

"THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CAREERS:  
A THEORETICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL  
PERSPECTIVE"

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THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CAREERS:  
A THEORETICAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Looking at careers from the standpoint of the actors' representations and approaching organizations as social constructions lead to a cultural view of career dynamics. Based on a review of career theory and on cross-cultural investigations of the internal and external career concepts, a cultural model of career dynamics is proposed. This model serves to link together the career perspective and the concept of culture. Implications for the practice of international career management are drawn.

## Theoretical Discussion

Edgar Schein (1975, 1978) has developed the "career anchor" concept, a conceptual breakthrough in assessing career orientations. People begin their work lives, perhaps as young adults in school, with certain ambitions, fears, hopes and illusions. Through experience and feedback early in their working years they uncover their initial interests, motives, values and skills. With much more on-the-job experience they gradually realize what they need and like, what they more deeply believe or value about work and life and what they are good at, how good they are at it and what skills and abilities are critical. These motives, values and talents gradually all come together in a total career self-concept. The idea that most people must spend on-the-job time to get the self-discovery information necessary to uncover this career identity is an important underpinning of the theory. Schein (1982, p. 2) says:

Talents, motives and values come to be inter-related into a more or less congruent total self-concept through a reciprocal process of learning to be better at those things we are motivated to do and value, learning to want and value those things we are good at, and avoid those things we are not motivated to do or do not value, resulting in loss of abilities or skills in those areas.

Schein (1982, p. 8) goes on to point out that the career anchor is an "over-riding concern or need that operates as a genuine constraint on career decisions. The anchor is the thing the person would not give up if he or she had to make a choice." Moreover, Schein's research has uncovered numerous career anchors (managerial, technical/functional, autonomy, creativity, security, service, pure challenge, identity, lifestyle).

Schein (1977) postulates that the individual's self-definition of career, or the internal career, is a person's own subjective idea about work life and his or her role within it.

Michael Driver (1979, 1980, 1982) has also published seminal work on the idea of different career self-concepts or internal careers. Driver discovered four diverse career concepts (linear, spiral, steady state, transitory) and he postulated that this internal career map is interdependent with certain cognitive styles and serves to guide an individual's long-term career choices.

Derr (1986) builds on Schein and Driver's work and postulates five diverse internal career success maps (getting ahead, getting secure, getting free, getting high, getting balanced). He also discusses changes and major transitions of the internal career, putting forth the idea that while any career orientation is long-term and basic (as opposed to short-term job changes), several events may trigger shifts in the internal career map. Alterations of the internal career may occur not only due to major events at work but when something in our personal life (e.g. a divorce, a mid-life crisis) provokes a change in our lifeview.

Other career theorists, such as Super (1953) and Holland (1973) have advanced important theories of diverse personal orientations towards work. Super maintains that vocational self-concept is a part of total self-concept and maturity. Holland believes personality impacts on vocational behavior, which in turn is influenced by various career opportunities and external events. Numerous scholars have linked individual career decision making to some internal psychological needs or values (e.g., Kuder, 1977; Roe, 1956; Allport, Vernon and Lindzey, 1960).

Holland's model brings up the counterpart to the internal career, or, in Schein's terms, the external career: the realities, constraints, opportunities and actual job sequences in the world of work. A rough way of differentiating the internal and the external career would be to

conceive the former as primarily "subjective" and owned by the career-oriented individual. It is the person's own aspirations and plans about future worklife. The external career would be more "objective" and would reflect the "real world" of constraints and opportunities in organizations and occupations.

The core of the internal career is the individual's career self-concept within the context of organizations and occupations. The core of the external career is the organizational and occupational context itself. A critical personal question regarding the internal career is "What do I want from work, given my perceptions of who I am and what's possible?" And a companion question elucidating the external career is "What's possible and realistic in my organization and occupation, given my perceptions of the world of work?"

Both the internal and external careers can be considered as psychological constructs and social representations. While the external career is supposed to represent objective work realities, it is highly influenced by perceptions of usually ambiguous and fast-changing situations.

