Boundaryless Careers to Career Entrepreneurship: Redefining Career in 21st Century

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ABSTRACT
Recent years have witnessed an overwhelming redefinition of career choices which have transcended the normal traditional boundaries. The environmental framework has played a crucial role in creating a prevailing sense of temporariness and instability worldwide. There is the birth of the new age employee who wants more from the career now than decades before. The paper discusses the non-traditional and multiple orientations of the individual employee who is now much more in control of his career, is proactive about its development and reaps the benefits of such a career choice. After a concise review of literature an exposition of the advantages and disadvantages of boundary less careers have been presented. In the context of India there is virtually no research – empirical research is of tantamount significance to have insights on developing feasible model of boundary less career and investigate into the antecedent, moderating and mediating variables.

Keywords: 21st century; boundaryless careers; career challenges; career entrepreneurship; competency

Introduction
The traditional definitions of career and career success have been redefined in 21st century due to economic pressures and consequent organizational restructuring. The aim of this research paper is to understand the context in which the individual employee has started responding to the changing nature of work from a social and psychological perspective. Individuals are reacting to disappearing career norms by shifting their focus away from organizational careers and toward specific professional and work roles. Periods of relative career stability are decreasing because “individuals are constantly in a state of becoming, of moving between and through various roles and their attached identities and relationships” [1]. The paper has highlighted this dominant issue through various sections, namely the background and the emergence of boundaryless careers, career entrepreneurship aspects which is followed by the implied strategies presented to grow with such careers.

Background
Among the rapidly expanding economies of the world, India holds a position of prominence [2];[3]. With reference to India in particular, it has been observed that its national culture has a rich heritage which is helpful in clarifying different human actions. It is further understood that these cultural facets are deeply ingrained in the individual psyche and are relevant in positive cognition and affect individuals at the workplace [4].

Hence, in recent years competition and a volatile, contingent and competitive business environment have redefined career stability and development dimensions worldwide and India is no exception this emerging trends. To respond effectively to such competitive environment organizations have widely undertaken manpower downsize [5]. With the tightening economic situation, the need to be competitive has resulted in organizations introducing several measures of financial control including restructuring and layoffs [6];[7]. For the first time, these layoffs hit managerial-level employees. The career ladder disappeared. Seniority did not matter. Thus, the implicit psychological contract between the organization and the employee – security and advancement in return for hard work and loyalty was broken [8]. People began to want jobs that met more of their life needs, not only the work needs. Without the promise of job security, people were not willing to sacrifice family due to work demands. No longer was the traditional career the “ideal.” [9] [8] described the new paths as “boundaryless” referring to the existence of career paths out of the bounds of a particular organization. The traditional career is stable and linear in a single organization; the nontraditional is dynamic and transitional in multiple organizations and occupations [10]. The traditional career is directed by the organization, the non-traditional is self-directed [11].

Traditional career still exists, although security is not guaranteed to the individual [12];[13];[14]. The new careers do not require that the organization manage the employee’s career. The expectation is that the employee will manage his or her own career, choosing to work for companies that provide opportunities to meet the employee’s objectives. These objectives vary from the traditional pay and promotion to challenge, travel, flexibility, contribution, and autonomy. Given this switch to self-directed careers, the organization’s role in the careers of their employees has become unclear [9].
Career development has shifted from the acquisition of skills and experiences that benefit a given organization, to a ‘boundaryless’, competency-based exploration that evolves in unexpected ways [11]. According to this new view, careers unfold in evolutionary sequences which require high degree of mutuality and reciprocity, increasing amount of relational learning and interdependence, and the need to occasionally ‘re-create’ one’s career identity [15]. In context to non-linear careers in practice today, there has been the emergence of the individual ‘Response-ability’—the ability and willingness to respond to changing conditions and create new professional opportunities—is an important element of 21st –century careers [16];[17]. Numerous authors have argued that competence is central to the success of a growing career, especially in a knowledge-rich or project based industry [16];[18]. Increased competencies in knowledge-based industries have been described as an ‘interplay between industry knowledge and self-knowledge through which boundaryless careers unfold’ [19].

The Current Perspectives
A very good overview of issues surrounding the boundaryless career concept has been provided by [20]. Although the structural and contextual changes to the 21st-century workplace are becoming more widely understood by organizational scholars, research is just beginning to focus on individual responses to the changing nature of work from both social and psychological perspectives [21]. Individuals are reacting to disappearing career norms by shifting their focus away from organizational careers and toward specific professional and work roles, “to more localized and portable sites for vesting the self” [1]. This shift of career focus requires an increased capacity for self-direction, the ability to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, and an understanding that identity will continue to evolve as an individual navigates multiple work roles over the course of a career [1];[22];[23];[24];[25];[26].

Defining career success for the 21st century requires the study of both external (objective) and internal (subjective) factors within a given career context [21]; [27]. The definition of work has also broadened as a response to a growing need for meaningful, purposeful, or spiritual work [28];[29];[30]. Older workers are becoming more prominent in today’s workplace; a longer life translates into extended middle age [31], which allows for additional education, the revisiting of earlier career goals, and opportunities for embarking on new careers rather than retiring.

