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The role of career shocks in contemporary career development: key challenges and ways forward

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Abstract

Purpose – This article aims to introduce the special issue entitled "the role of career shocks in contemporary career development," synthesize key contributions and formulate a future research agenda.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors provide an introduction of the current state-of-the-art in career shocks research, offer an overview of the key lessons learned from the special issue and present several important avenues for future research.

Findings – The authors discuss how the special issue articles contribute to a better understanding of career shocks' role in contemporary career development, focusing on (1) conceptual clarity of the notion of career shocks, (2) career outcomes of career shocks, (3) mechanisms that can explain the impact of career shocks and (4) interdisciplinary connectivity.

Originality/value – This article offers a synthesis of the critical contributions made within this special issue, thereby formulating key ways to bring the field of career shocks research forward. It also provides new avenues for research.

Keywords Career shocks, Career, Career development, Career resources, Career success

Paper type Research paper

Introduction and key challenges

Factors such as changing labor markets, globalization, technological developments and retirement policies have made careers more complex and unpredictable (Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2021; Vuori *et al.*, 2012). These developments have led people to engage in more career

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transitions across their life span, voluntarily and involuntarily crossing boundaries within and between organizations, occupations and even labor markets and countries (Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2021; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). Indeed, the traditional career model of lifetime employment is increasingly losing its appeal, even if it was never more than a dream for a majority of labor market participants. This trend is signified by a withdrawal from career development support by many employers (Michaels *et al.*, 2001) and a significant reduction of job stability (Kalleberg, 2009; Kalleberg and Mouw, 2018).

Yet, a paradox has emerged in the field of career studies: Whereas the careers landscape is becoming more complex and unpredictable, scholarly research seems to disproportionately focus on individual agency and control. This stands in stark contrast to careers research conducted between the 1960s and 1980s, which regularly focused on the role of chance events in career development (e.g. Hart *et al.*, 1971; Miller, 1983; Roe and Baruch, 1967). Since that time, however, the field has become dominated by theories, such as boundaryless career theory (Arthur *et al.*, 2005; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994) and protean career theory (Hall, 2002; Hall *et al.*, 2018), and concomitant empirical work that focuses primarily on agentic career decision-making, Although both aforementioned theories acknowledge the importance of boundaries and context, they have been cited primarily for their focus on flexibility and self-direction in career development. The strong emphasis on individual agency also shows in the constructs that have been studied, as several reviews in the field have shown that career scholars have focused mainly on topics such as career success, career decision-making and employability (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017; Lee *et al.*, 2014). In sum, although careers are increasingly characterized and impacted by external changes that make them more volatile and unpredictable, research has focused almost exclusively on the individual career actor. This trend, while perhaps understandable from a career counseling perspective, is problematic from a theoretical perspective because the contemporary career ecosystem likely features many unexpected events that can potentially change someone's career path in significant ways. For this reason, it is critical to gain a better understanding of how contemporary career development is the result of an interplay between individual agency and external events.

Heeding this call to integrate agency and structure, and building on the empirical study by Seibert *et al.* (2013), Akkermans *et al.* (2018) introduced a definition and preliminary conceptualization of career shocks. They defined career shocks as "disruptive and extraordinary events that are, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that trigger a deliberate thought process concerning one's career" (Akkermans *et al.*, 2018, p. 4). This definition implies that a career shock is a combination of an exogenous event with an individual perception and that both elements are necessary to produce a career shock. In other words: A major external event that does not cause someone to think about their career path actively would not be considered a career shock. Similarly, reflection about one's career path that is not triggered by an external event would also not constitute a career shock. Akkermans *et al.* (2018) distinguished several attributes of career shocks, such as their valence (e.g. positive shocks such as an unexpected promotion vs. negative shocks such as a sudden layoff), frequency (e.g. losing a loved one would typically be low frequency vs. valued coworkers leaving a company might be high frequency), predictability (e.g. a highly unpredictable natural disaster vs. a somewhat more predictable pregnancy), duration (e.g. a sudden conversation with an influential person vs. a long reorganization process in a company) and source (e.g. organizational, family-related).

