



How career variety promotes the adaptability of managers: A theoretical model

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Abstract

This paper presents a theoretical model showing how managerial adaptability develops from career variety over the span of the person's career. By building on the literature of career theory, adult learning and development, and career adjustment, we offer a new conceptualization of managerial adaptability by identifying its behavioral, cognitive, and socio-emotional dimensions, discuss how these competencies can develop from the variety of managers' cumulative career experiences, and propose several individual and career-related factors that moderates the relationship between managerial career variety and adaptability.

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1. Introduction

As we inquire more into the turbulence and change inherent in the contemporary work environment (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Hall, 2002), it is becoming clear that it is critical for a person to be not only a strong performer but also a fast, adaptive learner. However, neither the true nature of individual adaptability nor its relationship to managerial

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careers has been clearly established. One of the major reasons for this theoretical gap is that although the nature of managerial work is different from that of other professions such as engineering and medicine, many individual learning and career studies contain an implicit assumption that learning is maximized through specialization. In reality, management expertise is multi-dimensional and acquired through multiple types of experiences (Reuber, 1997). Particularly, at higher management levels, where there are less structure and more discretion, local knowledge of particular jobs, organizations, and industries are likely to be more consequential for the development and demonstration of managerial expertise than is task-specific knowledge (Reuber, 1997, p.54; Whitley, 1989). This means that the process of adapting to the demands of higher level jobs must be learned individually, in response to unique contextual requirements, rather than collectively. This makes individual adaptability more critical to success for managers than it might be for professionals and other occupational groups.

Therefore, our purpose here is to advance theory development on how managerial learning and adaptability develop from *career variety*. Based on previous research on managerial career typologies (Smith & White, 1987; White, Smith, & Barnett, 1994), we define career variety as the diversity in an individual's functional area and institutional context experiences accumulated over time. Drawing upon the literature of career theory, adult learning and development, and career adjustment, we are proposing that individuals who have a high variety of career experiences develop certain behavioral, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies. When managers need to operate in different circumstances, or when the environment of businesses changes, these competencies help them to adapt to new environmental circumstances without lengthy training or socialization periods.

In this paper, we first attempt to offer a clearer conceptualization of managerial adaptability. Second, we offer our explanations on why career variety is particularly important for adaptability. Third, we propose several moderators that affect the process of the development of managerial adaptability from the variety of managers' career experiences. Finally, we discuss some of the implications of our career variety/adaptability model and propositions for future research and practice.

2. Toward a conceptualization of managerial adaptability

Various studies define adaptability by using different names and definitions for the concept, such as role flexibility (Murphy & Jackson, 1999), adaptive performance (Hesketh & Neal, 1999; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000), and competence to manage new learning experiences (London & Mone, 1999; Savickas, 2005). Therefore, adaptability, and its closer concepts flexibility and versatility, are "elusive concepts that have not been well defined in the literature, and therefore, difficult to measure, predict and teach effectively" (Pulakos et al., 2000). However, even though it may be elusive, adaptability is a key quality that enables a person to manage the process of change and development over the span of her career:

"The attributes that individuals need to successfully engage the tasks inherent in minicycle transitions and maxicycle stages constitute career adaptability. Adaptability involves adjusting to vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas by solving problems that are usually unfamiliar, often ill-defined, and always complex (Savickas, 2005, p.51)."

In this same sense of seeing adaptability as facilitating career growth, Hall (1996, 2002) has proposed that adaptability is a higher order quality that is called a metacompetency—a capacity that enables a person to master many more specific skills when she masters this metacompetency. While Hall (1996) and Morrison and Hall (2002) treat adaptability as a higher order competence that predicts a variety of cognitive and behavioral outcomes, Pulakos et al.'s (2000) treatment of the construct is mainly performance or behavioral oriented. However, all researchers acknowledged that the definitions of adaptability involve multiple elements and that it is, therefore, quite complicated. Based on our review of the literature on adult learning and development, and career adjustment, we have identified some individual competencies that are likely to be core dimensions of managerial adaptability.

