on work goal attainment. On the negative side, these transitions should simultaneously reduce subjective career success by increasing employees' level of exhaustion. Furthermore, we hypothesize that perceived

supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration moderates the indirect effects linking integration preference and subjective career success.

**Hypothesis 7:** Perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration moderates the indirect effect of integration preference on subjective career success through home-to-work transitions and work goal attainment, such that the indirect effect is weaker when perceived supervisor expectation for integration is high (vs. low).

**Hypothesis 8:** Perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration moderates the indirect effect of integration preference on subjective career success through home-to-work transitions and exhaustion, such that the indirect effect is weaker when perceived supervisor expectation for integration is high (vs. low).

## Method

### Procedure

To test our research model, we conducted a three-wave online survey with a time lag of four weeks between each measurement point, using the online panel Prolific for sample recruitment. Collecting our data via Prolific enabled us to test our research model in a sample of employees working in different industries and occupations, because online panels provide an optimal access to high-quality data from demographically diverse samples (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Peer et al., 2017).

To screen the Prolific panel for suitable participants, we determined several criteria for study participation. Participants had to be between 18 and 65 years old, to live in the UK, to speak English fluently, and to work at least 21 hours per week. Moreover, we required them to have a minimum amount of spatial and temporal flexibility in their jobs. Therefore, we included only participants who indicated that in their current job, they generally had the possibility to answer work-related emails from home, and to work in their free time (e.g., on weekends).

At T1, we measured integration preference and perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work–home integration. Moreover, participants indicated the work goals they currently pursued. At T2, we assessed home-to-work transitions, work goal



attainment, and exhaustion. Finally, we measured subjective career success at T3. Participants received £2 for each questionnaire, and a bonus of £3 if they completed all three questionnaires. To ensure high data quality, we included an instructed response item in each of the three surveys asking participants to choose a predefined answer from a five-point Likert scale (see Cheung et al., 2017; Peer et al., 2017). If participants did not choose the predefined answer, we concluded that they did not read the items carefully and excluded them from our analyses.

## Sample

In total, 454 participants met the requirements for study participation and filled in the first survey. At T2, we contacted only those participants who had passed our attention check in the first survey ( $N = 435$ ). Of these, 417 participants filled in the second survey completely. At T3, we contacted only those participants who had passed our attention check in the second survey ( $N = 398$ ). Of these, 389 participants filled in the third survey completely. Finally, we excluded another 18 participants who did not pass our attention check in the third survey. Thus, our analysis sample comprises  $N = 371$  participants who filled in all three surveys attentively, which corresponds to 81.7% of those who had filled in the first survey.

The participants in our analysis sample were, on average, 34.94 years old ( $SD = 9.62$ ) and 59.1% of them were female. They worked in various industries (e.g., education, IT) and occupations (e.g., teacher, project manager) with an average organizational tenure of 5.95 years ( $SD = 5.94$ ). The participants worked on average 36.44 hours per week ( $SD = 5.74$ ), and most of them (85.4%) were employed full-time. The majority of participants were in a romantic relationship (73.5%) and 46.6% of them had at least one child.

## Measures

**Integration preference.** Integration preference was measured at T1 with the four-item scale by Kreiner (2006). The items used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), and a sample item is “I don’t like to have to think about work while I’m at home”. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016), we recoded the scale so that higher values indicated a preference for work–home integration (rather than segmentation). Cronbach’s Alpha was .87.

***Perceived supervisor expectation.*** We adapted the scale by Matthews et al. (2010) to measure perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees' work-home integration at T1. A sample item is "My supervisor expects me to go into work on the weekend to meet work responsibilities", and the items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Cronbach's Alpha was .88.

***Home-to-work transitions.*** We measured home-to-work transitions at T2 using the five-item scale by Matthews et al. (2010). A sample item is "In the past four weeks, how often have you answered work related e-mails while at home?". Participants indicated the frequency on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*). Cronbach's Alpha was .83.

