A set-theoretic approach of career management in high-performing organizations

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Research suggests that “high performance work practices (HPWPs)” (Huselid, 1995) are associated with beneficial operational and financial outcomes for organizations (Combs, Liu, Hall & Ketchen, 2006). Several of the practices included in bundles of HPWS relate to employees’ career development (e.g. possibilities for internal promotion, training). However, as to date these practices are reflecting a view on organizational career management that is no longer consistent with what careers mean in the so-called “new career era”. Indeed, the meaning of careers has changed and together with this, employees are increasingly considered as being primary responsible for managing their own career (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). In the career literature, evidence suggests that employees who experience that their organization invests in their career development in a more broader sense (hence not simply offering promotion prospects) and who actively enhance career self-management, report higher levels of both organizational commitment and career satisfaction (Sturges et al., 2002). This suggests that organizational career management is an important aspect of HPWPs, not only because it is instrumental for creating organizational continuity but also indirectly by fostering employees’ career satisfaction and commitment. In this study we depart from the framework of “new careers” and use a set-theoretic approach to investigate the necessary and sufficient elements in modern organizational career management that can lead to strong organizational performance. More specifically, and based on the ‘new careers’ literature (Hall, 2002) we address the following elements of career management: organizational career support, consensus about career management, development I-deals, individual responsibility for career management, human capital composition and company performance.

We apply fsQCA on a large number of cases (N=293 organizations), following a recent plea to consider QCA as a complement of conventional regression analysis (Cambré, Fiss, Marx, 2013). Moreover, we deploy a mixed method approach, using both regression methods and fsQCA, as recommended by Greckhamer, Misangyi & Fiss (2013). We analyze necessary and sufficient work place conditions of organizational (financial) performance with fsQCA.
Introduction

The recent career literature has mainly focused on the individual employee as the primary actor in managing his or her career. With responsibility for career management shifting from the organization to the individual, the majority of studies in the careers literature have addressed the outcomes of career attitudes and career management behaviors undertaken by individuals (e.g. career involvement, career competencies, networking behaviors, active job search...). The main interest being their importance for explaining individual indicators of objective (e.g. income, hierarchical position, ...) and subjective (e.g. career satisfaction, self-perceived employability, ...) career success (e.g. Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Although recent voices have renewed the attention for the organizational context in which careers take place (Dries, Van Acker & Verbruggen, 2012), a lack of insight remains into the benefits of managing careers for the organization. Moreover, although contemporary definitions of organizational career management emphasize the “facilitating” role of career management (i.e. guidance of individuals in their process of developing, implementing and monitoring career goals and strategies, Greenhaus et al., 2011), career management still remains a part of HRM and should hence be looked at as an element of HRM that needs to be aligned with organizational strategy (Segers & Inceoglu, 2012). The latter has received only limited attention in the past years, however. Career theory departs almost solely from the individual career actor’s point of view, in doing so largely ignoring the strategic function careers serve for organizations (De Vos & Dries, 2013; Dries, Van Acker & Verbruggen, 2012). In addition, an increasing number of scholars is expressing doubts about the claims made in the recent careers literature concerning the speed and inevitability of the ‘death’ of the traditional organizational career (e.g. Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Guest & Mackenzie Davey, 1996) – most empirical studies have demonstrated that both individuals and organizations still...
have a preference for organizational careers (Dries, 2011), leading some authors to label some of the assumptions made in the ‘new’ careers literature as rhetorical devices (e.g. Van Buren, 2003). In the contemporary career environment, with growing economic uncertainty and unpredictability, organizations are confronted with a so-called “career management paradox”: whilst investing in careers can be critical for the long-term continuity of the organization, there are risks associated with this investment due to the unpredictability of both the organizational reality as well as individuals’ career choices. This uncertainty about whether investments in career development will pay off in the long run causes some organizations to doubt about the necessity of this type of investment, and to play safe by hiring rather than growing talent. On the other hand, however, for those jobs for which talent is needed that is difficult to find on the external labor market or which is of high strategic value, organizations might not have an alternative than to invest in career development. The question as to whether it is beneficial for organizations to invest in career management is not only of practical relevance but also has important theoretical implications, given the strong and one-sided focus on individual career management in the literature.

