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Careers: Mobility, Embeddedness, and Success

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This article proposes refinements of the constructs of career mobility and career embeddedness and reviews the array of factors that have been found to energize (discourage) employees to change jobs, organizations, and/or occupations. The article also reviews the literature on career success and identifies which types of mobility (and embeddedness) are most likely to lead to objective career success (e.g., promotions) and subjective career success (e.g., career satisfaction). In the final section, the article revisits the utility of viewing careers as "boundaryless" and suggests alternative frameworks for future research on these topics.

Keywords: *careers; mobility; embeddedness; career success; boundaryless careers; job change; career change; career development; career management*

During the past decade, careers researchers have paid a great deal of attention to the topic of career mobility (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). To a considerable extent, this research emerged in response to a confluence of major changes in global and local labor markets (Sullivan, 1999). Increased competition from emerging economies with cheaper labor and raw materials resulted in more "off-shoring" of operations. Rapid increases in health insurance costs and pension liabilities created incentives for companies to replace full-time, permanent workers with temporary or part-time employees. The employment security of managers in large corporations declined in response to a lengthy period of mergers, acquisitions, and downsizings in major industries (Hirsch & Shanley, 1996). Moreover, as the shape of nuclear families changed, employees sought out new employment opportunities

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that better fit their changing personal circumstances (Kirchmeyer, 2006). In *The Boundaryless Career* (1996), Arthur and Rousseau not only synthesized the previous decade's research on the changing career landscape but also urged researchers to pay more attention to these new labor market realities in the future.

Several trends in careers research emerged during the past 10 years as a result of this focus on boundaryless careers. Careers research has concentrated much more heavily on career transitions than on career stability (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Lee, Mitchell, Sablynski, Burton, & Holtom, 2004). In addition, careers researchers have explored attitudes toward mobility and perceptions of mobility opportunities in more depth than actual mobility itself. Furthermore, during the past decade, careers researchers have concentrated much more on the inevitability of career change and its benefits than on its infrequency and its drawbacks (Eby, 2001; Feldman, 2002b). The aim of this article, then, is to reawaken interest in alternative perspectives on the role of career mobility in career success. Specifically, the present article has four goals.

First, we seek to clarify and refine the constructs of career mobility and career embeddedness. It is often unclear in the literature how much of a change in employment status is needed to qualify as a "career change." Along similar lines, the embeddedness literature is sometimes unclear because of level-of-analysis problems, as some levels of embeddedness (such as occupational embeddedness) may subsume others levels of embeddedness as well (such as job embeddedness).

Second, we review the literature on the forces that contribute to career mobility. Here, we examine the research on labor market, occupational-level, organization-level, group-level, personal life, and individual-difference factors that contribute to employee mobility. We also examine the differential effects these factors have on job embeddedness, organizational embeddedness, and occupational embeddedness.

Third, we review the recent research on the relationships between career mobility/career stability and career success. The term *career success* has become a catchall signifier for widely disparate measures of achievement, ranging from very specific measures of salary increases to very general measures of psychological well-being (Hall, 1976; Ng et al., 2005). Here, we synthesize previous work on how different types of mobility (and different types of embeddedness) influence *objective* measures of career success (such as pay raises) and *subjective* measures of career success (such as job satisfaction or job involvement).

In the fourth and final section of the article, we reconsider the construct of boundaryless careers and suggest ways in which the construct can be refined to make it more useful in future empirical research. Indeed, the term *boundaryless careers* has been used in so many ways in so many different contexts that it is now difficult to determine whether the term refers to the permeability of labor markets, the degree of actual mobility in individuals' careers, or individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward mobility. In addition, we highlight avenues for future research and potential implications of mobility/embeddedness research for management practice.

Refining Key Constructs

Mobility

The construct *career mobility* has been used in multiple ways by multiple authors to include everything from changing jobs to changing organizations to changing occupations.

By subsuming so many kinds of changes within one construct, important differences (e.g., individuals' motivation to change, ability to change, and adjustment to change) often get overlooked. Here, we suggest that it would be more constructive to focus on specific differences among job change, organizational change, and occupational change.

Job change refers to any substantial changes in work responsibilities, hierarchical levels, or titles within an organization. It includes internal promotions, transfers, and demotions.

In contrast, *organizational change* refers to any change in the employing firm. Organizational changes can be independent of job changes (i.e., an employee can go from selling Hondas to selling Toyotas) or involve job changes, too (i.e., an employee goes from selling cars for Honda to sales management for Toyota). For this reason, then, it is critical to specify whether or not organizational changes also entail job changes (Schniper, 2005).

Because the term *career mobility* has been used generically to refer to almost any kind of change in job duties, the degree of change across job transitions has been hard to track. Here, we argue that the term *occupational change* should be used to refer to transitions that require fundamentally new skills, routines, and work environments and require fundamentally new training, education, or vocational preparation (Feldman, 2002a). The connotations of the term *career change* in popular parlance imply major shifts in training required, job responsibilities, and work environments, but the term in scholarly writing includes changes both large and small. Hence, use of the term *occupational change* more precisely conveys when a *major* transition in career paths occurs.

Embeddedness

As we noted earlier, only recently have researchers begun to pay more attention to questions about why people stay in their jobs, organizations, and occupations even when other (and better) opportunities are available elsewhere. Beginning largely with the work of Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez (2001), there is now increased interest in the construct of embeddedness, namely, the totality of forces that keep people in their current employment situations.

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, et al. (2001) suggested that the forces toward *job embeddedness* are threefold: fit, links, and sacrifice. Fit is the extent to which a person's job meshes with, or complements, other areas of his or her life. Links refer to the extent of an individual's ties with other people and activities at work. Sacrifice refers to the ease with which these links can be broken (i.e., what people would have to give up if they left their current positions). The greater the fit, the number of links, and the degree of sacrifice, the greater the forces toward job embeddedness will be (Holtom & O'Neill, 2004).

In the embeddedness literature, there has been some ambiguity between the constructs of job embeddedness and *organizational embeddedness*. Because embeddedness in a particular job essentially embeds an individual in the current organization, too, Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, et al. (2001) did not differentiate job embeddedness from organizational embeddedness in much detail. Ng and Feldman (in press) note, though, that whereas job embeddedness implies organizational embeddedness, organizational embeddedness does not necessarily imply job embeddedness; certainly, interjob mobility within an organization is possible, too. Thus, although there is often overlap between job and organizational embeddedness in practice, they are conceptually different constructs.