***Work goal attainment.*** To assess work goal attainment, we followed the procedure described by Judge et al. (2005). At T1, participants indicated up to five work goals they currently pursued. On average, participants indicated 2.85 goals ( $SD = 1.30$ ). The work goals listed by the participants focused on, for instance, concrete tasks or projects the participants were working on (e.g., "Create presentation and workshop for HR meeting"), building up competencies or skills (e.g., "Continue to develop skills and knowledge of Wordpress"), proceeding in their careers (e.g., "To be promoted in my next review in June"), or improving their working conditions (e.g., "Cutting down unpaid overtime"). At T2, participants answered two items developed by Judge et al. (2005) to measure goal attainment for every work goal they had indicated (e.g., "I have made considerable progress toward attaining this goal"). The items used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), and responses were averaged across goals per participant. Cronbach's Alpha was .91.

***Exhaustion.*** We used the respective eight-item subscale of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003) to measure exhaustion at T2 (e.g., "There are days when I feel tired before I arrive at work"). The items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's Alpha was .84.

***Subjective career success.*** To assess subjective career success, we used the 24-item scale by Shockley et al. (2016). It measures eight dimensions of career success (i.e., recognition, quality work, meaningful work, influence, authenticity, personal life, growth and development, and satisfaction) with three items each, and we calculated the mean

across all items to obtain a score for subjective career success. A sample item is “Considering my career as a whole, I am proud of the quality of the work I have produced”, and the items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach’s Alpha was .93.

### **Control Variables**

We considered several potentially relevant control variables that might affect the relationships under study: gender (0 = female, 1 = male), age in years, and work and home demands. First, although there is mixed evidence about gender differences in career satisfaction, previous research has shown that gender affects indicators of career success, such as salary and numbers of promotions (Ng et al., 2005). Moreover, previous studies have reported negative correlations between female gender and permeability of the home boundary (e.g., Methot & LePine, 2016), and positive effects of female gender on exhaustion (Purvanova & Muros, 2010). Second, with increasing age, employees usually have established a higher level of career success (Ng & Feldman, 2014), thus they might be less willing to invest their personal resources in work-related matters. Finally, individuals who face a high level of home and work demands presumably experience a higher level of exhaustion. At the same time, it is conceivable that individuals with high work demands engage more frequently in home-to-work transitions to handle their workload, while individuals with a high level of home demands might refrain from investing their personal resource in work-related matters. We measured work demands with the quantitative workload scale (Spector & Jex, 1998), which uses five items (e.g., “How often does your job require you to work very hard?”). The items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*) and Cronbach’s Alpha was .92. We assessed home demands with a three-item scale by Peeters et al. (2005). A sample item is “How often do you find that you are busy at home?”. The items were answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*) and Cronbach’s Alpha was .89.

### **Construct Validity**

Using the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses to ensure discriminant validity of our constructs. At T1, we included integration preference and perceived supervisor expectation. The analysis showed that all items loaded significantly on their respective factor, and that the two-factors solution ( $\chi^2_{(df=26)} = 67.41$ ,

$p < .001$ , CFI = .98, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .03) fitted significantly better than a one-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(\Delta df = 1)} = 896.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ). At T2, we included home-to-work transitions, work goal attainment, and exhaustion. The results revealed that all items loaded significantly on their factor, and that the three-factor solution ( $\chi^2_{(df = 87)} = 301.04$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .90, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .07) had a significantly better fit compared to the one-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(\Delta df = 3)} = 1327.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the best-fitting two-factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2_{(\Delta df = 2)} = 484.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Results

Table 7.1 displays descriptive statistics and correlations for our study variables and control variables. To test our research model, we conducted a path analysis with the R package lavaan (Rosseel, 2012). Following the recommendations by Hu and Bentler (1999), we relied on several measures to assess model fit (i.e., chi-square, CFI, RMSEA, and SRMR). To test whether the moderation of the indirect effects was significant, we calculated the index of moderated mediation and bootstrapped confidence intervals for this index as described by Hayes (2015). Furthermore, we computed bootstrapped confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effects (see Preacher & Hayes, 2004). For bootstrapping, we used 10'000 bootstrap samples. To check whether the control variables affected our study results, we ran all analyses once with and once without control variables. Comparison of the analyses yielded identical results for all hypothesis tests. Following Bernerth and Aguinis (2016), we therefore report the results of the analysis without control variables to maximize statistical power and interpretability of the results.

