Personal agency and organisational attachment: A career capital perspective

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Abstract

Despite role transitions occurring frequently within organisations, career theories have often overlooked such transitions. Here we explore the role of personal agency and organisational attachment in shaping career capital enactment within intra-organisational role transitions. We propose a new career capital usage typology. Using an interpretivist approach, the research is based within a UK construction business and explores the role transition experiences of 36 business leaders. Through an analysis of workers' career capital use we identify a new typology and groups workers as follows: Passive Worker, Company Worker, Political Worker and Career Worker. We argue that type varies in accordance with levels of personal agency and organisational attachment and that this variation in type is particularly important during intra-organisational role transitions.

Keywords: Career mobility, career capital, personal agency, organisational attachment, intra-organisational careers

Introduction

Career theories have frequently focused on the idea of the "boundaryless career" (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), where individuals make career transitions between organisations. As such, career transitions taking place within a single organisation have been relatively neglected, despite traditional, intra-organisational careers continuing to be important (Dries & Pepermans, 2008; Lyons et al., 2015). In this article, we focus on these intra-organisational careers and explore how individuals use career capital to facilitate transitions within organisations. Career capital can be defined as "the overall set of non-financial resources a person is able to bring to his or her work" (Arthur et al., 2001, p. 101). It is a well-established concept, albeit one which has mainly been discussed in the context of transitions that happen between organisations (Arthur et al., 1999; Mayrhofer et al., 2004). However, recent research has brought the importance of career capital in intra-organisational transitions into view (Brown et al., 2020). The present study builds on this work to propose a new typology of career capital enactment which was identified through empirical work on career transitions within an organisation.

The limited research on career transitions within organisations is disappointing. Many researchers assert that intra-organisational careers continue to be important (Lyons et al., 2015), and that the shift from traditional to boundaryless careers needs to be put into perspective (Forrier et al., 2006). Furthermore, there are organisational benefits associated with encouraging intra-organisational careers, growing talent from within (over buying in talent externally) and facilitating talent flow to key roles (Collings et al., 2017; Iverson, 1996). This encourages mobilisation of critical skills and knowledge across organisations to support expansion, thereby over-coming the lack of capabilities

that threatens organisational growth (Collings et al., 2017). In addition, such intra-organisational transitions are recognised as being challenging for both organisations and individuals (Chudzikowski, 2012; Schlossberg, 1984). For the individual, internal transitions can be stressful (Baruch, 2006), requiring physical and mental effort. They may also bring disruption and the need for individuals to alter their attitudes, identity, networks, routines and skills (Chudzikowski, 2012). Leaders making such transitions can also feel more challenged in such circumstances, given their visibility in the organisation (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

In this study, we draw upon a sub-set of findings from a wider study of career capital in an intra-organisational context. It explores the role that personal agency and organisational attachment were observed to play as individuals used their career capital to support their transitions. While other writing has addressed the importance of personal agency in shaping career (notably in Hall's, 2004 concept of the "protean career"), our return to the intra-organisational context for careers brings back into focus how the organisation, and the individual's relationship with the organisation (organisational attachment) also shape how individuals use their career capital.

The focus on the organisational context of career capital enactment recognises that it is not just the protean career capital of the individual that shapes career, but also the position and relationships that the individual has within the organisation. There has been a lack of research exploring the impact of personal agency (Memili & Welsh, 2012; Meyers, 2019) and organisational attachment on intra-organisational careers, despite the importance of these concepts in shaping individuals' careers (Forrier et al., 2009) and impacting career decision-making.

In this article, we understand "career" as describing the evolving experience of individuals as they relate to, and interact with, institutions, the world of work and wider contexts over time (Arthur et al., 2017). Recent definitions of "career" have emphasised the interactional and relational elements of career and focused on the experience of careering within and between organisations (Baruch, 2006; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Whilst "career mobility" can attract a variety of definitions, including changes in job, organisation and occupation (Lyons et al., 2015), within this article, it is used to describe individuals' ability to undertake role transitions (Forrier et al., 2009) and the term "career capital" is used to describe the resources that they use to manage these transitions.

In this article, we respond to this gap in the literature by exploring personal agency and organisational attachment and their interaction with career capital usage in the context of intra-organisational role transitions as undertaken by business leaders.

In terms of structure, following a literature review of career capital, personal agency and organisational attachment, we then outline the research study methodology, design and process of analysis. Following a review of the findings, the implications for practice and research are explored, followed by concluding comments.

Theoretical background

In this section, we will briefly discuss the existing body of literature and theory that addresses the three key concepts that have emerged from the research: career capital, personal agency and organisational attachment.

