
1 Sustainable careers: introductory chapter

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TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY CAREER APPROACH

The study of careers became established within the more general field of organization studies in the mid-1970s (see Moore et al., 2007, for an appealing overview of the historical roots of career theory). Since then, to cite Arthur et al. (1989), ‘career theory has “gone legitimate”’. We (people who study careers) have become established. We have become a *field* (p. xv). ‘What was so remarkable about the 1989 *Handbook* was its highly creative approach’ (Gunz and Peiperl, 2007, p. 2). Arthur et al. (1989) allowed the structure of the career field to emerge from the ‘review chapters with a point of view’ (p. xvii, cited in Gunz and Peiperl, 2007, p. 2).

Next, Arthur et al. launched their ground-breaking book *The New Careers: Individual Action & Economic Change* (1999), building upon Karl Weick’s work on the *enactment* of careers (1996). From their book you can hear the voices of working people themselves, people from highly different socio-economic backgrounds, with different work histories and employment experiences, and reflecting the uncertainties and hardships in career patterns in the New Economy, which were being reported globally (see the preface of their book). These scholars show that traditional conceptions of careers were rooted in the stable conditions of the Industrial State model which has dominated the twentieth century and that new career models, better attuned to the New Economy of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, are needed. With their work, the idea of careers as actions rather than structures was born, as means of learning rather than means of earning, and as boundaryless entities rather than constrained ones. As such, Arthur et al. (1999) responded to Barbara Lawrence’s call for a historical perspective to be used while studying careers by pushing thinking about alternative explanations for phenomena, identifying more or less stable concepts, and expanding research horizons by suggesting new ways of studying old questions (Lawrence, 1984).

In 2007, Inkson’s valuable contribution entitled *Understanding Careers: The Metaphors of Working Lives* appeared, and provided us with a unique framework of nine archetypical metaphors (inheritances, cycles, actions, fit, journeys, roles, relationships, resources and stories) to encapsulate the field of career studies, which he illustrated by means of more than 50 career cases. His endeavor stressed the need to study careers in a more complete, balanced and integrated way. Inkson (2007), and in the recently updated version Inkson et al. (2015), advocated the use of these metaphors as they provide a variety of lenses to view the phenomenon of careers and demonstrate the richness of the career concept.

In exactly the same year, and, in a similar vein, supporting the idea that careers should be studied using a wider approach, the *Handbook of Career Studies* by Gunz and Peiperl (2007) appeared, which explicitly focused on the concept as it relates to the world of work. The editors defined work as ‘that which one does to make a living’ (Gunz and

Peiperl, 2007, p.4), and explicitly aimed to help reduce the fragmentation of the field's knowledge structure and facilitate scholars working on careers research to move toward a consensus about what really matters. We believe that their endeavor has indeed resulted in what they hoped for: 'greater interdependencies between research streams' (p. 8).

Our own empirical work on careers, their antecedents, both in terms of organizational as well as individual career initiatives, and their outcomes, has inspired us to explore the face validity of focusing on a new line in careers research, incorporating the perspective of *sustainability*. In today's New Economy, wherein uncertainties and hardships in career patterns are highly prevalent worldwide, focusing upon the sustainability of individuals' careers is of utmost importance. As workers have moved from an expectation of lifelong employment towards a focus on the need to protect their employability (Forrier and Sels, 2003; Fugate et al., 2004; Van der Heijden et al., 2009), it is important to increase our knowledge of those elements that contribute to sustainable careers for all workers, and to further our understanding of factors at different levels affecting this sustainability (De Vos and Gielens, 2014a; 2014b).

With this *Handbook*, we therefore intend to help close some knowledge gaps, as highlighted by Schein (2007, p. 576) in his afterword for the *Handbook of Career Studies*, by dealing with contemporary issues and dilemmas, such as the ever-increasing struggle to maintain a work-home balance, the impact of New Ways of Working, and the problems of later career and retirement, to mention but a few. Throughout the book, pertinent questions are addressed with respect to sustainability of contemporary careers, which aim to stimulate thinking and research on this topic.

Next, we will start with the conceptualization of *careers*, followed by an outline of four important elements characterizing the concept that have undergone important changes in recent years. Subsequently, we will go into the concept of *sustainable careers*. Finally, we will outline the *content of this Handbook* by putting the spotlight on every contribution, and by giving an overview of what our colleagues will offer you in the chapters that follow.

THE NEED FOR A NEW CAREER CONCEPT

A career is defined as the sequence of work experiences that evolves over the individual's life course (Arthur et al., 1989; Arthur et al., 1999; Greenhaus et al., 2010; Hall, 1976; 2002). Arthur et al. (1989) pointed out two central elements in this definition, namely 'work' and 'time' (p. 8). Building upon their conceptual work and the work by others on the changing nature of careers (for example, Arthur et al., 1999), we differentiate between four central elements in the definition of careers, namely the elements of *time*, *social space*, *agency* and *meaning*. Over the past decades, substantial evolutions have taken place in the world of work which have important implications for each of these elements, and which call for the reconsideration of the notion of contemporary careers, leading us to introduce the notion of 'sustainable careers'. We thereby aim to continue to respond to the call by Barbara Lawrence (1984) to put careers in a historical perspective in order to better understand what has changed in the time frame of careers, the social space in which careers take place, the agency with regard to careers, and the meaning of a career for the individual employee. Let us continue with an explanation of these four elements:

- *Time*: careers provide a ‘moving perspective’ (Hughes, 1958) on the unfolding interaction between a person and society (in Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8). That is to say, a career refers to the movement of a person through time, and hence, time is an inherent ingredient of every career. Over the past decades, there have been substantial changes in this element of time. One only has to think about changes in length of different career episodes or sequences, decreasing predictability of what will happen with one’s career over time, even changes in the timing of when and where you do your work (cf. *New Ways of Working*), to understand that careers indeed are to be characterized as ‘new’ (see also Thijssen et al., 2008 who gave a historical overview and a critical analysis of the concept of employability). In addition, another important change in the time element of careers concerns its length. Especially in Europe, over the past decade there has been a change in mindset that careers should last longer, meaning that individuals face a longer career in terms of expected retirement age. This combination of longer careers with less predictable and, in many cases, shorter-term career sequences calls for a reconsideration of the traditional notion of a career. The disappearance of careers with a predictable length and order of sequences, which was more deterministic for individuals, has made room for more options and opportunities to shape one’s career over time. Obviously, more options entail more choices to be made but also more uncertainties and hardships, as career scripts are becoming less clear.
- *Social space*: careers reflect the relationships between people and the providers of official positions, namely organizations or institutions, and how these relationships fluctuate over time (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 8). Careers are at the intersection between both, and as such are influenced by factors that stem from individuals’ life spheres (family or one’s broader life context) and by factors situated in the organization. Both, in turn, are situated within a broader societal context that is also affecting individuals’ career experiences (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014). That is to say, as a career refers to the movement of a person through social space as well, careers cannot be studied without considering the context with which they are inherently connected. This element of context has also undergone substantial changes over the past decades. Careers have moved from being bounded to being boundaryless (Arthur, 2014; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994), as both the broader life and organizational context as well as the broader societal context of individuals and organizations have undergone substantial changes (think, for instance, of the increasing globalization, technological evolutions, changes in the nature of work, demographic changes like ageing of the working population, and the growing prevalence of dual career patterns, to give some examples). Obviously, these changes have made careers more complex. As an individual’s career is no longer contained within a single or only a few employment settings over time, the ‘career playing field’ is seemingly endless (boundaryless). That is to say, the amount of choices individuals have to make across life spheres has expanded, yet, at the same time, we perceive an ever-increasing amount of unpredictability of career outcomes, and a decrease in job security (Lee et al., 2011). Otherwise stated, individuals may perceive more career opportunities, which, however, are in many cases at the risk of the sustainability of their careers.
- *Agency*: notwithstanding the many influential (structural) factors on all levels

(personal circumstances, job, organization, profession, society) that shape careers, a career is owned by an individual, and he or she is the one that has to idiosyncratically deal with, and respond to, stability and/or change in the world of work (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). We observe a general tendency to conceive of careers as more independent from organizations than they used to be in times of more predictability, stable growth, and employment contracts with a long-term perspective (for example, Arthur, 2014; Bidwell and Briscoe, 2010; Briscoe et al., 2006; Gubler et al., 2013; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Contrary to the traditional organization-based career, where the organization had primary responsibility for managing individuals' careers, in contemporary careers individual agency is the key to continuous career success. The individual is considered as the primary owner of his or her career and this ownership comes together with an increased responsibility in a world wherein everything seems to be more complex, and with seemingly more choices than ever. All in all, contemporary careers are not easy to handle, and entail the need for individuals to focus on a longer-term approach instead of taking career decisions with a short-term view in mind, the need to integrate career decisions with other life domains instead of a one-sided approach, the need to align individual career norms and objectives with employer norms and objectives, and so on. To conclude, agency requires the development of a set of career competencies (knowing how, knowing why, knowing whom; Arthur et al., 1995). Moreover, individuals are not as rational in their career decisions as an overemphasis on individual agency might suggest (De Vos, 2013). Finally, this individual agency does not imply that other actors in the career field (organizations, institutions) no longer have any responsibility in terms of managing careers (De Vos and Gielens, 2014b).

- *Meaning*: careers are subject to change in terms of what they bring to an individual, not in the least in terms of the value of specific career outcomes, as nicely pointed out by Arthur et al. (1999) when describing the evolution of careers from 'means of earning to means of learning'. In a similar vein, Inkson (2007) reported that individuals can have many different conceptions of careers, as reflected in the different metaphors that people use to describe their careers. The 'new' careers literature stresses that with the gradual displacement of the traditional psychological contract, based upon an exchange of long-term employment for loyalty and upward progress, by a new employability-based psychological contract, the meaning of careers and career success has changed (Dries et al., 2008; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Careers are no longer a mere succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy, through which persons move in an ordered sequence. Evolutions in the socio-economic context have diminished the occurrence of traditional, upwardly mobile careers and as such the experience of objective career success reflected in observable attainments such as pay, promotion and occupational status (Dries et al., 2008). With careers being defined as the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time (Arthur et al., 1989), subjective career success refers to career satisfaction about all aspects of these career experiences relevant to an individual. This implies that the meaning of career success will be determined by what one is realizing in comparison with one's internal career anchors (Schein, 1985). This makes the *meaning* of a career much more idiosyncratic than

it used to be. This is both an opportunity, as career choices can be made in accordance with one's inner life values, but also a challenge, as individuals have to derive satisfaction and fulfillment from their own anchors, rather than from how others evaluate them. In combination with the three elements described above, in an increasingly unpredictable and complex world of work, individuals are viewed as having primary responsibility for their own career and career success, in line with their subjective values. Yet, at the same time, underlying this new view on career success is that employability has become a core element and a critical vehicle for attaining whatever type of subjective success criterion that individuals might strive for.