We suggest here that there is also a third type of embeddedness that has largely been overlooked in the literature, namely, *occupational embeddedness***.** We define this term as the totality of forces that keep people in their present occupations. As with job embeddedness, the forces toward occupational embeddedness are fit, links, and sacrifice. Fit refers to the extent to which people's occupations are similar to (or complement) other aspects of their lives. Links refer to the extent to which individuals have ties to other people and activities in the occupation. Sacrifice is the ease with which links can be broken—what people would have to give up if they changed occupations.

In sum, then, just as there are different degrees of mobility, there are different degrees of embeddedness as well. Individuals can be enmeshed in their present occupations without being embedded in any particular organization, and individuals can be enmeshed in their present organizations without being embedded in any particular job.

Career Success

Over time, researchers on careers success have consistently differentiated the "objective career" from the "subjective career" (Ng et al., 2005). Measures of *objective career success* are typically external indicators of career advancement or the accumulation of extrinsic rewards. They include the highest level of education or hierarchical level attained, highest salary earned, rate of movement up an organizational ladder, and badges of accomplishment (e.g., professional honors) (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Measures of *subjective career success* are typically attitudes, emotions, and perceptions of how individuals feel about their accomplishments rather than the objective amount of achievement. Here, researchers have examined such variables as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and professional identification (Hall, 1976; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995).

As we will discuss in the next sections, different types of mobility and embeddedness are related to different types of career success. For example, occupational mobility can be positively related to subjective career success (like job satisfaction) but be negatively related to objective career success (because changing occupations often entails starting over at a lower hierarchical or salary level). Likewise, frequent organizational mobility may result in faster promotions and greater compensation but is less likely to result in deep organizational commitment.

Six Perspectives on Mobility and Embeddedness

In the previous research on mobility and embeddedness, six perspectives have been used to discover which factors motivate employees to seek out new employment opportunities and/or tether employees to their current career paths (Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, in press). From the most macro to the most micro level of analysis, these perspectives consider the roles of (a) structural labor market factors, (b) occupational labor market factors, (c) organizational policies and procedures, (d) work group-level factors, (e) personal life factors, and (f) personality and personal style differences.

Structural Perspective

The structural perspective suggests that employees' mobility or embeddedness is largely determined by structural factors in the labor market. Sociologists have long suggested that mobility is vacancy-driven; that is, mobility at the individual level is motivated (or discouraged) by the quantity and quality of the jobs available in the overall labor market (DiPrete, De Graaf, Luijkx, Tahlin, & Blossfeld, 1997; Fujiwara-Greve & Greve, 2000; Haveman & Cohen, 1994). Here we focus on the two dominant groups of structural factors that have been posited as major influences on the labor market, namely, macroeconomic conditions and the social and legal environment.

Macroeconomic conditions. Economic conditions influence the expansion or downsizing of firms (DiPrete, 1993; DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997). In a growing economy, firms are likely to expand both vertically and horizontally, thereby creating more opportunities for both promotions and internal transfers to new units (Inkson, 1995). There are also differences in the level of regional economic development that create geographic disparities in mobility opportunities. Because of more conducive climates or more plentiful natural resources, some regions experience greater economic development than others (VanHam, Mulder, & Hooimeijer, 2001). In addition, for a variety of political reasons, governments sometimes choose to devote greater resources to the economic development of particular cities or areas. Thus, regions with either historical economic advantages or government-supported initiatives (e.g., free trade zones) generate more opportunities for mobility as well.

Economic conditions may also influence people's attitudes toward mobility and their perceptions of mobility opportunities. For instance, Feldman (2002c) suggested that perceptions of favorable economic conditions increase young adults' aspirations for more fulfilling work and their parents' willingness to pay for more schooling. On the other hand, a weak economy may make individuals more risk-averse and unwilling to leave whatever jobs they do have, even if those jobs are unsatisfying (Leana & Feldman, 1994).

Social and legal environment. There are numerous examples of how the social environment can affect individuals' career mobility. For instance, Rosenfeld (1992) observed that the implementation of diversity programs led to increased upward mobility for female and racial minority employees in the public sector. In the private sector, promotion of diversity has also been positively associated with greater mobility for minority group members (Fujiwara-Greve & Greve, 2000).

Public policies affect opportunities for job mobility (DiPrete et al., 1997; Kruger, Eck, & Vermeulen, 2001), too. For example, those that strengthen the solvency of company pension plans tend to reduce mobility to other firms (Buchmueller & Valletta, 1996). On the other hand, benevolent policies toward the unemployed (e.g., extended unemployment subsidies) may contribute to individuals' being more selective about which jobs they will accept and more willing to experience long unemployment to find the best available jobs for themselves in the labor market.

Occupational Perspective

Gender composition. As Rosenfeld noted, "Differences among types of firms, industries, and occupations in their job rewards, career ladders, and employment relationships should affect the job shifts underlying careers" (1992:48). A prime example of this phenomenon is occupational segmentation by gender (e.g., Bygren, 2004). For example, women are overrepresented in jobs that are clerical and service-oriented in nature but are underrepresented in engineering and the physical sciences. Furthermore, the gender distribution *within* an industry also influences mobility opportunities. Maume (1999) observed that women who work in male-dominated occupations also have more difficulty moving up the hierarchy, presumably because of gender bias. In addition, in male-dominated occupations, women may also have less access to opportunities for job development and mentoring (Lai, Lin, & Leung, 1998; Ohlott, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1994).

Wage levels. Hachen (1992) performed a comprehensive study of the relationships between wage level and job mobility. He found that quit rates, intrafirm mobility rates, and upward mobility rates were lower in high-wage industries. Hachen reasoned that, because interfirm wage differences in high-wage industries are relatively small, the gain from external mobility would be minimal. Along similar lines, Hammida (2004) found that workers earning high wages change jobs less frequently than workers earning low wages.

Labor intensity. Leana and Feldman (1994) observed that labor-intensive industries (e.g., steel production) have higher involuntary exit rates and lower intrafirm mobility rates. In labor-intensive industries, reduction of labor costs is a major concern, and companies aggressively pursue cutting those costs by layoffs and plant closings. Also, in declining labor-intensive industries (like auto manufacturing), even opportunities to engage in intrafirm mobility tend to be lower.

Industry growth. Hachen (1992) found that the effects of industry growth on job mobility depended on whether growth occurred through the emergence of new firms or the growth of existing firms. The emergence of new firms increases external mobility because individuals have more alternatives in the labor market. When industry growth is fueled by increases in firm size, greater opportunities for upward internal mobility increase. As more units and departments are added, additional layers in the organizational structure (and hence more opportunities for hierarchical advancement) are added, too (Schniper, 2005).