Recent conceptual and empirical studies have started to shed more light on the nature and consequences of career shocks. From a conceptual perspective, Seibert *et al.* (2016) argued that resilience is a critical factor in effectively dealing with career shocks, and Akkermans *et al.* (2020) reflected on the potential effect of COVID-19 on careers from the perspective of career shocks. In addition, Akkermans *et al.* (2021) explored how career shocks may play

a role in research on job search, HRM, entrepreneurship and diversity. From an empirical perspective, Seibert *et al.* (2013) showed that early career employees' decisions to pursue graduate education were influenced both by positive and by negative shocks. Another study on young professionals by Blokker *et al.* (2019) demonstrated that positive and negative shocks moderated the role of career competencies in their employability via career success. Finally, Kraimer *et al.* (2019), in a study on academic career success, found that career shocks impacted objective and subjective career success via work engagement. In all, these studies have established that career shocks play an important role in contemporary career development. However, several key conceptual, theoretical and methodological challenges exist in the field that hinder the further development of our knowledge on career shocks. We will discuss them next.

Key challenges in research on career shocks

This special issue on the role of career shocks in contemporary career development aimed to pave the way for conceptual and empirical development of research on career shocks. Specifically, we aimed to conceptualize the nature of career shocks more clearly, explore the nomological net of career shocks and find effective ways of researching career shocks. To achieve these goals, we argue that the field must overcome four key challenges.

First, there is still a lack of *conceptual clarity* of what exactly constitutes a career shock. One category of research in this area refers to happenstance (Miller, 1983), serendipity (Betsworth and Hansen, 1996) and chance events (Roe and Baruch, 1967). This line of research has established that unplanned, accidental events have a considerable impact on people's careers (Bright *et al.*, 2005; Rojewski, 1999). Yet, studies in this area have adopted a relatively broad conceptualization of such events, for example "being in the right place at the right time" as a chance event. Moreover, this research has predominantly taken an all or nothing perspective, in that they assessed whether people experienced such an event or not (e.g. Bright *et al.*, 2005; Hirschi, 2010) or not measuring the event at all but using it as a background characteristic of a sample (e.g. Baruch *et al.*, 2016). However, the same external event may be a significant shock to one person but not for another. An unexpected layoff, for example, may cause one person to become depressed, whereas another may not notice all that much impact because they have alternative options available. Hence, a yes/no approach to defining career shocks that does not incorporate the ensuing and oftentimes idiosyncratic cognitive processing on the part of the focal person does not do justice to the complexity of the concept. The aforementioned Akkermans *et al.*'s (2018) definition of career shocks solves this conceptual problem to a certain degree. By acknowledging that a career shock is inherently a combination between an external event and an internal deliberate thought process concerning one's career, their definition captures the interaction between the event and the person's initial sensemaking of that event. This idea is similar to how Lee and Mitchell (1994) defined shocks in their seminal work on the unfolding model of turnover. They also emphasized that an event is only a turnover shock when it produces job-related deliberations about potential turnover. However, as a critique of the unfolding model of turnover, Morrell *et al.* (2008) pointed out a conceptual problem here, as the notion of a shock is defined partly in terms of its outcomes for someone's cognition and affect. As such, a significant challenge is to further uncover the conceptual properties and boundaries of career shocks and clarify how the shock itself differs from its outcomes.

Second, despite a rich scholarly literature on all kinds of unpredictable events across multiple fields of study, there has been a lack of research focusing on the *proximal and distal career outcomes of career shocks*. Perhaps the most influential stream of literature on shock events has been based on Lee and Mitchell's (1994) unfolding model of turnover. This model was groundbreaking in the turnover literature by incorporating shocks as a major antecedent

of intended and actual employee turnover and has received considerable empirical support over the years (e.g. Donnelly and Quirin, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 1996, 1999). However, theoretical and empirical research related to this model typically stops at the point of turnover and does not consider longer-term career consequences of the shocks that people experienced. One of the few exceptions is the study of Shipp *et al.* (2014) who, while not explicitly focusing on career outcomes, showed that the reasons for turnover (among which are positive and negative shocks) matter for whether people would return to the same employer later on (i.e. become a "boomerang hire"). Another exception comes from the field of Entrepreneurship. Based on Shapero and Sokol's (1982) work on displacing work events, Seibert *et al.* (2021) showed that such events (which are conceptually similar to career shocks) interacted with individuals' entrepreneurial identity aspiration to trigger a potential career transition in which they founded their own business. The paucity of research on the career-related outcomes of career shocks is also notable in other disciplines. For example, there is rich literature on life events in the field of (clinical and health) psychology. However, studies in this field have almost exclusively focused on outcomes related to illness, stress and psychological disorders (Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend, 1974; Kessler, 1997). While some research examines the role of significant life events in determining people's work adjustment (Bhagat, 1983), and work engagement and performance (Bakker *et al.*, 2019), studies examining the longer-term career consequences of life events seem virtually nonexistent. A notable exception is Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) work on discontinuous career transitions following traumatic life events. In all, it is clear that we need a better understanding of both the proximal and distal career outcomes of shock events.

