‘Follow your bliss’ or ‘show me the money’? Career orientations, career management competence and career success in Australian creative workers

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Abstract

Careers in the creative sector are unusual in that they are characterised by boundarylessness, in which short term employment relationships and self-employment are common, and the responsibility for career development is placed on the individual. In addition, it has been suggested that many creative workers possess career motivations distinct from those associated with traditional career patterns, such as progression and security. This study examines the career orientations of creatives to determine whether certain motivations are linked with career management competence and success in the boundaryless career. Responses from 310 creatives suggest that the motivations of creative workers are indeed dissimilar to workers in other sectors. Systematic differences were found between participants with different career orientations, with autonomy and interest / challenge motivations most clearly linked with high levels of career management competence and career success, and security motivations linked with low levels of career management competence and career success.

Introduction

The boundaryless career

Historically, career theory maintained key assumptions about the nature and shape of careers: workers are employed by a single stable employer, and are motivated to progress upward through the firm. In the last 15 years, these assumptions have been challenged. Theorists have documented an increasingly complex world of divergent career and life patterns. Workers,

particularly knowledge workers (those who develop and use knowledge in their careers), are engaging in shorter term, less stable working arrangements, and may combine or overlap various types of work as an employee with self-employment and education experiences throughout their lives. In this 'boundaryless career' pattern (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) there is a shift away from placing the responsibility for career development on the employer. Instead, the responsibility is on the individual to maintain his or her employability (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008) and to manage his or her wider career development.

Career motivations and career orientations

With the rise of the boundaryless career, there has been a related surge of interest in the idea that work and career can be a source of personal satisfaction (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Henderson, 2000). As knowledge workers take control of the external facets of career development, there is also more widespread recognition that there can be variety of values, preferences and motives underlying career choices. These motivations move far beyond the traditionally acknowledged priorities of financial and geographic security and progression within a single firm. Indeed, the boundaryless career pattern may put traditionally motivated careerists at a disadvantage, as work opportunities offering security and progression become harder to come by.

The concept of diverse career motivations was formalized into career theory as early as the 1970s in career orientation theory (Derr, 1986; Schein, 1974). A career orientation is a constellation of motives, talents, and values which form the standard by which we measure our career success (Derr, 1986). A career orientation is formed over time as the result of experience with work. Schein asserted that people only have one career orientation, and that it is relatively stable once formed, but Derr's conceptualisation suggests that a personal can maintain several career orientations, which evolve over time as further work and life experiences occur.

Derr's (1986) career orientations typology is outlined in Table 1. It suggests that there are five career orientations: *getting high, getting free, getting balanced, getting ahead, and getting secure.*

Table 1. Derr's Career Orientations: Motivational Themes and Key Values

Career Orientation	Key Values	Motivational Themes
Getting High	interest	obtaining interest, excitement, challenge, inspiration from

		work, development opportunities
Getting Free	autonomy	achieving freedom, individual control over work processes and environments
Getting Balanced	work-life balance	achieving a meaningful balance between work, relationships and self-development
Getting Ahead	recognition, progression	making it to the top of the hierarchy, achieving recognition
Getting Secure	security	job security, benefits, solidity, a sense of identity, order and place

Studies have applied career orientation theory to different occupational groups (although nearly all of those studied have been employees in large firms - e.g., Igbaria, Greenhaus, & Parasuraman, 1991; Kim & McLean, 2002), and several cultural contexts (e.g., Danziger & Valency, 2006; Ituma & Simpson, 2007). Some of these studies sought to 'match' career orientations with characteristics of certain jobs, based on the idea that career orientation – job congruence would lead to job satisfaction. Other studies simply identified the dominant career orientations in different groups of workers.

Although the findings of many of these studies conflict, and are based on samples of one type of worker, there is some evidence to suggest that career orientations have shifted since the early empirical work into career orientations was conducted in the 1970s and 1980s. In early studies, orientations corresponding to *getting ahead* emerged as being the most common type (Schein's (1974) general management' and 'technical/ functional competence' anchors). By the 1990s, although *getting ahead* was still seen as important, lifestyle and *getting balanced* were the dominant career orientations of workers in a range of sectors such as information technology, business, and engineering (Danziger & Valency, 2006; Schein, 1996; Yarnall, 1998). No studies to date have specifically considered the career orientations of boundaryless careerists.

