

A changing career world?
An empirical analysis on job mobility among managers and professionals in Germany

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ABSTRACT

New concepts of careers assume more flexible trajectories which are less linear and only weakly linked to a specific organization. Careers are more individualized and individuals are increasingly responsible for their own career paths. However, empirical evidence for these concepts is scarce, and there is some doubt about the degree of change regarding careers. Providing empirical support for a critical view of the notion of all-pervasive change of careers, we analyze the change in job mobility between 1984 and 2009, the influence of the economic cycle on job mobility, and the relationship between age and job transitions during that period based on a representative sample of managers and professionals from the German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP). Results show that changes in job mobility are linked to macro-economic influences, but do not reflect a broad trend toward a new career world. However, a shift to fewer internal changes can be shown, encouraging discussion on the nature of internal changes. In addition, we show that career changes are more frequent among younger managers compared with their older colleagues. This relation has not changed throughout the investigated period.

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1980s, Western societies have been witnessing substantial changes in some aspects regarding the organization of work, employment relations and careers. These changes are often related to a paradigm shift on a societal level that is often described as a shift from “fordistic” to “post-fordistic” forms of organization (Opitz, 2004) or a shift from “bureaucratic” to “post-bureaucratic”, “entrepreneurial” modes of regulation (du Gay, Salaman, & Rees, 1996, Munro, 2005). The effects of these sociocultural, politico-economic and technological transformation processes have been differently evaluated in contemporary management and career studies (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, Kanter, 1997, Peters, 2001), work, employment and organization studies (Courpasson & Reed, 2004, McCabe, 2009, Roper, Ganesha, & Inkson, 2010) and in sociology (Bauman, 2000, Boltanski & Chiapello, 2006). Whereas some scholars emphasize individual freedom and autonomies coming along with a ‘liberated’ world of work and “boundaryless careers” (Arthur 1994), others highlight the risks, precarious individual responsibilities and increasing inequalities aligned with social deregulation and individualization tendencies (Beck, 2007, Sennett, 1998).

Frequently, organizations react to a more competitive and flexible environment by downsizing and delaying. In turn, this affects individuals working in those organizations. The well-known career ladder implying a rise in salary, status and hierarchy is therefore questioned in career research since the early nineties. Concepts like the protean career (Hall, 1996), boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994), post-corporate career (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997), chronically flexible career (Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, & Meyer, 2003) and kaleidoscope career (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005) have emerged. In contrast to a previous understanding, these concepts assume more flexible careers, which appear less linearly, and linked to a certain organization rather unpredictably. This means that careers are more individualized and individuals are increasingly responsible for their own career paths (Arthur & Defillippi, 1994; Cascio, 1998; Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; Mayrhofer et al., 2002).

However, empirical evidence for these concepts is scarce (see, e.g. Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee, & Morris, 2000; Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002). While managerial and everyday rhetoric often claims that “the present is always an exciting, challenging time to be contrasted with a stable past” (Collin, 1998: 412), data rather indicate that these are not truly revolutionary times, but shaped incrementally (Eccles & Nohria, 1992: 25). There are substantial doubts as to the extent of changes in career paths and mobility (Guest & Davey, 1996) and the volatility of “present times” (Eccles et al., 1992: 25). A body of literature claims that no fundamental change in career conceptualisation has occurred at all (e. g., Diewald & Sill, 2005, Jacoby, 1999a; 1999b). In addition, the discussion about new careers tends to neglect contextual and institutional factors (Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007). This raises the question if and how these concepts, which are mainly developed in the Anglo-American context, adequately describe what is happening in different institutional environments as for example in highly regulated countries as Germany.

Our starting point in this paper is the assumption that the “post-bureaucratic turn” (Harris & Höpfl, 2006) produces both increasing opportunities and chances in consciously forming one’s (career) life, and increasing uncertainties and risks in doing so (cp. Rodrigues & Guest, 2010). Furthermore, and going beyond dichotomies, we do not assume that post-bureaucratic

modes of regulating work and career simply produce liberation from former constraints. Instead, we emphasize that within the “post-industrial network economy” discursive strategies and principles of governing individuals and their biographies become more complex, flexible and value-orientated and, thus, less authoritative and directive compared to industrial one’s (e.g. Alvesson & Karreman, 2004). In addition, bureaucratic rationalities are not to be seen as being completely external to ‘entrepreneurialism’ (Hodgson, 2004). Even if social and economic changes deeply shape the specific modes of work and career organization for about two decades, bureaucratic elements, especially within formal organizations, are not fully substituted by new post-industrial and market-driven modes of regulation (Josserand, Teo, & Clegg, 2006).

Against this theoretical background, our main argument is that as a consequence changes in work conditions and career patterns over the past 25 years are less fundamental than often claimed. In particular, we argue that job mobility has not changed over time as often suggested in the literature. Based on a representative sample of managers and professionals from the German Socio-economic Panel (GSOEP), we analyse the change in job mobility between 1984 and 2009, the influence of the economic cycle on job mobility, and the relationship between age and job transitions during that period.

SHIFTING PARADIGMS?

Work regimes and the role of the individual in a post-bureaucratic era

In the bureaucratic-fordistic ‘regime’ of work and career organization, the labour process was dominated by a rational and technical alignment (Kallinikos, 2004). Production was centrally planned, organized according to a strict division of labour and regulated through official ‘channels of commands’ (Vandenbergh, 2008: 879f.). According to formalistic and impersonal rules responsibilities, competencies and functions were, hence, distributed (du Gay, 2007: 105ff.). Through long-term, linear and uniform organizational strategies, efficiency, functional rationalization and regularity of organizational performance were, above all, to be guaranteed (Courpasson et al., 2004: 6). Within the bureaucratic regime workers were fixed at the production line in the factory or the office, and were, in this vein, easily controlled (Weiskopf & Loacker, 2006: 400). Labour and capital were coupled like space and time (Bauman, 2000). This stable coupling defined, again, clear boundaries between work and leisure, between professional and private identities (du Gay, 2007: 103ff.). The employee of bureaucracy was, so, a ‘free subject’ outside the factory – not least because the intent of industrial governmental strategies was to make the workforce ‘useful’, not to destroy it (Kallinikos, 2004: 22). Furthermore, fixed organizational boundaries constituted stable mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Amongst others, this implied that organizational orders and employee’s rights and duties were principally well known by the organizational members (Boltanski et al., 2006: 166).

