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### Career roles

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## Career Role Enactment and Perceived Employability

### The Moderating Role of Ambidextrous Leadership\*

It has become increasingly important for individual employees to remain employable over time. One way to do so may be by the enactment of career roles. Career roles may focus on exploration (targeting innovation and change) or on exploitation (targeting production and results). We predict that especially exploration career role enactment at work would be important for employees to be perceived as employable, because employees that enact exploration career roles are more versatile, better equipped to adjust and adapt, and more focused on increased variability of behavior. In addition, we investigate if leader behaviors may weaken or strengthen the relationship between employee career roles enactment and employability. One multi-source field study of supervisor-subordinate dyads [ $N = 297$ ] and one online experimental study of employees [ $N = 467$ ] were conducted. In line with our hypotheses, Study 1 shows that that exploration career role enactment is positively associated with perceived employability. Moreover, leader opening (encouraging) and leader closing (monitoring) behaviors moderated the role between exploration career role enactment and perceived employability: Especially when supervisor behavior complemented (and not supplemented) employee exploration behaviors (e.g., either through exhibiting low leader opening or high leader closing behavior) enactment of exploration career roles was positively related to perceived employability. These results could however not be replicated in Study 2. Nonetheless, results of our field study underline the importance of the interplay between supervisor and subordinate work behaviors in employees' employability. Implications, limitations and research ideas are discussed.

\* Chapter based on: De Jong, N., & Wisse, B. M. (2019). Career role enactment and perceived employability: The moderating role of ambidextrous leadership, manuscript in preparation.

In an increasingly competitive and changing world, employees no longer have the security of life-long employment (Hall & Mirvis, 1995), as organizations are constantly looking for people with an optimal skill set. Employees, therefore, benefit from ensuring that they remain employable throughout their career (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). In fact, it has been argued that an individual's general ability to gain and maintain employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment elsewhere, and (ideally) secure work that is both suitable and fulfilling (in other words -their employability-), is more important than the simple state of being employed (Hillage & Pollard, 1998; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Employable workers are able to cope with the fast changing job requirements of contemporary organizations, and as such they have more control over their career in current as well as potential future organizations (Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Sullivan, 1999; Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002; Thijssen, Van der Heijden, & Rocco, 2008; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). The question of what makes a person employable is therefore highly relevant to employees and organizations in today's society (Fugate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004).

To date, our understanding of how employees' work related behavior can help them to take control over their employability is vastly underdeveloped (De Jong, Wisse, Heesink, & Van der Zee, 2019; Veld, Semeijn, & Van Vuuren, 2016). We argue that employees who show to be open to developing new behaviors by demonstrating a focus on risk taking, innovating and experimenting have a higher ability to cope with changing job requirements (Gupta, Smith, & Salley, 2006; Rosing, Frese, & Bausch, 2011) and may thus be more employable. In the current study, we test the prediction that particularly the enactment of exploration career roles (i.e., the Expert, Guide, and Inspirer roles; Hoekstra, 2011) are vital for one's perceived employability, because these roles show that employees are willing to increase the variability of their behavioral repertoire.

Taking into account the interactionist perspective on employability (Veld, Semeijn, & Van Vuuren, 2015), we also investigate to what extent supervisors can influence the relationship between employee work related behavior and employability. More specifically, we investigate if supervisors' focus on fostering explorative and exploitative behaviors in followers by displaying opening and closing leader behaviors respectively (Rosing et al., 2011) moderates the relationship between employee career role enactment and employability. We build on both supplementary fit theory as well as complementary fit theory (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987), to formulate and test competing hypotheses about the role of leaders' display of closing and opening behaviors in the relationship between employee explorative career role enactment and their employability.

We hope to extend the insights on what it takes for employees to become and remain employable over time. Knowledge about which career roles will increase employability is not only relevant to individual employees, but also to HR practitioners, employment agencies, and organizations that focus on employee training and development. In

addition, we hope to highlight that employability is not only a concern of employees, but also that of the organizational context in which employees are working, because supervisor behavior may co-determine employees' employability.

### **Employability and Career Role Enactment**

Employability is often defined as a worker's ability to get and keep a satisfying job (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Most studies on employability focus on self-perceived employability, or one's own perception regarding "possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment" (Vanhercke, De Cuyper, Peeters, & Witte, 2014, p. 593). However, employability perceptions can of course also exist in others, like supervisors, co-workers or potential new employers. In fact, others' perceptions of employee employability may be just as important as self-perceptions of employability because others often have a determining role in career related decision making (e.g., hiring, firing, task assignment, promotion). So far, both other- and self-perceptions of employability have been considered to be largely influenced by a person's personal attributes such as his or her task specific knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA's; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Fugate et al., 2004). However, such attributes are particularly relevant for carrying out specific pre-defined tasks (Bagshaw, 1996; Lane, Puri, Cleverly, Wylie, & Rajan, 2000). Therefore, although KSA's are undoubtedly relevant for employability, it may be useful to recognize that careers can no longer be meaningfully defined by how employees perform on a fixed bundle of tasks (Parker, 2000). Instead, we employees nowadays are required to master a series of diverse and complex jobs for which they need to adopt various *roles* throughout their careers.

Work roles, or 'a set of activities that are generally carried out by an individual or group with some organizationally relevant responsibility' (Huckvale & Ould, 1995, p. 338) are broader than tasks. Work roles can be seen as a combination of tasks, processes, responsibilities and accomplishments that may change based on needs and opportunities. Compared to tasks, work roles imply a more dynamic and situational use of skills, capabilities and personal approaches. An even more encompassing concept is that of 'career roles'. Career roles are broader than work roles and are independent of jobs and functioning level. Career roles can be defined as 'a coherent and enduring set of characteristics of the perceived effects of the way a person is doing his or her work'. In other words, they are *'those enduring aspects of work roles that the person identifies with and is identified with'* (Hoekstra, 2011, p163-164). Carrying out a role has been referred to as role enactment (De Jong et al., 2019; Hoekstra, 2011). Notably, employees may enact several roles at the same time. In addition, while some employees may enjoy to change roles on a regular bases, others prefer their role repertoire to remain stable and unchanged (Roberts, 2006). We argue that career roles may be particularly important for employability given that career roles are not limited to specific tasks in a specific work context and focus –just like employability does- on the person in the context of work over time.