Table 7.2 shows the results of our path analysis. Inspection of the fit indices revealed that overall, the fit of the model was appropriate, although the RMSEA was slightly above the cutoff-value for moderate model fit ( $\chi^2_{(df = 6)} = 22.09$ ,  $p = .001$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .04). As expected, integration preference was positively related to home-to-work transitions ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Supporting Hypothesis 1, employees were more inclined to engage in home-to-work transitions when they preferred to integrate work and home. For testing our moderation hypothesis, we mean-centered integration preference and perceived supervisor expectation before building the interaction term (Dawson, 2014). Following Gardner et al. (2017), we calculated the reliability of this interaction term, which was satisfactory ( $\rho = .77$ ). In line with Hypothesis 2, we found that

**Table 7.1.** Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.41	-	-								
2. Age	34.94	9.62	.06	-							
3. Work demands (T1)	3.66	0.76	-.09	-.02	-						
4. Home demands (T1)	3.68	0.88	-.23	.08	.21	-					
5. Integration preference (T1)	1.96	0.89	.05	.10	-.09	-.05	-				
6. Perceived supervisor expectation (T1)	2.57	1.07	.06	.03	.28	.12	.07	-			
7. Home-to-work transitions (T2)	2.32	0.89	.08	-.00	.27	.14	.26	.53	-		
8. Work goal attainment (T2)	3.76	0.90	-.04	.07	.03	-.05	.05	.07	.13	-	
9. Exhaustion (T2)	3.09	0.72	-.14	-.07	.32	.18	-.23	.24	.13	-.22	-
10. Subjective career success (T3)	3.84	0.59	-.07	.06	-.03	.01	.17	-.15	.01	.25	-.44

*Note.* N = 371. T1, T2, and T3 refer to the three measurement time points. Correlations  $r > |.10|$  are significant at  $p < .05$ , correlations  $r > |.13|$  are significant at  $p < .01$ , and correlations  $r > |.17|$  are significant at  $p < .001$ , using two-tailed tests.

<sup>a</sup>0 = female, 1 = male.

**Table 7.2.** Path analysis results

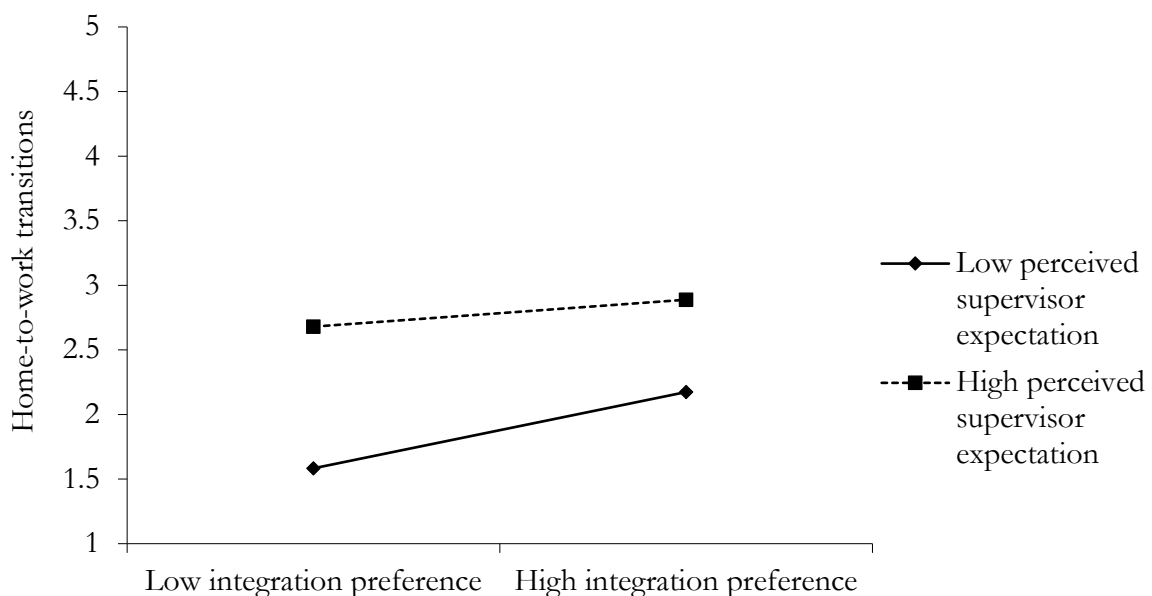
	Home-to-work transitions			Work goal attainment			Exhaustion			Subjective career success		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Predictors												
Integration preference	0.23	0.04	<.001	0.02	0.05	.714	-0.23	0.04	<.001	0.04	0.03	.187
Perceived supervisor expectation	0.42	0.04	<.001									
Integration preference × Perceived supervisor expectation	-0.10	0.04	.007									
Home-to-work transitions				0.12	0.05	.022	0.17	0.04	<.001	0.02	0.03	.626
Work goal attainment										0.10	0.03	.001
Exhaustion										-0.32	0.04	<.001
Variance explained			$R^2 = .34$			$R^2 = .02$			$R^2 = .10$			$R^2 = .23$

