

Capturing Career Reflections: Construction of an Instrument to Explore Careers and Career Development

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This study describes the development and validation of an instrument to tap employee reflections on career interests, needs and career development opportunities. Item construction was based on issues identified in previous qualitative research and themes prevalent in recent HRD career development literature. Pilot data for an exploratory factor analysis were gathered from 222 participants. The resulting instrument is unique in including both personal and systemic career issues, providing a new perspective for career development research.

Keywords: Career Development, Evaluation/Assessment/Measurement, Researching HRD

As organizations strive for success in a competitive global environment, they are exploring ways to become more innovative and effective. It is “an era when ‘working smart,’ flexibility, and efficiency are prized characteristics of any workforce” (Leibowitz, Feldman, and Mosley, 1992, p. 334). Yet, this need for high performing, creative employees has not fostered a commensurate interest in career development (CD) on the part of the organization. To the contrary, career development currently “is being overlooked as a contributor to HRD,” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p.312) at a time when it should be expanded to include employees at all levels and to accommodate changing perceptions of careers and career development (McDonald & Hite, in press). This paper responds to that need by describing the development of an instrument that will assess individual reflections on careers and career opportunities, and in doing so, yield data about HRD’s role in building a more effective workforce through career development. The following framework addresses key steps in creation of this instrument.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers at recent AHRD conferences have discussed the need for a greater connection between CD and HRD (Boudreaux, 2001; Conlon, 2004; McDonald & Hite, 2005; Van Dijk, 2004). Given the changing nature of careers and organizations, these papers introduced a number of themes related to CD. Several of these themes provided a framework for the construction of this instrument including work-life balance, access to learning opportunities, career intention/planning, and employee/employer responsibilities (e.g., rewards and expectations) (Conlon, 2004; Hite & McDonald 2003; McDonald, Hite, & Gilbreath, 2002; van Dijk, 2004). They reflect a new era in career development for individuals and organizations. In the quest to remain competitive, many organizations are seeking greater productivity with lower costs (Conlon, 2004), often prompting two seemingly contradictory actions, downsizing, and maintaining a stable, highly skilled workforce. In response to the former, employees are more likely to adopt a protean or boundaryless career perspective, setting and pursuing their own career paths and seeking to develop skills they can transfer to other organizational systems (Hall, 1996; Authur & Rouseau, 1996). Organizations interested in recruiting and retaining the workforce they need must acknowledge this shift in expectations and interests by focusing not only on their own needs but also on the satisfaction of their employees.

Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is increasingly being identified as a factor in determining career satisfaction and progress (Forret & Sullivan, 2002). Sometimes referred to as work-family issues, the topic has been addressed in numerous research studies, revealing a strong connection between work-family conflict and reduced career satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Martins, Eddleston, & Veiga, 2002). Similarly, Subich 1998, p. 398) found that particularly for some women, satisfaction with family roles might take precedence over the content of their work in determining their overall satisfaction, noting “it would seem advisable to incorporate assessment of women’s multiple role involvements and conflicts into research and practice when satisfaction is of interest.” Evidence also indicates that work-family concerns often influence women’s career choices and paths (Eccles, 1994; Hite & McDonald, 2003). Although most of the research on family and work to date has focused on women, men crafting careers in the current workplace also juggle multiple life-work roles. Items were developed to capture the influence of life and family

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issues on career. Additionally, the occupational scales from the Life Role Saliency Scales (LRSS) (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986) were included to assess the priority of work and career in individuals' lives.

Career Intention

Hall (2002, p. 12) has proposed "the career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life," recognizing in that definition the importance of the individual in defining what comprises his or her career. Similarly, Schein (1996, p. 80) described the advent of the "internal career" a "subjective sense of where one is going in one's work life" as a contrast to the traditional "external career" with parameters prescribed by and bound within an organizational structure. These descriptors and similar research (for example, Hall, 1996; Authur & Rousseau, 1996) redefined what constitutes a career and have transformed not only how careers are perceived, but also how they are planned and implemented. The planned career is now a viable option for many, including diverse and non-managerial employees, often overlooked as career builders in the past (Hall, 2002; Leibowitz, Feldman, & Mosley, 1992). The traditional view that hourly workers do not have career goals is being called into question. For example, McDonald, Hite, and Gilbreath (2002) reported that some non-managerial employees did think about their careers. The influence of career planning on success should not be underestimated. Gould's (1979) career planning model linked planning with implementation and achievement of career goals. Data from Aryee and Yaw (1993) linked career planning to both career satisfaction and commitment. The value of this intentional thinking about career goals prompted inclusion of items on the instrument that directly probed career plans.

