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Employee Career Development Practices in Consultancy Firms - How do they Affect Newly Hired Employees' Future Views in the Company?

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine and gain insights into how consultancy firms can retain valuable human resources by implementing favourable career development practices for their newly hired employees. This study aims to answer the following research question: *How do the career practices within consultancy firms affect the newly hired employees' future views in the company?* This question is of importance to consultancy firms today as their newly hired employees care more about their personal desires and career development, than monetary rewards. The *new organisational career* includes a more horizontal career path, and the companies need to acknowledge that when designing their career development practices to retain employees. To answer the research question we did a case study of newly hired consultants working in various consultancy firms located in Norway. The empirical data were obtained by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The results show several ways of how consultancy firm's career practices affect newly hired employees' future views in the company. Lateral career paths, well-defined career practices, perceived personal HR-investment and support accompanied by autonomy, entrepreneurial creativity, and work-life balance were highlighted by the respondents. All respondents identified with a boundaryless, self-directed protean career. We found that the perceived quality of career practices and models depended on the size of the enterprise. Future research should explore the factors affecting newcomers' commitment in consultancy firms, but expand the population beyond a small qualitative sample to generalize the findings. The thesis highlights some practical implications concerning the importance of horizontal advancement, mapping out employee's career orientations, and providing sufficient time, resources, and support. This study has expanded the scope of existing research related to career development to apply to the millennials generation and their new viewpoints on modern career development. Given the qualitative research design of the study, it supplements previous quantitative research with individual's perceptions, experiences and attitudes. The research makes a contribution to consultancy firms as to how design their career development practices to meet the current developmental needs and interests of employees entering their firm.

Keywords: Career development, newcomers, consultants, horizontal career path, retainment

Table of Content

| | |
|---|------------|
| Acknowledgments | II |
| Abstract | III |
| Table of Content | IV |
| Introduction | 1 |
| <i>Case Description: Newly Hired Consultants in Different Consultancy Firms</i> | 2 |
| Theoretical Background | 3 |
| <i>The New Organisational Career and Career Path</i> | 3 |
| <i>Career Orientations</i> | 4 |
| <i>Millennials in the Workforce</i> | 6 |
| <i>Job Rotation</i> | 7 |
| <i>Boundaryless and Protean Career Orientations</i> | 8 |
| <i>Professional Service Firms and their «Tournament-Model»</i> | 8 |
| <i>Changes in the Career Model</i> | 10 |
| <i>Proactive Career Development and Internal Employability Efforts</i> | 11 |
| <i>The New Psychological Contract</i> | 12 |
| Research Method | 15 |
| <i>Research Design</i> | 15 |
| <i>Sampling</i> | 16 |
| <i>Interviews</i> | 18 |
| <i>Data Analysis</i> | 21 |
| <i>Quality of Research Method</i> | 22 |
| <i>Ethics</i> | 23 |
| <i>Summary</i> | 23 |
| Findings | 24 |
| <i>Career Prospects</i> | 24 |
| <i>Career Orientations</i> | 26 |
| <i>Perceived Investment in Employee Career Development Practices</i> | 27 |
| <i>Career Development Practices</i> | 32 |
| <i>Career Model</i> | 36 |
| <i>Proactivity</i> | 39 |
| <i>Psychological Contract</i> | 40 |
| <i>Commitment</i> | 41 |
| Discussion | 46 |
| <i>Career Prospects</i> | 46 |
| <i>Career Orientations</i> | 47 |
| <i>Perceived Investment in Employee Career Development</i> | 49 |
| <i>Career Development Practices</i> | 51 |
| <i>Career Model</i> | 52 |
| <i>Proactivity</i> | 55 |
| <i>Psychological Contract and Commitment</i> | 56 |
| Limitations, Future Research and Conclusion | 58 |
| <i>Limitations and Future Research</i> | 58 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 59 |
| References | 63 |
| Appendices | 68 |
| <i>Appendix 1: Informational letter to Respondents</i> | 68 |
| <i>Appendix 2: Informed Consent</i> | 69 |
| <i>Appendix 3: Interview Guide</i> | 70 |

Introduction

The business environment is turbulent and complex, and it is difficult to have loyal employees and retain their knowledge. Today's societies are becoming more «liquid» and uncertain (Abessolo, Hirschi & Rossier, 2017). Individuals care more about their personal desires and plans for their career development. It used to be a loyal contract where an employee entered a firm, worked hard, performed well, was committed, and had job security (Hall, 1996). A stable organisational structure was viewed as a linear progression up an organisation's hierarchy (Bravo, Seibert, Kraimer, Wayne & Liden, 2017). What used to be the guideline to the next career step were the opportunities within the organisation such as job titles, pay grades, and functional role hierarchies. This has been replaced by a new view on career development concerning continuous learning and challenging work tasks (Hall, 1996). The responsibility for careers has now been largely transferred from the employer to the employee (Capelli, 1999 p. 154). Despite a shift towards an individual focused career management, the organisation's role in shaping future careers should not be underestimated (Baruch, 2006). Rapid changes, new technologies, and increased rate of knowledge attainment, require that employees need extra training and development activities (Baruch, 2006).

Past concepts build on forms of rigid ladders in which people are climbing upward if they thrive. This was the basic building-stone for the management of people. Those days have long passed. The psychological contracts within the new forms of careers are changing (Herriot and Pemberton, 1997). People need to gain «employability» (Ghoshal et al., 1999; Baruch, 2001) rather than «secure employment». Employers can no longer provide secure jobs, and stopped pretending that such a commitment is manageable –instead they can help employees to improve their competence and ability to acquire employment in case they are made redundant or just decide to move on (Baruch, 2001). Resilience, intelligence, employability – these are essential survival tools in the struggle to endure the change. And the change can be called by many names – rationalising, delayering, downsizing, rightsizing, flattening, restructuring, and even shaping up for the future. The brutal reality beyond these labels is simple – jobs are scarce, and to gain competitiveness or improve market value (although it might only be for a short period), organisations lay off their employees on a large scale, unlike the convention and tradition.

Today, companies are faced with a different view on the traditional linear career development, as the employees have other preferences for their career path. The so-called *new organisational career* replaces the concept of linear advancement through the hierarchy, with a more horizontal/lateral career path (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth & Larsson, 1996). This new perspective on career paths is important for organisations to consider when designing their employee development practices, as it is vital for retaining their employees. The consultancy firms in particular, depend upon the knowledge of their employees as the product they offer is solely based on their knowledge and how they make use of it (Malhotra, Smets & Morris, 2010). Thus, providing their employees with training and development activities are essential as it leads to delivering higher-quality products to their clients.

Little research examines how individuals and organisations can manage careers and career development within constantly changing organisational structures. Also, it is suggested that further research could focus on how organisations best can meet the human resource needs of the organisation while at the same time meet the developmental needs and interests of the individual (Clark, 2013). This thesis will address career development practices within various consultancy firms. The purpose of the study is to examine and gain insights into how consultancy firms can retain valuable human resources by implementing favourable career development practices for their newly hired employees. Thus, this research aims to answer the following research question:

How do the career practices within consultancy firms affect the newly hired employees' future views in the company?

To answer the research question we will study newly hired consultants working in various consultancy firms located in Norway.

Case Description: Newly Hired Consultants in Different Consultancy Firms

The volunteer turnover rates in consultant firms are assumed to be higher based on the large number of recruits every year and the pyramid structure they often have. A director of a research organisation states that staff turnover in consulting is between 15-20% per year, and people stay on average five to six years within these kinds of firms (Batchelor, 2011). We want to explore how this might relate to the employer's career practices and their way of

developing their employees. Our case study focus on consultants who have been employed for less than three years in a consultancy firm, and their thoughts about the employer's current career practices. The aim is to investigate their future views within the firm, and how they correspond to the career practices in that firm. The case study consists of eight different consultancy firms in Oslo. There were four small firms with less than 50 employees, one with 150 employees, and three enterprises were large and international. The employees we have interviewed worked on different levels within their company. However, their current job was everyone's first job after graduating, except for one.

This thesis first presents the theoretical framework including key concepts and relevant research. Second, the research method whereas sampling, data collection, research quality and ethical concerns are presented. Further, relevant findings are presented and thereafter discussed in light of theory and research. Finally, we conclude by using the main findings to answer the research question, and meet the objectives of the study. Limitations, and suggestions to future research are also included in the conclusion chapter.

Theoretical Background

Traditionally, career success has been associated with well-defined positions in the organisation's hierarchy, and supported through training, development and career management (Kanter, 1989). The academic literature was dominated by this thinking until the 1980s when it slowly changed due to globalization, competition and economic conditions that lead to downsizing and a flatter hierarchy than earlier (Clarke, 2013). This chapter presents the relevant theoretical concepts used in this thesis.

The New Organisational Career and Career Path

A new way of thinking of the career is «the unfolding sequence of any person's work experiences over time» (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996 p. 29–30). This implicates that a career follows a path, which indicates a sequence of moves and a development over time (Harris, Pattie & McMahan, 2015). A career path involves the jobs that help an individual in reaching his/hers goals and objectives (Doyle, 2018). For instance, a lawyer's career path will typically include graduating from law school, then becoming an associate at a law firm, and further be promoted to a partner in a law firm (Harris et. al., 2015). Although, career paths traditionally have implied a vertical advancement in the organisational hierarchy, it can also involve

lateral/horizontal progression within or across industries (Doyle, 2018). Regardless of the direction of the path, linear or lateral, it aims to increase the employees career values and needs by pursuing jobs that are relevant to reach their career goal. The employee development process in an organisation will typically entail career paths. Investments in human capital is important for the employees to advance within their career path (Harris et. al., 2015). Firms can provide the employee with additional education, training or work assignments that can help qualify the employee for the following positions within their career path (Harris et. al., 2015; Doyle, 2018).

Switching jobs, contract based work and a personal network to seek opportunities from is the basis for the new career form, especially for managerial and professional work (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). Clarke's (2013) study of the organisational career and its relevance today, showed that some managers pursue careers across organisations due to a desire for career and personal development, as well by a concern that they remain relevant and up-to-date in their skills. Many career decisions have been made based on personal values, particularly the desire for work–life balance and the desire for a good cultural fit with their employer (Briscoe & Hall, 2006). The new organisational career replaces the concept of linear progression, with a career path resembling the spiral career (Brousseau et.al., 1996). Brousseau et. al. (1996) argues that lateral career moves will be equally as important as linear career progression. Career success will now be seen less in terms of climbing an organisational ladder and more in terms of lateral moves that provide opportunities for creativity, learning, skill diversity and personal satisfaction (Clarke, 2013).

Career Orientations

In 1978, Schein made a framework that proposed that individuals have a career anchor to orient their careers around. The framework focuses on individual's internal values and needs, but it was conceptualized when more traditional career paths were common. Bravo et. al. (2017) used this as a fundament in their research and edited it to fit more into today's career orientations. Bravo et al. (2017, p.503) defines career orientation as «*the features of work that define one's career goals reflecting the individual's self-concept regarding his or her self-perceived values, interests, experiences, skills, and abilities*». Schein (1978) proposed that people only had one career anchor. Bravo et al. (2017) on the other hand, suggested that individuals could have several, but rank them differently.

The eight orientations that Schein proposed were (1) *Technical/functional competence* – the desire to become a specialist within one’s chosen occupation. (2) *Managerial competence* – the desire to aspire to be a general manager and be at an organisational level with profit/loss responsibilities. (3) *Autonomy* – the desire to experience freedom and independence in a job. (4) *Security and stability* – the desire for financial and job security. (5) *Entrepreneurial creativity* – the desire to make new ventures, product/service development, or shape new organisations including intrapreneurship. (6) *Pure challenge* – the desire to be challenged by difficult work cases and manage it. (7) *Service and dedication to a cause* – the desire to have an impact on the world that has a personal value purpose. (8) *Lifestyle* – the desire to be able to balance life and work issues as necessary.

Bravo et. al. (2017) found that those high on entrepreneurial orientations wanted opportunities to develop and create new products or services. It could be beneficial for a company to allocate such tasks to these individuals, as it may enhance innovative performance. People high on security orientation would not prefer to be involved in innovative projects, due to limited knowledge of the project’s success. These individuals prefer core positions and are less likely to pursue upward mobility (Bravo et. al., 2017). A lateral career plan and positions within the same area could be a suitable solution for these types of people. Significant findings showed that individuals high on managerial orientation are more proactive, are open to relocation, use mentors, and act in career self-management (Bravo et. al., 2017). Not surprisingly, they desire upward mobility. Even though they are high in managerial competence, they are low in organisational commitment, which means they don’t stay for a long period in an organisation. They are more likely to seek opportunities outside the organisation if their career needs are not satisfied. For a company, it is important to keep monitoring these individuals, and make sure they are properly challenged to avoid losing these candidates. Lastly, individuals high in technical career orientation favour a career within a technical path, but they still want to advance upward (Bravo et. al., 2017).

Based on the findings from Bravo et. al. (2017), organisations would benefit from mapping out the employees’ career orientations. This way it could be more clear for both the company and the individual to understand what they can do to be more efficient and retain people. This research was not done in a professional service firm (PSF), and it would therefore be

interesting to see if there were big differences among employees within PSFs and their career orientations.

Millennials in the Workforce

The workforce today consists of different generation types. First there are the *Baby Boomers* (1946-1964), second there is the group called *Generation X* (1965-1984), and the last are *Millennials* (1982-2004). There are some researchers that call the generation between 1975 and 2004 for *Generation Y*. Then there are those born after 2004 that has yet to be defined (Masnick, 2012). Millennials are the first generation to be fully technological. They have all grown up with Internet and mobile phones, and this affect their way of life. This generation is well educated as they have spent more hours in the classroom, after school activities and in general had more resources at disposal (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Millennials enters the workforce with a new attitude towards work and a different work ethic. Unlike previous generations of employees, millennials focus on career development, work-life balance and quality in the workplace (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Money is a lesser motivator, whereas opportunities for career growth and advancement, as well as a balanced life, are greater motivators (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). According to the Millennials in the Workplace Report (Centre for Women in Business, 2011), millennials care more about work experience and are therefore willing to make a lateral career move to gain knowledge, and considers making a difference more important than professional recognition. Their talent and skills are what will take them where they want in a career, and they express this to their supervisors. Millennials wants to be challenged, and they switch jobs if their «needs» are not met (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Calk and Patrick (2018) found that millennials score lower on safety, and support the notion that they seek other jobs if basic needs are not met. This differs from the older generation who is known for their loyalty to their firm. Work-life balance is also more important to millennials, and to some it might be more important than salary (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

Millennials have higher expectations in regards to what they get in return from the companies they join. They want an interesting job, but also know how they can develop and grow. A clear overview of ways to advance is important when they sign a new job contract. To meet this demand, some companies have started to show different paths they can progress to, both

upwards and sideways. Providing an insight into career paths and what behaviours and competence is needed, helps the employees to know what is important for them and what they want to work towards. Clear career paths and development practices is also a way for the company to retain people (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009).

