



Career self-management: Its nature, causes and consequences[☆]

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Abstract

In a recent special issue [Journal of Vocational Behavior 59 (2001) 284], scholars noted that the field of vocational psychology needs a better understanding of career self-management. This article proposes a conceptual framework of career self-management, based on Crites' [Vocational Psychology, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969] model of vocational adjustment. It argues that people use three types of career self-managing behavior (positioning, influence, and boundary management) as adaptive responses to career development tasks. These behaviors are used to respond to or eliminate thwarting conditions or career barriers, and thereby lead to vocational adjustment. Suggested determinants of this behavior are self-efficacy, desire for control, and career anchors. Career self-management can enhance perceptions of control over the career, leading to career satisfaction, but it may also be associated with negative outcomes and maladjustment. The framework is suggested to apply both to bounded 'organizational' careers and to more flexible, improvised careers. The article concludes by considering the implications for research and practice.

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1. Introduction

These are challenging times for workers. Many commentators have argued that, in an increasingly chaotic organizational environment, workers will experience a great range and frequency of transitions during their working lives, and will need to take responsibility for charting and navigating their careers. These challenges also impact the field of vocational psychology, since globalization, technological advances and postindustrial society are suggested to be changing the very nature of the occupations and career guidance with which the field is concerned. In a recent volume of this journal (Savickas, 2001), scholars acknowledged that the field needs to take account of new types of jobs evolving from informal communications, flattened organizational hierarchies, virtual teams, and teleworking. It also needs to be able to explain how employees manage their careers strategically, how they can be adaptive and flexible throughout the career, and how they can most effectively negotiate the boundaries between work and nonwork. The field could also benefit from a greater degree of integration with other fields such as industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology.

Accordingly, this article seeks to illuminate a behavioral phenomenon that is of key importance to vocational psychology: career self-management. This is a concept that has a considerable heritage in academic writing, depicted for example in early research exploring how managers and executives progressed in large corporations (Kanter, 1977; Whyte, 1956) and more recently in I/O psychology literature on the determinants of managerial success (e.g., Judge & Bretz, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Tharenou, 1997; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). The idea of individual responsibility for career has attracted renewed attention in recent popular writing, and also in academic work exploring the effects of organizational change on careers (e.g., Sullivan, Carden, & Martin, 1998). In some recent prescriptive accounts, considerable attention is given to the ways in which individuals can and should manage their careers (Inkson, 2000; King, 2001).

Curiously, while scholars have acknowledged the importance of career self-management for vocational psychology, there have been few attempts to underpin the concept with substantive theory, or to conduct rigorous empirical investigations of it. Career self-management deserves a more scholarly consideration in vocational psychology for a number of reasons. First, most people want to believe that their careers are their own property, and efforts to shape the direction of their careers provide them with a means to assert agency in their life course (Tiedeman & Miller-Tiedeman, 1984). This is increasingly relevant given the changing nature of work: if the nature of organizational life is becoming unpredictable or even chaotic, as some commentators argue, then career self-management may be the only way to navigate through a turbulent world. Being able to understand the more complex nature of occupations and help clients manage their way through this supposed career 'pandemonium' (cf. Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larsson, 1996) is essential if vocational psychology is to retain a contemporary focus.

Second, career self-management is a kind of vocational behavior that people engage in throughout the course of their working lives, not just at the outset. The study

of career self-managing behavior can therefore extend the reach of vocational psychology beyond its current focus on stable characteristics of individuals, opportunities and employment relationships to a more dynamic, time-dependent understanding of the career course. For many people, careers have a personal as well as a vocational meaning; the study of career self-management can help to understand not only how people achieve satisfaction at work, but also how they fit work in to the rest of their lives (Richardson, 1996).

Third, the study of career self-management can provide insights into all sorts of career patterns and trajectories. While self-managing behavior has been widely depicted in accounts of 'traditional' careers (e.g., Jennings, 1971), it is also pertinent to those who have long experienced career patterns similar to what are now termed 'boundaryless' or 'new' careers, such as contingent laborers or the self-employed. Such people may not have access to organizational career management initiatives for much of their working lives, and are obliged to seek out opportunities, update their skills and market themselves in ways that are now suggested to be important in a changing organizational world. Studying career self-management in such occupational groups should help to illuminate contemporary notions that lack a theoretical underpinning in vocational psychology, such as 'employability' and 'portfolio careers.'

This article argues that Crites' (1969, 1976) model of vocational adjustment provides an excellent starting point for understanding career self-management, but that this model could usefully be revised and updated to offer a more contemporary perspective. The article combines Crites' analysis with insights from I/O psychology in order to develop a more complete conceptual model of career self-management. The structure of the article is as follows. The first section revisits Crites' model, considering its relevance to contemporary careers and arguing that it can be viewed as an early model of career self-management. The second section identifies issues relating to the conceptualization of career self-management that are not addressed adequately either by Crites' model or by other literature on career self-management. The third section takes Crites' model as its starting point, and draws on some of the I/O psychology literature to describe the nature of career self-managing behavior, and the fourth section discusses the causes and consequences of that behavior. Finally the discussion section returns to the issues identified in the second section, and considers the implications for future research and practice.

2. Crites' model of vocational adjustment as a theory of career self-management

Drawing on a wide range of economic, sociological, and psychological work on vocational behavior, Crites (1969) depicted vocational adjustment as the process of achieving satisfactory performance in an occupation after the point of entry. He drew on work by adjustment psychologists (Shaffer & Shoben, 1956) to develop a model of vocational adjustment, which is depicted in Fig. 1.

