



# The conceptualization of career transitions

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## **Abstract**

This literature review examines different aspects of career transitions to provide a clear overview on the conceptualisation of career transitions. Relevant scientific literature was gathered from multiple scientific sources and were selected based on certain criteria. Results from this literature indicated nine different types of career transitions. Additionally, significant effects of motives based on individual characteristics, demographic factors and organisational factors in undertaking career transitions were reported. Furthermore, several contextual challenges and adaptive behaviours concerning career transitions were indicated. Finally, inconsistencies were found in examining the impact of career transitions throughout a large timespan. Results reported that the frequency of career transitions increased but also stability in job tenure and exit transitions. In conclusion, limitations, implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** career transitions, traditional career, contemporary careers, motives, career adaptability.

## Introduction

The era of employment for life is over, the 21<sup>st</sup> century worker is nomadic in nature (Arthur & Rousseau, 2010). The norm of holding one job or remaining with one work organization for life has given way to a pattern of periodic job changing (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Nowadays, the average person changes jobs ten to fifteen times during his or her career (BLS, 2016). The Bureau of Labor Statistics also reported that the average employee tenure decreased from 4.6 years in 2014 to 4.2 years in 2016. The increase in career transitions can be explained by several societal trends such as a broader concern for personal growth, fulfilment and managing their work-life balance (Hess, Jepsen, & Dries, 2010). However, there is no clear consensus on what is considered as a career transition.

Previous research in the career transition domain mainly focussed on studying specific career transitions such as the transition from college to one's first job among students (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999; Ryan, 2001), the career transitions athletes are faced with in their careers (Park, Lavalley, & Tod, 2013), the transition into retirement (Wang & Schultz, 2010) and coping with career transitions (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven & Posser, 2004). Despite the large amount of information about career transitions, research lacks conceptualization of career transitions in a more generic way. For some people a different role in their profession within their current company is considered as a career transition and for other people a change of profession in another company is required to be considered as a career transition. The goal of this research is to develop a clear understanding of career transitions by conceptualizing it in a more generic way that includes (1) defining different types of career transitions, (2) indicating different motives on pursuing career transitions, (3) identifying challenges transitioners are faced with, (4) presenting ways on how to cope with career transitions and (5) illustrate the impact of career transitions over the past decades.

This research contributes to science because it provides clearance towards the inaudibility of the term career transitions in scientific research. Future researchers can use this study as a guideline or inspiration for research in the career domain by making use of a clear distinction in career transitions. Nevertheless, does this study present implications for practice. Employees that are considering or undertaking a career transition can use this study to assist them in this process. On top of that, career counsellors can use this overview to help clients face career transitions. Especially nowadays career transitions are not just

normal, it is expected and considered a reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. (Ahn, Dik & Hornback, 2017).

## **Method**

In this section, the way in which scientific literature is gathered will be explained plus the criteria that is used for the selection of the literature used for this study will be discussed. Multiple scientific databases on the internet were utilized in order to gather relevant scientific literature. The scientific databases used in this study are WorldCat Discovery, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar and Web of science. The keywords that were used in the search term section in these databases were 'career transitions', 'traditional career', 'contemporary career', 'motives', 'career change', 'career adaptability', 'impact' and combinations between the terms with "AND" and "OR" to extract relevant information. In addition, the extraction technique 'snowballing' was used to gather more information. 'Snowballing' is described as the use of reference lists of existing papers to check for further relevant articles (Beauchemin & Gonzalez-Ferrer, 2011). This extraction technique was found to be very useful to gain more insight in terms and concepts used by more recent articles by reviewing the referred articles. For example, Hess, Jepsen, & Dries (2012) used the term 'boundaryless career' in their study and referred to the article of DeFillippi & Arthur (1996) to obtain more information regarding this concept. After reviewing their article, the concept 'boundaryless career' was much more clearly.

Furthermore, the selection of relevant literature was based on certain criteria to be classified as useful. The first criterion was that the literature had to have a scientific nature and had been published in a scientific journal. Secondly, the scientific journals that published the articles used in this study had to have a minimum impact factor of .5 to be considered as credible scientific literature. When these criteria were met, the titles that seemed useful for this study were picked for further examination, subsequently the abstract of the paper was read and when relevant the article was read in full. The final criterion was that the year of publication of the studies had to be after the year 2000. Due to the suggested changes in careers it was important that this research was relevant and recent. A few articles did not meet this criterion but were used nonetheless after consideration. The study of Louis (1980) was used for defining different types of career transitions due to lack of research on this topic. Nevertheless, this typology still seems applicable in the present which is why it is used

in this study. Additionally, some studies (Diebold, Neumark, & Polsky, 1997; Neumark, Polsky, & Hansen, 1999) used in describing the impact of career transitions throughout the years are dated before 2000. These articles were used nonetheless because existing research examined the impact of career transitions throughout 1970 till 1990 as the most recent period. The studies that are used for this literature review are mentioned in Appendix 1, including their authors, sample characteristics, main findings, journal and impact factor.

