

Chapter

The foundations of career resilience

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Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century, the individual life course was largely determined by ‘standard biographies’ (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Meijers & Wesselingh, 1999) whereby identity – the story individuals tell themselves and share with others about the meaning of their lives (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012) – was constructed on the basis of socially prescribed ‘master narratives’ (Davies & Harré, 1990) or ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard, 1984). This pattern changed in the second half of the 20th century with the advent of secularization, the lifting of socio-political barriers, growing prosperity and mobility and the resulting increase in possible choices. The ‘prescriptive power’ of these narratives became increasingly contested, especially by young people, resulting in a growing individualization of society (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991). For most people, this movement towards individualization was not problematic as long as the ever-growing prosperity made it possible to have a second or third chance to make new choices. However, society soon became a risk society (Beck, 1992).

Besides individualization, the risk society is characterized by (based upon Schnabel, 2000):

- *internationalization*, which refers to increased globalization with the accompanying economic liberalization and changing immigration patterns;
- *informalization*, as a form of de-institutionalizing organizations and ways of organizing things, as these had developed in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Organizations in the 21st century will become flatter, and will increasingly acquire the character of collaborative networks, where people work with one another in formal or informal teams, both close and through digital networks at a distance;
- *informatization*: technological developments will increasingly acquire an open informatised nature. The meaning of information will change, where the specific selection of relevant information will become more important than the volume and availability;
- *intensification*, refers to the changing dynamics and the increasing role and meaning of lived experience in life and work as emotional labour (i.e., work where emotions must be applied in a conscious way) becomes increasingly important (Doorewaard & Benschop, 2003; Sennet, 1998).

These developments characterizing the risk society forced employers to make their organizations more flexible. Flexibility was realised by “trimming the ranks of full-time workers, outsourcing some of their functions, and opting for part-time, contract, and project workers who can be moved around more flexibly and who do not require the same level of investment in employee benefits or career development” (Lent, 2013, p. 2). Under these circumstances realizing a sustainable career is primarily the responsibility of individuals themselves. Recently, Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015) defined sustainable careers as “the sequence of an individual’s different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual” (p. 7). However, being responsible for a sustainable career weighs heavily on individuals as they are confronted with

the fact, as Lengelle (2016) aptly states, “that safety and steadiness are not ensured by our employers; that our work and lives are subject to the chaotic laws of chance and that we need to cultivate a host of new career competencies. We can also not assume we will be able to survive the ups and downs of life and work without help and we must learn to ask for it” (p. 48).

In this climate, a person’s search for career fulfilment can easily be marked by feelings of “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011): maintaining an attachment to a problematic, imaginary career ambition and its attendant promises of job satisfaction, rewards and career development, in advance of it likely remaining unfulfilled or lost. Cruel optimism does not enhance a person’s chances on the labour market, instead individuals have to develop career adaptability (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2011), part of which is career resilience (Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). Within the social sciences resilience is understood as “the process of bending and rebounding to overcome adversity”(Hunter, 2001, p. 172). Research over the last decades has demonstrated resilience to be a multidimensional phenomenon that varies according to contexts, internal variables, and external changes (Chiaburu, Baker, & Pitariu, 2006; Connor & Davidson, 2003).

According to Richardson (2002), Everall, Altrows and Paulson (2006) and Metztl and Morrell (2008), models of resilience have predominantly focused on one of three operational definitions. First, as a stable personality trait, which protects individuals from the negative effects of risk and adversity. A trait is an individual disposition that is relatively stable over the course of a lifespan, is difficult to change and drives human behaviour (Pervin, 1993). Throughout a large part of the twentieth century, the trait approach was dominant among psychologists. During the past decades, however, scholars have started to question the predictive validity of the trait approach because of inconsistent findings between traits, well-being and behaviour across different situations at work (Nezlek, 2007). Second, resilience has been conceptualized as a positive outcome “which is defined by the presence of positive mental health (such as positive self-concept and self-esteem, academic achievement, success at age-appropriate developmental tasks, etc.) and the absence of psychopathology, despite exposure to risk” (Metztl & Morrell, 2008, p. 305). Third and last, resilience is interpreted as a dynamic learning process dependent upon interactions between individual and contextual variables that evolve over time. In this sense, resilience refers to the capability to ‘bounce back’ from negative emotional experiences associated with adversity, uncertainty and threat (Tugate & Fredrickson, 2004).