Now, following the governmental target to construct the workforce as “anti-nomadic”, productive and self-disciplined “occupational employee”, the bureaucratic “career regime” (McCabe, 2009) was, first off, aligned on the strategy of ‘standardization’ and ‘normalization’ (Kallinikos, 2004: 16ff.). As a ‘man of exchange’ (Hamann, 2009) the bureaucratic working

subject had to offer his standardized working qualifications, declare itself as obliged to formal rules and promise personal obedience, dutifulness and conformity (Kieser, 2002: 77). In return, he could count on a long-term employment contract, stable working hours, a continuous record of salary, an indexed pension, and, based on the principle of seniority, a calculable status position and a linear, steady career track (McKinlay & Wilson, 2006: 676). Within bureaucratic contexts of work, it, altogether, seems that the subject's biography was, mainly governed by the organizational 'career model'. This model constituted the central form of control over individual conduct, performance and self-presentation (McCabe, 2009).

Within the field of organization and management studies it is, generally argued that since the 1980s the dissolving of the "bureaucratic era" can be observed (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Virno, 2005), however. With the emergence of the so called "network society" (Castells, 2001), it seems that traditional distinctions between the realms of government and economy, the public and the private, begin to blur and reverse (du Gay et al., 1996: 267ff.). Whereas the classical welfare state was structured through stable boundaries between nations, institutions and different social spheres, the "postfordistic society" is, by tendency, transformed into a network of, more or less, flexible and uncertain associations (Vandenberghe, 2008: 881). Now, the 'era of entrepreneurialism' implies a reduced role of the state in favour of a new economy which emphasizes market orders, individual autonomy and responsibility at all the local levels where they can condition the actions of organizations and individuals (Donzelot & Gordon, 2008: 59). In contrast to the bureaucratic, industrial era, where the idea of 'exchange' built the general matrix of political orders, 'entrepreneurialism' discursively focuses much more on competition and a logic of rivalry and investment (Read, 2009: 27). Following critical voices, many areas that were once understood as social and political are, by this means, repositioned and moved towards the domain of self-government. Within the new management and career discourse this repositioning is, however, generally presented as an increase in individual 'freedom' (Arthur et al., 1996, Peters, 2001, critically e.g. Hamann, 2009: 40).

Since time and space become increasingly fluid and "dis-organized" (Sennett, 1998: 131), neither work nor capital is any longer bound to traditional spheres of production. "Post-fordism" refers to "light and flexible accumulation" (Bauman, 2000). As a consequence, the ideal model of the post-fordistic organization is a network-based, "lean" organization where management is decentralized, hierarchies are flattened, and where the production and labour process is no longer standardized but "improvisation"-based, innovative, mostly "immaterial" and "knowledge-intensive" (Lazzarato, 1998). In the 'creative network economy' organizational strategies are still interested in efficiency but they became dynamic and focussed on "flexible specialisation" (Clegg & Courpasson, 2004). These days, forms of work organization are, hence, increasingly dominated by self-organized team-structures and regulated through the production of trust and commitment and, so, governed along "*values*" – rather than impersonal rules (Knights & McCabe, 2003: 1589f., Alvesson et al., 2004).

The mentioned flexibilization and delimitation tendencies of work, now, also promote an increasing strategic market-orientation and, thus, contractualization of employment and career forms (Bauman, 2000). Due to market instabilities and dynamics, post-industrial or post-corporate careers are much less calculable than traditional "career tracks" which tend to be partly substituted (Vandenberghe, 2008: 880). Management authors like Kanter (1997) describe the post-industrial career path as a continuous sprint from one project to the next. Each

project, thereby, poses new challenges. The project's success, though, is, difficult to calculate; and even if a project is judged as successful by the market's evaluation criteria, it does no longer guarantee job security or career progression (Loacker, 2010: 61ff.). Still, what each project provides is the opportunity to increase the individual "human capital" and employability (Boltanski et al., 2006: 156). In this way, projects keep alive the chance of successfully competing for the next job and allow the working subject to "stay in the game" (Bauman, 2000: 172). Post-industrial career paths seem, thus, to be increasingly regulated by the model of "permanent market assessment" whereby the particular criteria, defining the working subject's reputation and 'value', are, possibly, subjected to continuous change (Weiskopf et al., 2006: 408). Patterns of careers, linked with such assessment procedures, are generally non-linear and no longer mainly organizationally defined (Guest, 2004: 2f.). Due to, at least in parts, fragmented employment histories and periodic changes in employment status, they are also named as "craft biographies" (Menger, 2006: 65). However, altogether, it seems that in the global economy "possibilities for reaffirming individual choices are opened up as workers are forced to shoulder the burden of responsibility for the 'career path', as well as other non-economic aspects of the personal biography" (Banks, 2006: 467). By trend, the market, thus, produces both more individual possibilities in forming one's biography *and* more (complex) dependencies and demands, resulting from the market's dynamic orientation.

All told, post-bureaucratic governmental strategies and logics seem to be quite heterogeneous, ambiguous and hybrid (Josserand et al., 2006). In this regard we want to highlight that one should be careful not to "over-emphasis on the notion of enterprise" (Salaman & Storey, 2008: 316). Like any other order, the order of "enterprise" is not to consider as being deterministic, universal or exclusive. As we illustrated, bureaucratic and post-bureaucratic "regimes" of work and career organization are partly characterized through different modes of government and different subject ideals. However, we also expect that bureaucratic modes of regulation – like hierarchical ordering, the exercise of power through authorities or mechanistic rules – are not opposite to but still very much part of the model of the "network enterprise" (McCabe, 2009: 1573, Harris et al., 2006). Simultaneously we want to note, once more, that we do not suggest that the decentralized structure of the post-bureaucratic regime simply increases individual freedom whereas reducing control and the exercise of power (du Gay, 2007: 173). Rather, we want to stress that forms of control and strategies of governing changed their form during the last two decades; they became more flexible and complex and, through the rhetoric of empowerment, commitment, self-management and team-orientation more ambivalent (Courpasson et al., 2004: 7).