## **Results**

To create a better understanding of the concept of career transitions, it is important to start with defining a career and distinguishing different types of careers. Explaining these different career types will be beneficial for obtaining a clear perspective on the conceptualization of career transitions which will be discussed subsequently. When a clear description of the different types, aspects, motives and challenges of career transitions is made, the best ways to deal with career transitions and how to make them a success are discussed according to the findings of previous studies. Lastly, the impact of career transitions was compared throughout 1970 till 1990, because it was the most recent period that examined this effect in scientific literature.

### **Defining careers**

A career is defined as a sequence of role-related experiences accumulated over time and may refer to a work or non-work role (Hall, 1976). Traditionally only occupational or professional roles were considered careers, such as lawyers and doctors. However, nowadays, the concept of career has been expanded to other work and central life roles e.g. housewife and peace-corp volunteer (Louis, 1980). Keeping both work and non-work roles in mind, it is essential when studying careers to examine the person within the total life space and throughout one's lifetime (Maanen & Schein, 1977). This view led to a growing recognition of the need to simultaneously consider internal (to the individual) or subjective aspects of careers, including the individual's changing attitudes and values, needs and aspirations, self-assessments and self-concept in relation to the role in question (Hall, 2004). These newer perspectives no longer consider upward progression through an organizational or professional hierarchy an essential element of a career, which led to new concepts of careers which will now be discussed.

Within the bulk of new career concepts that have been introduced in the career literature in the last decades, there are three main career concepts that stand out and will be discussed here. These career types are the traditional career (Super & Hall, 1975), the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001) and the protean career (Hall, 1976). Based on the theory of Super and Hall (1975), a career was a pre-destined path: employees would work and develop themselves within one or two firms and this formed a linear career path. The traditional career model rests on the assumption that growth and development generally unfold within the context of an organizational career system where success is measured by career rewards, including promotions and increased pay which are granted to the employee by the organization (Rosenbaum, 1984). Summarized, the traditional career is characterized by linearity and path dependency where employees move in a single direction through a predictable set of career stages and along an orderly career ladder (Valcour & Ladge, 2008). Opposed to the traditional career, the boundaryless career is defined as sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Boundaryless careers are distinguished from traditional careers through the different career path undertaken. A boundaryless career is not relying on specific, organizational promotions or predestined career paths taking place in one employment setting but is rather versatile and moves through a constantly changing work landscape (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). The protean career is defined as a career in which the person, not the organization, is in charge, the core values are freedom and growth, and the main success criteria are subjective e.g. psychological success versus objective e.g. position and salary (Hall, 2004). This means that a protean career is primarily focused on the psychological experience rather than the specific career path and is therefore based on self-direction in the pursuit of psychological success in one's work (Hall & Mirvis, 1995). Baruch (2004) used a landscape metaphor to describe the traditional career and modern careers (boundaryless career and protean career), which is helpful in visualizing and distinguishing these concepts. Baruch (2004) described the traditional career as a journey of mountain climbing. Everyone desires to reach the summit on the mountain (the present organization) by climbing as high as they can. The path is set for the climber, with clear guidelines and a definition of success for each member. Modern careers consider all the options of landscapes. Each member can choose whether they climb the highest mountain, pick a

different mountain, cross the hills or wander along the fields. You define your own success by navigation your own career and choosing your own directions.

For this study, it is important to distinguish these modern perspectives in the career domain to understand why people perform career transitions and why they differ per individual. Because of these new perspectives and an increasing emphasis on trends such as personal growth, fulfilment, individualism, increase in dual career families and earlier retirement, the proportion of people who undertake career transitions are growing continuously (Hall, 2004).

### **A typology of career transitions**

A career transition is defined as the period during which an individual is either changing roles (taking on a different objective role) or changing orientation to a role already held (altering a subjective state) (Louis, 1980). This definition indicates that a career transition takes place in a certain period and there is a change going on. The duration of the period differs per transition and depends largely on how the changer experiences the difference between new and old roles, or new and old role orientations (Louis, 1980). The impact of a career transition depends on the nature of the boundaries crossed (Sorensen & Feldman, 2005). In general, it will take longer if the difference between the roles is very big. For example, the transition to an entirely unfamiliar role is likely to take longer than a somewhat familiar role. That is because it is very difficult for the changer to anticipate on his or her reaction in a new situation (Sorensen & Feldman, 2005).

Louis (1980) introduced five basic propositions that form the foundation in understanding career transitions. These propositions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Five basic propositions for career transitions*

<b>Proposition 1</b>	During all types of CTs, individuals are faced with a variety of differences between old and new roles, role orientations, and role settings.
<b>Proposition 2</b>	The more elements that are different in the new role or situation, and the more they are different from those of previous roles, the more the transitioner potentially has to cope with.
<b>Proposition 3</b>	The type of transition undertaken is an indicator of the general nature and magnitude of differences with which the individual will have to cope.
<b>Proposition 4</b>	There is a typical coping process by which individuals interpret and respond to differences experienced during transitions of all types.
<b>Proposition 5</b>	An understanding of the coping process combined with an analysis of the type of transition undertaken can be used to foresee the needs and facilitate the adaption of individuals during career transitions.

Proposition 4 and 5 is about how the transitioners cope with career transitions and the best way to prepare for and adapt with these career transitions will be discussed later in this paper. First the different types of career transitions will be discussed.

