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## Article

# Same same but different: Changing career expectations in Germany?

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## **Same Same but Different – Changing Career Expectations in Germany?\*\*\***

Contemporary career research assumes more flexible career patterns implying increased job mobility. However, there is growing doubt that the proclaimed change is as drastic as has been suggested. We provide empirical evidence on career expectations in Germany between 1999 and 2009, arguing that objective career mobility is both a) mirrored by and b) a consequence of such expectations. Using data from the German socio-economic panel, we test for a general shift in subjective career expectations, job insecurity, and turnover intention among male and female white collar employees and managers. The major finding is that career expectations remain quite stable over time. Managers and professionals have more positive career expectations than other white collar employees but there is not a growing gap. Regarding the impact of explaining factors on job expectations, there is again no detectable trend. With this in mind, changes in workforce composition and characteristics of specific occupational groups prove to be more relevant for career expectations than a shift towards boundaryless aspirations.

## **Gleich und doch anders – Veränderte Karriereerwartungen in Deutschland?**

In der heutigen Karriereforschung wird vielfach von einer gestiegenen Flexibilität in Karrieremustern und einer erhöhten Arbeitsplatzmobilität ausgegangen. Es gibt jedoch auch Zweifel an der Tragweite und Intensität dieses Wandels. Wir untersuchen anhand des Sozio-ökonomischen Panels, wie sich Karriereerwartungen, Arbeitsplatzunsicherheit und Fluktuationsneigung von Managern und Angestellten in Deutschland zwischen 1999 und 2009 verändert haben. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass diese Karriereaussichten über die Zeit recht stabil bleiben. Manager haben positivere Karriereaussichten als Angestellte, aber auch hier zeigt sich kein Trend im Zeitverlauf. Betrachtet man den Einfluss erklärender Variablen, so zeigt sich ebenfalls kein Wandel. Vor diesem Hintergrund erweisen sich sozio-demographische Merkmale der Beschäftigten und berufsgruppenspezifische Merkmale als bedeutendere Erklärungsfaktoren für Karriereerwartungen als der unterstellte Wandel in der Arbeitswelt.

**Key words: boundaryless career, job insecurity, job expectations, turnover intention, job mobility (JEL: J63, L22, M51, O15)**

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## **Introduction:**

### **Career Expectations as a mirror of changing career patterns**

The changing socio-economic environment during the last decades has had profound implications for research on organisations. What has been labelled the transition from modern companies into 'post-modern organisations' (Clegg, 1990; Schreyögg, 1999), 'fractal companies' (Warnecke, 1993) or 'boundaryless organisations' (Ashkenas et al., 2002) is a description of changes in the internal structure of companies involving downsizing, de-layering and vertical disintegration (Morris & Farrell, 2007). This trend could be shown for the United States e.g. by Thomas and Dunkerley (1999) who have analysed restructuring strategies of fifty American companies. Other studies confirm the phenomenon of downsizing and de-layering in Australia, South Africa and New Zealand (Littler, Wiesner, & Dunford, 2003). In Germany, de-layering has been a widely used practice since the 1990s as well (c.f. Benders & Bijsterveld, 2000). One major consequence of downsizing and de-layering is a reduction of management levels and in conclusion of management positions (e.g. McCann, Hassard, & Morris, 2010; Morris & Farrell, 2007; Thomas & Dunkerley, 1999). Accordingly, highly qualified, employed professionals and (middle) managers are considered to be affected most (Morris & Farrell, 2007). The process of restructuring is still going on as is demonstrated, for instance, by McCann et al. (2010), observing companies' reactions to the 2009 recession in the US, the UK and Japan.

In line with economic and organisational changes, career researchers started to question whether traditional career paths are still up to date (e.g. Lazarova & Taylor, 2009; Mayrhofer et al., 2002; Miles & Snow, 1996; Rosenstiel, 1997). More individualized career patterns (Hall, 1996) and more inter- and intra-organisational mobility (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) have been widely assumed. Concepts such as the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and the protean career (Hall, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1996) arose in the 1990s. General assumption is that the changed organisational structure has led to increased flexibility among managers reacting to the requirements of today's labour market. A perceived necessity to be more flexible to deal with work-life pressures (Klauder, 2005) and increased job insecurity (e.g. Auer & Cazes, 2000) determine people's mobility. However, changing career patterns can also be motivated by the people's want of challenges and a better person-job and person-organisation fit (Hall, 1996). Reasons are, among others, a value-shift, more women participating in the labour market and technical opportunities (Klauder, 2005; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Employees look for new opportunities on a frequent and voluntary basis to find a job that fits their personal life. This idea of changed interests and needs and an active career crafting among employees is inherent to the concept of the protean career (Hall, 1996). Although initiated by external changes, increased flexibility and mobility is often considered to be a consequence of changed values, needs and aspirations on behalf of the employee.

In recent years some doubts have been raised about whether the idea of a boundaryless and protean career is appropriate and there is some empirical evidence that the proclaimed change is by far not as drastic as suggested (e.g. Diewald & Sill, 2005; Mayer, Grunow, & Nitsche, 2010; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Winkelmann &

Zimmermann, 1998). Against this backdrop, we consider subjective career expectations as a realistic assessment of one's career situation and development and as guiding one's own decisions. Contrary to career aspirations, we define expectations solely as probability estimations of future career developments like losing one's job, looking for a new job, being promoted or being demoted. Even if the expectations do not turn out to be an appropriate assessment, they build up subjective realities and continue to guide the employees' actions regarding the work-relationship, commitment and turnover. A strong relationship between the intention to do something and the eventual action has been shown by Sheppard, Hardwick and Warshaw (1988). Thus career expectations mirror the driving forces for future career steps and they are directly related to factual career mobility. Especially for turnover intention, this correlation has been widely shown (e.g. in the meta-analysis of Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Therefore, it is important to consider subjective interpretations and expectations of actual situations as predictors of behaviours (Boerner & Schramm, 1998; Mayer, Grunow & Nitsche, 2010; Schlese & Schramm, 1996).

As stated above, career expectations can be caused by organisational and economic changes or they can derive from intrinsic needs. Expectations are dynamic and capable of adapting to changed situations as described for instance by the psychological contract concept (Rousseau, 1995). Festinger (1957) describes this process of adapting one's expectation to a certain situation to overcome a state of cognitive dissonance. Accordingly, if organisational based job mobility has changed in recent years, this should be measurable in subjective career expectations as well. If people are faced with unexpected job changes, or if they perceive increased job changes around them, they might adapt their expectation and expect more job mobility in order to be prepared and overcome the feeling of being a pawn in future.

