

# CAREER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: AN EMPIRICAL SURVEY AND IMPLICATIONS<sup>1</sup>

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*A key ingredient in the knowledge economy is the development of people's careers. Companies approach career development in a variety of ways. To better understand how these approaches fit together and how they are used to address different situations, the authors surveyed 194 United Kingdom companies and identified five groups of practices. These groups were associated with certain organizational characteristics. Drawing on concepts from the careers literature, the authors suggest a two-dimensional model to explore how these groups of practices can be systematically understood and applied. © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

## Introduction

The study of careers in organizational contexts—the way in which careers shape and are shaped by organizations—is short of theoretical and systematic approaches. Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) have indicated that the concept of a career is not the property of any one theoretical or disciplinary view. They presented eight viewpoints from the social sciences on the career concept (psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, history, and geography), none of which concentrated specifically on its organizational aspects. This kind of breadth, while making important links among disciplines, leaves the study of careers in organizations without a clear focus. This makes it difficult to generate a comprehensive theory and subsequently leads to a problem of how to design empirical studies to examine such an unfocused concept. Careers are something

of a late entrant in management theory: Boerlijst (1984) claimed that the career as a whole began to receive real attention only in the 70's. More systematic study of careers has arisen since; yet the organizational aspect in career theory still lacks a comprehensive framework. It seems that, apart from normative designs for career systems, there is not yet an accepted theoretical model of career processes—let alone any empirical tests of such a model.

Meanwhile, the bulk of research in the careers area has moved beyond organizations to focus on more flexible, individual models such as the “Boundaryless Career” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), “Protean Career” (Hall, 1976, 1996), and “Post-Corporate Career” (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Clearly the wave of the future for many people, such careers nonetheless still involve links between organizations and individuals, although in a less structured or permanent way (Brousseau, Driver,

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Eneroth, & Larsson, 1996). Despite the unfashionability of organizational careers, it is, therefore, still important to take the organizational viewpoint into account in understanding career practices in order to put the newer, more individual views into context.

In this paper, we present the findings of an empirical survey of career practices in organizations and examine how these are applied. Our purpose is to create a model to provide scholars and practitioners with a general framework in which the various practices will be related to one another and to the characteristics of organizations applying them. The result may also suggest which kind of career management practices could fit different organizations and how a system built out of such practices could be based on theoretical thinking and empirical evidence.

The possible contribution of such studies was demonstrated by Robertson & Makin's (1986) work on the use of selection practices in 108 organizations. Their study was replicated by Shackelton & Newell (1991) and findings from both show how personnel practices can fit together to create good Human Resource Management (HRM) practice in the selection area. The present study explores the area of career management systems and provides a model for the way in which organizational career systems are put into operation. "Career" is here taken to mean a process of development of the employee along a path of experience and jobs that may be in one or more organizations (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992).

HRM in organizations includes many practices that are concerned with the management of careers. Strategic HRM emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to associate HRM with the strategy and direction of organizations (Fombrun, Tichy, & Devanna, 1984; more recent efforts include those of Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1997, & Gratton, 2000). Closely following came theoretical works relating to careers as a system within the organization, and relating them to strategy and HR practice, including those by Von Glinow, Driver, Brousseau, & Prince (1983); and Sonnenfeld & Peiperl (1988). Little research, however, has examined the actual *process* of career management within organizations. (Notable exceptions include Howard & Bray's (1988)

longitudinal study of managers in the Bell System and Lindsey, Holmes, & McCall's (1987) study of high potential managers' growth; both of these, however, primarily focussed on the individual rather than the organization.) Nonetheless, writers have emphasized the importance of career practices and activities and the increasing efforts exerted by top management in many organizations (Hall, 1986). Organizations have assumed more responsibility within this area, even if not always by means of traditional, long-term approaches and the career management practices they employ need to be better understood.

Very few theoretical career models exist, and most relate to the individual perspective (Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999; Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977; Driver, 1979; Greenhaus, 1987; Hall, 1976, 1996; Schein, 1978). The theoretical base of organizational career management is quite thin (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989; Gunz & Jalland, 1996) and shows little convergence (Peiperl & Arthur, 2000; Sullivan, 1999). Schein's cone model of career development is perhaps the only prominent example that reflects both individual developmental paths and organizational systems (yet even this is clearly outdated, based on its static, single-firm perspective). For the few models that do reflect the organizational aspect, empirical validations are rare. Several works explore the existence of career management practices (see below), but these were not directed to test theory or build it further. There is a need, therefore, to consider the current state of career management practice in organizations, to look for patterns, and to associate these with a wider framework.

To investigate and model career management practices require a comprehensive view of what those practices are. We began with the broader category of HRM practices and examined existing research. Tsui & Gomez-Mejia (1988) suggested a list of activities, programs, and methods with which the organization can handle HRM processes. Gutteridge & Otte (1983) also presented a catalogue of organizational HRM practices (see also Dalton & Thompson, 1986; Flippo, 1984; Hall, 1986; Torrington, MacKay, & Hall, 1985; Tyson & Fell, 1986). Among these practices were those

that had a close relationship with organizational career planning and its management. “Organizational Career Management” (OCM), as we call it, is concerned with the organization carrying out activities relevant to the career development of its employees. (This is distinct from career management as practiced by individuals, consultants, or job centres, for example, although it is not mutually exclusive with, but rather may complement them.) The importance and prominence of OCM has been recognized by many scholars (Gutteridge, 1986; Hall, 1986; Leach, 1977; Mayo, 1991; Schein, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977).

We also looked at several sources which suggested lists of OCM practices specifically (see for example Baruch 1996; Bowen & Hall 1977; London & Stumpf, 1982; Louchheim & Lord, 1988). An earlier survey by Walker & Gutteridge (1979) identified 10 OCM activities, although some of these were closer to other aspects of HRM than to OCM (e.g. recruitment, work-family interface). Some aspects of OCM practices and activities had been discussed by Gutteridge and Otte (1983), but their discussion was limited to 10 practices and an evaluation of only three of them. Perhaps the widest list was that provided by Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore (1993) in their study of OCM in the United States. Their study, however, concentrated on large American business organizations only (the top 1,000 United States corporations) and might thus have been unrepresentative of broader practice.