Managerial career mobility in the post-bureaucratic era

Starting point. The "appropriate individual" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) of the post-bureaucratic "regime of enterprise" seems to be the empowered, creative and hyper-productive "entrepreneur of the self" (du Gay et al., 1996) that considers himself as a bundle of hybrid skills and competencies that are to be strategically developed (Peters, 2001). Once discursively constituted as self-responsible manager of his own biography, this kind of working subject is no longer primarily restricted by organizational boundaries and limitations. Instead, it is dependent on market "demands" and, often loose and uncertain, "trans-organizational" network contacts. As the entrepreneurial subject is, above all, obliged to its own "human capital", one could also argue that it is no longer governed by the promise of

“organizational career” but by the promise of “employability” (Bröckling, 2007: 127ff., McKinlay et al., 2006). Now, the market, as central post-industrial instance of governing, seems to produce two vital effects: it individualizes (job) performance, responsibilities and (career) risks and it simultaneously normalizes the working’s subject conduct (Munro, 2005). Differently put, as the market continuously inserts multiple, partial modes of inclusion and exclusion (Fleming & Spicer, 2004), individuals are, these days, obliged to be(come) disposable and adaptable to, by trend, ever changing codes of conduct and professional norms (Storey, Salaman, & Platman, 2005: 1042ff.). The post-bureaucratic working subject is no longer just a “partner in exchange”, but becomes fashioned as self-governed “entrepreneur” that treats his self as a marketable asset (du Gay et al., 1996: 271f.). So contrary to the notion of repression and constraint, which generally dominated the industrial paradigm of work and career organization, post-industrial forms of governing seek to mobilize and activate (Weiskopf et al., 2006). They consequently operate through the imposing of indirect and more or less “free-floating” forms of power and control – like e.g. the promotion of competition and self-responsibility. In this vein, they primarily structure the subject’s field of actions and its “free choices” (Vandenberghe, 2008: 887).

Especially two prominent career concepts emphasize the self-governing aspect and have gained substantial attention in career research, reflecting these developments. On the one hand, the concept of protean careers (Hall, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1996) is characterized by careers developing independently of traditional career arrangements (Segers, Inceoglu, Vloeberghs, Bartram, & Henderickx, 2008). The protean career centres on a conception of psychological success resulting from individual career management, as opposed to career planning and development arranged by the organization. Protean careers have been characterized as involving greater mobility, a more whole-life perspective, and a developmental progression (Hall, 1996). Briscoe et al. (2006b) claim that although most protean individuals might exhibit higher mobility and a learning orientation, it is fruitful to say that mobility and learning may be correlates of a protean career, but not necessary components of it.

On the other hand, the concept of boundaryless careers (see Arthur, 1994 and the contributions in Arthur et al., 1996) argues in a similar way. Introduced in the mid-1990ies and since then increasingly researched (see e.g. Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005), it is conceptualized as self-development through inter-company mobility rather than through intra-company learning, which is the traditional way of development implying intra-firm mobility and long-term commitment. Described as “the opposite of the organizational career” (Arthur et al., 1996: 5) some of the hallmarks of a boundaryless career include: portable skills, knowledge, and abilities across multiple firms, personal identification with meaningful work, on-the-job action, development of multiple networks and peer learning relationships, and individual responsibility for career management.

In his original article Arthur (1994: 296) described six meanings of boundaryless career, whereas the most prominent is (1) the movement across the boundaries of separate employers. Other meanings encompass (2) the marketability drawn from outside the current organization and (3) extra-organizational networks or information. (4) The decline of traditional organizational career boundaries like hierarchical reporting and advancement principles and (5) the rejection of career opportunities for personal reasons are further expressions of boundaryless careers. With the last meaning (6) the psychological aspect of the concept is stressed, as a boundaryless future may be perceived by neglecting structural constraints. What all six mean-

ings share is “a focus on the weakening of people’s ties with organizations in the construction and enactment of their career” (see Arnold & Cohen, 2008: 8). Despite the original richness of the concept the idea is mainly associated with physical mobility across jobs, functions and organizations, as well as less rigid job structures and fewer hierarchical career paths in the literature (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

In line with the more self-governing aspects of the new working regime, arguments building on these concepts would suggest an overall increase in career mobility over time. Not only do elements of the broad institutional context favour more self-determined action, the notion of proteanism and boundarylessness support this tendency as well.

However, both critique of these career concepts and some of the elements of the post-bureaucratic work regime outlined above caution against such a statement. We will outline these in turn.

Critique of career concepts. Regarding critique of career concepts mentioned, in particular the concept of boundaryless careers, we follow the arguments of two recent articles (Rodrigues et al., 2010; Arnold et al., 2008) which identify four problematic areas.

Metaphor

Concerning the metaphor itself, especially the description of boundaryless career as the opposite of organizational careers results in a lack of accuracy (Inkson, 2006), and is regarded as an oversimplification of changes in career patterns. Organizational career models emphasize the intra-organizational progression, whereas the boundaryless career model focuses on the inter-firm mobility. As Arnold & Cohen (2008: 8) argue, organizational boundary crossing mobility does not exclude the notion of traditional hierarchical career and success. This may also account for the results of Stahl et al. (2002: 223) who interpret their results, that expatriates saw their assignments helping their career advancement even possibly not within their current company, indicating a boundaryless mindset. We therefore state again, that even with this boundaryless mindset, hierarchies are still of importance also within “network enterprises”. Accordingly, below we analyse if intra-organizational mobility has lost its meaning for organizations or individuals over the years.

Individual agency

Similar to the concept of the protean career (Briscoe et al., 2006a: 31), individual agency is overemphasized over structure (see e.g. Ituma & Simpson 2007; Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004) as the emancipation of individual career actors from the constraints of traditional careers is stressed (Inkson, 2006). In this point, careers research mirror the “regime change” most visibly: actors manage their own careers instead of relying on formal organizational career development programmes (Hall & Moss, 1998). For the illustration of this aspect, specific contexts are chosen, like the IT professionals in Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 1996), or the film industry (Jones, 1996). However, studies show that both organizations and workers still value and retain traditional careers (Dany, 2003). Career self-management is rather seen as a complement than a replacement for organizational career management by young managers (Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Mackenzie, 2002). Furthermore, evidence suggests that job mobility patterns in the 1980ies in the US are rather explained by variations in the business cycle than by individual actors desire to enact an independent career (Swinnerton

& Wial, 1995). In our analysis we will therefore account for the influence of the economic cycle on job transitions in Germany.

Range and nature of career boundaries.

The range and the nature of career boundaries is hardly discussed in the literature and a focus on organizational boundaries can be observed (Rodrigues et al., 2010: 1161). This is also reflected in the boundaryless career attitude scale (Briscoe et al., 2006b) with 11 out of 13 items inhibiting organizational boundaries. Gunz et al. (2000), as one of the rare exceptions, describe various relevant boundaries as a labour-market phenomenon like internal versus external hires, and they identify industry as the most significant boundary. Another relevant boundary refers to the psychological dimension: “the limits we place on ourselves when we wonder what we could possibly do” (Gunz et al., 2000: 29). Drawing on their results of studying careers in the IT industry, King et al. (2005) state that even for best educated and highly mobile individuals, careers are bounded by mental barriers, constraints imposed by institutional structures like intermediaries and recruiters and previous career decisions suggesting some kind of path dependency (see e.g. the tournament model of Rosenbaum, 1979). Women and local ethnic groups face other kinds of boundaries (Pringle & Mallon, 2003) but generally the discourse remains largely elitist (Arnold et al., 2008: 13). Sullivan and Arthur indicated in 2006 that mobility across organizational, occupational and cultural boundaries as well as psychological career mobility should be considered with the consequence that unless there is complete immobility it becomes difficult not to classify any career as potentially boundaryless (Arnold et al., 2008). Rodrigues and Guest (2010) point out that the notion of psychological boundarylessness, defined as ‘the perception of the capacity to make transitions’ (Sullivan et al., 2006: 21) is fuzzy and difficult to operationalize. Drawing on the arguments mentioned above the boundaryless career metaphor faces the danger to lose its potential to challenge, provoke and illuminate by becoming more diffuse (Arnold et al., 2008: 12).