The usefulness of these concepts, therefore, is to help differentiate two focal points of career dynamics: individual aspirations and occupational realities. Such a construct stresses the dialectical nature of the total career concept by locating it at the interface between a person and his/her work environment. Actually, the concepts are also linked together at their interface by a perceptually constructed view of the realities of work.

Looking at careers from the perspective of the actors' representations and approaching organizations as social constructions brings us naturally

to a cultural view of career dynamics. This perspective stresses the importance of looking at careers as symbolic systems of meaning. Most studies of careers are mono-cultural and do not account for either a symbolic or a cross-cultural point of view.

Numerous books have appeared in the last few years that have taken a cultural perspective on organizations (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale and Athos, 1981; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Davis, 1984; Frost, et al., 1985; Kilmann, et al., 1985; Sathe, 1985; Schein, 1985). Academic journals have devoted special issues to this topic.

For our purposes in this paper, a closer consideration of Schein's culture model is most appropriate. Schein (1984, 1985) defines culture as the "basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization" (1985, p. 8) and he discusses three levels of culture. The first level of culture Schein labels "artifacts." This refers to the visible manifestations of culture, such as behavioral patterns and the most obvious configurations of time and space. Artifact culture is easy to observe but hard to decipher.

The second level in Schein's cultural model is labelled "values." This refers to guiding beliefs, preferences or norms, i.e., the manifest or espoused values of a culture. This level is more difficult to assess but can be partly inferred from the analysis of artifacts.

The third level or deep culture is termed by Schein "basic assumptions." These are the invisible, preconscious or unconscious, non-debatable, taken-for-granted, underlying values which "determine how group members perceive, think and feel." They confer meaning to their manifest values and overt behavior. They are basic assumptions about humankind, nature and activities that become patterned into cultural paradigms.

Such infrastructure is very difficult to uncover but, once unearthed, may be very meaningful in interpreting the culture.

While artifacts may easily illustrate differences across cultures, the interpretation of such differences will require some understanding of the basic assumptions.

It is our contention here that the basic assumptions in Schein's model can best be understood in terms of broad cultural contexts such as national cultures. Such homogeneous contexts are formative through early educational experience, family patterns, institutional arrangements, religious examples, language, etc. They will shape people's basic assumptions to a significant degree. Organizational cultures, while important, are less likely to exert such a profound effect or to impact people at such a deep level. On the other hand, organizational cultures may exert a substantial impact on the upper layers of the cultural edifice, that is on behavioral norms and artifacts.

We will use this cultural framework in approaching the two major concepts in this paper. The internal career, we will argue, is a personal subjective map which operates at a basic assumption level. National culture is therefore critical in influencing the internal career. Additionally, we will argue that national culture influences the external career particularly through the mediating and differentiating effects of organizational cultures.

Since both of these dimensions of the total career concept are perceptually constructed views of reality that are affected by the basic assumptions of the individual careerist, a career has different meanings in different cultures and, therefore, different dynamics can be expected. If we consider culture as "the fabric of meaning" (Geertz, 1973), these propositions should not come as a surprise.

The sections which follow present some evidence for our contention that both the internal and external careers are culturally derived concepts and that nationality is important in their formulation . First, we will discuss the external career from this cultural perspective.

### The External Career

While the external career includes tangible realities in the world of work (e.g., job market, demographics, obsolescence, opportunity structure), important elements of the external career can be studied by collecting and analyzing various perceptions about careers and how careerists are being managed by employing organizations. However, before adopting this particular perspective, it may be useful to assess its limitations as well.

Indeed, a distinction can be made between the actual external career opportunities and constraints and those which may be individually perceived. While it may be true that what is most important in making individual career choices is the person's subjective interpretation of the realities in the world of work, it is equally important to point out that the realities of the external career, those with which individuals must eventually cope, sometimes differ from their perceptions.

Nevertheless, collective perceptions by numerous informed observers about the same career opportunities and career realities do have some important validity. If enough people perceive the same phenomenon, their collective views have credibility. Argyris (1982) points out that espoused theories of action (ideals) are validated as theories-in-use (realities) if they have been confirmed as such by numerous informed and experienced observers.

Following this line of reasoning, one way to ascertain the external career is to ask a number of knowledgeable respondents how they perceive

the determinants of career success in their companies. For instance, which employees' traits, attitudes or behaviors do they perceive as being particularly valued and rewarded by their companies.