2.1. Behavioral aspects of adaptability

Pulakos et al. (2000) developed a taxonomy of adaptive job performance and examined the implications of this taxonomy for understanding, predicting, and training adaptive behavior in work settings. They identified the critical dimensions of adaptive performance as “handling emergencies, or crisis situations, handling work stress, solving problems creatively, dealing with uncertain and unpredictable work situations, learning work tasks, technologies and procedures, demonstrating inter-personal adaptability, demonstrating cultural adaptability, demonstrating physically oriented adaptability” (Pulakos et al., 2000: 617). The Job Adaptability Inventory, developed based on Pulakos et al.'s (2000) study, attempts to measure adaptive performance. Hall's (2002) review of the literature on adaptive competence support the critical dimensions identified by Pulakos et al. study (2000). According to this, adaptive abilities are defined in terms of developing appropriate *behavioral responses* to environment, such as dealing with unique or stressful external demands (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) and positive adaptations maximizing gains over losses in functioning (Featherman, Smith, & Peterson, 1990). Since managers' work typically requires developing adaptive behaviors in response to changes in the environment and organizational functioning, we believe that showing adaptive performance is an important characteristic of an adaptive manager.

2.2. Cognitive aspects of adaptability

Hall (1986) has identified two types of cognitive learning from career experience: task learning (learning about the work one is doing) and personal learning (learning about the self or one's identity).

2.2.1. Task-related

Behavioral decision-making researchers treat expertise as the competence to use previous knowledge and skills when circumstances are different, and as the ability to generalize or “strategically conceptualize” from earlier experiences (Neale & Northcraft, 1989). This is very similar to the definition of an adaptive individual as a person who can modify previously learned methods and use existing knowledge to generate new approaches (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997).

Being able to show adaptability requires one to be able to *transfer previous learning to subsequent tasks*. Transfer of learning occurs whenever experience or performance in one learning task influences and improves performance on subsequent learning tasks

(Ellis, 1965). What is learned from prior experience and what inferences can be generated from the knowledge are the two key questions that must be answered to predict learning transfer (Gick & Holyoak, 1987). Learning transfer involves both knowledge content transfer and learning process transfer (“learning to learn”: Ellis, 1965; Schilling, Vidal, Ployhart, & Marangoni, 2003). Effective learning process transfer, which is particularly important for the development of managerial adaptability, means how individuals become better over time in applying previous learning to how to assimilate or process particular types of information when they face new problems (Ellis, 1965). At higher managerial levels, learning transfer and conceptual skills are particularly important, since those jobs mainly involve scanning and dealing with complex environments, analyzing strategic issues, and engaging in long-term strategic planning (Katz, 1974).

2.2.2. *Self-related*

From the point of view of the individual, one’s awareness of self is probably one of the most important aspects of adult and career development, going back to the pioneering work of Donald Super (1957, 1990), who described the process of career development as the implementation of one’s self-concept.

It is the person’s sense of identity that, by definition, helps her evaluate herself at the same time that she constructs this sense of self through processes of meaning making over time. It tells her how she fits in to her social environment. It tells her about her uniqueness as a human being. It becomes more complex and more integrated as a result of her career growth. Hall (2002) has defined identity as a complex, multifaceted construct that relates to the way an individual perceives him- or herself in relation to “others” in the environment. These “others” can be people, groups, organizations, the physical environment, or any other entity with which the person has a relationship. Through these interpretive and interpersonal processes by which the person imposes meaning and direction on her career, she engages in a process that Savickas (2002, 2005) terms “career construction”.

Adaptability requires an individual to be capable of making internal changes (self-awareness), and being resilient, positive, confident, and flexible in making those personal changes (Phillips, 1997; Savickas, 2005). This comes from the person’s need to have a clear personal direction and persistence (Shepard, 1984). Therefore, managers’ self-awareness and understanding of developmental needs and values have been identified as important dimensions of personal learning and change (Kram, 1996; Morrison & Hall, 2002).

2.3. *Socio-emotional dimensions of adaptability*

Adaptive individuals are also identified as having the ability to combine cognitive and affective skills to promote learning, curiosity, self-confidence, and coping abilities in approaching new tasks (Hesketh & Neal, 1999; Savickas, 2005). A closely related concept is emotional intelligence, which can lead to more adaptive and productive behavior in the workplace (Goleman, 1998). As opposed to the long-held belief that conceptual skills are most important at higher management levels (Katz, 1974), later research suggests that emotional competencies account for 85% of leaders’ effectiveness (Goleman, 1998). However, our theories of individual and organizational change have focused mostly on cognitive processes, at the expense of social and emotional bases of change (Huy, 1999). At the individual level, emotional intelligence is defined as “the subset of social intelligence that involves *the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate*

among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p.189; emphasis in original). In other words, it is simply related to how we handle ourselves and others.