Lyons and Kuron (2013) found that job satisfaction and organisational commitment appear lower among younger generations, but the intention to quit and career mobility seems higher. Furthermore, the authors suggest that the generational trends involve that workers are becoming more independent, self-focused, and less committed to their organisation. Thus, the workers are more mobile in their careers as they are constantly seeking personal fulfilment in their job (Lyons and Kuron, 2013). To attract and retain talent, employers need to satisfy the workers' individualistic growth needs. Also, employers may either accept these trends and adjust to a new reality of transactional, short-term employment relationships, or they need to provide their employees with flexible work conditions, job offerings and leaderships (Lyons and Kuron, 2013). The authors also highlighted that it is important that leaders today view generational differences as indications of broader trends in society and work-life that continuously evolve throughout the generations life courses.

Job Rotation

Campion, Cheraskin & Stevens (1994) examines how job rotation may be a proactive means of enhancing the value of work experience for career development. Job rotation is described as lateral transfers of employees between different jobs in the company (Campion et.al., 1994). There is various research claiming that job rotation is a strategy that can enhance career development (Hall, 1984; Wexley & Latham, 1981; Brett, 1984; Louis, 1982). Also, an important outcome of job rotation is the varied work experience that the employees get, which in turn contribute to job learning (Morrison & Brantner, 1992; Campion et.al., 1994). Kaymaza (2010) found that job rotation practices have a positive effect on motivation, knowledge, skills, competence and development of social relations. Implementing job rotation practices decrease monotony and boredom, while shifting from one department to another increase morale among the employees. This in turn create motivation to learn and develop (Kaymaza, 2010).

Boundaryless and Protean Career Orientations

The last few decades' new approaches to career paths have emerged. One perspective is *boundaryless career*. In a boundaryless career, an individual is no longer able to rely on organisational promotions and internal career paths. This means careers are not «bounded» in a single path or organisation. The boundaries crossed during an individual's career may be work roles, organisations, occupations and type of employment (Arthur, 1994). A second perspective is the *protean career*. The word protean comes from the Greek God Proteus and associated with words such as flexibility, versatility and adaptability. This approach brings the focus to the individual and that the person itself drives the career and not the organisation. As people and environment change, so does the career (Hall, 1996). There are two different dimensions within this approach. The *value driven* dimension suggests that an individual's values will determine the path and measures of success for a person. The *self-directed dimension* proposes the capability to adapt to the environment in terms of both performance and learning opportunities. This implies that a career is developed through the person's needs and goals, and success is a subjective criterion that the person sets for themselves (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). By looking at these two perspectives it shows that upward and linear career mobility might not be enough to motivate and retain employees. It is therefore important to understand what motivates employees' career choices to engage and keep top candidates (Bravo et. al., 2017). However, it is important to treat protean career and boundaryless career as distinct constructs (Baruch, 2006). Baruch (2016) implies that a protean career will thrive in a boundaryless career world, whereas it will most likely be suppressed or not supported in the traditional, rigid and stable career systems.

Professional Service Firms and their «Tournament-Model»

We have narrowed it down to examine career development practices in professional service firms (PSF). PSFs are defined as «*autonomous, self-owned organisations that have traditionally managed and developed human resources through a system of professional apprenticeship, culminating with promotion to partnership or dismissal from the firm*» (Malos & Campion 1995, p.613). *Professionals* are people with specific knowledge that are used to solve complex problems for clients. Employees working in professional service firms are often referred to as consultants. *Autonomous* means that the professionals are free to choose which problems they want to take on and find intellectually rewarding (Empson & Chapman, 2006). Professional service firms are known for using a *tournament model* as a

practice for promotion. The candidates in the tournament compete against each other and the prize is a promotion. There is a certain time period for the tournament and there are limited positions at the next stage. Promotions are based on a relative ranking among the team at a higher level, rather than individual's excellent skills. The employees that does not make it in the tournament are barred from later promotion rounds, and thus expected to leave the firm (Malhotra et al., 2010).

Baden-Fuller and Bateson (1990) describes an *up or out strategy* in a professional service firm to entail that individuals are expected to stay at a level for only a certain amount of time, before advancing upwards. If the person is not able to reach the expertise required at the next level after a certain time, it is implied that the person leaves the company. Each layer in the firm has different time periods, and it can vary amongst professional service firms. A minimum time rule is to ensure that the employees have the right set of skills and knowledge (Baden-Fuller and Bateson, 1990).

In some PSFs the associates work to eventually be asked to become a partner in the firm. There are two conundrums to this model. From the firm's perspective, they choose to invest money on hiring and training of new employees over a short period. Moving on, they only wish to keep a small number of these employees. The same process of recruiting, training and selection of new candidates is thereafter repeated by the firm. Research by Malhotra et.al. (2010) found that it was no formal policy stating that it was either «up or out», this was more of a norm. Even though the «up or out»-norm is not a formal policy, it is enforced by the partners practice. From an individual's point of view, there is a small chance of advancing to become a partner, and yet there are a lot of people choosing to sign a contract like this (Malhotra et al., 2010).

The product professional service firms deliver is solely based on their knowledge and the way the employees make use of it. Therefore, it is crucial for the company to make sure that their personnel can produce valuable output. However, it is difficult to measure effort (input) and knowledge creation (output) made by the employees. The pressure from the tournament model drives the employees to try their best to keep their performance on top. This is done by seeking personal development and increase competence to better their chances of making it to the next round (Malhotra et al., 2010). Profits are divided between partners, and that limits the number of partners. Typically, the firm does not want to keep the employees who failed to

make partner because they no longer have the same incentive to work towards a goal to be promoted. Keeping them as a non-partner associate would take a spot from an aspiring candidate who is aiming to reach a partner position. Finally, another reason for not keeping those who failed becoming a partner, is because they would receive higher salaries than those on lower levels (Malhotra et al., 2010).

Even though the chance of success is low, people still choose to enter these types of firms. As mentioned, many firms have a time limit in the contract so they know how long the tournament period will last. This gives some predictability in knowing when your time is up. Some firms have a practice involving that they will help the failed candidates with a job at one of their clients' firm. Such an agreement creates a good relationship to their «alumni» and this way they are more likely to create business opportunities. In general, the incentive to gain valuable human capital is enough reason for a person to join a PSF (Malhotra et al. 2010; Gilson and Mnookin, 1989).

Changes in the Career Model

Malhotra, Morris & Hinings (2006) imply that increasing size and organisational complexity in PSFs have made them adopt more managerial practices similar to corporations. Findings show that it differs between a form of partnership practice and more integrated arrangements. Malhotra et.al. (2010) found that many PSFs have started with a new practice where they have an alternative to partnerships as a way of providing employees with knowledge in exchange for commitment. This practice is based on recognizing the knowledge of their employees. PSFs also implemented bonus systems linked to firm performance, whereas the newly hired had bonus systems related to individual and practice performance (Malhotra et.al., 2010). Further, a challenge for many firms today is the pressure of continuous innovation. Malhotra, Smets & Morris (2016) therefore studied how career pathing is a determinant for the innovation capacity in professional service firms. They demonstrated how changing career paths accommodate work-life preferences of young professionals, and have the effect of enhancing innovation capacity for the firm as well.

Because of the changing desires of the current workforce, the traditional track does not longer fit most knowledge workers. Benko & Weisberg (2007) states that leaders need to rethink how their organisation offer career choices, to retain and attract talent. The authors propose

that this can be accomplished by changing the business culture, moving from a *corporate ladder model* to a *corporate lattice model* (Benko & Weisberg, 2007). «A *corporate lattice system encourages a continuous collaboration between employer and employee to design customized career paths*» (Benko & Weisberg, 2007). The model considers both the changing needs of the business as well as the employees' changing lives, resulting in a more adaptive model of career development. For instance, the professional service firm Deloitte implemented a framework, mass career customization (MCC), to facilitate the transition to a corporate lattice culture (Benko & Weisberg, 2007). Benko & Weisberg (2007) suggests that such a collaborative approach to designing careers can inspire higher employee productivity, reduce the costs of turnover and contribute to greater loyalty.

The current environment that professional service firms operate in is characterized by less promotional positions and a workforce who strives towards a career in line with their self-interests. Based on these changes in the environment, the career path within PSFs is also changing. Although the companies want some of the employees to «go out», they want the best ones to stay.

Proactive Career Development and Internal Employability Efforts

In today's dynamic society the need for employees to keep developing their competencies and adapt to change are essential (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). Therefore, it is beneficial for organisations to implement internal employability orientations and activities. *Employability* is defined as an individual's chances of acquiring a job, retaining a job, or moving in between jobs (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). *Internal employability orientations* refer to employees' openness to develop and adapt to changing work requirements, while *internal employability activities* entail employees' active self-development and career management within the organisation (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). George & Brief (1992) defined self-development as an employees' voluntary efforts to improve their knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform better in their current position, or in preparation for higher responsibility positions in the company (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015).

Employability orientations and activities can be linked to *proactive behaviour and proactive adaptability*, as it involves engagement in self- and career development. Seibert, Kraimer, &

Crant (2001) presented that several career researchers have regularly observed that individuals in the new, boundaryless careers need to be proactive. Crant defined proactive behaviour as «*taking initiative in improving current circumstances or creating new ones; it involves challenging the status quo rather than passively adapting to present conditions*» (Seibert et.al., 2001). An essential aspect of proactive behaviour is *career initiative*, which reflects several strategies employees use to advance in their careers. These strategies include career planning, skill development, and consultation with senior colleagues within the organisation (Seibert et.al., 2001). The researchers found that people who have a proactive personality are more likely to engage in several proactive behaviours, such as actively managing one's own career (Seibert et.al., 2001).

Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song (2013) presents a different perspective related to employees' proactive behaviour. They found that proactive behaviour of a newly hired employee is associated with initial levels of support from co-workers and supervisors. The newcomers who feel high initial support from colleagues are likely to feel that their co-workers want them to succeed, and thereby lower the costs associated with exposing proactive behaviour (Kammeyer-Mueller et.al., 2013). Lastly, the researchers concluded that initial levels of support from both their supervisors and co-workers were in general positively related to work proactivity, social integration, and commitment (Kammeyer-Mueller et.al., 2013).

The New Psychological Contract

When a person signs a contract in an organisation there are terms and obligations. This contract defines the relationship between the employer and employee, and their mutual obligations. It is an agreement that the employer works on its contribution to the organisation, and in return the organisation will provide benefits and compensation (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994). The perceived contribution from both parts is the psychological contract between the organisation and the employee (Robinson et al, 1994).

The psychological contract has changed in terms of what part the organisation plays. The organisation used to be a caretaker of the employee, but in the new psychological contract a different view is prominent. Today, there are lower expectations to the length of employment

from both parts. Further, employees are now more responsible for their own career development. In addition, employees' commitment is connected to their work rather than to the job and organisation (Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999).

The change in the psychological contract also refers to the 'new development' in which organisations are expected to invest in employees training and development, to make them adaptive for changing work tasks and new roles in the organisation (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). There is a psychological contract as there are no real obligations other than expectations and a reciprocal relationship between employee and organisation. In return to the HR-investment, employees are expected to be open for work changes and take responsibility for keeping their knowledge and skills up-to-date to be employable for the organisation (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015).

The financial crisis and the recession that struck in 2007 happened during the time when millennials were entering the workforce. They witnessed their older colleagues, who had been loyal to their firm, get redundant and asked to increase their own productivity (Bauerlein & Jeffery, 2011; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Thompson and Gregory (2012) argued that the younger generation view the psychological contract as non-existing. Further, they argue that the millennials believe the organisation needs to remind them *why* they should stay.

Responsibility for Career Development

Even though the employee is responsible for their career development, the organisation is responsible for providing their workforce with the tools and opportunities for assessing and developing their skills. When the responsibility lies with the employee they might get more involved in development activities to meet their career goals. Development activities can be training courses, informational interviewing, or identifying and interacting with a mentor (Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999). Employees who perceive a personal HR-investment are more willing to put in the work required to remain employable (Lee & Bruvold, 2003). From research, scholars found that employees who perceive that they have access to resources and options to take responsibility for developing their knowledge relates positive to the expected responsibility from the organisation (Fuller et al., 2006; Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). Arguably, this shows that if the resources are facilitated and easily accessed, employees are positive to this reciprocal relationship (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015).

Commitment to Work

The old psychological contract gave the organisation a caretaker responsibility because the commitment to the company and discourage to leave was based on rewards policies and practices. However, today, job security is more difficult to provide and the loyalty toward one's employer might be lower. This can turn into a lower intention of staying with your current employer. Lower job security makes it more important to develop skills to be more adaptable, and this again is a motivation to hinder obsolescence (Cavanaugh & Noe, 1999). Affective commitment describes the level of desire the employee has to remain in the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). Employees who perceive a social exchange relationship are more likely to engage in knowledge development activities to stay internally employable. Not only because they have an affective commitment to the firm, but also because it is a perceived obligation that they owe it to the firm. Those who do not perceive an HR-investment, but rather an economic exchange relationship is less likely to commit to anything outside contractual obligations and therefore behave in a way that does not help them remain internally employable (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). An employee can feel obligated to stay longer in the firm because the organisation has 'invested' so much in them.

The research that has been conducted on career development in PSFs has mainly focused on law firms. Professional service firms are not a homogeneous group, and we would like to look at a different part of the industry. The employees working in professional service firms are often called consultants and work in consultancy firms. We want to do a study of different consultancy firms and look at how employees experience their career path in the company and how the opportunities for career development affect their commitment to their employer. A fuller understanding of how individuals in consultancy firms perceive their career path is interesting to comprehend the effect of career development. Also, such insights can help these firms, where knowledge is their biggest asset, to keep valuable human capital. Existing research has identified various aspects of the *new organisational career* and how it affects organisations and its employees. There are several factors presented that may influence the employees' preferences and intent to retain in the company.