Laurent (1981a) developed such an approach originally as a tool for the diagnosis of organizational cultures and later on re-designed it as a comparative research instrument which he applied in a multinational context. Other studies (for instance, Laurent, 1981b, Inzerilli and Laurent, 1983) have indicated the substantial impact of national cultures on basic conceptions of management and organization. Hofstede (1980) has clearly demonstrated the influence of national cultures on work values. Furthermore, it has been established that cultural differences in management assumptions are not reduced by the corporate culture of large multinational firms (Laurent, 1983).

In order to further assess the validity of these findings, a large U.S. based multinational corporation was approached because of its high professional reputation in human resource management (Laurent, 1986). This corporation had implemented for years a standardized worldwide system for the multiple assessment of managerial potential and performance. The research objective was to assess whether this common administrative system would standardize managers' perceptions of career success criteria across various national affiliated companies.

Laurent conducted open-ended interviews of a representative sample of 100 upper-middle managers throughout the corporation. Among other questions, all interviews included the following one:

"In your view, what does it take to be successful at XY?"

All individual responses were systematically recorded and finally amounted to a list of 60 different items. This list was divided into two

balanced lists of 30 items (to reduce cognitive overload) in a survey questionnaire format. National samples of around 50 managers (matched according to education, job level, age, experience with the company, and function) were then surveyed in five affiliated companies in France, West Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. The respondents were asked in a confidential survey to select and check from each list of 30 items those ten that they perceived "as being most important in determining career success at XY."

Of the list of 60, the following ten items were chosen most frequently by the overall group of 262 respondents:

Rank

1. ambition and drive (82% selected this item)
2. leadership ability (77%)
3. skills in interpersonal relations and communication (75%)
4. being labelled as having high potential (72%)
5. managerial skills (69%)
5. achieving results (69%)
7. self confidence (65%)
8. creative mind (60%)
9. ability to handle interfaces between groups (58%)
9. hard work (58%)

These results represent the aggregate perception of the overall sample about employee characteristics valued by the company. A comparative analysis further revealed important differences between the five national groups in spite of the convergence that could be expected from a similar worldwide career system.

The most significant variations across cultures of the above top ten criteria were the following.

While only 57 percent of the Dutch managers selected "skills in interpersonal relations and communication" as a most important determinant of career success, 89 percent of the British did. "Being labelled as having high potential" was perceived as most important by 54 percent of the Germans as opposed to 81 percent of the French. "Achieving results" had a high American score of 88 percent and a low French score of 52 percent. Similarly, 81 percent of the Americans selected "self-confidence" while only 42 percent of the French did. Finally, "creative mind" was perceived as the top success criterion by the Germans (rank 1 among 60, checked by 77 percent) while it was seen as much less relevant by the French (rank 21, checked by 40 percent).

National differences of even higher magnitude were observed on many other criteria. For instance, "job visibility and exposure" provided the following spread:

	<u>United Kingdom</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Nether-lands</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
Percent choice	73	71	38	30	18
Rank	5	8	23	26	41

The results of the study also indicated important differences as to the amount of consensus within each national affiliate. For instance, while six criteria were selected as most important for career success by more than 80 percent of the American managers, the corresponding figures were three criteria selected for the British, one for the Dutch and the French and none for the Germans. Thus the degree of perceptual clarity, fit and comfort with the overall career success culture of the firm was

much higher for the American managers, culturally closer to the system designers.

Laurent (1986, p. 96) summarizes some of his findings concerning the German, the British and the French managers in the following way:

German managers, more than others, believed that creativity is essential for career success. In their mind, the successful manager is the one who has the right individual characteristics. Their outlook is rational: they view the organization as a coordinated network of individuals who make appropriate decisions based on their professional competence and knowledge.

British managers hold a more interpersonal and subjective view of the organizational world. According to them, the ability to create the right image and to get noticed for what they do is essential for career success. They view the organization primarily as a network of relationships between individuals who get things done by influencing each other through communicating and negotiating.

