

**At the Crossroads of Bounded and Boundaryless:  
Defining the Shared Career**

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## **At the Crossroads of Bounded and Boundaryless:**

### **Defining the Shared Career**

#### **Abstract**

This paper is an invitation to rethink traditional ideas of careers as individual undertakings and open them up to plural career trajectories. It defines a career profile – the shared career - as the durable, coordinated task collaboration in the working lives of two professionals in which the career trajectory of one individual evolves with that of another individual through a series of vertical, lateral, or cross-organizational moves that are jointly decided, undertaken, assessed and modified. It argues that shared careers are at the intersection of agency and communion, of bounded and boundaryless. Further, it advances a life cycle perspective of career pairing, distinguishing between an affective and a working genesis and focusing on complementary and overlapping knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom career competencies. Finally, it provides implications for individuals in shared careers and for career policies of organizations on hiring, developing and promoting career pairs.

**Key words:** shared careers, boundaryless careers, career competencies, relationship

## **At the Crossroads of Bounded and Boundaryless:**

### **Defining the Shared Career**

Two architects were chosen to share the 2001 Pritzker Architecture Prize, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron of Basel, Switzerland. The two men, both born in Basel in 1950, have nearly parallel careers, attending the same schools and forming a partnership architectural firm, Herzog & de Meuron in 1978. ... [They] work so closely together that each one complements the abilities and talents of the other. Their work is the result of a long term true collaboration making it impossible to honor one without the other.

-2001 Pritzker Award Announcement

In each of the buildings by Herzog and de Meuron, there is clear evidence of two very talented architects collaborating in an unusual design dialogue. The result is an impressively original joint body of work.

-Bill Lacy, Executive Director, Pritzker Jury

Jacques's strengths are my weaknesses...and his weaknesses are my strengths. I think I am definitely very good at the middle phase of a project, while Jacques tends to shine at the beginning and end.

-Pierre de Meuron

Much of the theory and research on careers has been premised on careers as individual undertakings (Nicholson & West, 1989). Careers are defined as "evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989: 8-9). They are considered vehicles for personal growth and an essential part of individual's life structures, which is expressive of his or her needs for power, wealth, prestige or autonomy (Levinson, 1984; Shepard, 1984; Kaufman, 1960).

Multiple changes in the organizational, occupational, industry and societal context pose numerous demanding challenges to executives and their careers (Arthur et al., 1999; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). In response, managerial

jobs become increasingly complex and require a wider range of mind-sets, roles, approaches, competencies, abilities and activities (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003; Sullivan, 1999; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1998; Rivero & Spencer, 1998; Alvarez, 1997; Farkas & Wetlaufer, 1996; Pearson, 1989; Mintzberg, 1973). However, it is unlikely that a single person can provide all roles and competencies needed (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2005; McCauley & Douglas, 2004).

These increasingly complex jobs and novel employment arrangements promoted by the advancement of the knowledge economy place new demands on careers. They also lead to a shift in scholarly attention from static to dynamic careers, and from bounded to protean and boundaryless career paths. The latter refer to careers that move across and draw validation from outside the boundaries of separate employers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Arthur, 1994; Hall, 1974). In the particular case of shaping one's career across projects, the career path is also known as a "checkerboard career" (Peters, 1992). In it, project members with different competencies gather together and create learning (knowing-how) opportunities as well as new interpersonal (knowing-whom) connections (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1998; 1996; Jones, 1996).

A boundaryless career context is more difficult to manage as career planning and advancement are replaced by improvisation and learning, which generates fragments in search of continuity (Rock & Garavan, 2006; Weick, 1996). It may look liberating, yet it can also be rather intimidating and confusing

(Hirsch & Shanley, 1996), leading to a “corrosion of the character” (Sennett, 1998) when agency and communion are left unbalanced (Arthur et al, 1999).

Further, the traditional psychological contract evolves to a stage, in which it is no longer the organization but the individual who aligns the career fragments and holds additional responsibilities for his or her own career development (Parker & Inkson, 1999; Hall, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1994). In it, the quest for individual authenticity becomes essential (Svejenova, 2005; Baker & Aldrich, 1996). Thus, the boundaryless career notion allows updating and expanding the repertoire of available career trajectories, yet it still revolves around the individual as “elementary unit in work arrangements” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996: 3).