Crites (1969, 1976) argued that a worker is motivated, either by internal or external stimuli, to behave in certain ways on the job (1), such as to seek acceptance from

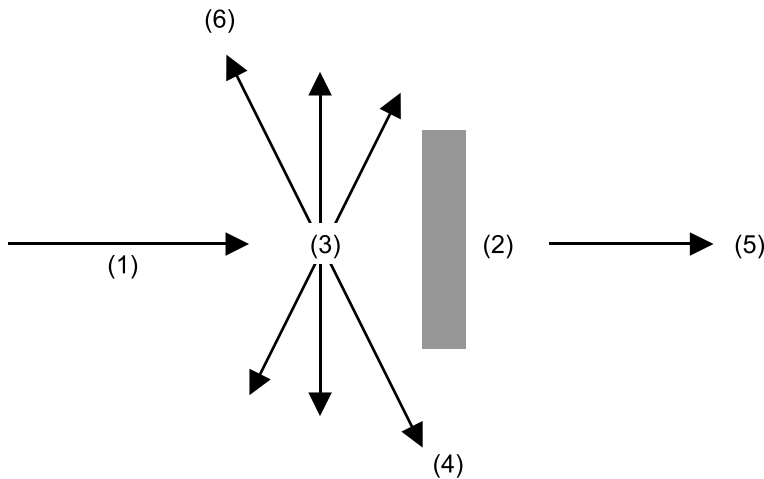


Fig. 1. Crites' model for the process of vocational adjustment. Source: (Crites, 1969, p. 355). Reprinted with permission from McGraw-Hill International.

co-workers, strive for prestige and recognition or achieve greater job freedom. When a worker is thwarted in this behavior (2), either by some external circumstance (frustration) or competing response tendencies (conflict), he or she attempts to adjust by making some response (3), which will eliminate the thwarting conditions or reduce the tension they arouse. If the worker makes an effective response (4), he or she is readjusted vocationally and experiences either job satisfaction or job success or both (5). However, if he or she fails to respond in a way that either temporarily or permanently overcomes the problem, the worker will persist in a state of frustration or conflict and be vocationally maladjusted (6). Crites argued that the process is a developmental one that takes place, in different contexts and with different kinds of thwarting conditions and foci for adjustment, over the whole course of the career from occupational entry to retirement.

Although it uses very different language from contemporary accounts of career self-management, Crites' model is nonetheless relevant to the challenges of managing a career in the 21st century. Crites acknowledged that careers rarely unfold unproblematically; most people encounter barriers, problems or conflicts during the course of their working lives. Although he referred mainly to research on 'traditional' occupations, such as salespeople, blue-collar workers and military personnel in his discussion of thwarting conditions, his analysis is nonetheless pertinent to those currently facing the kind of career 'pandemonium' described by Brousseau et al. (1996). Indeed, the idea that people experience barriers and frustration in their careers has become much more commonly accepted as a result of the considerable recent interest in 'new' and 'boundaryless' careers. Crites argued that the anxiety and tension aroused by conflict and frustration in such situations act as drive stimuli for the behavior of the individual, and motivate people to use a variety of work-adjustment mechanisms (Crites, 1969, pp. 404–406). These include *acquiescence* or *compliance* (giving up

rather than taking constructive action), *control* or *manipulation* (changing the environment), *compromise* (changing self and the environment), and *integrative* responses (achieving a synthesis among the factors in conflict without the necessity of change). The coping responses identified by Crites are similar to those described in recent accounts of career self-management which explore the techniques and coping strategies that people use to overcome career barriers (Inkson, 2000; London, 1998).

Crites (1976) argued that, through the successful use of adjustment mechanisms to overcome thwarting conditions, people master the career development tasks appropriate to their stage of vocational development. For example, in the establishment stage of the career, from occupational entry to mid-career, six development tasks must be mastered: organizational adaptability, position performance, work habits and attitudes, co-worker relationships, advancement and career choice, and plans (Crites, 1982). At other career stages, the nature of the tasks may change, and the motivation for mastering them may be different, but the process of vocational adjustment remains the same (Crites, 1969, p. 356). Thus his model describes the process of implementing a decision to enter an occupation, adjusting effectively, establishing oneself and progressing within that occupation. Although the term 'career self-management' is not used, the behaviors described are arguably similar to those described in more recent research on the subject (e.g., Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demarr, 1998). For this reason it can be argued that Crites' model of vocational adjustment, and other work describing adaptive behavioral responses to career development tasks (e.g., Super, 1957; Tiedeman, 1971), can be seen as early models of career self-management.

A similar argument can be made about early work in I/O psychology concerned with the behaviors people deploy in order to progress or develop their careers (e.g., Hall, 1976; Sofer, 1970). In much of this work, career self-management is not explicitly mentioned, but individual responsibility for career is implicit. There are, however, a number of areas for further conceptual development that are needed if either I/O or vocational psychology models are to be made relevant to the contemporary world of careers. Nor are these issues of conceptualization comprehensively addressed in more recent accounts of career self-management. These issues are considered in the following section.

3. Issues relating to the conceptualization of career self-management to date

The preceding section has argued that Crites' model of vocational development provides an excellent starting point for understanding career self-management. There are, however, some issues relating to the way career self-management has been conceptualized in the literature which are not adequately addressed either by Crites' model or by other researchers. First, it would be useful to understand more about how thwarting conditions arise, and to consider whether different types of barriers might apply to different types of career (cf. London, 1998). The objective or external thwarting conditions experienced by someone aspiring to an 'organizational' career may be quite different to those experienced by a 'portfolio' or contingent worker for

example. Relatedly, a more comprehensive account of the actual coping behaviors used to overcome thwarting conditions and satisfactorily master development tasks is needed (Dix & Savickas, 1995), together with a broader analysis of how these behaviors apply in different career contexts.