In the following, we discuss some limitations of the boundaryless career concept and examine data of the German socio-economic panel on changing job expectations among managers and professionals as well as other white collar workers.

### **Discourse on changing career patterns**

Based on Max Weber's (2002, orig. 1922) model of bureaucracy, the traditional career is regarded as an internal career path within one organisation considering individuals climbing up a ladder of status, salary and prestige over the course of their working lives. This had been the prevalent picture until the 1980s (e.g. Connor & Fielden, 1973; Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1982; Driver, 1982; Wilensky, 1968).

In the 1990s, the *boundaryless career* concept (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) was developed to adapt theory to the changed environment described above. According to this concept, inter-organisational mobility is considered a key character of the new career concept. Life-long internal careers with vertical orientation are not compatible anymore with the companies' requirements (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). The old organisational career model is considered to be out-dated in lean and de-layered organisations (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Mayrhofer et al., 2002; Miles & Snow, 1996; Rosenstiel, 1997). In the course of their working lives employees move between several companies to adapt their job to career plans or private demands. One decade later, this approach has been enhanced and described more complexly. Career is understood as a

combination of a certain amount of physical mobility, as already explained in the concept above, and a certain amount of psychological mobility, defined as the perception of the capacity to change one's job (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). Career expectations and aspirations are therefore included in the discussion on career research. Additionally, Lazarova and Taylor (2009) offer a two-dimensional concept of boundarylessness including physical and psychological mobility as suggested by Sullivan and Arthur (2006), and internal versus external mobility. Regarding intra-organisational careers, de-layering and downsizing cause larger gaps between management levels and non-managerial management positions. This leads to fewer promotion opportunities for managers and an increased usage of other career steps namely lateral and even downward mobility (Hall, 1996; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). In summary, more inter-organisational mobility, less intra-organisational promotions and more flexible intra-organisational career moves are described in these concepts.

Critics state that the boundaryless career is mainly conceptual and that empirical evidence is not available (e.g. Ituma & Simpson, 2009). Increased employee-based job mobility should result in less tenure and higher turnover intentions, but there are several indications of a rather stable situation. According to Auer and Cazes (2000), the average tenure in industrialised countries did not decline between 1990 and 1998. An increased physical inter-organisational mobility, which is considered a key factor of the new career paradigm, could not be supported. However, they claim rising job insecurity with stable national differences. Increased concern of losing one's job may be a signal for less stable employment structures. More recently, Rodrigues and Guest (2010) analysed OECD data on job stability. They report only a few changes regarding job tenure and turnover in the US, Japan and Europe and no increase in job mobility among managers and professionals between 1992 and 2006. Major shifts, as suggested by the boundaryless career concept, do not seem to have occurred.

Another point puts the generality in using the boundaryless career into perspective. The contemporary concepts have their origin in the American context and only later have they been adopted in other countries (especially in the UK). Due to its strongly regulated institutional environment regarding the employment market, Germany provides a clearly different context with a high institutional impact; this derives especially from rigid dismissal protection and fixed wage calculation systems as shown by the Cologne Institute of Economic Research, 2005. There are empirical arguments that the majority of employees in Germany are not affected by the discussed changes in the German labour market (e.g. Ortlieb, Schlese, & Schramm, 2005). Mayer, Grunow and Nitsche (2010) show that the vocational mobility of young Germans has not increased, considering cohorts born between 1929 and 1971. Rodrigues and Guest (2010) even indicate an increase in job tenure in Germany between 2000 and 2006. According to data from the German Socio-Economic Panel the mobility rate decreased between 1974 and 1994 (Winkelmann & Zimmermann, 1998) and between 1985 and 1997 inter-organisational mobility remained at a constant rate around 5% of employees (Diewald & Sill, 2005). Only from 1998 to 2000 is an increase to 7% of the workforce shown. The physical intra-organisational mobility is constant around 2.5% until 1992 and declines to 1.5% in 1993 remaining at this level until 2000. This speaks for a slight decrease in physical intra-organisational mobility and hence for the impor-

tance of internal labour markets and only a small and very recent increase in physical inter-organisational mobility. Although the trend from intra- to inter-organisational mobility underlying the new career paradigm is supported, the overall scope of job mobility and the small degree of changes argue against a widespread occurrence of boundaryless careers in Germany.

Furthermore, the overemphasis of individual agency at the expense of structure is perceived critically (Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004; Ituma & Simpson 2009). Although the reason for changed career patterns is often seen in a changed environment, the boundaryless career concept inverts the external pressure from the economic situation and the companies' reactions into volitional active career planning on behalf of the employee. This reminds one of the discussion of psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995) that is also dominated by the presumption of changed job expectations due to external pressures (e.g. Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999; Hiltrop, 1995; Raeder & Grote, 2001) resulting in internal motivation for more transactional oriented work-relationships (e.g. Raeder & Grote, 2001; Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). There is no doubt that transactional orientations have been growing, for instance with fixed term employment and temporary work, but we argue that this growth is directly related to the individual contractual arrangements and not to a general societal shift in values and orientations. This one-sided view on individually motivated boundarylessness leads to a focus on positive effects, neglecting negative consequences for the individual (Lazarova & Taylor, 2009). The psychological pressure to adapt to new companies and new social environments – often combined with geographical moves – has to be taken into account (Gerpott, 1988; Martin & Strauss, 1968; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Therefore, we assume that, although new contract types and work arrangements are gaining in importance, relational orientations are still the reality for a vast majority of the workforce and management. This particularly applies because, as stated above, changes to the labour market have not affected the majority of the German workforce. As derived from the bulk of commitment studies (e.g. Inkson & Baruch 2009; Meyer et al., 2002; Voigt & Jöns, 2005), companies do also have an interest in long-lasting relational orientations, albeit they may not be willing to guarantee it (e.g. Bradtke-Hellthaler, 2008, p. 125f; Haunschild 2004, p. 341). A boundaryless and transactional orientation could be a constructive strategy for seeking challenges and finding the right job or coping with changed career possibilities in early career steps, but it seems unlikely that everybody is able and willing to strive for a boundaryless career (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Even if young people make use of their opportunities in a globalized and boundaryless economy as suggested by Bradley (2009), the need for job security and stability should grow with age, family responsibilities and financial obligations (Gunz, Evans, & Jalland, 2000). Taking into account the demographic change, these career boundaries should gain in importance rather than become less influential for careers.