Louis (1980) developed a typology for career transitions that consists of two major categories in transitions: interrole and intrarole. Interrole refers to when a new and different role is actually taken and intrarole refers to when a new and different orientation to an old role is taken. Within this typology there are five types of interrole transitions and four types of intrarole transitions. These transitions will be illustrated in Table 2 and briefly explained below based on Louis (1980) findings.

Table 2. *Types of Career Transitions*

<b>Interrole Transitions</b>	<b>Intrarole Transitions</b>
1. Entry/Re-entry	1. Intrarole Adjustment
2. Intracompany	2. Extrarole Adjustment
3. Intercompany	3. Role/Career-stage Transition
4. Interprofession	4. Life-Stage Transition
5. Exit	



## **Interrole Transitions**

The first interrole transition is when an individual enters or re-enters a labor pool. A typical example for this interrole transition is the transition from a college graduate to their first full-time job. The person is taking on a novel role, not previously held and is faced with several challenges such as getting acquainted with the organization, dealing with the organizational culture and creating an identity for oneself in the organization (Schein, 1978). An example of an individual re-entering a labor pool is that of a housewife returning back to a job after raising her kids.

The second interrole transition, an intracompany transition, is when an individual takes on a different role within the same company. This change involves dealing with several new formal and informal procedures such as different co-workers, responsibilities, authority, technologies and work settings. For example, an employee that shifts from a technical role to a managerial role within the same organization is likely to have different colleagues, more authority, different communication lines, more responsibilities and a different physical setting.

The third interrole transition, an intercompany transition, is when an individual moves from one company to another. The changes associated with an intracompany transition also apply for intercompany transitions and the magnitude of the differences the transitioner has to cope with depends on the similarity between the old and new roles and the organizational climate. For example, a project manager in a private sector moving to a public sector has to cope with more change than a bartender moving to a different company within the private sector.

The fourth interrole transition, an interprofession transition, is when an individual changes profession. Interprofession transitioners are likely to encounter a large variety of differences such as a foreign culture, differences in procedures, norms, language, code of ethics and interpersonal interactions. Examples of interprofession transitions are a farmer taking up law, a banker becoming a military officer or a security guard becoming an entrepreneur. Such transitions contain many changes and potential surprises.

The fifth and final interrole transition is an exit transition. Four different exit transitions have been distinguished, varying in duration, type and source of initiation. The first exit transition is a leave of absence which refers to a brief and planned exit. Examples are a planned period of absence for traveling the world or a pregnancy leave. Secondly, a

withdrawal refers to a long-term leave initiated by the transitioner with an undetermined duration. A typical example of a withdrawal is a woman leaving her job to raise children. The third type of exit transition is involuntary unemployment. Involuntary unemployment is initiated by the organization and is often unanticipated and unplanned by the individual. The final type of exit transition is retirement. Retirement refers to a permanent exit from a particular role and is usually initiated by the transitioner, although earlier retirement can be influenced by a company (Wang & Shultz, 2010).

### **Intrarole Transitions**

As stated before, intrarole transitions refer to when a new and different orientation to an old role is taken. More specifically, a change in the individual's relation or internal orientation to a role already held. In contrast to interrole transitions, intrarole transitions may occur without the conscious awareness of the transitioner. As shown in Table 2, four types of intrarole transitions can be identified (Louis, 1980).

The first intrarole transition, an intrarole adjustment, represents an adjustment in orientation to a role that an individual makes in response to experiences over time in the role (Schein, 1978). For example, an employee is prohibited to make informal conversations with colleagues during working hours but overtime this restriction fades away and these social interactions could lead to an increase in one's job satisfaction or commitment. The formal role itself is not altered as a result of an internal adjustment but the increase in personal commitment and altered experience in the role indicates an adjustment in the role orientation.

The second intrarole transition, an extrarole adjustment, refers to the possible interaction and interdependence between a person's multiple life roles. For instance, a change in the family role leads to an adjustment in orientation in the work role. When an individual is experiencing troubles at home, this negative energy might be transferred into his work role which may distract the individual's attention and energy at work. Rapoport and Rapoport (1978) suggest that it is therefore important to take multiple life roles into account and consider the total "lifespace" of the individual in understanding career transitions.

The third intrarole transition, a role/career-stage transition, refers to the different general stages an individual typically passes during an organizational career (Super, 1957). These transitions in the progression in the career cycle often occur without the conscious

awareness of the transitioner. An example of a career-stage transition is the transition between early and mid-career, where the individual moves from a peripheral to a central role in the informal network of the company (Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977).

The life-stage transition is the fourth and final intrarole transition which refers to the passage of individual's through their normal stages in human development. These different life stages are accompanied with different issues and could therefore alter the orientation in one's work role. A popular phenomenon that represents a life-stage transition is a mid-life crisis. In a mid-life crisis an individual might feel discouraged because they perceive that their efforts have been worthless and are convinced that it is too late to start over (Jaques, 1965). These experiences of stagnation may result in a different orientation towards work roles and could therefore hinder an individual in entering new career transitions.

The career transitions discussed above should not be seen as identical when evaluating career transitions. Any particular career transition may possess different elements of different types of career transitions. The next section will discuss different motives in undertaking career transitions.