*Note.* Integration preference and perceived supervisor expectation are mean-centered. Values displayed are unstandardized coefficients. *P*-values are based on two-tailed tests.

\*0 = female, 1 = male.

the relationship between integration preference and home-to-work transitions was moderated by perceived supervisor expectation ( $b = -0.10, p = .007$ ).

As displayed in Figure 7.2, the positive effect of integration preference on home-to-work transitions was more pronounced when perceived supervisor expectation was low rather than high. To further investigate the moderation effect, we conducted simple slopes analyses with the R package *pequod* (Mirisola & Seta, 2016). The results illustrate that perceived supervisor expectation reduced the effect of integration preference on home-to-work transitions, albeit the simple slope was significant and positive for both low perceived supervisor expectation (i.e., 1 *SD* below the mean;  $b = 0.33, SE = 0.06, p < .001$ ) and high perceived supervisor expectation (i.e., 1 *SD* above the mean;  $b = 0.12, SE = 0.06, p = .041$ ). According to Gardner et al. (2017), this moderation can be classified as a substituting effect in which perceived supervisor expectation acts as a substitute for integration preference, because both the predictor (i.e., integration preference) and the moderator (i.e., perceived supervisor expectation) have a positive effect on the criterion, and the relationship between the predictor and the criterion is weakened as the moderator increases.



**Figure 7.2.** Moderating effect of perceived supervisor expectation for employee work–home integration on the relationship between integration preference and home-to-work transitions.

In line with Hypothesis 3 and 4, home-to-work transitions were positively related to both work goal attainment ( $b = 0.12, p = .022$ ) and exhaustion ( $b = 0.17, p < .001$ ). In

other words, home-to-work transitions enhanced employees' work goal attainment and increased their exhaustion. We further found that work goal attainment was positively related to subjective career success ( $b = 0.10, p = .001$ ), while exhaustion was negatively related to subjective career success ( $b = -0.32, p < .001$ ). Thus, employees rated their career success more favorably when they were more successful in attaining their work goals and when they experienced a lower level of exhaustion, respectively. These results supported Hypotheses 5 and 6.

Table 7.3 shows the conditional indirect effects of integration preference on subjective career success through home-to-work transitions and work goal attainment, and through home-to-work transitions and exhaustion, respectively. Regarding the indirect effect through work goal attainment, the index of moderated mediation was significant (estimate = -0.0012, 95% CI [-0.0041, -0.0002]), which means that this indirect effect was moderated by perceived supervisor expectation. As can be seen in Table 7.3, the indirect effect decreased in size with increasing supervisor expectation, although it was positive and significant for all levels of perceived supervisor expectation (estimate = 0.0041, 95% CI [0.0008, 0.0105], estimate = 0.0028, 95% CI [0.0005, 0.0072], and estimate = 0.0014, 95% CI [0.0001, 0.0053], respectively). This pattern of results provided support for Hypothesis 7.

