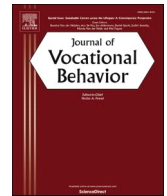




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Toward a broader understanding of career shocks: Exploring interdisciplinary connections with research on job search, human resource management, entrepreneurship, and diversity

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ABSTRACT

Career shocks have become an increasingly important part of current careers scholarship. In this article, we focus on the role of career shocks in career choice, career development, and career adaptation by exploring interdisciplinary connections with the domains of: (1) job search, (2) human resource management, (3) entrepreneurship, and (4) diversity. Specifically, we argue that a self-regulated job search process is likely often triggered by a career shock, yet could also trigger career shocks in its own right. We also note that employees' perceptions of the HR practices in their company are likely influenced by career shocks, and that the chance of employees to return to their employer in the future (i.e., boomerang employment) is affected by the occurrence of positive or negative shocks. Furthermore, there are ample opportunities to study how career shocks may trigger transitions between paid employment and entrepreneurship, and the role of identity and emotions in such processes. Finally, we argue that career shocks may instigate changes in the salience of social identity or even constitute threats to social identity, thereby reflecting on how career shocks may differentially impact people belonging to different social groups. We hope that our article, in the spirit of this *JVB 50-year anniversary issue's* aims, will inspire scholars both within and outside of the field of career studies to better understand how career shocks may impact the way in which people work and develop their careers.

The *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (JVB) 50-year anniversary issue aims to provide inspiration for the future of the field of career studies and vocational behavior by looking at its rich past to formulate directions for innovative new research. JVB focuses particularly on “the fields of career choice, career development, and work adjustment across the lifespan.” At the heart of research on such topics is the role of major career events that shape people’s careers. Indeed, in JVB’s very first volume, [Hart et al. \(1971\)](#) highlighted the important role that chance plays in occupational entry, arguing that vocational theory and counseling should take into account the role of unplanned situational events. Career events have remained part of research published in JVB ever since. For example, [Salomone and](#)

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Slaney (1981) found that individuals tend to report an interplay between chance events and their own personal characteristics and skills. They argued that studying chance in itself may not be effective, as it is the combination between a career event and how an individual deals with that event, that actually creates career impact. Typically, studies on career events in JVB focused on establishing the prevalence of such events in career decision making (e.g., Bright et al., 2005; Hirschi, 2010), and the role of shock events in turnover (e.g., Holtom et al., 2012; Maertz & Kmitta, 2012).

Based on the literature about career events, there has recently been an increasing momentum for the study of *career shocks*. Akkermans et al. (2018) defined a career shock as “a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual’s control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one’s career” (p. 4). This definition connects with Salomone and Slaney’s (1981) argument that chance in itself is insufficient because there is a complex interplay between an external event with an internal psychological process. Indeed, Akkermans et al. (2020) argued that the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates this point as it has had significantly different effects for people’s careers. Similarly, Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021) found that the 2011 New Zealand earthquakes would lead some to cling to their status quo, while it would trigger others to activate existing latent dissatisfaction to make a career move. Empirical studies on career shocks have shown that they impact people’s career planning (Seibert et al., 2013), career success (Kraimer et al., 2019) and employability (Blokker et al., 2019), among others.

One thing has become abundantly clear: this area of study has a lot of potential but also a high level of complexity because of the enormous range of interdisciplinary connections. The study of career shocks is, among other things, connected to micro-level psychological research (e.g., individual coping and resource management), meso-level management research (e.g., organizational events and diversity), and macro-level sociological research (e.g., societal shock events). As such, the range of theories used in conjunction with career shocks is notable, including affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994), event systems theory (Morgeson et al., 2015), and Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011) (for overviews, see Akkermans et al., 2018, 2020). However, although there is strong potential for interdisciplinary research on career shocks, empirical research has mostly remained within its own disciplinary boundaries.

In this article, we present opportunities for interdisciplinary research on career shocks. In light of the core aims of JVB, we focus on: (1) career choice in terms of seeking new employment (job search); (2) career development in terms of a traditional (human resource management) and non-traditional (entrepreneurship) career path; and (3) adjustment in terms of how people across social groups may react differently to career shocks.