There is a considerable interest in such instrumental behaviors in the I/O psychology literature, which explores, for example, ingratiation with supervisors, engagement in organizational politics and positioning for promotion. Much of this work draws heavily on the ‘traditional-bureaucratic’ career in its conceptualization of the type of behavior involved, with outcomes assessed in terms of promotion rate and salary increases. By implication, such behavior is advantageous for incumbents of organizational careers, but it is not clear why it might be important for other types of career. There is little either in Crites’ model or in the current I/O psychology literature to illuminate how people with highly mobile and flexible careers, such as software engineers or interim managers, might manage their careers. Are the coping behaviors required of those in ‘new’ careers different from those with careers approximating to the organizational model? Or is there an identifiable set of adjustment mechanisms that can be considered to apply to all types of careers?

A second, and related, area for further development is the question of *why* people engage in career self-managing behavior, and particularly, what accounts for differences between individuals. Crites (1969, Chap. 9) drew on theories of vocational motivation, arguing that people are ultimately motivated by the need for vocational success and satisfaction, and implying a linear view of progression within one organization or occupation. Since he gave only limited attention to reasons for changing employers, occupations or employment status, his model seems somewhat outdated at a time when employer change, contingent forms of working and notions of employability and marketability are recognized features of careers. A similar criticism can be leveled at most of the earlier I/O psychology research, which evokes a view of career self-management as being motivated by desire for increased power, status or responsibility, and as being concerned for *intra*-organizational mobility (Gould & Penley, 1984; Jennings, 1971). A comprehensive picture of career self-management needs to take account of *inter*-organizational mobility, and to consider alternative motivations such as knowledge accumulation or personal development. Those who value such outcomes might manage their careers in a different way to the ‘conventionally’ ambitious.

In considering motivation for career self-managing behavior, it is also important to incorporate the relationship between work and nonwork domains, since most theorists now acknowledge that the ‘career’ encompasses the nonwork sphere. Although Crites (1969, Chap. 8) acknowledged that vocational adjustment was related to general adjustment in life, his conceptualization of vocational adjustment was largely confined to the work sphere, and likewise his conceptualization of success and satisfaction were largely vocational. Following Super (1941), the vocation and ‘avocation’ were seen as mutually exclusive domains, with success in the avocation considered compensatory to vocational success. However, careers have a personal as well as a vocational meaning for many people; a complete picture of career self-management needs to consider people’s aspirations for their lives outside work, and to explore

adjustment mechanisms which are intended to fit work in with family or leisure commitments.

Third, in order to assess the importance of vocational adjustment to contemporary careers, a better understanding of its likely outcomes is needed, particularly where this pertains to occupational health and well-being (Lent, 2001). Some of the empirical research on career self-management suggests that it leads to accelerated salary progression or more frequent promotions (see Tharenou, 1997, for a review). Other commentators have described outcomes of a more intangible nature, such as greater fulfillment, psychological freedom or an enriched sense of identity (Hall & Mirvis, 1995), although there is little evidence to confirm that career self-management is necessarily associated with these outcomes. Indeed, there may be some disadvantages to attempting to overcome thwarting conditions, particularly where such barriers are features of the environment rather than the self and where there is a consequent likelihood of making negative attributions (Byster, 1998). Understanding its outcomes is important if we are to be clear about what *effective* career self-management is, and whether it is possible to develop interventions to help people manage their careers effectively.

The purpose of this article is to propose a conceptual framework that can help to provide insights and guidelines for researching these three key aspects: the nature of career self-management, its causes, and its consequences. The following section describes the nature of career self-managing behavior, taking as its starting point Crites' model of vocational adjustment, and supplementing Crites' analysis with insights from I/O psychology.

4. The nature of career self-management

The conceptual framework proposed here is based on a number of assumptions about individual agency and the context in which that agency is achieved. Building on Crites' model, it assumes that people do not have full decision latitude over their desired career outcomes (such as salary progression, skill development, contract renewal or a reduction in working hours). Achieving these outcomes depends on decisions made by a number of individuals who hold key positions within the wider organizational or social structure. These individuals who influence the progress of a career will be called 'gatekeepers' (King, 2001). Where a gatekeeper makes a decision that is inconsistent with a person's career goals or objectives in the short- or long-term, this is experienced as a 'thwarting condition' (depicted as (2) in Crites' model; see Fig. 1). Careers that unfold within one organization are likely to be affected by decisions made by 'local' gatekeepers, such as immediate supervisors or other senior managers, personnel professionals or mentors. Careers that span organizational boundaries are likely to be affected by a more diverse set of gatekeepers, including prospective employers, agency representatives, clients, project managers, or other contractors.

Gatekeepers make decisions about careers in a social context, and therefore their decisions are not necessarily rational or free from competing interests, personal agen-

das and political influences (Ferris & Judge, 1991). Recruitment, staffing, project allocation, contract-awarding, and promotion decisions are affected by the extent to which formal or informal mechanisms are used to identify candidates and the evaluation criteria used to pick the winners. The prior experience, accountability, decision-making heuristics and cognitive limitations of decision-makers affect their decisions (see Northcraft, Neale, & Huber, 1988, for a review). People use a range of behavior that is intended to prevail upon the decisions made by those gatekeepers who are in a position to influence their desired career outcomes. That behavior is career self-management. People use it with the objective of eliminating or resolving the thwarting conditions they would otherwise experience in their careers (depicted as (3) in Crites' model; see Fig. 1), thereby exhibiting adaptive, behavioral responses to career development tasks (Savickas, 1994; Super, 1957; Tiedeman, 1971).