Although emotional intelligence is considered innate, emotional competencies can be developed with motivation, practice, feedback, and support. They enhance the potential emotional intelligence of a given individual. Goleman (1998) defines emotional competence as "a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work". By building on Gardner's (1983) work, Goleman (2001) places these four dimensions into two categories of emotional intelligence: intra-personal intelligence (self-awareness, self-management) and inter-personal intelligence (social awareness and relationship management). "Although our emotional *intelligence* determines our potential for learning the practical skills that underlie the four emotional intelligence clusters, our emotional *competence* shows how much of that potential we have realized by learning and mastering skills and translating intelligence into on-the-job capabilities" (Goleman, 2001, p.28, emphasis is in original).

There is growing evidence that emotional competence is learnable and can be grown, especially for managers and leaders (Goleman, 1998; McCall, 1998). However, it takes a strong desire to change, openness to feedback, self-exploration, unlearning old habits and building a new behavioral repertoire, plus a lot of practice. Once achieved, however, emotionally intelligent managers are likely to be effective change agents for themselves and their organizations. Based on all of these discussions, we suggest the following proposition.

Proposition 1. *Adaptive performance, effective learning transfer ability, self-awareness, and socio-emotional competence are critical dimensions of managerial adaptability.*

Having identified the core dimensions of managerial adaptability, in the next section we attempt to explain why career variety is critical for the development of managerial adaptability.

3. Career variety and managerial adaptability

As we discussed earlier, career variety is defined here as the diversity of role-related experiences accumulated over time. Based on the literature on managerial career typologies, managers' career experiences can be categorized into "functional area" (e.g., production, sales, management, finance, and law) and "institutional context" (e.g., firm, industry, and national context) (Smith & White, 1987; White et al., 1994). For decades, management scholars have been interested in the effects of functional experiences on perceptions of managers (Beyer et al., 1997; Dearborn & Simon, 1958; Walsh, 1988). Dearborn and Simon (1958) argued long ago that functional experiences were incorporated into managers' belief structures and served as cognitive filters that narrowed their perceptions toward related experience. For example, CEOs' experience in different functional areas has been found to be positively associated with the breadth of their knowledge, skills, and perspectives (Rajagopalan & Datta, 1996). Experience in a variety of functional domains has also positively associated with promotion, salary level, overall positive affect, and perceptions of skill acquisition (Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994).

In addition to a variety of functional experience, previous research also suggests that managerial work requires extensive *contextual* knowledge in terms of local knowledge at the job, organization, and industry level. In other words, management expertise is

multi-dimensional and acquired through multiple types of experiences (Reuber, 1997). Therefore, we argue that adaptability is more related to a “situated learning” approach where learning is seen as being acquired through multiple experiences in a variety of contexts (Tyre & Von Hippel, 1997). From the adult learning and developmental perspective, Higgins and Kram (2001, p.279) argue that “...the greater the number of social systems represented by an individual’s developmental network, the greater the variety of exposure he or she has, increasing the range of knowledge obtained regarding different industries, jobs, organizations, or markets, and hence, the possibility for learning”. Through a variety of experiences, a person develops the managerial ability to differentiate and integrate various components of their environment. Bartunek, Gordon, and Weathersby (1983) also argue that effective managers develop “the ability to generate several interpretations and understanding of organizational events so that the variety in their understanding is equivalent to the variety in the situation” (1983, p. 273).

Furthermore, managers face dynamic decision tasks that require a series of interdependent decisions which have to be adjusted as fast as the environment changes. An experimental study by Thompson, Gentner, and Loewenstein (2000) investigated whether managers could transfer their knowledge to novel-appearing organizational problems and challenges. The study demonstrated that subjects tended to access previous knowledge that bears surface, rather than structural, similarity to the problem at hand. In other words, they failed to recall what was ultimately most valuable for solving new problems. The authors concluded that people showed little transfer of knowledge learned from individual examples. However, when multiple cases were compared, this led people to abstract their common principles which facilitated later memory access and knowledge transfer. Therefore, thinking across cases creates fundamentally more learning than thinking a case at a time (Thompson et al., 2000). Thus, a variety of experiences is necessary for people to be able to extract some general principles or lessons from these experiences in order to be able to “strategically conceptualize”, and transfer previous learning to a current task effectively (Neale & Northcraft, 1989).