All three definitions of resilience, however, stay within a framework that makes the individual primarily responsible for acquiring and being resilient. Conversely, Hartling’s (2005) concept of resilience as referenced by Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) moves beyond an individualistic notion. According to RCT, resilience has to be viewed in the context of relationships and culture. To illustrate, Hartling cites studies of white, middle-class businessmen and notes that the resilient individuals studied were “the beneficiaries of a silent system of extensive support comprised of secretaries, wives, mothers, and undervalued service providers (...) who likely made it possible for these privileged professionals to be hardy” (Hartling, 2005, p. 340). In other words, from the perspective of RCT, resilience is fostered by focussing on the relational empowerment of individuals. This implies not only the strengthening of individuals’ ability to create growth-fostering relationships, but also the creation of a learning environment that enables this strengthening. Resilience, in other words, is a shared responsibility of the individual and his or her social environment.

In this chapter we adopt the RCT-approach of resilience as it rightly critiques the one-sided individualistic character of constructionist career theories, that have been provided the past several decades (Leach, 2016; Reid, 2005). In order to overcome this gap in the scholarly literature, we will therefore focus on the question regarding relational empowerment and connections that can be fostered in order to cultivate resilience. We postulate that at the heart of career resilience is the ability to foster both an internal (i.e., meaningful felt conversation with oneself) and external dialogue (i.e., meaningful conversations with others about lived experience) in the process of developing a flexible, personal, and useful career narrative (i.e., career identity). In the following section, we will discuss a model for identity learning that forms the basis of our claim. Next, we will explore how much room there is for identity learning in both educational settings and in working organizations.

Identity learning

According to Brewer (2003) an identity narrative must create meaning in a social and in an existential sense. As Picasso once said: “The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away” (www.goodreads.com/quotes/607827-the-meaning-of-life-is-to-find-your-gift-the). At the core of modern career theories is the idea that this process of meaning-making can only be realized when individuals get to know themselves, more specifically identify life themes, which provide unity in a person’s life story (Meijers & Lengelle, 2015; Savickas, 2011). Life themes can be defined as “the affective and cognitive representation of a problem or set of problems, perceived or experienced either consciously or unconsciously, which constituted a fundamental source of psychic stress for a person during childhood, for which that person wished resolution above all else, and which thereby triggered adaptive efforts, resulting in an attempted identification of the perceived problem, which in turn formed the basis for a fundamental interpretation of reality and ways of dealing with that reality” (Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie, 1979, p. 48). “All trauma is preverbal”, Van der Kolk (2014, p. 43) succinctly states, therefore life themes are usually half or sometimes entirely unconscious and the task at hand is to take what has been suffered and give meaning to it through language. The idea is to voice tacit knowledge and begin to articulate a meaningful story of self that also has relevance for one’s career.

As “old pain is still pain, and the recollection of it will always hurt” (Baker & Staught, 2003, p. 159), and stressful experiences affect the development of brain, mind, and body awareness, all of which are closely connected (Siegel & Solomon, 2003). These experiences are stored in the emotional brain. However, as Robertson (2012, p. 283) puts it: “there can be no change without naming the problem” and this has to be done by and in the rational brain (McGilchrist, 2010). The process of constructing a career story, therefore, has to be conceptualized “as an experience linking reason and feeling instead of an experience of controlling emotions”, according to Van Woerkom (2010, p. 348). Indeed, a successful identity-learning process starts with a bodily awareness of emotions (Gendlin, 1996) and develops into a more cognitive understanding, which ultimately must meet with a sense of affective congruence. Such a process does not happen in isolation or automatically; current triggers that touch and help unearth life themes must be processed by the individual ‘in conversation’ with meaningful others.