Research Method

In this chapter, we describe and argue for the choice of research method in this study. First, the chosen research design and research method are presented. Further, we describe the sample of the research, how the data collection is conducted and analysed. The quality of the research is then assessed. Finally, ethical concerns related to the research method is considered.

Research Design

Choice of research method depends on the research question and the objectives of the study. Our aim is to reach an understanding as to how consultancy firms' career path practices affects the employees' prospects within the company. Previous research has studied career paths within PSFs (Harris et. al., 2015; Malhotra et.al., 2010; Malhotra et.al., 2016; Benko & Weisberg, 2007), but few has focused on newly hired consultants (less than 3 years) and the practices' effect on their retention. Thus, an inductive approach is ideal to elaborate theory by developing a richer theoretical perspective than already exists in the literature (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). We found an exploratory study as an advantageous means to ask open questions to gain a deeper understanding and insights in a topic where the research is currently limited. The advantage of this type of design is that it is flexible and adaptable to change. Exploratory research enables us to change our direction as new data appear and new experiences occur to us (Saunders et.al., 2012).

Case Study

This study focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a specific setting, by generating answers to the questions 'why? what? and how?' (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et.al., 2012). Saunders et.al. (2012) defines a case study as a «*research strategy that involves empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence*» (p.666). Thus, a case study is appropriate in this research as it seeks to gain depth insights in a phenomenon within its context (Saunders et.al., 2012).

Our study comprises eight different consultancy firms located in Oslo, whereas the main object is to explore particular cases of how consultants perceive their employer firm's career-practices, rather than to generalize. Although, findings based on this research strategy is difficult to generalize, we believe that the results could provide value to other professional service firms characterized by a similar context.

Research Method

The nature of our research is inductive and exploratory, aiming to gain a rich understanding of the case being studied. Given the nature of our research we find a qualitative method appropriate to answer the research question. Conducting semi-structured and in-depth interviews is preferable as we wish to convey individual's perceptions, experiences and attitudes, and to understand the context (Saunders et.al., 2012). There are some weaknesses related to conducting a qualitative research method, especially the fact that it is considered less objective, time-consuming, and difficult to replicate and generalize the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, the value of using in-depth and semi-structured interviews is derived from the flexibility that we may use to explore the complexity of the topic (Saunders et.al., 2012). We believe that this research method will be helpful to collect a rich and detailed data set to address our research question and objectives.

Sampling

To acquire the empirical basis of the study, gaining access to a suitable sample of participants is of essence. This section presents how we have gone forward to gain access and how we selected our sample.

Gaining Access and Preparation

To carry out our interviews, we found it necessary to gain traditional access which involves face-to-face interactions (Saunders et.al., 2012). Our strategy to gain access entailed using existing contacts and developing new ones. We requested access by approaching past students and acquaintances, now working as consultants, known to us through our networks. One advantage of this type of approach is that these individuals have knowledge of us, and are thereby more likely to trust our stated intentions and the assurances we give about the use of any data they share (Saunders et.al., 2012). However, it is important that we acknowledge our position in the field, and consider the existing relationship between the researcher and the researched. One of the researchers knew six of the respondents beforehand. The existing contacts were then utilised to gain access to their professional colleagues whom we did not know. This form of gaining access is suitable to use when doing a case study, and when conducting an in-depth study that focuses on a small, purposively selected sample (Saunders et.al., 2012).

Sampling

As previously mentioned, to answer our research question we are undertaking an in-depth study that focuses on one case which is selected purposively to meet our objectives. Thus, non-probability and purposive sampling is a suitable technique. This entails that the study's sample relies on our subjective judgment to select the proper sample. Even though purposive sampling cannot be statistically representative for the total population, our objective is making generalisations to theory rather than about a population (Saunders et.al., 2012). The goal is to gain access to a wide range of individuals relevant to our research question, providing us with many different perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The study's research question communicates that the perspectives and experiences of interest, lays with newly hired (less than 3 years) consultants. Thus, the respondents need to reflect these characteristics. Certain sample selection criteria were identified prior to our selection, to choose respondents that will best enable us to answer our research question. The criteria were consultants whose been working in a consultancy firm for less than 3 years. Based on these criteria, the sample will typically consist of one subgroup whereas the sample members are similar in terms of occupation (consultant) and level in the company (less than 3 years of experience). This sampling technique is referred to as homogeneous sampling, involving that characteristics of the selected participants are similar (Saunders et.al., 2012). By implementing homogenous purposive sampling, it allows us to explore the perspectives of the respondents in greater depth, and discovering the differences among them.

The sample came from eight different consulting companies of various size (Table 1). The enterprises are categorized as micro, small, medium-sized and large enterprises based on number of persons employed. One firm is categorized as a micro enterprise, three firms as small enterprises, one firm as medium-sized enterprise, and five firms as large enterprises (Ec.europa.eu, 2016). We ended up conducting a total of ten interviews. The sample size depended on our research objectives, what we found out and what we considered useful during the interviews. We conducted additional interviews until we reached the point where little new information was provided to us. Our sample has an even distribution of men and women. Naturally, there was an overweight of young respondents, as we requested newly hired consultants through our own networks. Table 1 illustrates an overview of the respondents and the size of their employer company.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

| Respondent | Gender | Company Size (No. Employees) |
|-------------------|---------------|---|
| Respondent 1 | Female | 250 000 (≥ 250) Large enterprise |
| Respondent 2 | Female | 442 000 (≥ 250) Large enterprise |
| Respondent 3 | Female | 154 (<250) Medium-sized enterprise |
| Respondent 4 | Male | 19 (<50) Small enterprise |
| Respondent 5 | Male | 36 (<50) Small enterprise |
| Respondent 6 | Female | 442 000 (≥ 250) Large enterprise |
| Respondent 7 | Male | 250 000 (≥ 250) Large enterprise |
| Respondent 8 | Female | 7 (<10) Micro enterprise |
| Respondent 9 | Male | 4343 (≥ 250) Large enterprise |
| Respondent 10 | Male | 36 (<50) Small Enterprise |

Micro enterprises: <10 , less than 10 persons employed

Small enterprises: <50 , less than 50 persons employed

Medium-sized enterprises: <250 , less than 250 persons employed

Large: ≥ 250 , 250 employees or more

Interviews

In this section, we present how we collected data, prepared our interview guide and carried out the interviews itself.

Data Collection

As previously mentioned, we conducted in-depth interviews to collect data. In an exploratory study like ours, in-depth interviews can be very helpful to figure out what is happening and to understand the context within the consultancy firms (Saunders et.al., 2012). We implemented semi-structured, in-depth interviews whereas an interview guide was developed prior to the interviews. This form of interviewing allows for flexibility during the interview as the order of questions may be varied depending on the flow of the conversation. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews provides us with the opportunity to ‘probe’ answers where further explanations from the interviewees are preferable (Saunders et.al., 2012).

Interview Guide

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher typically has a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered, which is referred to as an interview guide (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Appendix 3). By employing an interview guide it helps us to cover all our intended subjects, while maintaining a structure throughout the interviews.

Based on our literature searches and the research question we developed interview themes that reflect the variables we want to study. Our aim was to ensure a logical order of the questions, making it easy for the respondents to follow a reasonably flow of the questions. The interview guide always started by asking the interviewee about the number of years of employment in the consultancy company. Such information is useful for contextualising the interviewees responses (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Further, the interview guide used an ‘open ended’ approach whereas the respondents were subjected to relatively open questions that allowed them to freely discuss insights and ideas about a subject. Related to each theme we formulated initial questions, accompanied by probes that were used to follow up the initial responses to obtain greater details from the interviewees. The interview guide ended with a so-called ‘catch-all’ question, whereas the interviewees had the opportunity to comment fully on the topic and to raise any issues that we had overlooked in our questions.

As we conducted interviews, we learned that certain questions provided us with little relevant responses. Thus, we decided to make changes where we replaced some questions as we got a better understanding of the consultancy firms’ career practices. Before each interview we supplied the respondents with information about the research objectives, and a list of the interview themes (Appendix 1). Providing information to the respondents prior to the interview gives them the opportunity to prepare, and can promote credibility (Saunders et.al., 2012).

The Interview Process

The interviews were conducted in neutral settings, e.g. in a quiet café or in meeting rooms of the respondent’s workplace. We wanted the respondents to feel comfortable enough to express their personal opinions without any disturbances. Before starting the interview, the respondents received a letter where they signed consent to participate in the study (Appendix 2). They had the options to check off if they wanted the master thesis in its entirety when finished, and if they wanted a copy of the transcribed interview. We emphasized that we would ensure anonymity, in terms of name, position and employer. The respondents also had

to agree that the interview was recorded. The procedure of using an audio-recorder is important for implementing a detailed analysis and to ensure that the interviewees' answers are captured in their own terms. Also, it enables us to be responsive to the interviewees' answers so that it is possible to follow them up (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

As previously mentioned the interview guide commenced with fairly open questions to gain better insights into the respondents own perspectives and experiences. This helps reduce any bias and increase reliability (Saunders et al., 2012). Open questions invite the interviewee to respond more in depth and detailed, and are considered less leading than more specific questions. The initial questions were formulated as 'how' questions, and the probing questions were designed to avoid leading the respondent. Thus, we attempted to ask the probes in terms of 'why' and 'can you elaborate on that'.

The interviews were conducted in June 2018 in Oslo. Length of the interviews varied from 17 minutes to 46 minutes. The average length of the interviews was 30.7 minutes (Table 2). We were both present at eight of the interviews, and two were done without the other due to work commitments. The presence of both researchers on nearly all interviews may strengthen the validity, because one of the researchers may have done an observation that the other missed. After the interviews, we made notes of how the interview went, where it took place, feelings about the interview, and characteristics concerning the setting.

Table 2: Overview of Interviews

| Respondent | Date | Duration |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Respondent 1 | June 4th 2018 | 31 minutes |
| Respondent 2 | June 4th 2018 | 18 minutes |
| Respondent 3 | June 6th 2018 | 22 minutes |
| Respondent 4 | June 11th 2018 | 46 minutes |
| Respondent 5 | June 13th 2018 | 38 minutes |
| Respondent 6 | June 15th 2018 | 25 minutes |
| Respondent 7 | June 16th 2018 | 46 minutes |
| Respondent 8 | June 25th 2018 | 17 minutes |
| Respondent 9 | June 26th 2018 | 30 minutes |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------|------------|
| Respondent 10 | July 4th 2018 | 34 minutes |
|---------------|---------------|------------|

Data Analysis

This section presents how we transcribed, structured and analysed the data from our semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Transcribing

We transcribed the audio recorded interviews to a written form immediately after each interview was finished. In addition to what the respondents said, the way in which they said it is also essential for our analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). We noted relevant non-verbal communications, i.e. body-language and mood. By transcribing right after the interview, we ensured that essential factors beyond what was said, was not forgotten. Making sure that the transcription was accurate, we listened through the tape for final correction of any transcription errors. Also, we sent a copy of the transcripts to the respondents for final checking as it helps ensure factual accuracy (Saunders et al., 2012). Transcribing the interviews provided us with a total overview of the entire data material, forming the basis for the analysis. To prepare the data material for further analysis, we found it helpful to produce a summary of the key points from the transcripts.

Template Analysis

To analyse the qualitative data set, we implemented a template analysis. Such an analysis involves identifying categories per themes and attaching units of data to the categories (Saunders et al., 2012). Our analysis started with some predetermined codes, which are the themes that we expected to be highly relevant to the analysis, i.e. commitment, career practices and career model. Reading through the data set, we started marking segments that was of relevance to the research question. The segments which corresponded with our predetermined themes were coded as such, while new codes were added into the hierarchy as we uncovered new themes of relevance. Finally, when all transcripts had been coded into the template, it serves as the basis for our interpretation of the data and our findings.

Quality of Research Method

All research methods have limitations, and this section presents our assessment of the quality of our research based on the criteria of reliability and validity. We explain how we attempted to avoid bias that would threaten the quality of the research.

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with whether your data collection techniques and analytic procedures would produce consistent findings if they were repeated on another occasion or if they were replicated by a different researcher (Saunders et al., 2012, p.192). The lack of standardisation in semi-structured and in-depth interviews leads to concerns about reliability (Saunders et al., 2012). First, it is essential to state that the research objectives are to explore complex and dynamic contexts in a flexible way, with no intentions to be replicable. However, we did try to strengthen the reliability by avoiding biases. Interviewer and interviewee biases can be limited by preparing for and conducting the interviews in a proper manner (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, we obtained knowledge of the context and the group we were studying, supplied the respondents with sufficient information and attempted to avoid leading questions. Also, we recorded the interviews to ensure accurate data and other essential factors from the interview setting.

Validity

Findings from qualitative interviews are based on a small and unrepresentative number of cases, and it is therefore difficult to apply the findings to other settings (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, the external validity or generalisability is a common concern in qualitative research studies. Based on the nature of our research, which involves a qualitative case study using a small non-probability sample, it is difficult to make generalisations about an entire population. However, we argue that the purpose of our research is not to generalise, but rather to examine a particular setting: newly hired consultants' perceptions and attitudes related to career practices.

In semi-structured and in-depth interviews, a high level of validity may be achieved where the interviews are conducted carefully by clarifying questions, probing meanings and being able to explore responses and themes from a variety of angles (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, to increase the validity, we have been careful to ask explicit and comprehensible questions to

get clear answers from the respondents. Also, as previously mentioned, the respondents were offered to read through the transcribed interview to ensure there was not any misunderstandings. All the respondents agreed to this.

Ethics

In the process of gaining access to respondents, we supplied the potential respondents with a participation information sheet. By providing the individuals with sufficient information about the study and what participation would entail, they could make a fully informed decision on whether to participate. All respondents were asked to sign an informed consent form after reading the information letter. The respondents involved in this research has generously shared their own perspectives and attitudes concerning their employer organisation. Therefore, it is important that the research design does not subject those we are researching to the risk of embarrassment, harm or any other disadvantage (Saunders et al., 2012). Securing the anonymity of participants' identity has been a priority. Their names, age, gender, employer company, or position were not asked or collected. In cases where the respondents revealed information about employer and position, it was replaced by internal codes within the transcripts. The audio recordings were deleted after transcribing.