CD Interest and Access

In the wake of competition driven reductions and restructurings, organizations are increasingly depending on smaller workforces in flatter structural systems to yield large results (Swanson & Holton, 1999). As more responsibility is relegated to lower level employees, questions arise about how to best prepare the hourly workforce to be more effective and innovative. While research has begun to support non-managerial employees' interest in career development, there is little evidence of their participation in CD initiatives, prompting questions about awareness of, investment in, and access to such developmental opportunities (McDonald, et al, 2002). Leibowitz, Feldman, and Mosley's work (1992) suggests that access is a key factor, citing the dearth of career development opportunities available to non-salaried workers compared to their upper level counterparts. Wooten and Cobb (1999, p. 173) discussed this concern from a justice perspective, noting that "the allocation of CD resources" and "the policies and procedures used to decide who receives them" must be addressed as a fairness issue. More recently, researchers exploring human resource development's role in career development (Conlon, 2004; McDonald & Hite, in press; van Dijk, 2004) have urged HRD to advocate for CD initiatives that are more inclusive of employees at all levels. A search for existing scales that would measure intention to participate in and/or availability of CD was unsuccessful, leading to the creation of items for this instrument that directly addressed interest in, access to, and/or utilization of typical career development opportunities.

Rewards and Expectations

According to London (1983), career motivation potentially will be affected by a number of situational variables, including reward structures. However, given the changing nature of organizations and careers, the assumptions and expectations of both employee and employer regarding career outcomes have changed as well. A number of career scholars have discussed the changing psychological contract as it relates to individuals' careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Doyle, 2000; Hall, 2002). This changing contact has prompted several questions regarding employee and employer responsibilities as they relate to career development (Conlon, 2004). Employers are concerned with overarching issues regarding whether to provide CD opportunities, how to provide them, and who should have access to them. Employees may wonder if career development responsibilities lie solely in their hands and what they can expect in terms of rewards if they engage in CD activities. There is evidence that some employees are frustrated due to perceived lack of tangible outcomes for participating in career development activities (McDonald, et al., 2002). As McDougall & Vaughn (1996) suggest: ". . . the gap is widening between individual and organizational expectations of issues relating to performance and career development. . . ." These concerns prompted the construction of a series of questions concerning rewards and expectations of rewards for participating in career development activities.

Career Satisfaction

Each of the themes identified contribute to an overall sense of career satisfaction. For example, Van der Sluis and Poell (2003) found a positive relationship between opportunities to learn and satisfaction with career development. Many scholars have provided a number of ways to assess the overall impact of careers. Hall (2002) writes of "career effectiveness" while others focus on "career success" (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999). Most would agree that there is a need to broaden our definition of these terms to encompass more varied objective and subjective indicators given the nature of careers in organizations today (Sullivan, Martin, Carden, & Mainiero,

2003; Van der Sluis & Poell, 2003). Increasing, intrinsic factors are seen as important in determining career satisfaction, seeking what is “personally meaningful,” rather than the traditional goal of promotion within the system (Forret and Sullivan, 2002, p. 248). This focus suggests that self-report data, tapping individual perceptions regarding careers, is critical. An existing scale (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) was incorporated into the instrument to assess the overarching concept of career satisfaction.

Research Questions

Using qualitative data from a previous study, a review of the literature and exploration of existing instruments, a survey instrument was developed. It incorporates two existing scales with additional items that tap constructs not readily available through other sources. The research questions at this point in the process include:

1. What are the key factors in this instrument?
2. Are they distinct from other established measures of career satisfaction and life role salience?