The Career Roles Model (CRM, see Table 1) differentiates between six career roles. The six career roles (Expert, Guide, Inspirer, Maker, Presenter, and Director) can be divided into two groups, depending on the extent to which they represent specific organizational performance domains: Exploration and exploitation. Levinthal and March (1993) argue that long-term survival and success depend on an organization's ability to balance exploration and exploitation capabilities. Whereas exploration is necessary to ensure continuous development, exploitation is important for consistency and standardization of tasks. The career roles that are tied to the exploration organizational performance domain are Expert, Guide, and Inspirer. The career roles that are tied to the exploitation organizational performance domain are Maker, Presenter and Director.

**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.

For organizations to thrive, it is important that roles that focus on exploration as well as roles that focus on exploitation are performed (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Junni, Sarala, Taras, & Tarba, 2013). Notably, the enactment of exploration and exploitation roles can be viewed as two independent activities that can -but do not need to- coexist within one individual (Jansen, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2006; Katila & Ahuja, 2002). Exploration and exploitation roles differ in several ways. Exploitation roles are fueled by the underlying values of routinization and refinement (Hoekstra, 2011). Moreover, these roles rely heavily on previous experience and existing rules in order to improve pre-learned options (Mom, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007; Rosing & Zacher, 2016). Consequently, employees enacting these roles are primarily executing tasks and implementing knowledge in order to fine-tune, smoothen and standardize organizational processes (Hoekstra, 2011; March, 2001). They do so either by working (mostly) alone in routine tasks (the Maker role), by influencing others based on a preset frame (Presenter role), or by using a strategic standpoint, implementing strategies (Director role). Exploration roles, on the other hand, can be characterized by a focus

on innovation and change (Hoekstra, 2011). Behavior in explorative roles has previously been conceptualized as ‘searching for, discovering, creating, and experimenting with new opportunities’ (Mom et al., 2007, p. 910). Employees who enact these roles try out new things and try to learn from them (Rosing & Zacher, 2016), support the need for organizations to keep up with new strategies and help implement changes (Hoekstra, 2011; March, 2001). Employees in these roles explore new possibilities, either individually when diving into a problem to explore solutions (Expert role), together with others in an open and supportive process (Guide role), or collectively as an inspirer and sense-maker (Inspirer role).

We expect employees who enact more exploration roles to be perceived as more employable. Being able to enact exploration roles makes employees not only more versatile, but also more equipped to adjust and adapt, because enactment of these roles invites increased variability of behavior. Indeed, explorative behavior has been linked to innovativeness (Rosing & Zacher, 2016), knowledge creation and a willingness to change (Tuncdogan, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2015; March, 1991). As such, exploration roles may positively affect employability perceptions as these roles combine flexibility and risk taking strategies that are needed to cope with occupational transitions and the associated engagement in tasks that are usually new, complex and ill defined (Savickas, 2005). Moreover, the enactment of exploration roles (that include risk taking, discovery and innovation) may be highly visible within the organization. For instance, employees focused on change and innovation may be more inclined to invest in networks (Morrison, 2002), and more likely to persuade others to implement new solutions (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Thus, exploration roles may have a positive impact on one’s perceived employability, simply because the enactment of these roles generates attention for an employee’s work-related activities.

In contrast, there seems to be less reason to expect a relationship between the enactment of exploitation roles and perceived employability. Employees who spend their working life in a fairly pre-defined atmosphere, focusing on rules, regulations and strategies may not be seen as particularly likely to be able to adapt to new situations and demands (Karaevli & Hall, 2006). Moreover, the enactment of exploitation roles may be less noticeable (although very important) in an organizational context, because they focus more on the continuation of existing processes (including refinement, production and efficiency, Taylor & Greve, 2006) rather than on the creation of something new. Our first hypothesis therefore solely concerns exploration career role enactment and perceived employability.

*Hypothesis 1: Exploration career role enactment is positively associated with (perceived) employability.*

## The Role of the Supervisor

Becoming and staying employable is increasingly regarded as the responsibility of individual employees (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Dirkx, Gilley, & Gilley, 2004; Fugate et al., 2004; Hall & Mirvis, 1995). However, individual employee behaviors alone are not always enough to enhance employability perceptions (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Stevens, 2005). Instead, it is often the behavior of an employee in a certain organizational context (with its own specific HRM practices, culture, colleagues, and supervisors) that determines how the individual is perceived. In keeping with this interactionist perspective (Veld et al., 2015), the current chapter focuses on the question if supervisor leadership style can moderate the relationship between explorative career role enactment and perceived employability. Ambidextrous leadership seems to be particularly relevant in this context (Rosing et al., 2011; Rosing & Zacher, 2016; Zacher & Rosing, 2015).

Ambidextrous leadership is defined as 'the ability to foster both explorative and exploitative behaviors in followers by increasing or reducing variance in their behavior and flexibly switching between those behaviors' (Rosing et al., 2011 p. 957). On the one hand, opening leadership behaviors increase behavioral variance in subordinates and encourage their exploration behaviors by giving them freedom to develop different approaches to problems and by providing room for independent thinking. Closing behaviors, on the other hand, reduce the variance in subordinate behaviors and stimulate exploitation activities due to the leader's focus on corrective actions, specific guidelines, and monitoring. Truly ambidextrous leaders have the ability to fulfill multiple roles, differentiating between opening (exploration) and closing (exploitation) behaviors dependent upon the situation or the individual (Mom, Fourné, & Jansen, 2015; Rosing et al., 2011; Zacher & Rosing, 2015). The issue we seek to address in the current study is how leader opening and closing behaviors affect the relationship between explorative career role enactment and perceived employability. The available literature offers two perspectives that each lead to different hypotheses. Those perspectives are the ones that focus on similarity (supplementary fit) and the ones that focus on complementarity (complementary fit).