French managers look at the organization as an authority network where the power to organize and control the actors stems from their positioning in the hierarchy. They focus on the organization as a pyramid of differentiated levels of power to be acquired or dealt with. French managers perceive the ability to manage power relationships effectively and to 'work the system' as particularly critical to their success.

Thus, collective perceptions of one aspect of the external career (i.e., career success from an organizational perspective) vary according to national culture in a single multinational corporation where the occupational, administrative and organizational contexts are similar. This proposition raises several questions. Do the various managers simply view the same organization through their own cultural lenses and arrive at different subjective interpretations of reality? Or, do the various affiliates operate and reward differently within their cultural settings and there is no objective multinational reality of career success--regardless of what head office desires or designs? The answer to both questions may be "yes."

In another study of 225 European executives, undertaken at INSEAD, the European Institute of Business Administration (Derr, 1987), another collective perception of external career dynamics in major European firms was obtained. The inquiry asked the respondents to identify which kind of employees their companies most valued. In general, the executives reported that their companies attached most value to future high-level general managers. However, there were some interesting variations on this theme according to the national origin of the company.

The German firms were more bureaucratic and, along with the Swiss, attached higher value to technical competence and functional expertise. The French companies valued most those managers who came from elite schools with strong technical backgrounds but who quickly became general managers (avoiding all appearance of remaining narrow technical specialists). The British attached great importance to recruiting and developing persons with a more classical education and broad general approach to management and were currently debating the value of MBA training as opposed to this broader orientation. The Swedish firms maintained a delicate balance between differentiating some as high potential candidates and future "leaders" with special developmental experiences versus adherence to strong cultural norms of equality, social democracy and collaboration where nobody is singled out for special treatment.

Clearly, career success from the organizational point of view, whether assessed by the careerists or by the policymakers and career systems designers, is no more culture-free than other facets of the management and organizational world. In fact, it may be important and useful to view the external career as a cultural artifact. What about the internal career?

### The Internal Career

In the 1985 study at INSEAD mentioned above, Derr also derived a list from career orientation theory (Schein, 1978, 1982; Driver, 1982; DeLong, 1982; and Derr, 1980, 1983, 1986) of thirty-six (36) different ideas about career success. Respondents were asked to select twelve (i.e., one-third of the items) which were most important to them as indicators of career success. The respondents were also asked to circle those four items among the twelve checked which were considered the most important. The questionnaire format was modeled after the one used by Laurent. In Laurent's survey, however, the respondents are asked to check the items which they perceive as being most important in determining career success in their company (i.e. external career perceptions). The Derr questionnaire asks the respondent to report on his/her own personal definition of career success and the company point of view is not to be considered (i.e. internal career orientations). The top ten items chosen by the 225 respondents from the list of 36 are:\*

#### Rank

1. being influential enough to get exciting and challenging assignments
2. being in the "inner circle" regarding important decisions
3. being able to influence events and policies in support of my values and philosophies
4. achieving a balance in my progress at work, in my relationships (family life, friendships) and in self-development activities
5. being able to keep personal and professional life in equilibrium
6. becoming a general manager (e.g., Director, VP)
7. working for a firm whose values are congruent with mine

8. being able to sell my ideas to others
9. using my creative talents
10. creating new products, ideas, services or organizations

\*Circled items in this ranking were counted proportionately more than those simply checked in order to reflect the structure of choices in the instrument.

The reader will note that a number of the top items which comprise the internal career are associated with upward mobility, power and influence (see ranked items 1, 2, 3, 6, 8). Achieving some sort of balance between personal and professional life is also an important internal career objective (see ranked items 4, 5). Furthermore, there is an entrepreneurial aspect to several of the top ten items (see items ranked 9, 10).

According to Derr's theory (1986), there are five different internal career success maps: getting ahead (upward mobility), getting secure (company loyalty and sense of belonging), getting free (autonomy), getting high (excitement of the work itself) and getting balanced (finding an equilibrium between personal and professional life). A forced-choice instrument, the Career Success Map (CSM) questionnaire (see Derr, 1986, pp. 189-193), was administered to the respondents to further ascertain their career orientations.

