

## University of Groningen

### Career roles

de Jong, Nicole

DOI:  
[10.33612/diss.101440931](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.101440931)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
de Jong, N. (2019). *Career roles: their Measurements, Determinants and Consequences*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.  
<https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.101440931>

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

# 1

## **General Introduction**

For many people work and career are a major part of their everyday life. Work can provide income, fulfilment and a sense of purpose. As such, careers can become a part of who we are, providing a source for identity, status and social connections (Baruch, 2004, 2006). In the past, careers have often been portrayed as a ladder. Starting at the bottom with a relatively low-level job, people took years to climb up the hierarchical steps, getting a better position with every step upwards. Moreover, careers usually remained within one single company (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Super, 1957). In these past times, perceptions of one's position in life was primarily based on the number of promotions, the increases in salary and the associated societal status (Baruch, 2004, 2006). This traditional perspective on careers is underlined by early career definitions such as: 'The moving perspective in which persons orient themselves with reference to the social order, and of the typical sequences and concatenation of office' (Hughes, 1937). Careers were, in other terms, predictable, stable and fairly straightforward. Nowadays, such careers are no longer the norm and difficult to come by. Instead, it seems the work landscape has become less predictable (Savickas et al., 2009), and in want of a more individualized and dynamic approach.

In current time, careers can be perceived as a developmental process of the employee along 'a path of experiences and jobs in one or more organizations' (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992). Other scholars have, in a similar vein, defined a career as 'the sequence of individually perceived work-related experiences and attitudes that occur over the span of a person's work life' (Hall, 1987, p1). As such, it has been argued that careers can be described as 'protean' and 'boundaryless' (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006) which underscores the dynamic character of contemporary careers. In contrast to staying within one company, in one track (usually upwards), employees cross various (physical and psychological) boundaries and occupy different jobs and work roles in various organizations over time (Bravo, Seibert, Kraimer, Wayne, & Liden, 2017). Consequently, new career routes are likely to be less fixed and less clear, and people have ample options for moving within and across organizations. Thus, instead of as a ladder, careers can nowadays best be visualized as a jungle gym (Sandberg, 2013).

Even though careers are considered to be 'protean' and 'boundaryless' nowadays, they are not less important than in the past. A persons' career history contains essential meaning for the individual as well as for the environment. For many individuals, their career is a large part of the meaning of their life's journey, and hence of their identity (Inkson, 2007). Hoekstra (2011) argues that the formation of one's career identity over the years is a self-regulative process. He contends that a persons' career is a continually updated and revised "work in progress" in which the person him/herself as well as the (organizational) context are important operators. To understand how careers evolve over time, Hoekstra (2006, 2011) developed the career role concept.

## Capturing Career Development: Career Roles

In light of this new career perspective (in which the career is more a jungle gym instead of a ladder), the notion emerged that jobs themselves can no longer be captured into a clear defined bundle of tasks (Hoekstra, 2011). Especially higher level jobs have increasingly room for change as a result of job crafting behaviors and own initiative (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Consequently, employees are provided with an opportunity to make adaptations at work, customizing their jobs respectively (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Parker, 2000). These adjustments can gradually shape, strengthen, and change tasks, responsibilities and roles that employees fulfill at work (Hoekstra, 2011). It is through these development processes that career identity formation and strengthening can take place (Ashforth, 2001; Crant, 2000; Hall & Moss, 1998; Hoekstra, 2011).