## **Motives**

There are many different reasons why individuals pursue career transitions and the motives differ per person. It is evident that because of individual differences, some people move through a career change process with little difficulty while others may try but never successfully make a career change (Schlossberg, 1995). This section tries to indicate motives on different levels that determine why individuals undertake career transitions. These levels involve motives based on individual characteristics, demographic factors and organisational factors.

Several studies have examined the relation between individual characteristics, personality traits and pursuing career transitions. Carless and Arnup (2011) examined the effect of personality traits on undertaking career transitions. Results show that individuals with higher levels of Openness to Experience are more likely to undertake career transitions than those with low levels on this trait. Openness to Experience is characterised by imagination, curiosity, creativity, intelligence and being open to new experiences (Costa & McCrea, 1992). A career transition is often a big step to consider, hence it will be more likely to be undertaken by someone who is innovative and curious. Secondly, individuals with

higher levels of extraversion have found to be more likely to undertake career transitions. Extraversion is characterized by confidence, optimism, being well-spoken, energetic and extraverts are therefore more likely to initiate career transitions and obtain large work-related networks which will help them in obtaining a career change (Higgins, 2001). Multon and Johnston (1994) examined the effect of psychological resources on undertaking career transitions. They found that individuals that contain psychological resources with high levels of readiness, confidence, perceived support and control are more likely to undertake career transitions, tend to be in the transition process for a shorter period of time, experience less stress and feel like they are making more progress (Multon & Johnston, 1994).

The effect of demographic factors on pursuing career transitions have also been examined by researchers. The effects of age, gender and marital status will now be discussed. Results indicate that younger people are more likely to undertake career transitions than older people (Parrado, Caner & Wolff, 2007; Carless & Arnup, 2011). An explanation could be that younger people are more likely to be more flexible in their work-family domain and have not yet accumulated specific human capital in their profession compared to older people that are likely to have established considerable investments (Parrado et al., 2007). Secondly, findings on the effect of gender on pursuing career transitions are inconsistent. Some studies indicate that males pursue more career transitions than females, arguing that males are more flexible in their work arrangements (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Parrado et al., 2007) while other research reported no gender differences in pursuing career transitions (Carless & Bernath, 2007). The final demographic factor marital status, also seem to have inconsistent results. Some studies reported evidence that singles are more likely to pursue career transitions arguing that married couples have bigger risks and consequences associated with career change (Breedon, 1993; Parrado et al., 2007). While other studies reported that there is no effect of marital status on pursuing career transitions (Blau, 2000; Carless & Arnup, 2011).

Finally, organisational factors have been examined in predicting career transitions. The organisational factors discussed in this study are job security, job satisfaction and salary. Results indicate that when job security increases, the probability of individuals undertaking career transitions decreases (Staufenbiel & Konig, 2010). Schein (1978) stated that job security is one of the five anchors to choose a career and when their desire to maintain continuity in a job is threatened, they will consider career transitions. Job satisfaction was

found to be negatively related to thoughts about changing careers (Blau, 2000; Carless & Bernath, 2007). The more dissatisfied the individual is about his job, the more he or she thinks about pursuing career transitions which leads to active job search behaviour and eventually undertaking a career transition (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Finally, the effect of salary on undertaking career transitions has been examined. Results suggest that the prospect of a higher salary is positively related with undertaking career transitions (Breedon, 1993; Kidd & Green, 2006). However, Williams and Forgasz (2009) found that intrinsic motives were more important than extrinsic rewards such as salary in initiating career transitions. This section presented the effects of individual characteristics, demographic factors and organizational factors in undertaking career transitions. The next section will discuss the challenges transitioners are likely to face in undertaking career transitions.

### **Contextual challenges in career transitions**

Before elaborating on how to cope with career transitions, which will be discussed in the next section, it is important to gain insight in the challenges a career transitioner faces. It is impossible to identify all the possible challenges for each type of career transition so instead the communal contextual challenges will be discussed in this section. Ebberwein et al. (2004) illustrated three different contextual challenges that career transitioners are faced with. These challenges affect one's ability to cope with career transitions.

The first contextual challenge is: *Financial resources, or the lack of them, strongly influence how one copes with career transitions.* One's financial resources appear to be the most important factor for an individual's ability to cope with career transitions. Decisions about career transitions such as exit transitions and pursuing further education are significantly tied with financial pressures. Individuals that have some sort of financial buffer seem to experience less anxiety and stress in undertaking career transitions than individuals that have no financial buffer. So, the individual's attitudes and emotions seemed to be greatly influenced by their financial state.

The second contextual challenge is: *Family life interacts significantly with work life.* Much research has been done in the family-work domain. Resulting from this research, it is clear that both life roles are not a one-way street but interact with each other. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) presented in their literature that role pressures in the work domain and

the family domain are mutually incompatible which means that demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family situation interfere with work-related responsibilities (Netemeyer, Boles, & McMurrian, 1996). For example, a woman that is raising her children puts much time and energy in her kids and decides to not further educate herself because of lack of time and energy used in the family role. This indicates that family life influences career paths and thus career transitions.

