



Gains and losses related to career transitions within organisations [☆]



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ABSTRACT

With this study we aim to look at potential gains and losses in terms of higher career satisfaction and increased strain levels as a consequence of intraorganisational upward career transitions. Following the idea of a matching principle, we further expected stressors to mediate the relationship between transitions and strain, and resources to mediate the relationship between transitions and career satisfaction. Altogether, $N = 581$ employees from 11 German organisations filled in an online questionnaire twice, with a time lag of one year. About 20% of the respondents stated having experienced upward transitions. *SEM* analyses using latent difference scores for the mediators and dependent variables revealed that career transitions are related to increased strain (irritation), but also to higher career satisfaction. Furthermore, specific indirect effects could be shown to link upward career transitions with irritation via elevated time pressure and increased work–home interference. The link between upward career transitions and career satisfaction could be shown to be mediated by increased person–job fit, but not by autonomy. Results are discussed in light of organisational and individual measures in order to increase gains and to reduce losses related to upward career transitions.

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Although contemporary careers are getting more and more boundaryless and include changing of professions and employers, a considerable number of employees still make careers within their present organisation. This study investigates the consequences of internal upward career transitions for subjective career success and strain in a longitudinal design. Career transitions are likely related to both gains and losses. We chose career satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) as one of the most prominent and well-researched subjective indicators of career success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). As a career transition might also be aligned with many health- and well-being-related costs (Parasuraman, Puhorit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996), we included irritation as a measure of work-related strain. Moreover, we are further interested in potential mediators that may explain the link between career transitions and satisfaction with one's own career, as well as strain. In particular, we explore person–environment fit and autonomy as potential resources, and time pressure and work–home interference as potential stressors, to explain indirect effects. Our study stands out among others by using latent change scores for the dependent and mediating variables under study. We thus aim to test whether changes over time in stressors and resources can explain changes in career satisfaction and strain before and after an upward internal career transition. If we know which resources trigger the positive outcomes of a career transition and which stressors transport its negative outcomes, efforts can be taken to design work in order to elevate beneficial and decrease detrimental career paths.

In the following section, we will first briefly review the relevant knowledge about upward career transitions, and then suggest which consequences for career satisfaction and strain such transitions might cause. Based on the Job Demands–Resources model

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(JD-R model; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), we finally introduce our selected resources which might transport the positive impact of transitions on career satisfaction (motivational path), and our selected stressors which might explain a maladaptive effect of transitions on work-related strain (stress-related path).

1. Internal career transitions

According to Ng, Sorensen, Eby, and Feldman (2007), internal upward mobility “is traditionally the most desired type of job mobility because promotions increase status, esteem, responsibilities, and financial rewards” (p. 365). Besides these positive experiences (e.g., having a higher status, fulfilling career goals), career transitions include negative experiences (e.g., being accountable for failures, having to deal with a higher work load) as well (Elfering, Semmer, Tschan, Kälén, & Bucher, 2007). Consequently, positive and negative outcomes of internal (upward) career transitions can be expected. Research has shown so far that for internal job changers, the balance will shift between job demands and job resources after the transition (Dunford, Shipp, Boss, Angermeier, & Boss, 2012). They face higher demands due to enlarged responsibilities and roles, new procedures and rules, and almost no on-the-job training (Feldman & Brett, 1983). In contrast, the level of resources might not increase similarly. As compared to job demands, resources have also been found to be more stable (Brauchli, Schaufeli, Jenny, Fullemna, & Bauer, 2013). Though employees can make use of resources, such as social support or autonomy they had in their original position, these resources might not be best suited for the new demands: New sources for social support or feedback might have to be made accessible first. Accordingly, the equilibrium between demands and resources should shift initially after a transition in a way that in the first time after the transition, the demands outweigh the resources, resulting in higher levels of *psychological strain*. Theoretical support for this idea can be found in the Job Demands-Resources model (JD-R model; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which proposes that high demands are related to high levels of strain and that resources might be able to buffer this effect. Yet, if resources are not equal to the demands, negative consequences for health might still exist. Taken together, we expect a higher level of work-related strain after a career transition.

Conversely, an upward transition is also regarded to be a career step in that it should reflect higher *career success*. Most researchers share the assumption that career success is regarded to be a sum of indicators consisting of two broad dimensions (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Melamed, 1995); namely, objective career success (summarising measureable and verifiable [by others] indicators that consist of highly visible outcomes, such as pay and position; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999), and subjective career success (reflecting the individual evaluation of how much a person is satisfied with his or her career development; Heslin, 2005). Career satisfaction is defined as people’s satisfaction with their internally defined career outcomes (Greenhaus et al., 1990), and is seen as one of the most prominent subjective indicators of career success (Ng et al., 2005).

Arthur et al. (2005) found that 37% of the studies they reviewed assumed that objective career success—for example, a promotion—determines subjective career success. Abele and Spurk (2009) provided in a 10-year longitudinal study further evidence for the impact of objective parameters on subjective success, though they found even more support for the causal relationship of subjective measures on objective success. Upward career transitions should be related to higher subjective career success because employees have moved one step closer to their career goals. Based on these assumptions, we argue that career satisfaction (as a subjective parameter of career success) is higher after a career transition (reflecting an increase in objective career success). Our first two hypotheses read:

H1. Upward career transitions are associated with (H1a) more psychological strain as well as (H1b) higher career satisfaction.

2. Stressors and resources related to career transitions

According to the JD-R model, job-strain results from a workplace situation characterised by high job demands and low job resources. The JD-R model conceptualises job demands as “physical, psychological, social, and organizational [sic] aspects of the job that require sustained [...] effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Job resources refer to aspects of a job that reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, facilitate goal achievement, and/or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources may be located at different organisational levels and include, for example, opportunities for development, feedback, support of one’s supervisor, role clarity, and task characteristics (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The main propositions of the JD-R model suggest that job demands will result in elevated levels of strain and that job resources have a motivating effect (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

We chose two stressors and two resources which might explain the impact of career transitions on strain and satisfaction; namely, time pressure and work-home interference as stressors, and autonomy and person-job fit (PJ fit) as resources. In the following, we will first argue that these variables will be affected by transitions. Specifically, we propose an increase of stressors and resources. Next, we will suggest that the increase of stressors may explain an indirect effect of the relationship between a transition and higher strain. Likewise, we will argue that the increase of resources will supersede the effect of transitions on career satisfaction.

3. Stressors: time pressure and work-home interference

Time pressure is a well-researched stressor and has shown positive relationships with strain (e. g., Mohr, Müller, Rigotti, Aycan, & Tschan, 2006). Time pressure is a demand referring to high work load that has to be resolved within a limited time. As a

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