In order to address the association between organizational career management (OCM) and firm-level outcomes, we take a configurational approach, claiming that “organizations are best understood as clusters of interconnected structures and practices, rather than as modular or loosely coupled entities whose components can be understood in isolation” (Fiss, 2007:1190). We therefore expect the classic statistical methods like regression analyses not to represent the complexity of this relationship, as multiple paths to the outcome can exist, and some characteristics of OCM and outcomes might be positively related in one typology, but negatively or unrelated in another one (Fiss, 2011). Hence, rather than implying linear relationships, we assume causal complexity and nonlinear relationships. As such, we rely on set-relationships rather than variables and correlations. A set assess to what degree a case is a
member of a set and then analyzes the intersection between sets (Fiss, Marx & Cambré, 2013: 9). We propose that different types of combinations of dimensions of OCM will combine in different typologies, which can all be positively associated with firm-level financial results rather than financial results being associated with some dimensions (and interactions between them) in a linear and net-effect way as can be shown for instance via regression analysis.

Organizational career support

Within the broader HRM-field, research suggests that “high performance work practices (HPWPs)” (Huselid, 1995) are associated with beneficial operational and financial outcomes for organizations (Combs, Liu, Hall & Ketchen, 2006). Research in applied psychology and strategic HRM clearly indicates that investing in human capital can yield positive individual as well as organization level performance outcomes (Crook et al., 2011). Several of the practices included in bundles of HPWS relate to employees’ career development (e.g. possibilities for internal promotion, training). However, as to date these practices are reflecting a view on organizational career management that is no longer consistent with what careers mean in the so-called “new career era”. Indeed, the meaning of careers has changed and together with this, employees are increasingly considered as being primary responsible for managing their own career (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). In the career literature, evidence suggests that employees who experience that their organization invests in their career development in a more broader sense (hence not simply offering promotion prospects) and who actively enhance career self-management, report higher levels of both organizational commitment and career satisfaction (Sturges et al., 2002). This suggests that organizational career management is an important aspect of HPWPs, not only because it is instrumental for creating organizational continuity but also indirectly by fostering employees’ career satisfaction and commitment.
Consensus about career management

In addition to the content of OCM, also the process of OCM is a relevant parameter to include when studying its relationship with firm financial outcomes. This is consistent with the distinction made between HRM content and process in the HR literature (Bowen & Ostroff, 1994). By process, Bowen & Ostroff refer to how the HRM system can be designed and administered effectively by defining meta-features of an overall HRM system that can create strong situations in the form of shared meaning about the content that might ultimately lead to organizational performance.

From research on HRM system strength, that there is a positive association between consensus and employee outcomes including work satisfaction and intention to stay (Li et al., 2011). Consensus refers to the extent to which there is agreement among policymakers – typically HR and line managers – in the way HR practices are implemented. In our study we focus on the latter, i.e. the consensus between HR and line managers with regard to the objectives and implementation of career management. Line managers play a pivotal role when it comes to conveying messages to employees with regard to their career prospects, holding career conversations that stimulate employees to think about their career values and ambitions, and communicating this information back to senior or HR management. The alignment between these parties in terms of their vision on and approach towards career management is expected to be critical for determining the effectiveness of career management for the organization.

Individual responsibility for career management

As an individual-level construct, career self-directedness is an attitude reflecting a feeling of personal agency regarding ones career (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). Individuals with a self-directed
career attitude experience greater responsibility for their career choices and opportunities and are more actively engaged with their career development (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006). Self-directedness and career self-management behaviors following from this are considered to be key success factors for contemporary careers. Although many organizations base their career management approach on the assumption that “the employee is in the driver seat” (De Vos & Dries, 2013), as to date this organizational viewpoint on individual responsibility for career management has not been included in empirical studies on organization career management, nor has it been related to organizational outcomes.