1. Career shocks and job search

Career shocks are important in understanding turnover decisions (e.g., Holtom et al., 2005; Lee & Mitchell, 1994) and career outcomes (e.g., Blokker et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013), yet they have surprisingly received little attention in the job search literature. Job search can be defined as a: “goal-directed, self-regulatory process in which cognition, affect, and behavior are devoted to preparing for, identifying, and pursuing job opportunities” (Van Hooft et al., 2020, p. 1). The predominant theoretical lens in this area has been self-regulation (e.g., da Motta Veiga et al., 2018; Van Hooft et al., 2020), which proposes that how job seekers regulate their cognitions, affect, motivation, and behaviors influences their success (e.g., da Motta Veiga et al., 2018, 2020; da Motta Veiga & Gabriel, 2016; Van Hooft et al., 2020). Conceptually, in job search, the self-regulation process begins with setting the goal of finding a job, followed by actions that lead to achieving this goal. Job search research has generated a wealth of knowledge about how individuals can effectively navigate challenging and complex situations and events (e.g., job loss, job search processes), which is directly relevant for understanding career shocks. Yet, it could also be critiqued for being overly agentic, similar to criticisms of the field of career studies in general (e.g., Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Baruch et al., 2015). Indeed, Klehe et al. (2021) argued that being able to deal with events and traumas is key for effective self-regulation, which implies that knowledge about career shocks can enrich the self-regulatory perspective on job search.

What is perhaps most surprising in the job search literature is that career shocks are often the reason why individuals engage in a job search to begin with. Indeed, in many cases, individuals would be triggered to start setting new goals and seek new employment following such a shock, for example after unexpected job loss. This likely applies to all three types of job seekers distinguished by Boswell et al. (2012): new labor market entrants (e.g., an unexpected job offer or not being able to secure employment after graduation), job losers (e.g., major reorganization, unexpected layoff), and employed job seekers (e.g., major private events or a sudden epiphany about one’s career path). Stated differently, positive and negative career shocks often serve as antecedents to the job search process, and they likely influence whether and how individuals conduct their search for employment.

We see a clear opportunity for research to take a self-regulation approach to investigating the influence of career shocks on job search processes. For example, it would be interesting to compare whether and how different types of career shocks are related to job search self-regulation. If individuals become unemployed due to an external shock, for example because their industry has suffered a sudden decreased labor demand (e.g., hospitality industry during COVID-19; Forsythe et al., 2020), their job search goals will likely be to learn about new industries and how they could transfer their skills. In contrast, if individuals become unemployed due to an individual realization, such as a poor fit with an organization, we would expect that such individuals will exert relatively less effort on preparatory job search behaviors and more on active job search behaviors (Van Hooft et al., 2020). In short, we would argue that the *start* of a job search process is likely a complex interplay between the occurrence of career shocks and the way in which job seekers self-regulate their cognitions, affect, motivation, and behaviors toward reaching the goal of finding a job.

Similarly, career shocks can also occur *during* the job search process. For example, a change in family situation or a global pandemic might influence one’s geographical search preferences (e.g., Marinescu & Rathelot, 2018). Indeed, while the original job search goal

may have involved a broad geographical search across one or multiple regions, a change in family situation (e.g., getting married, having a child) could affect these behaviors and goals to redirect them toward a narrower, more localized job search within a city or region. In turn, if individuals conduct a narrower search, they might have a smaller pool of jobs to apply for, which could in turn influence the job search strategies they implement and the job search outcomes they achieve. In a similar vein, while the goal at the onset of the job search might have revolved around finding a job tied to a location, the unfolding of a global pandemic, such as COVID 19, might have changed the job search behavior to focus on remote jobs and organizations that support telework (McFarland et al., 2020). Thus, the specific cognitions, affect, motivations, and behaviors that job seekers experience may vary greatly as a result of career shocks happening during their job search process.