Based on studies working from a supplementary supervisor-subordinate fit perspective (see Ahkanasy & O'Connor, 1997; Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo, & Sutton, 2011), we would argue that when employee exploration career role enactment is *congruent* with leader opening and closing behaviors, the impact of employee exploration career role enactment on perceived employability will be the strongest. By supplementary we mean that a person fits into some context because he or she supplements, embellishes, or possesses characteristics which are comparable to those of other individuals in this environment (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987). As such, employees may be perceived as 'fitting in' because they are similar to other people in the working environment (for example their supervisor) possessing these characteristics. Supervisor-subordinate supplementary fit theory suggests that employees and supervisors react more

positively toward each other when they share similar characteristics, because greater similarity enhances the appreciation and understanding of one another's tendencies and behaviors and therefore increases liking and trust (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Research from this perspective has focused on leader-follower personality similarities (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Xu, Qin, Dust, & DiRenzo, 2019), manager-employee goal congruence (Witt, 1998) and leader-follower value congruence (e.g., Colbert, 2004; Krishnan, 2002; Byza, Dörr, Schuh, & Maier, 2017). These studies show that such similarities indeed have a positive influence on employee work outcomes ranging from promotion likelihood to psychological safety and taking charge behavior (also see Bakar & McCann, 2014; Turban & Jones, 1988; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002; Zheng, Diaz, Tang, & Tang, 2014). As such, one might argue that it is specifically when leaders display closing behaviors (thus stimulating employee exploitation), that the enactment of explorative career roles by the employee will be perceived as non-fitting and negative. Similarly, when leaders are weak in displaying opening behaviors (thus not stimulating any employee behavior per se), the employee that does engage in explorative career roles may be perceived as the odd one out. In both situations, employee explorative career role enactment may not positively predict perceived employability. The greatest fit with employee exploration role enactment would be achieved when the supervisor stimulates exploration (and thus displays opening behaviors) or at least does not stimulate exploitation (by displaying closing behaviors). Based on the supplementary supervisor-subordinate fit perspective we posit the following:

*Hypothesis 2a. Leader opening behavior moderates the relationship between employee exploration role enactment and employee employability, such that this relationship is more positive the more leader opening behaviors followers perceive.*

*Hypothesis 3a. Leader closing behavior moderates the relationship between employee exploration role enactment and employee employability, such that this relationship is more positive the fewer leader closing behaviors followers perceive.*

However, and in contrast, based on complementary fit theory (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987) one might argue that when employee exploration career role enactment *complements* leader opening and closing behaviors, the impact of employee exploration career role enactment on perceived employability will be the strongest. First, it is specifically when leaders display closing behaviors (thus stimulating employee exploitation), that the enactment of explorative career roles by the employee will complement the behaviors of the leader and draw attention. Similarly, when leaders are weak in displaying opening behaviors (thus not stimulating any employee behavior per se), the employee that does engage in explorative career roles will have something to add to the team and stand out. In both situations, it will highlight the valuable input the employee has to offer to (other) organizations, thus increasing perceived employability.



Second, especially when leaders display high opening (stimulating exploration activities) or low closing behaviors (not stimulating any behavior), employees that further engage in explorative career roles can potentially move towards high risk, unfavorable behavior. That is, further stimulation of behavioral variability or failure to focus on rules and regulations could potentially be harmful, as this may leave employees without direction (Gebert, Boerner, & Kearney, 2010). When supervisors display complementary guiding behavior, employees' otherwise potentially 'high-risk' activities (March, 1991) may be redirected towards long-term productivity and adaptability (He & Wong, 2004). As such, based on the complementary fit theory perspective, we offer the following competing set of hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 2b. Leader opening behavior moderates the relationship between employee exploration role enactment and employee employability, such that this relationship is more positive the fewer leader opening behaviors followers perceive.*

*Hypothesis 3b. Leader closing behavior moderates the relationship between employee exploration role enactment and employee employability, such that this relationship is more positive the more leader closing behaviors followers perceive.*

## **The Current Study**

To test our hypotheses we conducted two studies. Study 1 was a multi-source field study of supervisor-subordinate dyads. Subordinates were asked to report on their career role enactment and on their perceived leader opening and closing behaviors while supervisors were asked to rate subordinates' employability. Study 2 was an online experiment in which we manipulated the display of leader opening behaviors (low vs. high) and leader closing behaviors (low vs. high). We added measurements of exploration and exploitation career role enactment as continuous variables to the design. Employees were then asked to assess their (self-perceived) employability in that situation.

## **Method Study 1**

### **Respondents**

A sample of 297 supervisor-subordinate dyads was collected. Subordinates' (64% female) age ranged from 16 to 68 years ( $M = 36.84$ ;  $SD = 13.38$ ). Most subordinates completed secondary vocational education (32.1%) or higher education (43.6%). The majority of subordinates' worked more than 2 years in the current position (69.6%). Supervisors' (49% female) age ranged from 18 to 69 years ( $M = 44.51$ ;  $SD = 11.25$ ). Most supervisors completed secondary vocational education (26.4%) or higher education (62.5%). The majority of supervisors worked more than 5 years in their current position (63.5%).

Respondents worked mostly in commercially oriented (service) organizations (e.g., shops, financial institutions, health care organizations, etc.) that were located in the Netherlands.