Empirical support.

The empirical support for the dominant meaning of the metaphor, the changes in employment patterns, is modest (Pringle et al., 2003). Recently, Rodrigues and Guest (2010) analysed data from the OECD Employment Statistics Database in order to capture historical trends in job stability for the years 1992 to 2006. They found few changes regarding job tenure and turnover in the US, Japan and Europe as well as no increased job mobility among managers and professionals. Their results for Germany indicating a moderate increase in job tenure between 2000 and 2006 fit with an decreased mobility rate between 1974 and 1994 drawn from an analysis of the German Socio-Economic Panel (Winkelmann & Zimmermann, 1998). A more detailed analysis revealed some variations (Rodrigues et al., 2010: 1167) as job tenure declined moderately among young men between 15 and 24, low tenured workers and men between 55 and 64 years. Additionally, changes concerning women older than 25 could be observed, as their tenure increased. Other recent empirical studies cannot support the assumption of rising mobility; they, rather, show that the number of job changes (Diewald et al., 2005) and tenure (Auer & Cazes, 2000) is fairly constant over the last decade. Major shifts as suggested by the boundaryless career concept do not seem to occur.

Constraining elements of post-bureaucratic work regime. Our assumption that post-bureaucratic careers are not less regulated than bureaucratic ones also implies that careers have not lost their form; though, they are generally less obviously managed. As hinted at, ca-

reer boundaries seem to be increasingly shaped by the orders and rules of the market and less by a single organization or a particular employer.

Even in the era of “entrepreneurialism”, “careers are constrained by multiple boundaries” (Rodrigues et al., 2010: 1168); they become, in this vein, also more complex and dynamic. As a consequence of modulated “promotional” or “career scripts” it seems that e.g. institutional career regulations gain in importance (Dany, Louvel, & Valette, 2011: 19f).

Hence, while in a diversity of employment fields it seems that “organizational boundaries became more permeable” (Rodrigues et al., 2010: 1170), occupational boundaries became stronger (ibid.). The shifting modes of work and career organization tend to be very variable and depending from a diversity of political, institutional and organizational aspects (Roper et al., 2010). In other words, careers do not develop in a free market, and they are not the “result” of individual choices, made by autonomous career actors, as it is often suggested within the new management and career discourse (ibid.: 673). Instead, the effects of changing career regimes outlined above is confronted by institutional, occupational and thus contextual frontiers.

Drawing on the arguments made above, we concede that post-bureaucratic forms of careers may be more flexible, empowered and allow more individual agency. Yet, at the same time there are strong forces that lead to stable boundaries as well. The “appropriate individual” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) of the post-bureaucratic “regime of enterprise” representing the “entrepreneur of the self” (du Gay et al., 1996) is facing concrete institutional and contextual walls. Consequently, career paths in general appear not more dynamic than in bureaucratic careers, since these effects outweigh each other. Therefore, we overall assume a certain stasis, i.e. no change in the overall level of career mobility, which is also in line with core findings about the development of a number of HR practices in Europe (Mayrhofer, Brewster, Morley, & Ledolter, 2011): Job mobility has not increased significantly among those who traditionally benefited from organization career opportunities, namely managers and professionals (Rodrigues et al., 2010.: 1168).

Hypothesis 1a: The change towards a postfordistic regime has not lead to a general increase of job mobility among managers and professionals in Germany.

However, as job changes are a complex phenomenon, that we do not want to oversimplify, we consider different forms of job transitions. External job changes refer to those transitions between companies, and internal job changes refer to transitions within one firm, very broadly defined as any essential change in task and duty. In line with our argumentation above, we do not expect that intra-organizational mobility has lost its importance for individuals and organizations. We therefore assume that internal changes have not decreased in the last years. Furthermore, we doubt the increase of external changes as element of the boundaryless mind.

Hypothesis 1b: The change towards a postfordistic regime has neither resulted in increasing external nor decreasing internal job changes among managers and professionals in Germany.

As stated above, careers in a post-bureaucratic work regime are heavily influenced by market forces, reducing the importance of any single organization. Following this line, we argue that

there are factors on the macro-level that have to be considered (Mayrhofer, Steyrer, & Meyer, 2007). For the American labour market it has already been discussed that a supposed trend towards less job stability disappears if variations in the business cycle are taken into account (cp. Swinnerton et al., 1995; Diebold, Neumark, & Polsky, 1994; Diebold, Neumark, & Polsky, 1996). Cornelißen et al. (2007) found a positive relationship between economic growth and external job changes on the German labour market. Compatible with these findings, we argue that variations in the degree of job mobility are linked to economic growth and decline but, as stated above, there is no fundamental change in the level of mobility due to the regime shift in the last two decades.

Hypothesis 1c: Job mobility is rather an effect of the business cycle than a consequence of the regime shift.

But it is not only the exogenous context influencing career mobility sustainably. Instead, the “body and the brain” of career actors represents a comprehensible boundary as well. Especially, the influence of age on career mobility is well established in the literature. Empirical work on job mobility shows that younger managers are more mobile than older managers (Groot & Verberne, 1997; Nicholson & West, 1988; O'Brien, 2007). Even in new career regimes, we do not expect these results to be subject to change.

Hypothesis 2a: Job mobility among managers and professionals in Germany decreases with age.

While we argue that the level of career mobility decreases with age, we do expect the difference between older and younger managers to be constant. If the effects of the new career regime are rather stable concerning job transitions, a shift in the age effect cannot assumed.

Hypothesis 2b: The age effect remains constant over the time period analyzed.

SAMPLE AND VARIABLES

The results of the present study are based on data of the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), 2010 release (cf. Wagner, Frick & Schupp, 2007). The GSOEP is a representative longitudinal household-based panel survey. It has been carried out every year since 1984. The sample has been amended several times, and in 1990 it was extended to East Germany. By now, the panel has more than 20,000 participants in about 12,000 private households. As the only representative set of individual data in Germany, the GSOEP provides a platform for examining not only objective socio-demographic and economic measures but also information concerning personality and subjective perceptions of working conditions with a sufficiently high number of cases to examine differentiated effects of macro-, meso-, and micro factors on subgroups like the group of professionals and managers. The GSOEP includes weighting factors that allow making generalisations on managers and professionals in Germany.