### *Practices Considered*

A set of OCM practices to be used in the survey was identified from the sources cited above. These are listed in Table I. While alternatives might be argued, we assumed for the purpose of this study that this list covered the whole range of OCM practices. (This was also supported by a pilot study; see below.) The first six items were varieties of appraisal (direct and indirect) while the rest comprised a broader mix. A comparison with the list provided by Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore (1993) shows a substantial, but not a complete, overlap (see Table II). Some of the techniques in that list were not specific to career

management at the organizational level but rather fit into the broader category of human resource management (e.g. interview process, employee orientation programs). On the other hand, the list did not include certain relevant practices such as common career paths, formal education, and performance appraisal as it links to career planning.

Missing from both lists is any consideration of processes reaching beyond the organization, such as outplacement consulting or the facilitation of external networking for later employment. The argument could easily be made that such processes should be included; however, it was not clear what a comprehensive list of such “post-corporate” processes would look like, since many of them are currently being developed (Peiperl and Baruch, 1997; Peiperl, Arthur, Goffee, & Morris, 2000). Therefore we included several blank lines at the end of the list and encouraged subjects to add to it (see below) in anticipation of finding such new practices.

Also missing from the list are full multi-source 360-degree assessments, as well as job assignments that are purely developmental. Both have been linked to successful career management (Tornow, London, & Associates, 1998, pp. 63–66; London & Stumpf, 1986, p. 35). Although these general categories are not included, items 3 and 4 (peer and subordinate appraisal) are specific elements of the first practice, while item 17 (lateral moves to create cross-functional experience) is a specific element of the second.

### *Organizational Characteristics*

Beyond building a framework for OCM systems, we also wished to connect them with other features of organizations. Many organizational studies have used demographic data in addition to the main items under study in order to see where and how their findings were most generalizable. We were particularly interested in the basic demographic features of age, size, and industry sector, as well as in internal characteristics such as career systems strategies—in particular the use of internal versus external labor markets (the extent to which firms hire from outside at other than entry level—see Osterman, 1984) and the bases

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**TABLE I** Organizational Career Management Practices Used in This Research.

1. Performance appraisal as a basis for career planning
2. Assessment centers
3. Peer appraisal
4. Upward (subordinate) appraisal
5. Career counselling by direct supervisor
6. Career counselling by HR Department
7. Formal mentoring
8. Career workshops
9. Common career paths
10. Dual ladder (parallel hierarchy for professional staff)
11. Written personal career planning (as done by the organization or jointly)
12. Retirement preparation programs
13. Succession planning
14. Books and/or pamphlets on career issues
15. Postings regarding internal job openings
16. Formal education as part of career development
17. Lateral moves to create cross-functional experience

for developmental decisions (Sonnenfeld and Peiperl, 1988). We thought it would be likely, for example, that older organizations might be more apt to use certain practices (such as retirement planning) than would younger ones, and that larger organizations would be likely to use more formal and highly structured OCM practices than would smaller ones. If patterns of OCM practice emerged from the study, we wanted to see whether these features were associated with them.

Another potentially important element was the presence of unions, which seemed likely to affect career practices inasmuch as industrial relations have a bearing on HRM (Guest, 1995; Heckscher, 1988; Kochan, Katz, & McKersie, 1986). Past works indicated how different types of organizations tend to have different levels of unionization, and it was of interest to examine possible associations between unionization and the type of career management practiced in organizations.

Third and most complex was organizational climate. Scholars have been inclined to associate climate with managerial practice and structures, whereas culture is more closely associated with underlying values and beliefs (Child, 1984; Denison, 1996; Pettigrew, 1979). Both have been used in building conceptual frameworks about organizations (Gunz, 1989; Patterson, Payne, & West, 1996). Schein (1985) provided

such a framework based on his definition of organizational culture ("basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization", p. 8). Building on this, Derr & Laurent (1989) examined internal and external career systems to suggest that organizational cultures play a crucial role in determining career aspirations of people within organizations.

For this study, we chose a simple set of four dimensions of organizational climate: dynamism, group orientation, openness, and proactiveness. These measures were adopted from Baruch & Lessem (1994). Although they reflect only a subset of the many possible dimensions of climate, we felt these measures might be particularly relevant to the case of career systems.

#### *Propositions*

We expected that the 17 OCM practices would cluster together in groups, each with an underlying characteristic or theme. We also believed that differences in the application of the techniques in each cluster would occur depending upon various organizational characteristics including size, age, industry sector, climate, and reliance on internal labor markets. These propositions are as follows:

P1: The wide range of career management practices will naturally cluster into groups

*Scholars have been inclined to associate climate with managerial practice and structures, whereas culture is more closely associated with underlying values and beliefs...*

according to their common use and intercorrelations among the practices.

P2: The groups of practices will be associated with certain characteristics of organizations such as size, age, unionization, climate and reliance on internal labor markets.

If such clusters were to be found, they could be expected to reflect specific sets of organizational characteristics. For example, we believed that practices such as career counseling or career planning would be associated with open and dynamic climates and that 360-degree feedback would not be common in unionized firms. Without having identified the clusters of practices, however, it was impossible to develop specific hypotheses about the associations each cluster would evidence. We thus approached the question purely inductively.

### Method

We set out to document the use of the OCM practices in Table I in a broad sample of organizations. Data were obtained from a postal

survey of career development practices for managers in United Kingdom organizations. Each organization was asked the following question, referring to the set of practices in Table I:

Personnel/Human Resource Management departments practice a variety of activities, tools, or techniques for handling employees' career planning and management. Below is a list of such activities, tools, or techniques. For each item on the list, please indicate to what extent the activity, tool, or practice is applied in your organization for managerial staff.