Considering the weak empirical support – especially from German data – and the above mentioned critique, we doubt whether there is a general shift in career expectations among German white collar employees. We expect that neither intra- nor inter-organisational expectations, be it in a positive or a negative way, have been changed radically.



Hypothesis 1: There is no trend in career expectations (regarding turnover intention, job insecurity, and promotion and demotion expectation) among employees in the German labour market.

We have chosen this rigid hypothesis, claiming no changes in general and in detail, to challenge the mainstream position of a radical change that would instead expect a significant and considerable change.

Furthermore, it is striking that the concept of boundaryless careers has been applied to all types of employees within any company and institutional environment (Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009; Pringle & Mallon 2003) whereas the discussion of flexible and boundaryless careers is often carried out in the fields of management studies and has an elitist character (Arnold & Cohen, 2008). Comparative studies are rare and difficult to find. We therefore compare highly-skilled, employed professionals and managers to other white collar workers who have a weaker bargaining position in the labour market. Due to this difference in power but also due to differences in career aspirations and opportunities, a strong group effect on career expectations is assumed. Boundaries should be more present for regular white collar workers. We expect that highly qualified employees such as managers and professionals have more chances in the external labour market, as they have higher human capital, and thus a more positive impression of mobility. Higher turnover intention (Weller 2007, p. 172f.) and less job insecurity (Schramm 1992, p. 61f.) are the consequence. Regarding intra-organisational careers, we expect more flexibility among the managers. Analogue to the external labour markets, it can therefore be assumed that managers and professionals have better career chances within an internal labour market and therefore, expect more promotions than other white-collar workers. Apart from that, managers might expect more positive career movements, as they have higher human capital and organisations often promise a career development to their managers. Promotion aspirations are herewith part of their psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). We therefore suppose more expected promotion for managers than for other, less qualified white collar workers. Furthermore, we argue that the institutional environment in Germany, with its powerful work councils and unions, protects the system of internal labour markets for regular employees, i.e. for our group of other white collar workers, but not for executive staff, i.e. for our group of managers as they are usually not represented by the work councils. We therefore argue that managers are more aware of flexible career moves such as demotions and herewith expect more demotions than other white collar workers.

Hypothesis 2: Professionals and managers expect higher and more positive mobility than less qualified employees.

2a: Professionals and managers have higher turnover intention.

2b: Professionals and managers feel less job insecurity.

2c: Professionals and managers have a higher expectation of being promoted.

2d: Professionals and managers have a higher expectation of being demoted.

## Proactive and reactive determinants of turnover intentions

Closely related to the range of the boundaryless mood with its flexible career expectations is the question of voluntariness, i.e. do people desire more flexibility or do the companies impose flexible career expectations (along with the theory of cognitive dissonance by Festinger (1957))? To answer this question, we consider well-known influencing factors on turnover intention. We have chosen the variable of all expectations considered, because looking for a new job reflects flexible psychological career patterns very clearly. To account for a more structure-driven approach, we consider research on turnover intention that has been carried out for decades (e.g. March & Simon, 1958; Steers & Mowday, 1981, Weller, 2007). Those turnover intention models have used a large number of influencing factors also addressed by Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer (2007). Herewith, we combine research on labour markets with that of career research in the fields of management studies.

In his recent model of turnover, Weller (2007) states several influencing factors such as the economic situation (e.g. unemployment rates), the organisation where an individual works (e.g. income level), the individual's working group (e.g. social relations within this working group) and the individual itself (education, personality etc.). Steers and Mowday (1981) describe their model of turnover in a more detailed way. For them, economic and market conditions influence the alternative job opportunities of an individual. Within this context, one limitation of the boundaryless career concept which is often noted is the disregard of international differences. Institutional factors that would be capable of explaining such differences tend to be neglected by the boundaryless career concept (Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004; Forrier, Sels, & Stynen, 2009). Particularly for Germany, institutional influences should be relevant as it is a highly regulated country (Cologne Institute for Economic Research, 2005). Therefore, the economic situation and its interpretation with regard to one's own job opportunities is an important influencing factor on turnover intention (Cornelißen, Hübler, & Schneck, 2007; Schramm, 1999).

Furthermore, Steers and Mowday (1981) also refer to the individual's job expectations, values and characteristics that are of interest (e.g. Jenkins, 1993, Kirschbaum & Weisberg, 2002). This goes along with the critique on the concept of the boundaryless career that it is often applied to anyone; regardless of their personal circumstances (e.g. Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Additionally, job-related factors such as the individual's job performance and affective job responses such as job satisfaction, commitment and involvement are considered by Steers and Mowday (1981). The effect of job satisfaction on turnover intention is well supported empirically (e.g. Blomme, Rheede, & Tromp, 2010; Chen et al., 2011; Schramm, 1999).

Non-work influences such as e.g. the spouse's job or the age of the individual are also relevant (Steers & Mowday, 1981). The influence of socio-demographic factors such as age, gender and family should not be neglected (c.f. Blomme, Rheede, & Tromp, 2010; Schneidhofer/Schiffinger/Mayrhofer, 2010). The psychological contract should become more relationally oriented during one's working life due to family responsibilities, reduced employability, health etc. Hence, one should seek a job with more security than young people do, so that job insecurity and turnover intention is



reduced with advancing age. We also aim to control for the influence of gender on career expectations as a basic individual factor. Women are still underrepresented on the managerial level but, with changing role models and demographic change, the gender rate is becoming slightly more balanced. At the same time, career disadvantages for female managers – such as the glass ceiling – (e.g. Holst & Busch, 2010) are reported which may be reflected in their career expectations (in line with the theory of cognitive dissonance by Festinger, 1957). On the organisational level, Steers and Mowday (1981) consider organisational characteristics and experience. This can be related to tenure (as explained above) and the size of the organisation. A certain number of employees is a prerequisite for internal labour markets giving more alternatives to external mobility.

Beside the above mentioned individual and organisational determinants and the evaluation of job chances, we consider those factors that reveal a voluntary, or a more forced intention to change jobs. A voluntary change can be caused by low job satisfaction (e.g. Blomme, Rheede, & Tromp, 2010; Boerner & Schramm, 1998; Chen et al., 2011; Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2001) whereas a forced intention to leave a company can result from a feeling of job insecurity (c.f. Boerner & Schramm, 1998; Chirumbolo & Hellgren, 2003; Schramm, 1999). As we consider changes in career patterns, we wonder whether these factors have changed their explanatory value over time. In particular, if we suppose that employees nowadays craft their careers actively, the influence of voluntary job changes, i.e. job satisfaction, should increase whereas the forced change indicated by job insecurity should decrease. We have reasons to doubt that.