As an example we will look at two different university professors (professor A and professor B). These two professors are likely to behave differently in their jobs although the initial job descriptions may in fact have been very similar at the start of their tenure. Emphasizing different aspects of the job and working in a different manner to achieve targets, such as writing and publishing articles, both professors are likely to show different work behaviors. For example, while professor A may highly enjoy student contact, therefore actively seeking out opportunities to allow for more student involvement in research opportunities, professor B may value uninterrupted research time, thus keeping (unnecessary) student contact to a minimum. Both strategies may work equally well when publication output is compared, however, tasks and responsibilities are likely to differ for both professors. Including more people in the research process, professor A is likely to adopt a social and managing role in order to keep an overview of all the collaborations and the output. In contrast, professor B works highly independent throughout the entire process and is more likely to take on the role of the autonomous expert. Consequently, although the work output is similar, the work roles ('a set of activities that are generally carried out by an individual or group with some organizationally relevant responsibility'; Huckvale & Ould, 1995, p. 338) that both professors enact and develop will differ. Needless to say, this is a fictitious and simplified portrayal of the tasks, processes and roles a professor at the university can encounter. Nonetheless I hope this example gives an impression how, due to individual choices and adaptations, job enactment can differ between employees with a similar job description.

Notably, depending on the career stage employees are in, different processes can influence career identity formation. Specifically, career development can be seen as a gradual, interactive process that is the result of two forces: *role pressure and granting* on the one hand, and *role taking* on the other (De Jong et al., 2014; Hoekstra, 2011; Wille et al., 2012). Role pressure or role granting describes the process in which employees are selected into certain roles as a result of external demands, expectations, or

wishes (the environment influences the individual). Role taking describes the process in which employees select fitting roles based on personal preferences, personality and competencies (the individual influences the environment). In the early stages of peoples' career external *role pressure* processes will probably be leading, which results in role learning (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Miller, Johnson, Hart, & Peterson, 1988). Later on, as people start to recognize what roles are fitting and important to them, *role taking* processes may become more important. Moreover, because of the dynamic between self-regulation (e.g., role taking) and external pressures (role pressure) roles will become a hybrid private-public construct (Hoekstra, 2011). Going back to our example this means that although both professors may indeed have their own personal preferences, their boss or the university could have specific wishes or demands that may influence the extent to which both employees are able to enact in and develop their preferred role repertoire. For example, if the university highly encourages student involvement, professor B - whose first instinct is to work alone on research projects – might need to enact and develop more social and management skills as this is requested by the organization. Taken together this means that although employees nowadays often have the freedom to negotiate and proactively shape their jobs and subsequently careers, the roles they develop are still subject to social validation from the environment. Therefore, although employees may opt for certain roles, and although nowadays employees can have a large amount of influence on which roles they take on, these roles also need to be recognized and granted by external parties such as one's supervisor, colleagues or the organization.

In order to discuss the concept of roles in the career domain the Career Roles Model has been proposed as a content taxonomy for career development (Hoekstra, 2011). Career roles describe the content of career positions rather than job titles, making them easily recognizable and independent of jobs and levels of functioning. Specifically, a career role is seen as 'a coherent and enduring set of characteristics of the perceived effects of the way a person is doing his or her work' (Hoekstra, 2011 p. 164). The selection and choice of roles that people acquire in their work is guided by individual motives that drive people in their work and organizational themes that guide organizations to adapt and survive (Hogan, 2007; March, 1999). In the Career Roles Model three main individual motives can be distinguished; distinction (e.g., autonomy and agency), integration (e.g., connectedness and belonging) and structure (e.g., collective meaning and cohesion, Ford, 1992; Hogan, 1983). These motives are thought to underlie employees' career commitments: meanings of positions, long-term goals, or values to be attained in the work context. The model also posits two organizational motives; exploitation (e.g., processes focusing on stability) and exploration (e.g., processes aimed at innovation and change, March, 1999). These two motives focus on continuity and change capacity and determine the adaptability of the organization in its environment. Combining both individual and organizational motives, the Career Roles Model distinguishes between six