The third contextual challenge is: *an employer can have a significant impact on the experience of the transition*. The role of the employer can play a significant part in the process of one's transition. An employer can achieve a positive contribution in the career transition process by assisting the individual. The most obvious way for an employer to assist an employee in an exit transition is by offering a severance package, given the financial pressures accompanying a job loss. Another service that is offered less frequently by employers is arranging outplacement and career transition services to help the individual cope with his transition. On the opposite, when the employer neglects the individual and lacks clear communication, some individuals remain angry and these negative emotions about the past do not allow the individual to focus appropriately on the future and thus hinder the career transition process (Ebberwein et al., 2004). This section identified several challenges transitioners face, the next section will discuss ways to overcome such challenges and make the career transition a success.

### **Coping with career transitions**

The 'new' career context is labelled as one where career transitions occur more frequently than ever, leading to discontinuities and fragmented careers (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000). Some of the research in the career literature suggest that these transitions are 'the way to go', and they lead to more career success. First of all, Abele and Spurk (2009) stated that an upward career transition is regarded as a career step that reflects higher career success and career satisfaction. Secondly, Arthur and Rousseau (1996) stated that embracing career transitions leads to employee liberation, freedom and independence. On the contrary, other research states that career transitions lead to significant stress for the individual and their families (Dohrenwend, 1974), more psychological strain (Rigotti, Korek, & Otto, 2014), increased feelings of job insecurity (Littler & Innes, 2004) and sometimes leave careers in turmoil (Ebberwein et al., 2004). This leaves us to the question; How to

make a career transition a success and what skills are required? In this section, ways in how to cope with career transitions in a more generic way without going into specific cope strategies per type of career transition are discussed.

In order to successfully manage a career transition, the transitioner has to adapt (Super & Knasel, 1981). Super and Knasel defined career adaptability as “readiness to cope with changing work and working conditions”. They introduced this construct to stress the importance for the interaction between the individual and the environment. Cairo (1996) elaborated on this approach by emphasizing a proactive approach that includes a realistic assessment of one’s personal context in order to successfully adapt. Herr (1992) indicated that this proactive approach includes planfulness, exploration, information, decision making and reality orientation.

Ebberwein et al. (2004) tried to define the skills that reflect an adaptive approach towards career transitions by analysing individuals who are in the midst of a career transition. These adaptive responses will now be briefly mentioned. The first adaptive response is related to exit transitions which suggests to (1) *approach job loss with a healthy sense of urgency*. This implies that individuals who are facing job loss should plan their next moves considering realistic objectives instead of withdrawing or asking too much of themselves. These responses reflect high levels of reality orientation and planfulness as discussed by Herr (1992) and offer promising results in career transitions. The second adaptive response is to (2) *picture the details of your next career move*, even when there is no transition in sight. The majority of individuals with a job are not actively considering their next career move. However, the results show that individuals that are forward-looking such as daydreaming or planning for their next career move allows them to make informed decisions quickly. This response reflects high levels of planfulness and exploration fostering decision making in career transitions. The third adaptive response is to (3) *get ready to make changes* when career transitions seem imminent. This response also emphasizes to look forward instead of staying narrowly focused on the present. When an individual is noticing that a career transition may be nearby it is important to acquire accurate information and be ready to make a change to take control over the situation and avoid ending up in crisis. This approach contains all the elements of the proactive approach discussed by Herr (1992). The fourth adaptive response is to (4) *set realistic goals and outline steps* to achieve them. A lot of individuals that are oriented toward the future have great goals in their mind but the

plans to obtain those goals lack clarity. Therefore, it is important to develop a sense of clarity regarding achieving one's goals wherefrom it allows the individual to visualize a place to begin, a satisfying place to end, and the steps required in between (Eggerwein et al., 2004). This response emphasizes reality orientation which allows the individual to behave adaptively throughout the transition process.

To summarize this section, four adaptive responses to cope with career transitions are discussed: (1) approaching job loss with a healthy sense of urgency, (2) picture the details of your next career move, (3) get ready to make changes and lastly (4) set realistic goals and outline steps to achieve those goals. The next section will discuss the impact of career transitions throughout 1970 till 1990.

### **Impact of career transitions over the years**

Since the 1980s a big shift has occurred in the way people organize their careers due to societal, political and organizational trends (Courpasson & Reed, 2004). The shift contains the movement from a traditional career, which is characterized by linearity and path dependency where employees move in a single direction through a predictable set of career stages and along a hierarchical career ladder (Valcour & Ladge, 2008), to a boundaryless and protean career. This new era of contemporary careers is characterized by utilizing job opportunities beyond the boundaries of a single employment setting (DeFillipi & Arthur, 1996), a constantly changing worklandscape (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), decentralised structures (Sewell, 2005) and short-term employment relations (Ross, 2004). This section tries to illustrate the change of this career shift for career transitions by examining the frequency and the impact of the career transitions in the old era (1970s in specific) compared to the most recent era examined in scientific literature (1990).