Hypothesis 3: Alongside age, tenure, company-size, region and the subjective evaluation of job chances, job insecurity and job satisfaction have retained their degree of impact on turnover intention over time.

All three assumptions are tested for white collar workers in Germany using a representative data set as described below.

## Methods

The results of the present study are based on data of the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) 2009 release (cf. Wagner, Frick, & Schupp, 2007). The GSOEP is a representative, longitudinal panel survey of more than 20,000 persons in about 12,000 private households in Germany. With several sample amendments, it has been carried out every year since 1984. With this design, the GSOEP provides a platform for examining not only objective socio-demographic and career but also information concerning subjective perceptions of working conditions with a sufficiently high number of cases to conduct intergroup comparisons between, for instance, managers, professionals and other white collar workers. The analyses presented are based on weighted data allowing generalisation on the German management and white collar workforce.

### *Operationalization of career expectations*

GSOEP data has been widely used to investigate individual effects of job insecurity and career mobility (e.g. Bethge, Radoschewski, & Mueller-Fahrnow, 2008; Boerner & Schramm, 1998; Clark, Knabe, & Rätzl, 2008; Lurweg, 2010; Schramm, 1992). By contrast, career expectations have only very recently been regarded (Rainer & Siedler, 2008; Fietze/Holst/Tobsch, 2011). The GSOEP has collected data on career expectations using identical operationalization every two years since 1999. We have carried out pooled cross-sectional analysis regarding perceived job insecurity, turnover intention, promotion – and demotion expectations.

The information is based on probability assessments for negative and positive changes in job position. The respondents' expectation is measured by an 11-point-scale of likelihood ranging in increments of 10 from zero to 100 per cent ("How likely is it that the following career changes will take place within the next two years?").

Four items were selected to measure positive and negative inter- and intra-organisational mobility expectations. Inter-organisational mobility is covered by turnover intention ("look for a new job on your own initiative?") and job insecurity ("lose your job?"). Intra-organisational mobility expectations include promotion ("receive a promotion at your current place of employment?") and demotion ("demoted at your current place of employment").

### *Determinants of turnover intention*

To explain the variance in turnover intention we have chosen available determinants from the GSOEP that correspond with the theoretical concepts as discussed above. Beside job satisfaction and job insecurity (both single item measures on an 11-point-scale), five other variables are included. Two dichotomous variables differentiate whether the workplace lies in eastern or western Germany and whether it belongs to a small or a large company with more than 200 employees. A 3-point-scale judging the difficulty of finding a new job indicates the subjective labour market situation. Finally, considering individual characteristics, age and firm tenure in years are included.

### *Sample*

In compliance with the operationalization by Holst and Busch (2010, p. 16) our sample of managers includes employees "with extensive managerial duties (e.g. managing director, manager, head of a large firm or concern)" and employees "with highly qualified duties or managerial function (e.g. scientist, attorney, head of department)". The comparative group includes all other white collar workers. Marginally employed people and civil servants are excluded from the analyses.

About one third of employees belong to the manager and professional sample (table 1). In absolute numbers this is a projected group of minimum 4.38 million in 2005 and maximum 5.35 million managers and professionals in 2009. They are between one and two years older than other white collar workers since the portion of young employees between 18 and 27 years old (2-5%) is much smaller than in the comparison group. Regarding the current discussion of demographic change and diversification we observe two shifts in the composition of the managing group. First,

the proportion of highly qualified employees among other white collars is growing and the proportion of women among managers and professionals also increased steadily from 25.7% in 1999 to 35.0% in 2009. At the same time, there is only a slight decline in the proportion of women among white collar workers. Second, contrary to the trend of an aging workforce the average age of managers and professionals as well as other white collars remains constant. A closer look at the frequencies reveals that a growing number of young and female employees is compensating for the aging effect.

**Table 1: Socio-demographics of the employee samples**

| Survey year | Managers and professionals |                   |                 |              |                   | White collar workers |                   |                 |              |
|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------|
|             | N                          | N <sub>proj</sub> | Women's quota % | average age: | Manager's quota % | N                    | N <sub>proj</sub> | Women's quota % | average age: |
| 1999        | 991                        | 4833029           | 25.7%           | 43.1         | 32.0%             | 2303                 | 10281885          | 69.2%           | 40.3         |
| 2001        | 1595                       | 4715200           | 27.0%           | 42.6         | 29.8%             | 3757                 | 11131626          | 67.9%           | 40.8         |
| 2003        | 1890                       | 4588310           | 28.7%           | 43.1         | 29.5%             | 3771                 | 10974908          | 68.0%           | 41.1         |
| 2005        | 1722                       | 4380721           | 31.0%           | 43.3         | 28.2%             | 3444                 | 11131183          | 66.5%           | 41.3         |
| 2007        | 1785                       | 4875101           | 33.2%           | 42.8         | 37.0%             | 2597                 | 8314483           | 66.2%           | 40.4         |
| 2009        | 1816                       | 5354177           | 35.0%           | 42.7         | 38.2%             | 2638                 | 8675030           | 66.3%           | 40.8         |

N: actual sample size, N<sub>proj</sub>: projected sample size.