classes of career roles that are the result of the combination of the three main individual motives and the two organizational motives acting as environmental pressures for the person (see Table 1). Each career role is described by a broad label that is intended to be easily recognizable. The Maker role is focused on direct and tangible results, attaining goals and making things happen. In the Expert role, one focuses on questions and problems rather than on the direct results. Developing new insights and coming up with solutions are important in this role. The Presenter role is focused on influencing others using form, style, and impression management. In the Guide role, helping and guiding others is important. The focus is on relationships and the connection with others. The Director role focuses on the use of means and resources of the current collective to the best possible use in the long run. It focuses on attaining long term goals and realizing strategies. In the Inspirer role, one explores the possibilities for change and innovation and focuses on ideals, values and principles to be upheld in the collective (Hoekstra, 2011). While some employees prefer to broaden or adapt their scope of career roles over time, others prefer their role repertoire to remain stable and unchanged (Parker, 2007; Roberts, 2006). As such, people can differ strongly in the amount and type of roles they wish to develop and enact in at work. For the professors from our example this could mean that, working at various universities, over the course of their career professor A probably has found opportunities to enact in and further develop the Guide and Inspirer role. On the other hand, professor B can probably look back on a career where the Expert role has been highly developed.

**Table 1** The Career Roles Model: Six Career Roles

Dominant Personal Motives	Organizational Performance Domains	
	Exploitation Production, Results	Exploration Innovation, Change
<b>Distinction motives</b> Autonomy / Agency Self – assertion	Maker	Expert
<b>Integration motives</b> Connectedness, Belonging, Cooperation, Sharing	Presenter	Guide
<b>Structure motives</b> Collective meaning, Cohesion, Institutional structure	Director	Inspirer

*Note.* Adapted from “A career roles model of career development” by H. A. Hoekstra, 2011, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(2), 159-735. Copyright 2011 by Elsevier.

## Individual Differences and Career Roles

As a result of a more individualized career approach, individual differences such as person’s values, goals and personality characteristics have become important determinants of current career development (Hall, 2004; Savickas, 2013; Wille, Beyers, & De Fruyt, 2012).

Highlighting personal agency, scholars in the vocational psychology domain have repeatedly investigated a broad range of individual differences connected to work behavior and career development and success. Researchers have for instance focused on proactive work behaviors (Bindl & Parker, 2010), job crafting behaviors (Tims & Bakker, 2010), vocational interest (Holland, 1997) and personality traits (Wille et al., 2012) as determinants of work outcomes. Specifically, Holland (1997) proposed that 'people's vocational interests flow from their life history and personality'(p.8). Holland defined six personality types based on personal preferences and objections that can influence the type of work environment -including tasks, activities and roles – that employees seek out. These six types are Realistic (R), Investigative (I), Artistic (A), Social (S), Enterprising (E), and Conventional (C), together known as the RIASEC types. Individuals will select those work environments that are fitting based on their personality characteristics (Roberts, 2007). Moreover, research seems to indicate that individuals not only seek out certain environments, but also selectively strengthen and deepen those work and environment characteristics that match well with their preferences (Wille & De Fruyt, 2014). Similarly, specific personality characteristics also seem to influence development in certain career roles over time (Wille et al., 2012). This provides the opportunity to predict what type of work environments and career roles employees are likely to engage in based on personality trait scores.

Importantly, how people view their job in terms of tasks and roles may influence their job satisfaction and performance (Parker, 2007; Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). For example, compared to employees who hold a restrictive view about their job, results have shown that a flexible orientation enhances job performance, career potential and career success (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Morrison, 1994; Parker, Wall, & Jackson, 1997). Moreover, experience in a variety and diversity of jobs/functions and roles has been associated positively with promotion, salary level, and overall positive affect (Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994). Thus, in general, it seems that there are benefits to 'thinking outside of the box' and broadening one's role repertoire has certain advantages for one's career development.

Because careers have changed so much, the nature of career success must also be redefined (Baruch, 2004). Additional to success in terms of the number of promotions and salary, personal preferences such as personal development, satisfaction, work-life balance, freedom or autonomy are to be included as possible measures for success. As careers change, we need to understand a) who is in charge of careers and b) what is needed for successful long-term career development.