Figure 1 below is a graphical representation of the career orientation differences of four different European nationalities ( $N=84$ ), using the CSM questionnaire. In Figure 1, the lower the mean score on a scale of 1-12, the less a group has that particular career orientation. As to career orientations, GA stands for getting-ahead, GS for getting secure, GF for getting free, GB for getting balanced and GH for getting high.

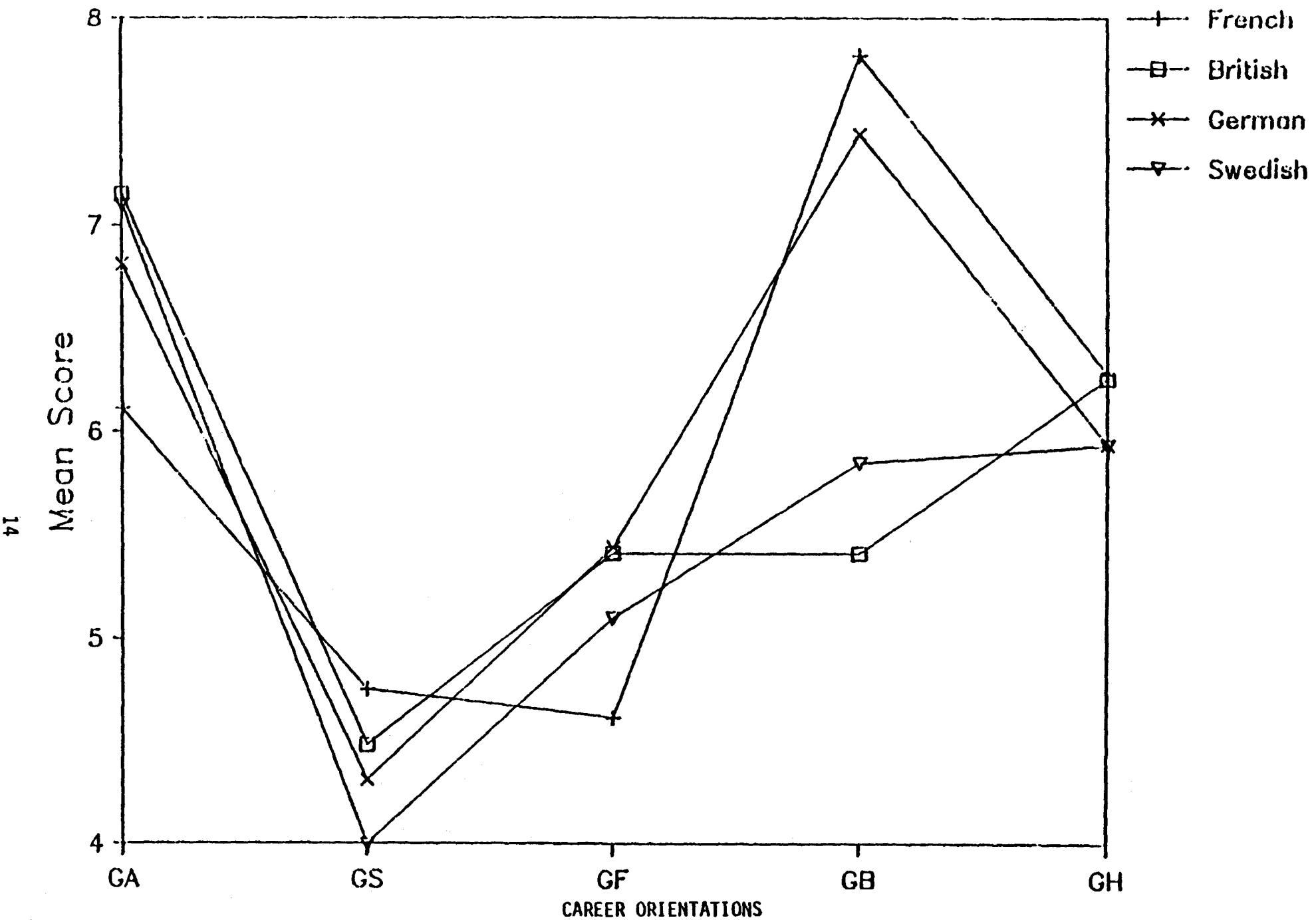


FIGURE 1. Career Success Map Across Four National Cultures

One surprising feature of these data collected from the INSEAD population described above is the extent to which the whole population has a getting-balanced orientation. In what would be predicted as a very getting-ahead group of respondents (high potentials in an exclusive executive development program), 29 percent had a predominantly getting-ahead profile, while 26 percent were judged to be primarily getting balanced. There are fewer getting high (20 percent) internal career orientations in this sample and relatively few getting secure (16 percent) and getting free (9 percent) orientations.

