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# WORK SYSTEMS AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

## Reporting

### Project Information

**WSCA**

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Project closed

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## **Final Report Summary - WSCA (WORK SYSTEMS AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT)**

The main objective of the WSCA Project was to study the effects of current employment practices and changes in the institutional environment on individuals' careers. I have addressed this question from three different angles.

First, I have investigated the impact of alternative employment systems on individuals' opportunities for promotions. Using a unique U.S. matched employer-employee representative sample, I find that individuals whose jobs are designed with high-involvement practices receive on average higher opportunities for promotion. In a related study, I have studied how different high-performance work practices, such as regular performance appraisals, affect individuals' career related practices (i.e. promotions and compensation) as well as their joint effects on company performance. Using a longitudinal dataset from Denmark, I find that formal evaluation of employee performance is crucial for firms that have meritocratic systems in place (pay and promotions based on individual achievements), and particularly when these firms may be more subject to biases.

Second, I have analyzed how recent changes in the institutional environment are affecting individuals' careers. To do that, I have constructed a database collecting data on the careers of top executives from U.S. Fortune 100 companies across the last fifty years, and I have investigated how the careers of these executives have changed with changes in the U.S. environment. I find that currently executives have much shorter tenures in their current firm, they have held more but shorter jobs, have less specialized experience, and hold more graduate degrees, which indicates a move towards external careers versus the traditional internal labor market. Also looking at changes in the institutional environment, I have investigated how a dual system of job protection in countries such as Spain, Italy, France, or Portugal affects women's careers. Using a longitudinal data of Spanish women, I find that women under temporary contracts seem to suffer worse work-family balance conditions than those under permanent contracts, which forces them to take self-employment as a temporary career path upon motherhood.

Third, I have investigated the effects of recent changes in broad organizational practices on career outcomes. I have investigated how the move towards a mediated labor market by agents such as headhunters, professional employer organizations, temporary and staffing agencies, and online job

boards, is impacting individuals' careers. I find that these intermediaries impact individuals' access to jobs, wages, and career advancement to the extent that they may facilitate movement across employers though at the same time they may introduce biases in the process. Looking at another prevalent change in organizational practices, I have investigated how the move towards geographically distributed teams is affecting workers' outcomes. Using data from a software maintenance multisite organization, I investigate the effects of manager-worker separation on worker performance. I find that, contrary to expectations, having the manager separated from the worker may be beneficial for worker performance as it forces manager to decentralize decision-making, a finding that speaks positively about the effects of telework practices.

All these studies have been reflected on academic and practitioners' publications such as Industrial Relations, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, the Academy of Management Annals, and Harvard Business Review, as well as on conferences, media publications, dissertation advice for PhD students, and training and development of MBA students and executives.

The findings of these projects are relevant to the careers literature as they provide evidence on how the careers of individuals are changing in the current organizational context. They also contribute to the debate on whether participatory work systems have delivered the promise that they would be a win-win arrangement for individuals and organization in terms of an outcome that has been neglected in prior literature: opportunities for career advancement. These studies also have implications for the income and opportunity inequality debate. How are organizations and institutions affecting the career advancement of individuals? Are they affecting all individuals in the same way or are they benefiting only certain groups of individuals? In addition, these studies are also relevant for corporations as they advance knowledge on the consequences of recent organizational practices such as the use of a geographically distributed workforce or labor market intermediaries.

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