The scale was from 1 (not applied at all) to 7 (applied extensively). As a check on the list, participants were also asked to indicate whether they applied any additional activities, tools, or practices. This was done to determine both whether any essential practice was missing from the list and whether respondents had correctly interpreted the items (i.e., Did they list one of the same practices using different terms?). No attempt was made to measure the

**TABLE II** The List Developed by Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore (1993).

*Employment self-assessment tools:*  
 career planning workshops  
 career workshops (stand alone)  
 pre-retirement workshops  
 computer software

*Organizational potential assessment process:*  
 promotability forecasts  
 psychological testing  
 assessment centers  
 interview process  
 job assignment

*Internal labor market Active Management:*  
 career information handbooks  
 career ladders or dual-career ladder  
 career resource center  
 other career information format or system

*Individual counselling or career discussion with:*  
 supervisor or line manager  
 senior career adviser  
 personnel staff  
 specialised counsellor: internal/external

*Job matching systems:*  
 informal canvassing  
 job posting  
 skills inventories or skills audit  
 replacement or succession planning  
 staffing committee  
 internal placement system

*Developmental programs:*  
 job enrichment or job design  
 job rotation  
 in-house training and development programs  
 external seminars or workshops  
 tuition reimbursement  
 supervisor training in career discussion  
 dual-career couple programs  
 mentoring system  
 employee orientation program

effectiveness of any practice, as to do this accurately would have been a far more complex undertaking (requiring, for example, multiple respondents from each subject organization). We assumed that the application of a practice implied, if not its effectiveness, then at least its (perceived) usefulness to the organization.

The use of an internal labor market was measured by two questions on the number of vacancies at middle and senior management levels filled internally. These were rated on a scale from 1 (none) to 7 (all).

In addition, we asked a series of questions about the demographics of the firm (age, number of employees, unionization, industry sector, etc.) and also four items on organizational climate:

- stable-dynamic
- individually-group-oriented
- closed/bureaucratic-open/interactive
- reactive-proactive

addressing the elements mentioned above on Likert-type scales of 1 to 7.

#### *Participants and Data Sources*

The research unit of analysis was the organization. The population consisted of a random sample of 524 organizations created using *The Personnel Managers Yearbook* (1995). This book contained a list of all 8,500 United Kingdom organizations employing more than 150 people. We did not include smaller organizations (fewer than 150 persons) as in most small organizations there is no HRM/Personnel unit as such, let alone any organizational career management. The requirements of HRM are different and are usually taken care of by the owner/managers directly, often on an ad-hoc basis.

We used a two-layered random sample: The first layer included 150 organizations that employed up to 500 people and the second, 374 organizations employing more than 500. (A purely random sample would have included small organizations for more than half its cases, as the yearbook contained a high representation of small organizations.) The anticipated source of information was the HRM/Personnel Manager; thus the questionnaire was sent to the person in charge of

HRM/Personnel in each organization. Although using a single source of information for each firm left some risk of bias, there was no clear method available for obtaining comparable second sources from the sample of firms. While HR managers might be expected to be knowledgeable about career management practices (at least formal ones), no other group of respondents could be guaranteed to have a similar knowledge base.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sub-sample of 20 HR directors. No significant additions or changes were necessary in the list of practices as a result, and the spread of responses on all items was satisfactory. From the subsequent mailing, 194 questionnaires were returned (37%), a considerable rate when compared to other surveys conducted at the organizational level (e.g. Huselid, 1995—28%; Park, Ofori-Dankwan & Bishop, 1994—20%). The main characteristics of participating organizations responding (i.e. size, age, sector of activity, unionization, and location) are presented in Table III. The picture derived from the table is a reasonably broad sample of United Kingdom organizations stratified as shown.

#### *Analytical Approach*

We first produced a frequency distribution of OCM practices to determine which were used most and least frequently and whether additional practices should have been included. We then used a factor analysis (varimax rotation) to see whether and how the OCM practices clustered together, per Proposition 1. This method was applied successfully in former studies (see Tsui & Milkovich, 1987, for the use of factor analysis to look for groupings of personnel activities). Finally, we ran a correlation analysis of the resulting factors with the organizational characteristics to determine whether there were any strong links between these characteristics and OCM practice.

### **Results**

Table IV presents the distribution of the 17 practices as spread across the 194 organizations. The order is from most frequent to least fre-

**TABLE III** The Main Characteristics of the Participating Organizations.

<i>Size (number of employees)</i>	up to 500 54 (28%)	501 to 1,000 42 (22%)	1,001 to 5,000 71 (37%)	> 5,000 25 (13%)
<i>Age (years of existence)</i>	up to 5 27 (14%)	6 to 25 46 (24%)	26 to 100 84 (45%)	> 100 31 (17%)
<i>Sector</i>	manufacturing 74 (39%)	services 33 (17%)	public sector 84 (44%)	
<i>Ownership</i>	private 76 (39.5%)	public 41 (21%)	government 66 (34%)	other* 10 (5.5%)
<i>Unionization</i>	most unionized 89 (46%)	minority unionized 59 (30.5%)	non-unionized 43 (22.5%)	
<i>Location</i>	London 36 (19%)	other large cities 15 (8%)	other 141 (73%)	
<i>Nation</i>	United Kingdom 131 (68%)	MNC United Kingdom base 30 (16%)	MNC non United Kingdom 30 (16%)	

MNC=Multinational Corporation

\* such as a combination of these three or employee-owned

N.B. Responses do not all total 194 as several respondents skipped certain questions.

quent use. It was notable that some of the most effective techniques, at least as shown by empirical studies, failed to appear near the top of the table. These included succession planning, assessment centers, and peer and upward appraisals. Succession planning (Miner and Miner, 1979) appeared near the middle, rather than the top of the table, possibly because of the increased difficulty of planning effectively for succession in continuously changing businesses—by the time a succession plan is created, it may already be obsolete. Assessment centers, which have long been seen as effective (Bray, 1985; Tziner, Ronen, & Hacoheh, 1993) are expensive to run and, despite their effectiveness, tend to be found only in very large organizations which were a minority of the present sample. Peer and upward appraisals, which can be extremely accurate measures of performance (Tornow, 1993), are still not widely used for applications such as career management and in particular have taken off more slowly outside the United States. We

would expect these two practices to appear higher on the list in future surveys.

