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How gender and career concepts impact Global Talent Management

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# How gender and career concepts impact Global Talent Management

Gender and  
career concepts  
impact GTM

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to further develop Global Talent Management (GTM) and the career literature by conceptualizing a model that uses widely discussed contemporary career concepts such as boundaryless career, protean career and kaleidoscope career, with a special focus on gender issues and contextual impact factors. This model contributes to the understanding of how GTM in multinational enterprises (MNEs) can be designed to fit lifelong career courses and to reduce talent scarcity by increasing the deployment of female talent.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors develop a theoretical model of a talent's lifelong development of career orientations, and draw insights from many discreet literature bases. Through a review of the relevant literature, this paper synthesizes a holistic approach to understand why MNEs need a tailor-made GTM with a particular focus on gender and a life phase-specific career orientation with strong local responsiveness.

**Findings** – The Dynamic Career Cube is a hermeneutic model that helps to visualize the individual career course of talented employees and the fit of talent's career orientations and GTM.

**Research limitations/implications** – A research agenda that includes a retrospective analysis of biographies, especially considering contextual factors such as culture and role stereotypes, is proposed as a starting point for research in this field.

**Practical implications** – The design and implementation of current GTM must be questioned to fit the contextual factors and to currently match the needs of talented male and female employees throughout their lifelong career course. Tailor-made GTM measures depending on the career phase are proposed.

**Originality/value** – The paper provides a novel synthesis of the existing research and literature on GTM, gender and careers. By showing the complexity of individual career decisions that are influenced by internal and contextual factors, the paper emphasizes the importance of flexible, locally responsive and gender-inclusive GTM. The paper is useful for academics who seek insight into a talent's decision-making process and practitioners who manage talent globally.

**Keywords** Gender, Boundaryless career, Kaleidoscope career, Global talent management, Protean career, Subjective and objective career success

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

The recent career literature includes challenging scenarios for companies. Young talented incumbents increasingly develop boundaryless and protean career orientations. Consequently, they act self-directed and move independently through a global labor market that provides them with unlimited options without organizational or country borders (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). However, multinational enterprises (MNEs)

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strive to attract, retain and develop these young, talented people through Talent Management (TM) (Iles *et al.*, 2010). Talent mobility and autonomy is partly caused by a diminishing trust between the workforce and employer. The traditional organizational career's promise of long-term employment and fast progression up the MNE's hierarchy can no longer be perpetuated (Dries *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, employees are pushed to "trade security for flexibility" (Stahl *et al.*, 2007, p. 5) in times of rapid changes. At the same time that globalization accelerates, international talent grows in value, and MNEs experience labor market shortages in both developed and emerging markets (Scullion and Collings, 2011; Schuler *et al.*, 2011).

One possible solution to manage global talent scarcity is to enhance the participation of women in the workforce. This solution challenges MNEs for two reasons. First, low gender inclusion in various TM elements with females who are often disadvantaged may be assumed from a study in the German context (Festing *et al.*, 2014). Second, research shows gender-specific differences in values and decision making throughout life (see, among many others, Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; Ochsenfeld, 2012). However, the boundaryless and protean career concepts are implicitly related to mostly male career orientations (Schinnenburg *et al.*, 2014), which raises questions regarding the adequacy and adoption of these concepts in Global Talent Management (GTM). Furthermore, both career concepts are agency based (Tams and Arthur, 2010). These career orientations lead talent to an independent development of career capital, which consists of the value that individuals create through their positive career development and its recognition in the internal and external labor markets (Lamb and Sutherland, 2010). A rather lax psychological contract with employers can be one consequence. We doubt whether the complexity and context of career decisions are sufficiently taken into account in GTM. Furthermore we question whether career orientations are either stable over the course of life or developed over time.

MNEs are challenged by the need to acquire and develop diverse groups with a wide variety of career expectations in different labor market segments. They also have to manage a complexity of contextual factors, such as different labor markets, cultures and employer organizations. Increasing globalization leads to the strategic importance of GTM and a higher value on talent (Meyskens *et al.*, 2009). Globalization causes MNEs to compete for talent on both a national and a global level (Scullion and Collings, 2011). In this environment, GTM should add to the sustainable competitive advantages of MNEs (Schuler *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, because of constant changes, competitive advantages are never stable, and new business models often require different skills and competencies. Therefore, GTM must be sufficiently flexible to adapt to unforeseen conditions, such as new key positions that emerge while formerly important positions decline in significance. Key positions may need to be filled in remote locations with talented individuals who have a defined set of competencies that previously appeared useless ("position approach"; Collings and Mellahi, 2009; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014).

Considering these unpredictable needs and the difficulties to evaluate the potential of employees, we disregard the high-potential approach and use a broader definition of talent. Cooke *et al.* (2014) define talent as individuals who can fill key positions after they have undergone professional development. Following our argument, all employees are talented individuals who, if necessary, have the willingness and potential to undergo the development to fill key positions with their unique set of skills and competencies and who also promise high performance in these positions. Therefore, we understand GTM as all organizational activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions that contribute to the organization's

sustainable competitive advantage in a global context. GTM also includes the development of talent pools to fill these positions and the advancement of a differentiated human resource architecture to enable the filling of these positions with competent employees and to ensure their permanent commitment to the MNE. Although we are aware of the many GTM definitions, our view deliberately includes a broader scope of employees than the elitist view that concentrates on potential and performance (Collings and Mellahi, 2009) without applying an inclusive approach (Dries *et al.*, 2014). The reasoning behind our GTM understanding is that the elitist view is insufficient to tackle current labor market challenges, because it focusses on mostly male careerists who are identified by their superiors shortly after they obtain their university degree. We argue that talent identification can occur at different career stages and that the timing may be influenced by gender and context. On the one hand, our definition enlarges the perspective and extends the talent pipeline; on the other hand, it keeps the scope of GTM sufficiently focussed to be economically viable. Consequently, the following conceptual investigation considers two groups of players in turbulent times. The first players are talented employees who are developing (more or less) career capital and looking for the best suitable options in their stage of life. The second players are MNEs that pursue economically viable and future-oriented GTM to manage the challenges of agency and interdependence in a changing global context (Tams and Arthur, 2010).

