

# Organizational Support and Practice of Career Self-Management Behaviors: A Study Among Employees of Kerala



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**Jominy Joice J**  
**Siby Zacharias**

Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala  
(jominyjoice@gmail.com)

*The study envisages finding out relationship between perceived organizational support (POS), leader member exchange (LMX) and practice of career self-management behaviors. The contemporary career environment signifies the increased role of career self-management behaviors which had both positive and negative organizational outcomes. The data shows that organizational support had direct relationship with career self-management behaviors. This paper is an account of the quantitative research study based on primary data derived from employees of IT parks in Kerala. The data derived through pre tested structured instrument. The article concludes by considering the implications for future research.*

**Keywords:** Career self-management, leader member exchange, perceived organizational support

## 1. Introduction

“Focus on career, not merely the job” is the mantra for successful employers and employees. There was a time when individuals advance hierarchically within a single organization over the course of their career. Recent literature on career management is generally unanimous in proclaiming that careers have undergone fundamental changes since 1990’s (parker and Inkson, 1999; Aurther and Rousseau, 1996). New career concepts like “Boundaryless career” (Aurther and Rousseau, 1996) “Protean career” (Hall, 1996) and “Post-corporate career” (Periperl & Baruch, 1997) have emerged. Organizational environment has become more volatile and unstable so that the individuals can no longer expect lifetime employment within one organization or steady climb up the corporate ladder; as a result individuals must play an increasing role in taking responsibility and managing their own careers (Kanter, 1989; Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Thus “career self-management”, “employability” and “marketability” became the need of the hour. Individuals are now more focused on developing their employability and marketability through career self-management behaviors. In some recent prescriptive accounts, considerable attention is given to the ways in which individuals can and should manage their careers( Inkson,2000; king,2001).They prefer to work in organizations that offer better career growth and career management opportunities . As a result, management of career became the responsibility of both employees and employers (Orpen, 1994). In such a situation it is important to study and understand how employers can influence individual career management. Past researches says that career help provided by the organization, such as training ,mentoring and career advice encourages individuals to engage in career self-management (Raabe, Frese, & Beehr,2007; Sturges, Conway, & Liefoghe,2008).These self-management behaviors will bring in both organizational (eg: organizational commitment (Sturges et .al,2000,2002)) as well as individual (eg: career satisfaction, helplessness(King ,2004)) outcomes. But It is important to note that organization will always tend to provide such support only to individuals whom they want to retain and develop (Arnold, 1997; cappelli, 2008; Sturges, Guest, Conway, & Davey, 2002).However, less is known about how generic forms of organizational support, such as perceived organizational support (POS) and Leader-Member exchange, may also stimulate employees career self-management behavior (Sturges, Conway & Liefoghe, 2010).

In Indian context, the Information technology sector employees are high in demand. The industry demands continuous learning, proper career management and updated skills from the employees’. Surprisingly the concept of career self-management behaviors among IT employees has received less attention. The purpose of this paper is drawn on a range of literature on career self-management behaviors among IT employees of Kerala and it envisages finding out the association between perceived organizational support and leader member exchange on various career self-management behaviors, particularly behaviors aimed at furthering their career inside the organization.

## 2. Career Self-Management

Career self-management refers to the proactivity employees show with respect to managing their careers (King, 2004; Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demarr, 1998; Orpen, 1994). It includes employee’s efforts to define and realize their personal career objectives, which can or cannot correspond with the organization’s objectives (De Vos & Soens, (2008). Career self-management involves those activities that allow individuals to make a realistic self-assessment of their own talents and

capabilities in view of organizational opportunities as well as concrete actions( e.g., networking, self-nomination, creating opportunities) undertaken to realize these ambitions( Noe,1996; Sturges et al.,2002). In short career self-management has been conceptualized as a three stage process by which individuals collect information about values, interests and skill strengths and weaknesses(career exploration); Identify a career goal; and engage in strategies that increase the probability that career goals will be achieved (Noe,1996)



Recent studies have explored in detail the third stage of this process, that is, the kind of behavior required to implement a career strategy. These include: networking behavior, concerned with getting to know influential people (Forret and Dougherty,2004); Visibility Behavior, that is, drawing attention to work achievements (Sturges et al.,2002); positioning behavior, for example, pursuing valuable job opportunities(King,2003); Influencing behavior, intended to influence the decisions of superiors at work(king,2003);validating behavior, related to establishing a professional identity(sturges,2008);mobility oriented behavior, that is making plans to leave the organization (Chiaburu, Baker,& pitariu,2006;Sturges et al.,2002,2008 )and behavior relating to building human capital, for example, through training and education (king,2004).In this except mobility oriented behavior, all other career self-management behaviors are beneficial for the organizations, since because they are aimed at furthering the career inside organization. (Sturges et al., 2000, 2002, 2005, 2010). Whereas mobility oriented behaviors are aimed at furthering the career outside the organization which will result in adverse organizational outcomes such as turnover, decrease in organizational commitment etc. (Sturges et al., 2002).