The study of Chudzikowski (2012) examined the change of frequency, form (types of transitions) and impact throughout 1970 till 1990. Results from this study indicated that the frequency of career transitions in the new era has been significantly increased compared to the old era. This increase could be explained by boundaryless careers being more dynamic, involving more frequent career moves within and across organizations (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and increased levels of job insecurity in the new era have reduced employee loyalty leading to a decrease in lifelong employment (Spell & Blum, 2000). Organizational transitions, in this study referred as interrole transitions, have all been supported to have



increased in the new era compared to the old era. This shift can be explained due to the linear direction in the traditional career in the old era where career transitions consisted mainly of vertical transitions across the hierarchical ladder such as promotions and demotions (Kallinikos, 2004) moving to the new perspective where multidirectional moves are expected because of trends such as individualism, self-development, decentralization, short-term projects and a constantly changing workplace resulting in turbulent career paths (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). More specifically, theory would suggest that vertical transitions occur less frequently in the new era compared to the old era because of decentralizations where hierarchies become flatter and vertical transitions have become less obtainable (Sewell, 2005). Chudzikowski's (2012) results refute this theory and show that vertical transitions have increased significantly over the years, which would suggest that the traditional career is far from extinct (Hall, 1996). However, the results also indicate that there are relatively more horizontal transitions (change in function, division or department) than vertical transitions (climbing the hierarchical ladder) in the new era which confirms the shift towards more physical mobility across jobs, functions and departments (Briscoe & Hall, 2006).

Other researchers were skeptical about the collapse of traditional careers and conducted research whether or not to support this statement with evidence. Rodrigues and Guest (2010) investigated in their study if careers are becoming boundaryless from the 1970s onwards by examining career transitions, job stability and job tenure (the number of years people are staying with their employer) to predict job mobility across organizational boundaries. Evidence was provided by big data sets from the US, Japan and Europe. Results of several studies (Diebold et al., 1997; Neumark et al., 1999) presented that job tenure has remained relatively stable since the 1970, concluding that there is not a clear trend in job tenure. Research on exit transitions indicated to not have increased since the 1970s (Polsky, 1999; Farber, 2007; Stewart, 2002) and thus not supporting the view that job tenure is changing dramatically.

Conducted research that tried to illustrate the impact of career transitions over the years, presented in this section, is not corresponding very well. The study of Chudzikowski (2012) indicates that there is a significant increase in career transitions and others state that job mobility has remained stable over the years (Diebold et al., 1997; Neumark et al., 1999). Contradicting results make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the impact of career

transitions over time. This inconsistency asks for clarification around this topic which has implications for future research. These will be discussed later on in this study.

## **Conclusion & Discussion**

In the past years, a big shift has occurred in the way people organize their careers due to societal, political and organizational trends (Courpasson & Reed, 2004). The assumption that career growth and development generally unfolds along a hierarchical ladder within the context of an organizational system has given way for a constantly changing work landscape where psychological success rather than objective success is the main criteria (Hall, 2004; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Valcour & Ladge, 2008). These 'new' careers are associated with high career mobility where career transitions occur more frequently than ever (Chudzikowski, 2012). Although there has been done much research about specific career transitions, research lacks that takes a closer look on the conceptualization of career transitions. This paper gives an overview of existing literature on career transitions in a more generic way.

First, a definition of a career was given. Previous research on defining careers has been corresponding, including both work and non-work roles and considering internal or subjective aspects of careers (Louis, 1980; Maanen & Schein, 1977; Hall, 1976). Additionally, three main concepts of careers were elaborated: the traditional career, the boundaryless career and the protean career. Previous research on defining these concepts were also aligned, characterizing the traditional career as a predestined path along an orderly ladder (Super & Hall, 1975; Valcour & Ladge, 2008), the boundaryless career as versatile and moving through a constantly changing work landscape (Arthur & Rousseau, 2001; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) and the protean career as a career focused on the psychological experience and based on self-direction (Hall, 2004; Baruch, 2004).

Secondly, the definition, basic propositions and different types of career transitions were discussed. Research conducted by Louis (1980) was mainly used for describing the typology of career transitions. Louis (1980) provided a clear distinction between different types of career transitions where other research lacks to conceptualize career transitions in a distinct way. The different types of career transitions were categorized in two main categories: interrole and intrarole transitions. The main categories were subdivided into five interrole transitions and four intrarole transitions (Louis, 1980). Other research (Schein,

1978; Sorensen & Feldman, 2005; Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977) was used to elaborate on these different types of career transitions to provide an extensive review. However, these studies are fairly old, thus it is recommended that future research provide a more modern perspective. This modern perspective should contain new insights in identifying career transitions such as performing qualitative methodologies to obtain a broader context of the experience of transitioners and taking into account more recent trends like globalization and the influence of internet and social media. These new insights might expose new types of career transitions.

Furthermore, different motives on why individuals pursue career transitions were discussed in this study. Existing literature reported significant effects of motives based on individual characteristics, demographic factors and organisational factors in undertaking career transitions. Results show that individuals with high levels of the personality traits 'Openness to Experience' and 'Extraversion' and the psychological resources 'readiness, confidence, perceived support and control are more likely to undertake career transitions (Carless & Anup, 2011; Higgins, 2001; Multon & Johnston, 1994). The demographic factor age was found to be negatively related to undertaking career transitions, younger people are more likely to undertake career transitions than older people (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Parrado et al., 2007). Inconsistent results were found for the demographic factors gender and marital status (Blau, 2000; Carless & Arnup, 2011; Carless & Bernath, 2007; Parrado et al., 2007). These inconsistent findings may be due to methodological reasons. For example, the data from the study of Carless and Arnup (2011) was derived from a sample in the United States and the data from the study of Parrado et al. (2007) was derived from a sample in Australia. Factors such as cultural differences could play a role in the outcomes which makes it more difficult to draw general conclusions. Finally, the organisational factors job insecurity, job dissatisfaction and salary were found to be positively related to undertaking career transitions (Blau, 2000; Carless & Bernath, 2007; Griffeth et al., 2000; Staufenbiel & Konig, 2010). For future research it is recommended to examine the effects motives on career transitions with a methodology that includes a sample of regions in Europe since the literature in this study is derived from Australia and the United States. This will extend the scientific literature in undiscovered fields. Additionally, existing literature examining individual characteristics should be extended with new measurements of personality traits such as the Myer-Briggs Type indicator model that consists of sixteen