Although there is significant interest in TM and career concepts, only several empirical studies that combine both can be found (Dries *et al.*, 2014). A review of the studies and considerations of gender and TM or gender and career issues led to a handful of articles (e.g. Festing *et al.*, 2014; Sankovich, 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding adding gender-specific career orientations to GTM. Currently, there is no literature or study that shows the male and female's career orientation throughout the talent life cycle and that contributes to the GTM debate. This paper attempts to further develop GTM and the career literature by examining the relationship between contemporary career concepts and GTM. Accordingly, this paper proposes a model that emphasizes the differences in career orientation throughout the global talent's lifelong career path, from entering the labor market until retiring, with a special regard to gender. This paper contributes to the GTM debate by considering the realities and perspectives of female talent, which thus far has led to the underutilization of female competencies and the often-discussed "leaking pipeline". Our objective is to provide GTM with a new, holistic approach that improves the perspectives of talented individuals and MNEs. We argue that this model is holistic, because it includes the value-orientation, self-directedness and physical mobility of individual talent, which is globally moderated by contextual factors such as national culture, employer organization and labor market. Moreover, the internal context includes gender and career stage. The model should help practitioners to develop a flexible, well-tailored, gender-inclusive GTM and support the development of corresponding HR tools that promote the unique progress of talented employees. For academics, the model provides a set of approaches for future research.

To develop our model, we first discuss the central concepts that are drawn from the career literature to explain implicit paradigms that may lead to blind spots in the debate on GTM in MNEs. Contemporary career concepts only partially consider contextual factors. For a new holistic model, it is vital to consider context as a second step, namely, culture, organization, including MNEs' models of upward mobility, professional identity, role stereotypes and labor market. Accordingly, we show their contextual impact on

career orientations and GTM with a special regard to gender. Third, to integrate women in the workforce generally and specifically in expert, managerial and leadership positions, gender-distinctive differences in career stages and the values that are more pertinent to women than men require consideration in GTM. The perceptions of career success are of particular interest. The next section of this paper combines all previously discussed aspects into a comprehensive model, the Dynamic Career Cube, which provides a broad gender-sensitive perspective on GTM-relevant career decisions and paths. Finally, the implications for GTM and a framework for future research are described. Every step in the paper is grounded on the review of the discreet literature bases in the corresponding fields.

### **Principal career concepts for GTM**

GTM and the contemporary career literature can be characterized by different assumptions, concerning aspects such as the importance of mobility and continuous employment in one organization. While career literature emphasizes the low importance of talent's continuous employment at one employer and proclaims inter-organizational mobility, continuity and intra-organizational careers are of higher importance in GTM, which, for example, can be observed in retention management (De Vos and Dries, 2013). Because of economic turbulence, it becomes increasingly difficult to forecast the global demand of skills and competencies. Consequently, even long-term succession plans do not necessarily provide the correct talent mix in the right location at a certain point in time (Meyskens *et al.*, 2009). One possible conclusion is that well-established and formerly successful HR instruments, such as succession planning and company career paths, have lost importance (Baruch and Peiperl, 1997). Therefore, investments in talent development appear to be risky and could be questioned in MNEs. Moreover, implementing GTM may be considered the sole result of mimetic mechanisms because successful and competitive companies use it (Iles *et al.*, 2010). Considering these debates, the question arises whether a MNE and talented individuals should still strive for a traditional organizational career or whether new career concepts are more attractive. A career is defined as a sequence of professional experiences over a person's life (Chudzikowski *et al.*, 2009). Based on this definition, the research has investigated contemporary career concepts over recent decades such as the boundaryless career (Briscoe and Hall, 2006) and the protean career (Hall, 1996). These concepts particularly focus on agency as well as individual, independent and opportunity-seeking career plans.

The unlimited options of boundaryless careerists deliberate them from being bound to a single organization. Boundaryless careerists can be described as psychologically and physically mobile because they transcend the physical and/or psychological limitations of a traditional company career path. A boundaryless mindset of the individual is part of this career concept. The individuals who follow the boundaryless career path have been found to approve interruptions of their career paths such as "improvised work experiences that rise prospectively into fragments and retrospectively into patterns" (Weick, 2001, p. 207). Protean careerists are value driven because they develop according to their own values and goals. Based on these values and goals, protean careerists are self-directed, opportunity-seeking, independent of organizational constraints and do not rely on company career patterns. Furthermore, they apply subjective measurements of career success (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). To react flexibly, protean careerists change their plans and

their identities when necessary. Self-awareness, personal responsibility and lifelong adaptability are required traits for a protean careerist (Hall, 1996).

Implicitly, these career orientations appear to be traits and behaviors of highly qualified, mobile, successful knowledge workers who decide independently and rationally regarding the best options to pursue their career. Knowledge work can be characterized by competencies that are established through extensive education, training and development (Schuler *et al.*, 2011); lately, it has received growing attention. One reason for the growing attention is the increasing number of knowledge workers, such as managers, leaders, consultants or IT specialists. The other reason for the growing attention is the high impact that their work has on the success of companies (Schuler *et al.*, 2011). For some highly qualified groups in the labor market, this impact leads to increased bargaining power, because companies have a greater need to update knowledge and may need knowledge workers more than knowledge workers need companies (Weick, 2001). However, it can be argued whether career agency really is self-initiated by employees or rather forced on them in “lean and mean” company philosophies (Baruch, 2001, p. 543) to push the hazards of volatile markets on employees (Tams and Arthur, 2010). Furthermore, Dries *et al.* (2012) found that traditional company careers lead to higher career satisfaction in the Belgian context; therefore, they conclude that organizations with stable, established career paths may be better prepared to attract and retain scarce talent than other organizations.