## Procedure

Respondents were approached at work and were asked to participate in a study about supervisor – subordinate relationships and work outcomes. In most cases this meant that one of our graduate student research assistants visited the targeted organization and asked the employees who were present for cooperation. In other cases, the research assistants (first) called organizations, or used encounters with personal contacts to request participation. Envelopes with paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed in pairs to employees and their direct supervisors. Each pair was numbered to enable matching of supervisor-subordinate data. Those employees and supervisors interested in participating in the study were asked to fill out paper-and-pencil questionnaires without consulting their colleagues, subordinates or supervisor, and to return the questionnaires in an enclosed envelope. Individual questionnaires could be returned independently in order to reduce response threat (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). Envelopes were picked up by the research assistants or returned by mail. Because people often filled out the questionnaire during work hours, we kept the survey short and to the point. All respondents received information on the voluntary nature and the confidential character of the study and were asked to sign an informed consent form. Approval from the ethics committee of the university was obtained prior to data collection.

## Materials

### Career role enactment

Career role enactment was measured using the VLR-30 (Hoekstra, 2011). Subordinates were presented with 30 statements and asked to indicate how typical each of these statements was for them in their work during the past year (1 = *not typical* to 7 = *very typical*). To assess *exploitation* career role enactment ( $\alpha = .91$ ) mean scores of the exploitation roles subscales (Maker, Presenter and Director role, five items per subscale) were computed and combined into an overall score. Example items of the exploitation roles are 'I see myself...'.enjoy the utmost in the activity of carrying out a task', 'Have a plan approved by framing it in the proper way' and 'Phrase the decision after a discussion'. To assess *exploration* career role enactment ( $\alpha = .87$ ) mean scores of the exploration roles subscales (Expert, Guide and Inspirer role, five items per subscale) were computed and combined into an overall score. Example items of the exploration roles are 'I see myself...'.apply expert knowledge in new problems', 'gain someone's confidence in a difficult relationship', and 'invigorate and provoke others with challenging views'.

### **Ambidextrous leadership**

Opening and closing leader behaviors were measured using the 14 item Ambidextrous Leadership Scale (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). Subordinates were asked to indicate how often their supervisors' displayed opening and closing leadership behaviors (1 = *not at all applicable* to 5 = *very applicable*, seven items per subscale). An example of an opening leadership behavior item is 'My supervisor allows different ways of accomplishing a task' ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and an example of a closing leadership behavior item is 'My supervisor monitors and controls goal attainment' ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

### **Employability**

An adaptation of the self-perceived employability scale (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) was used to measure employee employability as perceived by the leader. The questionnaire consists of 11 items. Supervisors were asked to indicate how well each statement fits their perception of the employability of the subordinate (1 = *I strongly disagree* to 7 = *I strongly agree*). An example item is 'In my opinion this employee could easily retrain to make him/herself more employable elsewhere' ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

### **Control variables**

Age has been shown to negatively be correlated with overall employability (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007) and was added as a control variable. Furthermore, subordinates' gender, education, tenure in current position, and frequency of contact with the supervisor were added as control variables because they may influence the interactions between supervisors and subordinates (see Coglisier, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009; Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

## **Results Study 1**

### **Preliminary Analysis<sup>1</sup>**

Correlations, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2. Note that the correlations indicate that both exploration and exploitation career role enactment are associated with supervisor employability ratings (see De Jong et al., 2019; Hoekstra, 2011).

### **Testing of the Hypotheses**

To test our hypotheses we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. Specifically, we used perceived employability of the subordinate as the dependent variable. After adding the control variables (step 1), centered scores of exploration career role enactment, exploitation career role enactment, leader opening behaviors, and leader closing behaviors were added as predictor variables (step 2). Finally, the interaction variables (based on the centered scores) were added as predictors (step 3; see Table 3).

Note that we added the interactions of both exploration and exploitation career role enactment with leader opening and closing behavior simultaneously to the design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the combined effects of career roles and leader opening and closing behaviors.

**Table 2** Study 1 Descriptives and Correlations of Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Control Variables</i>												
1 Age	36.84	13.38										
2 Gender	1.64	.48	-.02									
3 Education	5.01	1.48	-.11	.07								
4 Tenure	4.13	1.58	.60**	-.00	.00							
5 Contact with supervisor	3.80	.96	-.09	-.02	-.10	-.04						
<i>Career Role Enactment</i>												
6 Exploration roles	13.74	2.71	.21**	.01	.08	.05	-.05					
7 Exploitation roles	13.23	3.06	.12	-.01	.04	.01	-.05	.85**				
<i>Ambidextrous Leadership</i>												
8 Opening behaviors	3.81	.74	-.02	.08	.11	-.12*	.06	.44**	.44**			
9 Closing behaviors	3.62	.65	-.11	.01	-.09	-.16**	.12*	.19**	.17**	.17**		
<i>Dependent Variable</i>												
10 Employability	5.12	.84	-.09	.05	.13*	-.07	.09	.38**	.34**	.44**	.11	

Note:  $N = 297$  dyads. Gender (1 = men, 2 = women), education (ranging from 1 = primary education to 7 = graduate level or higher), tenure in current position (ranging from 1 = less than six months to 6 = ten years or longer), contact with supervisor (ranging from 1 = seldom/never to 5 = very often). \* $p < .05$ . (two-tailed) \*\* $p < .01$ . (two-tailed).

Results show that, in line with Hypothesis 1, exploration career role enactment predicted perceived employability of the subordinate ( $b = .29, p < .001$ ): The higher the score on subordinates' enactment of the exploration roles, the more positive the supervisor indicated to be about the employability of the subordinate. No effect of exploitation career role enactment on perceived employability of the subordinate was found ( $b = -.03, p = .70$ ). Furthermore, leader opening behaviors predicted perceived employability of the subordinate ( $b = .23, p < .001$ ): the higher the score on perceived leader opening behaviors, the more positive the supervisor indicated to be about the employability of the subordinate.