Some of this overall getting-balanced profile may be explained by response bias. Many of the INSEAD executives surveyed had been away from home for several weeks at the time of taking the survey. They may have been missing their families. They had also, several sessions prior to responding, experienced a class session on the subject of balancing personal and professional life. This class may have influenced them.

Another possible explanation is that managers often see themselves as more balanced and family-oriented than would their spouses, children or those who know them well (Renshaw, 1977; Burke and Weir, 1977). They might report these skewed self-perceptions in the questionnaire. Still, the possibility exists that many considered "high flyers" by their companies are really getting-balanced careerists in disguise. Given the first opportunity, they may make a career choice which promotes personal life/professional life balance over a long-term getting-ahead strategy.

As an illustration, Derr conducted an in-depth career interview with a young German executive at INSEAD. He had already deferred his gratification through a Ph.D. and M.B.A. program. His spouse was in medical training in Germany. He had all the right qualifications and

profile to be classified a very high-potential executive. His plan, nevertheless, was to continue in his large German company, work hard for three-five years and establish himself, get located in the south of Germany (location of headquarters and key plants figured prominently in his choice of company) and then voluntarily plateau and become a balanced careerist. This plan was synchronized to correspond with his wife's medical training so she would be ready at the moment of his voluntary plateauing to establish a part-time practice. Together, once established, they would begin a family and spend much of their time in recreational pursuits. This person was quite sure that he did not want to work as hard as his father had done.

The other interesting point of the data presented in Figure 1 is the cross-cultural differences. The British and Swedes are significantly more getting-ahead oriented than are the French. The French and Germans, on the other hand, have a significantly higher getting-balanced orientation than the British. Might the case of the young German executive above be somewhat reflective of the career agendas of more numerous German managers? Some other clinical data point out that the French, while working hard while on-the-job, view their time away from the workplace as sacred personal time and, hence, see themselves as more balanced. The big surprise is the Swedish data where it could be supposed that they would be more getting balanced as a group. Interviews reveal, however, that the Swedes in this sample are from a small group of self-selected Swedish executives who choose to pursue the high potential career track.

This cross-cultural analysis supports our contention that nationality is a major factor influencing a person's internal career orientation. Basic cultural assumptions, we argue, come from national or dominant subgroup culture (e.g., early childhood experience) and are major factors

in influencing one's assumptions about life and work. These basic cultural assumptions are at the heart of one's concepts about career success, even though they are later influenced by real-world external career events and by corporate culture at the espoused values and artifact levels.

Moreover, as pointed out above, nationality also influences how people perceive the external career. Thus, we see significant perceptual differences between national groups about what is important for career success within the same company.

Individuals may perceive the outside world (external career) according to their own cultural lenses and internal inclinations. Alternatively individuals may also define their own subjective inclinations according to their assessment of the more objective cultural context. While the interaction between the internal and external careers is likely to work in both directions, the complicating factor is that the total career concept is defined by both the perceptual constructs of reality and by the larger cultural environment.

### Conclusion and Implications

Based on both our research findings and the earlier theoretical discussion, it may be useful to propose a new model of career dynamics. This model serves to link together the careers perspective and the concept of culture. It might help us to understand how major culture variables interact with one another and, as such, may help guide future research in this area. Figure 2 below illustrates a Cultural Model of Careers.

In this figure, the Schein culture model is drawn as a triangle to indicate that assumptions are at the base of culture and that artifacts, while important, are the more superficial layer of culture. Values and norms are in between in their importance to cultural depth. The

surrounding dynamics are indicated by arrows and boxes, that represent organizational culture, national culture, internal career and external career, and their respective interactions.