Individuals with boundaryless or company careers generate career capital, which consists of certain individual skills, experiences and characteristics that allow them to increase and use differentiated value in the labor market (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). This value varies in its forms and the ways and stages of accumulation, such as experiences in special industries, functions and countries that make it relatively marketable globally (Lamb and Sutherland, 2010). The concept of career capitalism consists of three ways of knowing. First, knowing-how includes accumulated tacit and explicit knowledge, skills and expertise. Second, knowing-why focusses on the energy that derives from individual purpose, motivation and identification with the work-sphere (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). Third, knowing-whom covers the personal network, reputation and sources of information that are gathered on the career path. In the context of the global knowledge economy, Lamb and Sutherland (2010) add “nice-to-have” components, such as the articulation of a personal vision and an internal locus of control. Because career capital is tradable on the intra- and inter-organizational labor markets (Lamb and Sutherland, 2010), we argue that it is an important conception for GTM, especially concerning talent retention.

Career capital includes the market worth, which can be measured through objective career success. Generally, career success contains professional achievements and positive psychological outcomes that are accumulated through work experiences (Seibert *et al.*, 1999). Objective career success includes income, achieved hierarchical level, the number of promotions in one’s career and the number of subordinates (Biemann, 2009; Ng *et al.*, 2005; Schneidhofer *et al.*, 2010). We stated above that boundaryless and protean career concepts appear to belong to the male sphere. However, material and hierarchical success cannot be the only relevant measurements of a career: job satisfaction and subjectively perceived success may add to the picture. Exemplified for the Arab Middle East, Afiouni (2014) investigated women’s conceptualizations of success in a highly patriarchal socio-cultural context. Afiouni found that regional gender stereotypes shape the individual’s conceptualization of success, that work and family domains are interdependent and that work in women’s lives can supplement additional

opportunities to perceive success. Therefore, it seems important to consider subjective career evaluation. Subjective career success can be defined as an individual's subjective feelings of accomplishment. This definition reflects satisfaction with the pace of progress of personal career aspirations and objectives (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). The individual's subjective career success can be either self-referent, including career or job satisfaction that is measured by personal standards, or other-referent, such as the comparisons of personal career with an external reference group or another person (Abele and Spurk, 2009).

This discussion leads to the question how different concepts of career success influence one another. Abele and Spurk (2009) found that there are correlations between objective and subjective career success if subjective career success is other-referent. Moreover, subjective career success has a positive impact on objective career success over time (Abele and Spurk, 2009). This aspect makes it attractive for both – employee and employer – to enhance subjective career success. For GTM, these impacts emphasize the importance of understanding the gender-specific aspects of subjective career success.

Contemporary career concepts identify an independent, mobile and rational individual who increases career capital similar to financial capital (Inkson and Arthur, 2001). However, this perspective of human beings as almost “rational men” neglects the subjective career success and the importance of emotions, relationships and social groups for individual well-being and, therefore, human decision-making processes. Human beings differ in their “need to belong” (Kelly, 2001), but emotional relatedness and lasting connections with others as fundamental human motives (among others Baumeister and Leary, 1995) appear to be neglected in the enthusiasm concerning boundaryless careers. From a practical point of view, such relatedness leads to more social support, which is especially valuable to organize care for children and parents. We argue that contemporary career concepts basically focus on a small group of young (mostly male) knowledge workers and ignore the heterogeneity and reality of current knowledge workers, especially regarding gender, stage of life and culture. This argument is consistent with the results of Gerber *et al.* (2009), who found that Swiss employees with an ambitious “independent” career orientation were less than 20 percent of the sample, mostly male, under 40 years old, and had the lowest tenure in their organizations and the highest intention to quit. Considering that MNEs must attract and retain committed employees for sustainable competitive advantages, we question whether the protean and boundaryless career concepts are a suitable paradigm for GTM.

### **Contextual impacts on gender and GTM**

The current TM debate emphasizes the importance of contextual considerations (Minbaeva and Collings, 2013; Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). Considering the boundaryless and the protean career concepts, several scholars find it critical to assume that they can be constructed with limited consideration of contextual constraints (Afiouni, 2014; Tams and Arthur, 2010). We agree that both career concepts derive from western societies and research traditions, where individual decisions and upward mobility are considered normal to a successful career path. Therefore, in this section, we will present and discuss five contextual factors that play a role in career goals and decisions, namely, national culture, employer organization, role stereotypes, professional identity and the labor market. We illustrate the importance of each factor through examples that show how women are affected differently than men by these contextual aspects and consequently, must consider a distinct range of expectations for a professional career. It is beyond the scope of this paper to show the full depth of all possibly relevant

contextual factors. Therefore, aspects such as economic development, industry-specific impacts and the influence of the taxation and social security systems will not be considered in this paper.

First, cultural differences have an impact. Evans *et al.* (1989) explain different patterns of the country-specific management of career development, such as the Germanic, Latin, Japanese and Anglo-Dutch Models. The following points illustrate how national culture may be more restrictive for females than for males. In western national cultures, child care issues that are connected with a feeling of maternal guilt must be faced, whereas in some emerging markets, such as India and China, daughterly guilt may be more of a burden. In these regions, social stigma is attached to not personally caring for the elderly (Hewlett and Rashid, 2010). Highly collectivistic countries typically include tight family connections. One example is China, where the mobility of employees is often restricted by parental authority and expectations. Moreover, traditional Confucian culture clashes with new career concepts (Lau *et al.*, 2013). This conflict is especially true for women when their parents get older. Because of a lack of old age pension, older parents need their children's support. Additionally, Chinese women often experience sexual harassment and negative attitudes of them at work, which leads to stress (Shaffer *et al.*, 2000) and reduces their expectations (Jin *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, different cultural values and rudimentary social security systems may act as obstacles, especially for females in choosing boundaryless and independent career paths (Schinnenburg and Adam, 2013).