The term boundaryless does not actually imply a career “without boundaries,” because in reality there are always constraints in some form relative to a career, work role, occupation, or organization [32]. It does imply that the boundaries surrounding careers, work roles, occupations, and organizations are becoming more permeable and easier to cross both physically and psychologically [33]. On the positive side, it has been assumed that a boundaryless career gives individuals more flexibility, freedom, and choice to enact their careers [34];[35]. No longer constrained by hierarchical advancement principles and thinking, this career autonomy can enable them to pursue career paths in which they can attain personally defined career success (i.e., subjective career success) and achieve a higher level of work-non-work balance in their lives. It has been assumed that intensive boundary crossings may enhance individuals’ perceived career success by providing more opportunities for developing new skills, finding more interesting and challenging jobs, and aligning career choices with individual values [36]. In addition to facilitating the attainment of subjective career success, experiencing a boundaryless career is believed to help individuals better manage their multiple roles (i.e., employee, spouse, parent, and community member). More specifically, the boundaryless career could provide people with flexible time, space, and options to integrate different spheres of their lives so that they can achieve a desirable balance between their work and non-work lives [35]. On the negative side, however, the presence of a relatively discontinuous, idiosyncratic career path with periodic career transitions coupled with the lack of external guides may be very stressful for individuals [35]. The resultant career insecurity and uncertainty may decrease individuals’ chances to derive full benefit from the flexibility and freedom of their boundaryless careers [11];[34];[35]. The loss of identification with one’s organization, coupled with a loss of long-held status, responsibility, and monetary rewards as individuals move from one organization to another may negatively affect their sense of career success [37];[35] and, in turn their well-being. Moreover, undertaking parallel multiple roles (i.e., employee, parent, community member)—as a result of increasing work and non-work boundary crossings—might result in role overload and conflict, that, in turn, can pose a threat to individuals who desire to achieve a sense of work-life balance [35].

The concept of career entrepreneurship relates to the behavioral phenomenon of career self-management [38], as it describes one of the ways in which individuals can manage their careers. It is also related to the concepts of “career capitalism”
workers are now aiming for satisfaction related to intrinsic rewards whereby there is a deeper fulfillment of personal values and ideals. Managing a boundaryless career requires an individual seek out and contract personally fulfilling work. Thus, in today’s dynamic scenario the employee’s psychological contract is not done with the company but with one’s own inner, spiritual self where the candidate strives to reach the self-actualized level ultimately.

Finally, the dependence from the firm to one’s own abilities is a major stride that today’s worker has taken. For career associated to a single organization, the employees were trained and developed by the organizational initiatives in return for long-term association with the firm. The organization offered firm specific training, usually at specific points in the career. Ironically such programs started diminishing with the worker’s increasing age. Thus, workers were further bound to the organization as they lacked transferable skills and marketability [43].

The organization is only keen to invest on the core employees who they feel will stay for long term. So the mantle lies on the workers who must accept responsibility and seek opportunities for training and development by their own initiatives. Self career management is the key to sustaining the contingent business environment today. Workers moving across occupational and organizational boundaries need transferable skills today. Careerists need to focus on skills that will increase their marketability. Research on the boundaryless career suggests that organizations prefer generalist over specialist skills because of increased team-based approaches and new technologies [44],[45]. Also to change jobs, candidates require good contact base and negotiation ability. More so because of the growing trend of de jobbing, the candidates are today centering their activities on projects rather than specific jobs.

Also, Individuals are looking for works that are personally meaningful and this requires a considerable amount of reflection and self-evaluation. Individuals need to balance the work and non-work dimensions that are available to them. Individuals also need to seek out organizational cultures that match their values and lifestyles. The needs to prioritize crucial aspects of life and balance activities are paying vital roles today in the individual’s career.

A professional management of one’s own career is critical for boundaryless careers today and this consists of maintaining an updated personal portfolio, improving interpersonal skills and investing in professional courses and development.
Conclusion

To sum up, the new career trends are here to stay and so the organizations and the individuals require comprehending and accepting the concepts of the boundary less career concepts and career entrepreneurship issues. In a way the negative psychological stigma associated with alternate careers have almost disappeared in recent years. What matters in the current scenario is the individual’s perception of career capital (the accumulation of the assets) that makes them become successful in career. Here is embedded the challenge because there has been a sharp perceptual reshaping of these assets by the individual worker: the shift from the intrapersonal to interpersonal, the significance of the social constructs and the process by which the individuals utilizes them. In the context of India, virtually there has been no research till date, hence future implications directs substantial empirical research to develop a feasible career framework and supportive models because models are highly contextual.

Finally, the meteoric rise of the agile career entrepreneurs who have being setting new standards of success within their work sphere leads us to the inevitable question: Are the organizations ready to incorporate them within their folds to nurture them, develop them and reinforce them in customized patterns?

REFERENCE