While individual-centered, scholarly explorations into these new career realities point to the importance of external networks and other collaborative aspects, from career opportunities provided by a region and its relationships (Saxenian, 1996) to project networks as essential building blocks of a career (Jones, 1996). Further, they reveal instances of individuals in committed relationships who choose to join efforts in pursuing projects of their liking and navigating their careers (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2005; 2002; Marshack, 1998). These joint entrepreneurial efforts could take the form of a solo entrepreneur with a supportive spouse or, copreneurs who – alongside love - share ownership of their family firm, its management, and the responsibility for the business as full-time partners (Marshack, 1998: 19). Furthermore, research on USA entrepreneurs reveals they tend to undertake new ventures in teams rather than individually,

choosing their collaborators mostly among their kith and kin (Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2003).

This article extends extant academic ideas on careers as individual and independent undertakings by exploring and accounting for the richness, variety and complexity of shared professional arrangements in an increasingly boundaryless context. It contributes to the field of careers by defining a noteworthy, yet understudied pattern of long-term career collaboration, which offers a new – relational - way of thinking about career processes.

In that pattern, which we define *as shared careers*, the paths of two professionals unfold together in continuous task collaboration and through jointly made career decisions and moves. Their career unity is an entity in itself, which differs from either individual's separate career, raising motivations and outcomes that cannot be pursued independently. However, in spite of the numerous instances of career unity across business, scientific, artistic, political or sports contexts, there is still a dearth of research on shared careers and a need to define the shared career path with its life cycle and competencies. We argue that the shared career is at the same time bounded and boundaryless: being bound by the relationship, yet free from the boundaries of traditional employment assumptions.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we illustrate the propensity for shared careers and define the concept, distinguishing it from other related relational career concepts, such as dual careers, mentor-protégé, or job sharing relationships. Second, we focus on the life cycle of career coupling, highlighting

its stages and the competencies developed and used by individuals to connect, coordinate, and advance along their joint trajectory. Last, we articulate how the shared career notion contributes to the career literature and comment on its implications for individuals and organizations.

Next we offer some examples of shared careers and then proceed to the concept's definition.

## **SHARED CAREERS: PROPENSITY AND DEFINITION**

Dyads are a distinctive association form of two individuals, which differ from other small number associations, such as triads or quartets, in their ability to preserve members' individuality while securing high level of union, interdependence and shared responsibility (Simmel, 1902a, b). Following earlier studies on executive role constellations (Hodgson, Levinson, & Zaleznik, 1965), plural chief executives (Daniel, 1965) and working dyads (Gabarro, 1987), recent work reveals a renewed interest in the nature and dynamics of pluripersonal arrangements (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005; O'Toole, Galbraith & Lawler, 2002; Gronn, 2002; Sally, 2002). However, research on these phenomena in terms of career implications remains in its infancy.

**Propensity.** Shared careers can be found within and across established companies in a range of sectors, which require substantial differentiation of the logics and activities employed in the creation and delivery of products and services. They are particularly salient in endeavors, where the combination of

complementary competencies with strong commitment to the relationship over time is essential in handling the demands of the job.

In creativity-driven enterprises, such as entertainment, advertising, architecture, or science, like-minded professionals establish a joint practice to achieve distinctive style or enhance innovation (Farrell, 2001; Vagnoni, 1997; Pycior, Slack & Abir-Am, 1996; Greenfeld, 1989; Zuckerman, 1967). Stable career collaborations can also emerge between professionals who bring complementary skills, logics and networks in sectors from haute cuisine and film, to electronics (Svejenova et al, 2007; Alvarez et al, 2005; Kaplan, 2000; Heenan & Bennis, 1999; Nathan, 1999). They are especially salient in familial entrepreneurship and copreneurship situations (de Bruin & Lewis, 2004; Marshack, 1998).