*Degree of change in occupational responsibilities***.** In occupations that have experienced a high degree of change in activities and routines over time, individuals' disenchantment with, and their willingness to exit from, their current occupations is likely to be stronger. For example, many young adults became high school teachers in the 1960s and 1970s because of their enthusiasm for working with children and sharing their knowledge. Over the years, many of them left teaching because they worked in buildings with metal detectors, were alarmed by violence in their schools, and were hamstrung by state and federal regulations on how and what they could teach (Feldman, 2002a, 2002b). The relationship between degree

of change in routines and mobility can also be explained from an embeddedness perspective. Specifically, in occupations where activities and routines have changed substantially over time, the initial equilibrium of fit, links, and sacrifice is disrupted as well.

Human capital investments. Investments in generalizable occupational skills (skills that are easily transferable across organizations within an industry) tend to increase individuals' job mobility within the same occupation or industry (Fulgate, Kinicki, & Ashforth, 2004). On the other hand, generalizable skill investment may decrease job mobility across occupations because developing skills for a new occupation would entail a considerable sacrifice of time and money invested in training for the previous career (Ng & Feldman, in press). The amount of human capital investment in an occupation, then, is likely to be positively associated with mobility within an occupation but negatively related to mobility to different occupations. It is for this reason, for example, that we see greater occupational out-migration from public-school teachers than from university professors, but greater organizational mobility among professors than among public-school teachers.

Occupational networks. Social ties within occupational networks may also embed individuals in their current vocations. Individuals often seek to establish their self-concepts by identifying heavily with those whom they see as similar to themselves (Stryker & Burke, 2000). During the initial period of occupational socialization, new entrants have numerous opportunities to interact intensely with groups of colleagues who have interests and values similar to their own. Once individuals come to identify with others in an occupation and their self-concepts are defined, there is more psychological resistance to changing career paths (Allen, 2006). Moreover, because occupational networks often span multiple organizations (De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004), an individual's ties to an occupation are likely to be stronger (and therefore more embedding) than his or her ties to a particular organization.

Rigidity and permeability of occupational mobility structures. Finally, whether the occupation is characterized by rigid or permeable mobility structures can also influence individuals' mobility or embeddedness. Some occupations have higher barriers to entry than others (e.g., surgery and professional sports). Consequently, in-migration to these occupations is difficult even under favorable macroeconomic conditions. In contrast, other occupations are much easier to leave and reenter independent of societal trends. For example, in the latest available labor statistics on occupational mobility, Schniper (2005) reported that food service workers had the highest levels of occupational mobility, whereas architects, engineers, and lawyers had the lowest incidence of occupational mobility.

Organizational Perspective

There are many determinants of employees' mobility or embeddedness that operate at the organizational level (Malos & Campion, 2000). Below, we focus on the factors most frequently investigated in this literature: organizational staffing and compensation policies, the structure of pension and insurance benefits, intraorganizational networks, and socialization practices.

Organizational staffing and compensation policies. Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) suggested that the staffing policies chosen by an organization partially determine the availability of internal mobility options for its employees. They propose that organizations' staffing policies may be arrayed along two major dimensions: openness of internal labor markets and internal cohort competition. Those organizations high on *openness of internal labor market* actively recruit from outside the firm to fill positions. Conversely, those low on this dimension focus on internal job postings. Organizations high on *cohort competition* emphasize internal, merit-based competitions for promotions. In contrast, organizations without such an emphasis are likely to use seniority as a criterion instead. On the basis of these two dimensions, Sonnenfeld and Peiperl (1988) divided organizations into four generic types: baseball teams, clubs, academies, and fortresses. Some empirical support has been found for this typology using different samples (Baruch & Peiperl, 2003; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002).

Along the same lines, organizations' compensation policies also affect mobility and embeddedness. For instance, if an organization implements a "winner-takes-all" or "star" reward system, a few high-performing employees may become embedded by spectacular salaries, but others have much lower incentives to stay (Hirsch & Shanley, 1996; Hurley, Wally, Segrest, Scandura, & Sonnenfeld, 2003; Pil & Leana, 2000).

Structure of pension and insurance benefits. The structure of pension and insurance benefits may also act to influence individuals' job mobility or embeddedness, particularly in late career (Kim & Feldman, 1998, 2000). Perceived lack of sufficient retirement benefits embeds individuals in work. Whether that work takes place in the current organization or a different organization, though, depends heavily on the type of pension plan itself. Particularly in firms with fixed-benefit pension plans, continued membership in the current organization is critical to upping monthly pension benefits (via accrual of additional years of service). This observed relationship is also consistent with research on organizational commitment, which suggests that when individuals' "side bets" are high, their intentions to leave their organizations are low (Powell & Meyer, 2004).

Intraorganizational networks. Many organizational researchers have paid attention to how social networks of individuals affect work attitudes and behaviors (Davern & Hachne, 2006). For instance, when individuals begin their careers, they often actively network with colleagues (Ayree, Wyatt, & Stone, 1996; Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2006). Such ties serve as sources of information about norms and expectations, emotional support, and task assistance (Seibert et al., 2001). Productive mentoring relationships serve to provide much the same functions and yield similar benefits (Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002).

Moreover, these early links may help embed individuals in their organizations over extended periods of time (Coyle-Shapiro & Morrow, 2006). Initially superficial relationships can develop into deeper emotional bonds between newcomers and veteran colleagues within the firm (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). For instance, Nelson and Quick (1991) found that newcomers' frequent interactions with peers were positively related to intentions to stay with the organization. Higgins (2001) also found that the existence of quality social relationships was negatively related to job change. Green and Bauer (1995) found that doctoral students who received greater mentoring from advisors reported greater commitment to their current employers and to their professions.

Organizational socialization practices. Another organizational factor that may affect mobility or embeddedness is the socialization process individuals undergo (Allen, 2006). Organizational socialization is the process through which newcomers become familiar with the values, abilities, and behaviors that are essential for effective job performance (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998).

The overarching goal of organizational socialization is to promote greater congruence of employees' abilities and values with organizational demands and norms (Allen, 2006; Bauer et al., 1998). For instance, Kammeyer-Muller and Wanberg (2003) found that organizational socialization increased employees' role understanding, which in turn reduced the likelihood of withdrawal from the organization. Thus, successful organizational socialization tends to be associated with greater person-organization fit, which in turn is associated with greater organizational embeddedness.

Work Group Perspective

In this section, we discuss a number of factors related to the work group that may promote mobility or embeddedness. These factors include social capital, social support and group cohesiveness, relational demography, task interdependence, use of virtual work, use of external labor, and complementary versus supplementary person-group fit.