Career capital

"Career capital" provides a way of conceptualising how individuals manage the challenges associated with career transitions. The concept of capital uses the metaphor of money to explain how individuals accumulate (save), utilise (invest) and benefit from (receive a return) from their knowledge, skills, attributes and connections. Through the course of their career, individuals can

build and use their career capital (Dickmann et al., 2018) to improve their position within organisations and the labour market (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010). The concept of career capital, as it is used in this article, consists of the non-financial, resources that individuals use within and cultivate whilst working (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). It makes use of Bourdieu's capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) which emphasises the way in which capital is multi-faceted, bound up with power and partially fungible.

Within the careers' literature, there are a number of different frameworks that describe the nature and utilisation of career capital. These include Arthur et al. (1999), Mayrhofer et al. (2004) and Brown et al. (2020) which synthesised and extended Arthur et al.'s and Mayrhofer et al.'s frameworks. Brown et al.'s framework consists of three knowings: "Knowing Self", "Knowing How" and "Knowing Whom", collectively comprising 24 career capital aspects (Brown et al., 2020). Brown et al.'s career capital framework focuses specifically on career capital during intra-organisational role transitions and is used to focus this article.

Personal agency

Agency can be defined as the desire to influence one's functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006), striving to act independently of others to master one's surroundings and to exert power and influence (Bakan, 1966). Within the context of careers, agency can be defined as an individual's ability to mobilise the necessary resources (or career capital) for career development and to take actions to address environmental constraints and realise career goals (Lam & de Campos, 2014). Highly agentic people typically demonstrate: autonomy, self-determination, high aspirations, perseverance and the ability to learn from failures and view challenges as opportunities, whereas those with less agency tend to have lower aspirations and often feel helpless (Little et al., 2006).

Personal agency is dynamic and embedded in relationships, time and context (Lam & de Campos, 2014). It can be influenced by: parents, significant members of peer networks and levels of personal proactivity (Jenkins & Jeske, 2017) as well as the nature of our psychological contract with the organisation that we work for (Lam & de Campos, 2014) and the cultural alignment of our values alongside those of the organisation (Arieli et al., 2020). This emphasises that personal agency is also context-dependent (Forrier et al., 2009). Whilst some career literature portrays employees as passive and dependent upon the organisation (Lam & de Campos, 2014), there is also evidence that the relationship between employees and organisations is more dynamic with individuals seeking autonomy, asserting personal agency and drawing upon their own resources to craft their careers within the framework offered by the organisation (Bandura, 2001; Forrier et al., 2009).

Organisational attachment

Organisational attachment describes the psychological bond between the employee and organisation (Humphreys et al., 2003). The careers literature suggests that there are three forms of organisational attachment each with a differing source; namely: emotional attachment where employees want to stay within an organisation (affective commitment), economic necessity where employees need to stay within an organisation (continuance commitment), moral obligation where employees feel that they should stay within an organisation (normative commitment) (Coetzee et al., 2007; Van Der Werf, 2020). Organisational attachment matters to organisations as it impacts on work motivation, job performance, citizenship behaviours and ultimately turnover (Hassan, 2012; Joao & Coetzee, 2011).

A role holder's organisational attachment can impact their attitudes and actions (Crawshaw & Game, 2015) while working within an organisation. Where such attachment is high, a role holder shows more citizenship behaviours and loyalty to the organisation (Crawshaw & Game, 2015), where role

holders may come see their "organisation as part of themselves" (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 242). However, when such attachment is absent or depleted, a role holder may feel a reduction in confidence, motivation, organisational trust and ultimately propensity to remain within the business (Crawshaw & Game, 2015).

The cultivation of organisational attachment is influenced heavily by the quality of relationships across the business (Shapiro et al., 2016), within the team (Memili & Welsh, 2012), and with the line manager (Sturges & Guest, 2001). Such relationships are important in their own right, but also serve to mediate the relationship between the individual and the organisation and shape the way that the psychological contract is understood. Where the psychological contract works well employees view the organisation positively and organisational attachment strengthens as expectations are met and a congruency is observed between organisational rewards and role holder's motivations and values (Coetzee et al., 2007). However, such attachment can be diminished through: breaches of the psychological contract (Cafferkey et al., 2017), key people leaving the organisation (Shapiro et al., 2016), and when role holders feel at odds to team members (Tsui et al., 1992).

Consequently, in light of this literature review, we aim to empirically explore how personal agency and organisational attachment varies during such role transitions, and its impact on career capital enactment, together with the implications for business leaders, organisational managers, career practitioners and researchers.

We consider the following questions:

1. How do business leaders' levels of personal agency vary whilst experiencing intra-organisational career transitions and what is the impact of these variations?
2. How do business leaders' levels of organisational attachment vary whilst experiencing intra-organisational career transitions and what is the impact of these variations?
3. How does career capital usage interact with personal agency and organisational attachment for business leaders during an intra-organisational career transition?
4. What are the implications of these findings for business leaders, organisational managers, career practitioners and researchers?