Method

Instrument

The instrument developed for the present study was based on a thematic analysis of career issues as well as focus group data gathered from two previous studies examining career development issues for nonmanagerial employees (Hite & McDonald, 2003; McDonald, et al., 2002). Specific items were constructed based on the following issues: family influences, career planning and intention, CD interest and access, and rewards and expectations.

Three existing scales were utilized as well: a career satisfaction scale developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990) ($\alpha = .88$) and two scales from the Life Role Salience Scales (LRSS) developed by Amatea, Cross, Clark, and Bobby (1986). The career satisfaction scale consists of five items which measure individuals' perceptions of meeting career goals (e.g., regarding income, advancement, development of skills). The two LRSS scales utilized were the Occupation Role Reward Value (α range .82 to .86) and the Occupational Role Commitment (α range .58 to .83). Both of these scales focus on occupational roles, one of the four important life roles the authors identified. The Reward Value scale measures individuals' perceptions of the importance of that role (in this case, occupation) in defining oneself and/or defining one's satisfaction. The role commitment scale assesses individuals' “willingness to commit personal resources to assure success in the role or develop the role” (Amatea, et al., 1986, p. 832). Each of these scales consists of five items.

The initial survey had 49 items: 34 developed by the authors and 15 items from the scales described above. Respondents used a five-point Likert scale to indicate the extent they agreed (5) or disagreed (1) with the statement. The items were examined by two content experts, one in the field of career development, the other from human resource development. Two additional individuals with expertise in survey development examined the items for clarity. One additional item was added based on feedback received from these individuals. Space limitations preclude listing all items in this manuscript, however a full set of items are available.

Subjects

The participants in this study were 222 students, primarily undergraduates, attending a regional university located in the Midwest. The majority of the student population on this campus commute to classes, therefore most of the respondents were employed (88%). An equal number of those employed were full-time and part-time employees (44% each). Males represented 53% of the respondents; the mean age was 26 with an average of 8.4 years in the workforce.

Procedure

The researchers contacted numerous instructors, primarily teaching undergraduate leadership or business courses, requesting class time to administer a survey on career development issues. Once permission was received, one of the researchers went to the class and administered the survey. A brief description of the purpose of the study was provided and students were told their participation was voluntary. After students completed the survey, the researcher asked for comments regarding the construction of the survey. Based on these discussions, minor changes were made to the layout of the survey and to requested demographic information.

A confirmatory factor analysis revealed that all but two items loaded significantly on 1 of 9 factors. These factors are consistent with the proposed variables in the theoretical discussion. Most scales had reliability coefficients greater than the .70, suggesting they have a moderate level of internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Pearson correlations were then conducted.

Results

A series of principal components factor analyses with varimax rotation were conducted on the data, with both the Kaiser criteria and the scree plot suggesting that nine factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (and individual item eigenvalues generally above .6) be maintained. The first factor suggested was represented by the original five questions in Greenhaus et al.'s Career Satisfaction scale ($\alpha = .85$ in this study compares favorably with their reported levels.) Eight of the original ten LRSS items also represented a strong factor, although the two subscales suggested by Amatea and colleagues were highly correlated. Campbell and Campbell (1995) also found substantial overlap in the value and commitment scales in their construct validation study of the LRSS. The Cronbach's alpha for the overall LRSS in this study is .72. It should be noted that the two negatively worded items could be forced into the factor analysis in order to replicate the existing measure, with a resulting $\alpha = .68$.

When the two existing scales are forced to form the variables career satisfaction and LRSS, the next strongest factor that emerges is one that concerns Perceived Development Opportunity Fairness (PDOF). These 9 items ($\alpha = .84$) can be seen as having two highly correlated dimensions. Items in the first dimension reflect that some policies and practices are perceived to have resulted in a fair outcome. For example, *Participating in career development activities has helped me get promoted* or *Participation in career development activities has helped me receive raises* shows that respondents make a cognitive connection between fair processes being set up and perceptions of a just outcome from those processes. The second dimension taps the equal treatment of employees perceived from the formal policies within the organization. For example, *All employees have equal opportunities to develop their careers in my organization* or *I have opportunities to be mentored* are consistent with the notion that fairness judgments occur when situations and organizations fulfill expectations.