To test our hypotheses we focus on reported job changes of professionals and managers who have participated in the GSOEP in the period from 1984 to 2009. In compliance with the op-

erationalization by Holst & Busch (2010: 16), our sample of professionals and managers includes employees “with extensive managerial duties (e.g. managing director, manager, head of a large firm or concern)” and employees “with highly qualified duties or managerial function (e.g. scientist, attorney, head of department)“. We have excluded self-employed persons as well as marginal employment by advance, as well as civil servants to focus on private industry. Moreover we have excluded job beginner who have entered the labour market in the year of survey. Our accumulated sample size ranges from $N_{85-89} = 2108$ to $N_{05-09} = 8952$ (see Table 1). This increase in sample size is only partly caused by a rise of the workforce and an increased proportion of professionals among clericals; it is also due to the panel amendments and the integration of East Germany.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the professionals and manager sample.

years	N_{acc}	$\bar{N}_{hrf} /$ year	average age	the sample among clericals	women	Proportion of		
						juniors, < 33 years	middle aged	seniors, > 50 years
1985-1989	2108	2 293 278	42.43	.24	.20	.24	.49	.27
1990-1994	4328	4 266 688	41.71	.33	.20	.27	.48	.25
1995-1999	4564	4 675 726	42.48	.36	.19	.24	.51	.25
2000-2004	9345	4 694 569	43.03	.34	.24	.19	.56	.26
2005-2009	8952	4 930 607	43.12	.33	.31	.20	.55	.26

data of pooled cross-sectional analysis

The GSOEP data have been widely used to investigate individual effects of job instability (e.g. Bethge, Radoschweski & Müller-Fahnow, 2008; Boerner & Schramm, 1998; Clark, Knabe & Rätzl, 2008; Lurweg, 2010; Schramm, 1992). For the broader consideration of job transitions over time, the panel data have barely been used so far (see, however Diewald et al., 2005; Pollmann-Schult, 2006). Participants of the GSOEP are asked on a yearly basis whether they have changed job position during the last year. This initial question is followed by several items on nature of and reason for the job change. The data used in our analyses are derived from this information as described below.

Job transitions. The question: “Have you changed your job position since last year?” filters employees in the GSOEP sample for more detailed information on the job change. Afterwards it is classified what kind of transition has taken place. We have derived two dummy variables indicating the existence of an internal job change within the same firm, and an external job change (with or without a break in between) Note that there are remarkable low numbers of internal job changers in comparison to external transitions. Other types of change, as getting self-employed or entering the workforce for the first time are not considered, as they do not reveal relevant information for the hypothesis in question. For the examination of time-series data we have predated the information from survey-year to the referred previous year, since surveyed changes refer to the previous year. Detailed information on job changes is not available from the first year of GSOEP.

Region. East Germany provides data for the GSOEP since 1990. We have controlled for regional effects, using information on the place of residence. But, although East Germany has undergone a system change on the fast track regarding job conditions, contractual arrange-

ments and job perspectives, this turbulence has – with regard to the amount of job changes – even out already in the mid-nineties. Moreover, due to a smaller workforce, this bias has no impact for the presented results for Germany as a comparison of regression results shows.

Age and gender. Based on the date of birth, the respondent's age is calculated for each considered survey year. For comparative analyses we have grouped our sample. As long-lasting job qualification and experience are required, there are few young professionals and managers. To gain comparable subsample sizes and to reflect on cuts in life stages, we have built three groups: Juniors (up to 33 years, average of 22 % between 1985 and 2009), middle-aged (up to 49 years, 52%) and senior professionals and managers (above 50 years, 26%). The managers and professionals are by majority male. Regarding the current discussion on demographic change and diversification, we observe two shifts in the composition of the managing group. First the proportion of women has increased steadily from 20% in the 1980s to 31% nowadays. Women are mainly represented on lower management level. Second, expectedly, managers and professionals are getting older, too ($M_{85-89} = 42.43$; $SD_{85-89} = 10.35$; $M_{05-09} = 43.14$; $SD_{05-09} = 10.01$). A closer look at the frequencies reveals that a growing number of young and female managers is compensating for the aging effect.

Last job tenure. The variable *last job tenure* indicates the tenure on a previous job in months after an external transition. Note that we have measured the tenure only of external job-changers, not of persons remaining in their job. The variable does not provide information on tenure in general. There is a slight decrease in job tenure over time. Managers and professionals who leave their company had averagely worked 63 month for their employer in the 1980s. Nowadays, the average is 55 month with a high variance back then and today ($M_{85-89} = 62.97$; $SD_{85-89} = 62.67$; $M_{05-09} = 55.22$; $SD_{05-09} = 62.57$)

GDP. To indicate the business cycle, we have used the gross domestic product growth rate in real terms.¹ The data from 1983 to 1991 is drawn from the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), from 1992 on, we used the data from the Federal Statistical Office and statistical offices of the states (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder).

RESULTS

To examine the development of job changes over time and the impact of the economic cycle, we have analysed the time series of accumulated job changes for each reported year between 1984 and 2009 using linear regression analyses and lagged models.² Results are controlled for autocorrelation and especially for a positive trend over time. Testing the structural age effect on job mobility, we have used descriptive analyses and compare different age groups by mean. Due to a small group of young professionals and due to a little amount of senior profes-

¹ Comparative data for East and West Germany and non-adjusted growth rates have been used as well, but no relevant differences were found. In fact, the non-adjusted GDP fits better, but due to a positive trend related to inflation this data is less independent from time.

² Since job changes are reported for the year previous to the survey, regression models are dealing with data from 1983 to 2008.

sionals changing their jobs, we have pooled the data into groups of five-year-periods to get smoothed and reliable data.