Second, regarding organizational context, Ewerlin and Süß (2014) found that the differences in TM of German companies depend on internal factors such as headcount, not the external context. Moreover, western companies mostly distinguish two dominant systems of upward mobility: contest mobility and sponsorship mobility. The first system is based on the principle of competition, where performance on the job and a person's own contributions and abilities lead to upward mobility. The second system, sponsorship mobility, returns to the idea of the established elites who identify talented individuals, pay special attention to them and help them to win the competition (Ng *et al.*, 2005). Studies show that males are more attracted by the contest system and that female talent may be unrecognized by sponsors (Cabrera, 2009). These results are why it is highly questionable whether the idea of upward mobility and the limitation of two major systems of upward mobility fit MNEs in different cultural settings and considering the current female talent. In addition, individual perceptions of these two systems are not clear. Moreover, regarding organizations such as startups, the mentalities and rules of mobility may differ and consequently have a different impact on an individual's career decisions.

The third contextual factor, role stereotypes, appears here, because the boundaryless and the protean career concepts are implicitly bound to male career orientations (Schinnenburg *et al.*, 2014). Since the industrial revolution, the traditional division between the male, public and productive sphere, on the one hand, and the female, private and reproductive sphere, on the other hand, has been developing. Work and career belong to the productive sphere and include rationality, ambition and achievement; in contrast, being successful in the reproductive sphere demands nurturing and interpersonal harmony. This division leads to the dual existence of more agency-based male career concepts and more communion-like female career concepts (Schneidhofer *et al.*, 2010). The results of these historical developments are gender role expectations, which influence career decisions and contradict rational choices especially for women. These expectations also lead to the stereotypes of and obstacles to women in



management positions, which are described for female expatriates in the German clothing industry by Mayrhofer and Scullion (2002). Moreover, Heilman shows a devaluation of female performance if role expectations are not met (Heilman, 2001). Vance and McNulty (2014) found that gender bias in favor of males may prevent females from being selected for company-assigned expatriations. In addition, in some Asian cultures, such as South Korea, strong traditional role expectations involving matchmaking that include giving men the feeling of superiority are contrary to the expectation of a self-confident, well-educated woman in business situations.

However, we question if the traditional division between the male and female role stereotypes is helpful for current knowledge workers. Even if careerists are agents of their own career and development, success currently requires more than being active, independent and controlling. To learn and work successfully, individuals must also organize cooperatively in teams and projects to obtain support for the next step. These requirements demand a mixture of agency and communion. Initiative and adaptation therefore blend with readiness and adaptability. Weick (2001) argues that both agency and communion have significant value to a boundaryless career and complement one another.

Based on this understanding, the male and female dichotomy seems insufficient for further investigations. Therefore, in the paper, gender will be understood as biological sex and also as social construction; social construction especially leads to culturally deviant gender roles. To include both understandings gender is considered as a duality of masculine and feminine characteristics and behaviors, within which men and women may position themselves (Schneidhofer *et al.*, 2010).

The fourth contextual factor is the professional identity of talent. The protean career orientation includes identity alterations in changing environments. We argue that the concept of identity may be too casually considered in this career concept. Individuals construct their identities through “a system of choices that continue from selection through socialization” (Pratt *et al.*, 2006, p. 258). Common experiences and trainings lead to occupational identities with a consensus on appropriate behavior and communication patterns. Occupational identities include a sense of “who we are” and “who we are not” (Nelson and Irwin, 2014, p. 893), such as women in engineering becoming accustomed to belonging to the minority. The interaction between individual and organizational expectations does not occur in a single way; nevertheless, occupations, sectors and careers form values, behavior and habits. These values, behaviors and habits can be seen in the different attitudes regarding the importance of a vertical career, which is highly regarded in banking, whereas occupations with a traditionally high amount of females, such as nursing, do not strongly emphasize it. Females’ self-selection into specific occupational fields (Ochsenfeld, 2012) influences their perceived possibility of objective career success, such as income. Moreover, the behaviors and attitudes that may be considered a sign of competency and self-confidence in one profession, such as the dress code in consultancy, may be perceived as arrogance in other sectors. Consequently, the obstacles for talented employees who enter a new occupational field or industrial sector increase after an occupational identity has been established.

The differences among national labor markets is the final contextual factor that we consider. Initially, an overall shortage of highly qualified knowledge workers may diminish the importance of this factor. However, one striking difference is that for almost two decades, a talent demand-supply gap exists that derives from demographic trends in developed countries and too few graduates who fit the MNEs’ demands in

emerging markets (Stahl *et al.*, 2007). For example, in countries such as Germany and Japan, a shrinking population and the retirement of the baby boomer generation reduce the available talent pool (Schuler *et al.*, 2011). The situation looks different in countries such as China, Brazil and India, where a growing number of graduates with mostly high expectations to progress quickly enters the labor market. Despite increasing numbers, only a low percentage of graduates (e.g. 10-25 percent in the field of engineering) is considered sufficiently qualified to be hired by MNEs (Schuler *et al.*, 2011; Hewlett and Rashid, 2010). Additionally, mobile talent is increasingly scarce for reasons such as dual careers and rising security issues that have emerged in some areas of the world in recent years (Meyskens *et al.*, 2009; Hewlett and Rashid, 2010).

### **Important gender and life course effects on GTM**

The contextual challenges that are described above gain importance through the global feminization of labor markets: women are identified as the part of the global talent pool that is under-utilized (World Economic Forum, 2011). There is still an unequal distribution of highly qualified women and females in leadership positions (“leaking pipeline”), although the research indicates performance benefits for companies with women in senior management positions (Scullion and Collings, 2011). Moreover, in global labor markets, the gender gap increased after the economic crisis began in 2007 (Ryder, 2013). For example, the formerly converging labor force participation of women and men has stopped. However, women represent more than half of all graduates in many countries, such as Brazil (Hewlett and Rashid, 2010). This representation leads to the argument that there must be additional impact factors to context to fully understand gender-specific career decisions and orientations. This section focusses on these factors throughout a lifelong career course. For a holistic model, this focus is essential to enable a gender-inclusive GTM that may take values and realities of both genders fully into account in the design of GTM practices (Festing *et al.*, 2014).