*Development I-Deals*

Within the contemporary career environment, employees are considered to be the central actor in managing their career (Hall, 2002; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). In line with these shifts, career patterns have become more flexible and unpredictable (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and employees become more proactive in redesigning their jobs in order to increase the alignment with their own competencies, motives, interests and passions (Rousseau, 2005). One way of doing this is by negotiating idiosyncratic deals or I-deals with their employer. I-deals are voluntary, personalized agreements of a non-standard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers regarding terms that benefit each party (Rousseau, Ho and Greenberg, 2006). These individual negotiated arrangements are becoming widespread in today’s workplace as organizations and individuals experience a growing need for customization and individualization of various aspects of the employment relationship (Rousseau et al., 2006). The basic assumption underlying the notion of I-deals is that they are beneficial for both employees and employers. Recent research has begun to build support for the positive association between I-deals and individual-level outcomes like expected retirement age (Bal et al., 2012) and affective commitment (Lee et al., 2013). A distinction is generally made between flexibility I-deals, which refer to adaptations in workplace and –time,
and development I-deals, which refer to opportunities for learning and career development. Given the focus of this study, only the latter i.e. development I-deals will be included in our research.

**Human Capital Composition**

Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) argue that the human capital of any given organization can be categorized along two dimensions – i.e., value and uniqueness. *Value* refers to the potential of the human capital at hand to contribute to its organization’s core competence and enhance its competitive advantage. High-value human capital, hence, refers to assets that are pivotal to the organization’s core business whereas low-value human capital generally refers to so-called ‘peripheral’ assets. *Uniqueness* refers to the extent to which the organization’s human capital would be difficult to replace (high uniqueness) as opposed to being readily available in the labor market and easily copied by competitors (low uniqueness). Based on the conceptual dimensions of value and uniqueness, Lepak and Snell (1999) suggest an employment relationship that is organization-focused for those employees with competencies both high on uniqueness and value. Organization-focused exchange relationships encourage significant mutual investment both on the part of employers and employees to achieve long-term competitive advantage. In order to support or create such an employment relationship, organizations will likely rely on a continuity-based HR strategy that encourages employee involvement and optimizes their return on human capital investments. For example, they could sponsor career development and mentoring programs aimed specifically at developing organization-specific knowledge in their high-value, high-uniqueness employees (i.e. knowledge that is much more valuable within their specific context than to competitors) (Lepak & Snell, 2002). Differently stated, in an organization with a high proportion of high-value, high-uniqueness employees, continuity (i.e. the retention and succession of pivotal employees; Virany, Tushman & Romanelli, 1992) is expected to be at the top of the agenda as
high turnover, under these conditions, would pose a serious threat both in terms of qualitative and quantitative human capital shortages. Our conceptual framework builds on the assumptions of human capital theory. The basic premise of human capital theory implies that the productive capacity of employees can be enhanced by investing in their knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) (Becker, 1964). The investment in HR practices aimed at enhancing KSAs entails direct and indirect (opportunity) costs. From an economic point of view, such investments are only justified if they produce future returns in the form of increased worker productivity. (Sels et al., 2006). We will address whether in different configurations, the presence or absence of high value, high unique human capital together with other elements of OCM relates to positive financial results.

To sum up, in this paper we approach career management from an organizational perspective. Our major goal is to shed new light on the interplay of different elements of organizational career management in explaining a firm-level outcome (profit) using insights from several disciplines which have all relevance for understanding the importance of career management for organizations.

In addition, we empirically test the relations described here on a (large) sample of organizations using a rather novel approach for modeling causal relations, i.e. fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin, 2000, 2008). The basic idea is that causal relations are frequently better understood in terms of set-theoretic relations rather than correlations (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 1987). We will present several configurations that show how characteristics of the organizational context related to careers as well as the career management approach and policies present combine in different ways to explain an important organizational outcome, namely profit. From a hypothetico-deductive approach, we could formulate the hypothesis that “a combination of active career support, consensus about career
management, human capital composition, i-deals and individual responsibility for career management leads to high performance”.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

The unit of analysis of the study was the organization. The study took place in Belgium in cooperation with a leading salary administration and HR consultancy firm, which provided information about the study and a link to the online survey in its newsletter, sent through e-mail to all its clients in March 2012. The final sample size was 293 organizations. Most respondents came from privately owned companies (86 percent), with a majority of small (30% had between 50 and 99 employees) and medium-sized enterprises (38% had between 100 and 249 employees). 15% of the participating organizations employed between 250 and 499 employees and 17% employed over 500 employees. The distribution in our data is representative of the proportion of companies from different sizes in Belgium (Ramsden & Kiss-Haypál, 2000). In addition, participating organizations were distributed equally across the goods (33%), services (36%), and public sector (31%). Most of them were local companies or international companies that have their headquarters in Belgium (76%). The majority of respondents were HR managers or HR directors (60%); 14% were CEOs; 9% were CFOs; and 1% held yet another management position.