Table 2: Means of changes among the professionals and manager sample.

proportions (in %) Years	job- changer	internal job- changer	external job- changer	other changes	last job tenure	young job- changer	middle-aged job- changer	senior job- changer
1985-1989	14.38	5.64	8.21	.53	62.97	29.90	13.30	3.42
1990-1994	16.00	4.82	9.28	1.90	67.23	25.52	16.29	6.64
1995-1999	13.15	2.87	9.31	.96	60.58	27.83	11.05	5.35
2000-2004	11.71	2.16	8.49	1.07	55.07	24.69	11.41	3.81
2005-2009	12.96	2.53	9.35	1.08	55.22	30.63	11.30	4.37

Alteration of job changes over time. Regarding the changes over time (hypothesis 1), transitions of managers and professionals are rather constant over the years. There is no significant correlation between time and job-changes ($r = -.21$; table 3) and also visually, no trend in the overall job changes is detectable (see figure 1). So far, our first hypothesis can be supported by the data. However, taking a closer look and breaking up job changes into external and internal changes, it is obvious that the kind of job changes is indeed changing over the years. In table 2 it can be seen that the proportion of internal changes declines steadily over time, while the share of external and other changes increases only slightly. There is a clear decline of internal job changes ($r = -.74$; $p < .001$) but only a weak and non-significant increase of external changes over time ($r = .23$; $p = .28$; see table 3). For hypothesis 1a it has to be summarized that indeed there does not seem to be a trend of more external changes, but there are fewer internal changes.

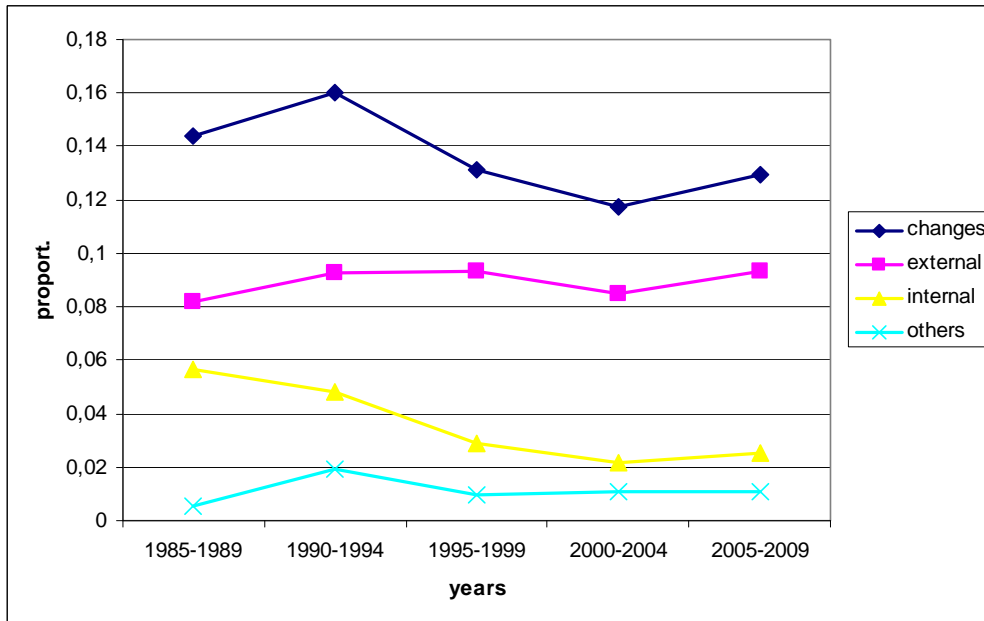
Table 3: Correlation Table

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Year	1									
GDP	-.33	1								
changes	-.21	.64 ***	1							
internal changes ¹	-.74 ***	.46 *	.65 ***	1						
external changes ¹	.23	.34	.48 *	-.11	1					
tenure	-.51	.13	.15	.37	-.37	1				
other changes ¹	.27	-.08	.08	-.35	-.07	-.50	1			
young changers	.08	.31	.63 ***	.37	.6 **	-.11	-.16	1		
middle-aged chang-	-.22	.6 **	.89 ***	.53 **	.3	.13	.23	.30	1	
senior changers	-.01	.44 *	.63 ***	.29	.29	.18	.04	.27	.45 *	1

¹ N= 25; all other variables have N = 26; *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

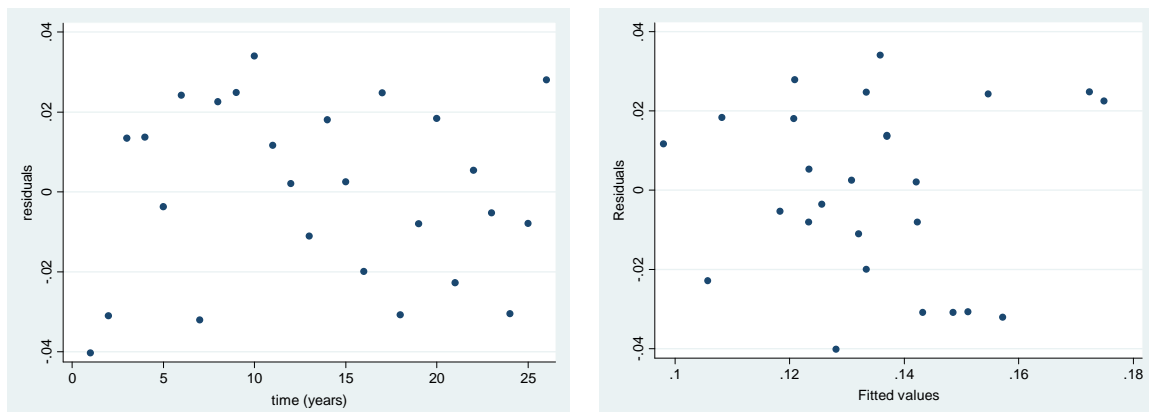
An additional indicator for the development of job changes is tenure. In regard to hypothesis 1a and the idea of increasing external changes, this tenure would have to increase respectively. However, this can hardly be observed by the data: in the first period (1985-1989) the average tenure is about 55 months. In the last period (2005-2009) this figure has only risen by 7 months. So, a clear trend cannot be seen here. This supports our results from above: there is no trend of increasing external changes visible, which supports one part of hypothesis 1a.

Figure 1: Proportion of job changes among managers and professionals in Germany - pooled data



To test hypothesis 1b that there is rather a cyclical effect caused by economic activity than a trend towards more job changes over time, we have conducted multiple linear regression analyses including a year counter and the yearly GDP growth rate from 1983 to 2008 as exogenous variables and the proportion of job-changers among professionals and managers as endogenous variable. Results indicate a strong impact³ of the GDP on the proportion of job-changers in the same year ($\beta = 1.26\%$; $p < .01$), but no linear trend over time is detectable. Further controlling for a time trend, we have regarded possible autocorrelation of the residuals (figure 1). There is no violation of regression criteria observable, neither for heteroscedasticity (Sroeter's test: $\chi^2 = .42$; $p = .52$) nor for autocorrelation. Breusch/Godfrey test ($\chi^2 = .062$; $p = .80$) and Durbin's alternative test for autocorrelation ($\chi^2 = .052$; $p = .82$) also reject the assumption of a trend.