Until recently, the research concerning gender-specific career paths and success frequently investigated the perspective of young academics before they entered the labor market. Interestingly, at this stage of career, statistically significant gender-specific differences are found in neither developed markets, such as Germany, nor in emerging economies, such as India or China. One reason for these findings may be that young individuals do not perceive gender-based career obstacles during their time at the university (Schinnenburg *et al.*, 2014).

Ochsenfeld (2012) found that in the first ten years of their career, German university graduates do not necessarily suffer from gender-specific organizational obstacles or discrimination. Rather, gender-specific self-selection into different fields of study and child care duties are considered the main obstacles to reach higher managerial positions. Ten years after graduation, the “mother gap” reduces the probability of a woman to hold a management position by almost half (Ochsenfeld, 2012). Evans and Diekmann (2009) also found that women tend to ignore industries, such as the fast-growing and well-paid IT-Business industry, when making career decisions. Furthermore, Schneidhofer *et al.* (2010) indicate that career capital particularly depends on gender and gender role types, with typical feminine behavior leading to salary disadvantages over time. Across nations, the research shows that especially working part-time because of a lack of child care services leads to serious disadvantages to the development and promotions of career women (Ochsenfeld, 2012; Gatrell, 2007; Benachop and Doorewaard, 1998). Furthermore, sociological research indicates that women’s career decisions depend on factors such as the income and profession of their partner (Shafer, 2011).

Correspondingly, depending on their biological stages, other values are more pertinent to women than men. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) found that women operate on a more relational basis than men in their work-related decision making and in non-work areas. Using the metaphor of a kaleidoscope, Mainiero and Sullivan found three different key career issues or colors that produce changing patterns when the tube is turning. The key career issues include the right amount of challenge, the balance to make their lives a “coherent whole” (p. 114) and the authenticity that includes the decision to simplify life and reduce stress. Women shift their career patterns to rearrange their roles and relationships by rotating different aspects. This rotation is especially related to partnership and family concerns. Depending on the career stage, challenges may be more dominant at the earlier stages of their career than balance and authenticity. In mid career, because of an increase of family and relational demands, the balance may move to the foreground. In later-career stages, authenticity may gain in importance. The research thus recommends the departure from the “cookie-cutter traditional corporate linear model of long hours, face-time and extensive travel” (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005, p. 116).

Similarly, but in disregard of gender issues, the sociological life course research notes that the ideal of the “three boxes” of age-differentiated social structure that is mirrored in CVs does not meet the current desires of individuals (Riley and Riley, 2000). The age-differentiated model focusses on education in youth, work in middle age and leisure in old age. It seems to be the result of the historical social differentiation among age groups that may no longer be appropriate. Riley and Riley (2000) argue that the age-differentiated model leads to dissatisfaction, because it does not include concepts such as lifelong learning and may lead to boredom and social isolation in old age. Because of a “people lag” (p. 269), societies are moving to age-integrated social structures, where ideally, education, work and leisure run parallel from the beginning to the end of the life course. This approach can be promoted by more flexible lives without age barriers and with age-heterogeneity such as more cross-age interaction. For individuals, this approach means to intermingle periods of education or training, work, family time and leisure (Riley and Riley, 2000). We argue that these findings have parallels to the kaleidoscope career patterns, especially the issue of balance. For GTM, these approaches may lead to the questioning of existing age barriers in companies such as a limited age range for assuming leadership roles (Fernández-Aráoz, 2009 in Schuler *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the re-thinking of instruments such as mentoring and sponsoring to enhance cross-age interaction may be useful.

Interestingly, Cabrera (2009) argues in her study in the USA that 17 of 25 career-oriented women chose “a protean career orientation” by re-entering the workforce after a career break as part-time workers. With reduced hours, they perform project work or become coaches to combine their work schedule with the schedules of their children. We doubt her interpretation. The wish for balance that these women expressed can also be seen as a result of a traditional role concept where the care of children is mostly considered the mother’s duty, whereas the male (bread winner) earns most of the household income. For mothers, this traditional role often does not leave chances to continue their earlier career path. The alternatives that typically result in lower wages, unstable working conditions and often in occupational downgrading are encouraged (Connolly and Gregory, 2008). Therefore, it is questionable whether these female decisions for balance are really self-directed and independent instead of mostly a necessity to combine family life with a professional role.

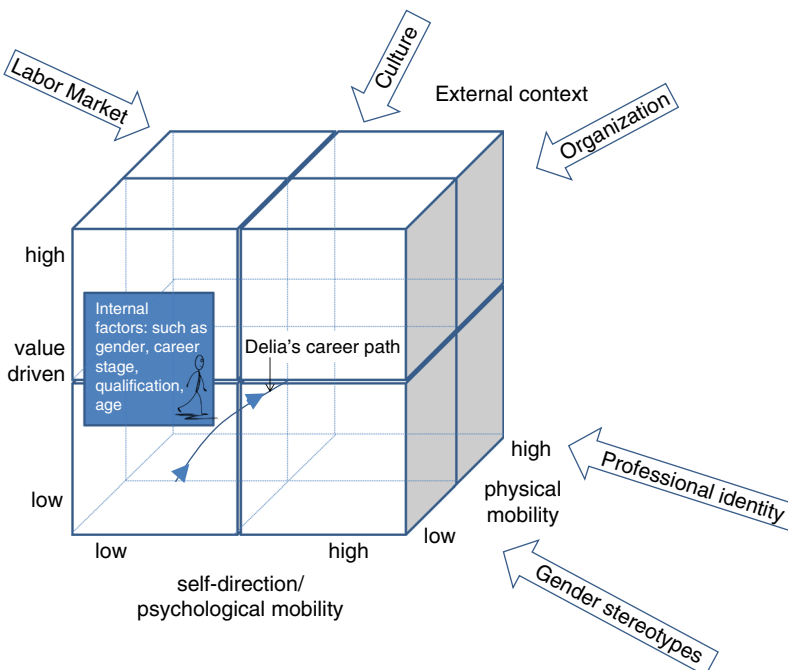
One possible conclusion is that gender differences begin to emerge during education and the first years on the labor market – which are caused by a person’s own value-based decisions and contextual factors. We argue that it is important to abolish the “glass ceiling” for females and put all talented employees into the “glass elevator” to enhance GTM’s economic viability. Therefore, research and practice should consider the special aspects and conditions of female talent in both developed and emerging markets to address global talent scarcity.