One item that failed to load with the fairness items and had negative correlations with items in the PDOF scale was *In my organization, upper level employees have more opportunities for training than people at lower levels*. One possible explanation may be that this item taps more than one of the three bases for fairness: equality, equity, and need based fairness (Bies, 1987; Greenberg, 1996). It is possible when respondents compare upper level and lower level employees, there may be more need or equity expectations that drive the number of opportunities expected. Equal opportunity across the board may be perceived as unfair for those who have advanced in their careers. More opportunity may be one of the valued rewards of career advancement. A second item hypothesized to belong in the PDOF scale also loaded by itself on a factor which had an eigenvalue less than 1. This item *It is the company's responsibility to provide career development opportunities to all employees* may have failed to load because of the same confusion. The implied standard of equality may not be the actual or desired expectation. As a consequence, these two items were dropped from subsequent analysis.

One factor was defined by the items relating to planning and goal setting, and was labeled Active Planning (APLAN) ($\alpha = .70$). Items included *I have planned my career* and *I have developed career goals* as well as less likely items such as *I want to be a mentor* and *I attend training when given the opportunity*. These items suggest a pattern of intentionality on the part of the responder in terms of thinking about one's career and developing specific strategies to achieve career goals.

The next factor was defined by interest in and perceived availability of specific CD opportunities and was labeled CD Interest and Availability (CDIA) ($\alpha = .60$). For example, one of the six items read *I have opportunities to further my skills through training in my organization* while another was stated as *I want to take on challenging assignments at work*. The lower reliability may be caused by the sample respondents currently being enrolled in higher education. They may not be looking for or recognizing career development activities initiated by their work organizations at this time.

Tuition Reimbursement (TUIT) is a strong factor in this study. Three items ($\alpha = .87$) ask whether tuition reimbursement is provided and whether the respondent plans on or is using it. Since all respondents were enrolled in college, this item response may have a positive bias.

Family Influence (FAM) consists of 3 items ($\alpha = .70$). It is important to note that there is no implied direction of the influence in this measure. The items tap the magnitude of the influence, and the respondent is free to characterize whether the effect is good or bad, harmful or helpful. For example, one item reads *Family responsibilities have influenced my choice of jobs*. Coupled with questions about satisfaction with work and home life balance (a one item measure in this study), statements can be made about the desirability of family influence.

Current Position Satisfaction (CPOSS) is a three item measure indicting satisfaction with the current amount of education, and the acceptability of a decision or need to stay or retire from this position. The items in this weaker factor ($\alpha = .52$) seem to reflect a desire to remain as well as a level of satisfaction with the status quo.

Work and life balance (WLBAL) is a one item measure in this study. The item consistently loaded by itself. Since several good measures of work and home life balance exist, there was little need to develop a new measure for this instrument.

An exploratory factor analysis was used to establish the discriminant validity among the conceptual domains represented by career satisfaction, LRSS and the new variables. To demonstrate independence, the individual-level scores for each of these variables were submitted to a principal-components factor analysis. With a nine-factor constraint, the rotated factor matrix showed all items loading on the appropriate factor and minimal overlap of items between factors. From this analysis we can conclude that respondents conceptually distinguished among these constructs.

Finally, descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the resultant variables were computed, and these results appear in Table 1. The resulting correlation matrix is consistent with expectations derived from the theoretical development of this instrument. All of the variables but LRSS and Family Influence are significantly correlated with Career Satisfaction, but at a moderate level, providing additional support for the validity of the new variables in this instrument. Similarly, the new variables are only moderately correlated or not significantly correlated with the existing scale LRSS, supporting the independence of these variables.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics: Correlations and Reliability Coefficients*