Methodology

This article is part of a larger research project which explores the experiences of business leaders undertaking role transitions within a UK-based construction company. The selection of the case organisation was determined by the requirements of the research questions as it was based within one country, with a population of business leaders, with an interest in exploring intra-organisational mobility. In addition, its HR Director was an existing client contact, thereby providing access to the case population, as existing contacts is often regarded as the best route into an organisation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). The project examined how career capital eases such transitions.

Study approach

In the study, we used in-depth interviews and took an interpretivist methodological approach by using a case study design; here interpretivist is defined as meaning the exploration of interpretative understanding of an individual's experience (Benton & Craib, 2011). The case study design comprised face-to-face, event-based narrative interviews with a case population of 36 business leaders, who had recently (within the previous three years) made lateral or upward, voluntary, role transitions within a UK-based construction company. Business leaders were defined as members of one of the three leadership groups defined by and applied within the case study organisation, namely the: Executive, Leadership Group and Business Deployment Group. All 36 business leaders

were invited and all agreed to take part within the research. In terms of composition, this case population comprised: 78% males, 78% married, 64% with dependents and 100% "White British" and "Other White Background" (applying the Office for National Statistics ethnic categories).

Interviews

The interviews explored what had supported and got in the way of internal role transitions and asked the business leaders to identify further support that they perceived might have helped them. The case study design brings in-depth understanding to previously under-explored, complex and particular real-life phenomenon (Gaya & Smith, 2016). In addition, through choosing event-based narrative interviewing, participants were able to access personal experiences more deeply. Through sharing their transition stories, chronological connectivity helped participants to recall the sequencing of events (Saunders et al., 2012) and causal relationships between reified constructs (Watson, 2009), for example, the links between role transitions and career capital.

Analysis

An iterative analytical approach was applied as the research was exploring new areas (Boyatzis, 1982). Iterative describes the on-going flow between the data analysis, the further reviewing of the literature and the data sense-making through journaling and creation of field notes. Interview scripts were thematically analysed to identify facilitators and obstacles for role transitions. To help to make sense of the interrelationships between what helped and what hindered the business leaders' role transition experiences, a visual map was developed for each business leader. In total, 24 career capital aspects were identified and all the interview scripts were recoded (Brown et al., 2020) against this career capital theoretical framework. Such career capital aspects were clustered into three knowings: Knowing Self (comprising of the following career capital components: Self-awareness, Self-confidence, Motivation); Knowing How (comprised of: Adaptability, Critical thinking, Influence, Initiative, Relationship building, Self-management, Tenacity, Career-relevant experience, Career-relevant market knowledge, Career-relevant business knowledge, Career-relevant job knowledge, Technical expertise, Qualifications); and Knowing Whom (comprised of: External non-work relationships [Family); Internal within work relationships: (Colleagues, Direct reports, Peers, Previous line manager, Line manager, Stakeholders); and Reputation).

After this manual thematic coding, NVivo was used to ease data interrogation. This combination of analytical and conceptual thinking helped to surface seven further themes relating to how career capital was drawn upon to facilitate such role transitions, namely: the impact of agency and attachment, connecting and crossing career capital, career capital investment, career capital development and erosion and finally career capital as an obstacle. All 36 interview transcriptions were re-coded against these seven emergent themes, and it is the first two themes that we draw upon within this article.

Findings

In this article, we focus on the findings of a wider study which relate to personal agency and organisational attachment in particular.

Personal agency

The notion of personal agency emerged as a theme within the participants' transition narratives. Across all 36 business leaders their level of agency varied and this impacted on their transition experience. Those with lower levels of personal agency often found transitions more difficult, while those with higher levels of personal agency were able to shape their transitions in line with their own interests and aspirations. It is important to acknowledge that such agency may be context-dependent (Forrier et al., 2009), with it not just relating to the individual's characteristics. Each of

the business leaders' scripts were recoded against the indicative emotions, behaviours and attitudes for personal agency.

Lower levels of personal agency were exemplified through a range of behaviours, including: reluctantly accepting new role terms and conditions that they were not happy with, waiting indefinitely to be allocated a coach, having no career plan, waiting for and allowing the organisational leaders to prompt new role opportunities and staying unhappily within a role. For illustration, Fleur's story shows how her line manager offered her the new role when the previous incumbent moved on:

> *Literally [my line manager] pulled me in and said 'Jonathan is moving on, so you are stepping up.' […] it was right 'Here you go, here is the hat, get on with it'.*

This illustrates how for Fleur both the opportunity and the speed of transition were instigated by her line manager. Fleur is unable to exercise personal agency and experiences agency being enacted by her line manager who determines that she should transition. This lack of agency had further implications for Fleur. She failed to clarify the role expectations, and as a consequence took 18 months to fully transition into the role. Feeling "at sea" and "being thrown into the deep end", Fleur's self-confidence "suffered a bit". Failing to build her relationship with her line manager, Fleur left the organisation within three years. Similarly, Bill describes how despite being dissatisfied with the working conditions, which led him to travel for work, he remained within the role:

> *You get to the point when you work away so much that I didn't see my family and they are 7 and 10 years old. You don't get any satisfaction from it.*

So, for Bill, the lack of personal agency manifests as being stuck and unable to transition rather than being pushed to transition. Furthermore, this impacted Bill's physical wellbeing through experiencing the transition as "exhausting, frustrating", and "without any reward". Finally, Sally's low level of personal agency was shown through her lack of active career management. She has no life plan and describes how she has taken work opportunities that have been offered to her:

> *I have never had that life plan […] I certainly didn't get here and think 'Right in 5 years I am going to be a [Department] Manager' […] I have generally gone through and taken opportunities that have been given to me.*

This illustrates how with reduced levels of personal agency, rather than considering which career opportunities she would like, Sally accepted roles offered to her. When asked about her career aspirations, she didn't know how to create this for herself, "I wouldn't know where to go to start looking". Sally wasn't able to see her future path, "I can't see certainly [department]-wise where I could go".

The business leaders who exhibited greater levels of personal agency demonstrated this through a range of behaviours, including: instigating and shaping a new role opportunity, prompting a cross-functional move, influencing new role terms and conditions before acceptance, declining role opportunities and extensions that do not meet their aspirations or circumstances, and having a career plan. To illustrate, Colin describes how he developed with his line manager the new role that he was transitioning into:

> *I had manufactured the role with [line manager] and myself, I still had to go through the proper recruitment procedure.*

This shows how despite still having to comply with organisational procedures, Colin heavily influenced the creation of his new role opportunity, what Berg et al. (2013) has described as "job crafting". Additionally, at the time of the interview, Colin had already left the organisation and had crafted a portfolio career through working for a consultancy in a more senior role whilst also running his own business. Bob offers another example of high personal agency when he describes how he negotiated the conditions of the new role:

> '[Line manager], could I go and do that role and take with me what I am doing at the moment and on the condition that I get to keep the head count?'

Bob's personal agency allowed him to craft the new role to ensure that it met his needs, emphasising the importance of negotiation within role transitions. Finally, Eve describes how her transition to a new role aligned with her career plans.

> I think that the good thing about that was that […] I was moving towards something new and that it was a step towards my career progression […] yes, I am on the right path.

By being aware of her own career path ambitions, Eve was able to accept a role opportunity that took her in the right direction to realise her career aspirations. Furthermore, within two months of undertaking the interview, Eve had been promoted into a more senior role within another organisation within the parent group. These examples show that personal agency can be described as the personal initiation and implementation of career-related actions within the opportunity structure afforded to you by the organisation.

Organisational attachment

Attachment to the organisation emerged as a theme within the business leaders' role transition stories. Across 35 business leaders, their level of organisational attachment differed and this influenced their transition experiences; whereas Isaac's transition story gave no indication of his levels of organisational attachment. Higher levels of organisational attachment generally eased the experience of making transitions for participants. Each of the business leaders' scripts were recoded against the indicative emotions, behaviours and attitudes for organisational attachment.

Participants who reported lower levels of organisational attachment described a range of emotions, behaviours and experiences, including: feeling disconnected from or frustrated with the organisation, talking about leaving the organisation, looking at role opportunities outside of the organisation, and offering up personal email addresses in order to receive the research summary paper which in itself indicated that they may not be expecting to remain working within the organisation. For example, on describing how organisational leaders had invited Alan to rejoin the leadership group whilst admitting their previous error in removing him, Alan described how the disconnection with the organisation had already happened:

> I was asked to come back to the leadership group saying 'We have got it wrong'. But the damage was done then, it happened, the disconnection […] so this is [pauses] so that is why I was happy to take the role on, well, it is very difficult to put my heart and soul into this.

This emotional separation from the organisation hampered his ability to fully engage with the new role. Also, by being portrayed as a "troublemaker" this experience impacted his emotional wellbeing leaving him feeling "hurt". Vera's low level of organisational attachment manifested differently through her active external job searching:

> *Yes. I had started looking externally as well so I had started looking you know not actively but started looking at the websites and what are the jobs that are available and procuring management, what are the requirements.*

This illustrates how, with lower levels of organisational attachment, Vera began to invest time in scanning the labour market for equivalent roles. Shortly after the interview, Vera was offered a promotion and negotiated a step up within her team. Finally, Bella's offering up of her personal email address indicated her belief that she may not be present within the organisation once the summary paper was issued:

> *I can give you now my personal address which is [personal email address] […] you never know, I may not be here!*

Bella subsequently left the organisation 12 months later, set up her own business and has since become a supplier to the organisation.