All in all, we believe that these changes with regard to time, social space, agency and meaning have important implications for careers, the practice of career management, and the field of career studies. Contemporary career research departed from this complex and constantly changing socio-economic environment and has introduced new career concepts, such as the boundaryless career (Arthur, 1994), protean career (Hall, 1976; 2002), kaleidoscope career (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), customized career (Valcour et al., 2007), and post-corporate career (Peiperl and Baruch, 1997). These new career concepts respond to changing employment relationships, for example, by stressing boundaryless careers or the importance of individual agency and personal meaning in careers. Over the past decades, the theory building and stream of empirical research in these fields have significantly contributed to our understanding of careers and the factors affecting careers and career outcomes.

However, in this *Handbook*, we go one step further by adding the perspective of 'sustainability', thereby incorporating evolutions in the four dimensions described above. As such, we do not so much aim to replace the contemporary career concepts, we rather advocate a fresh perspective on careers that recognizes the complexity of the career concept, thereby elaborating on these existing career concepts. For instance, whilst individual agency and personal meaning are central to the protean career concept, adding long-term implications of career choices as reflected in the time perspective, and contextual constraints as reflected in the dimension of social space can yield further insights into the sustainability of careers. In a similar vein, the concept of boundaryless careers suggests an independent stance of individuals towards their careers. Adding a sustainability perspective to this would provide a more nuanced picture of how actors within different contexts (for example, in one's working organization, one's broader life sphere, and in the broader societal context) interact with one another, have their impact on careers and can affect the sustainability of careers over time.

A more recent but growing line of careers research addresses the concept of employability as a prerequisite for career success (see, for instance, Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006). In line with theories on employability, we advocate a broader approach to careers that recognizes the challenges and pitfalls that are inherent in it. Adding the individual's employability (that is, career potential) to the range of interesting career outcomes, in addition to objective and subjective career success indicators that have been prevalent in research up to now, is another example of how the sustainability perspective might be incorporated in careers research. Taken together, career reality is complex and this implies that research questions are complex, and ideally need to address the

different dimensions that have been distinguished above. Careers form a complex mosaic of objective experiences and subjective evaluations, unfolding over time and within an increasingly complex environment. The rich variety of possible sequences of experiences making up an individual's career implies that we may encounter examples of both a 'positive spiral', wherein career episodes over time become enriched, and a 'negative spiral', wherein career episodes may be characterized by, for instance, demotivating and/or unrewarding experiences. The complexity of our world today entails many opportunities for individuals to make choices in line with their inner drives, but yet there is also an ample list of factors (as shown by the contributors to this *Handbook*) that might put careers 'at risk' for many individuals in today's society. Moreover, what might appear to be a 'successful' or 'satisfying' career in the short run does not always turn out to remain so in the long run. For instance, an overly ambitious young graduate might face a burnout during his thirties due to constantly running after new challenges, and this might put the long-term success of his career at risk. Or another employee might feel satisfied with a repetitive job without training or development opportunities, which allows her to combine work easily with family life, but then, unfortunately, faces the reality of her skills having become obsolete at a certain point in time, leading to job loss. These are just a few examples demonstrating that a fresh perspective on contemporary careers is urgently needed. First, this perspective needs to be multi-dimensional as this entails opportunities to study contemporary careers using a non-normative, yet rather flexible framework, clearly depicting the increasing variety in careers. Second, to fully understand careers, a long-term perspective is needed.

As mentioned by Arthur et al. (1989) in the preface of their *Handbook*, careers 'have to do with the long-term issues associated with working in organizations' (p. xv). Arthur et al. (1989) posited that career studies might suffer from the fact that many scholars address increasingly narrow and decreasingly innovative questions, and called for 'a good shot in the arm' in order to help rejuvenate career theory and to help us adapt to the dynamic character of modern industrial society (p. 7). Fortunately, a lot has happened over time, and career scholars have dealt with many appealing questions over the past decades. Still we believe that, exactly a quarter of an era later, time has come to give 'another good shot in the arm' responding to the new dynamics of current industrial society. This is why we introduce the concept of 'sustainable careers', yet only after we have briefly summarized some key notions on the concept of 'sustainability'.

SUSTAINABILITY

In Merriam-Webster, 'sustainable' is referred to as things that are 'able to last or continue for a long time' and that are 'able to be used without being depleted or destroyed', as well as 'methods of using resources that support their conservation and renewal' (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable>). The UN defines 'sustainability' as: 'a general worldview according to which people should strive to fulfill their needs in a manner such that the ability of future generations to fulfill their needs is not endangered' (Docherty et al., 2009, p. 3). In a similar vein, Latzke and colleagues (Chapter 4, this volume) defined sustainability as development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED,

1987, p. 43; cf. Ehnert and Harry, 2012, p. 223), (see De Lange et al., 2015, for a historical overview of the concept of ‘sustainability’ and its relevant components).