Thus, contrary to traditional depictions of careers as individual and independent undertakings, there are numerous examples of long-term career collaborations, such as the shared careers listed in Table 1. These examples come from different sectors, ranging from investment banking and architecture, to fashion, wine and politics) and spanning different time periods, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of them are partnerships, based on strong affective ties, such as the siblings (e.g., the Weinstein or the Gallo brothers) or husband-wife relationships (e.g., the Webbs, the Curie), while others are the result of a committed professional collaboration (e.g. Goldman Sachs' Friedman and Rubin). Further, some career pairs share a role (e.g. the Coen brothers who are co-scriptwriters and co-directors), while others have complementary responsibilities (e.g. Pedro Almodóvar as a film director, and Agustín Almodóvar as a producer).

In the main, the shared career is embedded in a co-founded and/or co-run company. Finally, as the examples reveal, a shared career can be concluded for a number of different reasons, ranging from retirement or death of one partner, to moving back to an individual career path.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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**Definition.** One way to define shared careers is by clarifying what they are not in comparison and contrast with other relational career-related types. Thus, career-share can be distinguished from “job-share” (Worzniak & Chadwell, 2002), which is about sharing a position without having to make joint career decisions or moves. Worzniak and Chadwell use the example of medical practices to clarify that job-share is about two or more physicians with similar competencies, providing cross-coverage for their patients. It is also distinctive from what Alvarez and Svejenova (2005) define as “professional duos” or “pairs at the top”, which capture executives who perform the top job together and are held jointly accountable for the company’s results.

Further, shared careers differ from “dual careers”, in which spouses or partners pursue two separate career paths (Blossfeld & Drobic, 2001; Hall & Hall, 1978, 1979; Rapaport & Rapaport, 1969). In dual careers, couples have to balance the personal and the professional dimensions of their lives. In particular, they have to deal with the tensions that emerge as a result of sharing a personal life, while being at different career stages and advancing along independent

careers paths with different professional requirements (Schein, 1996; Weishaar, Chiaravalli & Jones, 1984; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976).

Shared careers are also different from “mentor-protégé dyads” for which the career interventions are primarily unidirectional, usually from the mentor to the protégé (Farrell, 2001). Even in cases of informal mentorship characterized by closeness and intimacy, there is no shared decision making on career issues or joint career moves (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Kram, 1985). Finally, being in a shared career does not imply that one individual is expected to sacrifice her or his trajectory to support the career of a significant other (Chadwick & De Courtivron, 1996).

Another way to depict a shared career is by denoting its distinguishing characteristics, such as voluntary binding, joint career decisions and moves, and symbiotic mutualism. First, a shared career is a voluntary binding. Drawing a parallelism with the dimensions of community activity, it reveals a volitional commitment to joint work and shared investments in the chosen field, occupation or activity (DeFillippi, Arthur, & Lindsay, 2006). In it, the individuals involved are aware of the value, which each of them is able to add to the collective career as well as the opportunities for shared value creation by uniting competencies and networks (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005). By pulling together and integrating the career capital of two members – their knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996) – shared careers help address the requirements those professionals face as a consequence of increasing organizational and professional complexity.

Second, individuals who share their careers are involved in a joint enterprise, their collective response reflecting common goals and mutual accountability, as well as a shared repertoire of tools, actions, or concepts (DeFillippi, Arthur, & Lindsay, 2006). They identify, define and modify their career goals together and jointly undertake career moves within an organizational setting or across different projects or employers. Thus, for the duration of the coupling the career motives, decisions, actions, and achievements of one individual cannot occur or be understood separately from those of the other individual. For that to happen, the shared career needs to have a strong relational foundation, based on openness and disclosure; detailed knowledge of each other and, as a consequence, predictability of the reactions; as well as the capacity to handle conflict (Gabarro, 1987).

Third, career unity is characterized by symbiotic mutualism in which both individuals have a more meaningful and satisfying career when advancing along the career together than if they were to pursue individual trajectories (Alvarez & Svejenova, 2002). This is an outcome of a special attachment and commitment to the relationship - relational cohesion (Lawler & Yoon, 1996) - which develops over time with successive satisfactory exchanges. Hence, the members place high value on staying connected in professional and career terms and thus enjoying a more meaningful and satisfactory career.

Based on the above distinctions, we propose the following definition of shared careers, which serves to differentiate them from related professional or personal career arrangements, which we discussed previously:

Shared career is the durable, coordinated task collaboration in the working lives of two professionals in which the careers of two individuals evolve jointly in a series of vertical, lateral, or cross-organizational moves that are mutually decided, undertaken, assessed, and modified. The career contract is neither with the self, nor with the organization, but with the relationship.