The development of a career identity (i.e., career story) can only take shape in response to the processing of a ‘trigger’ (e.g., losing one’s job, wrestling with questions of career choice, repeated patterns of conflict), which forms a demarcation point in the life course (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012). Bühler (1935, p. 43) refers to such a crisis as a “boundary

experience”: an experience whereby an individual encounters the boundaries of his or her existing self-concept and cannot cope with the situation and its exigencies (Meijers & Wardekker, 2002).

It is important here to note that stressful experiences as described above deactivate the ability to be rational for brief or longer periods (Van der Kolk, 2014). Even if rationality is reengaged (by for instance putting feelings aside), the thoughts that emerge are frequently rationalizations and become unhelpful default narratives. Humans are apt to reach for ways of avoiding what triggers them emotionally rather than to touch on what is unprocessed. They do this by displaying the symptoms described by Baker and Staath (2003) in the acronym 'VERB' – victimization, entitlement, rescue, and blame. This form of rationalization is, as Rand (1984, p. 12) puts it: a “process of not perceiving reality, but of attempting to make reality fit one’s emotions”. No matter how much insight and understanding an individual develops, “the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality” (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 47) and it tries to explain away pain with unhelpful and even damaging consequences.

With the above in mind, it is clear that ways of conceptualizing and processing boundary experiences is necessary. Law (1996) developed a model that can be used to conceptualise how tacit knowledge is voiced. His model distinguishes four stages: sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding. *Sensing* is the stage in which information is gathered (from various sources, in particular those that are emotionally compelling), but no explanation or perspective is yet developed. In this first stage the main focus is on becoming aware of feelings (and the attached memories) so that the individual might ‘give them a voice’. *Sifting* is a sorting process, which moves a person “towards the issue of causality” (Law, 1996, p. 55). One compares one’s circumstances with those of others and starts to develop analogies and from those analogies, constructs and concepts start to emerge. Note that these two stages of sensing and sifting do overlap and that regressions are normal as well as leaps that lift the veil on what the ‘new’ story may eventually look like. In the *focusing stage* actual viewpoints are formulated. These viewpoints are still fragmented, but they are an attempt to string together feelings and ideas that arose during the sensing and sifting stages. The focusing stage ideally segues into the *understanding stage* and the insights and fragments start to become a new or ‘second story’ (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012).

Lengelle and Meijers (2015) argue that the engine that facilitates the movement of an individual through the four stages is dialogical in nature and depends upon an internal and external dialogue. From the perspective of Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), the internal dialogue can be described as a conversation between various sub-selves or I-positions that has beneficial effects when the initial conversation is broadened and deepened (e.g., more I-positions than normal begin to participate in the conversation; positions marginalized are given voice) and results in the development of meta- and promoter positions. When two or more positions act in service to each other, meta-positions may develop. Next, on the basis of meta-positions promoter positions can emerge, which represent an individual’s ability to become action-able (Ligorio, 2011). The internal dialogue can be summed up as the felt and meaningful interaction of I-positions within a person in which both the broadening and deepening of voices take place, but also where a sense of wholeness is created and experienced through a narrative articulation of those voices.

Without an external dialogue, however, an internal dialogue runs the risk of becoming self-absorbed or a dead end of foreclosure or rumination (Lengelle, Luken, & Meijers, 2016).

The reality that is constructed in an internal dialogue needs to be regularly verified and tested against an external reality. In this process the individual should be helped literally to: (a) not become stuck in VERB and (b) to find the ‘right’ words for expressing the boundary experience in a way that is increasingly rational but acknowledges emotions, hereby gradually providing the individual insight into his or her life themes and into the way one’s life themes influence his or her being and acting in the world.