Career self-management is a dynamic process, involving execution of a set of co-occurring behaviors, which can be divided into three groups. *Positioning* behaviors are concerned with making sure one has the contacts, skills and experience to achieve one's desired career outcomes. *Influence* behaviors are concerned with actively attempting to influence the decisions of key gatekeepers to those desired outcomes. *Boundary management* is concerned with balancing the demands of work and non-work domains. These behaviors may be deployed with strategic intent, in a pre-meditated rational fashion, but they may also be used in an improvised manner as a response to the immediate demands of a particular situation. For this reason, the term 'behavior' is preferred here to the term 'strategy' used by other researchers (e.g., Barney & Lawrence, 1989; Gould & Penley, 1984) and in prescriptive accounts of career self-management (King, 2001).

4.1. Positioning behavior

The first type of positioning behavior, *strategic choice of mobility opportunity*, relates to the initiation of job moves, or acceptance of proposed changes made by another party, such as one's employer or an employment agency. The term *strategic* is used here to convey the idea of deliberation and selection between alternatives at a point of transition in a career. There are benefits associated with some internal job moves, such as skill development or exposure to seniors, and costs associated with other jobs such as limited onward mobility or skill obsolescence (Jennings, 1971; Kanter, 1977). Likewise some external job moves, new assignments or projects may be more instrumental than others for the accumulation of 'career capital' (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). People pursue those opportunities that are perceived to be of instrumental value to them (Barney & Lawrence, 1989).

The second positioning behavior, *strategic investment in human capital*, involves making investments in training or educational qualifications. Some human capital investments may be made at a cost to the individual (including fees and foregone income), and others may be made available by an employer. Human capital investments may be of generic value, such as MBA qualifications, or they could be of specific value to a particular firm, occupation or industry. People choose to pursue investments that are perceived to be valued by gatekeepers, and which are readily

observable by them (Barney & Lawrence, 1989). Again, the term *strategic* is used here to convey the idea of deliberation and selection between alternatives at a given point in a career.

The third positioning behavior is *active network development*. Networks are said to offer instrumental benefits, such as information, career guidance, and advocacy for promotion or employment. Having a relationship with influential people within one's employing organization provides entry into social networks that are inaccessible through formal communications, and may facilitate exposure to gatekeepers. Similarly, establishing an external network of personal ties, for example with other members of professional associations, customer contacts, trade acquaintances or informal social acquaintances, provides opportunities for interaction with influential members of other organizations. The resources obtained from knowing or being known to others, or occupying a particular position in a social network, has been referred to as 'social capital' (see Seibert et al., 2001, for a review).

The fourth positioning behavior, *job content innovation*, is the development of substantive changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks and the enlargement of one's effective task environment (Graen, 1976). Job content innovation can be seen both as a means of developing human capital by learning new skills or gaining valuable expertise, and as a means to gain exposure to gatekeepers (Kanter, 1977). Example behaviors are joining a special project in order to gain access to senior management, or going beyond contractual obligations in order to secure contract renewal.

4.2. Influence behavior

Influence behavior is concerned with actively attempting to influence the decisions of key gatekeepers to desired career outcomes. The first type of influence behavior is *self-promotion*. Since job performance cannot necessarily be objectively verified, self-promotion is concerned with the manipulation of how performance is perceived. People use self-promotion tactics to present themselves in the most favorable and competent light, with the objective of causing evaluators to attribute positive characteristics to them (Judge & Bretz, 1994). Self-promotion is particularly useful in situations where decisions are often largely based on the applicant's claims alone, such as recruitment interviews or project tender situations (Schlenker, 1980).

The second influence behavior, *ingratiation*, is employed by people to make themselves more attractive to others. The use of ingratiation as a career self-managing behavior assumes that a gatekeeper's evaluation of an individual will be strongly influenced by whether he or she likes or dislikes that person (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Wayne et al., 1997). Enhanced attractiveness is said to improve a subordinate's chances of positive rewards, such as a pay rise or promotion. It may also increase the chance of a contract being renewed or extended, or of interpersonal networks being developed for instrumental purposes.

The third type of influence behavior is *upward influence*, which involves increasing gatekeepers' understanding of one's desired outcomes and their sense of obligation to deliver them. Such tactics might be used by someone who is high in power resources

relative to a particular gatekeeper, perhaps because of highly valued skills or knowledge (Schlenker, 1980). The idea of negotiating or bargaining with an employer has become familiar in discussions of psychological contract negotiations, and is particularly relevant to careers that span organizational boundaries, where negotiation of terms and obligations may be frequent and explicit.

4.3. Boundary management

Boundary management is concerned with balancing the demands of work and nonwork domains. Drawing on role theory, researchers have argued that the work and nonwork spheres entail multiple roles, which impose differing demands (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). People have to find ways of resolving the ‘competing response tendencies’ (in Crites’ terms) that result from conflict between work and home roles. Two behavioral aspects of this process of managing the work/nonwork boundary are of relevance here.

The first, termed *boundary maintenance*, is concerned with the location of the boundary between work and nonwork roles. Gatekeepers who are particularly engaged with either the work or nonwork domain (such as a supervisor or a spouse) act as ‘boundary-keepers’ (Clark, 2000). Boundary maintenance involves negotiating with such gatekeepers, and is intended to ensure that the performance of roles in each domain is effective. Examples of such behavior include talking about work-related issues with one’s partner in order to elicit support for working extended hours, or coordinating work hours with a partner to manage time with children. Boundary maintenance is also conducted in the work domain, for example by asking colleagues to cover work duties in order to attend to nonwork responsibilities.

The second type of boundary management is *role transition*, which is concerned with navigating the transition between work and nonwork roles. People use habitual behavior to facilitate the transition between the two domains, such as reading the business press over breakfast, or using commuting time to ‘unwind’ from work (Ashforth et al., 2000). Efforts to separate the two domains also facilitate transition, such as using different names or dressing differently for work, or refusing to talk about work at home to avoid being drawn into work-related moods and behavior (Ashforth et al., 2000; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Creating a physically distinct workspace in the home, where family members are not welcome, may also be important for home-workers.