Twenty-one companies indicated the use of another OCM practice that was not in the above list, and seven indicated the use of two such practices (total 35 indications). Of these practices, 11 were individual development items (with no clear organizational component), and five were “secondments”, meaning temporary assignment to another area. Of the others, some were informal (informal mentoring, for example), some were slogans for programs with no specific practices discernible, and several were a re-phrasing of one of the 17. These results indicated that the suggested list was comprehensive, covering the range of possible OCM practices. It also suggested that there was a good (if not perfect) understanding of the 17 practices among the subjects in the sample, although this was not conclusively proven. Finally, the lack of boundary-spanning activities such as outsourcing and external networking meant that either the subject firms were not engaged in

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**TABLE IV** The Use of the 17 Career Practices.

Career Practices*	Count of responses by category:							mean	sd	N
	Not applied at all				Applied extensively					
No. and Title	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
15. Job Postings	7	10	7	11	29	54	74	5.62	1.65	191
16. Formal education	5	7	20	21	50	61	28	5.08	1.48	191
1. P.A. for career planning	11	10	19	21	63	39	28	4.80	1.63	190
5. Counselling by manager	13	10	27	30	55	40	17	4.52	1.62	191
17. Lateral moves	7	24	33	26	52	37	13	4.33	1.60	191
6. Counselling by HR	26	15	19	34	46	42	9	4.16	1.78	190
12. Retirement Preparation	38	20	15	17	38	33	31	4.15	2.15	191
13. Succession planning	29	30	35	33	29	29	6	3.60	1.75	190
7. Formal mentoring	56	43	21	23	29	16	4	2.95	1.79	191
9. Common career paths	82	16	18	25	34	12	-	2.73	1.80	186
10. Dual ladder	100	17	14	24	21	11	2	2.42	1.77	188
14. Books/pamphlets	80	39	24	21	16	10	1	2.41	1.60	190
11. Written career plans	98	30	18	10	15	17	4	2.38	1.82	191
2. Assessment centers	101	27	15	15	18	9	6	2.34	1.79	190
3. Peer appraisal	107	18	24	15	13	11	4	2.26	1.73	191
8. Career workshops	102	32	20	15	11	7	4	2.15	1.60	190
4. Upward appraisal	122	20	11	12	10	11	4	2.04	1.70	189

\*listed from most frequent to least frequent use

such activities, or they did not associate them with organizational career management.

#### *A Typology of Organizational Career Management*

Table V presents the results of the factor analysis. We have labelled each of the five resulting

factors creating a typology which indicates the nature of each group of practices:

*Basic.* Job posting, formal education as part of career development, pre-retirement programs, and lateral moves to create cross-functional experience appeared in this category. These may be seen as elementary OCM practices which most organizations with HRM sys-

**TABLE V** Factor Analysis Results.

<i>Program</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Active Planning</i>	<i>Active Management</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Multi-Directional</i>
15. Job postings	<b>.79</b>	-.04	.03	-.05	.09
16. Formal education	<b>.70</b>	.14	-.01	.26	-.01
12. Retirement preparation	<b>.51</b>	.26	-.10	.38	-.18
17. Lateral moves	<b>.56</b>	.25	.34	-.05	.09
1. P.A. for career planning	.04	<b>.85</b>	.01	.12	.12
5. Counselling by manager	.12	<b>.73</b>	.14	.16	-.04
6. Counselling by HR	.28	<b>.49</b>	.43	.13	.09
13. Succession planning	.24	<b>.54</b>	.24	-.14	.42
2. Assessment centers	.00	.13	<b>.75</b>	.04	.16
7. Formal mentoring	.11	.20	<b>.63</b>	.35	-.04
8. Career workshops	-.01	-.07	<b>.58</b>	.47	.05
14. Books/pamphlets	.22	.05	.19	<b>.69</b>	.02
10. Dual ladder	.06	.08	.07	<b>.64</b>	.36
11. Written career plans	.00	.29	.31	<b>.51</b>	.16
9. Common career paths	-.07	.10	.25	<b>.42</b>	<b>.51</b>
3. Peer appraisal	-.01	.01	-.08	.23	<b>.75</b>
4. Upward appraisal	.07	.10	.14	-.01	<b>.72</b>

Statistics:

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Eigenvalue</u>	<u>CUM %</u>	<u>Cronbach α</u>	<u>Designation</u>
1	4.46	26.2	.60	Basic
2	1.78	36.7	.70	Active Planning
3	1.36	44.7	.61	Active Management
4	1.21	51.8	.68	Formal (α including item 9)
5	.94	57.3	.57	Multi-Directional (α no item 9)

tems need to apply. In fact, Table IV (pg. 354) indicates that they were applied in most of the subject organizations. The first two were also the most frequent in use.

These basic OCM practices, although currently widespread, may best fit the older, bureaucratic organization model rather than the

emerging organization where, for example, pre-retirement programs are not needed because most members are not expected to stay for long years of employment. Some of these organizations also change so rapidly that job postings become obsolete soon after they appear. Many new organizations are also reluctant to invest

in education for their members, preferring to “buy-in” fully qualified talent, for reasons of cost, high labor turnover (loss of investment), and fluctuating skill requirements that make long-term planning impossible.

*Active Planning.* Four practices appeared in this category: Performance appraisal as a basis for career planning, career counselling by the direct supervisor, career counselling by the HR department, and succession planning. These practices share both an active involvement on the part of the organization in the careers of individuals and a planning element that considers the individual’s development over time, as well as the organization’s need to fill jobs in the future. Companies using OCM processes in this category show an indication of a forward-looking HRM system that takes the initiative.

*Active Management.* Assessment centers, formal mentoring, and career workshops are the three practices in this group. They clearly all have an informational element, which characterizes either the process of information gathering for the organization or the use of information for developing individuals. The bi-directional nature of this information transfer is characteristic of organizations that take the time to put these elements in place.