The importance of variety in managerial career experiences has also been suggested by a study, which examined the differences between the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Top Management Team (TMT) members of the U.K. Fortune 500 companies (Norburn, 1989). The Norburn study is particularly interesting because corporate influences and the nature of the company experiences, and *not* the leadership traits, were the strongest factors that explained differences between CEOs and TMT members. Accordingly, the major underlying characteristic that distinguished the CEOs from subordinate TMT members was found to be the CEOs’ earlier exposure to multiple experiences. The CEOs’ exposures to a wider variety of situations were seen as particularly critical because they served as early training for complex multi-dimensional decision making (Norburn, 1989).

Therefore, the disadvantages associated with becoming specialized, such as the risk of becoming trapped in “core rigidities” (Leonard-Barton, 1992) by over investing in the exploitation of the current competencies (Levinthal & March, 1993) and loss of cognitive flexibility (Abernathy & Wayne, 1974) have directed the attention toward the importance of variety for improving learning. If a person spends his or her career in one specialized area or function, it is harder to adapt to a new specialty, new functional area, or new technology, due to what Hall (1986, 247) calls “career routine”. Managers who have spent most of their careers in a single industry, for example, have a limited knowledge and skill base, and are more likely to engage in a limited search for information (Cyert & March, 1963), compared to a person with more varied experience.

A Model of How Career Variety Promotes The Adaptability of Managers

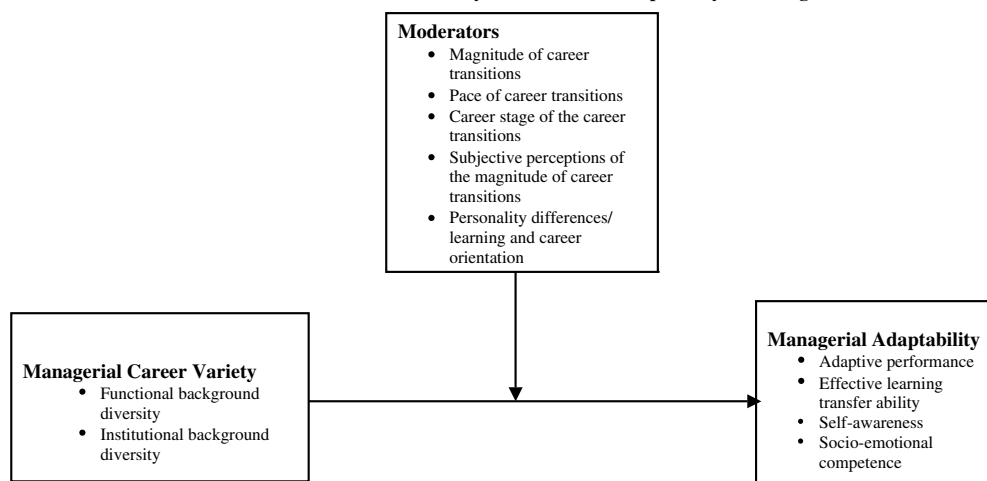


Fig. 1. A model of how career variety promotes the adaptability of managers.

Based on these discussions, we argue that through a variety of functional and institutional context experiences, individuals acquire increased cognitive complexity, and behavioral and cognitive flexibility. When they need to operate in different circumstances, or when the environment or the mix of businesses changes, these competencies help them to achieve adaptation to various circumstances without having to have many years of training or socialization (Fig. 1). Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 2a. *Career variety is associated positively with a manager's adaptive performance.*

Proposition 2b. *Career variety is associated positively with a manager's ability to transfer previous learning to novel tasks effectively.*

In addition to promoting the growth of skills and abilities, varied experience also promotes the development of new kinds of self-awareness. The new experience forces the person to try out new behaviors that literally bring out new facets of the self. Even if the person responds to the novel situation by employing familiar behavioral routines, the chances are good that these will not work, since they will not fit the new context. In time, through trial and error, the person will learn to behave in new ways, and these new behaviors will lead the person to see herself in new ways. Thus, this experimentation with new behavioral responses leads to changes in one's self-concept. Ibarra (2003) found that it is precisely through small, everyday "experiments" with new behaviors that a person comes to develop significant changes in his career, identity, and sense of self.