Variable name, # items, Reliability Coefficient Alpha (sig) Standard Deviation & n	PDOF	FAM	ACT PLAN	TUIT	CDIA	CP SAT	BAL	LRSS	CAR SAT
1. Perceived Development									
Opportunity Fairness (PDOF) 9 items, alpha = .84 sd .805, n=219									
Family Influence (FAM) 3 items, alpha = .70 sd 1.03, n=219	.058 (.400)								
Active Planning 8 items, alpha = .70 sd .532, n=212	.331** (.000)	.108 (.120)							
Tuition Reimbursement (TUIT) 3 items, alpha = .87 sd 1.47, n=216	.191** (.005)	.126 (.066)	.125 (.070)						
CD Interest & Availability (CDIA) 6 items, alpha = .60 sd .532, n=212	.508** (.000)	.014 (.841)	.358** (.000)	.277** (.000)					
Current Position Satisfaction (CP SAT) 3 items, alpha = .52 sd .901, n=219	.331** (.000)	.027 (.687)	-.003 (.969)	.047 (.497)	.174* (.011)				
Balance (BAL) One item sd 1.18, n=220	.125 (.069)	-.164* (.015)	.154* (.025)	-.003 (.965)	.113 (.098)	.228** (.001)			
Life Role Salience 8 items, alpha = .72 sd .597, n=214	.105 (.400)	.093 (.175)	.408** (.000)	-.007 (.916)	.162* (.019)	.099 (.155)	.224** (.001)		
Career Satisfaction 5 items, alpha = .85 sd .870, n=215	.505** (.000)	.071 (.299)	.188** (.007)	.197** (.004)	.380** (.000)	.488** (.000)	.228** (.001)	.099 (.155)	

** Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

* Pearson Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Next Steps and Implications for HRD

The importance of connecting HRD research and practice has been discussed frequently in the Academy. The development of instruments for practitioner use, practical tools that can enhance organizational effectiveness, is a tangible contribution that researchers can make to the field. For researchers, instrument development provides another means of sharing ideas and enhancing understanding of key concepts.

While the HRD literature has alluded to the important role of fairness and violations of justice norms on the behavior and attributes of employees (Conlon, 2004; Wooten & Cobb, 1999) more empirical work needs to be done. The assumption that fairness expectations are related most strongly to consistency and equality has long been

challenged in the organizational justice literature (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Greenberg, 1987). When considering CD activities, employee expectations for fairness may well be mixed between equality, equity, and need bases. Using an established fairness scale (e.g., Mansour-Cole & Scott, 1998) may help distinguish between process and outcome fairness. Such a scale will be incorporated into this instrument.

Some of the items on the active planning scale focused on the reflective aspect of career planning (i.e., *I have done a lot of thinking about my career*), while other items appear to capture the strategies one might incorporate to enact the plan. Unlike the scales recognizing opportunities and interests in particular career development activities, these items indicate an intention to utilize these activities to meet specific career goals and plans. A unique potential contribution of this instrument may be distinguishing between expressions of interests and reflective intentional planning.

We did not anticipate a scale specifically focused on tuition reimbursement. Initially we thought these items would load with the items focusing on CD activities and opportunities. The college student population of this pilot may have resulted in this factor being strong. More validation studies with other populations are needed to see if these items will continue to load as a distinct factor.

Subject demographics present two additional concerns. Selected for convenience and for their work involvement, the geographic similarity of the participants limits generalizability of the results. The pilot participants also may lack the depth of career experience that some of the items in the instrument require. All students participating in the pilot are enrolled in on-site courses on a commuter campus. While most are employed, many may not take their current work experience seriously, perceiving school as preparation for their “real” career. Since the focus of the instrument is career reflection, members of the pilot group may have been limited in their ability to provide insight on their careers and career development. The next step is to further validate this instrument by surveying employees of different job classifications within varied types of organizations.

This study describes the development and validation of an instrument designed to assess perceptions of careers and opportunities for career development. By tapping into reflections on fairness, work/life balance, career planning, development opportunities, and satisfaction, it yields data on both individual career interests and needs and on organizational CD initiatives, a unique and valuable combination. In a globally competitive, diverse workplace, career development takes on increasing importance at all levels in the organization, but a dearth of empirical research has hindered making the connection between CD and organizational effectiveness. This instrument offers promise not only through the data it can capture, but also through adding to the discourse on career development as a viable and strategic function of HRD.

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