different types of personality traits instead of the five in The Big Five factor model used in recent studies. Examining these different traits could lead to new insights in explaining career transitions.

Additionally, examining existing literature about contextual challenges in career transitions resulted in three communal challenges each transitioner is faced with. These challenges are financial resources, work-family interaction and the perceived contribution from the employer (Ebberwein et al., 2004). Conducted research that examined ways in how to cope with transitions and make them a success resulted in a few adaptive behaviours. These adaptive behaviours are a proactive approach including planfulness, exploration, information, decision making and reality orientation (Cario, 1996; Herr, 1992). The four adaptive responses derived from this proactive approach are approaching job loss with a healthy sense of urgency, picturing the details of your next career move, get ready to make changes when career transitions seem imminent and set realistic goals and outline steps to achieve them (Ebberwein et al., 2004). These challenges and adaptive behaviours are generally applicable for every transition and therefore insufficient for making statements about the all the possible challenges and adaptive behaviours per specific transition. In future research, it would be desirable to examine the possible challenges and adaptive behaviours per type of interrole and intrarole transition with a more in-depth analysis.

Finally, results indicate that the frequency of career transitions significantly increased throughout 1970 till 1990 (Chudzikowski, 2012). More specifically, organisational, horizontal and vertical transitions have increased with relatively more horizontal than vertical transitions which would confirm the shift towards boundaryless careers that are characterized with more physical mobility across jobs, functions and departments (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). However, other results indicate that job tenure and exit transitions have remained stable throughout 1970 till 1990 (Diebold et al., 1997; Farber, 2007; Neumark et al., 1999; Polsky, 1999; Stewart, 2000) and thus not supporting the view that careers are changing drastically towards boundaryless careers. These inconsistent findings may be due to methodological reasons. Chudzikowzki's (2012) research results were extracted from a self-reported dataset in Austria whereas the results from Diebold et al. (1997) were extracted from two large cross-sectional datasets in the United States. Differences in both samples such as geographical differences and differences in datasets make it difficult to compare and draw conclusions on a large population. Furthermore, the variables that

measure career transitions differ per study. Chudzikowzki's study (2012) used multiple variables (organisational, horizontal and vertical transitions) to measure career transitions whereas the study of Diebold et al. (1997) lacks conceptualization of types of career transitions used. It is needless to say that when different conceptualizations are used, different measurements are utilized and different results will occur. Therefore, it is desirable that in future research the same conceptualization and measurements for career transitions is used with comparable samples.

### **Limitations**

This study faced several limitations. First of all, multiple studies used in this review are conducted by the same authors. Hall, Arthur and Carless are found in different combinations, in different articles (e.g. Carless & Arnup, 2011; Carless & Bernath, 2007). Additionally, several articles in this study have referenced each other in their studies. Although they discuss clear distinct elements in their studies, some bias cannot be excluded. It is possible that the mentioned authors have shared views on certain topics discussed in this study that might have an influence on the results. It is recommended for future research that more different authors will be used to avoid such bias. Secondly, some results are based on just a few articles due to lack of research in that domain. The results that indicate different types of career transitions are primarily based on the research of Louis (1980) because other research lacks in distinguishing and identifying different career transitions. Therefore, in future research it is recommended to conduct more research on identifying career transitions with a broader context, including recent trends as globalization and social media as stated above. Finally, some studies used in this review seem fairly outdated due to lack of modern research in those domains. The largest part of the studies that are used for examining the impact of career transitions are published after the year 2000 but their results are extracted from samples throughout 1970 till 1990. Therefore, it is difficult to make statements about the impact of transitions nowadays. In future research, it is recommended to examine a more recent timeframe to provide a present overview of the impact of career transition.

## Implications

This study contributes to science by providing an empirical overview of career transitions in a way that has not been done before. Previous research mainly focused on specific aspects in career transitions such as retirement (Wang & Schultz, 2010), entering the labor market (Ryan, 2001), motives (Carless & Arnup, 2011) and coping strategies (Ebberwein et al., 2004). This study intertwined specific aspects of career transitions into a general conceptualization of career transitions which makes this study multidimensional and applicable for people that want to know more about this topic. Furthermore, recommendations for future research have been implied in this study. From a practical perspective, this study can be useful as well. People that are entering or in the process of a career transition can use this study as guidance to identify challenges and ways to cope with the transition to make it a success. Additionally, career counsellors can use this study as a tool in helping their clients by identifying their clients type of transition, the role of personality traits, possible adaptive behaviors, challenges and anticipating transitions as a normal part of career development (Ebberwein et al., 2004). Lastly, the interviews conducted in this study have implications for practice. The review of this study was linked to real life situations of people undertaking career transitions and showed corresponding results with the findings of this study such as the challenges the transitioners faced, the way they adapted to change and the influence of external factors such as family. These interviews have proved this study to be useful since it contains representations of real life situations.