Finally, we argue that job search self-regulation could also lead to the occurrence of career shocks. To explain, as they navigate the job search process, perhaps individuals invest time and effort in applying for jobs and interviewing with organizations, only to realize that their ultimate goal is rather different than they had originally thought. For example, their self-regulatory behaviors could cause a sudden realization that they want to become self-employed and/or start their own company (Hyttinen & Ilmakunnas, 2007; Rummel et al., 2021). Scholars could thus examine what aspects of the job search process, the job seeker, and the job search context, would lead to such career shocks.

In conclusion, there are many opportunities for interdisciplinary connections between research on career shocks and self-regulated job search, for all types of job seekers (i.e., new labor market entrants, unemployed individuals, and employed job seekers; Boswell et al., 2012). Career shocks research would benefit from this through a better understanding of cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral factors that influence how people may self-regulate career shock experiences. Job search research would benefit with the inclusion of career events that can trigger and change self-regulatory job search processes.

2. Career shocks and human resource management

Career shocks represent a timely and important lens to consider how HR practices can impact individual and firm level outcomes. This is an important focus as strategic HRM research has been critiqued as overly focusing on the impact of HR practices on firm performance, while neglecting to study the impact on individual employees (e.g., Dundon & Rafferty, 2018). The limitations of such a myopic focus of how firms strategically manage people have been particularly exposed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Collings et al., 2021), even more so because the pandemic has had such a major impact on people's careers (Akkermans et al., 2020). From an individual perspective, career shocks can trigger deliberations including potential changes in career-related behaviors (Akkermans et al., 2018), such as undertaking further education or changing employment, and they can alter work motivation and behaviors directed at the achievement of career goals (Kraimer et al., 2019; Seibert et al., 2013). As such, insights from the HRM literature concerning, for example, job changes, employment status or motivation more broadly, are likely to shed considerable light on how individuals can make sense of career shocks and inform their career-related actions.

It is well established that (career) shocks lead to turnover, as advocated by the unfolding model of turnover (Lee & Mitchell, 1994). However, HRM literature on turnover typically stops when turnover happens, and fails to consider the longer-term career consequences. In terms of the career transitions literature (e.g., Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2019): the pre-transition phase is covered elaborately, yet the actual transition and post-transition phases are typically not studied. Hence, studies related to employee turnover and exit in the field of HR could benefit from using knowledge about career transitions and, specifically, career shocks by taking a temporal, longer-term perspective. This is particularly important because the view of turnover as an end point in the employment relationship has been challenged recently (Keller et al., 2020; Shipp et al., 2014). It would be interesting to explore how HR practices impact departing employees' willingness to return to former employers. This could, for example, include employees who are laid off, or who had to exit the workplace owing to caring responsibilities. Research on boomerang hires, former employees who are rehired by the same organization, shows that employees whose turnover is related to shocks that are not associated with dissatisfaction with the job or company often keep the option of returning to that employer open (Shipp et al., 2014; Swider et al., 2017). This is significant as research highlights that boomerang hires may be cheaper to hire and outperform external hires (Keller et al., 2020), and they are more satisfied and committed and engage in higher levels of extra-role behaviors compared to non-boomerang employees (Snyder et al., 2020). In all, this means that employee turnover and its career implications would best be studied with an interdisciplinary lens that uses insights from both HR and career shocks literatures.

Another area where HR and career shocks research can enrich each other is employee health and wellbeing. In a recent review of the literature around employee health and occupational safety, De Cieri and Lazarova (2020) conclude that extant research has overwhelmingly focused on sub-clinical indicators of psychological well-being and on those aspects of well-being most proximal to employer interest, such as job satisfaction (Danna & Griffin, 1999). They conclude that HR scholarship has not devoted enough attention to employees' physical safety and physiological health, or long-term health outcomes (cf. Peccei & Van de Voorde, 2019). However, health and well-being are at the core of recent debates on career sustainability, and career shocks are assumed to play a key role in this area (Akkermans et al., 2020; De Vos et al., 2020). For example, a sudden illness or a major stressful event at work can lead individuals to reappraise their career goals, potentially leading them to change their current career trajectory (cf. Pak et al., 2021). Hence, the career shock literature can help understand how employees' health and wellbeing is impacted by sudden external events. At the same time, analyzing how employees evaluate HR interventions, such as work design or shift arrangements, to protect their wellbeing in times of major disruptions, and how this impacts on their career decision making, would be important to better understand how individuals can be supported when they experience career shocks.