Participants with greater levels of organisational attachment demonstrated a range of attitudes and behaviours, including: describing the organisation as a family, building close attachments to colleagues, working in the organisation for many years, committing to organisational work programmes lasting for numerous years, valuing job security and admitting not wanting to leave the organisation. To exemplify this, Jim showed high levels of organisational attachment when he described how the organisation resembled a family:

> *One of the things that I like about [organisation] is that we are like a family, we don't get rid of people easily.*

By likening the organisation to a family, Jim shows his strong levels of emotional attachment. Also, having been in the organisation for over 15 years, Jim had been able to secure management development and career coaching, which had further built his management skills and self-awareness, emphasising how coaching (Milne, 1988) and development (Meyers, 2019) can support the development of an individual's capability. Sue also demonstrated strong organisational attachment when she described her long employment tenure.

> *But I have always worked at [organisation] apart from a university job and my career has been [organisation]. I have never been in a different industry.*

This longevity of service indicates Sue's level of organisational loyalty. An implication for such loyalty, was organisational investment into Sue's development. Through attending development centres and being offered personal coaching, Sue found this support "beneficial" and "useful" in building skills, including: critical thinking and influencing. Finally, Bob shows an increasing level of organisational attachment through taking a longer-term career perspective:

> *It is just that sort of business that you are doing something that you are putting a lot of work into it and I just hope that it is helpful and progressive in my long-term career […] I think that probably it is a good organisation to trust; they trust me I guess.*

By being more trusting of the business, Bob shows how his levels of organisational attachment are growing and how this has enabled him to plan his career longer-term within the organisation. Given these behavioural, emotional and attitudinal indicators and examples, organisational attachment can be described as the personal connection with the organisation.

Worker typology

The analysis of personal agency and organisational attachment revealed that there was a relationship between these two themes. There were clear patterns in the experiences of participants which could be explained by their relative levels of personal agency and organisational attachment. By grouping participants into high and low levels of personal agency and organisational attachment it was possible to propose a new typology of workers that could be used to further explore their use of career capital (see Figure 1).
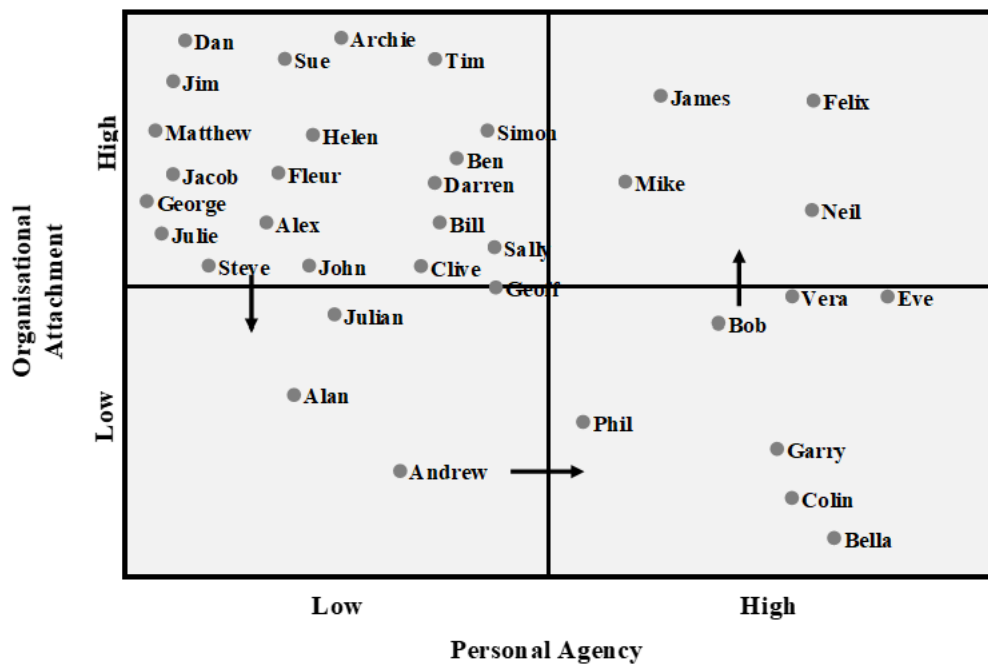
Figure 1. Worker typology

High	**Company Worker** Showing a connection with the organisation and demonstrating lower levels of initiation and implementation of career-related actions	**Political Worker** Showing a connection with the organisation and demonstrating higher levels of initiation and implementation of career-related actions
Low	**Passive Worker** Showing less of a connection with the organisation and demonstrating lower levels of initiation and implementation of career-related actions	**Career Worker** Showing less of a connection with the organisation and demonstrating higher levels of initiation and implementation of career-related actions
	Low	**High**

Organisational Attachment (vertical axis) / Personal Agency (horizontal axis)

Taking into account the balance of evidence of low to high personal agency and organisational attachment within each interview script, 35 of the 36 business leaders (excluding Isaac) were mapped onto this grid (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Mapping of Business Leaders into Worker Typology of Organisational Attachment and Personal Agency.
Note. Business leader frequency: 21 Company Workers, 7 Career Workers, 4 Political Workers and 3 Passive Workers.