### Dynamic Career Cube as hermeneutic lens for GTM

Based on the previous discussion, we assume that career orientation may develop over time. We conclude that career orientation depends on gender and additional internal and contextual factors. Therefore, we propose:

- P1a.* If individual talent’s career orientations change along the career path because of internal and contextual factors, GTM should include these changes to improve economic viability.
- P1b.* If talented males and females are affected differently by internal and contextual factors, GTM should include these differences to improve economic viability.

However, consistent empirical proof of this proposition has been missing. Therefore, GTM needs more insights to particularly adapt its elements to the needs of female talent. Deriving from the review of the GTM and career literatures above, we conceptualize our model, the Dynamic Career Cube (Figure 1). Our model helps to illustrate and understand the potential changes in career orientation over the course of



**Figure 1.**  
The Dynamic  
Career Cube

individual career paths (Schinnenburg *et al.*, 2014). Accordingly, our model attempts to help GTM to develop corresponding measurements and tools. Our model has special value for MNEs because one dimension focusses on physical mobility, which is highly important to MNEs to fill key positions in all required locations.

The Dynamic Career Cube is based on the constructs of protean and boundaryless career orientations and individual factors such as career stage and gender; it adds the discussed contextual factors to the picture. Therefore, the Dynamic Career Cube uses the current debate in the GTM and career literatures and should progress the theoretical framework of GTM. First, it visualizes three dimensions that were taken from the contemporary career concepts. The first dimension is the degree of value drivenness that derives from the protean career concept. The second dimension is self-direction as part of the protean career concept and psychological mobility as part of the boundaryless career concept. These dimensions are combined into one dimension, because they are conceptually closely related (Briscoe and Hall, 2006). As the third dimension, physical mobility derives from the boundaryless career concept.

The parameter value of each dimension in the model can vary between high and low. Talent can move through different quadrants of career orientation throughout a career. Furthermore, the parameter value is affected by an individual's contextual and internal factors. First, in different phases of their life-span, individuals' career orientations may differ depending on their career stage, such as early career, mid career and late career (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Career stages can be defined by age, positional or organizational tenure (Morrow and McElroy, 1987). In this paper we focus on age, because of our target group knowledge workers and our GTM understanding. The internal factors also include gender, with the consequently changing kaleidoscope career patterns, and personal traits, social background, occupation, qualifications and age.

Second, the individual career path in the cube is continuously influenced by interlinked external contextual factors such as national culture, labor market dynamics, occupational field and identity, employer organizations and gender stereotypes, as stated in the context section above. It is not possible to strictly divide the impacts of internal and contextual factors, because they mutually influence one another. For example, gender as an internal factor is intertwined with external gender stereotypes. Therefore we propose:

- P2. If MNEs use the Dynamic Career Cube to identify talent's position in the quadrants in different career stages, GTM tools can be better adjusted to talent's needs and reality of life to reduce attrition.

An overview of the expected career orientations in the different career concepts is given in Table I. Table I uses the three dimensions that are depicted in Figure 1 and the three career stages as part of the internal factors. The table also includes an example career, which we explain in the following paragraph.

The example presented in Figure 1 and Table I illustrates a current actual career path. It is based on a biography that we learned about informally. After finishing her degree, Delia, a business student, was highly driven by the search for an appropriate position in HRM. Initially, she had begun her career with a vocational education in banking. Consequently, only positions higher than those that she could have possibly reached with the latter one, were suitable because of the socialization in her initial occupational field. Applications were sent to companies all over her home country, Germany (medium self-direction and low value driven, medium physical mobility).

Career stage Type of career	Orientation	Early (20-34 years)	Mid (35-49 years)	Late (50 years+)
Tradition organizational career	Value driven	Medium-low	Medium-low	Medium-low
	Self-directed Physical mobility	Low High <sup>a</sup>	Low High <sup>a</sup>	Low High <sup>a</sup>
Boundaryless career	Value driven	Career capital	Career capital	Career capital
	Self-directed Physical mobility	High High	High High	High High
Protean career	Value driven	High	High	High
	Self-directed Physical mobility	High Depending on values	High Depending on values	High Depending on values
Example Delia	Value driven	Low	Medium	<sup>b</sup>
	Self-directed	Low	Medium	<sup>b</sup>
	Physical mobility	Medium	High	<sup>b</sup>

**Note:** <sup>a</sup>Presuming that MNEs demand high mobility; <sup>b</sup>will show in future

**Table I.**  
Career orientations  
in different  
career stages

The kaleidoscope career pattern mainly indicated challenge. Her first position took her to a big city far away from her home and her university town. Not even two years later she was laid off because the company closed down because of economic reasons. Shortly after that she found a challenging position in a MNE in the same city. This accelerated her mobility, because for an organizational career an inpatriation to the French headquarters was expected. The MNE's sponsorship system of upward mobility was helpful as this stage, because her boss identified her as a talent. So after a few years, in which she learnt the company ropes, she worked some time in Paris and later returned to Germany (medium self-direction and low value driven, high physical mobility). In the following years balance was almost absent in her kaleidoscope pattern. After marrying a man with instable income, she decided to assure their income. Later on, after having a child, she returned to work immediately and took over an expatriate position before the child's first birthday. Her family followed her (medium to high self-direction and medium value driven, high physical mobility). The kaleidoscope career pattern shows more balance and still reasonable amounts of challenge. The further development of her career orientation in late career remains unknown, because her relevant impact factors may change.