Another factor that leads to identity change in a novel situation is the new connections or relationships that the person encounters. Since identity is a social construct, a reflected self-appraisal, influenced by how the individual sees herself being perceived by her new role senders, these subtle feedback cues from her new social network also contribute to a new sense of self. And since this context and these relationships are so new, we would argue that the person has heightened sensitivity and openness to this feedback, so that this sense of

self may be clearer or more salient to the person than the sense of identity that she had in more familiar, routine situations. Ibarra (2003) describes this experience with novel situations as one of “exploring possible selves”, where the person is asking herself questions like, “Whom might I become?”, and “What are the possibilities?” (2003, p.12). In short, in a new situation, our awareness of self is heightened.

One kind of varied experience that leads to this clearer sense of self is an international expatriate assignment for a manager. This is a new type of situation where expats often report that “nothing works”—in countless everyday situations, their tried and true behavioral routines often produce exactly the opposite responses from what they were accustomed to at home. In their discussion of the themes and lessons of international experience, McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) found that a major theme was “learning about self and career”. One type of increased self-awareness that they found was “learning about likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, and preferences” (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002, p.81).

Since the person has become more self-aware in the novel situation, we would also argue that this triggers an overall increase in the person’s socio-emotional competencies. Goleman (1998, 2001) describes self-awareness as the first of the emotional competencies, and we have already discussed how self-awareness can increase with variety of experience. As the person develops a heightened sense of self in a new situation, he will become more aware of others with whom he is interacting. Thus, his social awareness and empathy might increase. As he becomes more aware of how different the situation is from his past experiences, he will try to adapt and use different methods of influencing others in this new world. In this way, his other emotional competencies (such as social awareness, empathy, and motivation) can be furthered, as well. For example, McCall and Hollenbeck (2002) found that expatriates developed greater social awareness by learning what support they needed from their family, employers, and others. They also developed new motivation skills by learning how to manage their families under the stresses of the new international environment. They also learned better how to manage their own career and career development. And we would argue that these would be functional responses to this new situation, so that to the extent that the person was successful in varied experiences, he would be developing greater emotional competencies.

These ideas lead us to the following propositions:

Proposition 2c. *Career variety is associated positively with a manager’s self-awareness and understanding of developmental needs and values.*

Proposition 2d. *Career variety is associated positively with a manager’s socio-emotional competence.*

4. Moderating influences

We have already discussed that the development of managerial adaptability requires a variety of career experiences. However, there are many individual and career-related factors that might enhance or hinder the process. These include the magnitude, pace, and stage of career transitions, subjective perceptions of the magnitude of career transitions, and personality differences/learning and career orientation. The following sections describe the major moderators of the relationship between managerial career variety and adaptability.

4.1. *Magnitude of career transitions: Related vs. unrelated variety*

In addition to presence of variety, the magnitude of change in each career transition has implications for managerial adaptability. Under conditions of high novelty, since people are not able to practice routine behavioral patterns, some personal development and learning is inevitable (Hall, 1986; Nicholson, 1984). “Stretch assignments”, or out-of-comfort-zone stretch targets, have been found to enhance motivation, performance, and creative decision-making (Thompson, Hochwarter, & Mathys, 1997).

Most stretch assignments involve jobs that are unrelated to the managers’ previous learning. This factor of “unrelated variety” enhances the learning power of the assignment. Unrelated variety (Schilling et al., 2003) in career experiences may also improve learning by giving the individual the chance to take some time off from his core job and reflect on what he has learned. In psychology, this process is called “distributive practice”, which may give the learner time to do the deep and elaborate processing that is necessary to draw on the general principles underlying the task (Mumford, Costanza, Baughman, Threlfall, & Fleishman, 1994; Schilling et al., 2003).

Furthermore, “negative transfer” or interference, whereby performance of the subsequent job is inhibited by the previous learning (Ellis, 1965, p.15), will occur less often when subsequent jobs are not similar to each other. Potential problems might emerge for learning when the new and the old jobs are apparently the same or similar, but in fact, may require different responses. Thus, the person may inappropriately apply the lessons from the old position to the new one. However, this negative transfer is less likely to be a problem under conditions of high novelty, when the two jobs are unrelated and it is clear to the person that it is necessary to explore and find new behaviors.

Although Latack (1984) had hypothesized that a high degree of change in a career transition can cause job stress because it creates role ambiguity (uncertainty on how the job should be done) and role overload (the perception that the new job beyond one’s resources and capabilities), she did not find any significant relationship between the magnitude of career transition and role ambiguity. Furthermore, as opposed to her expectations, she found that rather than being overloaded by a major career transition, employees are less prone to perceptions of job overload than their colleagues who made minor transitions or no transition at all. Based on these discussions, we suggest the following proposition.