De Lange et al. (2015) who explicitly aimed to conceptualize ‘sustainability at work’, signaled the recent addition of the notion of human (also labeled as social) to the sustainability debate (Garavan and McGuire, 2010, p. 491), and cited Pfeffer (2010) who referred to human sustainability as follows: ‘Just as physical sustainability considers the consequences of organizational activity for material or physical resources, social sustainability might consider how organizational activities affect people’s physical and mental health and well-being – the stress of work practices on the human system’ (p. 35). An exemplary definition in this regard was provided by Carl Holling (2001), who defined human sustainability as: ‘the capacity to create, test and maintain adaptive capability’ (p. 390). Holling’s definition is related to the operationalization of the concept of employability by Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden (2006): ‘the capacity of continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competences’ (p. 453). The latter suggests an important responsibility of the individual employee in creating, testing and maintaining his or her own work capacity or ability. In a similar vein, Oldham and Hackman (2010) stressed the increasing importance of personal initiative of workers to successfully progress or adjust one’s work capacity or ability across time by shaping or customizing their jobs in order to protect their sustainability at work (for example, via job crafting; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

In view of the above, we introduce the concept of *sustainable careers* and define it as *the sequence of an individual’s different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual.*

- Different patterns of *continuity over time* means that in the sequence of different kinds of career experiences, periods of employment can be interchanged by periods of part-time work, volunteering, unemployment, sabbatical leave, care-giving, and so on. In responding to individual aspirations, capabilities, needs and expectations with regard to work and personal life, satisfying, healthy, meaningful and productive career episodes (or experiences) are obtained and may be better protected thanks to career adaptability and employability-enhancing competencies. This continuity is preserved by taking into consideration consequences of career decisions over time. In line with the general notion of sustainability outlined above, continuity implies that present needs are being fulfilled without compromising future needs. A career is, in essence, dynamic. It is a cycle of events and decisions that determine the work people are doing, the changes they make from one job to another (within or across organizations), or transitions between paid work and other statuses (for example, non-paid work, unemployment, temporary leave, and retirement). These events, decisions and their outcomes (that is, subjective and objective career success) are intertwined. Given this dynamism, sustainability might have strategic potential as a concept for careers, and aligning sustainability

to careers might allow us to better understand what is sustainability at work, how we can foster sustainability at work, and which determinants play a role in maintaining and further developing sustainable careers.

- *Social space*. It goes without saying that the previously mentioned substantial changes in the career context, that is the economic and broader societal environment and the way organizations operate, do have effects upon the *social space* wherein careers unfold. Careers are enacted within and across different types of contexts (work, home, friends, leisure) (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014), and they have become more boundaryless (Arthur, 1994; 2014). Continuity here implies that influences of actors and factors in the social space, as well as the choices individuals make regarding (the combination of) the different social spaces they live in, may impact the sustainability of their careers. There is an urgent need to gain more insight into the impact on employees' careers of the growing unpredictability of the economic environment, of New Ways of Working and new types of organizations, dual career couples, and the need to care for elderly parents, to give some examples. How can different stakeholders, residing in the individual's broader social space (such as employers, employees, and one's relatives), help to protect and enhance sustainable careers across the life-span, despite – or maybe thanks to – these evolutions?
- As reflected in the dimension of 'social space' elaborated above, the organizational and broader life context will affect individuals' career choices. By *agency* we mean that how the career develops over time is the result of many choices made by the individual owner of the career, not the mere consequence of external influences and constraints stemming from this social space. Choices are made in line with the individual's career and private needs and aspirations, yet, obviously, these have to be aligned with organizational (employer) objectives and cannot be separated from the individual's broader life context in order to balance or compromise between (opposing) the individual's work, career and private interests, on the one hand, and (opposing) the employer's interests on the other hand (Van der Heijde and Van der Heijden, 2006; Van der Heijden et al., 2009). Sustainability in careers will stem from alignment, from mutual benefits for the individual and organization, as well as mutual benefits for the individual and his or her broader life context. Given that individuals are the primary owners of their careers, they are 'in charge' of expressing their interests and needs to all stakeholders involved. Yet, given the many social spaces in which careers are involved, over time this has not become an easy task. We advocate that sustainable career management is only possible if employers and employees, and all other stakeholders involved, strive for more openness in communication about expectations regarding work and personal development (see also Van der Heijden, 2005). However, given the pluriformity of the workforce and the increasing differentiation in individual aspirations, capabilities, career competencies and employability needs, individuals need to steer their career development by accepting and reflecting agency. Agency is also a timely topic when considering the sustainability of careers for those groups who are more vulnerable on the labor market (for example, young workers without qualifications, unemployed older workers, to name just a few). The latter often experience a lack of agency due to a lack of required (career) competencies, or due to the

negative experiences they encounter when putting this agency into practice without the desired result of obtaining a job.

- *Meaning.* Nowadays, careers entail a continuous need to produce new expertise, while, at the same time, they create new opportunities for development. The qualifications that are required for a job are becoming increasingly complex while, simultaneously, the ‘half life’ of these qualifications is becoming increasingly shorter (Van der Heijden, 2005). Employees who are able to make their careers sustainable and who are able to survive the current needs are the ones with not only the most up-to-date knowledge and skills, but also the capability to continuously build up the new expertise requirements, whilst at the same time deriving *meaning* from their professional activities. The more pluriform the working population, the increasing importance of other areas of life, such as ‘quality time’ with family and friends, leisure, differences in coping style, personality, and the increasing individualization, to mention but a few, all urge us to prevent thinking in categories regarding retirement age, career peaks, career success, learning needs and so on. Employees have totally different ideas on and answers to career-related questions like: How long do I have to go on for? How long will I be allowed to? How long do I still have? How long do I want to go on for? That is to say, individual employees attach highly different values (or meaning) to different career sequences and outcomes.