Social capital. The core tenet of social capital theory is that the diversity and uniqueness of ties to individuals in other networks significantly enhances individuals' access to valuable private or confidential information (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1985; Lin, 2001; Nahapiet & Ghosal, 1998). On one hand, social ties at work directly strengthen individuals' links with others in the organization and thereby promote job embeddedness (Mitchell, Holtom, & Lee, 2001). On the other hand, social capital can increase the likelihood of external mobility because highly networked employees have greater access to job leads and decision makers in the external labor market (Granovetter, 1985). For instance, Lai et al. (1998) found that people with greater social capital were more likely to find jobs through contacts with higher status people—a strategy that resulted in their obtaining higher status jobs.

The role of social capital with respect to mobility and embeddedness, then, is somewhat unclear. The mixed findings on the influence of social capital on mobility may be partially attributable to whether the social ties are organization based or occupation based (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000). Social ties that are organization based may act to directly increase job embeddedness, whereas social ties that are occupation based may open up more external mobility options for individuals.

Social support and group cohesiveness. It is not only the number of ties but also the emotional intensity of the ties that affects mobility and embeddedness. Specifically, relationships that involve deep affection and positive emotions are likely to reduce individuals' intentions to change jobs or occupations (Ng & Sorensen, in press; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999).

The negative relationship between group cohesiveness and mobility can also be explained from an embeddedness perspective. Group cohesion fosters obligations of reciprocity and, in so doing, increases links among work group members (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho,

Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004). Moreover, the emotional energy devoted to the development of work-group relationships may also increase individuals' sense of sacrifice when they consider external job opportunities (Pearce & Randel, 2004).

Relational demography. Researchers have found that when individuals are demographically different from others at work, they are more likely to leave their organizations altogether (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992). The underlying explanation for this phenomenon is that individuals who are demographically different are less likely to identify with their work groups' values and are more likely to have weak emotional attachments to coworkers (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991). On the other hand, those who are demographically similar to colleagues are less likely to be mobile. That is, those who value the reinforcement they receive from colleagues will be much less likely to leave their workgroup behind.

Task interdependence. Task interdependence is the extent to which coworkers depend on each other to achieve organizational or group goals (Van Der Vegt & Janssen, 2003). When working on tasks that are interdependent in nature, employees may feel a stronger obligation to remain because their leaving would interrupt the productivity of valued coworkers. Another reason why task interdependence may decrease job mobility is because task interdependence promotes stronger commitment to the organization as a whole (Bishop & Scott, 2000).

Virtual work. Advances in technology have changed the structure of work tremendously (Russell, 2003). On one hand, Golden (2006) found that telework was associated with increased organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions. The rationale behind this finding was that, by accommodating individual workers' idiosyncratic scheduling preferences, virtual work arrangements increased individuals' perceptions of person-group fit (Hill, Ferris, & Martinson, 2003). On the other hand, the frequent use of virtual work may accustom individuals to working alone, thereby decreasing their sense of identification with the work group as a whole (Hesketh, 2001). By and large, the effects of virtual work on mobility and embeddedness are still unclear.

Use of external labor. As organizational restructurings became more numerous, there was a concomitant increase in the use of contingent employees (e.g., part-time, temporary, and contract help) (Littler, Wiesner, & Dunford, 2003; White, Hill, Mills, & Smeaton, 2004). Not surprisingly, the contingent labor force is highly mobile across organizations by virtue of their short-term employment contracts (Liden, Wayne, Kraimer, & Sparrow, 2003).

What is perhaps more surprising is that the use of external labor appears to increase the job mobility of "internal" or "core" employees, too. The blending of internal and external labor may result in dysfunctional subgroup conflict (Davis-Blake, Broschak, & George, 2003). Studies have also suggested that social exclusion occurs between these two groups of employees (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004), communication between core and external labor forces is limited or biased (Sias, Kramer, & Jenkins, 1997), and competition for scarce work and resources between the groups is sometimes intense (Barnett & Miner, 1992; Pearce, 1993). Davis-Blake et al. (2003) also found that extensive use of externalized labor resulted in worsening relationships between core employees and management, decreased organizational loyalty among core employees, and increased turnover intentions.

*Complementary versus supplementary person-group fit***.** Researchers differentiate between two types of person-group fit: complementary and supplementary (Kristof, 1996; Ostroff, Shin, & Feinberg, 2002). Complementary fit occurs when individuals' skills and interests add value to, or "complete," those of other group members. In contrast, supplementary fit occurs when an individual's skills and values are the same as those of coworkers; it is the type of fit typically envisioned by the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Complementary and supplementary person-group fit may act to influence job embeddedness in different ways.

Where there is supplementary fit, communication among group members is more likely to be effective and identification with the group is more likely to be reinforced. Consequently, the links among individual members of the group may be strong—but an individual wanting to leave the group could be confident his or her work would be handled successfully by remaining teammates. In contrast, where there is complementary fit, individuals who "complete" the group may have fewer links to the group but may feel more obligated to stay put because their responsibilities could not be readily assumed by others. The effects of different types of person-group fit on mobility, then, deserve much more empirical attention.

Personal Life Perspective

The personal life perspective on job mobility suggests that individuals' mobility is determined, in part, by factors in their personal lives rather than in their professional lives. Researchers approaching the question of embeddedness from this perspective have studied three major factors in particular: (a) amount and predictability of time demands, (b) support in resolving work-life conflicts, and (c) family and friendship networks.

Amount and predictability of time demands. Time demands of personal life activities may elicit either mobility or embeddedness. If individuals cannot satisfy the time demands from work, they are more likely to leave for jobs that allow for greater flexibility, lower workload, or more predictable work hours (Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2004; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992). The underlying process presumed to drive this external mobility is burnout in the current job (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).

It should be noted that amount and predictability of time demands at home also influence individuals' mobility or embeddedness. Doering and Rhodes (1989) observed that when individuals do not have a family to support, they are more likely to make job changes. The theory of conservation of resources also supports this rationale (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999).

Support in resolving work-life conflict. Individuals faced with a high degree of work-life conflict typically experience a lower quality of life (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, in press). To reduce this conflict, individuals are likely to either switch to another organization that provides greater time flexibility or withdraw totally from the labor force. On the other hand, organizational programs aimed at relieving these conflicts (e.g., on-site child care) may increase the sense of fit and the magnitude of sacrifice individuals would feel if they left their positions (Casper & Buffardi, 2004).

Family and friendship networks. Family and friendship networks also influence mobility and embeddedness (Dette & Dalbert, 2005). Because an individual's mobility decisions affect close family and friends, too, an employee is likely to take them into consideration when making important job decisions. In early career, the main effect of families appears to be embedding individuals in their initial occupational choices (Feldman, 2002c; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). For instance, new college graduates may feel the need to remain in occupations related to their college majors because their parents expect them to (Vignoli, Croity-Belz, Chapeland, de Fillipis, & Martine, 2005).