This article argues that positioning, influence and boundary maintenance behaviors can be grouped together under the conceptual umbrella of career self-management. They can be grouped together because they are each in different ways intended either to eliminate external constraints that would otherwise prevent people from achieving desired career outcomes, or to resolve internal sources of conflict between roles. Positioning behavior increases the probability of gatekeepers making favorable decisions through the development of ‘social capital’ and ‘employability.’ Influence behavior increases the likelihood of attaining desired outcomes by negotiating with gatekeepers, or otherwise seeking to guide or manipulate their decisions. Boundary maintenance resolves incidences of role conflict by managing the expecta-

tions of colleagues, family and friends about performance in the work and nonwork spheres, and facilitating transition between spheres. Through the successful deployment of these behaviors, people are, in Crites’ terms, readjusted vocationally, and master the career development tasks that are appropriate to their career stage (depicted by (5) in Crites’ model; see Fig. 1). The precise *content* of these tasks varies according to life stage, and according to where they are in a given ‘minicycle’ of exploration, establishment, maintenance or decline (Super, 1957). However, the *process* they use to master these tasks, here termed career self-management, remains the same.

5. The causes and consequences of career self-management

The preceding section described the nature of career self-management. This section extends Crites’ model of vocational adjustment by offering a more detailed examination of what causes that behavior to be initiated (including desire for control, self-efficacy, and career anchors), and the consequences of engaging in it (including career and life satisfaction, secondary responses, and learned helplessness). A model of the causes and consequences of career self-management is depicted in Fig. 2. The shaded box in the center depicts the various career self-managing behaviors discussed above. While Fig. 1 depicts individual episodes of career self-managing behavior, Fig. 2 is intended to illustrate the ongoing, processual nature of career self-management, and its longer-term causes and consequences. Through successful use of career self-managing behaviors over a sustained period, people master their

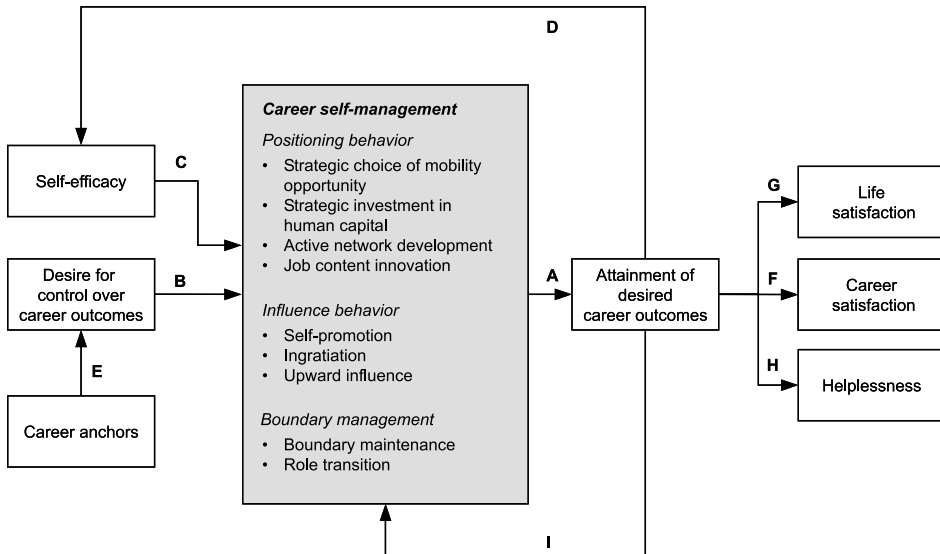


Fig. 2. A model of the causes and consequences of career self-management. See text for explanations of the relationships depicted. The letters on each arrow refer to explanations in the text.

development tasks and, as a result, achieve their desired career outcomes (see arrow marked with letter A in Fig. 2).

5.1. *Desire for control over career*

Crites (1969, Chap. 9) reviewed an extensive range of literature in an attempt to answer the question of ‘why men work’ (*sic*) and why, relatedly, they are motivated to engage in the process of vocational adjustment. Reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 1981) offers a similar explanation to Crites’ for why people are motivated to engage in control-seeking behaviors such as career self-management. Reactance theory argues that motivation to attempt to exert control is elicited by a particular event, which provokes a perceived loss of control over important outcomes. The greater the expectation that one can perform a desired act, the greater the motivational arousal if one is prevented from performing that act. This arousal is directed at the attributed cause of the frustration so as to restore the situation to that expected. It is the behavioral component of this reactance, termed career self-management, which is described here. Career self-managing behaviors are control-producing responses deployed as a means of increasing perceived control over the career. Skinner (1996) uses the term ‘primary control’ to refer to reactions to threats to control that attempt to regain or re-establish control. Similarly Crites (1969) described one possible type of adjustment mechanism as *control* or *manipulation*, where a worker manipulates the environment so that it no longer presents an obstacle to what he or she wants.

Individual differences in desire for control determine the extent to which people attempt to gain control over career outcomes (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986). To date, no published empirical research has demonstrated an association between career self-management and desire for control. However, Bell and Staw (1989) argued that differences in desire for control result from personality, and Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999) have drawn on Bell and Staw’s argument to show that proactive personality is associated with career initiative behaviors. This research suggests that there is a relationship between desire for control and career self-management (as depicted by arrow B in Fig. 2).

5.2. *Self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy is the belief that one can perform effectively the behavior required in a given situation (Bandura, 1986). Despite the extensive literature in vocational psychology on self-efficacy, there has been little consideration of the importance of self-efficacy for career self-management, although Crant (2000) has argued that it is associated with proactive behavior. Skinner (1996) observed that agent–means relations, or the extent to which a potential means is available to an agent, are important for understanding control-seeking behavior. Thus, it can be argued that self-efficacy affects the extent to which people engage in career self-management. People are likely to use career self-managing behavior to a greater extent where they feel competent to do so (as illustrated by arrow C in Fig. 2).