Navigating the new career: Career management competence

The skills suggested to be necessary to self-manage career development in the boundaryless career are known as career management competencies or skills (King, 2004). First, career management competence involves the ability to build a career in the boundaryless world of work

– the externally-oriented capabilities required to identify and exploit career opportunities, to see opportunities on the horizon and 'reinvent' one's self accordingly, and to build effective professional networks. These career building abilities relate to deFillippi and Arthur's (1994) 'intelligent career' framework competencies of *knowing what, where, when*, and *whom*. They are concerned with the deployment of *knowing how* skills, the technical abilities required to 'do the job'.

Second, career management competence involves internally oriented self-management capabilities– maintaining a realistic, positive sense of personal priorities and values, including having a sense of one's career orientation. In deFillippi and Arthur's (1994) framework, these competencies are referred to as *knowing why*. Career management can be seen as a process of continuously balancing and integrating the external and internal aspects of career: *knowing who, what, where, when, why, and how.*

Careers in the Creative Industries

Both boundarylessness and non-traditional career motivations are phenomena the creative sector has long recognised. Work in the creative industries is often characterised by finite length projects, and creatives are far more likely than workers in other sectors to be self-employed, or engaged by small-to-medium sized enterprises where stable employment or traditional hierarchical progression is not possible (Bridgstock, 2005). The well-documented oversupply of emerging creative workers in many fields results in intense competition for entry level positions where only the most skilled and talented will 'make it' (Menger, 2001). Rapid technological advancements in much of the sector have also meant that a commitment to being a working creative also means a commitment to continuous education and reeducation. Given the boundaryless characteristics of many creative careers, it follows that strong levels of career management competence will lead to enhanced career outcomes amongst creative workers.

Although little empirical investigation has been conducted into the career orientations of creatives, literature from the cultural economics field seems to suggest that non-traditional career orientations are common amongst creative workers. Caves (2000) asserted that one of the core economic properties of the Creative Industries is 'art for art's sake', reflecting a widely held notion that creative workers are prepared to sacrifice wages and other forms of external recognition for originality of creative work, technical skill development, and other 'intrinsic' rewards, to the extent that they are willing to be paid less than workers with more 'humdrum' jobs. Caves' (2000) theory indicates that creative workers may tend to be orientated away from

security and recognition / progression *(getting secure* and *getting ahead* orientations), instead preferring interest or challenge *(getting high)*. Another economic model, Throsby's (1994) 'work preference of artists' suggests that creatives are also inclined away from lifestyle *(getting balanced)* orientations. Throsby's model states that if creative workers receive a financial windfall of some type, they will use the income to work more rather than engage in non-work activities.

To the author's knowledge, no studies to date have to date attempted to link career orientations with creative career success. In a sector where boundarylessness is common and secure jobs are relatively rare, it would seem plausible that workers who value autonomy (*getting free*) might have higher levels of career management competence and do better than those who value security and stability (*getting secure*). Creatives who are orientated towards interest and development *(getting high)* might find it easier to feel satisfied with work, but might not possess as well developed career building skills or earn as much as those who aspire to recognition and high incomes *(getting ahead).*

This study identifies links between career orientations, career management competence, and career success in the boundaryless creative career. In doing so, it addresses the following four research questions:

1. What are the dominant career orientations of creative workers?

2. Are creatives with higher levels of career management competence more successful?

3. Are creatives with certain career orientations more likely to have high levels of career management competence than others?

4. Are creatives with certain career orientations more successful than others?

Methodology

The sample comprised 310 Australian creatives, sourced from a variety of professional networks and organizations. The participants included 122 professionals from the creative arts (e.g., writers, visual artists), 85 from the performing arts (e.g., actors, dancers, musicians), and 103 digital / technical creatives (e.g., filmmakers, designers, animators). All participants met professional practice criteria similar to those used by Australia Council-commissioned studies of the working lives of Australian creatives (Throsby & Hollister, 2003): they had produced professional (i.e., paid or funded via grant) creative work during the previous 5 years, and regarded themselves as being engaged in creating a serious and substantial body of work in

their field/s. Participants included 167 males and 143 females, with a mean age of 36.91 (SD = 10.47). On average, they had worked in their creative field/s for 13.79 years (SD = 9.75), and 79.35% had received formal training.