## Results

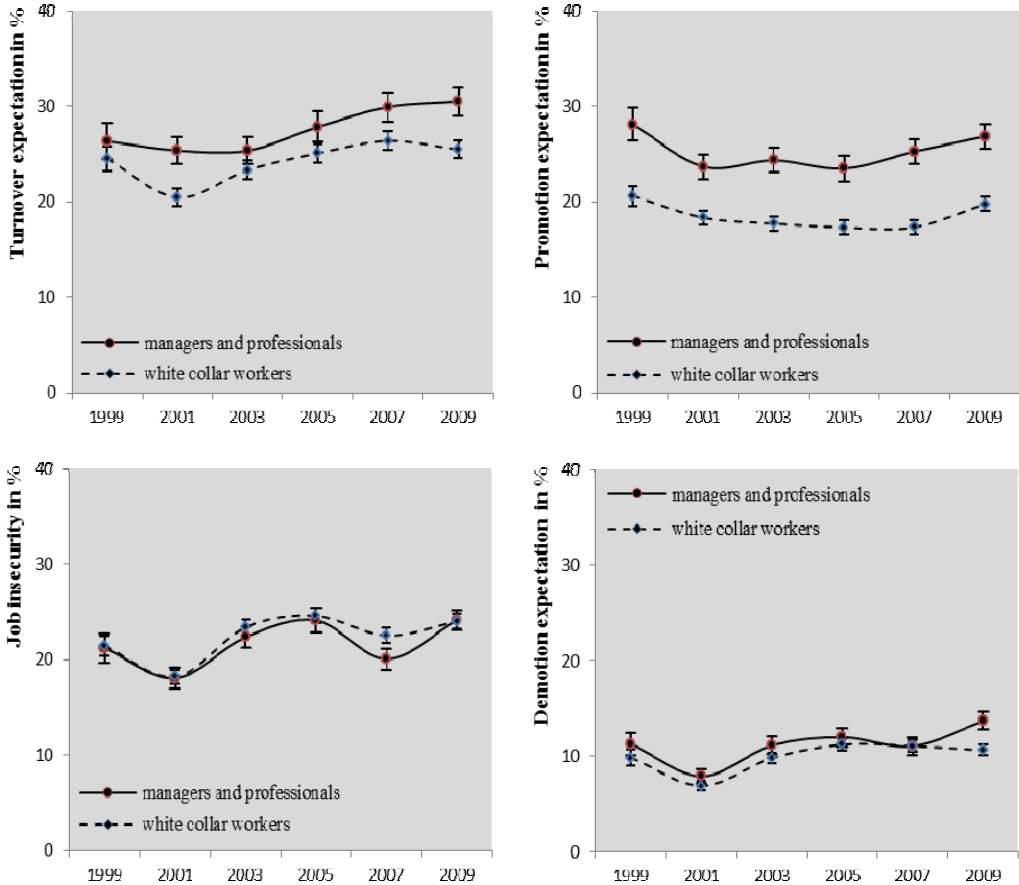
Taking a first glimpse at the distribution of mean career expectations over time reveals two major impressions (figure 1). First, generally speaking there is no obvious trend detectable. The graphs illustrate that turnover intention and promotion expectations seem to be quite stable over time. Apparently, there is only a slight trend towards increased turnover intention for the group of professionals and managers. Job insecurity and demotion expectation express a cyclical development over time that presumably coincides with economic cyclical effects.

Given the economic boom with low unemployment rates in 2001, there is relatively little job insecurity and fear of demotion whereas the recession with high unemployment rates in 2005 (DeStatis, 2010) and the financial crisis in 2009 coincide with peaks of insecurity and demotion expectation. Second, compared to other white collars, managers and professionals do have higher positive connoted career expectations (e.g. turnover and promotion). However, negative expectations regarding insecurity and demotion are obviously quite similar for both groups. The data is quite consistent with objective high job stability and tenure among German employees.

To test these apparent findings we consider .01 instead of .05 a more appropriate level of significance due to large sample sizes. Anyhow, we also indicate findings on a .05 level. We used one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test generally for changes over the years. Subsequently, t-tests were used to indicate long-term changes of expectations from 1999 to 2007 and 2009 respectively. We have tested separately for managers and professionals and other white collar workers controlling for gender.

We used 2007 and 2009 data to assure that changes are not biased by the financial crisis in 2009. Based on a .01 level of significance, a Bonferoni correction was applied, so that all effects are reported at a .005 level. Levene’s test indicates equal variances for 26 out of 32 comparisons. Accordingly, the degrees of freedom in question are adjusted for testing (italicised in table 2).

**Figure 1: Distribution of career expectations over time with 95% confidence intervals**



ANOVA indicates that all of the four tested career expectations differ significantly on a .01 level over the six measures between 1999 and 2009. This holds true for both groups of employees. Controlling for gender repeats this finding except for female managers and professionals, for whom there is no significant effect of time on turnover expectations ( $F(5, 2920) = 1.41, p = .22$ ), job insecurity ( $F(5, 2915) = 2.60, p = .02$ ) and promotion expectation ( $F(5, 2922) = 1.99, p = .08$ ); for this group only demotion expectation changed significantly on a .01 level ( $F(5, 2917) = 5.07, p < .001$ ). On the contrary, the strongest changes are among male professionals and managers regarding job insecurity,  $F(5, 6684) = 19.14, p < .001, \omega^2 = .014$  and demotion expectation  $F(5, 6678) = 15.31, p < .001, \omega^2 = .010$  as well as among female white collar workers re-

garding turnover expectation,  $F(5, 15665) = 17.84$ ,  $\omega^2 = .008$ , job insecurity,  $F(5, 15642) = 29.52$ ,  $\omega^2 = .008$ . However, the small and very small effect sizes ranging from  $\omega^2 = .00068$  to  $\omega^2 = .013$  (Kirk (1996) suggests that values of .01, .06 and .14 represent small, medium and large effects respectively) are in line with the volatile development shown by figure 1 and argues for very weak effects in general.

Altogether, there is only one development, namely a decrease of promotion expectation for male white collar workers, that is significant for both comparisons according to the .01 level of significance (table 2). At the same time, this is the only change found for male white collar workers. In contrast, female white collars show no development in promotion expectation but a significant increase in turnover-intention and a consistent increase of demotion expectation on .05 level which gives the impression of an alignment with male demotion expectation.

Regarding changes among managers and professionals, only turnover intention is significantly increased albeit in 2007 on the .05 level only. There are some other significant changes between the base measure and 2007 or 2009 respectively, but findings are not stable. For example, female managers and professionals have decreased job insecurity by 2007, but not by 2009. Contrarily, the male subgroup's job insecurity remained the same by 2007 but increased by 2009.