Proposition 3. *The greater the magnitude of career transitions, the greater is the positive association between career variety and managerial adaptability.*

4.2. *Pace of career transitions*

The duration of or exposure to prior knowledge is a critical element in order for an individual to successfully transfer learning from a previous experience. Learning-set theory points out the importance of practicing sufficient number of related problems before a particular problem is reliably learned (Harlow, 1949, 1959). Similarly, managerial succession and learning studies suggest that in developing new competencies, one needs not only variety of experiences, but also sufficient time at each assignment (Gabarro, 1987; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). Gabarro (1987) has indeed found that sometimes managers do not stay in important assignments long enough to learn much from them at all.

Therefore, pacing of the career experiences (frequency of career transitions and the time spent in each one) is important for the development of managerial adaptability. Experience that comes too fast can overwhelm managers and lead to an inability to transform an experience into a meaningful learning (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). On the other hand, an infrequent experience can lead managers to forget what was learned previously and may result in little knowledge accumulation (Argote, 1999). Therefore, we propose the following.

Proposition 4. *The positive association between career variety and managerial adaptability is greater if the pace of career transitions is optimized. (An optimized pace is defined as one that permits a balance between job assignments that are long enough to permit the learning of the knowledge, competencies, and perspectives associated with the role, yet assignment transitions that are frequent enough to require the individual to learn the skills of change and to become comfortable with the change.)*

4.3. Career stage of the transitions

A person's early career represents a critical period for learning. The time to grow adaptable managers and leaders is when they are just starting their careers, rather than when they reach their 40s and 50s (Karaevli & Hall, 2003). Early variety in experience has indeed been found to be linked to adaptability and openness to change later in the career (Bunker & Webb, 1992; McCall, 1998). Attitudes towards self and work, as well as skills and performances, are learned more easily at early ages, are more deeply internalized, and are thus more enduring (Karaevli & Hall, 2003). Early career is a time when an individual needs to develop action skills, so that he or she can apply the concepts and competencies that were acquired in school (Hall, 2002). Although going deep in one area, in other words, being specialized has been identified as an important competence in early career, it has been advised that a person should also be rotated to a new specialty after a few years in order to avoid becoming too narrow (Hall, 2002).

Therefore, we argue that the advantages of career variety for the development of adaptability will be particularly pronounced when the experiences are acquired early in an individual's career. A maximum variety of experiences a person can get is important in terms of improving thinking in flexible, strategic, and political ways. Providing early variety in early job assignments will keep people constantly on a steep learning curve. Therefore, we suggest the following proposition.

Proposition 5. *Managers who have a greater number of career transitions in their early career have a greater adaptability than those who experience transitions in their mid- or late career stages.*

4.4. Subjective perceptions of the magnitude of career transitions

It is expected that the extent to which managers identify with a particular role will affect their subjective perceptions of the magnitude, and therefore the process and outcomes of transitions. In fact, in her qualitative study of 19 new managers, Hill (1992) found that the promotion to a managerial level entailed a role identity transformation from a specialist to a generalist, and this change in identity presented a considerable challenge to new managers. This implies that the extent to which an individual

identifies himself or herself with the previous role will affect both the difficulty and the attractiveness of transition to the individual, both of which may bring personal development opportunity (Nicholson, 1984). Therefore, we argue that not only the magnitude of the career transition, but also the individual's subjective perception of the magnitude of the change affects the way career transitions influence managerial adaptability.

Proposition 6. *The greater the subjective perceptions of the magnitude of career transitions, the stronger is the positive relationship between career variety and managerial adaptability.*

4.5. *Personality differences/ learning and career orientation*

At the individual level, personality factors will affect the person's inclination to seek out or welcome new assignments that might represent variety. In terms of the "Big Five" model of personality (McCrae & Costa, 1999; McCrae & John, 1992), one might expect that openness to experience and emotional stability will have the greatest impact on the person's propensity toward and capacity to learn from high-variety mobility. On the other hand, people with negative affectivity are more likely to frame their work experiences pessimistically and to dwell on failure (Isen & Baron, 1991; Staw & Barsade, 1993.) These behaviors will probably produce negative rather than positive outcomes following a high-variety assignment. Tolerance of uncertainty and a propensity toward risk-taking have been shown to be key factors in managers' ability to deal successfully with challenging and varied assignments (Howard & Bray, 1988; Armstrong-Stassen, 1998).