Third, studies have paid insufficient attention to the *mechanisms* that explain how career shocks impact individual career development. Recent studies that have directly connected with the notion of career shocks provide some initial insights. For example, Seibert *et al.*'s (2013) study on career self-management and graduate education showed that career shocks impacted career decision-making (in this case: applying for a graduate program) via behavioral intentions. Additionally, Kraimer *et al.*'s (2019) work on academic career success showed that positive and negative career shocks impacted career success via increases and decreases in work engagement. From a conceptual perspective, the work of Akkermans *et al.* (2020, 2021) has argued that career shocks may impact career outcomes through the availability and mobilization of career resources and shifts in vocational identity. In related research that has not explicitly used the concept of career shocks, the unfolding model of turnover (Lee and Mitchell, 1994) hypothesizes that shock events can impact outcomes via image violations (Beach, 1990). When events are not compatible with existing personal and professional values and goals, they are more likely to impact turnover decisions. Another potential mechanism through which career shocks may impact outcomes is affective regulation. Weiss and Cropanzano's (1996) affective events theory proposes that workplace events can trigger affective responses, which subsequently impact attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction, commitment) and behaviors (e.g. performance, turnover). Ashton-James and Ashkanasy (2005) add that events may trigger affective responses via primary and secondary appraisal. The former is an automatic process. The latter involves the evaluation of possible discrepancies in one's social functioning. Taken together, only a few of these proposed mechanisms of how career shocks impact (career) outcomes have been empirically tested, and the range of different ideas requires reconciliation and refinement.

Fourth, there is *little interdisciplinary connectivity* in the area of career shocks research. From a theoretical perspective, we already discussed several frameworks in this article that are highly relevant to knowledge on career shocks yet have not been explicitly linked to this concept. For example, the ideas from the unfolding model of turnover (Lee and Mitchell, 1994), affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) and image theory (Beach, 1990) offer a wealth of knowledge on how events may impact people's attitudes and behaviors.

However, despite the obvious connections with research on career shocks, these theories have mainly been used in management and psychology but hardly in career studies. Similarly, ideas from the fields of organization studies (e.g. event systems theory, Morgeson *et al.*, 2015) and sociology (e.g. theory of practice, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) have mainly been applied to meso-level and macro-level phenomena thus far, yet can enrich our understanding of career shocks (cf. Akkermans *et al.*, 2018, 2020). The range of concepts that needs to be integrated into research on career shocks is also enormous, including the concepts mentioned above, such as chance events, turnover shocks and life events. Beyond that, there are many specialized research areas on specific events that could be relevant for the broader debate on career shocks, such as research on organizational change, unemployment, job insecurity, entrepreneurial success and failure and many more. Although it seems a daunting task to integrate all these different perspectives, we could make progress in career shock research if we start with such a literature synthesis. A recent example is the conceptual work of Akkermans *et al.* (2021) who formulated ideas on connecting research on career shocks with research on job search, HRM, entrepreneurship and diversity.

Based on the four key challenges we outlined in this article, next, we will reflect on the special issue's key contributions.

Lessons learned from the special issue

Table 1 offers an overview of the special issue articles and their unique contributions to the four challenges described earlier. Here, we briefly reflect on those contributions.

In the first article, Hofer *et al.* (2021) conduct a three-wave quantitative study among 728 Swiss employees to examine the role of career shocks in career optimism. They find that a negative organization-related career shock, measured using an item from Seibert *et al.* (2013), can lead to perceptions of increased job insecurity. This insecurity, subsequently, relates to lower career optimism. Furthermore, the authors found that perceived organizational support can mitigate the harmful effects of negative career shocks. However, they also note that one contextual resource is likely not enough as the indirect relationship between negative career shocks and career optimism was still significant at high levels of support. The study by Hofer *et al.* shows that career optimism – as a proximal attitudinal career outcome (Challenge 2) – can suffer after people experience negative career shocks. Second, they shed light on the mechanisms through which career shocks impact outcomes (Challenge 3), in this case through an increase in perceptions of job insecurity. Moreover, based on conservation of resources theory and job demands–resources theory, they argued that the process through which career shocks relate to outcomes is grounded in a resource gain or loss process. Finally, the authors bring in research from applied and vocational psychology (Challenge 4), specifically by incorporating the concepts of job insecurity and perceived organizational support in research on career shocks.