**Table 2: T-tests comparing four subgroups on three survey years**

|                                     | 1999 | 2007       |      |               |      | 2009       |      |                 |      |
|-------------------------------------|------|------------|------|---------------|------|------------|------|-----------------|------|
|                                     | Mean | $\Delta M$ | SE   | $t(df)$       | $r$  | $\Delta M$ | SE   | $t(df)$         | $r$  |
| <b>white collar workers</b>         |      |            |      |               |      |            |      |                 |      |
| turnover                            | 28.0 | -0.64      | 1.53 | 0.42(2006)    | .009 | -1.67      | 1.48 | 1.12(2048)      | .025 |
| job insecurity                      | 21.3 | 0.17       | 1.10 | -0.15(1996)   | .003 | 1.20       | 1.06 | -1.14(2020)     | .025 |
| promotion expectation               | 27.3 | -7.25      | 1.23 | 5.91(1325)*** | .136 | -4.40      | 1.22 | 3.61(2043) ***  | .080 |
| demotion expectation                | 11.2 | 0.86       | 1.01 | -0.85(2003)   | .019 | -0.32      | 0.90 | 0.36(2046)      | .008 |
| <b>female white collar workers</b>  |      |            |      |               |      |            |      |                 |      |
| turnover                            | 23.0 | 2.91       | 0.99 | -2.94(4374)** | .044 | 2.10       | 0.98 | -2.14(4420) *   | .032 |
| job insecurity                      | 21.5 | 1.51       | 0.78 | -1.92(4374)   | .029 | 3.20       | 0.79 | -4.05(4418) *** | .061 |
| promotion expectation               | 17.7 | -1.60      | 0.73 | 2.18(3279)*   | .033 | 0.63       | 0.75 | -0.84(4416)     | .013 |
| demotion expectation                | 9.2  | 1.33       | 0.62 | -2.13(3521)*  | .032 | 1.26       | 0.61 | -2.07(4419) *   | .031 |
| <b>professionals &amp; managers</b> |      |            |      |               |      |            |      |                 |      |
| turnover                            | 26.4 | 3.81       | 1.47 | -2.59(1713)*  | .058 | 4.57       | 1.46 | -3.13(1975) **  | .070 |
| job insecurity                      | 20.1 | 0.29       | 1.07 | -0.27(1914)   | .006 | 4.55       | 1.06 | -4.29(1974) *** | .096 |
| promotion expectation               | 31.1 | -4.36      | 1.32 | 3.31(1915)**  | .075 | -1.93      | 1.32 | 1.45(1974)      | .033 |
| demotion expectation                | 11.9 | 0.50       | 0.92 | -0.54(1914)   | .012 | 2.76       | 0.92 | -3.01(1974) **  | .068 |
| <b>male white collar workers</b>    |      |            |      |               |      |            |      |                 |      |
| turnover                            | 26.1 | 3.17       | 2.36 | -1.34(839)    | .046 | 3.40       | 2.33 | -1.46(914)      | .048 |
| job insecurity                      | 24.5 | -5.03      | 2.02 | 2.49(456)**   | .091 | -1.23      | 1.98 | 0.62(428)       | .022 |
| promotion expectation               | 19.7 | 2.70       | 1.90 | -1.42(840)    | .049 | 2.89       | 1.93 | -1.49(914)      | .049 |
| demotion expectation                | 9.6  | -1.31      | 1.22 | 1.07(835)     | .037 | 2.27       | 1.47 | -1.54(913)      | .051 |

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $r = \sqrt{(t^2 / (t^2 + df))}$ ; controlled for equality of variance.

In summary, career expectations have a volatile pattern over the years with no clear trend detectable. Only one finding, the decreased promotion expectation among male white collar workers, bears the double comparison on the strict .01 level, speaking for less active internal job mobility. Support for increased expected inter-organisational job mobility could be drawn from an increased turnover-intention in the male subgroup of professionals and managers as well as among other female white collars.

However, the margin of changed expectations and the effect size  $r$  for single comparisons also vary on a very low level. For all significant differences in means, the effect size ranges from  $r = .031$  to  $r = .136$ , so that we conclude that there has not been a general change in expected career mobility that affects neither the entire managers and professionals workforce nor other white collars.

In addition to the above reported development of mean career expectations over time, we have examined the overall difference between managers and professionals and other white collars, using pooled data. Cases are formed by expectation measures from 1999 to 2009. Levene's test indicates that – apart from demotion expectation among male employees – all compared subsamples have unequal variances. Degrees of freedom have been adjusted.

The results are quite homogenous for males and for females. Professionals and managers have more distinct positive mobility expectations than other white collars. This holds true for turnover expectation as well as for promotion expectation (table 3). Additionally, male managers and professionals also have slightly higher demotion expectation than other white collars. Both findings speak for a higher expected mobility among managers and professionals. In contrast, job insecurity and – in spite of a slight difference among males – demotion expectation seems to remain on an equal level for the two professional as well as gender groups.

**Table 3: Expectations of managers/ professionals and other white collars, pooled data**

|                       | $N_{whc}$ | $N_{mp}$ | $Mean_{whc}$ | $Mean_{mp}$ | $\Delta M$ | SE  | $t(df)$          | $r$  |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------|--------------|-------------|------------|-----|------------------|------|
| <i>male</i>           |           |          |              |             |            |     |                  |      |
| turnover              | 7412      | 6697     | 26.3         | 27.6        | 1.38       | .54 | -2.58(14035) **  | .022 |
| job insecurity        | 7364      | 6690     | 22.2         | 21.5        | -.72       | .40 | 1.78(14004)      | .015 |
| promotion expectation | 7405      | 6687     | 22.8         | 27.0        | 4.24       | .46 | -9.30(13645) *** | .079 |
| demotion expectation  | 7389      | 6684     | 10.7         | 11.8        | 1.10       | .33 | -3.35(14072) *** | .028 |
| <i>female</i>         |           |          |              |             |            |     |                  |      |
| turnover              | 15672     | 2926     | 23.1         | 27.7        | 4.58       | .65 | -7.07(4014) ***  | .111 |
| job insecurity        | 15649     | 2921     | 22.5         | 22.0        | -.43       | .51 | .84(4119)        | .013 |
| promotion expectation | 15661     | 2928     | 16.3         | 20.9        | 4.59       | .53 | -8.71(3808) ***  | .140 |
| demotion expectation  | 15644     | 2924     | 9.5          | 9.6         | .16        | .37 | -.43(4237)       | .003 |

whc: white collar workers; mp: manager and professionals; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; controlled for equality of variance.

As for the third assumption of constant explanatory values among typical determinants of turnover expectation, we have conducted OLS regressions explaining turn-



over expectation for each year separately. Independent measures are job satisfaction, job security, age, tenure, region, company-size and difficulty of finding a new job. A structural change in explaining turnover will be reflected by a shift in effect sizes over the years. The determinants have been checked for possible multicollinearity. *VIF* factors range from 1.02 to 2.04 so that multicollinearity problems can be excluded. The results for managers and professionals and other white collar workers controlled for gender are presented in table 4. Region and company-size do not have any relevant and barely significant effect sizes over the years (ranging from  $r = .00$  to  $r = .09$ ). Thus, the individual's turnover expectation cannot be explained by the fact of whether the employee is working in Eastern Germany or in a large company. For clarity reasons, both variables are discarded from table 4.