Furthermore, insights from the HR attributions literature shows that exploring the intended and implemented HR practices alone is insufficient. This literature highlights the importance of causal explanations that employees infer about organizational motivations for

implementing particular HR practices and that these can vary between individual employees (Nishii et al., 2008). For example, if employees perceive HR interventions to be primarily aimed at individual health or wellbeing, they will be more committed and experience lower strain at work (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015). Career shocks may play a pivotal role in such attributional processes. For example, if an individual experiences a major organizational shock (e.g., a reorganization) they may feel more insecure (Hofer et al., 2021), which could lead to having more negative attributions toward HR interventions in that organization and, subsequently, lower commitment and higher turnover (intentions). At the same time, positive career shocks (e.g., an unexpected promotion) may favorably impact on individual's perceptions of their organization's HR policies and practices, leading to higher well-being and productivity. In all, we see opportunities for research on HR attributions to take into account career shocks when analyzing how HR practices impact HR attributions and, subsequently, how those attributions influence individual and organizational outcomes.

Although most of the previously mentioned opportunities for interdisciplinary connections between HRM and career shocks have focused on negative career shocks, we also stress the importance of HR's contributions to supporting individuals in capitalizing on unexpected opportunities (e.g., positive career shocks). HR policies and practices can create opportunities for career growth, for example through formalized career customization policies (Straub et al., 2020) and employability-enhancing interventions (Akkermans et al., 2015). Another emerging example of an HR intervention focused on creating opportunities for development is the internal opportunity marketplace, which matches organizational needs with employee capabilities (Collings & McMackin, 2021; Schrage et al., 2020). Collings and McMackin (2021) outline an initiative based around a redefined career framework focusing on the skills required in the future of work, where employees bid to work on projects where their skills meet a need in the project team. These projects provide a flexible platform to capture career development opportunities, which offer opportunities for the exploration of new skills, development of new professional ties, and even new professional identities unavailable in their full-time jobs (Rogiers et al., 2020). Such HR interventions essentially create opportunities for career shocks, particularly positive ones, to occur, which further underlines the potential in connecting the HR and career shocks literatures in future research.

3. Career shocks and entrepreneurship

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) defined entrepreneurship as the identification and exploitation of business opportunities, and it is primarily associated with the founding of a new business venture (Baron, 2007). Entrepreneurship is an important area of study because of its impact on job creation and employment growth, economic efficiency, innovation, and also the wellbeing of the individual entrepreneurs themselves (Van Praag & Versloot, 2007). The mutual compatibility of career studies and entrepreneurship seems natural: the background and career experiences of the individual entrepreneur will be an important factor in entrepreneurship and, at the same time, a move from paid employment to self-employment would seem to be virtually a template for protean (Hall et al., 2018) and boundaryless (Arthur et al., 2005) career patterns. However, Chandra (2018) reports a topic mapping of publications in the entrepreneurship area and found that the topic of careers is only a small point on the periphery of the visual topic overlay, primarily focusing on entrepreneurship education. Yet, there is a renewed interest in the individual in entrepreneurship. Constructs of interest to careers scholars, such as personality traits (Zhao et al., 2009; Zhao & Seibert, 2006) and entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Zhao et al., 2005) are again appearing in the entrepreneurship literature. Such a psychological approach to careers, and a career shocks perspective in particular, is still an under-utilized topic in entrepreneurship but one that holds potential for both those interested in entrepreneurship and in career studies.