Unarguably, the variety in possible answers to these questions supports the notion to elaborate research on careers incorporating the dimensions of continuity over time, social space, agency and meaning. That is to say, sustainable careers are the ones that respect the pluriformity in the working population. Moreover, while earlier work seems to focus upon professional workers, in our approach we take an ‘inclusive’ perspective on careers. Careers are not the exclusive domain of professional workers, but instead apply to all individuals as part of the workforce. Challenges with regard to sustainability of careers might differ depending on the segment of the workforce (for example, depending on the individual’s education, occupation/profession or position), yet the notion of careers applies to everyone and this also holds when studying sustainable careers.

We would like to emphasize that the focus of our definition lies on the individual, yet, as indicated above, a career that is sustainable implies a balance between individual and organizational needs, and hence should imply continuity not only for the individual but also for the organization. In this sense, we bring the organization back into the definition of careers, albeit while attaching a broader meaning to it than usual. Nowadays, there are many different types of organizations and the range is very broad (from the typical ‘GE’ type of company, at one end of the continuum, versus an alliance of some freelance persons, at the other end), implying that sustainability of the individual’s career is highly dependent upon the ability one has to align individual needs with the needs of the specific type of organization with which one is employed. As such, we turn back to Schein’s (1978) conception of careers as a matching process between individual and organizational expectations.

TOWARDS MORE SCHOLARLY WORK ON SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

We believe that, in line with current socio-economic evolutions and the increasing need to better understand factors that might contribute to sustainability at work, the boundaryless career concept defined as ‘sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings’ (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994, p.307; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1996, p. 116) still forms a rich and relevant framework, allowing sustainability to be studied. This ought to be done by going beyond the study of career sequences from the limited perspective of direct physical mobility (personal conversation with Michael Arthur, 5 July 2014; Arthur, 2014), and taking the previously outlined multi-dimensional perspective incorporating continuity over time, social space, agency and meaning. This also means that we elaborate on ideas from protean career theory (Hall, 2002) by stressing the importance of meaning and individual ownership of careers, while at the same time acknowledging the contextual constraints (as reflected in the other three dimensions of our conceptualization). Obviously, one can come up with similar lines of reasoning building upon the other contemporary career concepts, such as kaleidoscope career, customized career, and post-corporate career.

As such, we advocate the rich approach outlined by Arthur (2014), who described a boundaryless career as typified by the following six characteristics: (a) moves across the boundaries of separate employers; (b) occupational careers drawing validation from outside any single employer; (c) careers sustained by external networks or information; (d) careers where traditional hierarchical reporting relationships were broken; (e) rejection of career opportunities for personal or family reasons; and (f) careers where people ‘may perceive a boundaryless future, regardless of structural constraints’ (p. 3).

The ‘boundaryless career’ concept referring to careers as actions rather than structures, as means of learning rather than means of earning, and as boundaryless entities rather than constrained ones (Arthur et al., 1999) forms a sound basis or starting point to help individual employees understand the ample amount of opportunities all parties involved have to shape careers in order to make them sustainable. The notion of a boundaryless career seems to depart from an ‘optimistic’ or ‘positive’ perspective, implicitly stating that – whatever conception of ‘boundaryless’ individuals might enact in their career – the concept is associated with positive career outcomes. However, we believe that the complexity of today’s world calls for the need to take a broader and long-term view, incorporating both stimulating and hindering factors in the light of sustainable career outcomes. While aiming to build upon the notion of ‘independence from, rather than dependence on, traditional organizational career arrangements’ (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), we have invited the contributing authors to reflect on present-day careers, and their possible influencing factors, while focusing upon their ideas about sustainability at work.

According to Latzke and colleagues (Chapter 4, this volume), a sustainable career is viable (renewable, flexible, integrative), a sound career strategy should be long term, and career investments are based on a holistic foundation, but also dependent on the other agents’ strategies and behaviors. They state: ‘Even the most viable, holistic and long-term strategy may fail if the significant others’ behavior is at odds with a sustainable destiny in the field. On top of this, in contexts where mere survival is the ultimate career goal [. . .], questions of sustainability do not even arise’.

A sustainable career is thus one that endures over time and that is characterized by development, conservation and renewal of the working individual's career-related resources, including human and social capital (for example, skills, credentials, reputation, relationships) as well as personal characteristics such as proactivity and resilience that aid in career self-management (for example, Arthur and Kram, 1989; Granrose and Portwood, 1987; Parker et al., 2010; Pazy, 1988) (Valcour, Chapter 2, this volume).

Building on the general notion of sustainability, sustainability in careers implies protecting and fostering (rather than depleting) human and career development with a focus on balance and renewal (Newman, 2011). Correspondingly, Fleisher et al. (Chapter 6, this volume) stated that 'sustainable career management entails increasing employees' awareness for career capital acquisition, stimulating them in making use of these resources, and having them reflect on how they can benefit from these in their job or future career'.

If we consider the concept of sustainable careers across the life-span, it is obvious that sustainability appears to be increasingly problematic in many key stages of the career life cycle (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014). For example, more and more career starters are facing serious problems in finding employment in their early career phase, while at the same time endangering their employability by a lack of learning opportunities in the workplace. In addition, older adults, coping with late career issues, are being let go years before they planned to retire as industries are restructured and jobs are changing at an ever-increasing rate. As regards employees facing mid-career issues, parents, caregivers for elders, and many highly-talented individuals (especially women) are finding it increasingly difficult to synthesize family demands with careers and leadership roles (Gautun and Hagen, 2010). Zaniboni et al.'s definition (Chapter 18, this volume) of sustainable careers provides a clear example of incorporating this life-span perspective into conceptualizing the concept: 'a career path that fits with the needs and aspirations of the person, together with the opportunities and constraints of organizations and societies. In particular, regarding older workers, this could mean staying longer in the labor market and staying satisfied, engaged, productive and healthy'.