According to this model, basic assumptions are mostly rooted in national cultures. Internal career represents a set of such basic assumptions about the world of work. Values, norms and artifacts--while translating basic cultural assumptions--may then emerge as differentiated translations through different organizational histories: organizational cultures develop at this level of the cultural edifice. External career represents such a set of perceived values, norms and artifacts, related to the world of work in organizations.

While the interaction between national cultures, organizational cultures, and career dynamics is obviously more complex than suggested by the arrows of Figure 2, we have attempted to indicate the major interactions suggested by our research findings. Thus the internal career would be directly influenced by the basic assumptions that characterize homogeneous cultural settings such as national cultures. The external career would also be influenced by national culture through the mediating effects of the diverse organizational cultures that have developed over time within the broad cultural milieu. Finally, the external career and the internal career are presented as mutually interacting elements of the total career concept.

Following are some implications of this model and ways in which managers and human resource professionals might make use of it.

Individual careerists might want to better understand how their early childhood experiences in their cultural setting impact their current internal career orientations. It might also be important to consider how

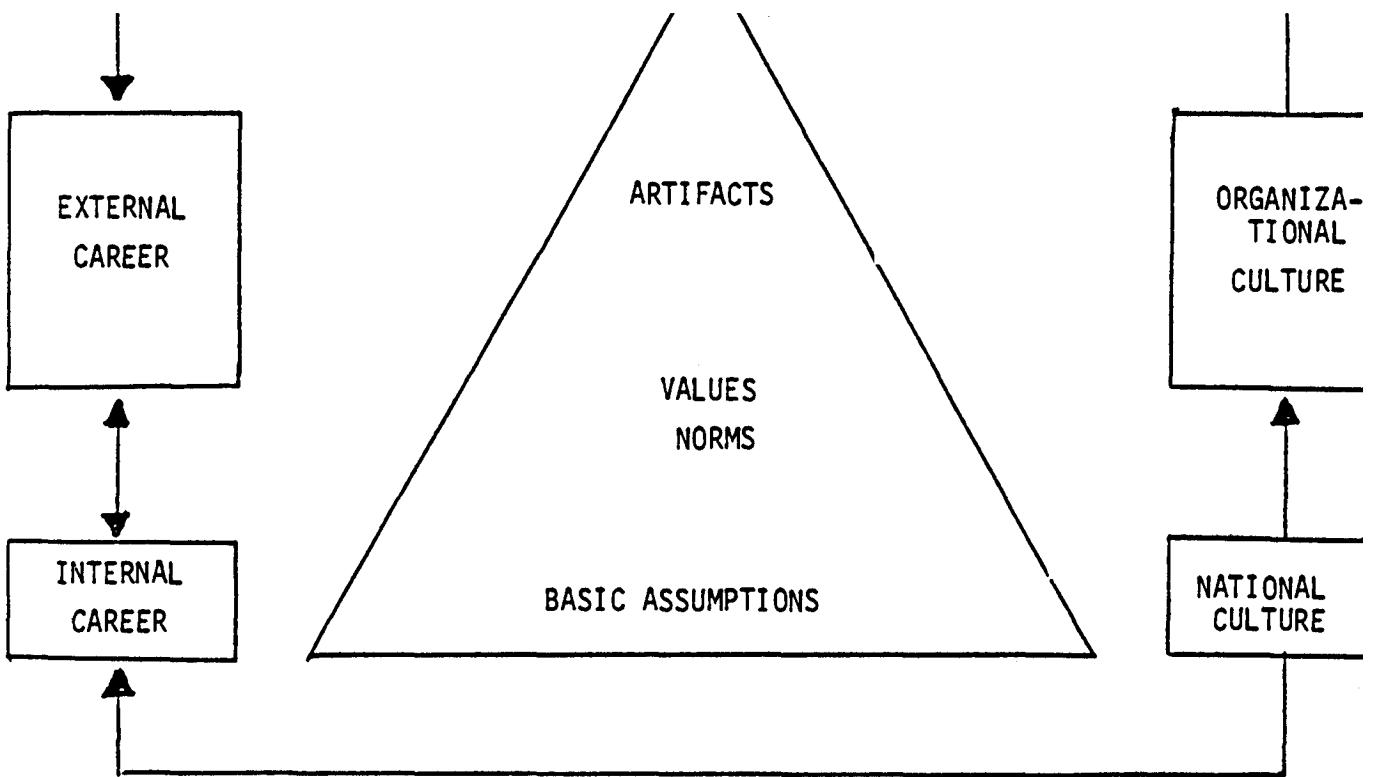


FIGURE 2. A Cultural Model of Careers

these basic assumptions are interacting with the various values and artifacts of the corporate cultures in which they work or, indeed, how their basic assumptions converge with or diverge from those of the organizations and occupations in which they work. Moreover, given these very basic assumptions, individuals should consider the limits they wish to ascribe to corporate culture and external career realities. For many, some of these interface issues will be fraught with internal conflict and require some compromise. One of the areas needing future research, as pointed out by Mihal et al. (1984) and Taylor and Prejor (1985), is coping with internal v. external career mismatches. Understanding that culture is a key intervening variable in such coping and compromising may be very important.

General managers and human resource specialists may wish to consider two aspects of this approach. First, corporate culture is not only shaped but inherited. While an organization's deep culture may reflect assumptions about clients, leaders, activities, professional groups and even key product lines, it will also be influenced by the deep basic assumptions of employees. As organizational work forces become increasingly multicultural, these basic assumptions may vary at fundamental levels and reflect the larger cultural context (national for instance) from which they originally emerged. This also applies to how employees tend to think about their careers and their basic definitions of career success.

On the other hand, organizations are enormously influential and can shape behavioral norms and actions in significant ways through the artifact and value levels of culture. Thus, as Laurent (1987) has pointed out elsewhere, organizations may change in significant ways and exact enormous integration of employee effort by effectively managing their corporate

cultures. They may do this in spite of the fact that they do not really change the basic assumptions of individual employees.