Summary

This chapter has presented the research method in which forms the basis for this study. We have used a qualitative method, by collecting data through ten semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The data set were then analysed through a template analysis, which entails categorising the data into relevant themes. We attempted to strengthen the reliability by preparing for and conducting the interviews in a proper manner, to avoid biases. To secure and increase the validity, we have been careful to ask clear questions, and sent transcribed material to the respondents to ensure accuracy. However, the external validity is weak, because we have used a small non-probability sample. Therefore, it is difficult to make generalisations from our findings to other settings. Nevertheless, we still believe that the research will provide valuable insights for those who read it.

Findings

In this chapter, we will present the empirical findings of the study. After categorizing and analysing the interview transcripts, some themes have recurred with most respondents. These topics are relevant and important to answer our research question, as well as important to the respondents themselves. The themes involve; *career prospects, career anchors, perceived investment in employee career development practices, proactivity, career development practices, career model, commitment, and psychological contract*. The findings are presented as a summary of the respondent's answers regarding each topic, supplemented by quotes from the respondents.

Career Prospects

We wanted to identify the respondents' career prospects as it forms the basis for the research study. Envisioning their career prospects, five of the respondents emphasized the importance of exciting and challenging work tasks and roles. The general view amongst these respondents entailed that the work tasks needed to be enjoyable, interesting and challenging. One of the respondents highlighted that: *«It needs to be something fun that motivates me to get up every morning» (Respondent 2*. Another respondent found challenges, freedom, and a good working environment as essential factors when picturing his future career.

Further, four of the respondents highlighted their desire to try out new aspects of the industry within their current organisation or in new organisations. One respondent imagines that her career prospects involve a combination of crossing roles and organisations. This is supported by two respondents who both stated that it is essential to try new departments or organisations. One respondent conveyed that rapidly climbing the corporate ladder is not a concern for her. She is rather interested in trying out new and exciting areas within the company: *«If there are some opportunities to advance in the organisation, I think it is equally important that you have the opportunity to move sideways and test different areas of the company. Because if not, I believe it may be a bit monotonous, and then you may want to get out of that business before you reach the top anyway» (Respondent 6)*. The general take-away from this is that these respondents all expressed their interest in trying out different aspects of the company to learn and gain more experiences.

For three of the respondents it is important to expand their knowledge base, and acquire new skills. One of the respondents has ambitions to start her own company in the future. Therefore, she is eager to learn as much as possible and be challenged in her job. Obtaining further knowledge within the subject she is specialized in is essential. Picturing his career, respondent 9 expressed how it is important that he experiences progression, personal development and has a positive learning curve over time. Finally, a respondent stated that: *«I would like to expand my skill set and competence by trying out new roles. I can become a project manager and so later in my career» (Respondent 10).*

Five of the respondents expressed the significance of advancing upwards in the hierarchy. Nevertheless, neither of the respondents seemed to have any rush in climbing the corporate ladder. Respondent 1 stated that she would like to slowly but surely move upwards in an organisation. She did however say that: *«I have not decided that in a certain number of years I will become a project manager in that particular company, I am not that determined. I am very open-minded».* Furthermore, a respondent added to the fact that he wants to be professionally challenged with interesting tasks, by stating: *«Of course, you are interested in getting to a level where you get more responsibility, and it is always nice with a higher salary» (Respondent 7).* Respondent 10 supported this statement because advancing upwards to gain more responsibilities, by becoming a project manager, is a goal for the respondent. However, he stated that he is also interested in trying out different aspects of the company to learn and gain more experiences, before taking on management responsibilities. Another respondent presented a different perspective, as she wanted to advance within the consulting industry to build a network: *«Perhaps I will work for a few years in consulting and work my way up the ladder to build social capital» (Respondent 8).*

Finally, when asked to envision his career, one respondent emphasized the aspect of being a contribution and taking ownership of the work. *«For me, it is about being able to influence or make a difference during my career. Whether it is creating something in a big or small firm, or perhaps in my own firm, is not so important. However, being able to improve something, that is important. Enjoying what you do, and that you have a personal stake in it is something that I seek going forward in my career» (Respondent 9).*

Career Orientations

Based on Schein's career anchors we wanted to find out what was important for the respondents. Several of the participants said that there were multiple of the anchors that were important to them. Eight of the respondents found autonomy as one of the most important anchors. Four of them mentioned that it is important that they can manage their own time if they deliver what they are supposed to. This is supported by one of the respondents who works in a big consultancy company: *«If I had the opportunity to manage my own time I would have been able to organize and prioritize my work in a better and more efficient way. This way I would not have to work weekends. When I have been able to manage my own work, I get much more motivated» (Respondent 6)*. Respondent 10 expressed that the presence of autonomy and independence was one of the main reasons for why he wanted to work in a smaller company.

Another anchor that was mentioned by seven of the respondents was entrepreneurial creativity. From their answers, it shows that they care about creating something within a company, and contributing that way. Respondent 4 expressed that: *«Creating something through my work is very important to me»*. This was further supported by Respondent 8, who stated: *«Creating something in a company is what triggers me to work within consulting»*.

Lifestyle and work-life balance were mentioned by five of the respondents. Some of them recognized that this anchor would be more important in the future. Both respondent 1 and 2 found lifestyle as a very important aspect of their career: *«... being able to combine career and progression with family is important to me» (Respondent 1)*. Respondent 7 found lifestyle important, but considered it to be more of a hygiene factor, however he did not want to be as his boss who only saw his family on Saturdays because of work. One of the respondents presented a different point of view regarding lifestyle and its significance for him and his career moving forward: *«Depending on how fun it is to work; it becomes less important to have time off because work becomes your 'hobby'. However, if you lack ownership and you are not 100% committed at work, then work/balance becomes important» (Respondent 9)*.

Further, managerial competence was mentioned by five of the respondents. Respondent 1 expressed how she wanted to obtain managerial competence and get more responsibility in

the future. One of the respondents reflected over the idea that if you get more managerial competence it would naturally lead to more autonomy/independence, which in turn would provide you with more time to execute entrepreneurial creativity.

In relation to managerial competence, one of the respondents reflected over the management competence anchor versus the technical competence anchor: *«I am motivated by the desire to be a specialist within a field. That is more important to me than being a leader. Being a leader in itself is not so interesting, but being an expert within a field is something that appeals to me»* (Respondent 2). Furthermore, there were shared opinions related to the anchor regarding the desire to become a specialist within one's chosen occupation. Two of the respondents claim that being a specialist is something they find interesting: *«Becoming an expert within a field is something I could picture myself being, but it would have to be later»* (Respondent 6). In contrast, two respondents expressed that they do not want to become a specialist at all: *«I am more of generalist than a specialist»* (Respondent 9). *«To become an expert is not important to me. I think you eliminate a lot to of areas to work within»* (Respondent 10).

The career anchor involving service and dedication to a cause were important to three of the respondents. *«For me, it's about being able to influence or make a difference with my work»* (Respondent 9). Finally, the anchor related to safety and stability were considered as a hygiene factor by two of the respondents: *«Safety and stability is definitely important, but I consider it more as a hygiene factor»* (Respondent 10).

Perceived Investment in Employee Career Development Practices

Several of the respondents conveyed that they have employers who invests in the employees by offering mandatory courses and additional voluntary courses to expand their employees' knowledge base. However, all respondents implied that they were expected to be self-driven and take responsibility for their own career development.

One respondent expressed that they have two years of mandatory courses, and in addition to this they can sign up for different communities after hours. *«They are very good at offering us courses. We have courses you can sign up for voluntary in the evenings in which you are payed. These involve talking about a specific field, or you can participate in solving cases*

and stuff like that. It is really cool» (Respondent 7). Respondent 2 stated that they have many mandatory courses that are required, and that the organisation has a lot of focus on offering opportunities regarding courses. They have opportunities that exceed what is required, but you would have to be willing to put in an effort: *«... it is expected that you put in an extra effort yourself though» (Respondent 2).*

Respondent 6, who works in the same company as Respondent 2, adds that they have a week in Spain every year where they can learn core consulting skills. She also stated that if you would like to advance upwards you can go on their platform to find the competence requirements and see what you are lacking. *«Other than that we have many different courses on our platform which can last from 30 minutes to several days, both virtually and in classrooms» (Respondent 6).* Further, she mentioned that the employees have a personal training budget that they can use on competence development activities as they like. The respondent appreciates how the company invests in their employees.

Another respondent who also works in a big company expressed how they also have many mandatory courses, and many additional courses that are optional. Here, it seems like they can focus on their interests: *«We have the freedom to choose. If you are very keen on working with personal development, then we have a lot of opportunities and you can do it all the time if you like. And if you only want to do it occasionally, that is also okay. So, it's very individually controlled» (Respondent 9).*

Nevertheless, not all the respondents who works in companies that offer many courses and training opportunities are completely satisfied. Respondent 1 thought that the courses and training related to competence development was really good, but she misses more focus on personalized career development and her career prospects within the company: *«They are focused on training us to be better, but little is communicated as to how far you can go within the organisation and what your career prospects could be. That is something I would like to have more of. The firm made it clear from the beginning that your career development is basically up to yourself. You need to take responsibility to sign up for the courses you would like to attend to gain a particular competence».* Similarly, another respondent expressed: *«We are very lucky in the organisation that I work because we use a lot of time to build competence. Even though that is good, I don't get much follow up on my career and how I can get better at what I am doing, or in what direction it could take me» (Respondent 3).*

Three respondents, who all work in small or medium sized enterprises (SME), were not satisfied as they wished that it would have been invested more resources in them. All three respondents communicated that there is a lack of structure and courses to introduce them to their work. *«In my organisation, the competence development is done through the work you do. I had hoped that there would be more structured career development when I began working here. I used six months to understand that 'okay, there is no structure here'. You just have to keep going on your own» (Respondent 4).* Furthermore, a respondent stated: *«Where I work there is a bit of chaos, so it is not much focus on personal development and progress really. It is more task oriented than person oriented» (Respondent 8).*

One respondent, who is part of the competence group responsible for the on-boarding in the company, stated: *«We have traditionally been bad at investments in personal career development as there were not many new employees hired. So, when I started, it was a bit like do it yourself, there was no system. We were not good at it then. Now we have realized that we must invest resources in newly hired employees and their development» (Respondent 10).* The respondent identifies with the company in such a way that he talks about resources invested in him in a more general way: *«We have set some frameworks and structures for how we want to work with the development of the employees, but they are also relatively new.... We do not have much courses and so because we find that the best learning is done on project» (Respondent 10).* Supporting this statement, one of the other respondents emphasized the aspect of on-the-job learning: *«When we talk about development, working out on a project is where you learn the most, but those courses and so, they help you when you are out» (Respondent 7).*

One of the respondents used to work in a big consulting firm, but now works in a smaller firm. He perceives that his employer expects them to be self-driven on career development activities. *«One of the things we are evaluated on is how we develop our competencies and how we develop the company with that particular competence. We do not have any fixed budget regarding coursing or training, but if you can defend your time and resources used on learning something, it is okay» (Respondent 5).* The respondent also explained how the organisation offers required courses to learn certain things to carry out his job.

Time and Resources

In relation to how the employees perceive the investment in resources, we asked them whether they feel that the organisation provide them with the sufficient time and resources to complete the courses and trainings. Three of the respondents mentioned how they need to prioritize the client, and because of that it is difficult to set aside time to take the courses. They had different attitudes towards it though. A respondent found it difficult to manage her time, and wanted the organisation to provide more flexibility to engage in career development activities: *«The challenge is that they push on attending courses, but the challenge is getting the time to do it. I think if you want to make it work then you may need to have a fixed day once a month, where you for instance have three hours dedicated to courses. We have such a high priority list that the customer always comes first, so you always put everything else aside»* (Respondent 1). Similarly, another respondent also experienced having too little time to participate on career development activities at the moment: *«I am probably one of those who have taken fewest of the courses because I have been working on a project that is quite time consuming and resource-intensive. It has often been the case that project-specific tasks have appeared and I had to cancel courses. Despite the busy days with ongoing projects, I still have a training budget, and the opportunity to complete courses when I have the time»* (Respondent 6). One of the respondents does not feel that the organisation invests much in time and resources because the client is to be prioritized: *«Here, billable hours are written in CAPS LOCK, bold writing. If it is not affecting billable work, it is okay to do other activities»* (Respondent 4). One respondent expressed how it is expected that you put in a certain effort yourself to follow through with career development activities: *«The firm expect that you are willing to put in the effort yourself, as you get paid for the hours you spend on it. However, when engaging in courses and such, your workload will naturally increase for a period. Thus, then it comes to participating in courses, you will need to find time to do it outside of client projects»* (Respondent 2).

Finally, two of the respondents stated how they are satisfied with how their company considers the time and resources needed to participate in career development activities: *«They are very good at having courses and put in time and resources for you to take them. In addition, we have the opportunity to participate on extra courses after hours in which we get paid to do. So, that is very good»* (Respondent 7).

Importance of Career Development Activities

All the respondents we spoke with said that it was important for them that they were offered career development activities. One respondent mentioned how such activities is motivating: *«I think it is important and I am highly motivated by it. I am driven by being able to develop myself further, both professionally and on consultancy skills. Therefore, to me it is crucial that I am offered such development activities by my employer» (Respondent 1).*

The second respondent talked about the importance of staying relevant and updated to be attractive for the employer. She also said: *«It is also important to feel that the employer is invested in me, and wants to invest in me. A feeling of loyalty» (Respondent 2).* Further, two of the respondents mentioned that career development activities are so important for them that it was one of the main reasons for why they chose to enter that particular firm: *«It is essential in the beginning of your career. This is one of the main reasons why I have chosen to go to a consulting company like this. It will be absolutely crucial to build a skill set and to develop yourself as much as possible at the start so that you become a valuable asset to the firm» (Respondent 7).* Sharing this opinion is respondent 6 who stated that: *«It is important, especially in the beginning when you do not know exactly what work life is about yet, and you are coming straight out of school».*

For respondent 4 the career development was important, but it did not necessarily need to be in the form of structured courses or training: *«Personal career development is important to me as I want a steep learning curve. When the learning curve is declining because I am not sufficiently challenged in the projects, I would like to supplement it with courses. However, if I learn enough by working on challenging projects it is not as important with courses and such» (Respondent 4).* Another respondent shared a similar opinion: *«I believe it is more about having the opportunity to manage my time, than the importance of having the regular courses and certifications» (Respondent 5).*

Also, talking about the importance of being on an interesting and challenging project is respondent 10: *«I started in a small firm because I did not want a set structure of mandatory courses, I wanted to be thrown out in deep water. As of now I am happy with the opportunities I have gotten, but it depends on the projects. My first year I was at a project*

that lasted for a year. I learned a lot in the beginning, but after a while my learning curve flattened. To me, it is important that competence development is done on the projects».