## **Career Development and Employability**

It seems an ongoing negotiation between society, organizations and individuals has unfolded concerning who's responsibility careers actually are. Stemming from the 1950's employability focused mainly on achieving full employment as a social goal (Feintuch, 1955). During times of economic prosperity, governments tried to stimulate participation in the labor market for all social groups (Forrier & Sels, 2005). This is reflected

in early career development theories as well. For example, Super (1957) perceived career development as 'a lifelong, continuous process of developing and implementing a self-concept, testing it against reality, with satisfaction to self and benefit to society' (p. 282).

However, as economic conditions changed and employment demands diversified, attention shifted towards the necessity to keep individual workers as employable as possible. Consequently, in the 1980's, the dominant approach became a matter of organizational policy, shifting towards an organizational perspective (Forrier & Sels, 2005). Employability was seen as a proxy for organizational flexibility, to be attained through Human Resource Development. The idea was that highly employable workers would enable companies to cope with internationalization and competition in a constantly changing environment (see Nauta, Van Vianen, Van der Heijden, Van Dam, & Willemsen, 2009). In this sense, employability refers to company flexibility through the skills of their employees: highly skilled employees enable organizations to meet the changing demands of the environment (Van Dam, 2004).

Changing perspective again, during the last three decades the focus has shifted towards the individual employee (Dirkx, Gilley, & Gilley, 2004; Ellinger, 2004). Career development for individual workers was focused on 'the alignment of individual subjective career aspects and the more objective career aspects of the organization in order to achieve the best fit between individual and organizational needs as well as personal characteristics and career roles' (Boudreoux, 2001, p. 805). Furthermore, individual workers were increasingly held responsible for their own career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Thus, within this individualized career climate, although organizations and individuals can share in the responsibility, ultimately it is considered up to employees themselves to seek opportunities to become versatile, flexible, adaptable (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Briscoe, Hall, & Frautschy Demuth, 2006).

## **Unresolved Questions and the Aims of this Dissertation**

In the above, I have provided a short overview of relevant (yet not exhaustive) research insights in careers, career role development and employability. However, within these domains there are areas where our knowledge is still insufficient. This dissertation aims to enhance our knowledge on career development processes by addressing specific areas which still lack adequate scientific understanding. As such, the main goal of this dissertation is to provide a more advanced understanding of the measurement of career roles, of the process that explains how individuals may come to enact certain career roles, and of the extent to which career role enactment relates to flexibility and employability of individual employees in a landscape where individual agency becomes more and more apparent (Savickas, 2013).



First, focusing on the difference between career role preferences and role enactment, this dissertation will explore the process of role acquisition. Notably, as employees progress in their career the process of selecting tasks and roles ideally is a conscious decision (Crant, 2000; Parker, 2007). Unfortunately, in reality we are not always provided with opportunities to select our own roles. Instead, our decisions are guided by both role taking and role pressure processes. Although over time employees can start to commit to certain roles as a result of self-regulation processes, they are also bound to external demands from the environment (such as expectations from the organization, co-workers, supervisors, etc. etc.). Therefore, it is highly likely that some tension may arise between self-regulatory role taking and external (social) driven role pressure processes (Hoekstra, 2011). Consequently, the roles we may initially prefer may not be the roles that are granted to us in our work environment. As such, differentiating between career role preferences and career role enactment in both meaning and measurements, can enhance our understanding in career development processes. Special emphasis will be given to *how* specific personality traits influence preferences and career role development, as our understanding of the mechanisms behind development processes that underlies career role development is still lacking.

Furthermore, I will investigate how career role enactment influences employability. Because of the shift to individual employability the generic nature of the concept has lost a core part of its meaning. Under the societal and organizational perspectives employability necessarily referred to a certain organization or sector of society. Employability was simply a manner of 'how, and 'where'. Under the individual perspective however the employability construct is so broad that it becomes almost meaningless, in need of direction. Otherwise, employability becomes equivalent to talent or individual potential. Therefore, the current notion of individual employability invites us to further investigate and specify what determines if someone is employable. From a practical standpoint, individual employability may be captured by the specific career roles that employees engage in. Having a clear language will help identify what it means to be employable, which is important for understanding employability and career development in general.