*Formal.* Written personal career planning for employees, dual career ladder, and books and/or pamphlets on career issues are the three practices in this group. These represent elements of career management whereby the organization provides the employees with a formal system of information and presentation of opportunities. It is a different kind of information transfer, this time in a downward direction rather than being bi-directional.

*Multi-Directional.* Peer appraisal, upward (subordinate) appraisal, and common career paths factored into this category. Common career paths, however, were logically more associated with formal career structures, and because the item also had a substantial weighting on the *formal* factor, we decided to add it to that group instead. The remaining two practices could be characterized as increasing options by expanding the directions through which people can receive feedback and develop within the organization. To some extent, they transcend the traditional vertical struc-

tures, which characterize bureaucratic organizations. We see these as “cutting edge” practices, those which many future organizations will need, though they are not necessarily new in historical terms. (They had arisen already by the 1970s but in limited numbers.)

To test the proposition of possible associations between the OCM characteristics and other features of organizations, we combined the components of each group into one scale measure and tested its reliability. The Cronbach alphas, indicating scale reliability for each of the five groups, are given at the bottom of Table V. The results broadly support proposition 1. Thus the typology, whose value must of course be judged eventually by its applicability, could claim an empirical underpinning for its elements.

#### *Intercorrelations and Association with Other Organizational Characteristics*

Table VI contains the intercorrelations among the aggregate measures for each scale, as well as correlations between these measures and certain organizational characteristics.

Most of the practice groups were significantly intercorrelated, signalling that the factors were not orthogonal. Because all of the practices were to some extent related, being elements of organizational career management, this was not surprising. Their distinctiveness stemmed not from their orthogonality but from the closely related characteristics or practices within each group (described above).

As proposed, there were moderate associations between the types and certain characteristics of organizations. Most notable were those related to the climate characteristics of the organizations; also significant were size, unionization, and reliance on internal labor markets. Age did not show any significant relationship (see note at the bottom of Table VI).

Each of the five types of OCM evidenced certain relationships:

1. *Basic* activities were positively associated with dynamic, group-oriented, and proactive climates. These activities, some of the most frequent in practice, were embedded in the workings of those organizations that felt a responsibility to facilitate the career progress of all employees at some fundamen-

**TABLE VI** Correlations between the Five Types of OCM and Organizational Characteristics.

<i>Cluster/ Factor</i>	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Active Planning</i>	<i>Active Management</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Multi-Directional</i>
<b>Basic</b>					
<b>Active Planning</b>	.43**				
<b>Active Management</b>	.22**	.39**			
<b>Formal</b>	.26**	.42**	.51**		
<b>Multi-Directional</b>	.06	.26**	.23**	.38**	
<b>Climate: Stable-Dynamic</b>	.18*	.28**	.03	.12	.14
<b>Climate: Individual-Group</b>	.21**	.07	.03	.08	.08
<b>Climate: Closed-Open</b>	.15	.27**	.06	.01	.19**
<b>Climate: Reactive-Proactive</b>	.21**	.27**	.13	.08	.10
<b>Age+</b>	.02	-.13	.02	-.04	-.01
<b>Size (employees)</b>	.05	.10	.15*	.22**	.09
<b>Unionization</b>	-.14	.09	-.04	.03	-.19*
<b>Internal Labor Market</b>	.10	.37**	.18*	.23**	.20**

\* = p < .05; \*\* = p < .01

+Age was problematic: First, the sample contained a very wide spread, with a few organizations over 200 years old; second, some organizations had been re-established recently out of previously existing organizations (e.g. National Health Service trust hospitals); thus their actual age (years of continuous operation) was much higher than the stated age of, say, two to four years.

tal level. A group orientation, coupled with an action bias, would facilitate this. None of the demographic factors evidenced any relationship with this cluster, perhaps an indicator that these activities really were basic—in the sense of being widespread.

2. *Active Planning* activities were strongly associated with dynamic, open, and proactive climates. A certain level of openness was necessary to the counselling activities contained in this cluster. Again, a bias toward taking action, in combination with an open climate,

could lead to the use of these techniques. Reliance on internal labor markets was strongly associated with this cluster, a relationship that reflects the use of career and succession planning within the organization.

3. *Active Management* was not significantly correlated with any climate measure, but was near-significantly correlated with proactive climate. Once again there is the tendency for doing something rather than nothing that links (albeit tenuously) these activities together. As two of the three elements in this

cluster were well down the usage list (Table IV), stronger correlations would have been unlikely. Size and internal labor markets were correlated with this cluster, indicating in particular the kind of environment necessary for the creation and success of assessment centers, the first element of the cluster.

4. *Formal* activities were not correlated with any climate measure. This was not surprising, since given their less active nature, these elements appeared to have little to link them to climate. These activities were also relatively little used. Similarly to the active management cluster, size and internal labor markets showed an effect, even more strongly in this case. As larger organizations are often more formal than smaller ones, and as three of the activities in this cluster were focussed on career paths for present employees within the firm, this was not surprising.

5. *Multi-Directional* activities were correlated with open climates. These kinds of environments are fundamental to the success of such activities as peer and upward appraisal because of the high requirement for regular, candid giving and receiving of feedback (London, 1995; Peiperl, forthcoming). This cluster was negatively associated with unionization and positively associated with internal labor markets. This made sense since unions are not typically associated with open climates or with innovative appraisal methods, whereas internal labor markets are more associated with trusting the capabilities and opinions of employees over long periods.

The correlations provided moderate support for Proposition 2. This was in line with our expectations, as the measurement of organizational climate is by nature a complex process, and a few self-reported data points could not be expected to adequately characterize an entire organization. Still, climate and internal labor market indicators evidenced more and stronger relationships with the OCM groupings than did the three more traditional demographic measures of age, size, and unionization.

Implications of these findings are discussed further below, including how organizations might better understand and develop their career systems in accordance with their existing cultures. It may also be the case that

other characteristics not tested in our survey may prove to correlate with some or all of the clusters. This would take additional research to test.