Career Development Practices

We wanted to gain an understanding of what kind of career practices the different consultancy companies implemented, and if there was any similarities or differences among the various enterprises.

Respondent 1 communicates that there is a huge focus on career development within her firm. The employer offers a two-year program for the newcomers, in which involves mandatory and required courses. The respondent also explained that the firm has introduced a new development concept that are intended to promote a desire for expanding their knowledge base. In addition, she stated: *«We have an annual trip abroad where we are three days participating on various courses. I feel that it is a great focus on employee learning and development» (Respondent 1)*. This perspective is supported by respondent 7, who works in the same company as respondent 1: *«My employer has introduced a new practice were the employees take a course online, and then show their newly obtained competence in a real project. A partner will then approve that they have the competence at a level of bronze, silver or gold standard» (Respondent 7)*. However, respondent 1 do miss more specific practices in terms of guiding the employees' future career in the organisation: *«My employer has from the beginning expressed that your own career development in this company is pretty much up to you. You must take responsibility to communicate which courses you would like to attend to achieve your preferred professional competence. This is both good and bad, because the outcome will be that you are either active or passive» (Respondent 1)*.

Another respondent expressed how the employer offers mandatory training, trips abroad with coursing, a learning platform with virtual and classroom courses, a personal training budget, and a career counsellor for each employee. In terms of the career counsellor she stated that: *«We have meetings with the career counsellor where we talk about my opportunities within the company and the different offers that I can make use of. The counsellor also asks me whether I am enjoying my current work, and if something could be improved. I find the offers diverse and well communicated» (Respondent 6)*.

Respondent 9 explained how their career practice for newly hired consultants entail a *first 1000-days* program where everyone is required to follow certain courses. In addition, the company offer good internal competence teams who provide the employees with development through courses or interest groups. The respondent talked about how every employee has a personal performance manager: *«We meet up with our performance manager every third or fourth week to set new goals for the next 90 days. Also, we discuss tasks or roles that I would like to test to challenge myself more at work» (Respondent 9)*. The respondent mentioned a program they have, called *structured personal development*. He stated that the employees were well informed about training opportunities and where to seek guidance. In addition, he explained how every new employee get an introduction to a so-called *competence-matrix* that basically tells them everything they need to know about competence development within the company.

One respondent, who used to work in a large enterprise, but now works in a small enterprise did a comparison of the two different companies: *«There is a much better flow of information in my current company, as it is much smaller than my former employer. Although the larger enterprises offer more possibilities, it comes across as diffuse because there is so much information to process. In a smaller company, it is much more clarified, even though the level of opportunities is smaller here, e.g. they have not the same opportunity to travel on projects internationally» (Respondent 5)*.

One of the respondents, communicates some discontent regarding her employer's career development practice. The respondent made this statement: *«My employer has introduced a so-called career-tree, which is supposed to illustrate the different paths within the company. However, the tree is not descriptive at all, it does not show any clear steps. I find the career development area of the company as poor, because they present no clear path for my career within the company. I do not even know when I am done being a junior consultant...so there is not a structured career path or development practice» (Respondent 3)*. Further, she explained how she was told to put together a plan until 2020, but did not get any instructions or guidance as to how develop this plan. The respondent told us that the management easily forgot about career development, and did not necessarily understand that it is important to people. Respondent 4 highlighted how he requested introducing a mentoring practice in his company, and the advantages it would provide the employees. Even though the company has

considered implementing such a practice several times, it is not billable work so therefore has it never become a reality.

A respondent's employer had another take on career practices, whereas he stated that they do not offer much courses and so because they find that the best learning is done out on projects. Therefore, the company had set a framework and a method on how to foster competence development on the projects. The respondent did however express how they have implemented a competency game: *«If you read an article or book or something like that, we will register it in a google doc, and then you get points, and good articles are spread out to the employees» (Respondent 10)*. He explained how the company has also clarified that the employees can use a certain amount of time during the year to attend courses and such. Finally, this respondent highlighted a new practice tailored for the new employees which is called *on-boarding revolution*. This practice involves putting together some introductory packages related to the core businesses of the firm, providing the newcomers with a solid foundation to get started quickly.

Assessment Consultations

We wanted to identify how the various consulting companies performs assessment sessions and guidance for their employees, as this is a central aspect of a firm's career practice. The general perspective amongst all the respondents were that they have some form of assessment with a supervisor during the year.

Five of the respondents stated that their employer provided each employee with a career counsellor. Respondent 1 explained that they have conversations four times a year with their nearest supervisor, a PA (personal responsible), to talk about personal development and potential improvements: *«We discuss both which activities to focus on going forward, while also reflecting on the past and my accomplishments. However, this practice is new, before we only looked back on everything you had done previously and received a grade based on the work performance» (Respondent 1)*. Likewise, another respondent stated that all employees in her firm are assigned a career counsellor: *«We have conversations with our career counsellor 1-2 times every six months to reflect on our progression and the way forward» (Respondent 2)*. Respondent 6, who works in the same company as respondent 2, also mentioned having career counsellors they meet with regularly about guidance. Similarly, respondent 7 and 9 explained that their firms offer a performance manager to every employee

and how they operate with 90-day cycles. Before each cycle, the employee and his PA set up some activities to ensure personal development. This practice also entails giving feedback to the employee. Respondent 7 who works in the same company as Respondent 1, also mentioned the previous practice which involved giving grades for prior accomplishments and not focusing as much on future development: *«Previously, we had meetings whereas we listed every activity completed, received a grade for your work and then moved on to discussing your salary. The company realised that this created incorrect incentives and wanted to move away from this practice. Today's assessment sessions do not affect our salary, but is just for your own personal development» (Respondent 7).*

One of the respondents referred to his employer's assessment practice as *calibration*. The company offers it three times a year, and it involves the management sending out a questionnaire in advance to all employees asking them to rate two of their employees and themselves. After finishing the rating, you get a score and discuss it in the assessment meeting with supervisors. Feedback on various working conditions as well as future aspects of the employees' career is also a subject of matter in this session. Furthermore, respondent 10 mentioned how his firm implements a 360 evaluation four times a year: *«I evaluate myself in terms of what I have done well and what I can do better. Thereafter, I evaluate all the people I have worked with, and then I have a chat with my manager» (Respondent 10).* One employer offers assessment and guidance sessions once every six months. However, the respondent stated that you could initiate additional guidance if you desired: *«My firm appreciates receiving and providing me with feedback. I believe that in a consultancy firm feedback and guidance are crucial as consultants primarily sell their knowledge to the customers» (Respondent 5).*

Two of the respondents were not all content with the consultations initiated by the employer. Respondent 3 expressed how her company have assessment sessions, but she was not pleased with the way the conversations unfolded. She explained that when she expressed dissatisfaction with her current job and wanted to do something about it, she did not get the guidance she needed: *«Instead of asking me how I am feeling that things are going at work, my supervisor only told me that I was doing a good job» (Respondent 3).* Respondent 8 also communicated some discontent with the way her employer carried out the assessment and personal development of the employees. She explained how she needed to initiate the

conversation herself, and expressed how she would like to be more challenged and do things a bit differently at work.

Career Model

Seven of the respondents works for firms that have a structured vertical career model. There are defined levels ranging from consultant, senior consultant, manager, senior manager and partner. One of the respondents described their model by stating: *«It is a very defined career ladder with promotion steps, so you are constantly being measured on where you stand in relation to getting a promotion. There is a normal progression, a given number of years it is common to be on a certain job level before advancing further upwards» (Respondent 2).*

Respondent 1 stated how their model involves advancing upwards, and that for those who do not advance the firm has created a level referred to as ‘consultant group 3’: *«Usually, everyone advances upwards from consultancy group 1 to group 2 before becoming senior consultant. Those who do not advance end up being a consultant on level 3. However, the commodity is that these employees recognize that they should move on and find something else to do. My employer has actually stated that a part of their pyramid involves hiring a lot of people, and that a fair part leaves after a short period» (Respondent 1).* Further, the same respondent talked about how the company carry out the assessment of promotion for the employees: *«There is an evaluation of everyone every year where they have a roundtable. The partners discuss every face and talk about what they have done. If you have performed in accordance to the set standards you will get a promotion».* Four other respondents talked about having a similar meeting before they would get a promotion.

The employer of respondent 9 follows a set structure with a timeframe. However, the timeframe is more of an indication of how long it takes to acquire the knowledge and skills they are expected to have before moving to the next level. Two other respondents mentioned the opportunity to advance faster than the model indicated: *«We have a flexible model. When I first started working in the company they said it took 1-2 years before I could advance from junior consultant to consultant. However, later the managers expressed that if you do well it would be possible to advance in less than a year» (Respondent 4).* This respondent had worked there for 9 months and got the promotion the day we interviewed him. This type of

flexibility was also found in respondent 10 and his company's career model: *«You could advance faster than normal. I was promoted to consultant after 1,5 years because they were satisfied with the work I did. The managers said that it is possible to advance faster because extra hard work should be rewarded here» (Respondent 10).*

In contrast to these structured stepwise career models, there are two respondents who stated that their company lack a structured model. Respondent 8 thinks she might be done being a junior consultant after one year, but her impression is that she must ask about further advancement. Respondent 3 finds herself in a similar position. She stated that she once was presented with a PowerPoint slide showing a timeframe and career steps, but by her supervisor's behaviour it seemed like it was not meant for her to see. Therefore, she has no further clue on the company's career steps: *«There are no steps described. I don't even know when I finish being a junior» (Respondent 3).*

Naturally, most of the respondents explained how to advance upwards in the hierarchy. However, one of the respondents commented on how that is not the desire for everyone.

«Although the steps in my firm's model are very clear and linear, not everyone wants to advance to the next step. Some want to be at a certain level and just stay there and try out different things. When you reach the higher levels, you need to narrow it down and specialize within a field. Not everyone has a special interest, so they prefer to stay at a specific level to make sure they keep the variety» (Respondent 6). In addition, respondent 9 communicated how people in his organisation mostly set goals to move upwards, but added that it was also possible to just 'go with the flow' if that is a desire for someone. However, he was not sure if anyone does it, but it is possible.

We also asked our respondents about whether their employer offered a horizontal career path. Seven out of ten respondents mentioned that they had the option to switch between the departments within the company. Three respondents expressed how their company offers a form of horizontal career path for their employees. One respondent stated: *«We have horizontal rotation in addition to the vertical career model. If I'm working with data analysis and want to work with strategy, I can apply to move to this department. I always have the opportunity to rotate, I just need to finish my current project, and then I will move on to the*

next team. We work a lot across teams» (Respondent 9). Another respondent expressed how her firm has a horizontal path and how easily the employees can switch between departments: «My employer offers horizontal options, and in several layers, really. You can switch between projects and roles inside the department, and you can also change department. An employee who started at the same time as me was working in financial services. She thought it was boring and switched to my department. It is common to switch across the organisation, and there are many possibilities to do so» (Respondent 6). Lastly, respondent 3 communicated that her company offered both a vertical and horizontal career path: «You can advance upwards and become a senior, or you can move across departments and try new things. We have a very flat structure, so you can basically talk to the director during lunchtime and express your desire to switch departments. Things are done very quickly and easily in my firm. Whether this practice is thought through is debatable, but at least it is very easy to change departments» (Respondent 3).

Furthermore, respondent 5 stated how his firm offers a form of job rotation: *«Yes, we have job rotation, but we have cross-staffing. This entails that we work across departments, whereas everyone has a home-base, but you support other projects across the organisation. The firm encourages this kind of work across departments» (Respondent 5). A respondent commented on how people also switch departments or roles if they are tired of doing the same thing. « I have experienced that much of the reason why people switch roles is that they get bored of one thing or the other. A person who has been working too long in the strategy department might think that it is only arrows and boxes. A person who has been working in analytics for a while might think that it is only about hard numbers and programming» (Respondent 9).*

Two respondents mentioned how they have another practice for those who do not want to advance the corporate ladder. Respondent 4 stated: *«It is possible not to go the typical consultant path, but you can become an expert within a particular field. I would probably call this a horizontal alternative in this context» (Respondent 4). Similarly, another respondent stated that they have the option of becoming a professional expert within an area they are interested in.*

Three respondents talked about the possibility to move between departments, but they were not encouraged to do so: *«It is possible to move to another department, but the firm have a policy where they explain how it is not supposed to be an advantage in terms of salary. There are not so many that switches» (Respondent 1)*. Respondent 2 stated: *«There is no rotation program available. It is a big company and if you are not happy there are ways to change department internally. However, you switch because you do not fit in or want to do something different internally, rather than being encouraged to move around within the company. When you reach higher levels within the firm it becomes more normal to change between departments and roles, but on my level, it is not so available» (Respondent 2)*. In addition, respondent 4 mentioned that if you have trouble fitting in, then the most natural solution would be to look for another place to work.

Proactivity

Nine of the respondents have acted proactive with regards to their own career development, by initiating participation in different courses, conferences, departments, projects and feedback-sessions.

Respondent 1 told us how she initiated a feedback meeting with a partner within her department, to get advice on how to further develop and how her future within the company looked like. Similarly, another respondent took the initiative to participate in a strategy-course whereas she needed to set aside time to complete the course. Another respondent expressed how he acted proactive by strategically seeking out managers to work with to learn from them. *«In my company, it is more about pursuing people you want to work with and learn from, rather than seeking courses. I feel that I have been very proactive on this matter, because now I have worked with everyone at different levels within the organisation» (Respondent 4)*. Furthermore, one of the respondents felt obligated to be proactive as she found herself in an ambiguous position in the company: *«The first six months in this firm I was constantly doing research about other departments and my opportunities within the company. This was a result of being placed in a highly technical role, even though I am not a technical IT professional at all» (Respondent 6)*. Respondent 7 stated how the company require that you to take the initiative for your own development. He explains how he has set

aside a time to outline and plan his upcoming career development activities. One respondent acted proactive by initiating an ‘evening of knowledge’ where she scheduled a specialist to come and present a subject for the employees. Other respondents told us about how they pitched conferences and learning courses to their supervisors that were beyond what their employer offered.