**Table 7.3.** Conditional indirect effects

Indirect effect	Level of moderator	Est.	SE	95% CI
Integration preference → Home-to-work transitions → Work goal attainment → Subjective career success	Low perceived supervisor expectation	0.0041	0.002	[0.0008, 0.0105]
	Medium perceived supervisor expectation	0.0028	0.002	[0.0005, 0.0072]
	High perceived supervisor expectation	0.0014	0.001	[0.0001, 0.0053]
Integration preference → Home-to-work transitions → Exhaustion → Subjective career success	Low perceived supervisor expectation	-0.0181	0.005	[-0.0314, -0.0095]
	Medium perceived supervisor expectation	-0.0122	0.004	[-0.0222, -0.0061]
	High perceived supervisor expectation	-0.0064	0.004	[-0.0162, -0.0003]

*Note.* Levels of the moderator are the mean +/- 1 SD from the mean. Confidence intervals for the indirect effects are based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.



Regarding the indirect effect through exhaustion, the index of moderated mediation was significant (estimate = 0.0055, 95% CI [0.0017, 0.0117]), meaning that this indirect effect was moderated by perceived supervisor expectation as well. As depicted in Table 7.3, the indirect effect decreased in size with increasing supervisor expectation, although it was negative and significant for all levels of perceived supervisor expectation (estimate = -0.0181, 95% CI [-0.0314, -0.0095], estimate = -0.0122, 95% CI [-0.0222, -0.0061], and estimate = -0.0064, 95% CI [-0.0162, -0.0003], respectively). These results provided support for Hypothesis 8.

## Discussion

In this study, we aimed to shed light on the relationship between work–home integration and subjective career success. Our analysis revealed two competing mechanisms linking work–home integration with subjective career success: one career-enhancing path and one career-impairing path. On the positive side, employees who frequently engaged in home-to-work transitions were more successful in attaining their work goals, which enhanced their subjective career success. On the negative side, these employees also experienced a higher level of exhaustion, which resulted in a lower level of subjective career success. These findings indicate that integrating work and home can have positive consequences for subjective career success by enhancing work-goal attainment while it can also bring along undesirable consequences by impairing well-being.

In line with the assumptions of boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000), we further found that individuals who preferred to integrate work and home engaged in home-to-work transitions more frequently. As expected, this effect was moderated by perceived supervisor expectation: When employees perceived that their supervisor expected them to integrate work and home the effect of their own boundary management preference on home-to-work transitions was reduced. In this situation, the supervisor's expectation presumably created a strong situation in which the employee perceived a norm to integrate work and home. As a result, the effect of their own preference on the enactment of work–home integration diminished. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that supervisors can considerably affect employees' boundary management (Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Derks et al., 2015; Koch & Binnewies, 2015).

Finally, we found support for our moderated mediation hypotheses, as the indirect effects of integration preference on subjective career success through both work goal attainment and exhaustion were more pronounced when perceived supervisor expectation was low rather than high. These results indicate that perceived supervisor expectation acts as an important contextual factor shaping the mechanisms that link integration preference and subjective career success.

### **Theoretical Implications**

By generating first evidence about the relationship between boundary management and subjective career success, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the processes involved in subjective career success. Our analysis revealed that work–home integration is linked to subjective career success through two contrasting mechanisms, which demonstrates that boundary management is an important determinant of subjective career success that has not been considered in career research so far. These findings illustrate that integrating research on the work–home interface in the study of careers contributes to gain a more holistic understanding of individual careers in today’s world of work (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014). The insights gained in our study further suggest that taking a resource-based perspective which draws on established theoretical approaches such as conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) or the work–home resources model (ten Brummelhuis & Bakker, 2012) helps to shed light on the processes linking the work–home interface to individual careers.