Our table indicates that the existing career literature generally assumes that career orientations persist throughout different career stages. However, in a study on knowledge workers, Lamb and Sutherland (2010) deduce that these incumbents experience a gradual shift from an external locus of control, such as the organizational context, to an internal one while accumulating career capital. Moreover, Tams and Arthur (2010) conclude that agency, especially in a boundaryless career, may change depending on the dynamic global context. In the previous sections of our paper we show that career orientations change over time because of internal and contextual factors such as experiences, relationships, role models and labor market options. Based on the real-world example of Delia's career, we further stress that the original

assumption of a continuity of career orientations is not realistic. Therefore, current career concepts can help to understand talented employees' career decisions in different career stages if additional aspects over the life-span of employees are included. If GTM draws the conclusion that it can develop HR tools based on each talented employee having a single, stable career orientation, it disregards the variations that occur throughout the career path. Moreover, age brackets in GTM, such as the widespread focus on talent under 40, may prevent a broader identification and development of talent. Consequently, GTM may not meet real-world talent expectations and needs, while MNEs do not understand talent career decisions and under-utilize talent. This is especially true for female talent because traditional organizational career and contemporary career concepts are based on the male perspective. herefore we propose:

- P3a.* If MNEs develop tools that fit talent's needs and orientations in different quadrants of the Dynamic Career Cube, their talent pool expands because of a bigger scope of identified talented employees.
- P3b.* If GTM develops well-tailored, gender-inclusive tools adjusted to talent's career orientations in different career stages, it attracts more talented females on the global labor market.
- P3c.* If GTM allows local responsiveness of its practices, more talented employees develop intra-organizational.

Overall, the first contribution of the Dynamic Career Cube is to improve the mutual understanding of MNEs and talent. Second, it serves as a hermeneutic model that can be applied as a lens to identify the fit of talent's career orientations and GTM. Third, it advances understandings of the impacts of gender on talented employees' careers and demonstrates the importance of employing a more gender-inclusive GTM approach. Fourth, the need for tailor-made measures and tools in all quadrants of the cube becomes obvious, and practical implications can be derived from examining the specific issues of each of the cube's quadrants. Finally, it gives rise to a new field of research questions because so far there is no empirical proof of the connections depicted by the cube. The next sections of this paper will therefore examine the practical implications and suggest a research agenda.

### **Implications for GTM**

What dynamics promote or hinder female talent identification, development, deployment and retention? With the aid of the Dynamic Career Cube, MNEs can achieve greater transparency when attempting to answer this question and develop their GTM. In this section, we show how MNEs can utilize their understanding of an individual talent's career orientations, career stages and connection to the organization despite the presence of the traditional organizational career concept. This may help to overcome a limited gender inclusion in TM elements.

The GTM debate also addresses the challenge faced by MNEs to strike a balance between global integration and local responsiveness (Sparrow *et al.*, 2014). Research includes evidence for an international convergence of TM practices in MNEs (Stahl *et al.*, 2007), which may suggest attempts to identify a best practice approach in GTM based on the boundaryless and protean career concept. However, this paper demonstrates the importance of context and casts doubt on the gender fit of contemporary career concepts throughout the life course. Consequently, solutions to

certain problems may simultaneously require context-sensitive interventions, as suggested by the contingency approach (Cooke *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, instead of attempting to develop a gender-neutral form of GTM, concepts that seek to be inclusive of both genders appear more appropriate (Sankovich, 2014). To achieve a fit between talent's needs and expectations, which are influenced by internal factors and the external context, it is insufficient to implement "one-size-fits-all" GTM elements. The talent's personal and professional development and the changing environment require flexible solutions. Furthermore, traditional systems of upward mobility are not suitable for all personal situations such as dual career family constellations. To attract, develop and retain talented employees from both genders in different phases of their careers and be economically viable, GTM should treat the above career concepts as a path that principally applies to young, male career-orientated knowledge workers. Further approaches toward more tailor-made GTM seem necessary.

A first step toward a gender-inclusive GTM would be to question existing age barriers in talent identification in general and especially with respect to leadership position. Thus, GTM should include employees in the talent pool who may require some time to meet high physical mobility or performance requirements. These limitations may be the result of internal factors such as family demands. After time has passed (e.g. after the individual's children have grown up), mobility and performance may increase again. A tailor-made GTM would help talent to develop the necessary competencies for new and challenging positions throughout all career stages. Mentoring programs involving role models are an example of a useful tool. Such programs may increase loyalty and affect the psychological contract that binds the talent to the organization in the long term, as the former will perceive subjective career success and the opportunity to maintain or increase career capital. A potential outcome of such a strategy is that the talent will take over a key position that is difficult to staff.

This is just one example of how using the cube to monitor a talented employees' career paths may help to solve the problem of talent scarcity. In the following paragraph, we will detail the practical implications of four of the eight quadrants of the career cube. Specifically, we will discuss the quadrants with medium to high levels of self-directedness because we assume that, in many career stages, talent can currently be characterized by medium to high levels of self-directedness. Moreover, the traditional organizational career provides sufficient solutions for those with low self-direction.