For older individuals who are married and have started their own families, mobility decisions may be influenced by the relative earning power of spouses, with primary wage earners having a proportionately greater influence on mobility decisions (Eby, Allen, & Douthitt, 1999; Van Ommeren, Rietveld, & Nijkamp, 2002). By and large, individuals who care deeply about work-family balance tend to have a preference for stable home lives and community environments (Lee & Maurer, 1999). For instance, Kirchmeyer (2006) observed that married individuals fear that any major changes they made in their organizations or occupations could also have major (and/or negative) consequences for their families and significant others by disrupting their friendship and social ties.

Personality and Personal Style Perspective

The last set of factors we consider deal with individuals' stable predispositions. In particular, we focus on the four that have received the most attention in the mobility literature, namely, attachment styles, personality traits, career interests, and intelligence.

Attachment styles. Attachment has been defined as "the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to particular others" (Bowlby, 1977: 201). Individuals can be classified into four categories of attachment styles based on two dimensions: *self-view* and *others-view* (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins, 1996). Those with positive self-view and positive others-view have *secure* attachment styles. Those with positive self-view and negative others-view have *dismissive* attachment styles. Those with negative self-view but positive others-view have *preoccupied* attachment styles. Finally, those with negative self-view and negative others-view have *fearful* attachment styles.

Attachment style can have a major impact on mobility and embeddedness. Those who have *secure* attachment styles may experience more internal-upward job transitions. As Blustein, Prezioso, and Schultheiss (1995) noted, these individuals tend to have a positive view of others, which in turn may increase managers' evaluations of their promotability (Shore, Barksdale, & Shore, 1995). Those with *preoccupied* attachment styles may feel favorably toward their employers and be predisposed to be organizationally stable. However, because preoccupieds do not have positive self-concepts, they may be less likely to apply for internal promotions (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 2001; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). Individuals with *fearful* attachment styles do not have favorable views of others and are more likely to frequently switch employers as a way to avoid committing themselves to work relationships and organizations (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000; Wolfe &

Betz, 2004). Those with *dismissive* attachment styles have a positive view of themselves, but not of others; they, too, tend to change employers more frequently (Wooten, Timmerman, & Folger, 1999).

Big 5 personality traits. Personality traits have long been investigated as important influences on job mobility. Here we focus on the "Big Five" (neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience) because this taxonomy is the most widely used one in this research area (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Van Vianen, Feij, Krausz, & Taris, 2003; Watson & Clark, 1992).

Neuroticism appears particularly relevant in predicting different types of job mobility. Because people high on neuroticism consistently demonstrate nervousness and anxiety, they may not be seen as desirable candidates for internal transfers or promotions (Ng et al., 2005). However, those scoring high on neuroticism may frequently seek out external-lateral mobility options because they have low self-esteem and tend to search for positive affirmation elsewhere (Judge & Bono, 2001). *Extraversion* and *openness to experience* may be related to greater upward mobility (both internal and external to the firm) because individuals with these traits tend to be more active and skillful in seeking out new job opportunities (Judge, Bono, Illies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Watson & Clark, 1992).

Given that *conscientiousness* is consistently related to job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), people who are high on conscientiousness should have more opportunities for upward mobility (Tharenou, 1997). However, because conscientiousness is also associated with dutifulness, responsibility, and dependability, highly conscientious individuals may be more likely to have greater internal mobility than external mobility. To date, *agreeableness* has not been clearly demonstrated to be related to any particular kind of job mobility.

Locus of control. Another personality trait that has been examined in the mobility literature is locus of control. Rotter (1966) differentiated between individuals with internal and external locus of control. Internals are those who believe that they are the masters of their own fate and are typically confident in their abilities to manage their environments. Externals, on the other hand, are those who believe that they do not have much control over their lives and perceive themselves in passive roles with regard to mastering their environments.

Because internals are often more successful in their careers (Ng et al., 2005), they are likely to have more mobility options, both internally and externally. For instance, Phillips and Bedeian (1994) observed that internals were more likely to be "spotted" by senior employees and to achieve greater hierarchical advancement. On the other hand, because externals do not believe they can gain active control over their careers, they are disinclined to explore new career opportunities, either laterally or vertically (Ng, Sorensen, & Eby, in press).

Career interests. Researchers have theorized that individuals' specific career interests also affect mobility and embeddedness (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Gail, 1994; Oleski & Subich, 1996). Because Holland's (1985) typology of career interests is the model most commonly adopted and validated in the careers literature (Larson, Rottinghaus, & Borgen, 2002; Prediger, 2000), we discuss the potential relationships between the six interest areas in this typology and job mobility.

Individuals with *social* career interests are more likely to experience mobility because they are more comfortable exploring new jobs in both internal and external labor markets (Larson et al., 2002). In contrast, individuals with *conventional* career interests may have the least amount of external mobility because they prefer routine and predictability in their jobs (Douce & Hansen, 1990).

Individuals with *investigative, enterprising,* and *artistic* career interests may be more likely to experience mobility than stability, but for different reasons. Individuals with investigative interests tend to be similar to those high on openness to experience and therefore are more likely to welcome new job opportunities (Larson et al., 2002). Those with enterprising career interests are especially motivated to move upward and externally because they have a greater need to manage others (Chan, Rounds, & Drasgow, 2000). Because individuals with artistic career interests are concerned with self-expression and creativity, they may have a greater desire to seek out self-employment instead of organization-based employment. (To date, there has been little empirical evidence of the relationship between *realistic* career interests and job mobility.)

Types of intelligence. Both Hunter (1986) and Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) made an important distinction between fluid intellectual abilities (Gf) and crystallized intellectual abilities (Gc). *Fluid intellectual abilities* refer to the capacity of working memory, level of abstract reasoning, and ability to pay attention and process new information. The weight of the evidence suggests that maximum levels of Gf are usually reached in the early twenties and decline thereafter, although certainly not at the same speed for all individuals. Consequently, the cognitive "cost" of exerting effort to learn new material is greater for middle-aged and older adults than it is for young adults (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004), and occupational embeddedness is likely to increase with age (Feldman & Ng, in press).

Crystallized intellectual abilities are associated with greater general knowledge, vocabulary, and verbal comprehension (Cattell, 1987). They encompass both vocational knowledge (about work topics) and avocational knowledge (about culture, for instance). In contrast to Gf, Gc appears to grow well into middle age and beyond (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Kanfer and Ackerman (2004) also suggested that, as Gf declines, individuals compensate by moving into work roles that place high demands on Gc and low demands on Gf (Baltes & Baltes, 1990). For this reason, older workers are more likely to seek out internal opportunities for managerial jobs but are less likely to seek out external mobility options for technical jobs.