De Hauw and Greenhaus (Chapter 15, this volume) defined a sustainable career as a career in which employees remain healthy, productive, happy and employable throughout its course and that fits into their broader life context. This definition is based upon the work of Greenhaus and Kossek (2014) and Kossek et al. (2014), who stated that a sustainable career has the following essential characteristics: (a) is successfully integrated into a satisfying personal and family life that fits with one's core and career and life values; (b) provides employees a sense of sufficient security to meet economic needs and well-being; (c) comprises flexibility and capacity to suit one's changing needs and interests; and (d) is characterized by renewability such that an individual has regular opportunities for rejuvenation.

Given the theoretical outline that has been given above, we may conclude that different trends are observable in these reflections. First, the trend of individualism and individual agency. Second, the increasing awareness of the impact of the organizational, broader life context, and societal context when studying and enhancing sustainability in careers. Therefore, we advocate an integrative approach that highlights the role and interconnectedness of multiple actors (that is, individual employees, employers, organizations, and other stakeholders) (see also De Lange et al., 2015). Notwithstanding the

individual responsibility for sustainable careers, organizations should also be actively engaged in protecting and enhancing sustainability at work. That is to say, the efforts and activities of both employees and employers should be carefully aligned in order to come up with life-span-aware and diversity-friendly sustainable career management.

Moreover, we would like to call for a non-normative framework aimed at enhancing healthy, prosperous, productive and challenging careers that are beneficial for both parties involved (see the bullet point above on the dimension of Meaning for more specific thoughts in this regard). Sustainable careers are built upon the notion that they should allow individuals to have positive career experiences over the long term in ways that promote organizational and individual effectiveness (Herman and Lewis, 2012; Kossek et al., 2014). Therefore, in our opinion, mutual understanding between employee and employer (in particular direct management parties) is key in order to respond to the above-mentioned pluriformity of the workforce and to align employees' individual aspirations, capabilities and expectations with regard to work and private life with the employer's goals and expectations (see also Van der Heijden, 2005).

The focus of this *Handbook* is on the individual employee's career and its sustainability. Across the different chapters this career concept is considered through different lenses, including meso- and macro-level changes that might influence the micro-level of individual careers. However, the macro- and meso-level in themselves do not form part of this *Handbook*. Particularly, we follow the conceptualization of the career as an individual's construction – through sense-making – of their experiences in their work as well as their broader (private) life. As such, careers comprise a constant interplay of external events and individual actions developing over time (Lee et al., 2011). Similarly, Valcour (Chapter 2, this volume) refers to a so-called struggle 'to find work that fits their skills and interests, to keep learning and developing, to manage both work and personal responsibilities, and to achieve security and stability in the midst of a dynamic and often difficult business and labor market environment' (individual perspective) in combination with the struggle of 'employers [that] need to find ways to attract, retain, motivate, develop and manage employees that are cost-effective and responsive to both the needs of the business and the needs and preferences of employees'.

To conclude, in line with Valcour, we plead for far more attention to the alignment of career-related needs and goals of employees and organizations which come together in the notion of a sustainable career. It goes without saying that the contributing authors to this *Handbook* have truly helped us in shaping our ideas on sustainable careers as well, and, as such, this introductory chapter shows that the concept is under construction.

OUTLINE OF THIS *HANDBOOK*

In this introductory chapter we have dealt with our conceptualization of 'sustainable careers', and advocated an integral perspective wherein both the importance of individual responsibility and (broader) contextual factors are taken into account. Moreover, we have given an overview of different factors and ingredients that ought to form the basis for contemporary approaches both in research and practice aimed at maintaining and enhancing sustainability at work. Valcour's contribution helps us to better understand the concept of sustainable careers, its responsible parties, and possible

outcomes. She comes up with an appealing categorization of four primary attributes of sustainable careers: (1) alignment of work with the individual's strengths, interests and values; (2) ongoing learning and renewal; (3) security via employability; and (4) work–life fit over the life course. Next, she moves to a discussion of possible consequences of these attributes, and differentiates between four core objectives of talent management: (1) maximum yield on human capital value; (2) continuous updating of organizational competencies; (3) stability via adaptability; and (4) organizational commitment and retention. Herewith, she explicitly supports our notion that the crafting of sustainable careers within organizations occurs at the *intersection between individuals and organizations*, and that in the case of a collaborative partnership between both parties, advantageous outcomes are attainable.

The chapter by Buyken and colleagues goes into the fostering role that career adaptability of employees can play in the light of constructing sustainable careers. In addition to presenting an interesting *multi-dimensional operationalization of the concept*, their contribution responds to the need for taking up a *life-span perspective* in contemporary career research. Specifically, they discuss career adaptability by dealing with employees in different life transitions and career stages. Moreover, both the individual and (broader) societal perspective are taken into account, herewith complying with our call for this mutual responsibility perspective in research on sustainable careers. Latzke and associates, in their contribution on relational career capital, add the importance of the *relational dimension* to research and practice on sustainable careers. The authors stress that using a *holistic view*, wherein viable investments in building up career capital use a *long-term strategy*, is the key for sustainable career management. Their Bourdieuan-inspired concept of career capital is built upon the idea that, in comparison with traditional views of career capital, the complex interrelation between individual agency and the social structure should be emphasized in order to enhance our understanding of the value of career capital. Specifically, they focus upon empirical work on the value of career capital by studying business school graduates across several career fields. Bozionelos also adds the *relational perspective* to the study of sustainable careers and deals with the value of social capital (that is, resources that become available via relationship ties in the workplace and the society) in the light of individual career prospects, over and above other forms of capital, including human capital. He goes into specific career activities, such as mentoring relationships and network ties, and how these contribute to social capital. Moreover, Bozionelos critically reflects on the tensions that utilization of social capital for career benefit might cause by comparing the interests of individuals or circumscribed groups versus the interests of the wider collective, and cautions for a 'dark side' to it. Fleisher and colleagues proceed with enhancing our insight into the value of the *relational dimension* in sustainable careers research and practice, and advocate that employees' engagement in corporate volunteering initiatives may be beneficial in the light of *career capital building*. Their qualitative case study focuses on the importance of volunteering initiatives for individual workers' psychological, human and social capital, which they may use, in turn, to contribute to organizational culture, capabilities and connections. In addition, in the light of the *balance dimension* to sustainable careers, from their contribution, we may conclude that volunteering experiences might be beneficial for both individual career outcomes as well as for further organizational development. Egold and Van Dick add to the scholarly work regarding the *relational*