In practice, for instance in educational settings and in working organizations where career guidance is provided, it is key that those guiding others engage in career dialogues with students or clients, not speaking about or ‘towards’ individuals but rather *with* them. This seems like common sense but research shows that this rarely happens (Hall & Moss, 1999; Winters et al., 2009, 2012). Secondly, the dialogue should be about experiences relevant to the student or client; the latter becomes apparent when the student or client expresses emotion words. Frequently the presence of emotion words is a sign that a boundary experience is being touched on. Emotions must, as Doorewaard (2000, p. 44-45) suggests, be valued and treated with respect. They are often extremely powerful motives for the behaviour of individuals. When an emotion is ignored or even denied, it can be turned against others, which may result in paralysis affecting the individual and the environment. Emotions should be seen as potentially shedding light on underlying messages they carry (see also Ashforth & Humphrey 1995, p. 97).

Figure 1 shows how the construction of a narrative career identity takes shape through a career dialogue. It is a process that starts with a boundary experience that is emotionally relevant but at the same time has no meaning yet and that evokes a defensive ‘first story’. In order to attach meaning to the experience, the individual has to enter both an internal and external dialogue. These dialogues make it possible for tacit knowledge to be voiced and through the four stages described above, a ‘second story’ takes shape.

*** somewhere here Figure 1 ***

Dialogue in educational settings

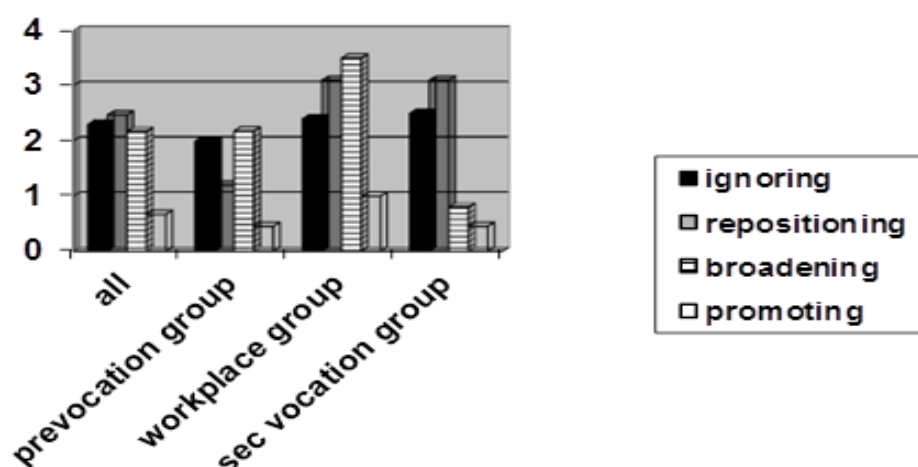
A longitudinal study, that Winters et al. (2012) did in a school for secondary vocational education, showed that it is difficult to achieve an actual career dialogue in the current educational system. As well, Quinn (1991) showed that in organizations that remain stable over a long period of time, a culture develops that is attractive to personality types who value output, control, and management and are therefore less open to change and innovation. Especially in full-time education, the culture with respect to the interaction between students and teachers barely changed between 1920 and 1980. Teaching was focused on the efficient transfer of established knowledge in the form of an established curriculum. The teacher was the central figure who was seen to be enthusiastically transferring knowledge to students from his or her precise and well-defined area of expertise. Although school culture has changed since 1980, most of the teachers in Dutch secondary vocational education had their teacher training before or just after 1980. It isn’t surprising, therefore, that even today, schools rarely offer room for the development or expression of student narratives (Winters et al., 2009), let alone for emotions that require a dialogical learning process. Moreover, because educational

culture is still largely monological, most teachers are very uncertain about their abilities to help students in developing a career identity in the form of a story (Kuijpers & Meijers). It is important to acknowledge that teachers feel uncertain in this area because the effectiveness of a dialogical career approach largely depends on the trust the counsellor has on the chosen approach and on the willingness to give up the role of expert and knowledge keeper (Cooper, 2008). Career identities are co-constructions that depend upon open and caring relationships; vulnerability is key in unearthing and beginning to articulate pain and purpose, and in this process the safety of the learning environment is imperative (Lengelle & Ashby, 2016).