Mobility, Embeddedness, and Career Success

Having reviewed the literature on factors leading to mobility and embeddedness, we now turn to two other related questions. First, which sets of factors are most closely associated with different types of job, organizational, and occupational mobility (and embeddedness)? Second, which types of mobility and embeddedness are most closely associated with different kinds of career success?

Although there have been numerous studies of how the various factors identified earlier relate to job mobility and job attitudes (cf. Ng et al., 2005), there have been very few empirical

studies of the factors associated with embeddedness, particularly organizational and occupational embeddedness. Similarly, as noted above, there are very few studies that empirically link different levels of embeddedness (job, organizational, and occupation) to either subjective or career success. As a result, there is not a sufficiently large empirical base on which to make strong statements about the relative effect sizes of different factors on types of mobility and embeddedness or about the relative effect sizes of different levels of mobility and embeddedness on various outcome variables.

At the same time, though, some preliminary patterns of results are emerging. Below, we provide our qualitative assessments of the state of the literature on relationships among career mobility, career embeddedness, and career success.

Strongest Influences on Embeddedness and Mobility

Aggregate amount of mobility. In general, the structural factors (such as macroeconomic conditions) appear to have their greatest impact on the aggregate amount of mobility in the working population—across jobs, across organizations, and across occupations (DiPrete, 1993; Doeringer, 1990; Hachen, 1992). Poor economic conditions make it financially more difficult for individuals to accumulate enough resources to invest in new occupational training. In addition, poor economic conditions also decrease the number of new positions within firms and the number of new firms created. Poor economic conditions also increase job insecurity, thereby making individuals less likely to give up any longevity-based employment security or compensation benefits accrued in their current firms.

Mobility of historically disadvantaged groups. The social and legal environment factors appear to have their greatest impact on the aggregate mobility of populations that have been historically disadvantaged (Fujiwara-Greve & Greve, 2000; Rosenfeld, 1992). During the past 50 years, changes in social policy have increased educational and employment opportunities for these employees by either reducing barriers to entry (e.g., affirmative action legislation) or by providing resources for entry (e.g., Job Partnership Training Act). Even government set-asides for particular geographic locations have been typically targeted at areas that have been economically distressed for considerable periods of time. For the population in general, though, social and legal policies have had only modest effects on employee mobility and/or embeddedness (DiPrete & Nonnemaker, 1997).

Occupational mobility and embeddedness. The factors that seem to be particularly salient for occupational mobility are the permeability of occupational mobility structures and industry growth. Permeability of occupational mobility structures and high industry growth rates not only reduce barriers to entry but also increase workers' expectations that they can successfully shift into a particular new career path (Arnold, Loan-Clarke, Coombs, Wilkinson, Park, & Preton, in press; Ng, Sorensen, Eby, & Feldman, in press). On the other hand, the factor that seems to embed individuals in their current occupations most strongly is level of human capital investment (Fulgate et al., 2004; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999). Both the economics and management literature suggest that individuals are reluctant to give up on "sunk costs," particularly when those sunk costs are high and are unlikely to be recoverable in the near term.

Organizational mobility and embeddedness. The literature to date suggests that the structure of pension and insurance benefits has the strongest effect on embedding employees in their current organizations (Kim & Feldman, 1998, 2000). Using the same logic as above, individuals are reluctant to give up on sunk costs, particularly when those sunk costs are high. It is interesting to note here that pension and insurance benefits are not typically high on the factors individuals consider when choosing organizations but tend to be more important in decisions about leaving organizations (Buchmueller & Valletta, 1996).

The effects of compensation policies on organizational change and embeddedness are complex. For example, although it is true that high salaries can embed employees with golden handcuffs, true stars are often able to extract equally high or higher salaries in the external labor market (Pil & Leana, 2000). In general, wage differences across organizations are positively related to external mobility decisions (Hammida, 2004), but the interactions between wages and longevity-based benefits on mobility decisions have not yet been explored in much depth.

Job mobility and embeddedness. Here, we need to consider the differences between job change within organizations and external job change separately. In terms of internal job changes, the factors that appear to be the most embedding are social capital and social support. Even for individuals who feel the need for new job challenges, high social capital and high social support appear to focus employees' search for new positions within their current firms (De Janasz & Sullivan, 2004).

On the other hand, the factors that appear to lead to more external job mobility are predictability of time demands and support in resolving work-life conflict (Ng & Sorensen, in press). Guidelines regarding predictability of time demands and support for work-life conflict are more likely to be set at the organizational level than at the unit level. That is, it is relatively uncommon for some units, but not others, to have flextime and day care facilities. For this reason, then, individuals who like their job responsibilities but cannot function adequately in a particular organizational context are more likely to seek out external job mobility opportunities instead.

Individual mobility and embeddedness. In general, the research on individual differences suggests that these attributes affect decisions to engage in *any* type of mobility rather than any *specific type* of mobility (Judge et al., 2002). For example, although openness to experience has been linked to greater willingness to change positions in general, there is not enough evidence at this point to argue that openness to experience is strongly related to any particular type of mobility (job, organizational, or occupational). Similarly, although individuals with social career interests appear to be more open to mobility in general, there is not much evidence to suggest whether those interests have a greater impact on job, organizational, or occupational mobility (Ng et al., 2005).

Relationships With Career Success

Occupational mobility and embeddedness. In general, there is not much concrete evidence that changing occupations leads to more tangible rewards like salary, certainly in the

short run. Even for individuals who are moving from lower wage occupations to higher wage occupations, workers have to spend money on retraining and incur some loss of income while getting retrained (Arnold et al., in press). Moreover, individuals entering new occupations with long training periods (like medicine) have to forego multiple years of earnings to make career changes. It is likely (but not inevitable) that occupational mobility leads to greater objective career success in the long run, because we would expect more moves into higher paying occupations than into lower paying ones (Hachen, 1992; Schniper, 2005).

On the other hand, the relationship between occupational change and subjective career success may be higher for a variety of reasons (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Hill et al., 2003; King, Burke, & Pemberton, 2005). First and foremost, individuals usually only make these dramatic changes when their affect toward new occupations is significantly more positive than their affect toward their current occupations. Second, individuals often enter new careers with high positive expectations of job satisfaction, and those expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Third, through processes of cognitive dissonance, individuals may raise their evaluations of their new occupations to justify the sacrifices incurring in leaving their prior vocations. Thus, subjective career success (e.g., job satisfaction) is likely to be positively associated with occupational mobility (Feldman, 2002a).