Contrary, respondent 3 have not tried to seek career development activities within her current organisation. She stated that: *«The trainee program I am currently participating in is so badly planned that I do not necessarily want to foster a career path in this firm because I do not think they are competent enough to do it any better in another department either. Therefore, I have not gone out of my way to find out what I can do since I have almost made up my mind that this is not for me» (Respondent 3).*

Psychological Contract

We were interested to see if any of the respondents felt a psychological contract based on the firm’s investments in career development activities. None of the respondents expressed feeling any psychological contract towards their employer based on the development practices and investments. However, the general point of view amongst these respondents entailed that a few of them felt a relational psychological contract towards their colleagues.

Respondent 1 stated that she did not feel any psychological contract after receiving resources to attend courses and such: *«Having attended courses and trainings would not solely make me stay at the firm if I got another great job offer» (Respondent 1).* Likewise, respondent 2 did not feel a psychological contract towards her employer. One of the respondents who were considering seeking out of her firm, explained how she initially were concerned with the huge amount of resources her employer had spent on her training. However, after speaking to her brother-in-law who also were a consultant, she realized that staying in a company just because you feel that they have invested resources in you would be a mistake: *«What is the option really, I cannot stay in a job for several years because I felt obligated due to the money spent on my training. So, now I have stopped thinking about it» (Respondent 3).* Another respondent told us how she did not consider career development activities as something binding for her to stay in the firm. In addition, she stated that the investments in training would probably benefit the employer anyways, as the knowledge acquired would be

advantageous for as long as she worked there. Two respondents stated that they have seen how much their company are billing for their work compared to the compensation provided, and thereby do not feel that the investments are binding. Respondent 7 stated: *«I do not feel a psychological contract towards my firm, because you see what they earn on my work compared to what they pay me in compensation».*

Four of the respondents explained how they rather felt a psychological contract towards their human relations within the company. One of them stated that he did not feel particularly invested in, but if he were to leave his firm, he would feel that he was disappointing his colleagues a little bit. Supporting this perspective, respondent 5 stated: *«I feel that there is more of a psychological contract between the employees rather towards the company itself. Consulting is a profession where you are extremely dependent on your colleagues and having a good relationship with them as you often need each other's help. Therefore, I do not necessarily feel that I owe the company something, but rather my colleagues» (Respondent 5).* One of the respondents, who works in a small consultancy company, expressed that it would be hard to leave the firm because of her close relationships towards her colleagues: *«Because the firm is so small, you get to know each other very well. Thus, you take certain things much more personal than if you were working in a large enterprise. It would cost me a lot to leave the company in favour of one of the competitors» (Respondent 8).* Sharing another perspective is respondent 10, who stated that he does feel a psychological contract, but not necessarily because they provide him with resources for personal development. He explained how the relations towards the employees are more valuable: *«It is more about how my colleagues treat me as a part of the company, and involves me the future development of the firm. Being a part of a collective is much more important than investing a certain amount of money in me» (Respondent 10).*

Commitment

We wanted to examine and gain insights whether the organisation's development activities and practice affected the employees' desire to stay in the company. This would also give us a more nuanced view of what is important for each individual when envisioning their career.

There are two respondents who talked about the importance of being acknowledged by their superiors in the company. The first respondent said she had a conversation with her personal

manager about her future in the company and if she wished to stay or apply elsewhere: *«My personal manager told me that I was good at my job and that I could do well in this organisation if I choose to stay here. Of course, you get motivated by this kind of feedback because you are recognized and seen for what you have done. Also, she creates a picture of me having a future career in the organisation»* (Respondent 1). Another respondent does not want to stay in her current company, and stated that career development activities affected her in a medium level. She stated that she was not comfortable with her current work tasks, but did not receive any guidance from her supervisors. If someone would have given her a solution, i.e. changing departments, she would consider staying at the firm. However, the respondent stated that her issues has never been properly addressed, and she is therefore no longer committed to the firm.

Furthermore, two respondents expressed how a feeling of being invested in affected their commitment to the company: *«Being offered career development activities definitely builds loyalty, and that I have something to gain by staying in the company»* (Respondent 2). On the contrary, respondent 8 stated how investments in the employees were missing, and that is why she might not want to stay in the company: *«They should do something to keep young promising people. There are small things that does not quite work, i.e. career development. I do not feel that I am challenged enough»* (Respondent 8).

Three of the respondents are positive towards career development activities, but mentioned additional factors that affect their commitment towards their employer. Respondent 7 said that it affects him, but highlights the importance of being rewarded for your effort: *«If you work ten-hour-days, then learning might be enough. But when you work more than 10 hours a day, you might expect to get something more in return, i.e. pay raise or advancement. And if it goes too slow... then you should find somewhere else eventually. You can have as much competence development as you like, but if you are not compensated in a way that seems fair, compared to those on higher levels, and how much you contribute, then it might not be the right place to stay»* (Respondent 7). This respondent works in one of the large international enterprises, and explained how the employees cannot get individual rewards for doing a good job because it is all standardized, whether it is getting a promotion or salary increase:

«Basically, I think they can add more flexibility to their systems, which will give incentives to those who do the best so that they can move upwards in addition to learning» (Respondent 7). Likewise, respondent 10 articulated that career development initiatives affects his commitment, and mentioned how it was fun to advance earlier than expected. Although, the upwards advancement is not the main factor when it comes to what makes him stay: «The promotion is a confirmation that they think I have done a good job. An early promotion is very positive, but it is not an essential thing for me. What opportunities I have within the company and what I want to work with, that is probably more important» (Respondent 10).

Respondent 9 (a person who recently has accepted another job offer) talked about how career development activities is not considered a decisive factor to him. He still has two more months to go in the consultancy company. We asked him if there were anything that could have been done differently to make him stay: «If they had added 50% more in training and competence cultivation now, it would not have made me stay anyway. So, to me it is more like ... to a certain degree a hygiene factor. Even though they have exceeded my expectations by far. So, I am very pleased» (Respondent 9). He also mentioned that certain components of importance to him was lacking in his current firm: «Working as a consultant, it is hard to feel ownership to the work you deliver to the customer. There are no one who follows the process from A to Z». Another respondent also expressed feeling a lack of ownership to her company and work: «It is tiring not to be able to follow any of the projects through» (Respondent 2).

One of the respondents revealed that the career development and practices in the company has made her re-evaluate her timeframe of staying in the company: «Yes, the career development initiative really does affect my commitment. Because before I started working, I thought after being in a job for 4-5 years, you would get bored doing the same thing every day. However, in my company I think you can work here for a long time before you have tried out every opportunity. By presenting and highlighting all the different work roles you can try within the company, has really made me see this more as long-term» (Respondent 6). In addition to the activities they offer, she expressed how she feels that the company listen to their employees: «If you are bored of working with the client on projects, I experience that there is a low threshold to communicate so because I feel they want to keep us. It is stressful to recruit new people, and it gives us the opportunity to let them know if I want to try out something new. I have not tried yet, but I do not think it will be a problem» (Respondent 6).

Time Perspective

The respondents' time perspective differs, however everyone mentioned a certain number of years they had imagined working in the company for. The general take on this subject were that some had a set time frame which remained unchanged or was altered after entering the company. Others wished to «go with the flow» and wait to decide their exact time frame after getting to know the company and their opportunities there.

One of the respondents had a specific time perspective of two-three years, and still stood by it. Furthermore, respondent 3 imagined having a short time perspective and stated that this is affected by her restless nature: *«I will finish as a trainee now in August. Had I been offered another job today I would have resigned immediately. I am in general a restless person by nature, so now in the beginning of my career I have no plans of staying anywhere too long. When I started in my current firm, I thought at least one, potentially maximum two years, before I move on»* (Respondent 3). One of the respondents is working on a side project and eventually wants that to be her main job. This influences her time perspective as she stated that: *«Determining a time perspective is difficult. I am working in a start-up-company on the side, and it could end up being something big or become a total failure»* (Respondent 8). However, the respondent picture herself working in the consulting industry for maximum five years: *«You get so much valuable and different experiences working as a consultant since you work on different projects with focus on problem solving. I have been thinking three to five years as a consultant for a while now. Nevertheless, I do not think that working as a consultant is a long-lasting lifestyle, because you work really long days»* (Respondent 8). Respondent 9 stated that he believed he would be working in his firm for about two-four years, with the emphasis on four. However, the respondent mentioned that he now has accepted a new job offer due to the extraordinary opportunity it provided him with.

There are three respondents who expressed having a predetermined time frame when entering the firm that eventually changed after started working. These respondents stated that they might stay longer because they had no desire to explore something else yet. Respondent 1 communicated how her future perspective depends on different factors: *«Initially I had a perspective involving staying for two years to get through the trainee program and become a senior. Today, I have still not made up my mind whether I will stay until I become a manager or if I will be gone after two years. It will depend on my progress. If I find myself declining by*

not getting more responsibility or feel like I am not rewarded sufficiently for my work, I will look around for other jobs» (Respondent 1). Initially, respondent 4 had a two-year perspective in mind when he started working in his firm, but after working for a while, he added another year: *«I experienced that things take longer than expected in the beginning. It took half a year to simply understand how people work here, and then it has taken half a year now to understand how to break the code of delivering good work. So, from here on out it is about delivering well for two years, and then I feel like I would want to fly elsewhere» (Respondent 4).* Respondent 6 explained that she used to have an exact time perspective, but how this has changed after working in the company: *«First, I was just so happy to get a job, because I am an engineer and it was the oil crisis when I finished my studies. Before starting in my current job, I imagined working for four-five years in one company before moving on. Anyway, after working here for six months and learning about the many opportunities within this firm, I believe that I would stay here much longer» (Respondent 6).*

For others, the time perspective was not as explicit because they were more concerned with learning and developing. Respondent 7 wanted to see as he goes before deciding on an exact number of years in his company. To him, acquiring knowledge quickly is the most important factor. However, he imagined that he would probably stay for three years. Similarly, respondent 10 expressed how learning is his biggest concern when picturing his time perspective within the firm: *«If I am acquiring new knowledge and find my work interesting, I would probably stay for a while. Currently, I like it here. It is a good environment where I can work with competent colleagues. Also, I think the partners communicate and do good things about how they want to control the company and what direction they want to take it, and they do the right things to back it up».* He continued on about how he does not want to work in a traditional streamline company yet, but as he has no desire to become a partner in the organisation he will seek elsewhere eventually: *«I can picture myself staying here for a while, but I have no goal of becoming a partner in the company, nor be a consultant forever. At one point or another, I would like to go over to a streamline company. But I am in no hurry. I have not determined an exact time frame, but I do have a 2-5-year time perspective» (Respondent 10).*

Unlike respondent 10, respondent 5 has yet to figure out if he wants to stay a consultant his whole career: *«I am very uncertain, either I will stay for three to four years, or 'forever'. What is nice about being a consultant is that you do a lot of different things, but it is also*

what makes it difficult to be a consultant in the long run. Some manages to combine private life with being a consultant and others fail. My perspective will depend first and foremost on my life situation, and I have considered the fact that it is also typical with a 'consultant burnout'» (Respondent 5). When he mentioned 'forever' we asked him if it was because he was considering becoming a partner. He was very reflective while he answered: *«I do not know if I would go for partner. Being a partner you are legally responsible. Do I want to become a partner or not? I cannot really answer that here and now» (Respondent 5).* This respondent has worked at a big consultancy firm prior to where he is employed now. We therefore also wanted to hear what his thoughts were before leaving his former company: *«Initially I thought that I would just try out being a consultant in a large enterprise. I feel that the standard time frame for consultants there is two years to become seniors, and then they leave. I do not believe that was my vision when entering the firm, I was more eager to just see how this goes» (Respondent 5).* However, he continued saying that while he was working in his former company he set a time frame of maximum three to four years because he thought it was both repetitive and boring.

Discussion

In this chapter, we discuss the findings up against existing theory and research. The aim is to gain insights regarding findings that help answer the study's research question and objectives. This chapter follows a similar structure to the one used in our findings section, but the sections concerning psychological contract and commitment is discussed together as previous research looks at commitment in the context of the psychological contract.

Career Prospects

According to Clarke (2013), people today pursue careers across organisations because they seek career and personal development, and wants to evolve their skill-set to remain relevant and attractive. Our findings identified that several of the respondents wished to try out new aspects of the industry within their current organisation or in new organisations to learn and gain experiences. This indicates that the respondents' prospects in terms of their desired career path corresponds to the existing theory regarding the new way of thinking of a career. In addition, Brousseau et. al. (1996) found that lateral career moves will be just as important as linear advancement, and Clarke (2013) added how lateral moves provide learning opportunities, skill diversity and personal satisfaction. This is similar to several of the

respondents' prospects, as they expressed not being concerned with climbing the corporate ladder, but were instead interested in trying out new roles across organisations to learn and evolve. Thus, the career prospects of the respondents are in line with the theory concerning the new boundaryless career whereas employees are expected to cross roles, organisations and type of employment (Arthur, 1994). Most respondents wanted exciting, challenging and interesting work tasks and roles. This supports existing theory as it is in line with Hall's (1996) take on the new career development concerning continuous learning and challenging work tasks.

All the respondents are millennials, and our findings showed that all respondents valued the importance of being challenged and seek personal development, more than advancing upwards. This is in accordance with Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009) who found that millennials focus on career development, work-life balance and quality in the workplace. Our findings showed that the respondents were less motivated by salary, and if their learning curve flattened or they did not experience having development opportunities, they would start looking elsewhere. This is supported by the research done by Crumpacker & Crumpacker (2007) who found that money is a lesser motivator for millennials, whereas opportunities for career growth are considered greater motivators. Also, Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009) found that millennials want to be challenged, so if their needs are not met they want to switch jobs. Based on these findings, employers need to consider the millennials' individualistic growth needs and how they envision their career path to unfold. This way, by satisfying the employees' desire to learn and gain experiences, the consultancy firms are much more likely to retain and attract talent (Lyons and Kuron, 2013).

Career Orientations

Schein (1978) argued that people only have one career anchor, while Bravo et. al. (2017) suggested that individuals have several anchors, but rank them differently. Our findings are more in line with the theory that Bravo et. al. (2017) described. Several of the participants said that there were multiple of the anchors that were important to them. A few also reflected on how one anchor were essential and thus reasoned why others also were of importance. An example was the connection between autonomy and entrepreneurial creativity. To have the time and resources to be creative at work, they first needed autonomy. This can be considered a nuanced view of the existing theory as it presents another explanation as to why individuals

have several anchors. Autonomy were one of the anchors that was of most importance for the respondents. Eight of the respondents we interviewed mentioned that anchor, and pointed out the importance of being able to have the freedom to manage their own time.