In their model of personal influence in organizations, Bell and Staw (1989) argued that a positive experience of exerting control leads to greater self-efficacy, which in turn leads to further attempts to exert control. If this is the case, attainment of career outcomes is likely to be associated with a person's level of self-efficacy, and people who have attained their desired career outcomes might be expected to have higher self-efficacy than those who have not (as depicted by arrow D in Fig. 2).

5.3. *Career anchors*

Reactance theory states that individuals will be motivated to restore control where they perceive a threat to control over some aspect of their environment or experience that is perceived to be salient (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). That salience is determined by the 'high order' conceptions they hold of themselves, which regulate their activity across time and in a variety of settings, and which provide reference values for lower order behavior (Bandura, 1986; Klein, 1989; Scheier & Carver, 1988). In career terms, the idea of higher order goals has been expressed as career 'orientations' or 'anchors' (Schein, 1996). Career anchors provide a central organizing principle that guides a person's career-related decisions, and drives and constrains choices about how to achieve desired career outcomes. Following reactance theory, career anchors might be expected to determine which control motivations are salient for the career (arrow E in Fig. 2). Through their impact on control motivation, career anchors inform which individuals are identified as gatekeepers with respect to a person's career, and determine which behaviors are used to influence those gatekeepers.

5.4. *Career and life satisfaction*

Crites (1969) argued that effective response to thwarting conditions should lead to mastery of career development tasks, and ultimately to vocational satisfaction and success. Similarly, from a control theory perspective, it can be argued that enhancements to perceived control ensue where the use of career self-managing behavior results in the attainment of desired career outcomes. As Super (1994) noted, such success leads to feelings of being in control of one's present and future, which in turn should lead to career satisfaction (arrow F in Fig. 2). Perceived control is thought to be associated with positive outcomes in the work sphere, such as increased performance and job satisfaction, reduced stress and work adjustment (Terry & Jimmieson, 1999), although it has not hitherto been associated with career satisfaction.

Super (1994) also observed that finding that one can control one's activities helps in the development of self-esteem. Similarly, I/O psychologists have argued that control at work is associated with positive outcomes in the broader life sphere, including psychological and physical health (see Terry & Jimmieson, 1999, for a review). Successful management of the work/nonwork boundary attenuates conflicts between work and nonwork roles, leading to enhanced perceptions of control over the life sphere and a general sense of well-being. Thus satisfaction with life in general, as well as with the career, might be expected to result from attainment of desired career outcomes (arrow G in Fig. 2).

5.5. Learned helplessness

Crites (1969) also dealt with the problem of maladjustment, arguing that if a person fails to respond to thwarting conditions in a way which either temporarily solves or permanently resolves the problem, he or she will persist in a state of frustration or conflict, and be vocationally maladjusted (depicted by (6) in Crites model; see Fig. 1). Similarly, the framework proposed in Fig. 2 suggests that, if career self-management does not deliver desired career outcomes, perceived control is not enhanced. One possible response is to persist with the same behavior with the expectation of rectifying the situation. This is most likely to happen where the person concludes that intended outcomes are still likely to be forthcoming, or that insufficient effort has been made. However, if this or a similar failure has been experienced in the past, and a person is repeatedly exposed to uncontrollable outcomes, he or she might relinquish attempts at control. Repeated failure to exert control reduces expectations of control, which in turn reduces the motivational arousal for reactance (Bell & Staw, 1989; Brehm & Brehm, 1981). The suggested eventual outcome of failure to exert control is psychological disengagement, learned helplessness or alienation (arrow H in Fig. 2). Crites described this type of adjustment as characterized by *acquiescence* or *compliance*, whereby people give up and endure their plight, or become dependent.

5.6. Secondary response

Rothbaum, Weiss, and Snyder (1982) argued that because perceived control is so valued, the quest for it is rarely abandoned in the manner that the learned helplessness model suggests. They depicted control as a two-stage process: individuals first attempt to restore control directly and if this is not possible they attempt to adapt to their environment as a kind of 'secondary' response (Skinner, 1996). Unlike relinquishment of control, secondary control is active, but aimed at the self rather than the environment. Secondary control is concerned with changing oneself to minimize or ameliorate losses or threats to control, and is more like the *compromise* form of adjustment identified by Crites (1969, p. 405). The worker attempts to solve conflicts and remove frustrations by changing both self and the environment. A typical example of this is physical disengagement from the current situation by, for example, changing employers. Alternatively, if a person experiences an internal thwarting condition such as conflict between motives or roles, he or she may respond by suppressing one of them at least temporarily (Crites, 1969), by adopting a more instrumental attitude to work or by a greater inclination to segment work and nonwork roles. Thus failure to achieve one's desired career outcomes may result in changing one's use of career self-managing behavior (arrow I in Fig. 2).

In many instances secondary responses represent a more adaptive means of dealing with failure to achieve desired career outcomes than relinquishment of control. These are the kind of *integrative* work-adjustment mechanisms that achieve a synthesis among the factors in conflict or circumvent frustrating circumstances (Crites, 1969). The adaptive use of secondary responses can therefore be seen as a form of coping strategy to deal with the lack of control inherent in careers. As such second-

ary control responses provide a kind of ‘career resilience’ (London, 1998), enabling people to resist career disruption in adverse circumstances, and to cope with insecurity and uncertainty. Career resilient individuals adapt to failure to achieve desired career outcomes by deploying alternative behaviors or revising their goals, rather than by withdrawal or helplessness. This kind of integrative adjustment, according to Crites, represents the best possible vocational adjustment that can be attained.