### Groups of Organizational Career Practices: An Emergent Model

There are clearly limitations to the use of statistical tools in trying to discern the meaning of field data. Substance is more important than significance, and since no grounded theory of OCM practices yet existed, we set ourselves the task of establishing one, going beyond the statistical results but nonetheless building on the data analysis. Having interpreted likely meanings for the individual clusters of OCM activities, we then sought a logic that might discern a pattern of relationships among them. We first tried to construct an hierarchical model that might suggest which practices were used in a kind of sequence of sophistication from least to most advanced. In considering the practices and the intercorrelations among them (Table VI), however, we soon became convinced that no such linear hierarchy existed. Rather, out of this information we developed the descriptive model shown in Figure 1.

The model comprises two dimensions: the level of sophistication of the OCM practices and the level of involvement on the part of the organization necessary to put them into use. Along the vertical axis (increasing sophistication), the *basic* cluster appears at the bottom as the common denominator among OCM practices. Its elements were the most frequently reported in the survey (Table IV). The *Multi-Directional* cluster appears at the top. Its elements were the least frequently used in the survey, and in our opinion, some of the most advanced. (These two clusters also evidenced the lowest intercorrelation; see Table VI.)

The horizontal axis (increasing involvement) separates the middle three clusters, which are not easily sorted by sophistication. Although there was no index of involvement in our survey, upon examining the elements in each of the clusters resulting from the analysis we were struck by the differences in the degree of involvement necessary on the part of the organization and its managers to carry out the various practices. Of the three middle clusters,

... climate and internal labor market indicators evidenced more and stronger relationships with the OCM groupings than did the three more traditional demographic measures of age, size, and unionization.

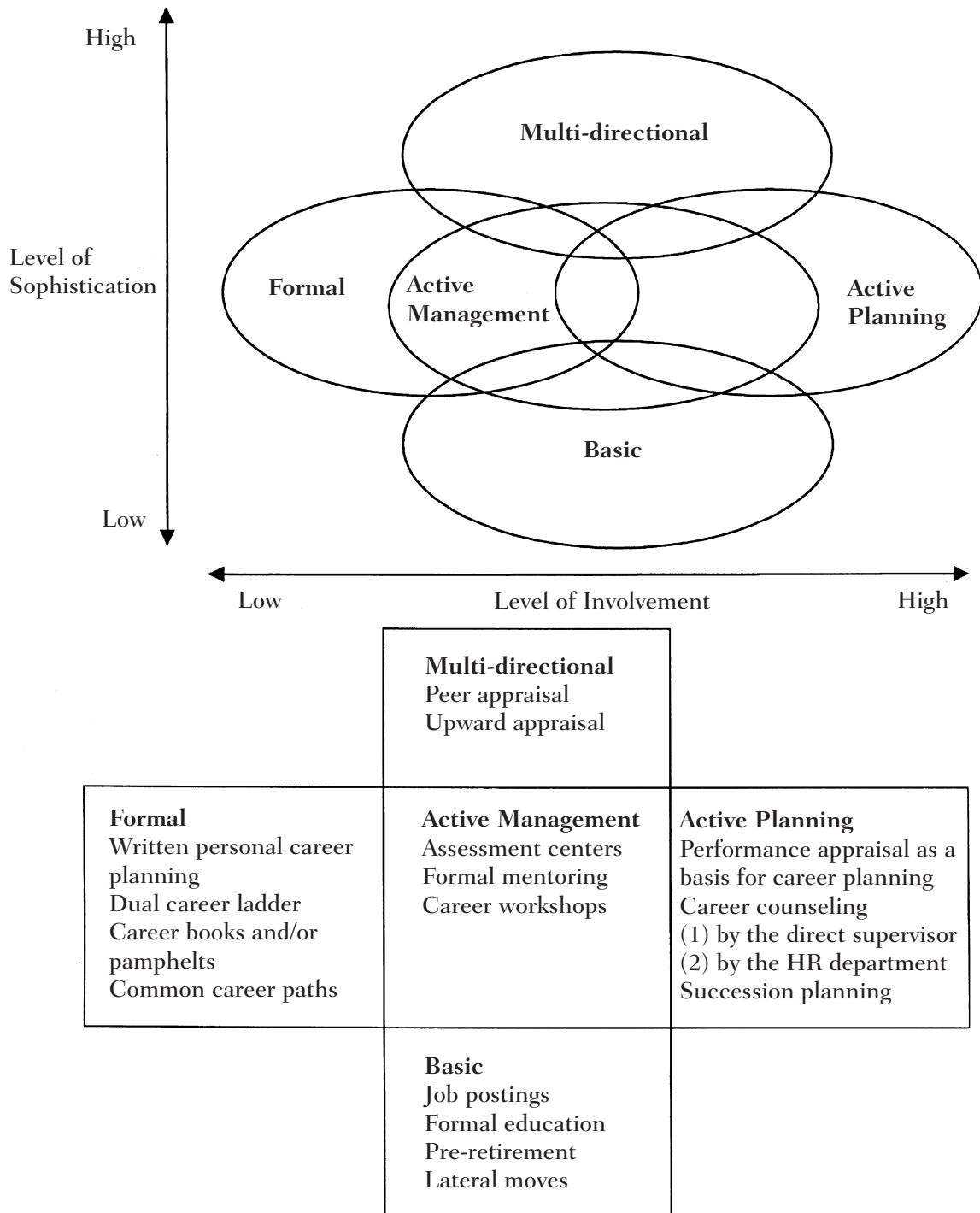


FIGURE 1. Two dimensional model of career management practices.

the *Formal* group appeared to require the least involvement, the *Active Management* a moderate amount, and the *Active Planning* group the most organizational involvement of the set. (An examination of the intercorrelations in Table VI will reveal that this is a reasonable grouping, as all three of these clusters were significantly correlated.)

The *Basic* and *Multi-Directional* clusters have been left in the middle on the horizontal dimension, although it might be argued that the *Basic* activities require slightly less, and the *Multi-Directional* activities slightly more, involvement on the part of the firm. In order to evaluate the model and settle these placements empirically, it would be necessary to develop an actual measure of organizational involvement in OCM activities and apply it to the clusters developed here.