Another anchor of significance to several respondents were entrepreneurial creativity. It seems like there are two different aspects of how the respondents find it important to enfold entrepreneurial creativity. First, there is the aspect of being innovative and create something new for other companies. Second, there is the journey of following the projects all the way and feel ownership of the value they create in their company. Bravo et. al. (2017) propose that it is important to try to find ways to involve individuals high on entrepreneurial creativity on projects where they can enfold and be creative. Most of the respondents were happy with what they got to do as consultants. However, two of them talked about the lack of ownership as they never got to follow the projects through, and it would therefore be wise for the employers to offer alternatives that satisfy their desire to create and take ownership of something.

Lifestyle and work-life balance were also important to our respondents. This supports existing theory regarding millennials and how they are predicted to care more about having a work-life balance (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Several of the respondents reflected over how this anchor would be more important later in their lives when they would have established families. One of our respondents pointed out how he did not want to become his boss who only saw his family on Saturdays.

There were five of the respondents who found managerial competence important. These individuals all mentioned acting proactive in terms of seeking career development. However, there is no special notice that these individuals are more proactive than the other respondents, as Bravo et. al. (2017) argues. Further, Bravo et. al. (2017) states that they are low in organisational commitment and do not stay in an organisation for long. Contrasting to this theory, three of the respondents high on managerial orientation stated that they have no desire to seek jobs elsewhere yet. They recognized the significance of learning and developing in one place, and wanted to stay if they continued to do so. These respondents are willing to explore their opportunities within one company to evolve, and therefore it is important that the employer monitor their activity to make sure they are properly challenged and minimize the risk of losing these candidates (Bravo et. al., 2017).

The career anchor involving service and dedication to a cause were important to three of the respondents. A Millennials in the Workplace Report from Bentley University (2011) proposed that for millennials making a difference were more important than professional recognition. There were five respondents who highlighted managerial competence, while there were only three that valued dedication and cause. It shows that there are no substantial findings among this study's respondents supporting the statement from this report. However, one of the respondents cared about dedication and cause, and she cared also more about being a respected expert in a field rather than being a leader.

According to Bravo et. al. (2017), people high on security orientation would not prefer to be in an uncertain position such as a consultant. There were two respondents who talked about safety and stability as a hygiene factor. It shows that it is not very important to newcomers in professional service firms, as they have a sense of what they are getting in to. From our respondents, it seemed like the opportunities and career prospects related to their position in the company were more important than security and stability.

Perceived Investment in Employee Career Development

Our findings showed that several of the respondents felt invested in by being offered mandatory courses, voluntary courses, conferences, mentoring, interest groups and other career development activities to acquire knowledge. Also, as previously stated in the career prospect section, all the respondents found development initiatives as very important for them to evolve. This is in accordance with Harris et. al. (2015) that stated how investments in human capital is important for the employees to advance within their career path.

Some respondents did not feel invested in when it came to being offered employee development activities. These respondents were mainly employed in small enterprises, and wished there would have been invested more resources in them. Evidently, our findings show that there is a difference in the respondents' answers based on the size of their company. Those working in large enterprises mostly felt that the company invested a lot of resources in their development. Three out of four respondents who expressed some discontent with the investments in career development, were working in small or medium sized companies. These respondents communicated that there was a lack of investments in guidance and

favourable courses and training offered to them. These findings support existing literature stating that small and medium sized companies do not have the human resource development expertise, infrastructure and general resources which large enterprises has access to (Hill & Stewart, 1999). Further, Westhead and Storey (1997) found that a manager or an employee is less likely to receive training (particularly job-related, formal training) if he/she works in a small, rather than a large firm.

All employees implied that they were expected to be self-driven and take responsibility for their own career development. One respondent explained how her employer offers a lot of resources, but that it is expected that you put in a certain effort yourself to follow through with the initiatives. This is supported by research done by Cavanaugh & Noe (1999) who stated that today the employees are more responsible for their own career development than before. However, the respondents did expect their employers to provide them with the necessary resources to carry out career development activities. This is in accordance with the so-called 'new development' involving that the organisations are expected to invest in training and development for the employees to prepare them for the changing work tasks and roles as their career progress (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015).

Lee & Bruvold (2003) found that employees who perceive getting a personal HR-investment are more willing to put in the work required to remain employable. Supporting this research, our findings showed that most of the respondents who were pleased with their employer's current practice and felt invested in, also stated that the initiatives were motivating. One respondent told us how she was driven by having opportunities to develop her skill-set. In contrast, one of the respondents who expressed a lack of investments in employee development was not as committed to remain employable in her current firm. This respondent mentioned how she did not want to create a career path in her firm because she did not find the employer competent enough concerning career development.

Although most of the respondents were offered some kind of development activities, not all of them were provided with the time and resources to carry through with the activities. Typically, these respondents expressed that they were obligated to prioritize the client, and therefore found it difficult to make time for career development activities. They would wish having more flexibility in terms of managing their own time to engage in activities. This relates to research stating that those employees who perceive that they have access to

resources, while at the same time have opportunities to take responsibility for their own development, are in fact positive towards the expected responsibility given by their employer (Fuller et al., 2006; Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). Thus, even though all employees are expected to be self-driven and take responsibility for their own career development, if they are provided with the time and resources to carry out with development activities, the employees are most likely to appreciate this reciprocal relationship (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). This is in line with the ‘new psychological contract’, which will be discussed in light of our findings later in the thesis.

Career Development Practices

Similar to the findings related to perceived investments in employee career development, there was also a difference in terms of the career practices based on the size of the companies. The respondents who worked in large enterprises were mostly pleased by the employer’s career development practices, while those working in small and medium sized enterprises either missed structure, mentoring, or various levels of opportunities. Several of the respondents working in a small or medium sized company expressed how their employer prefer on-the-job training instead of structured courses. This is found to be a characteristic among small enterprises, where Hill & Stewart (1999) described the training and development activities as ad hoc, selective and aimed at the satisfaction of immediate, job-related, problem solving needs of individuals. Our findings support existing research stating that on-the-job training with little emphasis on personal development is preferred in small and medium sized firms (Hill & Stewart, 1999).

One of the respondents who has worked in both a large and small enterprise did a comparison of the practices. He found the level of opportunities greater in the large enterprise, but the information flow about development activities were much more clarified in the small company. This is in accordance with Hill & Stewart (1999) who stated that large companies typically have issues ensuring that decisions made at the top of organisations are delivered effectively through the ranks. This is not so problematic for the small and medium sized companies, where typically the owner/manager is closer to the workforce and therefore better placed to deliver information to all employees.

Today, employees and especially millennials, are very concerned with having an employer who offers an up-to-date career practice that satisfies their changing desires. Therefore, consultancy companies cannot avoid the fact that traditional practices need to be replaced with an employee career development practice that fosters learning and challenging work tasks (Hall, 1996). Supporting this research, our findings identified that there were some employers who had adapted their current practices to optimize the employee training and development activities. Two respondents stated how their organisation moved from only reflecting on the past to also focusing on future activities to ensure employee development. Both respondents were pleased about the recent change in practice, as it created the correct incentives and helped them develop to reach their goals and advance within their career path. Furthermore, the findings also identified companies who did not adapt their practices and how this affected the employees. The respondents requested better quality on everything from mentoring and assessments, to structured and interesting courses. An interesting common feature of these informants is that they all work in a small enterprise. The general opinion among these respondents were that the second the on-the-job experiences and trainings no longer were challenging enough; they would seek elsewhere. This is in accordance with the existing theory related to the preferences of the millennials generation as previously stated. Thus, the employers should monitor these employees and make sure they are properly challenged. If not, they risk losing these candidates.

Career Model

Baden-Fuller and Bateson (1990) describes an ‘up or out’ strategy in a professional service firm to entail that individuals are expected to stay at a level for only a certain amount of time, before advancing upwards. If the person is not able to reach the expertise required at the next level after a certain time, it is implied that the person leaves the company. Each layer in the firm has different time periods, and it can vary amongst professional service firms. A minimum time rule is to ensure that the employees have the right set of skills and knowledge (Baden-Fuller and Bateson, 1990).

The findings show that seven of our respondents’ employers have a structured career model, which is described as central in a professional service firm. These models have a set structure where you work your way upwards in a vertical way. Our respondents did not describe it as a tournament model where they apply to a higher position and thereafter get selected. From

what they said it was more of an individual evaluation, and that employees move upwards if they meet certain criteria. Advancement is based on their skills and knowledge, which is opposite of what Malhotra et. al. (2010) described. The model in three of the companies were similar to the 'up or out' tendency described by Bade-Fuller and Bateson (1990). One of the respondents mentioned that her employer follows a pyramid model which involves investing money on hiring and training of a lot of new employees, and then expect a percentage to leave after a few years which is more in accordance to what Malhotra et. al. (2010) propose. An up-or-out tendency in which the respondents 'fear' does not seem to be a concern for the respondents. Seven of the respondents talked about advancing upwards, and that they had a system for when promotions were carried out. From their explanations, it occurred that their perception of getting a promotion was within reach if an employee worked hard and did their job. Nonetheless, there are various possible reasons for why they have this perception. Consultants seem to leave voluntarily to seek challenges elsewhere if they are not pleased with the opportunities available with their employer. Although a percentage of these voluntary turnovers might be because the employees feel like they are not meeting the standards set by the company, none of the respondents mentioned hearing of this outcome. From our respondents' statements, there are mostly a vertical career ladder, but the practice of advancing differs between enterprises.

From our findings, we draw the assumption that people do not enter consultancy firms to become partners anymore. There were only one that were thinking about it, and one who mentioned pursuing manager level. Today, they enter to learn and gain competence, before they move on to something new, which is in line with a protean career (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). A lack of desire to become a partner could show that the criterion for success is subjective, and not bounded to a position in a company (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Based on the findings, the respondents acknowledge having a boundaryless career as they all anticipate that their careers will involve crossing between different work roles, organisations, and type of employment (Arthur, 1994).

Offering different career paths to satisfy the workers' individualistic growth needs is becoming more and more important (Lyons and Kuron, 2013). As mentioned, the majority had a structural vertical career path, but several employers provided flexible alternatives in addition to the set model. In accordance to both Lyons and Kuron (2013) and Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009) flexibility and different options for growth and development is important

to millennials. From our findings, it shows that the consultancy firms are adapting to environmental changes in the industry and towards the younger workforce. Our findings identified that the companies all have different ways of adding flexibility to their career model, and thereby support the existing theory highlighting the importance of versatility in today's career models.

First, some of the companies added flexibility to their career model by giving the employees an option besides advancing through the structured model. This alternative involved remaining at a certain level if the person were content with it. In one of the firms this was possible, but not normal to do. Another respondent, however, stated that it was normal, because continuing to move upwards meant specialising, and not everyone wanted to do so. From what she expressed, it did not seem like a problem to choose not to advance upwards, and could be interpreted as an option to avoid employees seeking elsewhere. As for millennials, it is also in line with the assumption that they prefer to learn and grow, which is a higher motivation than salary and promotion (Sujansky & Ferri-Reed, 2009). Staying in a position on a lower level to have a wider spectre of tasks is one way to grow, and specialising and continue to move upwards is another way. This shows why it is important to have both options.

Second, several of the respondents mentioned having some form of horizontal career model within the company. Job rotation, by changing work roles within or across departments, were the most common horizontal option amongst the firms. Seven out of ten respondents described having the option of changing departments within the firm. However, two of these firms were not encouraging it, and had more defined departments and areas of expertise. Furthermore, three other firms implemented cross-staffing and fostered diverse teams. This way it is easy for the employees to expand their knowledge and meet new challenges, in line with what the millennial generation desire. The respondents indicated how rotation provided them with varied work if they found their current work as monotonous and boring. These findings support the existing theory by Kaymaza (2010) who proposed that this type of lateral transfers within an organisation can promote learning and development of social relations among colleagues, while decrease monotony and boredom. Another horizontal alternative which were offered by two firms, involved becoming an expert within an area of interest.

Two respondents expressed how their company lack a structured and clear career model. One of the respondents emphasized the importance of having a career path when you are young and starting off your career. This respondent was not happy with her current organisation regarding their structure and career path, and because of this she was likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. This is in accordance with the research conducted by Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009) who found that providing insights into different career paths and what competence is needed, guides the employees. Also, having a clear career model is a way for employers to retain their employees. The respondents participating in this study identifies with a self-directed protean career, and they thereby choose to stay longer in a firm when they have many options, as they will continue to learn and find new ways to be challenged (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Proactivity

Most of the respondents claimed having acted proactive to ensure their own career development. They have initiated participation in different courses, conferences, departments, projects and feedback-sessions. This is in accordance with carrying out internal employability activities, that involves active self-development and career management by the employees themselves (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). Although, it is of essence to highlight that some of the employers have facilitated the possibilities for employees to carry out self-development activities. For instance, one of the organisations have a practice where the employer assesses the ability of the employees to take responsibility for their own development. This is beneficial for the organisations, because implementing internal employability orientations and activities encourages the employees to keep developing their knowledge and skill-set in an ever-changing society (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015).

All respondents stated that their employer depends on them being self-driven regarding career development. This is in line with existing research done by Seibert et. al. (2001) who found that much research has observed that the employees in the new boundaryless careers must act proactive. The respondents mentioned different strategies they have used to advance in their careers. Some respondents stated how they had initiated consultations with senior colleagues. Most of the respondents expressed that they acted proactive by seeking personal skill development through courses and conferences. While one respondent stated that his strategy involved career planning whereas he outlined and planned his upcoming career development

activities. These strategies are considered proactive behaviour and career initiatives that are used to make progress in employees' careers (Seibert et.al., 2001). Based on the respondents' desire and motivation to engage in self-development, it may indicate that most of them have an underlying proactive personality, which is considered the basis for engaging in proactive behaviours, such as actively managing one's own career (Seibert et.al., 2001).

All the respondents have worked for less than three years in their respective firm, and are only just starting off their careers. This makes them so-called newcomers to their organisation. Most of the respondents who acted proactive, experienced being supported by their employer. This is in accordance with the research done by Kammeyer-Mueller et.al. (2013), who found that the newcomers feeling high initial support from colleagues and supervisors are more likely to expose proactive behaviour. Not only did the support lead to proactive behaviour, it also affected the newly hired employees' commitment towards their employer (Kammeyer-Mueller et.al., 2013). In relation to this, one of the respondents did not make an effort to seek career development activities within her current organisation because she did not feel that her employer supported her when she expressed being uncomfortable in her job. Thus, supporting the existing theory of Kammeyer-Mueller et.al. (2013), this respondent has not acted proactive, and neither does she feel committed to the company anymore.