To date, there has not been a great deal of research on the relationship between occupational embeddedness and subjective career success. Using the attraction-selection-attrition paradigm (Schneider et al., 1995), we would predict that individuals who are most unhappy with their occupations would drop out of those occupations over time. As a result, individuals who are embedded in their occupations over a long period of time are likely to be generally satisfied with their vocations. However, the link between occupational embeddedness and objective career success is more tenuous and depends, to a large extent, on the wage levels within an occupation (Feldman, 2002a; Ng & Feldman, in press). For example, librarians may be highly embedded in their occupations, but typically there are relatively low wages and limited upward mobility opportunities in that career path.

Organizational mobility and embeddedness. The relationships between organizational mobility and objective measures of career success are frequently opposite those we observe with occupational mobility. Interorganizational mobility tends to bid up wages in the labor market (Lam & Dreher, 2004), because individuals are reluctant to change jobs unless a noticeable pay raise is part of the package. In addition, many individuals who are unsuccessful in getting promoted internally seek out opportunities for promotions in the external market and frequently take them when offered. Thus, all things being equal, organizational mobility tends to be positively related to objective career success.

On the other hand, the influence of interorganizational mobility on subjective career success may depend on whether the mobility is sought from an "approach" or "avoidance" motivation (Kondratuk, Hausdorf, Korabik, & Rosin, 2004). When individuals change organizations voluntarily (e.g., to take advantage of significant promotion opportunities), feelings of subjective career success are likely to be higher (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005). However, if mobility is sought out primarily to escape highly stressful environments, then individuals might hurriedly accept jobs in other organizations that are only marginally superior to their present positions. In these cases, we would not expect any significant increase in subjective career success. Moreover, there is some evidence that individuals carry

over poor job attitudes in one organization to the next (Hochwarter, Perrewé, Ferris, & Bryner, 1999).

The evidence on the relationships between organizational embeddedness and career success is mixed. There are reasons to expect that organizational embeddedness may be associated with greater subjective career success. Individuals who are terribly unhappy are most likely to self-select out early in their tenure with an organization, and so the remaining, long-term employees tend to be relatively satisfied (Schneider et al., 1995). Moreover, long-term embeddedness in an organization is likely to be associated with greater feelings of security and financial well-being in retirement (Kim & Feldman, 1998, 2000).

However, long-term organizational embeddedness may not be significantly related to objective career success. Because external wages typically get bid up faster than internal wages, employees who have spent their whole careers in one firm may end up making lower wages than their more mobile counterparts (Hammida, 2004; Haveman & Cohen, 1994). Also, particularly at the higher levels of organizations, it is hard to get promoted internally into top management positions. Consequently, external mobility might be more strongly related to ultimate hierarchical level attained than embeddedness is (Baruch & Peiperl, 2003).

Job mobility and embeddedness. Like organizational mobility, external job mobility often enhances objective career success because individuals typically accrue new skills or a broader range of skills in such moves. These enhanced skill sets tend to raise individuals' salaries and/or their promotion prospects in the labor market (Bird, 1996; Eby et al., 2003). In addition, because wages in the external labor market tend to increase more quickly than internal wages, external job mobility is more likely to lead to greater objective career success than internal job mobility does (Feldman, 2002a).

Here, too, the relationship between job mobility and subjective career success is influenced by whether individuals engage in external job mobility to approach better opportunities or to escape bad job situations. When individuals change jobs to take advantage of more interesting and involving duties and responsibilities, external job mobility is likely to be associated with greater subjective perceptions of career success (Hall & Chandler, 2005). In contrast, when turnover is motivated by a desire to escape the present job rather than from any genuine interest in the new position, there is no reason to expect that feelings of subjective career success will be any higher (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). In addition, the relationship between job changes and subjective career success is influenced by whether the job moves entail upward, lateral, or downward mobility. Subjective career success is highly likely with promotions and highly unlikely with demotions.

Discussion

In this final section, we revisit the construct of *boundaryless careers* and suggest some ways in which it can be more thoughtfully used in future careers research. We also identify additional avenues for future research and implications for career development in practice.

Reconsidering the Construct of Boundaryless Careers

Although the term *boundaryless career* has been used extensively in the careers literature, the construct is somewhat imprecise. In their original formulation, Arthur and Rousseau (1996: 6) enumerated at least six different connotations of the term. These include changes in employers, external validation of market worth from outside employers, connectedness to external networks, nonhierarchical reporting relationships, refusal to take employer-offered job changes, and flexibility (or constraints) on mobility because of personal circumstances.

Consequently, it has sometimes been unclear as to whether the term *boundaryless careers* refers to the nature of the environment in which career mobility takes place, the actual trajectories of workers themselves, or even geographic mobility (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). It is also sometimes unclear whether the term refers to *objective* measures of mobility (e.g., the frequency with which people change jobs) or to *subjective* measures of mobility (e.g., employees' perceptions of the desirability or instrumentality of increased mobility). Ironically, during the past decade, the construct of boundaryless careers has become somewhat boundaryless itself.

Here, we suggest that there are two major components of the boundaryless career construct. The first is the *permeability* of institutional labor markets. From an institutional perspective, permeability refers to the number of alternative jobs, organizations, and occupations available to employees and the ease or difficulty of entry into them (Belous, 1990; Doeringer, 1990). The second is the *plasticity* of individuals' career paths. At the individual level, plasticity refers to the frequency and degree of change (in jobs, organizations, and occupations) across a person's work history (cf. Nicholson & West, 1988). We believe it is critical to distinguish boundarylessness as an attribute of the environment from boundarylessness as an attribute of an individual's own work history.

We also propose a specification that clearly differentiates objective from subjective boundarylessness, much as we currently distinguish objective career success from subjective career success (Hall, 1976; Ng et al., 2005). For instance, there are both objective barriers to entry (e.g., years of education required) and subjective measures of permeability (e.g., employees' perceptions of labor market opportunities). Similarly, there are both objective indicators of plasticity of career paths (e.g., the ratio of job changes to years in the workforce) and subjective indicators of plasticity (e.g., attitudes toward the desirability of job mobility).

Furthermore, we suggest that some original elements of the "boundaryless career" construct—particularly, networking outside the firm, getting external validation of wages from outside employers, and refusal to accept job changes from the current employer—be considered as *career tactics* instead (Cappelli, 1999; Pil & Leana, 2000). Although these tactics can certainly be instrumental in terms of increasing mobility and/or career success, they are not systematically aligned with boundarylessness per se. For example, individuals may seek out external validation from the market not so they can *move* but rather so they can *stay* in their current firm but with a higher salary.