The recruitment materials invited professional creative workers to respond to an online questionnaire which contained measures relating to career orientation, career management competence, and level of career success. Although several career orientation scales exist (Derr, 1986; Igbaria & Baroudi, 1993), none had been validated with a creative cohort, and previous work on the nature of creative careers (Bridgstock, 2005; Throsby & Hollister, 2003) suggested that some of the questions, such as those relating to hierarchical status within an organization, might not be relevant to many participants. Thus, participants were asked to respond to the following open-ended question: "How would you define career success?" An a priori procedure with two coders was employed to code responses, where possible, into the 5 categories corresponding to Derr's (1986) career orientation typology.

The career management competence measure used in this study was the 11-item scale developed and validated by Bridgstock (2008) based on the competencies contained in the Australian Blueprint for Career Development (Haines, Scott, & Lincoln, 2003). The measure consists of 1-6 Likert scale questions and is divided into two subscales: *self management*, involving 6 items relating to internal career management, such as maintaining a positive self-image and understanding personal motivations and aspirations, and *career building*, involving 5 items relating to external career management, such as locating and using career information and applying for or creating work.

Both internal and external measures of career success were included in the study. The external success measure used was annual income. To measure internal career success, participants rated their current levels of career success on a 1-6 scale, based on their own definitions. This scale ranged from 'not at all successful' to 'highly successful'.

Results

1. What are the dominant career orientations of creatives?

Of the 310 responses to the question, "how would you define career success?", 287 were able to be coded into at least one of Derr's (1986) career orientation categories. Two themes of particular interest emerged in the coding of the responses into orientations. First, the creatives'

getting ahead responses most often related to recognition from peers and gatekeepers rather than hierarchical position in an organization or number of promotions. Second, many *getting secure* responses pertained to earning a living only from creative work, without recourse to income from work in an unrelated field or dependence on family members.

Of the responses that were not able to be categorised, 16 related to contributing to development of the participant's field, to a cause, or to humanity (most closely related to the *service to a cause* career anchor in Schein's (1974) typology, a category not included in Derr's (1986) categorization), and in 7 cases did not contain any clearly identifiable orientation (e.g., *"there's no such thing, [career success] doesn't exist"; "I'm still here, still trying"*).

Multiple career orientations were evident in 14.29% of the categorized responses, with 12.20% of responses containing themes relating to two categories, and 2.09% containing themes relating to three categories. In the 41 cases where multiple orientations were evident, the 'primary', or first mentioned, career orientation category was used in the further statistical analyses in this study.

The primary career orientations of the participants are depicted in Figure 1. The most common career orientation amongst the creatives was *getting secure*, accounting for nearly a third of the primary responses. Non-parametric tests revealed that the *getting secure* group were on average 5 years younger and had 5 years less experience in the workforce than the other orientation groups (Age $U=72358.500$, $p<.001$; work experience $U=7468.500$, $p<.001$).
In addition to *getting secure, getting high* and *getting free* were also prominent career orientations in the sample, in combination accounting for about another third of responses. *Getting balanced* was the least common of Derr's (1986) career orientations in the sample.

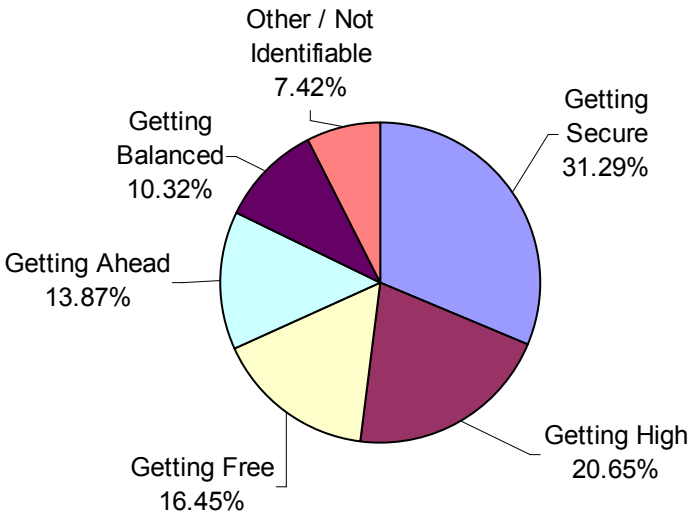

Figure 1. Primary career orientations of creative workers using Derr's typology. N=310

Question 2: Are creatives with higher levels of career management competence more successful?