In a series of studies, Winters et al. (2009, 2012, 2013) used Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) as a framework for understanding and analyzing how conversations about work placements foster career construction. Their research showed that it is not the student who is at the heart of the conversation, but the curriculum, and furthermore that mentors engaged in work placement talk mostly *to* (65%) and *about* (21%) students, and hardly ever *with* (9%) them. The students sit with their teachers and their mentors from practice, but this does not mean that they can take part in the conversation and direct it to reflect on their personal learning goals. Little opportunity is given to students to express what they think of their experiences in the work place, let alone about what they have learned or wanted to learn from these experiences. Training conversations are almost completely aimed at the evaluation of the student and on transferring expert opinions from teacher and mentor to students. In short, one might say that schools remain a monological and patronizing environment where identity learning rarely happens.

Winters et al. (2012, 2013) also explored the quality of career conversations in three culturally different contexts within vocational education: conversations between teachers and 15-year old students in pre-vocational education ('prevocational group'), conversations between teachers, workplace mentors and 18-19 year old students in secondary vocational education ('secondary vocational group') and conversations between workplace mentors and 18-19 year old students in secondary vocational education ('workplace group'). Results showed that the average conversation has some potential with regards to constructing a career identity. Positioning (i.e., formulating an I-, meta- or promoter position) does happen and is done mainly by students themselves. In pre-vocational education, more I-positions are formulated than in secondary vocational education and more than in the workplace, probably due to the existing culture of carefulness (i.e., much attention is paid to the well-being of each individual student). During their placement in an organization, more meta- and promoter positions are formulated than in both other contexts, probably due to the business-like culture in which every individual is held responsible for the success of the group. In secondary vocational education, the conversations were longest, but they offered even less room for positioning than the less standardised and shorter inquiries about how students' placements went in pre-vocational education. This is likely due to the fact that 65% of all students in secondary vocational education enter the labour market immediately after completing their course of studies. As the quality of secondary vocational education is under close surveillance by the Department of Education; employers and politicians force schools to use standardized evaluative procedures, and little room is left for the narratives of either students and teachers (for a description of the same tendency in the USA, see Berliner & Nichols, 2007). A dialogue was not dominant in any of the contexts studied. In other words, when a student 'positions him/herself', teacher and mentor strategies are rarely directed at stimulating the broadening of those positions, let alone focused on the formulation of meta- and promoter-positions.

Table 1. Number of strategies used to respond to positioning in an average conversation, split for the three contexts



Winters et al. (2013) were especially interested in the response of teachers to student positioning. They found four different strategies: ignoring the I-position (ignoring), repositioning by talking on behalf of the student (repositioning), broadening the I-position without conclusion (broadening), and dialogue in the direction of the formulation of a promoter position (promoting). Table 1 shows that the three studied contexts show strong similarities when it comes to using the strategies of “ignoring” and “promoting”. In an average conversation a formulated position is ignored twice (to 2.5 times for the workplace and secondary vocational group), while an I-position stimulates a dialogue less than once (0.5 times for the prevocational and secondary vocational group), resulting in the formulation of a promoter position. The strategy “repositioning” happens twice per average conversation (once per conversation in the prevocational group and three times per conversation in the workplace and secondary vocational group). When it comes to “promoting” as a strategy, an average conversation shows this dynamics twice (the workplace group stands out with an average of 3.5 times per conversation as compared to the prevocational and secondary vocational groups). The conclusion is obvious: positioning is done by the students themselves and teachers/mentors respond most often with non-dialogical strategies (i.e., ignoring and repositioning).