The type of career self-management behavior that an individual practices depends up on 3 major variables.

- Career variable
- Individual variables
- Organizational variables

The career related factors includes career goal(Nabi,2000; Noe,1996; Sturges,2008), Career stage(Sturges,2008),career strategy-aimed at furthering career inside/outside the organization (Kossek, Roberts, Fisher, & Demaar 1998;sturges et al., 2002) .Individual factors includes self-esteem, extraversion, work centrality, proactive personality and gender(Nabi,2000; Emmerik et el.,2006;Chiaburu et al.,2006; Forret & Dough. whereas organizational variable includes organizational support, management support and organizational career management intervention.(Raabe et al.,2007;Sturges et al.,2002,2008).Thus from the previous literature as mentioned above, a conceptual framework is developed and is presented in (Figure 1)

**Antecedent**

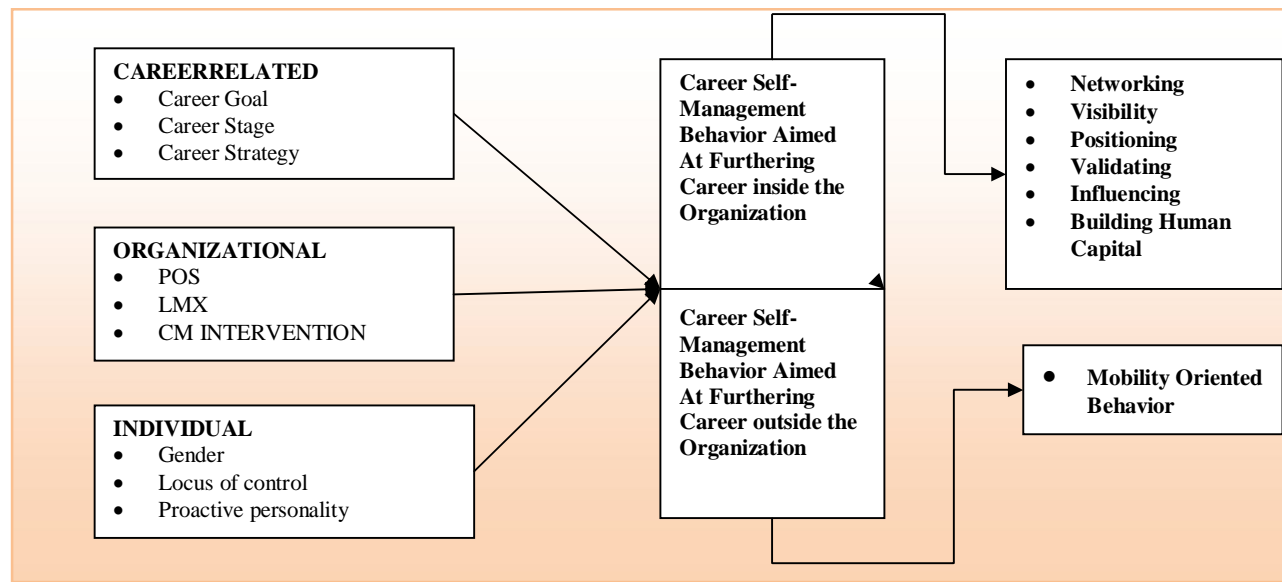


Figure 1 Framework of Antecedents of Career Self-Management

**3. Organizational Support and Career Self-Management Behavior**

According to (Baughman, Sue and Ann Bette Hubbard, 2000), career management has become the priority of the organizations so as to retain competent workers. According to (Lee C.H and Bruvold N.T, 2003), investing in the employees' career development is essential for maintenance and development of KSAs of both individual's and the organization as a