The second research question, pertaining to the degree of relationship between career management competence and career success, was addressed with the computation of simple bivariate correlation statistics. The Spearman's non-parametric correlations indicated a moderately strong and statistically significant relationship between both of the career management scales and the two success measures at p<.001, indicating that creatives who reported higher levels of career management skill were also generally more successful. In addition, there was a strong correlation found between the career management scales, *self management* and *career building*, at .62 (p<.0001). The correlation between the two success measures was somewhat lower, but still statistically significant, at .21 (p<.001). The correlations are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Spearman's Correlation Matrix: Measures of Career Management Competence and Career Success

	Career Management Scales		Career Success Measures	
	Self Management	Career Building	Income	Self-Rated Success
Self Management	1.00	.62	.40	.18
Career Building		1.00	.47	.26

Income	1.00	.21
Self-Rated Success		1.00

Note. All correlations are significant at p<.001

Question 3: Are creatives with certain career orientations more likely to have high levels of career management competence than others?

Omnibus ANOVA procedures were used to determine whether there were differences in career management competence between participants with different career orientations. As the group sample sizes and variances were unequal, Games-Howell post hoc tests (1976) were then used to discover where the group differences lay.

The omnibus ANOVAs revealed significant differences between creatives with different career orientations in terms of both the *self management* and the *career building* scales ($F(4,282)=6.28$ and $F(4,282)=5.75$ respectively, both $p<.001$). The post hoc tests split the career orientations into two groups: those with comparatively high mean scores, and those with comparatively low mean scores, significant at $p<.05$. Creatives with *getting high*, *getting free*, or *getting ahead* orientations assigned themselves comparatively high scores on both scales; those with *getting secure* orientations tended to assign themselves much lower career management competence scores on both scales. The *getting balanced* group had fairly high self management scores, but low career building scores. The post hoc comparisons are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Significant Differences in Career Management Competence by Success Orientation Using Games-Howell Post Hoc Tests: Mean Scores

	Self Management overall 27.26 (5.31)		Career Building overall 21.89 (4.64)	
	High	Low	High	Low
Getting High, n=64	28.76 (5.73)		23.13 (4.42)	
Getting Free, n=51	28.19 (4.52)		23.00 (4.28)	
Getting Balanced, n=32	28.56 (5.05)			21.25 (4.06)
Getting Ahead, n=43	27.60 (5.91)		22.84 (5.53)	
Getting Secure, n=97		25.21 (4.61)		20.28 (4.27)

Note. The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Question 4: Are creatives with certain career orientations more successful than others?

The final research question asked whether there were career orientation group differences in the success measures. For the income success measure, an omnibus ANOVA procedure was used. For the career success self-rating measure which was a single Likert scale, a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test of group difference was necessary. Both procedures were followed by Games-Howell post hoc tests to determine where group differences lay.

Significant group differences were found for both the self-rated success measure $\chi^2(4)=35.58$, $p<.001$), and the income success measure ($F(4,282)=6.00$, $p<.001$). The post hoc comparisons showed three groupings of orientations for each success measure, at $p<.05$. The participants with *getting high* or *getting free* orientations had comparatively high incomes and also comparatively high levels of self-rated success. Those with *getting secure* orientations had the lowest incomes and the lowest self-rated success levels. The *getting balanced* group fell into the middle using both success measures. The *getting ahead* group had the highest mean income levels, but had levels of self-rated success as low as those of the *getting secure* group.

Table 4. Significant Differences in Career Success Measures by Success Orientation Using Games-Howell Post Hoc Tests: Mean Scores

	Self rated success overall 3.76 (1.42)			$ Income Overall 35,142 (15,288)		
	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Getting High, n=64	4.34 (1.43)			38,390 (19,070)		
Getting Free, n=51	4.20 (1.37)			36,882 (15,856)		
Getting Balanced, n=32		4.09 (1.35)			35,718 (14,509)	
Getting Ahead, n=43			3.26 (1.11)	40,604 (12,854)		
Getting Secure, n=97			3.26 (1.34)			28,474 (11,481)

Note. The numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Discussion

The results of this study, taken in conjunction with previous career orientation studies, suggest that creatives would indeed seem to possess different motivations from workers in other sectors, perhaps in part because of the nature of the work in the Creative Industries. This first became apparent during the career orientation coding process: although most of the responses could be coded into categories, the themes within the categories were distinct from those suggested by theory (Derr, 1986). For instance, many of the participants in this study with *getting ahead* orientations desired recognition from individuals they saw as gatekeepers rather than progression up an organizational ladder. Participants with *getting secure* orientations often viewed career success as getting enough income from creative work so that they did not have to rely on other sources of income. Also, for a number of participants 'contributing to a cause' emerged as a key career motivator, a theme not easily categorisable using Derr's (1986) typology.