Building on this definition, we argue that a shared career is located at the intersection of the bounded and the boundaryless, with individuals responding to and creating or influencing the boundaries, which they encounter in their professional progression (Tams & Arthur, 2008).

On the one hand, shared careers are boundaryless trajectories, as they can cross employment boundaries and gain marketability outside of separate employers. Hence the career partners can advance professionally across a range of settings and occupations or, else, decide to grow jointly within the same organization, which can be one they have established.

On the other hand, however, shared careers are bounded, which is in line with Gunz et al's (2000) argument that boundaries, rather than disappearing, are becoming more complex and multifaceted. Its binding is relational, influenced by the motivation, objectives and moves of the career partners. Relational boundaries are used to create a strong career in a world of weak employment situations characterized by permeable and temporal organizational boundaries (Weick, 1996). Further, a shared career is also enclosed by prior career history and occupational identity of the individuals involved and the institutional

constraints imposed by gatekeepers to the job opportunities, which they encounter (King et al, 2005).

## **LIFE CYCLE OF A CAREER COUPLING**

Time is an important dimension of shared careers. Incentives for career sharing emerge when there is a continuity of collaboration and joint experiences, as well as escalating emotional and material exchanges (Hodgson et al., 1965). Individuals who are contemplating a shared career must be able to share a position or work close with another person and be willing and able to accept another person's point of view, not only with regard to work, but also with respect to their career's direction and joint development. It is important to periodically assess the benefits and trade offs of a shared career. Although it may provide what Farrell (2001) called instrumental intimacy – the connectedness of two minds in reaching joint ideas – it may also lead to difficulties in making joint career moves (e.g. a more restricted range of viable alternatives, less flexibility or slower speed in deciding or acting), as each new career opportunity must provide room for two professionals rather than one.

To grasp the essence of shared careers, several pertinent questions need to be addressed: What is the genesis of a shared career? What conditions favor its emergence and influence its progression? When does this career pattern work and when does it fail? Here we offer a life cycle view of shared careers as a progression through a sequence of stages, such as initiation, functioning, and

termination. Complementarities, trust and relational cohesion influence the direction and evolution of the shared career.

**Initiation.** Shared careers emerge in two principal ways: from an existing social relationship, such as an affective dyad, or in the course of a task-based interaction in a working dyad (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005). Affective dyads such as siblings, spouses, romantically involved couples, or close friends are usually grounded in reciprocated affection (Marshack, 1998). That is why the family appears to be a natural environment for career unity. In families, exchanges among members begin at an early age and, by the time professional collaboration between two family members is contemplated, there is already a strong, close insight on respective abilities and character, which facilitates the entry into and successful joint undertaking of a career. As our psychology seems suited for a social universe that is known and finite, there is a tendency toward kin selection in ventures that involve high uncertainty such as startups (Ruef, Aldrich, & Carter, 2003). Thus, two individuals can initially share a strong and binding social relationship and use it as a foundation on which to build their professional collaboration and joint career.

In a task-based partnership, individuals initiate their interaction through work-specified encounters (Gabarro, 1987). Task-based ties differ from affective relationships in that they are influenced by different situational and contextual forces and are subject to different social controls (Gabarro, 1987; Marwell & Hage, 1970). Thus, shared careers can be initiated because of work proximity and/or repeated task-based interactions, as explained by John Whitehead, former

co-CEO, along with John Weinberg, at Goldman Sachs: "... we had desks that faced each other starting in 1950 when he [John Weinberg] joined. We became partners eight or nine years later and we rose up the ladder together, every step of the way. ... Eventually, we decided to be joint co-managing partners ... [and] take over the management of the firm" (Whitehead, 2002: 5).

Shared careers are also initiated when two employees who work together in the same company identify an opportunity to join another business or establish their own business, as in the case of Sapien's co-CEOs and co-chairs who met as consultants employed by what is now Cambridge Technology Partners and then moved on together to establish their own company (Whitford, 2000). In addition to work proximity, magnet places (Farrell, 2001) serve the function of putting like minds together, which can in turn choose to embark on a shared career. A magnet place can be an art studio, a laboratory, a university – in general, any place that attracts individuals with shared values and aspirations. In the words of Nicholson (2000: 179), 'one could say that the whole of Silicon Valley stems from gangs of young men who carried on playing together beyond their college years'.