whole. In the changing career scenario, supporting employees in individual career management is the most important developmental step organization can adopt. Organizational support is found to be a major antecedent of career self-management as discussed above. Social exchange theory (eg: Blau, 1964) suggest that if employees receive support from their employer's, then they will in turn feel obliged to reciprocate (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Reciprocation may take the form of career self-management aimed at furthering the career inside the organization (Sturges et al., 2002), job performance (bunderson, 2001) etc...previous studies done by Orpen also suggest that career management help from the part of organization is not the waste of time some have thought, but that it can lead to more successful careers for employees (Hall,1990; Orpen,1994). So studies reveals that organizational support may lead to internally oriented career self-management behavior among those employees that the organization wishes to retain and develop (Sturges et al., 2010). There are mainly two sources of organizational support in this regard, that is support from the line manager/supervisor (LMX) (Wayne, shore, &Liden, 1997) and the support from the organization (POS) (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986).

Perceived Organizational Support (POS) which is based on organizational support theory is the belief that employees form about the extent to which the organization cares about their wellbeing, fulfills their socio emotional needs, values their contribution and its readiness to reward the same (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Shore & Shore, 1995).Pos is found to be stated in literature as organization's commitment to the employees. POS had strong relationships with affective commitment, job satisfaction, and positive mood at work; desire to remain with the organization and turnover intentions (Rhoades et al., 2002) and career self-management (Sturges et al., 2002)

Leader-member exchange is (a) a system of components and their relationships (b) involving both members of a dyad (c) involving interdependent patterns of behavior and (d) sharing mutual outcome instrumentalities and (e) producing conceptions of environments, cause maps, and value (Scandura, Graen, &Novak, 1986, p. 580). LMX was conceptualized quite broadly, as being comprised of the amount of interpersonal attraction between a leader and a member and the degree of loyalty that existed between a leader and a member (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Cashman, 1975) as well as attention, support, and sensitivity (Dansereau et al., 1975).Since LMX and Pos are derived from social exchange theory, as mentioned above, employees will reciprocate the same as internally focused career self-management.

The conceptual framework tested in this study (Figure: 2)

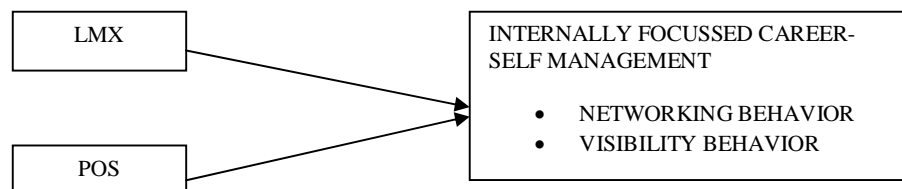


Figure 2 Conceptual Frameworks for Hypothesis Testing

#### 4. Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives formulated for the study are-

1. To study various career self-management practices among IT employees of Kerala
2. To understand whether there is any significant relation between perceived organizational support and practice of career self-management behaviors aimed at furthering career inside the organization
3. To understand whether there is any significant relation between leader member exchange and practice of career self-management behaviors aimed at furthering career inside the organization

#### Hypotheses

The study had the following hypotheses

**Hypotheses 1:** perceived organizational support is positively related with career self-management behaviors aimed at furthering career inside the organization.

**Hypotheses 2:** leader-member exchange is positively related with of career self-management behaviors aimed at furthering career inside the organization

#### 5. Research Methodology

A quantitative research approach was adopted for finding out the association between perceived organizational support, leader member exchange and practice of career self-management behaviors. The source of data collection has been primary as well as secondary. The source of secondary data has been journal articles, research papers, newspaper articles, discussions, government bulletins, websites of Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), Thiruvananthapuram, Info-park, Kochi and company databases, circulars, Ph D thesis etc. Updated information from various secondary sources has been collected and used in this paper.

The primary data has been collected using a structured questionnaire which consists of 26 questions, in which career self-management behavior was measured using items adapted from measures developed by Sturges et al.(2002,2005) , Perceived organizational support using Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) scale and leader member exchange was assessed using the 7-item LMX scale ( Liden & Graen,1986; Scandura & Graen,1984). List of software firms from the respective selected Techno parks [Software Technology Parks of India (STPI), Thiruvananthapuram and Info Park, Kochi] was compiled to define the population of the study. Convenient sampling technique is adopted for the study. Online Questionnaire was send to 100 employees of various IT companies in Info park and techno park in which 40 employees responded and from that 32 were taken for analysis and rest 8 were avoided due to insufficient data.

The data collected has been analyzed using SPSS 21.0 version tool. Correlation was used for statistical analysis. Parameters like Mean, Standard deviation are also used.