Further, once the responses were coded into categories, it became apparent that the most common career orientations of the sample (*getting secure*, *getting high*, and *getting free*) were quite different from the dominant career orientations of individuals working in other sectors as reported in the literature, where *getting ahead* and more recently *getting balanced* tend to be prominent (e.g., Danziger & Valency, 2006; Schein, 1996; Yarnall, 1998). From the present findings, there would appear to be a remarkably large proportion of workers in the Creative Industries for whom security and stability is the highest career priority. These creatives tend to be fairly young and inexperienced, with poorer career management skills, and have comparatively low incomes. This finding seems to correspond with the phenomenon of talent oversupply and underemployment at entry level in the creative sector. Encouraging emerging creatives to engage in activities that will enhance their career management competence, such as career education programmes and work placements (Bridgstock, 2007) may enhance their career outcomes. In addition, Higgs and Cunningham (2007) have identified that there are considerable opportunities for creative workers outside the creative industries, in sectors where traditional career paths may be more common. Pursuing a non-boundaryless career outside the Creative Industries but which still draws upon creative skills may be more satisfying for the creative worker who values safety and security.

The large number of creatives with *getting secure* orientations also suggests a potential deficiency in career orientation theory. Security and stability is located at the second level of Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs, whereas the other career orientations align with the higher

need levels, which include love/belonging, esteem and self-actualisation. Maslow's theory of human motivation states that individuals will always prioritise needs at lower levels over needs at higher levels. Needs emerge only when higher priority (lower level) needs have been satisfied. Thus, if a creative worker is experiencing difficulty making a living, they may have a *getting secure* orientation. However, once the need for security is met, they may adopt other career orientations. This proposition could be tested by investigating the career orientations of a group of creative workers with incomes significantly above subsistence levels.

Amongst the creatives studied, those with interest / challenge (*getting high*) and autonomy (*getting free*) orientations had consistently high career management competence scores and were the most successful when both subjective (career success ratings) and objective (income) measures of career success were considered. Although the recognition / progression (*getting ahead*) group also had high career management competence scores and the highest mean income levels, this group assigned themselves career success ratings as low as the ratings given by the *getting secure* group. This finding indicates that while certain career orientations seem to be linked with both career management competence and career success, a separate relationship also appears to exist between career orientations and career outcomes, at least when a subjective career success measure is used. Even though the *getting ahead*, *getting high* and *getting free* creatives are similarly career competent and have similar income levels, *getting ahead* creatives are less likely to believe they are successful. It may be that creatives with *getting high* or *getting free* orientations can exert higher levels of personal control over events which constitute career success for them, whereas those with recognition (*getting ahead*) orientations are at more dependent on others for their desired career outcomes. Future studies could use qualitative techniques in conjunction with structural equation modelling to further explore these posited relationships.

In contrast to the findings of recent studies of other types of workers (Danziger & Valency, 2006; Schein, 1996; Yarnall, 1998), there were comparatively few *getting balanced* creatives in the sample, and this group fell in the middle in terms of the career success measures. The relative lack of *getting balanced* creatives may be reflective of the nature of working in the boundaryless creative sector, where workers often make significant sacrifices in family relationships, health or leisure activities in order to remain competitive (Perrons, 2003). Unfortunately, these sacrifices can also lead to high levels of stress and burnout, and may also have an impact on the quality of creative work produced.

In summary, an examination of the career orientations and career management competences of creative workers provides additional insights into the predictors of creative success. Generally speaking, creatives who are motivated by autonomy and freedom or interest and challenge appear to be better equipped to navigate the world of work and more successful than other creative workers. Conversely, creatives who have traditional career orientations seem less likely to be successful in their boundaryless careers, at least when subjective measures of career success are used.

One limitation of the present study is that it has relied on cross-sectional, self-report data from creative workers, and therefore has a potential problem of common-method bias. It is also impossible to determine from this research whether the relationships between career orientations, career management competence, and career success measures are causal or merely correlational. Future studies could examine career orientations of creative workers longitudinally, and supplement the career success scales with objective measures such as job performance. Future work should also be conducted to refine the career orientations typology, which remains theoretically underdeveloped and provides an insufficiently nuanced picture of the motivations underlying career behaviours, particularly in the boundaryless creative career.

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