Second, the workforce of the future may be more pluralistic and international, one in which basic assumptions and definitions of career success are diverse and can only be influenced to some extent by organizational practices and policies (Derr, 1986). The direction of successful management in the future, therefore, may be through understanding diverse career profiles, which may be deeply imbedded in national culture, and learning to use that diversity to the company's advantage. Management needs to design career development systems which accommodate different types of workers with diverse career success orientations and use their strengths more successfully.

For example, some companies are providing a variety of career-oriented alternatives which might apply to talented but diverse employees. One option is widening the definition of a "high-potential" employee to include not only a general manager but, also, valued technical gurus, internal entrepreneurs, and excellent company loyalists. Another possibility is to provide multiple career ladders and various movement options (e.g., lateral moves) for these various career types according to company needs and what is valued. A third possibility is to provide a career information center in which employees of various internal career orientations can uncover information about those in-company opportunities which best suit them.

The next challenge to policymakers has to do with the many organizations that operate internationally, whether they are called multinational, transnational, or international firms, those organizations that draw their human resources from many different parts of the world. As we have seen above, career concepts--whether the internal or the external

career--vary across national cultures. How can career policies, often designed from and managed by corporate headquarters, avoid the costly traps of ethnocentrism and cultural myopia? If career policies and practices reflect the cultural values of headquarters, how are they going to travel abroad? Are they going to be internationally effective?

In this complex area of international human resource management, it is probably easier to raise questions than it is to formulate recommendations. However, the integrative concept of culture may help to better frame some of the issues. If we look at career policies and practices as artifacts of both an organization's culture and of its national cultural environment, the need for consistency and the need for flexibility and variety in such policies and practices become more obvious. Forward-looking multinational firms will try to develop a corporate culture that is capable of building upon cultural diversity in career concepts as an asset to their overall human resource policies.

This posture obviously requires moving away from the myth of universality in management models and from the comfortable path of standardized career practices. It implies an ability to recognize, appreciate and use the unique insights, skills and styles of various cultures, a willingness to decentralize management prerogatives internationally and active steps toward the internationalization of key human resources--with no exception for the very top echelons of the firm.

While the challenge for the practice of international career management is tremendous, the challenge for career theory is commensurate. Indeed, most theoretical developments have tended to ignore their cultural

texture and to treat career concepts in isolation from their deep-seated cultural meaning. More comparative work is needed to expand our understanding of career dynamics beyond its cultural boundaries.

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