This special issue's second article features a cross-sectional quantitative study among 207 Brazilian employees. Mansur and Felix (2021) investigated whether positive and negative career shocks would relate to thriving and whether career adaptability played a role in this relationship. Using career shock items based on Seibert *et al.* (2013), they find that career adaptability mediates the relationship between career shocks and thriving. Moreover, positive affect moderates this indirect relationship, though only for negative career shocks. Overall, their findings indicate that positive career shocks primarily exhibit direct relationships with career adaptability and thriving, whereas positive affect is essential to buffer the effects of negative career shocks. The study of Mansur and Felix adds thriving as a career-related outcome (Challenge 2), a concept that has mainly been studied in the area of positive psychology thus far (Challenge 4). Furthermore, they point to potential mechanisms (Challenge 3) of how career shocks may influence career outcomes. Specifically, building on

Table 1.
Overview of articles in this special issue on the role of career shocks in career development

Authors	Study design	Sample	Theoretical framework	C1: Conceptual clarification	C2: Career outcomes	C3: Mechanisms	C4: Interdisc. connectivity
Hofer, Spurk, Hirschi	Quantitative, three-wave survey data	728 Swiss employees	Conservation of resources theory; job demands–resources theory		Career optimism	Job insecurity (mediator); POS (moderator)	Applied and vocational psychology
Mansur and Felix	Quantitative, cross-sectional survey data	207 Brazilian employees	Affective events theory; career construction theory		Thriving	Career adaptability (mediator); positive affect (moderator)	Positive psychology
Pak, Kooij, De Lange, Meyers, Van Veldhoven	Qualitative, interviews, template analysis	33 Dutch employees aged 50+	Ability-motivation–opportunity theory; sustainable career framework	Distinction positive–negative and work-private shocks	Motivation to continue working	Demands, resources, person–job fit	HRM
Nair and Chatterjee	Qualitative, interviews, thematic analysis	41 Indian MBA graduates		Career-related boundaries, sources and career stages of shocks	Career transitions		Diversity (culture, gender)
Rummel, Akkermans, Blokker, Van Gelderen	Qualitative, interviews, thematic analysis	25 Dutch, German, Austrian, UK graduate entrepreneurs	Displacing work events	Distinction pre- and post-transition positive and negative career shocks	Career decision-making	Shocks vs. impact of shocks before and after career transitions	Entrepreneurship
Korotov	Practitioner article using vignettes	Six executives in Germany		Role of immediate emotions		Dealing with shocks through coaching	Executive coaching
Petrović, Vukelić, Mol	Practitioner article using lived experiences	62 Humanitarian workers in Serbia (Red Cross)	Job demands–resources theory	Distinction career shocks and stressors		Organizational support policies	Applied psychology

career construction theory's principles, positive career shocks appear to enhance career outcomes via an increase in career adaptability. Conversely, negative career shocks may undermine outcomes via reduced career adaptability. Finally, based on affective events theory, the study shows that positive affect is an essential boundary condition that seems particularly helpful as a buffer to the detrimental effects of negative career shocks.

In the third article of this special issue, Pak *et al.* (2021) performed a qualitative study among 33 individuals to study the process through which career shocks and career sustainability are related. They focused on employees aged 50+ to explore whether career shocks play a role in their ability, motivation and opportunity to continue working. Pak *et al.*'s findings show that positive and negative career shocks can trigger changes in available demands and resources. Similar to Hofer *et al.*'s study, and in line with Akkermans *et al.*'s (2018) theoretical recommendations, this once again shows the vital role of demands and resources. Furthermore, their findings emphasized the impact of employers on this process: The type of HR practices they implement plays a crucial role in the degree to which career shocks enhance or decrease person–job fit and, ultimately, workers' ability, motivation and opportunity to continue working. This study contributes to the conceptualization of career shocks (Challenge 1) by pointing to a potential conceptual distinction between private-related and work-related career shocks, which might have different effects on demands, resources and outcomes. This finding adds empirical evidence to Akkermans *et al.*'s (2018) argument about the source of career shocks playing a role in their effects on career outcomes. Furthermore, Pak *et al.*'s research embeds the retirement and HRM disciplines (Challenge 4) in research on career shocks, thereby adding the ability, motivation and opportunity – and, in a broader sense, career sustainability – as a relevant career outcome (Challenge 2) of career shocks. In terms of mechanisms (Challenge 3), their study sheds light on the essential role of gains and losses in demands, resources and person–job fit perceptions.