#### *Implications for Management*

In designing a career system, HR managers are typically faced with a plethora of choices around which elements to incorporate. This study has shown how these elements cluster together, and how these clusters correlate in practice, both with one another and with certain organizational characteristics. This information may prove useful to HR managers in setting up their OCM programs. In particular, HR managers and others charged with managing careers in organizations should develop career systems as actual *systems*; that is, as sets of practices which naturally fit together and are appropriate to the organization's stage of development, form, and/or industry.

For example, established companies that seek to provide the basic elements of a career system should consider first the elements of the *basic* cluster. Because most of the companies in the random sample reported the use of these practices, employees (particularly new ones hired from other companies) would likely expect these support mechanisms to be in place, and their omission could constitute a disadvantage. Job postings and lateral moves might be seen as fundamentals of an open system, while formal education and pre-retirement planning might be seen as basic benefits; they

thus belong in any organization with sufficient infrastructure to carry them out.

Companies looking to sustain stable internal labor markets and offer longer-term careers may find the elements of the *formal* cluster appropriate. Dual ladders in particular developed in large firms such as IBM in the 1960s and 70s in order to allow scientists and other non-managers to continue to advance their careers without having to enter the management ranks, therefore making long-term career development possible for such people. Often the presence of common career paths, written career plans, and books or pamphlets explaining the career system can add stability and promote a long-term view. Although many organizations have had to move away from such a focus, many (particularly in the public sector) still retain the elements of the "Club" (Sonnenfeld, Peiperl, & Kotter, 1988) in which long membership and contribution to the group lead to steady career advancement.

Organizations trying to maximize knowledge about individuals' potential, both for the individual and the organization, should consider using the somewhat resource-intensive practices of the *Active Management* cluster. Assessment centers, formal mentoring relationships, and career workshops all focus on knowing as much as possible about the individual and his/her prospects, as well as how the firm's career system works. This cluster is also closely related to the *Active Planning* cluster, whose elements should be used by firms attempting to translate information into action by making specific career plans for individuals and succession plans for the firm.

At the other end of the spectrum, HR managers concerned with being cutting edge should consider the use of *Multi-Directional* practices but should be aware that these are more common in larger organizations with low unionization and high openness. Peer and upward appraisals, although rapidly gaining currency, are not easy to do well and usually require significant support (Tornow, 1993; London & Smither, 1995; Peiperl, forthcoming). To attempt to introduce such practices in small, unionized, or "closed-culture" organizations might be difficult.

*This information may prove useful to HR managers in setting up their OCM programs.*

Furthermore, the emergent model suggests that when deciding on OCM practices generally, organizations would be wise to consider the level of involvement necessary from HR and line managers in order to make such practices work. Introducing highly demanding practices such as those in the *Active Planning* cluster may be inappropriate in situations where managers are not likely to be able to sustain the necessary effort to make them work; they may do more harm than good if they are seen by employees to be introduced only to be left unsupported.

Managers also need to consider the possible implications of the relationships between the OCM clusters and other factors, in particular climate. The results from our climate measures have pointed out the importance of applying OCM in accordance with the environment within the organization. It is important for managers to consider not only what is desirable but also what is possible, given the firm's current climate, and not to set unrealistic goals. Although our four climate measures are somewhat simplistic, we believe that most organizations will be able to place themselves within each dimension. The following considerations, of necessity somewhat speculative, may be helpful:

More stable (less dynamic), and similarly more closed (less open) organizations may be best served by the *Basic* and *Formal* OCM clusters. These contain activities which fit established processes rather than demand continual energy and change. By contrast, more dynamic (less stable), and similarly more open (less closed) organizations, although they may use these clusters, are more likely to benefit from the *Active Planning* and *Multi-Directional* activities, which involve taking a direct hand in employees' career management on a regular basis.

Individualistic organizations should concentrate on the *Active Planning* and *Active Management* clusters, in which the level of information about individuals, and the amount of attention paid to their careers, are maximized. Conversely, group-focused organizations may find the *Multi-Directional* cluster, which maximizes group-level performance inputs, and the *Basic* cluster, which contains some family-type elements (education, retirement planning), fit best.

Reactive organizations, in which there is time for few initiatives, may find the activities of the *Formal* cluster the only set they are able to maintain. By contrast, proactive climates would be well-placed to benefit from the *Basic* activities to begin with, and from the *Active Planning* and *Active Management* clusters at a further level of involvement.

### OCM in Practice

How well does the model hold up in practice? We found numerous examples of companies whose activities centered around one or two of the OCM clusters:

HSBC is one of the world's largest banks with a substantial share of the retail banking market in several countries including the United Kingdom. The firm has long relied on the *Basic* and *Active Planning* clusters of OCM practices. Jobs (except at the highest levels) are typically posted and people encouraged to apply; formal training is offered both internally and externally at all levels, and pre-retirement counselling is provided. The underlying philosophy has been to build generalist bankers, and lateral moves across areas are encouraged. Hierarchical performance appraisals are tied in directly with career planning, which is done in conjunction with one's manager. In addition, each business area has in place a succession plan which is updated annually.

Interestingly, few if any of the activities in the *Active Management*, *Formal*, or *Multi-Directional* clusters are used at HSBC. There may be something of a shift going on at the bank, however, exemplified by its elite cadre of 400 "permanent expatriates". These people are seen as the leading edge in the company, and here there is evidence of the *Active Management* cluster of activities, in particular assessment centers, both for selection and for later assignment and promotion. Thus, the bank may be moving toward a more innovative approach to OCM.