## **Overview of this Dissertation**

In addition to the current introductory chapter, this dissertation consists of three empirical chapters, as well as a final concluding chapter that summarizes the findings and offers general conclusions and discussion points of the present research. All three empirical chapters of my dissertation aim to increase our understanding of peoples' career role development in organizations. I do so by disentangling career role preferences from career role enactment, subsequently zooming in on determinants for career role

enactment and by focusing on potential key consequences of career role enactment. First, adding to the development of practices and instruments that can improve our understanding of career role development, a new measure for career role preference is developed (Chapter 2). Second, the influence that personality characteristics and career role preferences have on peoples' career role enactment is investigated (Chapter 3). Third, the relationship between career role enactment and employability is explored (Chapter 4).

The three empirical chapters in this dissertation are written as research articles. As such, they can be read independent of one another, and as a consequence, theoretical overlap may occur across chapters. Furthermore, all presented research was conducted in collaboration with colleagues, therefore, throughout the remainder of this dissertation I will use 'we' instead of 'I' from this point onwards.

## **Chapter Two**

A reliable scale for measuring the extent to which people engage in the mental act of identifying a particular career role as part of the self was lacking in the literature. One of the challenges in constructing such a scale is to prevent self-serving motives dominating the responses (Robins & John, 1997). Indeed, oftentimes people tend to enhance one or more self-components either for self-protection or self-enhancement (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009). Especially if these aspects are important for one's self-concept, social desirable answering can occur (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011; Paulhus, Harms, Bruce, & Lysy, 2003). The Comparison Awareness Inducing Technique (CAIT) may be an instrument that can reduce the effects of self-presentation tactics. Chapter 2 reports on the development of a measure for career role preference, the Career Role Identification Questionnaire (CRIQ) that is relatively insensitive to self-presentation tactics.

## **Chapter Three**

As mentioned, the concept of a job as a well-defined bundle of tasks has become less applicable. This is especially the case in high level jobs, as they oftentimes have room for making individual adjustments to one's role repertoire at work (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006; Parker, 2000). This has led careers to become more driven by values, preferences and personality characteristics. Although the role of personality characteristics in career role enactment has been studied in the past (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012; Wille et al., 2012), the question as to *how* personality is associated with a certain role repertoire is still unanswered. Chapter 3 therefore explores the relationship between personality and (expected) career role enactment with career role preferences as a potential mediating mechanism.

## Chapter Four

In today's business environment people no longer have the security of life-long employment (Hall & Mirvis, 1995), and a consequence they need to ensure that they remain employable throughout their career (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). We argue that the influence of specific types of career roles (i.e., explorative roles) on employability may depend on the wider social context in which the employee functions. Investigating both supplementary and complementary fit perspectives we formulate competing hypotheses and test the role of closing and opening leadership behaviors in the relationship between employee explorative career role enactment and their employability. In other words, we address whether the relationship between exploration career role enactment and employability is particularly strong in situations where the supervisor *is* (supplementary fit) or *is not* (complementary fit) able to fulfill tasks associated with the focal career roles. Chapter 4 therefore focuses on the influence of career role enactment at work on employability and the role of the supervisor.

## General Discussion

This chapter summarizes the main findings of the empirical chapters. It also reflects on how our research, focusing on the identification and measurement of career roles, their determinants, and their effects on employability, adds to a more elaborate theoretical understanding of career development processes. It provides suggestions for how future research may build upon our findings and it presents a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of our research. Finally, this section provides practical implications of our findings for individuals who want to craft their own careers and for coaches, consultants, and HR-specialists who want to make sure that the wishes and needs of every employee are considered so that they may meet their full potential.