6. Discussion

The introductory section argued that Crites’ (1969, 1976) model of vocational adjustment provides an excellent first step in understanding career self-management. However, a better understanding of the concept is still needed if vocational psychologists are to understand more about why it is important, how it works and what are its consequences. This article has set out a framework describing the nature, causes and consequences of career self-managing behavior. The discussion section returns to the issues identified earlier, and reconsiders them in the light of the proposed framework. It also considers the implications for practice.

The first issue raised at the beginning of this article concerned the *nature* of career self-management. While Crites’ model provides a starting point in identifying why career self-management is important (as a means of overcoming the thwarting conditions that would otherwise frustrate the progression of the career), it does not really illuminate the kinds of behaviors involved, and the extent to which they might be context-specific. The framework proposed here suggests there are three types of behavior that people use to manage their careers. (It is important to acknowledge that while this article makes a conceptual distinction between the three types, further research is needed to confirm the empirical validity of that distinction.) Two of these, positioning and influence behavior, have commonly been associated with career self-management, and many prescriptive accounts include elements of both (King, 2001). Positioning behavior is partly concerned with making the right connections, but it may not be sufficient simply to be well connected; there is also a need to invest in those ties to mobilize benefits. Thus positioning and influence behavior can be mutually reinforcing.

The framework proposed here is unusual in incorporating a third type of behavior with the other two. The idea of managing boundaries between home and work is familiar within the literature on work-family relationships, but is new to theoretical work on career self-management. Historically, boundaries between the organization and the home have been asymmetric, with employers acting as if families and family responsibilities do not exist (Ashforth et al., 2000). The literature has reflected this asymmetry; as a notable example, Gould and Penley (1984) included extended work involvement (working long hours and taking work home) in their Career Strategies Inventory. With the spread of mobile and invasive technologies, such as laptop computers and cell phones, it is more likely that work and home domains will overlap, so boundary management is increasingly important. Boundary management is also likely to vary in direction and intensity as the relationship between work and family changes over the course of a career. Future studies looking at the relationship be-

tween individuals' proactive or strategic behavior and career success need to incorporate a wider range of behavior (i.e., to include positioning, influence, and boundary management behavior) and to acknowledge a broader range of career patterns and trajectories (rather than concentrating on managerial and professional careers). That, in turn, requires a more complex analysis of career outcomes, including those pertaining to family and leisure domains.

This article makes no particular claim about the extent to which the world of careers is in a state of change. The framework is intended to be relevant to any model of career; it is suggested that the management of both 'traditional' and 'boundaryless' careers can be understood using the same explanatory framework. Most people's careers do not adhere precisely to either type: few people work for all their lives on one career track in one company (Inkson & Arthur, 2001), but only a few have careers that could genuinely be termed 'boundaryless' (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000). Most follow company-created pathways for parts of their working lives, and at other times branch off along idiosyncratic and improvised routes (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999). Those pursuing 'organizational' careers may focus to a larger extent on local gatekeepers and deploy behaviors that are intended to overcome thwarting conditions in the current employment situation. Those in other types of careers, such as contract workers, contingent laborers, or the self-employed might need to take a broader view about the source of thwarting conditions (such as the business environment or the labor market) and to focus on the expectations of prospective gatekeepers rather than current ones. However, in either case the *process* of career self-management, as a control-seeking response to overcoming what Crites calls 'thwarting conditions' in order to achieve vocational adjustment, can be considered to be the same.

The second issue raised at the beginning of this article related to the *causes* of career self-management. Here it has been argued that the extent to which people engage in career self-management is, in part, determined by their desire for control over the career. Some people will experience a greater motivation arousal to attempt to exert control; such people might be considered to exhibit a more 'proactive' personality (Crant, 2000). Linking career self-managing behavior with perceptions of control indicates why career self-management is important for all individuals, and not just for incumbents of 'organizational' careers. Since people do not have full decision latitude over their careers and are engaged throughout their careers in a process of overcoming thwarting conditions, engaging in career self-management is an important way of enhancing perceptions of control over the career.

Another suggested determinant was self-efficacy. The association between self-efficacy and career self-management implies that some will be more confident in their abilities to engage in these control-seeking behaviors than others. Thus people will differ in the extent to which they engage in career self-managing behavior. They also differ in the way that behavior is targeted; career anchors determine which aspects of control over the career are salient, and direct the use of career self-managing behavior to attempt to exert control. The framework proposed here has imposed a somewhat simplistic distinction between behavior and cognition and has not considered cognitive functioning, such as goal setting, self-regulation or personal beliefs, which may have an impact on career self-managing behavior. Arguably the notion of 'secondary control' reactions in

the event of failure to achieve desired career outcomes is as much a cognitive as a behavioral response. Certainly, as discussed below, metacognitive skills are likely to be important for career self-management to be effective (Hesketh, 2001).

The third issue raised at the beginning of this article concerned the *outcomes* of career self-management. In this article a reactance theory perspective has been used to argue that career self-management is associated with perceptions of control, which are in turn linked with well-being. Career self-management would seem to be desirable for the individual so long as perceived control is enhanced either through attainment of desired career outcomes, or through some kind of secondary response in the event of failure. If the context of careers is changing to the extent that some commentators suggest, then career self-management may be particularly adaptive for those employees in career 'pandemonium' (cf. Brousseau et al., 1996): it may be the best way to preserve a sense of self-determination and control in a turbulent environment.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that career self-management does not necessarily provide a certain solution. Career self-management may be important and desirable, but it may also be associated with downsides, particularly for those who are not in positions of privilege or success. Commentators have observed that the 'discourse' of career reflects the dominant values and meanings of a wider society in a way that puts a favorable interpretation on them. As Gratton and Hope-Hailey observed:

The concepts of the new career make assumptions about individuals' ability to influence and control their own destiny, and the rhetoric that is heard is the rhetoric of those who have succeeded and are already at the top of organizations. (Gratton & Hope-Hailey, 1999, p. 99)

This discourse largely overlooks the fact that career outcomes are a product of the social structure in which people operate. The feasibility of overcoming thwarting conditions and externally imposed constraints must be seen in this light; career options and choices are limited by contextually defined opportunities, but individuals use career self-management to negotiate their own position within these constraints. If they can do so by using adaptive secondary responses or integrative adjustment mechanisms, they will, in Crites' terms, achieve optimal vocational adjustment.