The fact that teachers respond with non-dialogical strategies is due, at least partly, to feelings of disempowerment. Teachers reported that the conversations they had with their students are usually about school progress and rarely about self and future (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012; Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011). It was notable that 40% of the teachers felt that their work in providing careers guidance was not well-supported by either the school or other professionals working in the field; 63% of teachers reported that they received almost no support from their managers and colleagues, and 54% of teachers reported that they received almost no support from employers or other professionals. The current socio-political climate of education in Western societies favours an approach to teaching and learning in which test preparation and scripted curricula are the preferred methods (Hillocks, 2002; Marshall, 2009).

This approach has led to a narrow view of what counts as teaching and learning (Franciosi, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Lipman, 2004; Ravitch, 2011). The *Standards Era* policies do not focus on making time for narrative and dialogical encounters with students, leaving teachers even less experienced with this “largely verbal process” that entails “a collaborative relationship” (McIlveen & Patton, 2007, p. 10). Many teachers, however, are beginning to realize its importance and explicitly ask to be trained in initiating a career dialogue with their students (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2015).

Kuijpers and Meijers (2011) conducted a study about the effects of teacher training on career dialogues promoting career competency development in students. For the quantitative part of the study, a quasi-experimental research design was used to measure effects among 2,291 students. Video-recordings of conversations were used for qualitative research. An important conclusion of this study is that a two-day off-the-job training program for teachers was insufficient to achieve significant changes in guidance conversations, measured at a student level. However, off-the-job training combined with individual coaching and team coaching on-the-job, proved to be effective in improving guidance conversations from a student perspective. An actual improvement requires being guided in applying the off-the-job training in the teacher’s own context. Not only the quantitative study showed changes in guidance conversations after the training program as reported by students, but changes were also seen in the recordings of conversations. In other words, teachers asked more career-oriented questions and students gave more career-oriented answers. These results make clear that having career conversations that foster career identity formation via an internal and external dialogue, that, we argue, is at the foundation of resilience, can be learned by teachers accustomed to a monological culture of teaching.

Dialogue in working organizations

Positive relationships in the workplace are highly important in the light of the current need for establishing career sustainability (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015). As casual encounters might be positive in the light of work satisfaction, and for providing social support, in-depth dialogue is needed to foster relational empowerment and connection in order to cultivate resilience. After all, given the characteristics of the previously explained risk society, people need to construct their careers throughout their lives. More specifically, “individuals’ career development is no longer viewed as linear and hierarchical, but multifaceted, unstable, cyclical, and transitional over the life course” (Bimrose & Hearne, 2012, p. 338).

In response to this reality and the societal changes mentioned above and captured in the concept of the ‘risk society’, De Vos and Van der Heijden (2015) introduced the four-dimensional operationalization of sustainable careers (continuity over time, social space, agency, and meaning). Such a new career concept which is intended to respond to the changing employment relationships (e.g., rise of increasingly boundaryless careers or the importance of individual agency and personal meaning) requires both an in-depth internal and external dialogue. Therefore, an important question to answer is whether current working organizations provide enough room for such a dialogue. As the interaction between an individual employee and direct supervisor is most important in the light of career growth (given formal evaluation cycles), in this contribution we will focus on the latter as our main stakeholder in fostering career resilience (see also Van der Heijden, 2011). Indeed, Textor and

Hoeksema (2001) indicated that managerial commitment appeared to be the most important factor of career success of their subordinates.