The fourth article features a qualitative study among 41 Indian MBA graduates. Nair and Chatterjee (2021) specifically looked at how career shocks may trigger career transitions. Their findings indicate that career shocks may lead to different career transition types and trajectories. For example, career shocks instigated in the private life domain – such as marriage or elderly care – primarily associate with geographical transitions, whereas shocks that originate from the job – such as a fallout with a manager or colleagues – mainly impact organizational exit. In all, their study shows that agency and structure jointly determine how career shocks in different domains can cause different types of career transitions. Furthermore, in line with prior findings by Kraimer *et al.* (2019), Nair and Chatterjee show the importance of taking a life span perspective as different career shocks occurred during different career stages. Although they do not explicitly utilize it, this is in line with Pak *et al.*'s focus on career sustainability (cf. De Vos *et al.*, 2020). This research contributes to a more precise conceptualization of career shocks (Challenge 1) by pointing to certain contextual boundaries that may determine which types of shocks people experience. The study also shows that different career shocks can happen to people belonging to different career stages and genders, thereby adding to the nomological net of career shocks. Furthermore, Nair and Chatterjee's study adds career transitions as an essential outcome (Challenge 2) and connects with research on cultural and gender diversity (Challenge 4).

The special issue's fifth article by Rummel *et al.* (2021) reports on a qualitative study among 25 recently graduated entrepreneurs under 30. The authors explored the potential career shocks that may trigger a move into entrepreneurship. Their findings show that these young entrepreneurs experienced positive and negative career shocks, which they argue are related to push and pull motives, respectively. In addition, their study points to different types of shocks occurring before and after the move into entrepreneurship. For example, chance meetings with influential people (positive) and disappointment with corporate life (negative) were shocks typically leading these graduates into entrepreneurship. Once they

had done so, they would experience other shocks, such as unexpected successes (positive) or sudden challenges related to mistakes or external pressure (negative). Like the article by Pak *et al.*, Rummel *et al.*'s research provides further empirical evidence of the valence component of career shocks (Challenge 1). Furthermore, their findings show that career shocks before and after a significant career transition are likely of a different nature. This research also confirms that career shocks need to be separated from their outcomes, as has been suggested by Akkermans *et al.* (2018) (Challenge 3). Rummel *et al.* show that career decision-making, as a career outcome, is essential to the study of career shocks research (Challenge 2). Finally, their article connects the careers literature with the entrepreneurship literature (Challenge 4) by showing, similar to Seibert *et al.* (2021), that career shocks (or: displacing work events) can trigger career transitions into entrepreneurship.

Similar to another recent *CDI* special issue about migrant career development (Richardson *et al.*, 2020) and in line with recommendations to strengthen the relations between research practice (Ozanne *et al.*, 2017), this special issue features two practitioner articles. These papers focus primarily on connecting recent scholarly insights into career shocks to existing practices outside of academia. First, Korotov (2021) uses six vignettes of managers who sought career coaching to reflect on the role of career shocks in their career development. As he argues, executives are a difficult group to gain access to, yet their specific work context is likely to instigate many career shocks. Korotov's article shows that career coaching can be a powerful tool to activate individual agency in dealing with career shocks (Challenge 3). The vignettes he presents emphasize the essential role of immediate emotions after experiencing a shock (Challenge 1). Finally, connecting the literature on executive coaching with research on career shocks (Challenge 4) adds an important lens to study career shocks. In the second practitioner contribution, Petrović *et al.* (2021) discuss the career shocks that Red Cross staff and volunteers experienced during the height of the 2016 migrant inflow into Europe. They discuss how a training program that the Red Cross offered their workers could offer them support in dealing with stressors and career shocks. From a conceptual perspective, Petrović *et al.* highlight the similarities and differences between stressors and career shocks (Challenge 1). Furthermore, bringing in insights from the applied psychological literature on job characteristics and organizational support (Challenge 4), they discuss the essential role employers can play in inoculating people against negative shock experiences (Challenge 3). In sum, the two practitioner articles significantly contribute to the special issue by providing insights into the supportive role that coaches and employers can take to support workers in highly volatile work environments.