Shared careers are formed for different reasons. They can be instrumental in getting access to a range of existing and future (potential) complementary competencies and relationships, which the individuals bring together and which allow them to deal with the requirements of their profession in a better and, more satisfying way. The members of a successfully joint career are usually odd pairs, with different cultural backgrounds, personalities, skills and relational sets

(Gronn, 2002). Although it is not possible to be normative about the most beneficial combination of characteristics for a duo, there is a wide agreement in the literature that the traits of the two members of a duo should blend well. This blending, cemented with shared values and interests, provides a strong foundation on which cooperation to emerge and thrive. Overall, shared careers are formed because of mutual interest of the individuals, unlike the case of professional duos, such as co-heads, which can be appointed by a higher authority, or introduced and brought together by match-makers (Alvarez, Svejenova, & Vives, 2007).

**Functioning.** With this foundation in place, there are different mechanisms that could help a shared career unfold successfully. For its proper functioning, it is important to articulate the division of labor; specify which tasks are to be performed separately and which are to be carried out jointly; secure sufficient space for each partner to exercise personal responsibilities and provide mechanisms that integrate these contributions back into a single voice and action program of the duo (Gronn, 2002). Further, there is a need for a shared awareness of critical interdependencies and ways in which coordination and mutual adjustment can take place, as well as a working relationship with a strong level of commitment and interaction (Gronn, 2002). Another aspect in the functioning of career sharing, in addition to the task collaboration, is the making of career decisions and moves jointly.

The longevity of shared careers arising from working relationships could be improved and their operation enhanced through role separation, role sharing, and integration mechanisms (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005). Professional duos are more balanced if they are able to turn their working collaboration into an affective one and combine the benefits of both affective and cognitive trust as the glue that holds the partnership together (McAllister, 1995). As explained by architect Pierre de Meuron when talking about his relationship with his shared career partner Jacques Herzog: “It's not only professional collaboration,” de Meuron adds. “It's friendship, and that's unique. To have no barriers in a relationship, whether it's husband and wife or a working collaboration, [means you can] be open to everything.”<sup>1</sup>

**Termination.** The exit of one member from a shared career leads, by definition, to its breakup. A shared career can end one-sidedly, because of the willingness of one person to return to the pursuit of an individual career or natural causes, such as the demise of one of the partners. It can also unbundle by mutual agreement, for example, due to retirement or changes taking place in the profession or the relationship (e.g. Woody Allen's public break up with his best friend and long term film producer Jean Doumanian). Thus, personal circumstances as well as relational and contextual specificities may produce changes that cause a drift away from career unity, back to individual trajectories.

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<sup>1</sup> “We can help change in China say architects Herzog and de Meuron”, The Times, March 12, 2008.

**Consequences.** Shared careers can have both positive impact and drawbacks on the individuals involved in the career pairing.

On the positive side, Increasingly complex occupations and demanding employers require mindsets, roles, and competencies that are difficult for an individual to possess and employ (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). Hence, sharing a career with a trusted other may provide complementary capabilities for performing a job, which can lead to achievements, which the individuals alone will be unable to deliver. For example, returning to our opening example on the architects Herzog and de Meuron, their durable professional association has allowed them to “obtain results that cannot be produced by one of them alone” (Foster, 2006: 41). Further, sharing a career offers companionship and support in demanding occupations that can be characterized by loneliness, such as certain top executive or artistic occupations. It is also a source of freedom in the pursuit of distinctive and innovative projects. For example, as the filmmaking Coen brothers acknowledge, their career unity allows them to overcome loneliness and isolation - “When we work together we obviously don’t get that feeling of isolation that others sometimes feel” (Levine, 2000: 79) - and to pursue their distinctive vision, making “their own films their own way” (Levine, 2000: 164).