For boundary theory, our study underscores the importance of distinguishing boundary management preferences from the enactment of a certain boundary management style (Allen et al., 2014). Our analysis showed that integration preference had an effect on integration enactment in the form of home-to-work transitions, and that these transitions were part of the mechanisms linking integration preference with subjective career success. These findings indicate that employees actively manage the boundary between work and home by using a boundary management strategy that is in line with their own preferences (Kossek et al., 2006). Moreover, our findings about the moderating role of perceived supervisor expectation emphasize the importance of including contextual factors in the study of employees’ boundary management (Ashforth et al., 2000; Capitano & Greenhaus, 2018; Piszczek, 2017; Piszczek & Berg, 2014). According to our results, the social context

in which employees are embedded at work can actually have a substantial impact on the enactment of their boundary management preference. Based on these insights, we claim that identifying further contextual variables that may affect the link between integration preference and enactment is crucial for a more thorough understanding of employees' boundary management.

### **Practical Implications**

Our study results also yield useful practical implications. For employees, our findings imply that they should be aware of the possible positive and negative consequences when they integrate home and work by engaging in home-to-work transitions. Although home-to-work transitions may help them to achieve their work-related goals and thus pave the way for a high level of subjective career success, employees should be aware that these transitions can also impair their well-being, which can ultimately undermine their subjective career success. Engaging less frequently in home-to-work transitions and establishing an impermeable boundary around the home domain might be one possibility for employees to prevent adverse effects on their well-being. Employees who still engage in home-to-work transitions because they prefer to integrate work and home might develop individual strategies to buffer the potential downsides of work–home integration. Based on previous research (Sonnentag, 2001; Wepfer et al., 2018), we propose that these strategies could aim at establishing recovery activities that facilitate psychological detachment from work and thereby improve employees' well-being.

The insights gained in our study are also relevant for organizations and managers. Our findings show that the effect of employees' own boundary management preference on their work–home integration diminishes when they perceive that their supervisor expects them to integrate work and home. In this situation, employees presumably perceive a social norm they aim to comply with, regardless of their own preference. In extreme cases, employees who prefer to keep work and home completely separate might engage regularly in home-to-work transitions because they feel pressured to do so. Although encouraging employees to engage in home-to-work transitions likely results in a higher level of work goal attainment, our study also demonstrates harmful effects on employees' well-being. These insights imply that organizations and particularly supervisors, who have a considerable influence on employees' behavior, should refrain from communicating a

high expectation regarding work–home integration. Supervisors should also be aware that social norms emerge not only when they are stated explicitly, but also when they are communicated implicitly (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Therefore, supervisors should act as work–home friendly role models for their employees and set a good example for a reasonable extent of work–home integration (Koch & Binnewies, 2015). For instance, supervisors could establish a routine for contacting their employees with emails or other means of communication only during work hours. In the long run, this will help employees to stay healthy and productive.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our study has three main limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, although we used three measurement points that were separated by four weeks each, we cannot rule out that some of our estimates are biased due to common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To further reduce common method bias, we encourage researchers to include additional data sources (e.g., the focal employee’s supervisor or romantic partner), and to assess all variables involved in the indirect effects at different measurement points in future studies.

Second, our study design does not allow us to draw inferences about the causal direction of the identified effects. Therefore, we cannot rule out reversed causality or reciprocal effects between the study variables. For instance, it is conceivable that employees who are satisfied with their career success have more personal resources available and, as a consequence, experience a better well-being (Leung et al., 2011). The causal relationships that are implied in our research model could be better tested with the use of longitudinal or experimental study designs. In future studies, researchers could use longitudinal designs that, optimally, span multiple years in employees’ careers. This would allow for an investigation of changes in subjective career success over time, which can help us to understand the causal relationships proposed in our study model (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010; Selig & Preacher, 2009).