The career perspective sensitizes scholars to the fact that entrepreneurship may be only one stage of a more encompassing series of career positions (Burton et al., 2016) that may involve not only transitions between jobs and even occupations, but entry and exit from self-employment. Estimates are that up to 90% of entrepreneurs found their new ventures while in paid employment (Hellmann, 2007; Sørensen & Fassiotto, 2011), and approximately 10% of self-employed workers continue their employment in existing firms (Raffiee & Feng, 2014), suggesting highly complex career trajectories. Thus, one area where a career shocks perspective can inform entrepreneurship research concerns the initial decision to pursue a career as an entrepreneur. Some research has already been conducted from this perspective. Haynie and Shepherd (2011) studied discontinuous career transitions into self-employment among soldiers who were unable to perform the duties associated with their military career because they had become disabled by combat injuries. They found that those who developed coherent career narratives oriented toward the future adapted more successfully to their traumatic career shock. Furthermore, Seibert et al. (2020) examined less extreme but perhaps more frequent types of career shocks as a trigger for transitions from paid employment into entrepreneurship. Building on seminal work by Shapero (1984), they found that experience of specific events, including a missed raise, a pay cut, a business idea ignored, or major change within their employing organization increased the extent to which the individual would engage in activities designed to start a new business venture. Importantly, these career shocks had their strongest effects on employee behavior when individuals held a strong entrepreneurial identity as a possible-self aspiration. Similar to Seibert et al.'s (2020) findings and also building on Shapero's (1984) work, Rummel et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study among recently graduated entrepreneurs and found that many of them had moved into entrepreneurship as a result of experiencing a career shock, such as a chance meeting with an influential entrepreneur or a sudden disappointment in corporate life.

Career shocks research may also contribute to movement from self-employment into paid employment. In particular, two major types of career shock may be important. First, although the image of entrepreneurs can be heroic and even romantic, embodying attributes of strength and control, the actual work associated with starting and managing a new venture can involve long hours of demanding and even tedious work (Dyer, 1995). Entrepreneurship is also stressful due to significant levels of personal risk and responsibility and little separation between work and life spheres (Zhao & Seibert, 2006). Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that first-time entrepreneurs may experience considerable reality-based career shock simply having to do with a misalignment between their expectations and the actual nature of entrepreneurial work. Second, failure rates of new ventures are very high (Shane, 2008), yet

individual entrepreneurs tend to be overconfident (Hmieleski & Baron, 2008; Koellinger et al., 2007). This is a formula for an unexpected, disruptive, and highly critical event we would call a career shock, however, until recently little research has examined the consequences of failure for the entrepreneur (Shepherd et al., 2016). The dramatic and unequivocal nature of new venture failure also offers an opportunity to enrich the literature on career shocks and transitions: under what conditions does the entrepreneur who experiences firm failure return to entrepreneurship and when do they move (back) into paid employment?

What the aforementioned studies of career shocks and entrepreneurship highlight is the important role of identity processes (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The entrepreneurship literature has devoted considerable attention to the closely related topics of entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2009; 2017) and entrepreneurial identity (Donnellon et al., 2014; Newbery et al., 2018). This literature sees entrepreneurial identity as a force not only driving one into entrepreneurship, but influencing the amount of effort exerted as an entrepreneur, the work roles filled by the individual as an entrepreneur (Cardon et al., 2013) and the organizational strategies enacted by the entrepreneur's firm (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Thus, a future direction for the career shocks literature may be the way shocks not only interact with identity, but cause changes in the salience of different potential identities. For example, building on the findings by Seibert et al. (2020), shocks may instigate changes in the nature and salience of different career identities and, possibly, lead to career transitions between paid employment and entrepreneurship. The career shocks literature could benefit from a greater understanding of the conditions under which shocks might heighten existing identities, reshape role identities, or cause the abandonment of one identity and the emergence of another. The relationship is likely to be complex, with perhaps weaker shocks making aspects of one's existing career identity more salient but stronger shocks requiring a larger reconstruction of one's career identity. Conversely, strong and persistent role identities may function to buffer the effects of career shocks on attitudinal and behavioral reactions. This buffering effect is most likely to be true with respect to negative career shocks, with identity in this case acting as a mechanism facilitating stability rather than change in career trajectories.