It is also important to reconsider whether the construct *boundaryless career* should retain all the positive connotations it has acquired during the past decade. The term has commonly been used to convey notions of unbounded, limitless, or infinite possibilities. However, boundaryless careers are hardly cost-free. For example, Eby (2001) found that among dual-earner

married couples, the interfirm upward mobility of one spouse was often accompanied by downward mobility of the other.

In sum, then, the utility of the construct of boundaryless careers has decreased over time as the number of attributes associated with the term has increased. Going forward from here, a more precise, value-neutral specification of that term will be needed for serious research to accumulate in meaningful ways. Indeed, as King et al. (2005) noted, it might be just as fair to use the term *bounded career* as *boundaryless career*.

Directions for Future Research

Consistent with the discussion above, then, it is critical that researchers start taking a finer grained look at career mobility, career embeddedness, and career success. By lumping all kinds of mobility together, we increase the likelihood of spurious (and suppressor) relationships with indicators of career success. Equally critically, we may draw overstated inferences about the degree of mobility in the population. It has now become almost an urban myth that the average graduate today will have five to seven careers throughout his or her life, but that figure is totally inconsistent with objective data on occupational change (Schniper, 2005). We owe it to other scholars, and to the public at large, to be more precise with our data and our inferences from those data.

Although careers researchers draw on a wide variety of theoretical perspectives in their research, careers research has been dominated by a few paradigms in particular: valence-instrumentality-expectancy models (Kim & Feldman, 2000), the stress-coping paradigm (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), role theory (Eby et al., 1999), and network theory (Green & Bauer, 1995). Two additional perspectives, in particular, might be fruitfully brought to bear on questions about mobility and embeddedness.

One research perspective that warrants greater attention is cognitive decision processes. With numerous advances in cognitive psychology during the past decade, it is time to reconsider how decision-making heuristics and biases play into mobility and/or stability decisions. Furthermore, to the extent that these biases have been studied in previous research on mobility, they have primarily been explored in the context of decisions about first jobs out of school. However, individuals' cognitive processing capacities change over time. Thus, we need to investigate how decision-making biases influence mobility and/or stability decisions across the entire career (Feldman & Ng, in press; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004).

Another theoretical approach to mobility and embeddedness that might prove useful is one grounded in emotions research (Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). That is, we have relatively little evidence about how individuals' emotions, rather than their cognitions, affect decisions to leave or stay. Also, research on emotional contagion might help us understand the dynamics that underlie widespread exits from a firm—exits that are not explainable by individuals' personal circumstances alone.

Like several other fields in the organizational sciences, careers researchers have often focused their investigations on one level of analysis (e.g., the structural perspective, the family perspective, or the individual-differences perspective). Although no research study could reasonably be expected to investigate all factors related to mobility and embeddedness, the

lack of attention to labor market dynamics in particular (cf. DiPrete et al., 1997) has been a major methodological shortcoming in careers research. The economic context in which mobility or embeddedness occurs significantly influences how individuals perceive the possibility or desirability of changing jobs; in some senses, labor markets become the "strong" or "weak" situations that allow (or prevent) individual employees from acting in ways consistent with their true preferences. Moreover, labor market dynamics might interact with individual differences to help explain mobility and/or stability behavior. For instance, the relationship between locus of control and the decision to leave might be moderated by the robustness of the labor market, with internal locus of control influencing mobility decisions only in growing economies but not in stagnant ones.

As noted earlier, there has been much more research on intentions to move than on actual mobility behavior (Ng et al., 2005). It is easy to see why this is the case, given the difficulty of collecting actual mobility data over time. Nonetheless, the relative lack of attention to actual mobility in academic disciplines besides economics has resulted in a situation in which we know much more about willingness to move than actual mobility itself. From a methodological perspective, then, much more longitudinal research on actual mobility is clearly needed.

Implications for Practice

The research on mobility and embeddedness has some implications for how organizations and individuals pursue career development activities. For example, the common practice of making employees generate outside offers to justify requests for pay raises has several unintended negative consequences. It signals employees that they should be frequently job hunting—despite the evidence that intention to search is an excellent predictor of turnover and that it is the best employees who will be able to generate the most external offers (Maertz & Griffeth, 2004). At the same time, employees who generate these offers often feel boxed into accepting them, even if they are not excited about them, simply to save face if their current employers do not "counter" (Pil & Leana, 2000).

For organizations, the decisions about whether to encourage mobility or embeddedness should be tied closely to corporate strategy. Mobility and embeddedness are not ends in and of themselves but rather means of linking HR practices to overall corporate goals. In quickly growing units or functional areas, more organizational embeddedness is likely to be encouraged. In contrast, in business units and functional areas experiencing decline, firms may be more willing to live with higher levels of turnover and external job mobility. In addition, firms can use longevity-based benefits (like pensions) and family-friendly practices (like on-site child care) to increase/decrease organizational embeddedness as needed.

From the perspective of individual employees, decisions about mobility and embeddedness are complex and appear to depend heavily on career stage and life stage considerations (Feldman, 2002a). The evidence suggests that, in early career, the benefits of both job and organizational mobility are numerous: They each build human and social capital at a stage in life where the returns on these investments can accumulate. Moreover, for young adults who came out of school with little specific (or the wrong kind of) training, the ability to engage in occupational mobility and yet recoup the costs of retraining is still high.

In contrast, as individuals enter middle age, the forces toward occupational embeddedness become stronger; employees become both more time-involved with, and financially committed, to family responsibilities (Kondratuk et al., 2004). That does not mean middle-aged or mid-career employees cannot, or should not, be occupationally mobile. Rather, such moves require a very high degree of investment in one's career (relative to one's personal life) and sacrifices from one's family and friends as well as from oneself. Job and organizational mobility at mid-career can still be generally beneficial, both to avoid career plateauing and to increase one's standard of living.

Finally, in late career, the degrees of freedom for older workers are often greater. Older workers' career concerns shift from the accumulation of assets to a greater desire for close relationships and socially meaningful work (Hall, 1976). Thus, many earlier constraints on mobility are relaxed (Kim & Feldman, 2000). Moreover, late-career and older workers typically have fewer embedding forces related to children and parents and thus experience less pull to keep them on their current trajectories. It is perhaps quite fitting that, after long careers marked by countless obligations to employers and families, older workers should have the most opportunities for genuinely boundaryless careers. Thus, as highlighted throughout the article, for scholars and practitioners alike who are concerned with issues of mobility and embeddedness, it is critical to explore the different constellations of mobility opportunities, embeddedness constraints, and definitions of career success across the entire life span.

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