There are also potential drawbacks. For example, one member’s problems could negatively affect the career of the other member. In addition, for individuals who have been involved in a shared career, there is a risk of

becoming relationship-dependent and unable to project a distinctive individual competencies' profile on the job market. As partners have advanced along successful trajectories by working together, relying on critical complementarities and interdependencies, they may also experience difficulties in pursuing a career path independently. Similarly to what has been observed in boundaryless careers, few people are prepared to benefit from a shared career (Baker & Aldrich, 1996; Perrow, 1996). One of the main difficulties in career sharing remains that of finding the "right" partner and learning how to work and advance professionally together. Having a good personal relationship is not enough for the successful development of a shared career.

Finally, as partners co-evolve in setting objectives and making joint career decisions and moves, they need to manage their goals, expectations, and commitments to the joint career path, as well as continuously update and adjust their career competencies.

## **COMPETENCIES FOR A SHARED CAREER**

We address DeFillippi and Arthur's (1996: 124) call for generating "a richer compendium of competency-based career profiles". For the purpose, we build on their typology of knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom career competencies and extend their comparative table of competencies in bounded and boundaryless career profiles (p. 124) with the profile of the shared career. Table 2 reveals the extended comparison.

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*Knowing-why* is a competence that captures the sources of motivation in the development of a career path and is related to identity, meaning, personal beliefs and values (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). In a bounded career context, an employee's career identity bears a strong imprint of the organization, in which it unfolds. In a boundaryless career, identity is anchored primarily in an occupation and is decoupled from a specific job or employer. In the case of a shared career, identity is defined by the relationship, in which it is embedded, with only minor organizational and occupational imprints. Further, for a shared career to be successful and provide meaningful direction for the joint trajectory as well as clues for sense-making, the career motivations and values of the individuals involved (e.g. what constitutes career success) in the career sharing need to have a significant overlap. In the words of Luis Valls, on the shared career with his brother Javier Valls at the helm of Spanish bank Banco Popular:

Sharing things – ideas, hobbies, tastes, exhaustion – helps to prevent fighting. There is no doubt that having the same blood, sensibility, criteria, vision of the game greatly reduces the scope for disagreement. The likelihood of conflict is slight when there is no need to discuss the decision because there is ‘instinctive’ consensus about the goals or how to achieve them. (Valls, quoted in Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005: 185).

*Knowing-how* is context-specific and refers to career-relevant skills and job-related knowledge, which an individual brings to a company and/or develops in the process of his or her employment (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). In

traditionally bounded careers, as a result of working in a systematic, structured way, an individual acquires “employment-specialized knowing-how skills” (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996: 123). Those skills help in the task performance, yet they could also become a competency trap when a market changes and requires a new set of competencies (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Levinthal & March, 1993; Levitt & March, 1988). In boundaryless careers the accumulation of know-how is employment-flexible. It develops as an individual advances across different organizations and employment opportunities. The transfer of knowledge and practices in a boundaryless context depends on how much such knowledge and skills are context specific and how willing the host organization is to embrace novelty and integrate it with its extant ways of doing. A case in point is Formula 1, in which employment mobility within England’s motor sport cluster allows for transfer of knowledge and skills across teams, with teams “becom[ing] very adept at sharing knowledge across the business” (Jenkins, Pasternak & West, 2005: 57). Finally, the knowing-how in boundaryless careers may also involve attitudes and aptitudes for moving across organizational boundaries. Having worked in a range of settings and contexts allows an individual to learn how to transfer know-how from one employer to another and thus contribute to the diffusion of practices and the strengthening of his or her own employability.

In the profile of a shared career, knowing-how has three different meanings, which combine specialized with flexible features. First, it captures the way things are done within a specific organization (if the career sharing takes place in a given employer) or in a particular occupation (if the shared career

unfolds across projects and/or employers' boundaries). Second, it depicts the competencies for transitioning across employers, while keeping the commitment to the relationship. Third, it also involves a "liaison career competence", which is associated with the skills and attitudes necessary for the sustenance of a close, committed, long-term professional partnership with both work and career collaboration. Hence, there are employer-specific, profession-driven, and liaison-dependent competencies and skills. To use the Coen brothers' example again: "the way we worked was incredibly fluid. I think we're both just about equally responsible for everything in the movie" (Hinson, 1985: 13). Finally, similarly to occupational communities, shared careers provide opportunities for a continuous pursuit of new knowing-how competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996).