³ A vice versa causal relationship does not make sense so that – although we cannot exclude an indirect relationship, we can assume that variation of the GDP causes job changes.

Figure 2: Scatterplots for regression model 1.

In a second step we have considered interrelationships between time and the GDP. Note that there is a slight negative correlation ($r = -.34$, $p = .09$) between both variables. Additionally, the GDP and the previous year's GDP are significantly correlated ($r = .42$; $p < .05$). Controlling for a postponed effect of the economic cycle on the proportion of job changers, a second – autoregressive lag – model has been tested (table 4). This model includes the GDP of the previous year and the same year of reported job changes. Explained variance is increased up to $R_{Aj}^2 = 46\%$. Results clearly support a GDP effect in the same year ($N = 25$, $\beta = .01$; $p < .01$) and although not significant a $\beta = .005$ ($p = .09$) from the previous year's GDP speaking for a smaller lagged effect on job changes. Generally spoken, our results support hypothesis 1 and 1b. Job mobility has not increased over time, but there is a significant business cycle effect on the proportion of job changers.

Internal and external job changes. Going more in detail, we have split job changes into internal and external changes. In comparison to external changes, there is an outstanding small proportion of internal job changes ranging from $\bar{M}_{85-89} = 5.64\%$ to $\bar{M}_{05-09} = 2.53\%$ (table 2). Compatible with other research we have expected a higher rate. E.g. a case study of a Dutch organization detected an internal change-rate of 7.2% between 1987 and 1996 (Dohmen, Kriechel, & Pfann, 2004) and a study among UK managers between 1980 and 1992 reports a constant proportion of internal changers around 9% (Inkson, 1995). We assume that the low number of internal changes found in the GSOEP may underrepresent intra-organizational mobility. Therefore, the absolute numbers should be judged with caution. Maybe this is due to an unclear guidance in the GSOEP survey or an unclear interpretation of internal job changes as we discuss later.

To determine the impact of regime change and alternatively, the business cycle on internal and external changes, we have conducted linear regression analyses similar to model 1. With regard to internal changes, a clear negative time effect ($\beta = -.0016$; $p < .001$) and with regard to external changes a weaker positive effect ($\beta = .0009$; $p < 0.05$) is observable. The impact of the GDP is for both types of job-change positively related and comparable strong, but only for external changes the coefficient is significant ($\beta_{\text{int}} = .0024$; $p = .19$; $\beta_{\text{ext}} = .0055$; $p < .05$).

Concluding, the variance of aggregated internal job-changes among professionals and managers can be explained by $R_{Adj}^2 = 20\%$, the variance of external changes by $R_{Adj}^2 = 54\%$.

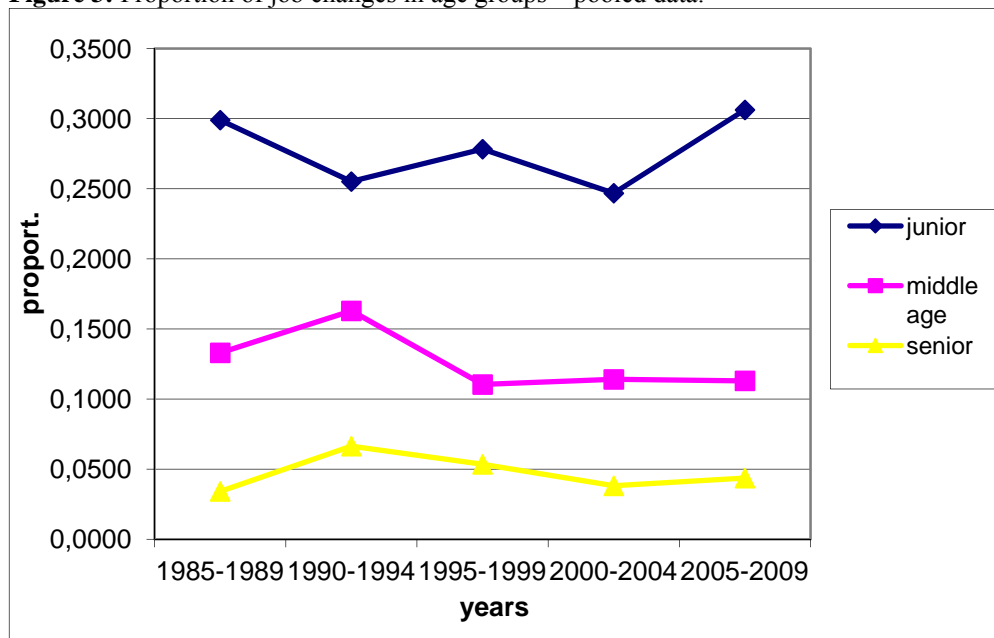
Table 4: Regression of the proportion of job changers from 1983 to 2008.

	<i>regr. model 1</i>	<i>lagged model</i>	<i>internal changes¹</i>	<i>external changes¹</i>
	β	β	β	β
time (years)	.00	-	-.0016 ***	.0009*
GDP	.013 **	.010**	.0024	.0055*
lagged GDP	-	.006	-	-
constant	.108 ***	.104***	.052 ***	.064***
F	8.08 **	11.18***	15.23***	3.92.*
R ²	.41	.50	.26	.58
Adj.R ²	.36	.46	.20	.54

model 1 and the lagged model are based on N = 26; ¹N = 25; *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Structural age effects. Testing for a structural age effect (hypothesis 2), we have compared three age groups, junior, middle-aged and senior professionals and managers. Figure 2 supports our assumption of a distinct structural age effect (supporting hypothesis 2a) that remains stable over time (supporting hypothesis 2b). The proportion of job changers is highest among young professionals. Roughly spoken, junior professionals under the age of 34 change their job averagely every three to four years. For middle-aged professionals the average proportion of job changers over the last 25 years is 12.7% and for senior professionals only 4.7%.

Figure 3: Proportion of job changes in age groups – pooled data.



DISCUSSION

Our study has a number of limitations. First, it is a single country study focusing on a specific segment of the workforce. While this is an advantage in terms of contextualizing our results, it clearly limits the empirical foundation for generalizing our claims. It does e.g. neither consider the work and career situation of individuals holding temporary contracts or, more generally, being employed in new, self-organized, project-based forms of work (Durbin and Tomlinson 2010),⁴ nor does it consider the particular work and career situation of the growing group of subjects (with very different educations and qualifications) engaged in immaterial, knowledge-intensive fields of work or in cultural professions where formal organizations in the traditional sense are increasingly of marginal relevance (Lazzarato 1998, Virno 2005). For their work and life situation, often unintentional, changes or mobility demands seem to be the norm (Loacker 2010, Storey, Salaman and Platman 2005, Voß & Pongratz, 2004).⁵ Second, the study uses an existing data set with all the limitations in terms of operationalizing the constructs we are interested in which we have outlined above, for example the way that internal job changes are captured. Third, this is single source data which might cause some problems in terms of the estimation of job changes. In the light of these limitations, we discuss our findings.