Psychological Contract and Commitment

Cavanaugh & Noe (1999) argue that the psychological contract has changed towards a more independent relationship where the organisation is no longer seen as the caretaker. There are lower expectations towards the length of employment, and employees are more in charge of their own career development. As mentioned previously in this chapter, our respondents were of the same opinion. This is in line with the theory regarding the new psychological contract where organisations are expected to invest in their employees' training and development by facilitating it, and in return employees find time to take courses and engage to stay up-to-date on their skills and knowledge (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). The findings support this theory, as most of our respondents found this type of contract reasonable except one, who thought it was difficult to manage her time to carry out training activities. She thought it could be an idea to set aside approximately three hours a month, which was mandatory spent on courses. None of the others proposed a similar solution.

After only working in the company for six months one of our respondents understood that she did not want to continue in the company longer than her trainee period. She was having issues in regards to her psychological contract, feeling like she did not reciprocate what they expected. They had invested a lot of resources in her, but she was not doing her part of being employable to the firm and keeping the knowledge in the organisation (Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). A moral dilemma is whether to stay and be worth their time and resources, or be free to look for other options without taking it into account. After consulting with a family member about the predicament, he put it in perspective for her. She could not stay in a job she was not satisfied with only to justify the resources spent on her by the firm.

There were none of the other respondents who felt an obligation through a psychological contract. Some of them mentioned that the reason for the lack of psychological contract was because they knew how much revenue the company made on projects compared to their salary. This finding corresponds to the existing theory of Solberg & Dysvik (2015) concerning how a strictly economic exchange relationship does not foster commitment to the company. However, six of the respondents mentioned a relational contract and a trust among their colleagues they would be afraid of breaching. This finding offers an extension of the existing theory presented by Cavanaugh & Noe (1999) who argues that individuals are more loyal to their work rather than the company. From our findings people are more concerned with the ties and the trust they have built with people in the organisation. One of the respondents felt more obligated towards his colleagues rather than the firm, stating that as a consultant they work so close together and depend on each other. Disloyalty towards her colleagues is what another one would feel if she were to join a competitor, even though she might get a higher salary. The psychological contract of the respondents is all about the commitment they feel towards their colleagues in the firm, but not towards the organisation itself. Thus, these findings concerning relational commitment towards co-workers offers a nuanced view of the existing theory as it presents a different point of view as to whom individuals feel loyalty towards in the workplace.

There were a few of our respondents that perceived that they had access to a wide range of resources and felt that they were given more responsibility in the firm. This affected their time frame within their current organisation in a positive matter. One of the respondents had extended her time perspective from four-five years to an indefinite timeframe, after

experiencing all her options and opportunities in the company. Similarly, after discussing her future career in the firm with her personal career advisor, another respondent did not have a definite time frame anymore. Two others talked about how they felt they were given responsibility, and therefore wanted to stay if they felt they were growing. These findings support existing research by Lee & Bruvold (2003) and Solberg & Dysvik (2015), as employees who perceive an HR-investment are more willing to put in an effort to remain employable, and it has a positive influence on their perception of the psychological contract. One can assume that these respondents' expectations are met, and are satisfied in terms of the psychological contract. In accordance to Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009), these millennial employees are less likely to seek a new job elsewhere if their needs are met.

One of the respondents were not happy with the HR-investment and felt like her employer were not listening to her. As a predicted consequence when the needs are not met, she is not willing to do anything to remain internally employable or seek other options in the firm (Lyons and Kuron, 2013; Solberg & Dysvik, 2015). The same respondent also expressed that her employer had no defined career path which also affected her commitment in a negative way. The findings match the theory presented by Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009), who emphasized the importance of implementing a clear career path and way to progress within the firm to retain their employees. Lastly, one respondent felt like her company did not see her value and made no effort to keep her in the company. Thus, she was not committed to stay long term in her current company.

Limitations, Future Research and Conclusion

In this chapter, we present the limitations of the study and make suggestions for future research. Thereafter, we present the main findings and conclusion of this study, by answering the research question and objectives. Finally, we present the main contribution of this research.

Limitations and Future Research

As most studies, our master thesis has certain limitations. First, this study used a case design, and the context is therefore narrow which might be a limitation. Also, the sample size is small, and thus we might have missed interesting and important viewpoints. Further research should expand the population beyond a small qualitative sample to generalize the findings.

We found that the quality of career practices is related to the size of the enterprise. Thus, it would be interesting to undertake additional research examining how company-size matters in terms of the quality of employee career development and employees' commitment. Several of our respondents talked about feeling a lack of ownership to their work as consultants. Therefore, we also suggest that further research should examine consultants' feeling of ownership towards the output they create and how that affects their commitment to the employer. Also, our research primarily involved recent graduates, therefore it would be interesting to do a similar research of employees whose career are more established. Further, the interview guide was altered and improved as we gained a broader understanding of our case. Thus, the first couple of interviews were not as informative as they could have been. The respondents' firms were differing in size, and therefore made it difficult to find patterns. The study illustrates an interesting snapshot of a certain group of consultants and their organisations, however it is difficult to generalize any conclusions. Thus, the elements we have identified related to career development which affects employees' commitment, would be interesting to examine using a quantitative method.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to gain insights into how consultancy firms can retain valuable human resources by implementing favourable career development practices for their newly hired employees. Various career development initiatives to retain newly hired consultants were detected by interviewing the respondents. First, we found support for the research done by Brousseau et. al. (1996), Clarke (2013) and Arthur (1994), who stated that employees today value a lateral career path providing them with learning and personal development. The career prospects of this study's respondents involved lateral career moves across roles and organisations to seek challenging work. In addition, our findings showed how several of the respondents highlighted the importance of feeling ownership of their work. This finding offers an extension to existing research concerning younger generations done by Lyons & Kuron (2013) and Sujansky & Ferri-Reed (2009).

Further, our findings were in accordance with Bravo et.al. (2017) supporting their research that individuals have several career anchors. Although the respondents are all millennials, they did differ in terms of which career orientations they found most important. Autonomy, managerial competence, entrepreneurial creativity, and work-life balance were highlighted

most by the respondents. To retain employees, the consultancy firms might find it helpful and advantageous to map out their employees' career orientations. This way the employer get an overview of what is important for the employee and his/her career. One interesting finding who offered an extended viewpoint to existing research by Bravo et.al. (2017) and Schein (1978), was the fact that several respondents found some anchors to be interdependent, e.g. autonomy and entrepreneurial creativity.

Further, the findings showed that the respondents working in a large enterprise felt that their employer invested more in their career development, than those working in a medium or small sized firm. The small enterprises were criticized for their lack of investments in guidance and favourable courses and training. We found that all respondents expected their employer to provide them with the necessary resources to carry out career development activities. Those who did not perceive getting a personal HR-investment, mainly working in the small/medium sized enterprises, were not willing to remain employable and create a career path in the firm. The importance of perceived investment is what scholars has already stated. Even though some of the respondents perceived getting a personal investment in career development, they did however experience not receiving the sufficient amount of time to carry out the career development activities. Prioritizing the client was often an issue, and therefore it was suggested that the employer should set aside a fixed amount of time per month dedicated to development activities. This is a factor that existing literature does not discuss. Our findings indicate that the career practices and their quality depends on the size of the enterprise. The respondents working in a large enterprise were mostly pleased with the employer's career development practices, while those working in small and medium sized enterprises missed structure, guidance and various levels of opportunities. The companies who adapted their practices to optimize employee career development, had a positive effect on the employees as they felt it helped them meet their individual needs. We identified some companies who did not adapt their practices and how this affected the employees in a negative matter. These respondents worked in small and medium sized companies, and they requested better quality on mentoring and assessments, as well as structured and interesting courses.

Although most of the respondents' employers follows a structured, vertical career model, they do have different ways of adding flexibility to their model. Horizontal options like job rotation and having the opportunity of becoming an expert within a certain field were

implemented in several of the firms. The respondents who found their employer lacking a structured and clear career model, were considering to seek opportunities elsewhere because having a well-defined career model when you are a young newcomer is highly important. We found that the respondents of this study identify with a self-directed protean career, as they choose to stay longer in a company where they have various options that provides learning and challenging work (Hall, 1996; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The respondents also acknowledged having a boundaryless career, where they anticipated crossing between organisations, roles, and type of employment (Arthur, 1994). This shows that these findings support existing theory.

Furthermore, the findings identified that most of the respondents have acted proactive to ensure their own career development. In accordance to Solberg & Dysvik (2015), the findings identified respondents carrying out internal employability activities, as well as employers facilitating the possibilities for employees to carry out such self-development activities. We also found that most of the respondents who acted proactive, felt supported by their employer which encouraged proactive behaviour and affected the employees' commitment towards their employer in a positive way. The respondent who did not feel any initial support from her employer, did not engage in proactive behaviour as she did not feel committed to the company anymore. The findings indicate that none of the respondents in this study felt an obligation through a psychological contract with their employer. However, they did mention feeling a relational obligation towards their colleagues. Thus, our findings show that the psychological contract is more about the commitment towards their colleagues, rather than towards the firm itself. This finding extends the existing theory on psychological contracts as it presents a broader view of employees' felt obligation and commitment towards their organisation.

The present study has identified several ways of how consultancy firm's career practices affect newly hired employees' future views in the company. The findings may have practical implications for the employees' commitment to their employer. First, the findings highlight the importance of having options to advance horizontally, and not just move upwards like the traditional model intends. Newly hired employees in consultancy firms value horizontal career paths as it involves moving across roles and organisations and provides them with challenging work. An indication based on theory and our findings, a firm should start mapping out their employees' career orientations, as well as make them feel invested in by

offering mentoring, assessments, favourable training, and the time to attend the career development activities. Further, implementing a well-defined and flexible career model, with various opportunities is a key to retain employees. Since the new psychological contract depends on the proactive behaviour of the employees, it is important that the companies facilitate and invests in employees training and development. Another aspect that is important for the consultancy firms to consider is to support the newly hired employees. If not, the newcomers are likely to refrain from exposing proactive behaviour and it affects their commitment to their employer in a negative way.

Most of the career development initiatives discussed in this thesis have been identified in previous research. However, little research has examined how organisations can manage career development of newly hired consultants in various enterprises of different sizes. The present study found that the career development initiatives presented in relation to the ‘new organisational career’ had a positive effect on the newly hired consultants and their desire to remain in the company. Regardless of the size of the employer enterprise, all the respondents valued learning and development higher than upwards advancement in the hierarchy. This study’s main contribution involves expanding the scope of existing research of career development to apply to the millennials generation who enters the workforce with a new attitude towards career growth and advancement. This thesis nuances what is of highest importance and concerns for the millennial generation. Thus, the research makes a contribution as to how consultancy companies today can meet the staffing needs of the organisation, while at the same time keep valuable resources by meeting the developmental needs and interests of the individual (Clark, 2013).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informational letter to Respondents

Request for Participation in the Research Project on Career Development Practices in Consulting Companies

We are two students from BI Norwegian Business School who are studying Masters in Science, majoring in leadership and change. In connection to this, we are writing our master's thesis on career development practices in consulting companies and how they affect new employees (employed for less than 3 years) prospects in the company. This assignment is part of the five-year business master's degree.

We want to conduct an in-depth interview with people who can provide relevant information on how they perceive their company's practices related to career development. The length of the interview may vary between 20 and 60 minutes. If we get your approval, we would like to record the interview. Then we will transcribe the interviews and store them until the study is complete. The end of the project is September 2018.

Your company is chosen because it is considered a consulting company that practices different career development measures. The reason for choosing you as an informant is your employment in a consulting company for a period of less than 3 years.

If you have any questions about the interview, please contact us or our supervisor:

Anders Dysvik, Professor - Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, BI

E-mail: anders.dysvik@bi.no

After the interview, we will offer you a copy of the transcriptional interview for control, as well as the master's thesis in full, if desired.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Best regards,

Ruth Solveig Øksnes, phone: 95127525, email: ruthoeks@gmail.com

Jenny Haugetun Kokkersvold, phone: 91126126, email: jenny.hkokkersvold@gmail.com

Appendix 2: Informed Consent

Consent for participation in the study

I am willing to participate in the study and have read through the informational letter.

- I would like a copy of a transcribed interview
- I would like a copy of the master thesis in full when it is finished

(Signed by project participant, date)

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

How long have you worked in your current company?

When you picture your career, what is important to you?

- To work your way up in an organisation or to try new departments or organisations?

Which of these career anchors are important to you when you picture your career?

(1) Technical/Functional competence - Desire to become a specialist in a field within the profession.

(2) Managerial competence – Want to be leader at a certain level in the organisation

(3) Autonomy/Independence – freedom and independence in a job.

(4) Security/stability – have a safe income and job

(5) Entrepreneurial creativity – desire to create something and be innovative

(6) Pure challenge – challenging and difficult problems to solve

(7) Service/dedication to a cause

(8) Lifestyle – balance a life between work and time off.

Employee's perception of career development

Do you feel that your organisation invests resources and facilitates development of their employees? (through training, development)

- Are you offered career development activities?
- Does your employer set aside the time and resources to carry out such development activities?

How important is it for you to be offered career development activities?

How well are you informed about your opportunities in the company?

Proactive Engagement

Have you actively been looking for opportunities for career development in your company?

- What have you done to find out what kinds of opportunities you have?
- Do you participate in the career development activities that the company offers?

Have you had a conversation/assessment about your career and development in the company?

- What kind of information/offers did you receive?

How do you experience the opportunities for promotion in the company? What is the natural next step for you?

- Does the company have a vertical career model where you advance upwards in the organisation?
- Does the company offer horizontal career paths, i.e. job rotation?
- If so, have you been offered a job rotation?

Psychological Contract

By feeling invested in by your employer (through courses, training, etc.), how does it affect your thoughts and intentions of staying in the company?

Commitment

Based on the offer of career development, how does it affect your desire to stay in the organisation?

- What could have been different?

What is your time perspective on your career in the company?

- Have you changed your time perspective from when you first started?

Closing «catch-all» question

Feel free to share your thoughts about the company's practices regarding career development.