Ways forward for career shocks research

The studies presented in this special issue offer significant new insights into conceptualization and theory building on career shocks. That said, essential questions remain. Below, we will elaborate on several such questions and formulate a research agenda.

Expanding the taxonomy of career shocks

The special issue studies imply that different career shocks may happen to different people. For example, the career shocks described by Rummel *et al.* among young entrepreneurs primarily relate to initial transitions into employment. In contrast, the shocks reported by Pak *et al.* among older workers mostly revolve around motivations to continue working. In their study among Indian MBA graduates, Nair and Chatterjee reported arranged marriage as a significant career shock among women, a finding that likely would not have come up if the study had been performed in, for example, the USA or Western Europe. In the two practitioner contributions, Korotov and Petrović *et al.* share unique career shock experiences

of executive managers (e.g. the rarity of same-level employment positions) and Red Cross employees (e.g. events associated with a massive influx of migrants). Prior studies had already zoomed in on career shocks unique to specific target groups. Examples are Kraimer *et al.*'s (2019) study on career shocks among academics (e.g. winning a prestigious prize or publishing a high-impact paper) and Blokker *et al.*'s (2019) study among young professionals (e.g. finding one's first job more quickly or slowly than expected).

Consequently, we call for more research identifying both unique and shared shock events among different populations. For example, career shocks may differ between early-career, mid-career and late-career workers. Similarly, different career shocks may occur among different occupational and cultural groups. We would speculate that certain career shocks are more or less universal, for instance, unexpected loss of employment or career advancement opportunities. Other shocks, however, may be more context-specific, such as career shocks related to specific career phases (e.g. retirement-related shock events among older workers), occupations (e.g. severe accidents among blue-collar factory workers) or cultures (e.g. arranged marriage in certain cultures). Future studies could shed more light on potential similarities and differences in career shocks, thereby expanding conceptual clarity and building toward an overall career shocks taxonomy.

Occurrence and mechanisms of career shocks

Another fascinating avenue for future research relates to potential antecedents of career shocks. Although career shocks are inherently, at least to some degree, unpredictable (Akkermans *et al.*, 2018), it seems likely that certain factors may predispose certain people to shocks more than others. In line with Akkermans *et al.*'s (2021) suggestions about salience and impact of specific career shocks among different social groups, the literature on diversity and career development would be particularly relevant to take into account here. Perhaps specific *contextual characteristics* and *individual characteristics* are more or less likely to trigger career shocks. Regarding contextual features, Korotov's contribution about executive managers shows that they constantly navigate high-pressure situations in which they carry many responsibilities. Because of these "high stakes" situations they continuously find have to navigate, they might be more susceptible to experiencing (positive and negative) career shocks. Similarly, the humanitarian staff and volunteers in Petrović *et al.*'s article work in a volatile environment characterized by highly disruptive events both to themselves and the migrants with whom they work. Hence, in line with a sustainable career lens (De Vos *et al.*, 2020), we argue that future research needs to incorporate different layers of context – such as organization, occupation, country and family – as antecedents or boundary conditions of career shocks.

Yet, individual characteristics also come into play here. For example, some of these executive managers and humanitarian workers may be significantly impacted by the constant potential for career shocks. In contrast, others may "get used" to such situations, essentially inoculating themselves against career shocks. Seibert *et al.* (2016) argued that resilience might be an essential way to cope with career shocks, which could explain how some people in turbulent career contexts may be more (low resilience) or less (high resilience) impacted by career shocks. The urgency of studying this is clear, as Infurna and Luthar (2016) showed that, contrary to popular belief, resilience is far from a given following significant life events. Furthermore, Wordsworth and Vilakant (2021) showed that people experiencing an earthquake had very different responses to the event based on their preshock motivations: some clung to the status quo, whereas others used it as a trigger for a career change. Future research should test a range of individual factors that could influence how individuals deal with career shocks. For example, certain demographics, such as gender and age could play a role here. Furthermore, a range of dispositional characteristics seems

relevant, for instance Big Five, HEXACO and Dark Triad personality characteristics (Lee and Ashton, 2014) and core self-evaluations (Chang *et al.*, 2011; Judge *et al.*, 2001). Finally, people's tendency to deal with challenging situations in certain ways would be relevant to incorporate in research on career shocks, for example by studying the role of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1998; Lanaj *et al.*, 2012) and goal orientation (Seijts *et al.*, 2004; Vandewalle *et al.*, 2019). In all, we, therefore, urge scholars to study the *occurrence* of career shocks among different groups and the *mechanisms* that may explain why people deal differently with career shocks.