A scatter plot with the vertical axis labelled "Organisational Attachment" (ranging from Low to High) and the horizontal axis labelled "Personal Agency" (ranging from Low to High). The upper-left quadrant contains: Dan, Archie, Sue, Tim, Jim, Matthew, Helen, Simon, Jacob, Fleur, Ben, Darren, George, Julie, Alex, Bill, Steve, John, Clive, Sally, Geoff, Julian, Alan, Andrew. The upper-right quadrant contains: James, Felix, Mike, Neil. The lower-right quadrant contains: Bob, Vera, Eve, Phil, Garry, Colin, Bella.

Based on this analysis, with regards gender patterning, five and three of the eight females were coded as Company Workers and Career Workers respectively, with none mapped into Passive and Political Workers. This distinction mirrors previous research findings where gender influences acceptance of change (Iverson, 1996). This patterning by gender is interesting, but we have been cautious in inferring too much from it both because of the limited sample size and because examining gender differences was not an explicit aim of the research. There would be value in future research with this typology looking at the issue of gender more actively. The business leaders' location within the quadrant showed their respective position during their transition, with three business leaders (Bob, Steve and Andrew) altering their worker types as a consequence of their particular role transition experience: Andrew grew in personal agency, whilst Steve decreased, and Bob increased in organisational attachment. Such shifts in typology show that worker types are contextual rather than innate and suggest that a change in the relationship between the individual and the organisation, as well as changes in personal agency, prompted by factors within or without the organisation, may result in individuals adopting different approaches to career capital enactment.

We will now discuss and illustrate each of the types in descending order of frequency, before going on to consider the wider implications.

Company worker

Company workers had a strong organisational attachment but exhibited a limited amount of personal agency. This was the most common type and described most study participants. Archie's transition experience exemplifies that of a Company Worker. He was working in a role which led him to be away from home regularly; rather than initiating a role change himself, he signalled to the organisation that he wanted a change and waited until a role was found for him. He sustained working from home in challenging conditions for three years. On eventually being offered a role, he happily accepted; Archie had been within the business for many years and saw his career as remaining within the organisation. Four years after the interview, Archie remains within his role:

> *So the actual travel itself was horrendous but that wasn't the worse part, it was being away four nights […] so I had made overtures that if there was anything coming up that I would be interested coming back more based here.*

> *So at the same time there was a reshuffle agreed in [function name] department and I was asked if I would like to do this role […] I think that I said 'Yes!' straight away.*

The Company Workers were typified by a pattern of career capital usage that was focused on making use of their networks. Most participants in this group reported that they made use of Stakeholder relationships, (those individuals within the organisation who have a vested interest) and Direct reports (those team members who reported to them directly), to aid their role transition. In addition, Company Workers had invested in their Reputation (the widespread belief held about the individuals) within the firm and developed their Business knowledge (comprising relevant business knowledge including: structure, position within parent company, functions, departments, stakeholders and processes).

Career worker

The next most frequent worker type, albeit with a much lower representation than the Company Worker, was Career Worker; they have a high degree of personal agency, but limited organisational attachment. They are keen to advance their careers and view the organisation that currently employs them as just one amongst many possible environments within which this career development might happen.

Phil's transition experience provides a good example of the behaviour of Career Workers. Phil had a career plan to change the organisation's strategic direction (high personal agency). He was keen to get as much from working for the organisation and reported that once he had done this, he would leave.

> *I don't care who I upset, I came into this organisation with a mindset. I want to change the organisation – that is a true [strategy name] organisation. This is my goal and I am going to do that and I am going to get as much out of it as I can and when I can't get anything out of it, I will leave.*

Within two years of undertaking the interview, Phil left the business. Career Workers' career capital was focused on their own capability rather than those associated with relationships or the organisational context. So, they reported that Self-confidence (their self-belief and ability to speak out and assert ourselves, including with more senior people), Qualifications (their formal graduate and post-graduate qualifications within business or a functional or technical specialism), Tenacity and Self-management were all important to managing their career transitions.

Political worker

The next most frequent worker type was the Political Worker, defined due to their high levels of influence amongst colleagues, enabling them to actively carve out their new path within the business. They combined a high level of organisational attachment with high personal agency. They were actively engaged in building their careers and using their career capital, and believed that the organisation was the best vehicle for their ambitions. Whereas the Company Workers were content to trust the organisation to deliver them progression, the Political Workers were actively influencing with the organisation to advance. This kind of proactive organisational behaviour was less common than the Company Workers and only described four of the participants.