The overall explanatory values of the models lie between 8% and 25% (adjusted  $R^2$ ). It is striking that throughout every regression, the explanatory value is higher for the male subgroup. Given the rising number of female employees, this is an important structural change. Typical explaining factors for male career expectations may not be suitable as predictors of expectations of the growing number of female employees.

**Table 4: Multiple OLS regression analyses explaining turnover intention**

|                                   |                            | 1999     | 2001     | 2003     | 2005     | 2007     | 2009     |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <i>white collar workers</i>       |                            | $\beta$  | $\beta$  | $\beta$  | $\beta$  | $\beta$  | $\beta$  |
| <i>male</i>                       | age                        | -.23 *** | -.35 *** | -.20 *** | -.15 *** | -.20 *** | -.25 *** |
|                                   | tenure                     | -.12 *   | -.06     | -.09 **  | -.11 *** | -.14 *** | -.14 *** |
|                                   | job satisfaction           | -.15 *** | -.29 *** | -.31 *** | -.29 *** | -.27 *** | -.30 *** |
|                                   | difficulty finding new job | -.10     | -.17 *** | -.15 *** | -.19 *** | -.20 *** | -.14 *** |
|                                   | job insecurity             | .38 ***  | .21 ***  | .36 ***  | .29 ***  | .38 ***  | .28 ***  |
|                                   | Adj. $R^2$                 | .22 ***  | .20 ***  | .17 ***  | .23 ***  | .15 ***  | .16 ***  |
| <i>female</i>                     | age                        | -.15 *** | -.22 *** | -.23 *** | -.21 *** | -.17 *** | -.23 *** |
|                                   | tenure                     | -.13 *** | -.07 *   | -.10 *** | -.12 *** | -.16 *** | -.14 *** |
|                                   | job satisfaction           | -.30 *** | -.29 *** | -.24 *** | -.25 *** | -.23 *** | -.27 *** |
|                                   | difficulty finding new job | -.18 *** | -.09 *** | -.13 *** | -.07 *** | -.13 *** | -.07 *** |
|                                   | job insecurity             | .33 ***  | .33 ***  | .38 ***  | .37 ***  | .39 ***  | .36 ***  |
|                                   | Adj. $R^2$                 | .08 ***  | .14 ***  | .13 ***  | .09 ***  | .13 ***  | .14 ***  |
| <i>professionals and managers</i> |                            |          |          |          |          |          |          |
| <i>male</i>                       | age                        | -.28 *** | -.21 *** | -.26 *** | -.17 *** | -.26 *** | -.16 *** |
|                                   | tenure                     | -.10 *   | -.10 *   | -.09 **  | -.12 *** | -.12 *** | -.11 *** |
|                                   | job satisfaction           | -.23 *** | -.21 *** | -.21 *** | -.29 *** | -.29 *** | -.33 *** |
|                                   | difficulty finding new job | -.16 *** | -.15 *** | -.14 *** | -.16 *** | -.15 *** | -.24 *** |
|                                   | job insecurity             | .31 ***  | .30 ***  | .30 ***  | .37 ***  | .30 ***  | .30 ***  |
|                                   | Adj. $R^2$                 | .25 ***  | .21 ***  | .19 ***  | .14 ***  | .21 ***  | .23 ***  |
| <i>female</i>                     | age                        | -.10     | -.16 *   | -.16 **  | -.23 *** | -.07     | -.19 *** |
|                                   | tenure                     | -.28 *** | -.18 **  | -.13 **  | -.09     | -.13 **  | .00      |
|                                   | job satisfaction           | -.20 **  | -.28 *** | -.25 *** | -.26 *** | -.32 *** | -.20 *** |
|                                   | difficulty finding new job | -.23 **  | -.33 *** | -.13 **  | -.21 *** | -.16 *** | -.16 *** |
|                                   | job insecurity             | .38 ***  | .26 ***  | .33 ***  | .37 ***  | .39 ***  | .37 ***  |
|                                   | Adj. $R^2$                 | .20 ***  | .20 ***  | .13. *** | .20 ***  | .17 ***  | .15 ***  |

$\beta$ : standardised Beta; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Looking at the effect sizes of single regressors, it turns out that job insecurity and job dissatisfaction are the most important factors pushing turnover intention. In all subgroups, the effect sizes are quite stable over the years, though satisfaction is sometimes slightly weaker than the security issue (cp. table 4). There is no consequent change in importance detectable. Other variables show a rather volatile effect size over the years, but a clear trend of gaining or losing importance cannot be supported.

The only eye-catching change is an increased impact of job satisfaction for male managers and professionals over the past three waves (from  $\beta_{03} = -.21$ ; to  $\beta_{09} = -.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, concordant with the protean career, highly qualified employees' turnover intention is more related to job satisfaction than it was some years ago but, relative to the insecurity aspect; both factors are still very much in balance.

Taking effect sizes of age into account, a third high impact factor relativizes the reported slight changes among the impact of job satisfaction even more. Congruent with Mayer, Grunow and Nitsche (2010), there is no change between cohorts, but there is a strong life-cycle effect in explaining turnover intention. As an aside, it is remarkable that female managers and professionals turnover intention has become less and less affected by tenure over the years. ( $\beta_{99} = -.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta_{09} = -.00$ ,  $p = .949$ ). This is the most eye-catching and consistent change in effect size.

### *Methodological limitations*

The career expectation data show strongly positively skewed distributions. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirms the non-normal distribution for both subgroups, controlling for age and gender (N ranging from 152 to 3654,  $p < .01$ ). The mode is consistently at zero, pointing out that a large group of employees does not expect any career change at all. Given this violation of the normal-distribution assumption<sup>1</sup> we have not only used ANOVA and t-tests for comparing mean career expectations, but we have counterchecked results conducting the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test and the Mann-Whitney-U test respectively. However, given the 11-point-scale indicating career expectations, there is a high amount of ties, biasing the results of rank-based non-parametric measures. Finally, results of parametric and non-parametric procedures do not differ much. The parametric measures are slightly more conservative, retaining the null hypothesis of equal means, but regarding effect sizes, results are quite similar.