Measures

All six conditions were measured using validated scales. An important step in performing fsQCA is to calibrate set membership. In this study, the direct method (Ragin, 2008) was used, which calculates set membership on a range of 0-1 based on three anchors: full inclusion, full exclusion, and the crossover point which is the point with the greatest ambiguity. Four conditions were measured using validated 5-point Likert scales, used in prior
research. We therefore calibrated each of these conditions with the (summed) score of 1.5 as fully out, 3 as the crossover point and 4.5 as fully in.

Organizational career support. Respondents were asked to indicate for a list of seven career management practices based on the work of Baruch and Peiperl (2000), Eby, Allen, and Brinley (2005) and De Vos, Dewettinck, and Buyens (2008) the extent to which they were used in the organization. We recoded the data for this item into a dummy variable indicating whether the practice was used or not (0 = No; 1 = Yes). We then created an index by summing the number of career management practices that were used by the organization. Sample items are “career planning workshops”; “career conversations between supervisor and employee”; “self-assessment instruments”. This index was calibrated using the sum of the practices that were present (ranging from 0 to 4), with 0 as the fully-out anchor, 3 as the fully in anchor, and 1 as the crossover point because this marks the difference between those who benefit from career support (1 or above) and those who don’t (0).

Individual responsibility for career management. Following earlier conceptualizations of ‘career self-directedness” in the careers literature (Briscoe & Hall, 2006), we used 4 items that assess the extent to which the responding organization considered employees as the primary responsible for managing their own careers. Alpha reliability was .70. A sample item reads “employees have to formulate their own priorities regarding their careers”.

Consensus about career management was assessed with 4 items adapted from Li et al. (2011) which measure the extent to which line managers and HR managers are aligned in the way they approach career management. Alpha reliability was .86. A sample item reads “HR managers and line managers have the same ideas about what a good career management entails”.

Development I-deals: were assessed with four items adapted from Bal et al. (2012), which measure whether the organization allows individuals to negotiate individual
arrangements that deviate from what is standard provided to all employees with regard to career paths, development opportunities, and competency development. A sample item reads “does your organization provide the possibility for individual arrangements that deviate from what is provided standard or formally with regard to the choice of training programs that employees want to participate in?”. We recoded the data for each item into a dummy variable indicating whether the I-deal was possible or not (0 = No; 1 = Yes). An index was then created summing the number of i-deals offered to employees. This index was calibrated using the sum of the i-deals that were present (ranging from 0 to 4), with 0 as the fully-out anchor, 3 as the fully in anchor, and 1 as the crossover point because this marks the difference between those who benefit from development i-deals (1 or above) and those who don’t (0).

*Value and uniqueness of human capital.* Following the conceptualization by Lepak & Snell (2002), value and uniqueness of human capital were assessed by asking respondents to indicate the proportion of their workforce possessing competencies that were (a) of high strategic value (*value*) and (b) difficult to find in the labor market (*uniqueness*), using a response scale ranging from 1 = Less than 5% to 5 = More than 75%. Uniqueness was assessed using 4 items (e.g. “competencies that are difficult to replace”), and the Alpha reliability was .77. Value was assessed using 3 items and the Alpha reliability was .78 (e.g. “competencies that provide value to our customers”).

*Financial results.* Profit before taxes was taken as the indicator of the outcome variable financial results. Profit (loss) before tax is taken from Belgian financial statements (fiscal year 2011) and provided by Companyweb. They are compliant with International Financial Reporting Standards. Datasets were linked based upon VAT-numbers of our 293 respondents. Companyweb also provides percentiles of the outcome ‘Profit (loss) before tax’, based on 360.203 Belgian organizations. We used the 75th percentile as the cut-off for scores
to be coded as “fully-in,” and the 25th percentile for scores to be coded as “fully-out.” As a crossover point, we used the 50th percentile.