James's transition story provides a good illustration of a Political Worker. He instigated a role change to a new function and asked several colleagues to coach him to enable this to happen. Additionally, James shared how he is likely to still be within the organisation in two to four years' time suggesting that he believes that the organisation offers the best context for his career advancement.

> *I talked to a number of people around the business and I just looked at what other people do [...] I think that [function] is the place for me. [...] so I went and spoke to a couple of different people and asked them if they would coach me.*

> *Interviewer: In terms of the consultancy summary that I share, I will write that up and that will be 2018 [...] the deadline is 2020. [...] Would you like a copy of that?*

> *Yes definitely, thank you!*

> *Interviewer: In terms of email, shall I use the [company] one?*

> *Yes, I will almost certainly still be here. There is another insight for you!*

However, by instigating a role change between functions, he suffered severe challenges from his previous line manager. James kept going, to secure his transition to this new function:

He was quite sore quite obviously having lost me to the dark side! So I got kicked around the room a few times for no real reason other than he didn't like it [...] he is a really nice guy but he was a bit of an arse during that time [...] I just persevered, just water off a duck's back, that is all you can do.

Political Workers also reported clear similarities in the way that they developed and deployed their career capital portfolio. They were likely to develop their Influence (the intention and ability to gain others' buy-in by direct persuasion, indirect influence through third parties or through a systematic campaign) and ability to impact within the organisation and their relationships with Colleagues (relationships and resources gained through colleagues at all levels excluding their own organisational level, including internal coaches). On the other hand, they were less likely to focus on talking about their Career-relevant experience (comprising work-relevant experience drawn from previous markets, sectors, businesses, functions, roles and activities), Reputation and personal standing or their Previous line manager (relationship and resources gained through their previous line manager before making the role transition).

Passive worker

Finally, Passive Workers was the least represented type; they were low on both personal agency and organisational attachment. They had limited career aspirations and also felt disconnected from the organisation. Julian's experience illustrates how Passive Workers managed their career and transitions. He showed a lack of understanding of what he wanted as his next career move and he accepted terms and conditions that he was unhappy with. In addition, he felt frustrated with the organisation and emotionally upset:

> *I was listless, if I was honest. The answer to your question is that I am listless. I had no idea of what my next move was.*

> *Clearly the offer, their offer, was to give me a company car no salary increase or anything [...] I made the point I am not entirely happy with this [...] There wasn't any room for negotiation and again I felt a bit helpless in that situation [...]. Here I am, all bitter and twisted.*

In terms of the composition of their career capital portfolio Passive Workers had smaller networks than other kinds of workers. They were unlikely to make use of their Colleagues and Direct Reports. They were also unlikely to exhibit career capital associated with Self-management (their ability to manage their feelings, thoughts and actions) and Tenacity (their ability to keep going and not giving up even in the face of adversity).

Discussion

The findings illustrate how varying levels of both personal agency and organisational attachment impact the business leaders' role transition experiences. Consequently, on reflecting upon the first two research questions, both personal agency and organisational attachment vary between business leaders during their intra-organisational career transitions through the demonstration of differing behaviours, emotions and attitudes. Participants exhibited different levels of personal agency and organisational attachment. The levels of agency and attachment exhibited by participants were both expressed aspects of their personalities, but were also shaped by the opportunities afforded to them within the organisational context.

When exploring the implications of these differences, there were positive and negative consequences to both the transition experience and the career development that resulted from it. Higher levels of personal agency led some business leaders to orchestrate a promotion (Eve), and craft a future career transition out of the organisation to realise their own ambitions (Colin, Bella, Phil). However, there were also some negative consequences to this highly agentic behaviour, where some business leaders had to withstand high levels of sustained challenge and consequential erosion of their career capital (in the case where James lost his relationship with his previous line manager). Lower levels of personal agency led some business leaders to fail to embed within the role and diminish their career capital (in the case where Vera lost self-confidence, failed to build a relationship with her line manager and eventually was asked to leave the organisation). In addition, some business leaders withstood conditions that negatively impacted their emotional wellbeing (Bill, Julian, Archie), this echoes research findings that emphasise how burn out can be a natural consequence of feeling pushed and under pressure from organisational actions (De Boeck et al., 2018). Also, lower levels of personal agency led some business leaders to fail to craft career plans and develop their career management skills (Sally, Julian).

Higher levels of organisational attachment enabled some business leaders to access development and coaching support, which fostered the development of career capital (in the case where Jim developed management skills and self-awareness, and Sue developed her critical thinking and influence). Additional positive pay-offs included job security (Alan) and the ability to plan longer-term within the business (Bob). Lower levels of organisational attachment led to both positive outcomes, in the form of greater leverage in negotiations (Vera) and negative consequences through failure to fully engage with the role and experiencing negative emotions (Alan).