perspective to the study of sustainable careers and suggest that identification, disidentification, ambivalent identification and neutral identification, on the one hand, with an organization or a professional network, and/or occupational groupings, on the other hand, are important aspects that might explain career outcomes related to sustainability at work (that is, job satisfaction, well-being and work engagement). In their empirical work, they moreover deal with potential antecedents of identification, that is, need for identification, positive and negative affectivity, tenure, intra-role conflict, role ambiguity and individualism. They herewith provide us with empirical proof for the importance of including the relational dimension within future work on sustainable careers. In a different vein, Richardson and Kelliher add a further operationalization of the *relational dimension* of the sustainable career concept. Their large-scale empirical work explores the implications of developments in technology that facilitate remote workers' interaction with colleagues, managers and customers. In addition to meeting formal performance targets, this study found a perceived need to maintain and enhance visibility to ensure career progression and continued employment. Richardson and Kelliher critically reflect on the implications of these outcomes in the light of current HR policies related to sustainable careers. Their contribution is important in the light of the increasing implementation of New Ways of Working across the globe. Vinkenburch and associates come up with a conceptual integrative *framework on sustainability in combining career and care*. They plead for exposing, challenging and changing underlying normative and gendered beliefs about ideal workers and ideal parents or care providers, as the interplay between normative beliefs, behavior or 'choice', and career outcomes has important consequences in the light of possibilities to promote sustainability and true *flexibility* in combining career and care. Semeijn et al. provide a framework for individual (being the micro-level dimension) sustainable labor participation, in terms of its components employability, vitality and workability. However, when discussing the impact of possible determinants of sustainable labor participation, they take a *broader view* building upon the Job Demands–Resources Model, and differentiate between what *employees (micro-level)* and *employers (meso-level)* can do to realize more sustainable organizational practices. De Cuyper and colleagues deal with the relationship between felt job insecurity and perceived employability, both being important characteristics reflecting negative and positive sides of the concept of sustainable careers. They conclude that in order to better understand issues of causality in this relationship, multiple mediators as well as personal and structural factors as potential moderators are to be included. Herewith, they support our view that sustainable careers should be studied at the *intersection between individual employees and organizations*, and that a *mutual responsibility perspective* should be taken. Verbruggen and associates examined antecedents (career competences) and outcomes (perceived employability) of two aspects of job mobility (boundaryless mindset and organizational mobility preference) using a sample of unemployed job seekers. They concluded that the relationship between psychological mobility and career outcomes might be significantly different across different groups in the labor market. Herewith the importance of including the *broader context dimension* in research and practice on sustainable careers is further backed up. It seems that a multi-dimensional perspective to sustainable careers indeed helps us to better facilitate individual career management. Van Dam and colleagues, in their contribution on the role of employee adaptability, proactivity and goal striving in the light of sustainable careers,

first stress the individual responsibility in modern careers. On the other hand, they support our *mutual responsibility perspective* by arguing that career sustainability requires adaptive behavior that is aimed at establishing or restoring the balance between the goals, interests, values and expectations of both the organization and the individual employee. Guest and Rodrigues, in their contribution on the importance of career control, provide further support for our notion on careers being at the *intersection between individuals and organizations, and incorporating a (broader) context*. The authors argue that career preferences and attitude, personality and human capital help to shape career decisions, yet that the latter will be influenced by external factors, such as parents and schooling, employing organizations, work–family issues, legislative factors, as well as macro-contextual factors. It is at this intersection between the individual and the organization where the potential for conflict over career control might evolve. Their empirical work indicates that career control is associated with career sustainability, measured as higher job, career and life satisfaction. Moving to the *life sphere domain*, De Hauw and Greenhaus go into the importance of work–home balance as a driver for career decisions. They come up with an appealing model, illustrated by means of clear examples of career decisions that individual employees may use, such as moving upwards, becoming self-employed, or working part-time, to protect or restore their career sustainability. Herewith, the *diversity dimension* is added to our thinking about contemporary careers in terms of an increased variety in possible career patterns. Mauno et al.’s empirical quantitative work, which also goes into the importance of the *life sphere domain*, indicates that atypical work arrangements, including non-standard working hours and temporary work, do not automatically imply negative family-related outcomes. However, there are certain risk factors (such as night shifts, and small children at home) that are positively associated with negative family-related outcomes (such as work–home conflict, marital instability, and children’s socio-emotional or cognitive problems). Obviously, their outcomes are highly relevant as negative family-related outcomes have important implications in the light of career sustainability. Aalbers and De Lange emphasize the importance of *healthy lifestyle and cognitive functioning* in the light of sustainable careers. In addition to describing the most frequently used behavior change theories, the current state of lifestyle intervention research and its many applications, the authors discuss different types of interventions, how they have been developed in practice, and go into appealing examples of eHealth interventions. They conclude with some insightful thoughts on how more *personalized care* may help us in sustainable career management across the life-span. Changing to the *time dimension* of sustainable careers, in this particular case life-stage, the work by Zaniboni and colleagues goes into the influence of job characteristics. They call for more work in the field of sustainable careers by taking a *broader view incorporating the importance of both individual effort, as well as organizational interventions*, in particular focusing on the role of job characteristics in the light of promoting successful ageing at work. Herewith, in addition to taking a *multi-dimensional approach to sustainable careers*, they also stress the *mutual responsibility perspective*. Schalk and colleagues continue to increase our insight into sustainable career management in the second half of the career (herewith touching upon the *diversity dimension* in career research) by focusing on specific issues that are prominent in the second half of the career, such as the difference in motives, career perspectives, the role of stereotypes, and health issues. They stress that career sustainability is only possible in