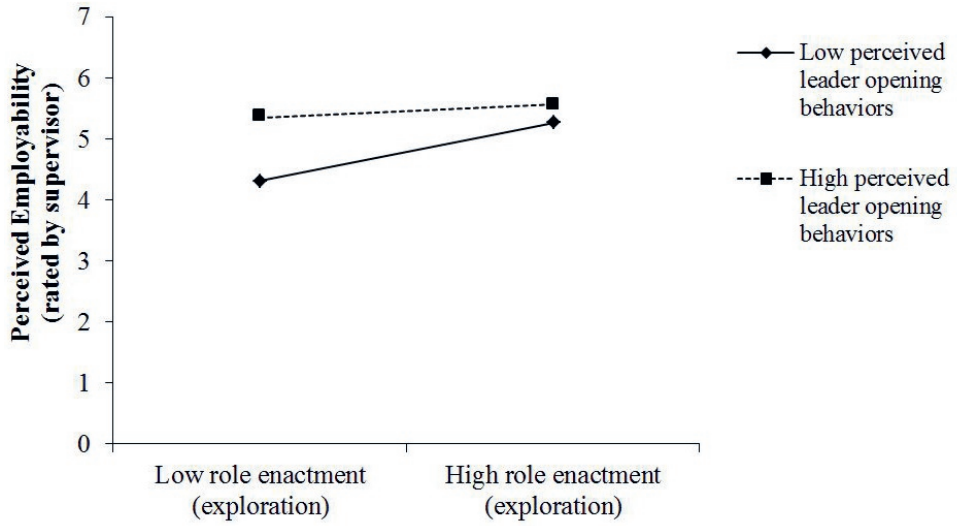
We also found that the relationship between exploration career role enactment and perceived employability of the subordinate was moderated by leader opening behaviors ( $b = -.19, p = .04$ ). Simple slope analysis (see Figure 1) show that when subordinates perceived a stronger display of leader opening behaviors, perceived subordinate employability was not contingent on exploration career role enactment ( $b = .10, p = .44$ ). However, when subordinates perceived a lower display of leader opening behaviors, perceived subordinate employability was positively related to exploration career role enactment ( $b = .48, p < .001$ ).

Furthermore, the relationship between exploration career role enactment and perceived employability of the subordinate was also moderated by leader closing behaviors ( $b = .23, p = .02$ ). Simple slope analysis (see Figure 2) show that when subordinates perceived a stronger display of leader closing behaviors, perceived subordinate employability was positively related to exploration career role enactment ( $b = .52, p < .001$ ). When subordinates perceived a lower display of leader closing behaviors, perceived subordinate employability was not contingent on exploration career role enactment ( $b = .06, p = .65$ ). Exploitation career roles or the interaction variables including exploitation roles were found not to be significant. Therefore, the results are in line with the complementary fit Hypotheses 2b en 3b, and do not support the the supplementary fit Hypotheses 2a and 3a.

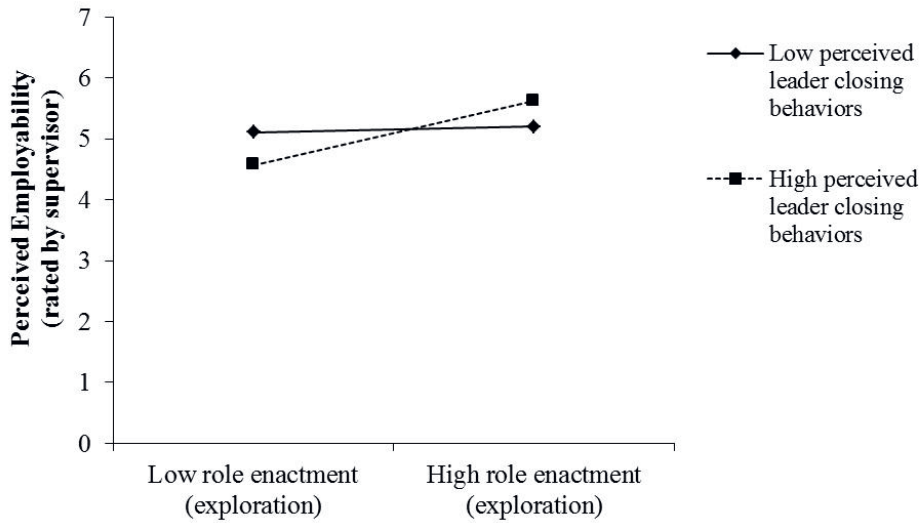
**Table 3** Study 1 Results of the Regression Analysis with Perceived Employability as Dependent Variable

<b>Model variables</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>SEB</b>	<b>B</b>
<i>Step 1 Control Variables</i>			
Constant	5.11	.33	
Age	-.01	.00	-.20
Gender	-.04	.09	-.03
Education	.02	.03	.04
Tenure	.05	.04	.09
Contact with supervisor	.07	.05	.08
<i>Step 2 Main Effects</i>			
Exploration role enactment	.29**	.09	.34
Exploitation role enactment	-.03	.09	-.04
Leader opening behaviors	.23**	.06	.27
Leader closing behaviors	-.03	.05	-.04
<i>Step 3 Interaction Effects</i>			
Exploration role enactment x Leader opening behaviors	-.19*	.09	-.28
Exploration role enactment x Leader closing behaviors	.23*	.10	.31
Exploitation role enactment x Leader opening behaviors	.08	.09	.12
Exploitation role enactment x Leader closing behaviors	-.04	.10	-.06

Note.  $N = 297$ , Model 1  $R^2 = .03$ , Model 2  $R^2 = .27$ ,  $R^2\text{Change} = .24^{**}$ , Model 3  $R^2 = .32$ ,  $R^2\text{Change} = .06^{**}$ . \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed), \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).



**Figure 1** Interaction effect for employee exploration role enactment and leader opening behaviors on perceived employability



**Figure 2** Interaction effect for employee exploration role enactment and leader closing behaviors on perceived employability

## Method Study 2

### Participants and Design

We gathered a sample of 467 employees from the United States<sup>2</sup>. These employees participated in an online experiment and were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (leader opening behaviors: low vs. high) x 2 (leader closing behaviors: low vs. high) between-subjects design. Moreover, exploration and exploitation career role enactment were added to the design as continuous variables based on pre-manipulation measurement. Employees' average job tenure was 18.03 years ( $SD = 10.82$ ). Of the employees, 46.3% was female,  $M_{age} = 38.27$ ,  $SD_{age} = 10.73$ , 18% had a secondary education degree, 45.8% had a bachelor's degree and 17.6% had a master's degree (or higher).