Finally, our study addressed the effect of perceived supervisor expectation regarding employees’ work–home integration on the enactment of employees’ boundary management preference. While this approach allowed us to investigate how perceived social norms affect individual behavior (Cialdini & Trost, 1998), we do not know whether

the employee's perception corresponds to the supervisor's actual expectation. Future research could explore how employees' perception of supervisor expectations emerges and, in doing so, distinguish between injunctive and descriptive norms. Injunctive norms describe which behavior "is typically approved/ disapproved" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 597), thus shaping an individual's perception of which behavior is deemed adequate by others in a given situation. In contrast, descriptive norms describe "what is typically done" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 597), thus affecting an individual's perception of which behavior is usually shown by others in a given situation. Supervisors presumably shape both injunctive and descriptive norms by signaling their expectation regarding employees' work–home integration and by acting as a role model for how to manage the boundary between work and home. Investigating the formation of both injunctive and descriptive norms would generate relevant insights into the question how supervisors shape employees' perception of which boundary management style is expected from them.

### Conclusion

Our study highlights the relevance of employees' boundary management for their careers. According to our results, work–home integration can have both positive and negative consequences for subjective career success through an improved work goal attainment and decreased well-being. Furthermore, we found that perceived supervisor expectation about employee work–home integration acted as a contextual moderator of these processes, such that the effects were less pronounced when perceived supervisor expectation was high rather than low. We hope that our study initiates more research linking careers with the work–home interface to gain a better understanding of the interrelations between individuals' boundary management and their careers.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### Personal Data

Date of birth	March 21, 1989
Place of birth	Bad Urach, Germany
Nationality	German
Degree	Master of Science in Psychology

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### Academic Positions

Since 03/2015:	<b>ETH Zurich</b> , Switzerland Doctoral researcher in Work and Organizational Psychology
08/2012–02/2015:	<b>FHNW</b> , Switzerland Research assistant at the School of Applied Psychology
03/2011–07/2012:	<b>University of Konstanz</b> , Germany Research assistant at the Career Service Center

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### Education

Since 03/2015	<b>ETH Zurich</b> , Switzerland PhD in Science
10/2011–09/2014	<b>University of Konstanz</b> , Germany Master of Science in Psychology
10/2008–08/2011	<b>University of Konstanz</b> , Germany Bachelor of Science in Psychology

**Research Focus**

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Career mobility

Career goal attainment and success

Flexible work, work–home interface, and boundary management

Self-regulation in couples

**Research output**

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**Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles**

Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2018). When do employees cross boundaries?

Individual and contextual determinants of career mobility. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 27*(5), 657–668.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1488686>

**Work in Progress**

Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (Revise and resubmit, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*).

How romantic relationships affect individual career goal attainment: A transactive goal dynamics perspective.

Kornblum, A., Unger, D., Grote, G., & Hirschi, A. (Ready to submit). Boundaries for success? How work–home integration and perceived supervisor expectation affect individuals' careers.

**Organized Conference Symposia**

Kornblum, A. (2020, February). Coping with the turbulent times: Using resources to gain career success instead of work–life stress. Symposium organized for the 1<sup>st</sup> conference of the Career Division of the Academy of Management (AOM) in Vienna, Austria.

Kornblum, A. (2019, May). Crossing borders: Investigating the links between nonwork factors and individual careers. Symposium organized for the 19<sup>th</sup> congress of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) in Turin, Italy.



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### Conference Presentations as First Author

- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., Grote, G. & Hirschi, A. (2020, April). Linking boundary management and career success: The role of work goals and exhaustion. Manuscript accepted for presentation at the 35<sup>th</sup> conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) in Austin, USA.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., Grote, G. & Hirschi, A. (2020, February). Boundary management and careers: Does the integration of work and private life affect subjective career success? Paper presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> conference of the Career Division of the Academy of Management (AOM) in Vienna, Austria.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2019, September). Can my partner facilitate my career? The influence of romantic relationships on shared career goals, resources and career goal attainment. Paper presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> conference of the section Work, Organizational, and Business Psychology of the German Psychological Society in Braunschweig, Germany.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., Hirschi, A., & Grote, G. (2019, September). Boundaries for success? How managing the work-home interface affects individuals' careers. Poster presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> congress of the Swiss Psychological Society (SGP) in Bern, Switzerland.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2019, May). Career goal attainment in close relationships: How significant others facilitate politicians' election success. Paper presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> congress of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) in Turin, Italy.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2018, September). Politicians' election success: The role of shared career goals and resources in close relationships. Paper presented at the 51<sup>st</sup> conference of the German Psychological Society (DGPs) in Frankfurt, Germany.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2018, August). Close relationships and career goals: How significant others facilitate career goal attainment. Paper presented at the 78<sup>th</sup> congress of the Academy of Management (AOM) in Chicago, USA.

- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2017, September). When employees don't want to set a boundary: The relationship between integration of work and private life and promotability. Poster presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> conference of the section Work, Organizational, and Business Psychology of the German Psychological Society in Dresden, Germany.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2017, May). The influence of boundary management on home-to-work conflict and promotability. Paper presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> congress of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP) in Dublin, Ireland.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2016, September). Career transitions in context: Which effect do individual characteristics and the labor market situation have? Paper presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> conference of the German Psychological Society (DGPs) in Leipzig, Germany.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2016, August). Predicting career transitions: Effects of the labor market situation and individual determinants. Paper presented at the 76<sup>th</sup> congress of the Academy of Management (AOM) in Anaheim, USA.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Grote, G. (2016, July). Does context matter? The impact of individual characteristics and labor market changes on career mobility. Paper presented at the 32<sup>nd</sup> congress of the European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) in Naples, Italy.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Kessler, C. (2016, April). The crossover of job insecurity in dual-earner couples. Paper presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> conference of the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology (EAOHP) in Athens, Greece.
- Kornblum, A., Unger, D., & Kessler, C. (2015, September). The crossover of job insecurity in dual-earner couples. Paper presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> conference of the Section Work, Organizational, and Business Psychology of the German Psychological Society in Mainz, Germany.
- Kornblum, A., Pässler, K., & Hell, B. (2014, September). Development and validation of study-specific competence tests for the Swiss self-assessment psychology. Paper

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presented at the 49<sup>th</sup> conference of the German Psychological Society (DGPs) in Bochum, Germany.

### **Academic teaching**

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#### **Teaching Experience**

- M.Sc.          Human Resource Management (ETH Zurich)  
                  Work Design and Organizational Change (ETH Zurich)
- B.Sc.          SPSS-Exercise on scale development (FHNW)  
                  Tutorials on research methods and statistics (University of Konstanz)

#### **Thesis Supervision**

Supervision of several theses (M.Sc. and MAS) at the ETH Zurich and at the University of Zurich, most of them in applied contexts within companies in Switzerland.

Selected topics:

- Managing the boundary between work and private life
- Work-life balance and psychological health
- Career development and career success
- Performance in flexible work settings
- Leadership in virtual teams
- Drivers of employee fluctuation and voluntary turnover
- The effects of agile work practices on team collaboration

#### **Memberships**

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- Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP)
- Academy of Management (AOM)
- European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology (EAWOP)
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie (DGPs)
- European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS)

**Grants**

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- 2019 Funding for research project “Welche Auswirkungen hat der Umgang mit der Grenze zwischen Arbeit und Privatleben auf die Karriere von Mitarbeitenden? Eine Untersuchung von möglichen Wirkmechanismen” [How does the integration of work and private life affect employees’ careers? An examination of underlying mechanisms], received from the “Stiftung Suzanne und Hans Biäsch zur Förderung der Angewandten Psychologie” (CHF 6'806.–)
- 2018 Travel grant for congress participation received from the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHF 1'000.–)
- 2016 Travel grant for congress participation received from the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHF 1'000.–)

**Reviewing Activities**

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Human Resource Management Journal

Personnel Review

PLOS ONE

Ergonomics

International Journal of Workplace Health Management

Annual meeting of the Academy of Management (Divisions: Career and OB)