*Knowing-whom* is about the interpersonal connections, structure and process that link people to employment opportunities and to developments within and outside their field (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). In the context of the bounded career, the organization is individual's predominant locus of relationships. While he or she is not operating in an intra-firm relational vacuum and may have a range of relationships that are not firm-specific, the firm is the relevant boundary for the network, which is needed for getting things done and advancing professionally. The relational structure is rather hierarchical and the way relationships are formed is dependent on organizational structure prescriptions. In a boundaryless career context, the relevant network is inter-organizational and is characterized by much greater diversity. The structure is

nonhierarchical and opportunities for new jobs in it are emergent. Differently, in the context of a shared career, the locus is the relationship of the career partners, which allows the combination of intra- and inter-firm networks and the management of the network in a proactive way. Having two individuals committed to a single career allows for a greater social capital, particularly if the individuals' contacts are non-redundant. Thus, common ties can provide a shared career pair with a source of support and identity (Coleman), while different ties can be a source of new opportunities (Burt).

**Interdependencies among competency dimensions.** The knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom are complementary forms of career capital (Inkson). If symmetrical in their development, they allow shaping a coherent career profile and a meaningful and successful career. In the case of asymmetries among the three competencies (e.g. a motivation for an employer-independent career in the absence of a network of contacts to provide opportunities for career moves) the desired career profile can be difficult if not impossible to realize (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). For a shared career, for example, it is important that the knowing-how and knowing-whom capital of the career partners are largely complementary, while their career goals and orientations depicted in their knowing-why competence are shared.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION**

In this paper we sought to define the shared career as a distinctive career profile, in which the career contract is with the relationship. We offered illustration of its propensity and depiction of its life cycle stages and required career competencies.

Focusing on the shared career allows to introduce the dyad as a unit of analysis in career studies, a stream of research that has tended to focus on individual or organizational careers. Thus, we shed light on an understudied yet relevant relational career phenomenon, which takes place at the intersection of the bounded and boundaryless. It differs from work on traditional organizational boundaries, as the boundary it depicts is that imposed by a significant other with whom a shared career is pursued. It is also distinguishable from work on boundaryless careers, as the responsibility for the career path across organizations does not reside in an individual but in a pair.

Further, the study of shared careers allows advance understanding on how to balance the duality and tensions of agency and communion in career development (Bakan, 1966; Marshall, 1989). On the one hand, the shared career provides opportunities for agency of its individual members, in which they can take initiatives and convince and coordinate with their career partners on necessary career adjustments or moves. On the other hand, the relational binding of the career provides continuity across career fragments and thus facilitates sensemaking and communion, the latter being often unrewarded or unrecognized by formal organizational systems (Marshall, 1989: 285). After all, “if communion is to be better understood, we will need new theories of

organization which accommodate the settings and processes beyond the workplace through which communion frequently takes place” (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999: 176). A shared career could help shed light on communion. Finally, the social and organizational context in which a shared career unfolds needs to be taken into account (Blau, 1969; Gabarro, 1987).

Shared careers are not only theoretically meaningful phenomena, but also empirically relevant ones both for individual careers and organizational practices. The underlying logic of career sharing, in which the relationship is a career anchor, allows its members to successfully manage careers in the absence of ‘external markets’ by focusing on “competencies rather than titles, fulfilment rather than advancement and roles rather than positions” (Weick & Berlinger, 1989: 320). Further, shared careers have implications for organizations, particularly in regard with their tendency to hire and promote individually when specific competitive advantage, or combination of competencies, may reside in a dyad whose members are involved in career sharing.

More applied research should be performed on the practices of companies that are able to recognize and realize the potential of dyads. Hiring pairs requires special selection mechanisms that are able to capture potential synergies for an organization from the teaming up the talents. Further, a professional duo with complementary competencies and styles could be a source of competitive advantage for the organization. Not realizing the importance of pairing and promoting its members individually may destroy effectively functioning work units. As Belbin (1981) argued, a common mistake is that ‘Pairings of proven

effectiveness are often broken up to fill managerial gaps or even as well-intentioned acts of management development, with little realization of how much the interdependence of two people contributes to the running of a successful unit' (Belbin, 1981: 129).