Results show that the change hypothesis underlying much of the new careers concept at best partly applies to managers and professionals in Germany. Overall, no trend exists towards an increase in the number of job transitions. Apart from that we can support the results of Auer & Cazes (2000) and of Rodrigues & Guest (2010) that there is no clear decrease of job tenure. This has a number of implications for the current discussion on change in the career landscape. Most basic, our results provide support for a critical view about the taken-for-grantedness of an increased change. This does not necessarily challenge the concepts linked with it. Yet, it cautions us not to generalize too much from observations looking at specific groups of individuals for whom new careers may be a reality. This supports our idea that the more traditional and the post-fordistic careers co-exist, rather than exclude each other. In addition, our results also support a more contextualized view of career. This is especially true in terms of differentiating between countries and taking into account macro-factors such as the economic cycles. Overall, this supports a call for more country-comparative research in careers and adds to the critique of overemphasizing agency over structure.

Our results also show rather few changes among managers in Germany; this goes along with the evaluation that the approach of boundaryless careers is rather elitist (as discussed by

⁴ Gebel (2010), also using data from the GSOEP, e.g. discusses the (primarily early) career effects of temporary employment and, thereby, highlights the high wage losses and risks linked with, repeated, temporary employment contracts (ibid.: 656f.).

⁵ In their study of careers of female part-time managers Durbin and Tomlinson (2010: 632ff.), however, even refer to another point: the career mobility of these managers is less than they aspire. This kind of exclusion is primarily explained through the formal part-time position in which the women are employed.

Arnold et al., 2008). People – including highly skilled and educated managers – do not have careers without any mental or structural boundaries (c.f. King et al. 2005; Pringle et al., 2003). On the contrary we could show the influence of a boundary on the micro level (age) and on the macro level (economic cycle). Swinnerton & Wial (1995) have already discussed the influence of the economic cycle on career transitions in the US and now our results hint in the same direction for Germany. This strengthens the explanatory value of structural boundaries which are present, for example, in the “free” market.

However, we have seen a shift in the kind of job changes of managers and professionals in Germany. Contrary to theories revolving around the boundaryless career, external (and other) changes do not increase. Regardless of a boundaryless mindset, inter-organizational mobility does not gain in importance. We do however, other than expected, see a decline in internal job changes. Does this really mean that intra-organizational hierarchies lose their importance? We want to scrutinize on this aspect. As already mentioned, we doubt that internal changes are mirrored correctly by the GSOEP. It is surveyed whether the respondents had a job change in the last year. If they confirm this, then they are asked whether this was an internal or an external change. We assume that many respondents, who indeed have changed their task or duty in their jobs essentially, do not consider this as a job change. External job changes are clearly defined by a new employer and company turnover, whereas internal changes are rather vaguely interpreted as a new job position. Therefore, the number of job changes may be underrepresented. Yet, it is hard to see why this should be different over the years and as the proportion of internal changes declines over the years, we have to discuss why this is the case. Note that there is no corresponding development to more external changes.

One explanation focuses on changes in the organizational structure. In times of delayering and downsizing, fewer job opportunities are offered by the companies. Neus and Walter (2009) show that between 1995 and 2006, 265 German companies which are listed at the stock market, have laid off 7.6% of their employees on average. An international comparative study showed that delayering has taken place in almost half of all surveyed companies (N=2964). Especially middle management was affected between 70 and 91% by this delayering (Littler, Wiesner, & Dunford, 2003). These developments lead to flatter and more narrow hierarchical structures and therefore to less internal promotions within the companies. One may argue however, that this in turn could lead to increased lateral movements on the same hierarchical level compensating the decrease in promotions. Another possible explanation for the general decline in internal changes can be a changed understanding of job changes. While we have defined an internal job change as any essential change in task or duty, others may interpret an internal job change as a clear move onto a different position with a different job title. Moreover, the understanding of internal transitions might have changed over the time. A change in task and duty might have been considered as a job change in the 80s, while today in our fast changing society, such changes are not considered as a transition anymore. In this vein, Inkson (1995) noted that the number of managers who declared a change in duties increased steadily from 2.8% in 1980 to 8% in 1992. Jobs became more flexible and diverse. This could be an explanation for not interpreting job changes as an internal transition nowadays. Qualitative research approaches have a chance to investigate former and current understanding of job changes, which we encourage herewith.

Future research should focus more elaborated on individual differences, given the demographic change, especially for older professionals. A comparison of industry affiliation and

individual characteristics between the groups of changers and long-lasting employees should help to draw a more nuanced picture of developments in career patterns over time. Also, further analyses on the explanatory power of economic growth for different age groups might be interesting. Preliminary analyses have shown that the GDP has a strong effect size for young and middle-aged professionals, but not for seniors. Moreover, an expansion of the research design to other employee groups, as e.g. clerical workers can give interesting insights on the scope of our results.

CONCLUSION

In the present study the focus is on careers, more precisely those of managers and professionals, full time and not limited, engaged in large formal organizations; Even if the working subject is within conventional contemporary management and career discourses constructed and defined as self-responsible, autonomous and innovative (career) actor, we assume, following Roper et al (2010: 674), that “career boundarylessness disadvantages at least as many people as it advantages” (ibid.).

The increasing dynamic of careers over the past decades, the growing flexibility and a strong agentic emphasis linked with career transitions constitute corner stones and largely unchallenged assumptions in career research. Our empirical results add to the growing literature which takes a more differentiated and somewhat sceptical view on these assumptions. Stasis instead of change, and even counter-intuitive results dominate. This not only invites further research in other national and institutional contexts than Germany to take a closer look at the developments in various contexts, learning more about the important role various elements of the respective contexts for careers and career decisions. It also cautions us against premature subscription to seemingly universal developments that might be only true for a specific combination of individual and contextual characteristics. Hopefully, both deepens our understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

The current case shows that German manager’s formal job changes did not strongly increase during the last two decade. This does, however, by no means imply that we assume that the work (organization) and career practices and the discursive normative expectations with which these professionals are confronted would not have changed since the late 80s. By contrast, we want to emphasize that managers are, like other employment groups and professionals (even if not in same way), affected by social, politico-economic and institutional transformation processes (Boltanski/Chiapello 2006). Our future research will consider these effects in more detail and, thus, put a stronger focus on qualitative changes in manager’s careers.

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