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## Appendix 1.

Author(s) and year of publishing	Sample characteristics	Main findings	Journal / impact factor
Louis (1980)	Meta-analyses.	Identified different types of career transitions, basic proportions and commonalities across career transitions.	Academy of management review / 9.41
Carless & Arnup (2011)	Longitudinal design with data from 24,856 full-time employees in Australia between 2001 and 2006.	Openness to experience and extraversion are positively related with career change. Younger people and males are more likely to undertake career transitions. Marital status had no effect.	Journal of vocational behavior / 2.55
Carless & Bernath (2007)	Self-report questionnaire with data from 437 Australian psychologists.	Career planning, career resilience, and job satisfaction were important predictors of intentions to career change. Conscientiousness, gender and career identity were unrelated.	Journal of career development / 1.26
Parrado, Caner, & Wolf (2007)	Longitudinal design with data from 38,416 men and 15,366 women in the United States between 1969 and 1993.	Younger people, single people and males are more likely to change occupations and industries.	Labour economics / 1.04
Kidd & Green (2006)	Longitudinal questionnaire survey with data from 741 research scientists in the UK between 2003 and 2005.	Career identity, career resilience and salary were predictors of intention to change occupations.	Personnel review / 1.43
Ebberwein, Krieschok, Ulven, & Prosser (2004)	Qualitative research interviewing 48 people in career transitions in the United States.	Identified three contextual challenges and four adaptive behaviours in career transitions.	The career development quarterly / 1.06
Rigotti, Korek, & Otto (2014)	Longitudinal design with data from 581 employees in 11 German organizations with a time lag of one year.	Career transitions are related to increased strain but also to higher career satisfaction.	Journal of vocational behavior / 2.55

Chudzikowski (2012)	Longitudinal design with data from 807 Austrian business graduates between 1970 and 1990.	Organizational, vertical and horizontal career transitions have significantly increased throughout 1970 till 1990.	Journal of vocational behavior / 2.55
Rodrigues & Guest (2010)	Meta-analyses. Including big data sets from the US, Japan and Europe between 1970 and 1990.	Job tenure remained relatively stable and exit transitions have not significantly increased since the 1970s.	Human relations / 4.03
Courpasson & Reed (2006)	Literature Review.	Due to societal, political and organizational trends a shift occurred in the way people organize their careers that includes high career mobility.	Organization studies / 3.11

## **Appendix 2.**

### **Interviews regarding the practical implications of this study.**

In order to link the findings of this study to practice, interviews were conducted with two employees that were in the process of a career transition. The first interviewee works as a soldier in the Dutch army and was recently in the midst of a school-to-work transition. The second interviewee works currently at a construction company as QHSE (Quality, Health, Safety and Environment) coordinator and recently changed profession after being production manager for twenty years at the same company. In the following section the interviews will be briefly discussed.

#### **Interviewee 1**

Interviewee 1 moved last year from his VEVA-education to his first job as a soldier in the Dutch army. He experienced his transition as a pleasant process. He explained that he received proper guidance from his VEVA-education to help him enter his first job. His motives to undertake this transition were mainly because of the salary and to develop his skills as a military, emphasizing the latter one. He stated that it was very important in his profession to continuously learn and develop yourself in his profession because career transitions are expected in the Dutch army. He indicated that he encountered some obstacles in transitioning to his first job. In the beginning, he had difficulties adapting to the strict rules and the hierarchy in the Dutch army. He explained that his personality traits such as his openness to experience, his perseverance and his social skills helped him adapt to these changes and make his transition a success. Furthermore, he stated that his work and family interfere a lot with each other in his life, both positive and negative. He elaborated that he extracts energy and support from his family when he's abroad for a mission but also has a hard time focussing when family demands get too much. Lastly, he indicated that he's already planning his next career moves in pursuing a rank as a corporal in the Dutch army due to the high levels of job insecurity in his profession.

#### **Interviewee 2**

Interviewee 2 switched professions from a production manager to a QHSE-coordinator within the same firm due to a burnout. After twenty years of working as a production

manager he stated that he felt jammed in his profession and acted cynical about his future in the company. Unlike interviewee 1, he experienced his transition as an unpleasant one because he was forced to perform a job transition in order to secure his mental and physical health. Nevertheless, he stated that his transition went fluently because of the guidance of his organization and the competencies he possessed. The challenges he encountered were mainly the novel aspects of his new job such as working with new software, new co-workers and new policies. He explained that his competencies and personal traits such as perseverance, integrity, openness to experience, enterprising and flexibility helped him adapt to these changes and make his transition a success. Furthermore, interviewee 2 also stated that work and family interact at a large extent with each other. He elaborated by indicating that the problems encountered at work are transferred to your home and vice-versa. Lastly, he indicated that he tends to stay within the same company for as long as possible because he accomplished and invested much within the same company over the years. He feels committed to continue his work in within the same company, including developing new skills and competencies.