Furthermore, there was a dynamic relationship between these two themes that proved to be important in explaining their experience of transitions and their approach to career capital enactment. The identification of the worker typology brings additional clarity to our third research question and confirms that career capital usage interacts with personal agency and organisational attachment. The aspects of career capital that participants used to support them through their role transition experience were clearly influenced by their personal agency and organisational attachment.

Implications for practice

Turning attention to our fourth research question, we can explore the implications of these findings. Business leaders would benefit from recognising their own levels of personal agency and organisational attachment, as this is likely to impact forthcoming role transition experiences, the cultivation of career capital and indeed personal mobility within the organisation. Consequently, it may be pertinent to deepen personal understanding by becoming more familiar with their own: motivations, confidence and sense of knowing (Arthur et al., 1999) and sense-making in their career so far (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). Such understanding can also include exploring the type of relationship that the business leaders have and wish to have with their employer (Arthur et al., 1995). Through understanding what matters to them, it is easier for business leaders to determine the employer relationship that serves them.

The implications of this research for organisational managers involves recognising the importance of the relationship between personal agency, organisational attachment and career management and using it to guide the way in which individuals are managed within the organisation. Some business leaders are likely to see career management as their own responsibility (typified by Career Workers and Political Workers), whereas others may see career management as the organisation's responsibility (as viewed by Company Workers and Passive Workers). Consequently, it may be useful to provide transition management support for business leaders, including encouraging business leaders to build self-awareness (Arthur et al., 1999). This self-assessment may include the clarification of the type of relationship that the business leader wishes to have with the organisation. Such awareness can lead to tailored training requirements.

It may also be of value for the organisation to further enhance its strategic approach to how intra-organisational careers are managed. Considering how far career management is a responsibility of the organisation, an individual employee or a combination of the two could help to shape organisations' human resource strategies. An organisation may choose to have a tailored approach, with different stances being taken for specific employee populations. Such a decision is likely to interact with organisational approaches to the psychological contract, organisational attachment and progression within the firm (Arthur et al., 1995). Furthermore, given that personal agency and organisational attachment are also context-dependent, in addition to being influenced by the individual, there is a role for organisational managers to consider how they may reshape the context in ways that enable forms of career capital enactment that are aligned with organisational goals. This enables organisations to bring innovative ways for conceptualising human capital resource, and actively find ways of retaining talent and crafting the necessary pipelines to support organisational growth (Collings et al., 2017).

For career practitioners, these findings provide some key concepts which can be deployed within career counselling and careers education. Discussion of career capital, personal agency and organisational attachment as well of consideration of worker typology may offer useful analytical tools that can aid individuals to increase their self-awareness (Felker & Gianecchini, 2015) and develop and enhance strategies of career capital enactment (Tempest & Coupland, 2017). In addition, there may be value in developing diagnostics tools (either qualitative or quantitative in nature) to support clients in their career exploration.

Implications for research

Finally, while turning our attention to consider the implications for researchers, as well as providing rich insights, we must first acknowledge the limitations in this research study. Although the benefits of a case study approach have been argued within this previously under-explored area, the case

organisation is a UK-based, construction business, and the case population has a narrow focus. Firstly, it represents business leaders who have experienced a voluntary and lateral or upwards transition within their business. Secondly, of the 36 business leaders invited and interviewed, there were issues concerning diversity. In terms of case population composition, 100% of the business leaders were from white ethnic origins and 78% were male.

Consequently, when considering future avenues of research, it may be pertinent to undertake the same research study but with a different case organisation and population through exploring varied contexts, with different transition dimensions prevalent, for example international (e.g. Makela & Suutari, 2009), involuntary (e.g. Kulkarni, 2020) and voluntary, downward transitions. Such different transition dimensions are likely to create specific individual challenges (Schlossberg, 1984), and are more likely to reflect a greater diversity of career moves. Moreover, given the homogeneous nature of this case population, it may be of value to explore populations with greater levels of diversity. In addition, it may be relevant to explore the worker typology further and the balance of power between the role holder and organisation. Potential areas of exploration include: further definitional clarity in the worker types, the dynamics between worker typology and career capital portfolio compositions, and gender patterning.

Conclusion

Transition management is an important facet of both talent management and career management, particularly amid increasing and more complex transitions (Chudzikowski, 2012; Mayrhofer et al., 2004). During intra-organisational role transitions, the interplay of role holders' agency and attachment and career capital enactment are important despite their previous under-exploration (Memili & Welsh, 2012). Our worker typology provides a useful lens to understand role transition experiences and the career capital usage. Such understanding will support individuals, organisational managers and careers practitioners to effectively build and use their career capital within the context of role transitions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and through the enclosed references.

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