First, we examine a career stage in which highly mobile talented employees are highly value driven. This stage is closely related to the boundaryless and protean career orientations. GTM can help to attract and retain incumbents in this quadrant by highlighting attractive positions that promise challenging positions throughout the world. Moreover, it is crucial to help talented employees to connect their values to those of the organization. For female talent this approach can include a family-oriented company policy with liberal part-time options that do not diminish career options in the long run. Moreover, obstacles that females face that derive from traditional company career paths (Linehan and Scullion, 2008; Sankovich, 2014) should be reduced. Therefore, to improve talent retention, one task of GTM in this quadrant would be to change selection patterns and thereby provide both genders with an equal opportunity to be selected for company-assigned expatriations and prevent talented females from dropping out or to choosing self-initiated expatriations (Vance and McNulty, 2014).



Nevertheless, talent that is very mobile in this quadrant may wish to move across organizational boundaries to improve career capital and follow own values. GTM can identify solutions in this regard by keeping in touch and offering support even though a formal employment contract will not be in place for some time. Examples of such measures include coaching that helps talent to increase career capital or offers to stay in the organization's talent network.

Second, talented employees in a low-mobility, highly value driven career stage may be very involved in personal affairs. Following the idea of kaleidoscope patterns this may be because of females' relational decision making and high demand for balancing private and professional matters (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). In this career stage, GTM must support talent if the company is to fill key positions at a later stage, as stated in the paragraph above. Third, talent in a low-mobility and low-value driven career stage may experience a difficult phase of life. By offering company support such as coaching, such difficulties may be overcome while simultaneously contributing to the development of individual ties with the MNE. The future potential to fill key positions may not be diminished if talent is supported in this stage. Finally, talent in a high mobility, weakly value driven career stage may be used to fill challenging positions in remote locations. Depending on the further development of the talent, a particular task for GTM is to carefully monitor talent retention, especially during repatriation phases and during international assignments, to avoid attrition.

#### **Avenues for future research**

To date, there is little cross-cultural empirical evidence of the protean and boundaryless career concepts. The importance of communion and agency, contest and sponsorship mobility also remains unclear. Similarly, the links among these aspects and gender, career concepts, GTM and talent's perceived career success and satisfaction is thus far absent in empirical studies. A single study can hardly address all of these features. Therefore, in this section, we propose initial steps for an empirical investigation of the Dynamic Career Cube and our propositions.

Whenever they consider subjective career success, individuals adopt a retrospective viewpoint. Accordingly, they attempt to generate continuity, despite that their work experiences may consist of diverse and potentially disconnected fragments. One reason for this is that the learning process, which is an essential part of accumulating career capital among knowledge workers, is not possible in the absence of continuity. Moreover, careerists "without any sense of continuity whatsoever should experience substantial ongoing states of arousal that interfere with learning" (Weick, 2001, p. 218). Therefore, reconsidering the perspectives of young academics before they enter the labor market (Walk *et al.*, 2013) and drawing on the Dynamic Career Cube, a suitable research approach to fill the identified gap should employ a retrospective perspective and examine the biographies of professionals. Consequently, the objectives of an empirical investigation would include the changing career orientations of talent over time. Such an investigation should consider knowledge workers with a particular emphasis on potential gender-specific differences and examine how they make sense of their careers in light of the impacts of internal and contextual factors. First, the results of such a study could shed light on the individual knowledge worker's perspective on career decisions, success and satisfaction and the accumulation of career capital. Parallels and differences with respect to gender and contextual impacts could be revealed. Conclusions for GTM practices may be drawn. Moreover, considering the

individual course through the Dynamic Career Cube and the personal development of the career kaleidoscope may lead to a new typology of career paths and contribute to the career literature.

Moreover, a longitudinal survey could illuminate the connection between talented individuals' career attitudes and GTM. The adverse effects of adopting a retrospective perspective would be avoided in this research approach. However, decades would be required before the results could be put to their full use. Additionally, our rather broad definition of talent does not fit such an approach because the talent pool sample in the early-career stage may differ from that in the mid or late career. This would result in difficulties in comparing the samples.

To further the conceptual development of gender-inclusive GTM, a stronger focus on internal factors would be fruitful. This paper stresses contextual factors to show the strength of their impact on the careers of talented people. Addressing internal factors and relational decision making by female talent would be a further valuable contribution. Family-related work decisions (FRWD) have been considered in some studies (Greenhaus and Powell, 2012), but the impacts of these decisions on the career orientations of male and female talent remain unclear. The academic debate concerning FRWD may be a conceptual starting point for the further development of gender-inclusive GTM.

## Conclusion

Applying the Dynamic Career Cube to disentangle the complex factors that influence talent's career path contributed to the development of well-tailored GTM approaches. In this paper, we concentrated on important aspects for female talent, which naturally led the consideration of papers in a broad set of fields, and hence we do not provide a complete review of the GTM and career literatures. To date, the cultural context appears to be a particularly undervalued topic in GTM studies. A broader scope for GTM – which we primarily addressed from a gender and life-stage perspective – would support MNEs in redesigning HR instruments and GTM with a particular focus on gender issues and hence to embrace the underleveraged potential of female talent. However, research investigating the Dynamic Career Cube and our propositions is needed as a next step. Identifying kaleidoscope career patterns that can be matched with specified sets of GTM activities to recruit, motivate and retain talent depending on the career orientation at a certain point in the individual career could help MNEs to establish a more reliable and extensive talent pipeline. Critics may regard this as a backward approach, but company careers that include organizational support and intra-organizational career steps improve the career satisfaction of employees. These factors are valuable for talent in certain career stages and can create certain “sheltering” elements to increase retention. These measures may become more relevant, if talent's flexibility and boundarylessness is largely the result of a perceived lack of security in MNEs and global labor markets. Furthermore, the career impacts of external contextual factors strengthen the argument for a strong local responsiveness in GTM. Consequently, locally responsive GTM activities and practices should be emphasized over alignment, delivery and coordination.

In essence, we argue for unique approaches: talented people require well-tailored development paths that give them sufficient room to follow their own values in the context of their specific set of career impact factors. Moreover, MNEs must design their own GTM in accord with industry- and organization-specific impact factors while allowing for local variations.

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