Exploring and testing career shock attributes

The third suggestion for research on the conceptualization of career shocks is to test shock attributes. In their conceptual article, Akkermans *et al.* (2018) delineated several attributes, including valence, frequency, predictability, duration and source. The special issue articles contribute to some of these, most notably including positive and negative career shocks (Mansur and Felix, 2021; Rummel *et al.*, 2021). In addition, Pak *et al.* (2021) contribute to the source attribute to point to a difference between work-related and private career shocks. Finally, Petrović *et al.* (2021) suggest adding identity relatedness to the list of attributes defined by Akkermans *et al.* (2018). Having said that, we need a much better understanding of these (and other) attributes, and we call for researchers to address this issue in their future studies on career shocks.

Qualitative studies could explicitly formulate questions about these issues, such as asking about how frequent and unpredictable events were to people and whether such attributes impacted how they dealt with the career shocks. Quantitative studies could adopt event system theory's (EST) (Morgeson *et al.*, 2015) propositions that event attributes are moderators in the event–outcome relationships. EST argues that event novelty, criticality and disruptiveness moderate the impact of events on outcomes. Similarly, when career shocks are more unpredictable, frequent and more prolonged, this may strengthen their impact on people's careers. Indeed, Chen *et al.*'s (2021) study on workplace events and innovation showed that event novelty and criticality interacted to enhance creativity and innovation. Similarly, career shock studies could include the conceptual shock attributes as moderators in their research models.

Measuring career shocks

One of the elements in the call for papers of this special issue focused on measuring career shocks. None of the special issue articles explicitly focus on this element, which leaves critical questions still open.

From a qualitative perspective, the special issue studies used different ways of assessing career shocks. For example, Pak *et al.* asked participants to draw trajectories of their careers, thereby explicitly asking for the experience of significant life events (i.e. not explicitly called "career shocks"). Both Nair and Chatterjee and Petrović *et al.* did not ask about career shocks yet found them a clear emerging theme in their data. Rummel *et al.*, on the other hand, provided an explicit definition of career shocks to participants and asked about their occurrence and impact. In all, this shows a diverse pattern of qualitative approaches to studying career shocks.

Interestingly, from a quantitative perspective, the opposite occurred as Hofer *et al.* and Mansur and Felix based their measure of career shocks on Seibert *et al.*'s (2013) work. Although scholars made modifications to the scale based on their specific samples (e.g. Blokker *et al.*, 2019; Kraimer *et al.*, 2019), Seibert *et al.*'s (2013) items have been the foundation of essentially all quantitative studies on career shocks until now. However, one problem with this scale is that it conflates the career shock with its career impact. Items are rated on a scale from 0 (*have not experienced it*), 1 (*yes, have experienced it, but no to minimal*

impact) to 4 (*yes, have experienced it, and had a large impact*). The occurrence and impact are measured in these items, yet the career deliberation central to Akkermans *et al.*'s (2018) definition is not. In other words, there is a disconnect between conceptualization and operationalization of career shocks.

Hence, we call for qualitative and quantitative studies to be more precise and consistent in their approach to measuring career shocks. Having reliable and valid measurement instruments would be a crucial next step to achieve this. Although these are currently under development, they are not yet available. Until they are, we urge qualitative scholars to connect closely with the definition and attributes described by Akkermans *et al.* (2018), as this will ensure an accurate assessment of career shocks. Furthermore, quantitative studies should be clear about the specific events they study (and why these), including both the external event and the career deliberation in questions on career shocks, and separate the career shock from its potential impact on career development and outcomes.

Concluding note

In our original call for papers, we said that "the main aim of this special issue is to generate a number of high-quality studies that examine the role that career shocks have in contemporary career development." Specifically, in this introduction article, we formulated four fundamental challenges in career shock research: conceptualization, focusing on career outcomes, studying mechanisms and making interdisciplinary connections. In the end, this special issue offers two quantitative, three qualitative and two practitioner articles that have provided valuable answers to those questions (for an overview, see Table 1). We hope that this collection of articles will help advance scholarly knowledge of career shocks and spur future research.

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Note: special issue articles are designated with an *

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