RESULTS

Regression

First we conducted a preliminary regression analyses in which we, controlling for size and sector, regressed our outcome variable, profit, on all six career management variables included in our model. Only size (β=.14, p < .05) and organizational career support (β=.25, p < .001) were significantly associated with profit. Next, we also performed a regression analyses in which we treated value and uniqueness of human capital as moderator variables, based on the possibility that depending on human capital structure, the relationship between aspects of career management and profit would be different. Therefore, we added the interaction terms of both uniqueness and value of human capital with the four other variables included in the model. None of the interaction terms were significantly related with profit, suggesting the possible existence of more complex interactions or configurations. Moreover, to examine these complex interaction terms (of at least five variables), a conventional regression analysis will no longer be applicable (because the results will be too difficult to interpret), but a configurational approach will serve this goal (Greckhamer et al., 2013).

Configurations

Analysis of necessity

Table 1. Analysis of necessary conditions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Involvement</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual career</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development i-deals</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We first test whether any condition is necessary for the high performance outcome. Causal necessity demonstrates that the outcome constitutes a subset of the causal conditions. A consistency score of 1 indicates that a causal condition is present in all cases. When some or more cases fail to meet the consistency criterion, the lower the consistency score will be. Conventionally, a fuzzy set condition is labeled ‘necessary’ if the consistency score meets the threshold of 0.90 (Ragin, 2006). Table 1 reports the analysis of necessary conditions in the present study. ‘Individual career’ almost meets the criterion of 0.90, whereas development i-deals does meet this criterion (.89). Therefore, we can conclude that in any of the configurations that are sufficient to produce the outcome, development i-deals will be present. It will therefore be excluded in the analysis of sufficiency (Ragin, 2008). However, we do not consider ‘individual career’ as necessary (.85), it therefore will be included in the subsequent analysis of sufficiency.

**Analysis of sufficiency**

The next step involves an evaluation of the extent to which career management factors are causally related to organizational high performance\(^1\). Sufficiency of causal combinations is assessed through the use of fsQCA’s truth table algorithm. Our analysis involves the five non-necessary conditions and the outcome. This results in \(2^5\) or 32 potential combinations of these causal conditions. We observe 18 out of 32 logically possible combinations of career management conditions to relate to high performing organizations.

We adopt the advice by Rihoux & Ragin (2009) that consistency levels be a minimum of .80. Furthermore, Ragin (2008: 133) suggests that for establishing a frequency threshold “the issue is not which combinations have instances, but which combinations have enough instances to

\(^1\) Clearly, given the causal asymmetry that is core to the configurational approach, one can also analyze the configurations leading to the absence of the outcome (i.e. low performance). The focus of our study is to gain insight in the causal relationship between conditions and high-performance. Hence we do not explain low-performance. However, fsQCA analysis shows no consistent configurations explaining low-performance, using the six conditions described here.
warrant conducting as assessment of the subset relationship”. In small-N research it is common to specify a minimum frequency of one or two, whereas in large-N studies, the minimum frequency should be “much higher” (Greckhamer et al., 2013:66). Balancing the consistency cut-off and the frequency threshold, we adopt a consistency cut-off value of 0.793 and a frequency threshold of 4 what enables us to perform our analysis on 85% of the cases.

In a typical QCA analysis, the aim is now to reduce the truth table algorithm rows into more simplified combinations. Ragin (2008) suggests the use of intermediate solutions because logical remainders can be restricted to those that are the most plausible. A logical remainder is a logical combination of conditions that is not empirically present in the data set in relation to the presence of the outcome. Our discussion in the theory development section makes clear that we expect the individual characteristics (i.e. active involvement and individual responsibility) to be present (and not absent) in a solution describing the outcome. Therefore, we have included them as ‘present’ in the intermediate solution.

A standard analysis of the truth table reveals several useful statistics. Table 2 presents the solutions that explain the outcome. The solution consistency offers an assessment of the degree of fit of the solution with the fuzzy-set scores for each condition. Coverage refers to the joint importance of all causal paths (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

The results in Table 2 show three configurations of conditions leading to high-performance.

The first solution indicates that high performance is achieved when consensus and individual responsibility for career management are present and value and uniqueness of human capital composition is absent. Active career support is not relevant for this solution, while it is important in solution 2. Indeed, solution 2 involves those with individual career responsibility, active career support and no value or uniqueness of human capital composition. The third path to the outcome consists of a configuration of individual career
responsibility, active career support and also value and uniqueness of human capital composition.