### Procedure

Employees were recruited via the online platform Amazon Mechanical Turk. Note that research has shown that Mechanical Turk data are as reliable as data from traditional survey methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Buhrmester, Talaifar, & Gosling, 2018; Chandler & Shapiro, 2016), particularly when recommendations regarding how to deal with potential validity threats are followed (Chueng, Burns, Sinclair, & Sliter, 2017)<sup>2</sup>. Only respondents working a minimum of ten (payed) hours a week were allowed to participate in the survey. Employees first read a brief description of the study before giving their informed consent. We assured respondents that their participation was voluntary and we guaranteed the confidential treatment of their data. Approval from the ethics committee of the university was obtained prior to data collection.

Employees first answered some questions that assessed demographic variables and were asked to fill out the career role enactment questionnaire. Thereafter, employees were informed they were about to read a scenario and they were asked to imagine they were working within their current employment situation with the supervisor described in the scenario. We used the description of the supervisor to manipulate leader opening and closing behaviors. After the manipulation, participants answered the manipulation check items and filled out a scale used to measure self-perceived employability. Finally, all employees were thanked, debriefed and paid. Participation in the study took approximately 20 minutes and employees received 1.75 US\$ upon completion.

### Leader opening and leader closing behavior manipulation

Employees were asked to read a description of a supervisor. The description of the behavior of the supervisor was based on items from the Ambidextrous Leadership Scale (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). To manipulate leader opening behavior, we for instance mentioned in the high opening behavior condition: 'when providing instructions, your supervisor gives you the option to choose a way of working that fits your style'. In the low opening behavior condition no instructions on specific task completion were provided.

To manipulate leader closing behavior in the high closing behavior condition we for example mentioned: 'When providing instructions, your supervisor tells you exactly what rules and guidelines you should follow'. In the low closing behavior condition no instructions on specific task completion were provided (see appendix for a complete description of the manipulations).

## Measurements

### Career role enactment

As in Study 1, we used the VLR-30 (Hoekstra, 2011) to measure employees' exploration ( $\alpha = .93$ ) and exploitation ( $\alpha = .93$ ) career role enactment.

### Manipulation checks

To check the effectiveness of the leader opening behavior manipulation and leader closing manipulation we used a shortened version of the Ambidextrous Leadership Scale (Zacher & Rosing, 2015; three items per subscale; 1 = *never* to 7 = *every time*). Participants were asked to what extent they found the leader in the description to display either opening ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ,  $\alpha = .91$ ) or closing leadership behaviors ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ,  $\alpha = .94$ ).

### Self-perceived employability

Similar to Study 1, we used an adaptation of the self-perceived employability scale (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). This time, employees were asked to indicate how well the presented statements would fit with their perception of their own employability in case they would be supervised by the described supervisor ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### Control variables

As in Study 1, we controlled for age, gender, education, and tenure of the participants.

## Results Study 2

### Manipulation Checks

First, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the leadership opening and leadership closing manipulation on perceived leader opening behaviors scores. As expected, we found a main effect of the leader opening behavior manipulation  $F(1, 463) = 152.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .25$ . Participants in the high leader opening manipulation condition experienced the leader to display more opening behaviors ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than participants in the low leader opening behavior condition ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ). Unexpectedly, we also found an interaction between the leader opening and



leader closing manipulation,  $F(1, 463) = 36.87, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$ . Simple main effect analyses indicate that in the low leader opening behaviors condition those participants who experienced more closing leadership behaviors perceived the supervisor to display fewer opening leadership behaviors ( $M = 2.41, SD = .12$ ) than participants who experienced fewer closing leadership behaviors ( $M = 5.21, SD = .12$ ),  $F(1, 463) = 170.70, p < .01$ . In the high leader opening behaviors condition, we also found that those participants who experienced more closing leadership behaviors perceived the supervisor to display fewer opening leadership behaviors ( $M = 4.52, SD = .11$ ) than participants who experienced fewer closing leadership behaviors ( $M = 5.93, SD = .11$ ),  $F(1, 463) = 19.51, p < .01$ , but in this condition the effect was less pronounced.

Second, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of the leadership opening and leadership closing manipulation on the perceived leader closing behaviors scores. Again, as expected we found a main effect of the leader closing behavior manipulation ( $F(1, 463) = 303.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .40$ ). Participants in the high leader closing manipulation condition experienced the leader to display more closing behaviors ( $M = 5.41, SD = 1.39$ ) than participants in the low leader closing behavior condition ( $M = 3.28, SD = 1.68$ ). Again, we found an interaction between the leader opening and leader closing manipulation  $F(1, 463) = 144.39, p < .01, \eta^2 = .24$ . Simple main effect analyses indicate that in the high leader closing behavior condition those participants who experienced fewer opening leadership behaviors perceived the supervisor to display more closing leadership behaviors ( $M = 6.27, SD = .13$ ) than participants who experienced more opening leadership behaviors ( $M = 4.57, SD = .12$ ),  $F(1, 463) = 422.93, p < .01$ . In the low leader closing behavior condition those participants who experienced more opening leadership behaviors also perceived the supervisor to display more closing leadership behavior ( $M = 3.90, SD = .12$ ) than participants who experienced fewer opening leadership behaviors ( $M = 2.61, SD = .13$ ),  $F(1, 463) = 14.90, p < .01$ , but in this condition the effect was less pronounced.

In sum, these findings indicate that our manipulations were not fully successful, and that the manipulations were not independent of each other. As a consequence, all further analyses should be interpreted with caution.