## **Discussion**

In general, there is no clear trend in career expectations detectable in the period from 1999 to 2009 in Germany. This mainly supports our first hypothesis. Negative expectations for all groups are quite volatile, which may very well derive from cyclical developments. A clear trend towards more psychological inter- and intra-mobility in line with the concepts of boundaryless career (e.g. Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) cannot be seen among German white collar workers. Granted, our results rely on a period of one decade only, but we argue that the findings are to some

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<sup>1</sup> A log-transformation, reshaping the distribution of career expectations does not change outcomes neither of the ANOVA nor of the t-tests.

extent projectable to previous years. Given the stable pattern of long tenure and the low mobility rate in Germany during the last decades (as shown by Diewald & Sill, 2005; Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Winkelmann & Zimmermann, 1998) and assuming a strong link between subjective and objective mobility, earlier changes cannot have caused a dramatic change.

So, subjective career expectations generally remain the same but with small differences that must be mentioned: There is a slight decrease of expected positive internal mobility among male white collars. Moreover, there is a slightly increased external mobility expressed by turnover intention for male professionals and managers as well as for female white collar workers. This complies at least partly with boundaryless career concepts. Nevertheless, compared to the scope of cyclical shifts observed for negative expectations, the effect of a decade is rather neglectable. The latter becomes even more evident when discussing the range of the new career concepts and comparing expectations of managers and professionals with those of other white collars. Supporting hypotheses 2a and 2c, managers and professionals have higher turnover intentions and higher promotion expectations. The intergroup difference has more impact than the above mentioned changes over time. It seems that the higher educated and more powerful managers and professionals have more positive flexible career expectations and may gain from the changing socio-economic environment in the long run. This supports the elitist character of the discussion around the new career concepts (Arnold & Cohen, 2008) at least within the German context. It is likely that a comparison with more detailed group selection would produce much higher differences in subjective mobility. However, in contrast to our assumption, the compared groups do have the same level of negative job expectations i.e. a comparable level of job insecurity and demotion expectation – not supportive of hypothesis 2b and 2d. It is notable, that female employees, when compared to male colleagues of the same group, have similar external mobility expectations but generally lower promotion and demotion expectations.

As other scholars have shown, the boundaryless career expectations can be found, e.g. in highly dynamic environments such as creative industries (e.g. Haunschild, 2004), the IT sector (Bagdadli et. al, 2003; Donnelly, 2009) or among young people just starting their careers (Bradley, 2009). However, our results suggest that, transferred to a large professional group, changes in career patterns cannot be found. Our separation of the sample into male, female and managers/professionals and other white collar workers is not sufficient to identify a group that has clearly changed career expectations as postulated in the new career concepts.

Regarding the reason for turnover intentions, our results confirm that job security and job satisfaction are the major influencing factors supporting the results of Boerner and Schramm (1998), Blomme, Rheede and Tromp (2010), Lambert, Hogan and Barton (2001), Chen et al. (2011), Chirumbolo and Hellgren (2003) and Schramm (1999). Both influencing factors have quite stable effect sizes over the years, herewith supporting our third hypothesis. Boundarylessness in terms of turnover intention is often a consequence of job insecurity and thus of external constraints that are generally not subject to the more agency-based career concepts (cp. Chen, Wakabayashi, & Takeuchi, 2004; Ituma & Simpson 2009). This could be a reaction to companies' flexible

staffing policies or to the (global) economic situation. Job satisfaction as a reason for turnover intention can be seen as an indicator of agency-based drives to change one's job voluntarily. However, job satisfaction in 2009 is not more related to turnover intention than a decade earlier and this holds true for professionals and managers as well as for other white collar workers.

Against the backdrop of stable subjective mobility, it emerges that changes in the German workforce composition are more relevant for subjective career patterns than a shift in career aspirations. Our study repeats the finding of Mayer, Grunow and Nitsche (2010) that the high impact of age on psychological job mobility is not a cohort but a life-cycle effect. This holds true for managers and professionals as well as other white collars, regardless of gender. Given the on-going demographic change, this will influence turnover intention seriously. In contrast, it is remarkable that the East and the West have no explanatory value in predicting turnover intention. Maybe macro-effects become more visible in international comparisons than on a national level where the same legal and political framework is given; maybe it is due rather to differences between urban regions and rural areas that are more capable of explaining subjective mobility. Moreover, the selected factors causing turnover intention seem to be good predictors for male employees and fit best for managers and professionals. They are worse in explaining turnover intention among women. As Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) state, the career paths of women have never matched the standard employment relationship. In the same vein, Pringle and Mallon (2003) show that women and ethnic minorities can turn into career outsiders in the framework of the boundaryless career. At the same time, women increasingly participate in the labour market and life- and role models have become more diverse.

Summarizing, we see a rather stable picture of career expectations for managers and professionals as well as other white collar workers in Germany. Slight changes towards more flexibility can be seen, but have a negligible effect size. In order to define the scope of changes there is a need to pay more attention to comparing various occupational groups and to incorporate age and gender as well as household and private life data in future career research. Apart from that, the link between expectations and future actions should be considered in career research.

### *Conclusion*

Discussion about and criticism of career concepts such as the boundaryless or protean career is large and numerous. However, the discussion is predominantly held in an American cultural and institutional setting. Our paper contributes by extending this discourse internationally. Focussing on subjective career expectations instead of objective mobility, we further enrich the discussion on career by linking labour market developments to perceptions of the workforce. In the German case, we show that the basic assumption of increasing flexibility is not reflected in career expectations neither for managers and professionals nor for other white collar workers.

In line with other critics on the claimed change in career patterns and employment systems in Germany and on international level, our results urge caution in generalizing changes in employment systems. Overemphasis on an ever-changing society and on growing market dynamic in theoretical concepts (e.g. psychological contract)

as well as in public discussion could emerge as an inappropriate guideline in designing HR strategies. Moreover it could even result in a self-fulfilling prophecy if employees proactively react to the calls for being more boundaryless. Job stability and intra-organisational career paths are still of importance to German white collar workers. Career and talent management even gain in importance given the phenomenon of an aging workforce as well as the strong negative impact of growing age on mobility. Especially managers and professionals expect positive career mobility connected to promotions. Company vision and HR strategies should not promote transactional, protean and boundaryless oriented employees. HR development, diversity and age management should be enforced and in today's de-layered organisations there is a need to develop new internal career concepts e.g. by using side-step promotions or skill and competence related human resource development.

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