Solution 1 and 2 show a limited unique coverage (similar to $R^2$ in regression analysis; Fiss, 2009). However, they refer to actual empirical cases. Furthermore, we also checked other fsQCA results, where a two-path solution shows a combination of the current solution 1 and 2 and the current solution 3. In this two-path solution the combined solution 1 and 2 holds a unique coverage of 0.19. Because we consider the three paths equally important both from an empirical and from a theoretical point, we opt for a three-path solution.

Table 2: Configurations predicting high profit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Configuration</th>
<th>Solution Configurations Explaining Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Career Responsibility</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC_value</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC_uniqueness</td>
<td>☒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCM active involvement</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raw coverage</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique coverage</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall solution consistency</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall solution coverage</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Black circles indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with “X” indicate its absence. Large circles indicate core conditions; small ones, contributing conditions. Blank spaces indicate “don’t care.”
DISCUSSION

It was the objective of this study to address the association between organizational career management and firm-level outcomes, taking a configurational approach. Even though careers appear to have become more of an individual than an organizational concern (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), the organization still forms the context within which careers develop. Careers are an important vehicle for ensuring organizational continuity, and career development forms a dimension of high performance work systems which is associated with substantial investments in employees both in terms of time and money. Yet, the costs associated with career development also raise questions about the return for the organization. Our central assumption was that the components of organizational career management should be conceived as interconnected elements (Fiss, 2007), and that given this complexity multiple paths to the outcome of organizational performance can exist. We therefore, after having performed linear regression analyses, applied fsQCA on a large number of cases (N=293 organizations). The following elements of career management were included in our research: organizational career support, consensus about career management, development I-deals, individual responsibility for career management, human capital composition and company performance.

The regression analyses failed to demonstrate a significant association between most of the components of OCM, with the exception of organizational career support. This finding implies two things. First, the significant association between the provision of active support for individuals’ careers and firm performance suggests that investing in career development is not only beneficial for individuals but also at the organizational level (although caution is needed when interpreting the causality of the relationship given the lack of longitudinal data).

Second, the lack of significant associations between the other components of OCM and financial performance, as well as the lack of a significant interaction effect of human capital
uniqueness of value suggests that either the associations might be more complex than traditional linear regression analyses can reveal, or they are non-existing.

The findings from the fsQCA support the idea of complex causality, revealing three paths that lead to the outcome of financial performance. Human capital composition appears to be a relevant differentiator in this, as we also proposed in our theoretical part. Together these three solutions indicate that high performance can be achieved in three ways. In the first two avenues both value and uniqueness of human capital are absent, but high performance can still be realized via components of career management, being either consensus and individual responsibility, or active career support and individual responsibility. The third avenue combines the presence of both value and uniqueness of human capital together with active organizational career support and individual responsibility. The provision of development I-deals is present in all three configurations. This configurational solution deviates from the first conclusion one might be inclined to draw based upon the regression analyses. Indeed, also the absence of organizational career support can be associated with financial performance but only in the condition that human capital value and uniqueness are low, and two other career management components namely consensus and development I-deals are present. On the other hand, in order for organizational support to be beneficial for financial performance, other components should also be present. Together these findings support the idea about complex relationships between career management components.

The findings with regard to human capital value and uniqueness suggest that both dimensions are relevant to consider for organizations when working out organizational career management. Consistent with Lepak and Snell’s (2002) framework, different types of HR-management might be effective depending on an organization’s human capital composition.
The finding that development I-deals are associated with financial performance in all three solutions indicate that this modern approach to careers, i.e. daring to deviate from standard systems and allowing individual flexibility, is important to include in organizational career management, no matter whether the human capital composition is high on uniqueness and value.

Finally, consensus between managers and HR about career management is only necessary in solution one, which suggests that other components of career management can compensate for the absence of consensus between stakeholders.

In conclusion, even though from a theoretical viewpoint relevant arguments could be formulated for expecting a positive association between each of the career management components separately and financial performance, the application of fsQCA underscores the importance of considering the complexity of combinations of components. Our results do not point out one single best way for organizations to work out career policies, but rather to consider their human capital composition and based upon this to make decisions about career management components to work out if they want to see a positive association not only with individual career outcomes but also company performance.

**Limitations and suggestions for future research (to be elaborated)**

In order to test causality, longitudinal data should be used. Furthermore, instead of single respondents, multi-rater data about OCM and multi-source data to represent a company’s view, will increase the validity of the instrument. And other outcomes should be investigated as well.
REFERENCES