Based on ample empirical research (see for instance Van der Heijden, De Lange, Demerouti, & Van der Heijde, 2009) however, it's clear that middle management (i.e., direct supervisors) is strongly inclined to take on a short-term oriented or an instrumental leadership style. In a situation of high employee career potential, it is in the supervisor's interest that the employee's expertise (knowledge and skills) is utilized within the department that he or she is heading, thus, restraining the employee from moving to another job or to another field, herewith hindring possible career growth. After all, the 'here-and-now' functioning of subordinates determines the career success of the supervisor him or herself (Van der Heijden, 2000; Van der Heijden et al., 2009). We believe that this is the result of current evaluation practices across working organizations, wherein middle management is mainly, and even on many occasions, solely evaluated according to their output. This focus on output neglects the potential of middle management to actively engage in the development of human capital management, aimed at fostering career resilience (see also Baruch & Vardi, 2016; Lee, Burch, & Mitchell, 2014). Sound human capital management requires that top management consider HRM systems to be of strategic importance, and supports continuous and systematic training of line management (Earnshaw, Rubery & Cooke, 2002; Marchington & Wilkinson, 2002) – the fostering of resilience among staff should therefore be a priority and would mean that middle managers (i.e., direct supervisors) build time for the previously described internal and external dialogue. Indeed supervisor career support appears to be associated with greater employee career self-management and adaptability (Ito & Brotheridge, 2005). Moreover, an employee who is supported in the fostering of resilience is not only a more connected employee but also one able to perform better under pressure or as part of a team; these things are of strategic importance though the theory and practice of investing in this way is often only given lip service.

In order then to seriously support employee's career resilience through internal and external dialogue, all parties involved must share certain common understandings that go beyond what has been formally specified in employment agreements (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Employees in this day and age are driven by the motive of 'expressivism' (Rose, 2000), implying that line managers should make room for individual aspirations to shape the psychological contract. That is to say, all individual workers should be enabled to alternate periods of high investments and loyalty with periods of reflection, and sometimes change (see also Baruch & Vardi, 2016; Conway & Briner, 2009). This is why the annual performance appraisal needs to be enhanced by discussions on development interests and reflections on future career aspirations (Boxall & Purcell, 2003) in order to become a richer conversation. This is in essence the invitation to a more courageous conversation than is customary in organizational settings – the language is of 'wholeheartedness' (Whyte, 2002) and must go beyond notions of efficiency, accountability, and goal-oriented performance.

This conversation (i.e., external dialogue) is at the heart of cultivating high-quality relationships between employees and their direct supervisors (Reitz, 2015). Understanding each other's needs requires the strength of this vulnerable dialogue (Meijers et al., 2014) and the conversation is characterised by high-quality exchanges, also called Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) (see also Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Closer relationships are also necessary in view of the different perceptions (between the individual workers of him or herself and of his or her supervisor) regarding ratings of occupational expertise and employability (Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), which are important predictors of career success (Van der Heijden et al., 2009). More specifically, the outcomes of previous empirical research indeed

confirm that the nature of the rater, self or supervisor, produces very different information about the employee. An explanation for this is the lack of communication between the two parties. At higher functioning levels especially, employees' work is highly independent and often solitary, even. In order to gain greater insight into the potential of one's workforce, supervisors should bridge the gap that exists between them and their subordinates, especially, as the supervisor's opinion is to a great extent influential upon the career of the individual employee.

In order to truly make use of knowledge of perception differences and openly share the information, employee and supervisor should have an elaborate base of information to talk about the differences in perception (Jones, 2001). Ratings on their own do not convey sufficient information for people to improve. In order for staff to develop and learn, they need to know what they should change, where (specifically) they have fallen short, and what they need to do. Indeed, we stress the need to discuss seriously differences in perceptions, and to ask supervisors to clearly indicate by means of examples of performances and behaviours what underlies their decision as to determine a particular scale anchor in evaluation settings. The latter might for instance prevent age-related stereotyping, in which case supervisors think more negatively about their older workers' career resilience (see for instance Kooij, De Lange, Janssen, & Dikkers, 2008). As such, the explicit exchange of information underlying the choice in evaluation settings should be part of the external dialogue aimed at fostering career resilience.