### Testing of the Hypotheses

To test our hypotheses we, again, conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. Self-perceived employability was the dependent variable. After adding the control variables (step 1), centered scores of exploration career role enactment and exploitation career role enactment were added as predictor variables. We also added the leader opening and leader closing behaviors manipulations as dummy variables to the design in this step (step 2). Finally, similar to Study 1, we added 4 interaction terms to the design (step 3; see Table 4).

Results show that, in contrast to Hypothesis 1 and the results of Study 1, exploration career role enactment did not predict self-perceived employability ( $b = .18, p = .25$ ). Exploitation career role enactment again did not predict self-perceived employability ( $b = .17, p = .26$ ). However, both leader opening and leader closing behaviors predicted self-perceived employability (resp.  $b = .29, p < .001$ ;  $b = -.23, p < .001$ ). In the high opening leadership condition, participants were more positive about their employability than in the low opening leadership condition. Similarly, in the high closing leadership condition, participants were less positive about their employability than in the low closing leadership condition. Furthermore, contrary to our expectations, the relationship between exploration career role enactment and self-perceived employability was not moderated by either leader opening ( $b = -.21, p = .20$ ), or leader closing behaviors ( $b = .20, p = .21$ ). Therefore, both the supplementary fit Hypotheses 2a and 2b, as well as the complementary fit Hypotheses 3a and 3b are not supported by the results of Study 2.

**Table 4** Study 2 Results of the Regression Analysis with Self-Perceived Employability as Dependent Variable

Model variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Step 1 Control Variables</i>			
Constant	5.47	.30	
Age	-.01	.01	-.13
Gender	-.07	.08	-.04
Education	-.02	.04	-.02
Tenure	.01	.10	.14
<i>Step 2 Main Effects</i>			
Exploration role enactment	.18	.15	.19
Exploitation role enactment	.17	.16	.18
Leader opening behaviors	.29**	.08	.15
Leader closing behaviors	-.23**	.08	-.12
<i>Step 3 Interaction Effects</i>			
Exploration role enactment x Leader opening behaviors	-.21	.16	-.16
Exploration role enactment x Leader closing behaviors	.20	.16	.15
Exploitation role enactment x Leader opening behaviors	.26	.17	.20
Exploitation role enactment x Leader closing behaviors	-.18	.16	-.13

Note.  $N = 467$ , Model 1  $R^2 = .01$ , Model 2  $R^2 = .19$ ,  $R^2\text{Change} = .19^{**}$ , Model 3  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $R^2\text{Change} = .01^{**}$ . \* $p < .05$  (two-tailed), \*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed).

## Discussion

Currently, career trajectories including life-long employment within one company, are more the exception than the norm. As such, employees need to maintain employable in order to make sure that they are attractive to current and potential future employers. The present studies zoom in on potential antecedents of employability. The two studies focus not only on the importance of the enactment of exploration career roles in predicting perceived employability, but they also include leader opening and closing behaviors as potential moderators.

### **Career Roles, Employability and the Role of the Supervisor**

Results of Study 1 show, as predicted, that exploration career role enactment is positively associated with (perceived) employability (*Hypothesis 1*). Furthermore, exploitation career role enactment is not associated with (perceived) employability. Moreover, although no prior main effect hypotheses for leadership behavior were formulated, opening leadership behaviors were also found to be positively associated with perceived employability. This is in line with the notion that when supervisors are able to stimulate creativity and the implementation of innovative ideas in subordinates, this may have positive effects on the employability of those subordinates (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014). These results add to previous research showing that leadership styles can influence employee employability. For example, transformational leadership has also been shown to stimulate career development and employability in employees (Van der Heijden & Bakker, 2011; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2014). Furthermore, in line with our expectations, both opening leader and closing leadership behaviors were found to influence the relationship between exploration role enactment and perceived employability. Specifically, in line with the complementary fit perspective (*Hypothesis 2b* and *3b*), we found that when subordinates perceive their leader to display fewer opening behaviors, the positive relationship between exploration career role enactment and perceived employability is strengthened. Additionally, we found that when subordinates perceive their leader to display more closing behaviors, the positive relationship between exploration career role enactment and perceived employability is also strengthened. It seems that in situations where supervisor and subordinate complement each other with respect to a focus on exploration supervisors have the most positive perception of employee employability. This finding adds to previous theorizing suggesting that both exploration and exploitation need to be balanced in order to yield the most positive results (Zacher, Robinson, & Rosing, 2016). Apparently, supervisors also appreciate that their subordinates bring something to the table that the supervisor him- or herself does not have to offer. However, we were unable to replicate the hypothesized findings in Study 2. Instead, results of Study 2 only indicate that leader opening and leader closing behaviors were positively associated with self-perceived

employability. Differences between both studies might be due to a number of reasons which will be discussed in the following limitations section.

### **Strengths, Limitations and Future Research**

The differential effects between the two studies may be explained by a number of factors. First, the results from our manipulation check indicate that our manipulations did not fully have the intended effects. One reason for this could be that individuals do not pay full attention to the presented manipulation (i.e., 'subjective inattentiveness', Cheung, Burns, Sinclair, & Sliter, 2017). In our experimental approach, differences between conditions were relatively subtle and required high attentiveness of our participants. Perhaps this degree of attentiveness is not to be expected from Mturk participants. Perhaps opening and closing behavior manipulations in more controlled experiments settings would be more successful. Furthermore, in the online experiment employees were provided with a (hypothetical) scenario describing a supervisor. Consequently, the employees were asked to imagine that this person was their supervisor in their current job before rating their own employability. Making use of a scenario may have oversimplified complex ambidextrous leadership behaviors (Zacher & Rosing, 2015). Indeed, although studies using an experimental set-up are usually highly recommended for their internal validity, it remains a challenge to replicate often complicated real-life situations. Nonetheless, future research could work towards more sophisticated ways of measuring the complex nature of ambidextrous leadership. Thus, enhancing our understanding of the dynamic interaction between ambidextrous leadership behaviors and employee behaviors in relation to (self-) perceived employability.