Finally, in today's increasingly fragmented career experiences, shared careers could provide individuals with continuity, coherence, and source of attachment in their professional lives. They could also help solve some of the tensions facing professionals in today's complex organizations and serve as a platform for a fulfilling professional and personal life. In view of the committed and smooth collaboration that characterizes them, they could also lead to enhanced contributions to fulfilling organizational objectives.

**Table 1**

**Illustrating the Shared Career**

	<b>Individuals sharing a career</b>	<b>Related company</b>	<b>Principal activity</b>	<b>Professional relationship</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>End</b>
1	Sidney and Beatrice Webb (husband & wife)	London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	politics, education	Co-founders of LSE (1895); co-authors of books; also involved in the Fabian Society, the Labour Party, etc; pioneers in social and economic reforms; historians	1894 (publish first book together)	1935 (publish last book together; retired)
2	Pierre and Marie Curie (husband & wife)	n.a.	science	Nobel Prize winning physicist and physical chemist, who discovered radium and polonium in their joint investigation of radioactivity	1895 (start collaboration)	1906 (death of Pierre)
3	Ernest and Julio Gallo (siblings)	E&J Gallo	winery	Founders	1933	1993 (Julio Gallo dies)
4	Valentino Garavani and Giancarlo Giammetti	Valentino fashion group	fashion	Owners until 1998/ Designer and manager	1960	2007 (Valentino retires)
5	Christo and Jeanne-Claude (husband & wife)	n.a.	art	Artists	1961	-
6	Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Berge	Yves Saint Laurent Haute Couture house	fashion	Founders, designer and manager/ founders of Fondation Pierre Bergé - Yves Saint Laurent, since 2002	1962	2008 (Y.S. Laurent dies)
7	Gerard Pelisson and Paul Dubrule	ACCOR Group	hotels	Founders, Co-CEOs, Co-Chairmen	1967	2006 (joint retirement)
8	Gilbert Prousch & George Passmore	n.a.	art	Artists	1970	-
9	Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron	Herzog and de Meuron	architecture	Founders and Partners	1978	-
10	Harvey and Bob Weinstein (siblings)	Weinstein Co.	film	Founders, producers; Previously, founders of Miramax	1979	-

11	Ferran Adrià and Juli Soler	El Bulli	haute cuisine	Chef and restaurant manager; co-owners since 1990	1983	-
12	Fernando y Humberto Campana (siblings)	Campanas	design	Founders/Designers	1983	-
13	Joel and Ethan Coen (siblings)	Mike Zoss Production Inc.	film	Scriptwriters, directors, producers	1984	-
14	Pedro and Agustín Almodóvar (siblings)	El Deseo, S.A.	film	Scriptwriter and Director/Producer	1985	-
15	Stephen Friedman and Robert Rubin	Goldman Sachs	investment banking	Divisional co-heads, co- COOs, Co-CEOs, co-charimen	1985	1992 (Rubin goes into politics)
16	Jerry A. Greenberg and J. Stuart Moore	Sapient Corp.	business and technology consultancy	Founders, Co-CEOs	1991	-
17	Viktor Horsting and Rolf Snoeren	Viktor & Rolf	fashion	Founders/Designers	1992	-
18	Michael Lazaridis and James Balsillie	RIM (Research in Motion)	wireless communications	Founders, Co-CEOs	1993	-
19	Larry Page and Sergey Brin	Google	search engine	Researchers, Founders	1996	-
20	Niklas Zennstrom and Janus Friis	Joost	free online TV	Founders; Serial Entrepreneurs, also founders of Kazaa, Skype	2001	-

**Table 2**

**Competencies in Bounded, Boundaryless, and Shared Career Profiles<sup>2</sup>**

	CAREER PROFILE		
	Bounded	Boundaryless	Shared
<b>COMPETENCY</b>			
<b>Knowing-why</b>			
Identity	Employer-dependent	Employer-independent	Relationship-based
<b>Knowing-how</b>			
Employment context	Specialized	Flexible	Specialized, while flexible
<b>Knowing-whom</b>			
Locus	Intrafirm	Interfirm	Partnership
Structure	Hierarchic	Nonhierarchic	Relational Proactive
Process	Prescribed	Emergent	

<sup>2</sup> Based on DeFillippi & Arthur (1996: 124) and own elaboration.

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