A proactive personality, which involves independence in career behavior, will also incline a person to take initiative and seek out the kind of learning opportunities that can be found in varied career assignments. The proactive personality is one that takes initiative (Crant, 1995), and it is positively related to objective and subjective career satisfaction (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999) and career initiative (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

We would also expect that the person's orientation toward learning and toward the career will be important in determining his propensity toward mobility. Individuals with a strong protean career orientation, being more self-directed and values-driven, might be more inclined than those with a low protean orientation to seek out assignments that will stretch them and help them grow in directions they value (Hall, 2004). And, similarly, the person's goal orientation may make a difference. That is, people who go into a new situation with a learning orientation are motivated by novelty and discovery, and they will thus be expected to learn a great deal in new and varied assignments. On the other hand, a person with a performance orientation (characterized by a desire to perform well competitively and to avoid the perception of failure (Button, Mathiev, & Zajac, 1996), might avoid variety, or if presented with it, might avoid risk and play it safe, thus learning little. Based on these discussions, we suggest the following proposition.

Proposition 7. *The positive association between career variety and managerial adaptability is greater if an individual has a high tolerance for uncertainty, openness to experience and propensity toward risk-taking, positive attitude, proactive personality, and learning and protean career orientation.*

5. Discussion

The purpose of this paper has been to advance theory development on how managerial adaptability develops from variety of managers' career experiences. The meaning and consequences of career variety differ in different vocational groups. We have focused on the managerial group, since understanding how adaptability develops is particularly important for managerial jobs, as many managers who are successful in their own technical track or functional area derail when they are promoted to higher level managerial positions, which are less structured and require more discretion (McCall, 1998).

Although research in leadership has focused mostly on managerial performance, career and individual learning theories suggest that as we inquire more into the turbulence and change inherent in the contemporary business environment, it is critical for a person to be not only a strong performer but also a fast, adaptive learner (Arthur et al., 1999; Hall, 2002). Therefore, the new-age concept of a flexible or "protean career" is not measured by chronological age and life stages, but by continuous learning and adaptability (Hall, 2002). Unfortunately, however, the theoretical development in studying individual careers in and out of organizations has not been translated much into managerial careers.

Since our focus in this paper has been on managers, based on prior research on managerial career typologies (Smith & White, 1987; White et al., 1994), we defined career variety in relation to managers' functional and institutional context experiences. However, although we have not explicitly incorporated them into our discussion of career variety, we acknowledge the importance of learning that happens through education and out of the job. An interesting avenue for future research is to offer a more sophisticated conceptualization and measurement of the construct of career variety. Since contemporary careers are more boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and protean (Hall, 1996, 2002), and the importance of upward mobility has diminished while that of lateral mobility has increased, leveraging the concept of career variety will not just be important for studying managerial careers, but also all careers in and out of organizations. For example, the developments that have come with the knowledge-based economy, where there has been a shift from position-based power to individual-based learning, have highlighted the importance of having diverse experiences for career success (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996). Therefore, the investigation of various individual outcomes of career variety, apart from individual adaptability (e.g., objective and subjective career success) is important for the advancement of research on career theory.

The framework proposed here has important implications for the well-being of individuals as well as organizations in terms of career planning for managers and staffing of top managerial positions in a way to facilitate positive deviations from the status quo. We believe that having an available pool of managers who have diverse experiences—people who view learning, mobility, and change as part of their job—will bring enhanced flexibility and adaptability to organizations. Since it is impossible to know just what skills and personal qualities will be needed in the future, it is more important to develop a person's ability to learn from experience.

Therefore, it appears that organizations that need to build their adaptive capacity should do well to *manage for career variety* as part of their leadership development activities. Much the same way as job challenge was stressed years ago as a strong predictor of career performance, now that adaptability is so important in a turbulent environment, career variety should be encouraged as a way of building adaptive capacity. Put another

way, just as diversity in an organization's work force builds a stronger employee base, diversity in a person's career experience builds a more adaptive manager capable of handling a variety of complex, unforeseen situations. In addition, we know that there are several characteristics of individual and jobs that can interact to heighten the positive impact of career variety, and these should be used more explicitly as components of a developmentally based managerial selection system. Given the increasing importance of diverse experiences and adaptability, we believe that empirical testing of our framework and propositions will be important for theoretical as well as practical reasons.

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