It takes courage to fill in performance appraisals, by not only looking back at past performance, but by also talking about competencies, employability strengths and weaknesses, and about factors influencing the employee's career resilience. Given the informative value for career development, resilience and sustainability, it is well worth devoting attention to these opportunities for increased validity of performance evaluations, with the aim of taking the human being into consideration in a meaningful way. In order to really understand employees capabilities throughout career stages, not only sound data is required but a conversation with which to ascribe and questions meanings related to it. Both supervisors and employees should seriously invest in a dialogue in order to obtain in-depth information about the individual employee's needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Notwithstanding differences in opportunities and affinities throughout one's working life, we believe that many career problems can be solved, and career resilience may be fostered provided that line managers change their attitude towards age, career models, and career success and increase the breadth and depth of conversations held. That is to say, they should take a non-normative perspective as they alone do not have the capacity to decide what success implies and how and when, i.e., at which age, it should be experienced. In addition, we consider it important to acknowledge the urgency to carefully consider the boundaries to workforce capacity in relation to the present-day work pressure, in order to determine the reasonableness of employers' expectations versus employees' expectations over the life stage (see also Demerouti, Peeters, & Van der Heijden, 2012). This can be fostered by conversations that actually pertain to felt experience regarding workloads and employer demands. That said, it should be noted that the 'safety' of such conversations need to take into consideration the precarious nature of much of employment; what is shared should be there to enhance work place competence and confidence or to redirect workers to other opportunities, not as another way to screen, judge, disqualify, or threaten already insecure workers. Given the current demands placed upon the workforce and the complexity, insecurity, and individualization of society – realities which we do not expect will decrease over time – attention to fostering career resilience through dialogue enlarges the individual's

flexibility to find suitable and valued work and to build up a sustainable career, and should be one of the pillars of management in current working organizations.

Conclusion

It follows from the above that educational and work environments which foster career resilience should:

- ***be practice-based***: the learning process of teachers and middle managers must be based on questions and problems that arise from actual practices and lived experiences and in response to concrete problems. The theory required on how to respond to and explain these problems should be offered “just in time” and “only in the amount needed” to address these problems and be intended as a starting-off point for a dialogue (not a lesson or transfer of knowledge).
- ***promote dialogical interactions***: dealing with concrete problems will only lead to changes if teachers and middle managers are encouraged and feel safe enough to question their professional identities, foster truly innovative practices, and have a conversation between all parties (including students and employees) about the personal and societal meaning of one’s work. The kind of dialogue that is needed, is described by Shotter (1993, p. 20) as “*a socially constructed myriad of spontaneous, responsive, practical, unselfconscious, but contested interactions*”, a conversation that is “*quite the opposite of the apparent representation of dialogue as converging upon a single ultimate ‘Truth’*”. As will be clear from Shotter’s quote, dialogue is something completely different than a discussion. A dialogue means to show and accept vulnerability and uncertainty and to assume an exploration process is underway as the ‘right’ words are found (see Meijers & Lengelle, 2012) – which includes not being corrected, educated or judged for using the ‘not yet right’ words in the process of articulation.
- ***fosters cooperation*** and consensus on the basis of a clear and strategic management vision: initiating and keeping such a dialogue going demands transformational leadership (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005; Geijsel, Meijers, & Wardekker, 2007). This type of leadership simultaneously provides direction based on the strategic vision, but also creates space for teachers and middle managers to set out their own tactics to achieve desired goals. It only creates the necessary space when upper management keeps a dialogue going about the concrete work experiences of teachers and middle managers.

Resilience, as described in this article is not a ‘trait’ or an ‘outcome’ of primarily a learning process, rather it is the result of a dynamic socially imbedded conversation aimed at the development of a career identity, whereby the internal dialogue (i.e., one’s felt experience articulated to one’s self) is enriched by an external dialogue (i.e., meaningful conversations with others about lived experience) and vice versa. The learning process required of teachers and middle managers is that they question their professional identities and ‘restory’ those identities in the face of societal challenges that they themselves together with their students and employees face. The reality of the risk society and the changing face of work means resilience is not simply a psychological need but a strategic imperative for the future of work and learning. This process is not an easy one, in fact, “One of the great difficulties as you rise up through an organization is that your prior competencies are exploded and broken apart by the territory you’ve been promoted into: the field of human identity.” (Whyte, 2016)

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