## 6. Results

### Reliability

Internal consistency of the instrument was examined by using cronbach reliability test which shows total reliability of 0.721 for career self-management scale which includes 3 sub constructs including networking behavior, visibility behavior and mobility oriented behavior. The alpha coefficient for the 8 Item POS scale was found to be 0.838 and the cronbach alpha reliability of the 7 item LMX scale was 0.826 which shows adequate reliability.

Means, inter-correlation for measures in this study are shown in table 1

**Table1 Means and Inter-Correlations among Variables**

	Means	1	2	3	4
1. Networking behavior	3.49	1	.366*	0.206	-0.092
2. Visibility behavior	3.56	0.366*	1	0.481**	0.474**
3. POS	3.47	0.206	0.481**	1	0.341
4. LMX	3.38	-0.092	0.474**	0.341	1

\*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-Tailed)

\*\*correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Mean scores of the variables measured indicate that career self-management behaviors aimed at furthering career inside the organization which includes networking and visibility behavior was found to be average and perceived organizational support and leader member exchange among IT employees of Kerala was also found to be average.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that POS would be positively related to career self-management behavior aimed at furthering the career within the organization. No significant relationship was found to exist between POS and behavior aimed at furthering the career within the organization in terms of networking behavior. But a strong and positive correlation exist in the case of perceived organizational support and visibility behavior ( $r = .481, p < .01$ ). so hypothesis 1 is partially supported

Hypothesis 2 proposed that LMX would be positively related to career self-management behavior aimed at furthering the career within the organization. A significant positive association was found between LMX and behavior aimed at furthering the career within the organization in terms of visibility behavior ( $r = .474, p < .01$ ) but not networking behavior. Thus in the case of hypothesis 2, It is partially supported.

## 7. Discussion

The major objective of the study is to find out whether there is any significant correlation existing between perceived organizational support, leader member exchange and career self-management behavior aimed at furthering career inside the organization. The study was conducted among the IT sector employees of Kerala. Researcher limited the study to IT sector mainly because of the fact that IT industry and IT employees were more prone to job hopping and thus they are found to be following the characteristics of the "new career". The correlation analysis shows a direct positive relationship between perceived organizational support and visibility behavior which is a sub construct of career self-management behavior aimed at furthering career inside the organization. This is similar to findings of previous studies where perceived organizational support is associated with internally focused career self-management behavior (De Vos & Dewettinck, 2009; Noe, 1996) especially visibility behavior (Sturges et.,al,2010). Visibility behaviors are mainly aimed at drawing attention to own achievements. The findings support the view that individuals engage in career management behaviors aimed at raising their profile at work in order to present themselves to the company as employees worth investing in. (Sturges et.al. 2005). The analysis also showed a positive correlation between leader member exchange and visibility behavior but not associated with networking behavior. This is similar to findings of studies done in UK, where leader member exchange is positively associated with Visibility behavior and no correlation with networking behavior (Sturges et al., 2010). This link suggests that support from a line manager may assist individuals in promoting themselves at work (Noe, 1996), especially when career management help is not provided in an especially structured way, as is the case in the Industry where the research was

conducted. The research context may also provide an explanation for LMX being associated with this type of internally focused career self-management behavior. (Sturges et al., 2010).

The study has many limitations. This study mainly concentrated on IT sector employees in which sample size is comparatively less and is comprised of young employees. This may have had an impact on the results and therefore may affect the generalizability of the findings to other groups of employees working in different settings. Further research among different samples is needed to confirm and develop further theory about antecedents of career self-management behavior. Despite these limitations, the research findings highlight important theoretical and practical considerations. This is one of the first studies done in Indian context, in order to examine the interactions between different antecedents of career self-management behavior in IT industry. Future research on other antecedents of career self-management behaviors like individual variables like, gender, proactive personality, work centrality and its association with internally focused career self-management will be fruitful. Further analysis of various career related and organizational outcomes of career self-management is recommended since this concept had many practical implications in changing organizational career context

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this empirical study clearly indicates that perceived organizational support and leader member exchange had significant positive relationship with (visibility behavior) internally focused career self-management. So this clearly states that even in the changing career context, organizational as well as supervisor support will result in positive self-management behaviors. The concept of new careers paved way to more individualistic career management, which proclaims the need of more research in the area of career self-management. It is hoped that this article will stimulate an academic debate on the subject.

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