6.1. Implications for practice

The principal objective of this article was to offer a perspective on career self-management drawn from both I/O psychology and vocational psychology. The intention was to provide a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, account of career self-management behavior. However if the framework is to be useful to vocational psychology, it needs to be developed, with appropriate empirical underpinning, into models and materials for education and intervention (Savickas, 2001). There is, therefore, a need for researchers to build on the framework proposed here and on conceptualizations offered by others in order to understand what accounts for *effectiveness* in career self-management. We can speculate about what the outcomes of effective career self-management might be: high employability (developed by carefully targeted positioning behavior), extensive personal impact in shaping career outcomes (achieved using influence behavior), effective performance in both work and nonwork roles

(achieved by boundary management) and occupational health and general well-being (achieved through vocational adjustment). However, as long recognized by guidance practitioners, the effectiveness of career self-management must be judged on idiographic criteria; a person's behavior can only be considered effective if they themselves are satisfied with the outcomes.

This framework points to some factors which might determine whether people are likely to be effective in achieving success on their own terms. First, the notion of gatekeepers, introduced here, points to the socially situated nature of career self-management. Effective career self-management may need to be highly tailored to the demands of a particular situation. Social influences are important in determining not only which outcomes are valued, but also what behavior is perceived to be appropriate in pursuit of those outcomes. These influences emerge from peers, superiors and networks within organizations, as well as a wider set of communities such as occupational, networks, friends or family. King (2001) has suggested that people need to use these communities to gather intelligence about how to achieve their desired outcomes. This intelligence-gathering process involves charting the institutional landscape, identifying gatekeepers, and selecting appropriate instances for the deployment of career management 'strategies' in a planned and rational manner. King (2001) also argued that people should reflect on prior use of career strategies and evaluate their success, as a guide to future behavior. Guidance counselors could usefully assist clients with these intelligence-gathering and evaluation processes, particularly at the outset of their careers.

Second, as Hesketh (2001) observed, people are more likely to be effective career self-managers if they have the necessary metacognitive skills. The framework proposed here suggests that self-efficacy for career self-management is likely to be important, and the considerable work in vocational psychology on various aspects of career self-efficacy could usefully be extended to include career self-management. It is also possible that, as Hesketh suggests, goal setting based on self-insight and career clarity will lead to effective career self-management. The capacity to engage in behavioral self-management of a more general nature (through self-observation, setting personal standards, monitoring performance against those standards and regulating behavior) is also likely to be important since such activity helps people reduce deviation from higher-level reference values (Saks & Ashforth, 1996). Career counselors could work with clients to develop these metacognitive skills.

The paradoxical nature of career self-management is that, while it enhances perceptions of control, it pertains to a sphere where absolute control is not available. Initiatives that promote self-responsibility for career in highly optimistic terms, but fail to acknowledge the constraints on achieving those goals may backfire: employees may form unrealistic expectations about what they can achieve, as Kossek et al. (1998) found in a quasi-experimental study. There may be negative consequences for perceived control, self-efficacy and well-being if this is the case. This risk is compounded in instances where self-responsibility for career is promoted in parallel with organizational restructuring or downsizing, which reduce opportunities for intra-organizational mobility, or in the context of a tight labor market. It is important for individuals to understand their particular circumstances within a larger

social, economic and psychological climate (Byster, 1998), and vocational psychologists need to be aware of this before they advocate career self-management as a panacea for career ‘pandemonium’ (cf. Brousseau et al., 1996). It may help to encourage people to develop career resilience through ‘secondary control’ responses in the face of such constraints, and to help them think in terms of connection and community (Byster, 1998).

7. Conclusion

As Lent (2001) observed, vocational psychology has been limited in the range of career development phenomena and variables that it has embraced. Reams of journal pages have been devoted to issues of initial career choice and entry, but there has been far less effort to understand career adjustment. This article offers insights into a different kind of vocational behavior: the behavior that people use within a chosen occupation to remain economically productive, to keep pace with developments in technology and opportunity, to maintain contacts and acquaintances, to move between employers and to fit work in with the rest of their lives. It is these kinds of challenges that people face when they are confronting the ‘thwarting conditions’ described by Crites nearly fifty years ago.

This article has attempted to offer a deeper insight into the ways in which people achieve a sense of self-determination and mastery over the tasks that confront them. It began from a position of strength in vocational psychology by adopting Crites’ model of vocational adjustment, and sought to extend that model by drawing upon a range of theoretical perspectives from outside vocational psychology. This article argued that engaging in career self-management can deliver positive psychological outcomes, including career and life satisfaction, enhanced self-efficacy and well-being, if desired career outcomes are achieved. Career self-management may therefore be greatly beneficial for self-motivated high skilled workers seeking to adapt to a changing world of work. However, for less advantaged workers who struggle to mobilize the personal resources necessary to engage in it effectively, career self-management may be undermining. This should be acknowledged in popular debates about the changing nature of work, which have hitherto tended to portray career self-management in highly optimistic terms, as a source of personal empowerment and liberation.

There are many ways in which the framework could be developed and refined, and there is still considerable need for empirical research on career self-management, particularly beyond managerial and professional populations. It is hoped that this article will stimulate an academic debate on the subject. The vigorous researching of career self-management has become a pressing need, if we are to understand better our own lives and the lives of those whom we research.

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