Consumer products giant Unilever has long been known for its excellent management development. This appears to center around the *Active Planning* and *Formal* clusters. Performance appraisal feeds directly into career planning through a process known as Perfor-

*Reactive organizations, in which there is time for few initiatives, may find the activities of the Formal cluster the only set they are able to maintain.*

**TABLE VII** Implications for HR Practice: Summary of Key Goals Appropriate to Each OCM Cluster.

	Basic	Active Management
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer basic career system elements</li> <li>• Satisfy employees' expectations</li> <li>• Requires infrastructure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize firm knowledge of employees</li> <li>• Maximize employee knowledge of firm and options within it</li> </ul>
<i>HR Strategic Goals</i>	<p><b>Formal</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support internal labor market</li> <li>• Provide stability</li> <li>• Clarify options for career development within firm</li> </ul>	<p><b>Active Planning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make performance-career links explicit</li> <li>• Offer personal and emotional support</li> <li>• Provide for succession</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Multi-Directional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximize performance feedback</li> <li>• Promote open culture</li> <li>• Risks in small or "closed" organizations</li> </ul>	

mance Development Planning (PDP), a globally integrated approach to appraisal, reward, and career management. It includes career counselling by managers as well as written career plans, which while not cast in stone are indicators of both what the individual employee wants and what the company feels it can deliver. Particularly in the first five to seven years of employment, common career paths exist with different templates in different functional areas. Although dual ladders do not formally exist, it is not uncommon within Unilever to see functional experts promoted up a narrow ladder with management titles but with little line responsibility, which appears to accomplish the same dual-ladder purpose. Succession planning also takes place annually throughout Unilever's 12 business units for all senior management roles.

Elements of the *Basic* cluster also exist at Unilever, in particular formal education, which is provided mainly internally. This education, however, as well as any lateral moves, are reserved primarily for the early identified, carefully tracked high-potential group (10-15% of managers globally). There is little evidence of the *Active Management* activities, even for this cohort, but there are a few parts of the company in which *Multi-Directional* activities are beginning, on a voluntary basis. The company expects this to increase in future.

At Electronic Data Systems (EDS), one of the world's largest IT firms, careers have long been the province of individuals. "You're in charge of your own career management" has been the firm's philosophy for many years and given the firm's long-standing high-growth record, there is rarely any shortage of opportunities for people to move laterally or upward. As a result, very few OCM practices are in evidence. Interestingly, however, in recent years the firm launched a 360-degree feedback system in order to ensure the continued development of employees' capabilities and skills, key attributes which would provide them with opportunities. The company thereby began its OCM with the *Multi-Directional* cluster, the most advanced in our model. At the time of this writing, EDS was also developing a succession planning system (*Active Planning* cluster) in order to ensure at least some stability in a firm whose sheer size has begun to put a strain on its traditionally fluid career systems.

### Conclusions and Future Research

There has been a good deal of research published in the careers area in recent years. Much of it has been theoretical but not well connected to empirical work. Although a number of models of career theory and practice

exist (DeFillippi & Arthur, (1996), Greenhaus, (1987), Gutteridge & Otte, (1983), Hall, (1986), London & Stumpf, (1982), Schein, (1978), and much empirical work has been conducted, connections between the empirical and theoretical studies has not been as strong as one might expect.

This study investigated a comprehensive set of OCM practices through a random-sample postal survey and established the existence of five clusters of practices. It linked those clusters together in an emergent model and considered their relationships with other organizational characteristics, particularly climate-related. In so doing, it has built upon studies that have taken a similar approach specifically to examine recruitment and selection processes (Robertson & Makin, 1986; Shackelton & Newell, 1991). Since the role of most HR and line managers includes not only bringing people into organizations but also developing their potential, this study adds to the existing research in providing a basis of comparison for organizations in the OCM area.

Additionally, the study adds a layer to the development of a theoretical framework for the area of careers. As suggested in the introduction, career management lacks such a framework which should be based at least in part on empirical evidence. The proposed model provides one such beginning upon which future theoretical and empirical work may draw.

There was little evidence in this study, however, in the area of boundary-spanning activities and careers transcending organizations. In light of the present debate on the end of organizational careers, it is important to acknowledge that such developments are taking place. For many firms, they lead to a crossroads where the organization will need to decide how far it will be involved in the career planning of its managers and employees and how much will be left for the individual to manage.

The post-corporate career (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997) may represent a paradigm for the near future, but the organizations in this study either did not recognize it or, more likely, considered it a separate sphere of activity to their own career management practices. Such

a view may be short-sighted: The more individuals leave the organizational career frame of reference, the harder it will be for organizations to make it work. On the other hand, we would not expect organizational careers to disappear, and in turbulent environments it is all the more important for the management of those careers to be undertaken with a good understanding of the available tools and practices. In the best case, organizations and individuals will both play a role in career management and will share important information about opportunities and links to be pursued for the benefit of both.

What also has not been examined here in any detail, and should be the subject of further research, is the question of which organizational characteristics are most important to the success of OCM practices. More specific data on organizational structures and processes, including other variables such as turnover rates, economic performance of the firm, and performance evaluative style of managers would provide an important complement to the broad-brush elements (age, unionization, climate) considered here.

To evaluate the model, a set of measures for sophistication of OCM practice and level of involvement would need to be developed. In addition, a data set including organizations from several countries would provide more robust evidence and would allow comparisons across national cultures and legal systems. HR practices are more heavily legislated in some countries than they are in the United Kingdom, from which this sample was drawn; however, United Kingdom labor markets and business practices are not dissimilar to those in the United States. Still, because the United States has been the source of the majority of HR and careers research, the data set should be extended to include United States firms as well.

Of course, we recognize that even with its solid grounding in the existing literature, our list of OCM practices would elicit some disagreement. We can only respond that such disagreements are healthy and invite the undertaking of similar research on different sets of practices, the results of which might then be compared with, and build upon, the present study.

*In the best case, organizations and individuals will both play a role in career management and will share important information about opportunities and links to be pursued for the benefit of both.*

Finally, these are an analysis and a model built on current practices in organizations. They are not, therefore, a description of either best practice, or more importantly, best possible (future) practice. It may well be that new career management techniques are currently being developed

that will make obsolete some of the items on the list from which the clusters were drawn. If so, a similar survey at some future time would undoubtedly yield a different pattern of OCM activity, allowing researchers to update the clusters and the model presented to reflect the new realities.

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## ENDNOTES

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