the event of a good fit between work and employee, and requires active efforts from both parties, that is employee and organization (by means of sound HR activities). They highlight particular challenges that women workers have to deal with in order to develop a sustainable career. Bal, in his search for ways to enable older workers to continue working, stresses the importance of *individualization of career arrangements*, and herewith supports our view of using a *non-normative framework in the management of sustainable careers*. Specifically, he goes into the added value of idiosyncratic deals (or I-deals) for retaining older workers' motivation and performance. In addition, his contribution is in line with our plea for incorporating the (broader) context. Supportive climate, psychological processes that occur within the worker, and fairness in the distribution of negotiated deals across the organization are all dealt with. De Prins and colleagues introduce a broader scope by moving from a single career perspective to a more integrated HRM and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) perspective. Their contribution definitely adds to the literature on contemporary careers by adopting a *critical reflection on present-day dominant HRM practices, systems and models*. They refer to sustainable career management as a specific domain of HRM that brings Respect, Openness and Continuity into career management by *balancing short- and long-term employee needs*. De Coen and colleagues move to the 'final' stage in sustainable career management and deal with the transition that employees go through when they face retirement. Specifically, they investigate how career competencies (self-awareness and adaptability) influence the intention to retire through their impact on self-directedness, career satisfaction and employability. From their empirical work they have found that self-awareness and adaptability increase self-directedness, which, in turn, relates positively to external employability and career satisfaction. The latter two appear to decrease retirement intention, and herewith are important career indicators in the light of sustainability at *the end of career span*. Adaptability thereby outweighs the impact of self-awareness. Froidevaux and Hirschi add to our understanding of how to ensure a 'smooth' transition to retirement by focusing on the role of meaning in life for retirees and meaningful work for older workers who are close to retirement. Building upon quotations from qualitative research, they describe ways to promote meaningful work for older workers and how to create a new meaning or to pursue a previous meaning as a retiree, and discuss different roles that individuals, organizations and career counselors can play in this regard. In addition to advocating a *multi-actor perspective*, they discuss the importance of the *dimensions of continuity and personal agency* as the building blocks of sustainable careers. Baruch comes up with a novel perspective on internal and external labor markets (within and outside organizations) that supports our notion of the importance of including *the broader labor market context in career research*. He discusses paradoxes, such as the co-existence of stable and dynamic labor markets or the existence of so-called different 'rules of the game' for different labor market segments (across professions, sectors and geographies). Next, he explores the potential of the concept of the ecosystem for understanding and managing sustainable careers. Bernhard-Oettel and Näswall continue to increase our insight into how to protect sustainability in careers across labor market transfers (and add to our understanding of the broader labor market context dimension), by dealing with career continuance and competency transfer in the context of re-employment coaching. Based upon their expertise, they discuss the importance of job context and content similarity for successful competency transfer. In addition, they go

into the influence of individuals' competency profile, their willingness to transfer their competencies, as well as factors which either facilitate or hinder competency transfer. Stone and Jawahar's contribution on the significance of task, citizenship and counter-productive performance behaviors for sustainable career development in organizational settings comprises exemplary work that illustrates the need to study careers at the *intersection between individuals and organizations*. Their fascinating outcomes, which have far-reaching consequences in the light of our specific careers, being academics, is important as it introduces the idea of a possible 'spillover' of the importance of predictors across life and career domains, and calls for more longitudinal research to better understand the impact in the light of sustainability in careers. Briscoe goes into the classroom setting and provides us with very interesting ideas on educational approaches for developing and maintaining careers for student-practitioners in a sustainable fashion. He emphasizes the independent and interactive roles of both the educators and student-practitioners, and he stresses the need to take a long-term view when having a dialogue on career development. He advises that the latter should comprise exchanges on identity, values, skills, experience, history and behaviors when trying to understand one's present and past, and outlines how to respond to the environment in order to create sustainable careers. Obviously, Briscoe touches upon all four elements of our conceptualization (time, social space, ownership and meaning).

To conclude, just as we approached our fellow authors to contribute to this *Handbook*, we also aim to invite scholars to continue working in this niche of career research, and to add new elements (or dimensions) to the definition of sustainable careers. Obviously, only time will tell us how sustainable our current thinking on careers is. We do hope, however, that by sharing our notions on sustainable careers, we will encourage many scholars to continue empirical work in this important knowledge field.

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