Second, whereas the dyad study included supervisor ratings, the online study made use of self-report methods measuring self-perceived employability. Although the employability literature does not make a (theoretical) distinction between the two, there is reason to suspect that findings could be markedly different depending on which measure is used. For instance, individuals sometimes have the tendency to engage in overestimation of their personal effectiveness (Lindeman, Sundvik, & Rouhiainen, 1995). Moreover, the use of other reports could be problematic as well, because employability ratings may not only be based on the recall of actual employee behaviors, but could also be based on inferences based on semantic memory, which may be affected by bias and noise (see Hansbrough, Lord, & Schyns, 2015). In this respect, it has been suggested that the self should be more accurate than others for characteristics that are low in observability (e.g., neuroticism), whereas others should be more accurate than the self for characteristics high in evaluativeness (e.g., intellect; Vazire, 2010). Although some studies have been conducted including both employee- as well as supervisor ratings (Van der Heijden, Gorgievski, & De Lange, 2015), multi-source employability studies are still scarce. Yet, we argue that including different perspectives (e.g., supervisors, peers or costumers) may offer unique insights as it will highlight different aspects and

perspectives on employability which otherwise could not have been obtained. As such, we highly recommend that future studies use multi-source ratings as this may increase validity (Brett & Atwater, 2001; Woehr, Sheehan, & Bennet, 2005) and enhance our overall knowledge in employability research. Moreover, we hope that some of these future studies will specifically focus on the accuracy of self and other employability ratings.

Supervisor-subordinate fit research has received some attention over the last decades. However, compared to supplementary fit (see Ahkanasy & O'Connor, 1997; Hoffman et al., 2011) the role of complementary fit between supervisors and their employees has received limited attention so far (Marstand, Martin, & Epitropaki, 2016). It appears however that both complementary as well as supplementary fit can have positive work outcomes, depending on the type of fit and type of work-related variables that are being investigated. Possibly, future research could investigate the differences between both complementary and supplementary fit, thus mapping when complementary fit and when supplementary fit comes into effect in order to assess their effects on employability over time (Pisacentin & Chapman, 2006). For example, it could be the case that supplementary fit may in fact be harmful for long-term career development as supplementary fit may foster stagnation, tunnel vision or group think (Kristof, 1996), which could hinder growth and development. Arguably, widening our view on fit can enhance our overall understanding in career development in general and extend our insights in person-supervisor fit research.

### **Practical Implications**

Based on the finding in Study 1 that career role enactment positively influences (perceived) employability, and the finding that the style of the supervisor can play a role in perceptions of employability, some tentative suggestions for employees and their organizations and supervisors are discussed. First, through counselling, coaching and job-crafting training organizations can support employee development and growth (Haan, 2014; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). More specifically, for both individuals as well as organizations it may be important that organizations invest time and HR resources in employee's career role development as it is likely to positively affect perceived employability. For example, to increase employees' capability to execute a broader set of tasks, a variety of organizational interventions can be introduced. Specifically, work redesign with a particular focus on enhancing involvement (e.g. through improvement groups), enhanced task control, and a broad ranging training positively influenced employees' feelings of proficiency to carry out a broader set of work tasks (Axtell & Parker, 2003). This, in turn, may enhance employees' career role exploration enactment, aiding to long-term employability in the workplace. Furthermore, acknowledging that employee employability may also be dependent upon the fit an employee perceives with the supervisor, it may be equally important for organizations to invest HR resources into supervisor training. This training can focus on recognizing and developing

ambidextrous leadership skills that will enable leaders to engage in fitting support behaviors for their employees.

## Conclusion

In today's society, employees need to ensure they remain employable throughout their careers (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The results of our multi-source field study have shown the relationships between career role exploration enactment, leader opening and leader closing behaviors and perceived employability. Specifically, as shown in our field study, it could be that when employee exploration activities are matched with complementing leader behaviors (either high closing behaviors, or low opening behaviors) perceived employability is positively fostered. Although these results could not be replicated in an online experiment (which we will discuss in the below) our study suggests the importance of the enactment of explorative career roles as a way to remain flexible in today's fast changing career landscape. Moreover, by introducing the importance of leadership behaviors as a moderating factor between career role enactment and employability, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of long-term career success.

## Notes

1. All questionnaires have previously been used and validated. However, prior to conducting our analyses we have performed confirmatory factor analyses on the predictor (career roles and ambidextrous leadership) and dependent (employability) variables in our study. We compared different models ranging from a one-factor model, in which all items are indicative of one factor to a five-factor structure, in which all study variables are grouped into separate factors. For Study 1, compared to a one-factor model (RMSEA = .16, CFI = .83) and a three-factor model (career roles, ambidextrous leadership and employability; RMSEA = .10, CFI = .88) the five-factor model has a better fit (exploration roles, exploitation roles, leader opening behaviors, leader closing behaviors and employability; RMSEA = .085, CFI = .90). For Study 2, compared to a one-factor model (RMSEA = .15, CFI = .92) and a two-factor model (career roles and employability; RMSEA = .099, CFI = .95), the three-factor model has a slightly better fit (exploration roles, exploitation roles and employability; RMSEA = .097, CFI = .95).
2. From the initial sample of 564 workers we deleted participants who indicated a) not to use their data ( $N = 3$ ), b) who showed unusual response patterns in combination with inconsistencies on at least two reversed items ( $N = 37$ ), and/or c) took a very short or very long amount of time to read the manipulation (bottom 10%;  $N = 54$ ; participants taking over 500 seconds to read the manipulation;  $N = 3$ ). We continued the analyses with the remaining 467 participants.
3. Note that Levene's test revealed that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met ( $p < .001$ ) for both opening and closing behaviors. Therefore, we set a more stringent significance level ( $p = .01$ ) for evaluation our results (Pallant, 2007). Furthermore, confirmatory factor analyses for the six items used to check the effectiveness of the leader opening and leader closing manipulation show inadequate fit indices (two-factor solution, RMSEA = .19, CFI = .95), which is also an indication that the results should be interpreted with caution.

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