A final suggestion for mutual enrichment between career shocks and entrepreneurship research lies in the area of emotions. In particular, some studies have begun to explore the role of emotions in entrepreneurial behavior (Cardon et al., 2012), and the role of affect in entrepreneurial decision making, creativity, and motivation (Baron et al., 2012; Foo et al., 2009). To date, career shocks research has mostly focused on cognitive mechanisms and reactions, but given what we know about events and emotions from affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), it is likely that emotions will be closely associated with career shocks. The finding regarding emotions in the entrepreneurship literature suggest that relations of emotion to the recognition, creation, and attractiveness of entrepreneurial opportunities may generalize to the career domain as well. That is, career shocks may engender emotions that facilitate the recognition and evaluation of alternative career opportunities.

4. Career shocks and diversity

Careers scholarship and diversity research have a natural overlap. Therefore, in this final section we explore avenues for research at the intersection of diversity research and career shocks. Specifically, we draw on diversity scholarship to identify mechanisms through which collectively experienced shock events trigger career-related thoughts. Diversity refers to those demographic and cultural markers (e.g., race, gender, country of origin) of an organization's labor force that have meaning in a given context. Most pertinent to the research on careers, diversity research considers as meaningful those demographic and cultural markers of a labor force that influence people's employment experiences and opportunities, and that present a *performance* opportunity or constraint for teams and organizations (Barak, 2016; DiTomaso & Post, 2007). This is directly relevant for research on career shocks as different career shocks may happen to people associated with different demographic and cultural groups and, subsequently, have unique impact on performance opportunities and constraints for organizations. As an example, Nair and Chatterjee (2021) uncovered in their qualitative study that women in India reported an arranged marriage as an important shock to their further career plans and paths. Such a shock would likely be less salient among other cultural groups that do not practice arranged marriages.

Demographic and cultural markers influence individual and group outcomes through two important mechanisms: social identity and intergroup relations. Individuals have multiple social identities (e.g., based on demographic and cultural markers), the salience of which depends on context, and that condition how people experience and makes sense of the world. In addition, in most social settings, a consensus emerges about the traits and characteristics associated with specific demographic and cultural markers (e.g., stereotypes, stigma). This could cause positive shocks if such characteristics are in line with someone's social identity group, yet could also cause negative shocks if this is not the case. Stated differently, social identity can constrain or enable access to career opportunities, especially when legislation further cements the consensus on who is desirable or not in a work force. Individuals' career trajectories may also depend on the relationships among social identity groups in a given context (DiTomaso, Post, & Parks-Yancy, 2007), because social identity groups vary in their relative size, status, and power (DiTomaso, Post, Smith, et al., 2007; Van Dijk et al., 2020), and these structural considerations can influence the dynamics in a team. For example, belonging to a higher power or higher status social identity group confers more authority and legitimacy in team discussions. Similarly, conflict among groups in a larger social setting may spill over in work teams, affecting the team's dynamics and performance capabilities (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2009). This also implies that the *same* shared external event (i.e., career shock) may have *different* effects on individuals depending on social identity groups they belong to.

As the conceptualization of diversity suggests, the characteristics of a labor force that are meaningful vary by context and over time. In line with Akkermans et al.'s (2018) definition of career shocks as being a combination of an external event and a career-related deliberate thinking process, external events may constitute career shocks when they alter or bring new meaning to demographic and cultural characteristics, because the new meaning of social identity groups may cause individuals to (re)consider career decisions. Hence, external events may change the social meaning conferred on various demographic and cultural groups (Disha et al., 2011) and

have significant individual career implications. In this light, we see two clear opportunities for interdisciplinary connections in research on diversity and career shocks.

First, external events may change the relative standing of a social group in a given context. As one example of how historical events may trigger a social reconstruction of social identity groups, 9/11 caused respondents of public opinion polls in the US to acknowledge being more suspicious of people they thought were of Arab descent and supporting the profiling and surveilling Arabs and Arab Americans (Schildkraut, 2002), presumably because they were no longer deemed “real Americans.” As another example, COVID-19 raised the social status of healthcare workers to “critical” (Nayna Schwerdtle et al., 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). As a social group’s relative standing changes, so do the opportunities of their members. Further, changes in stereotypes, legislation, and discriminatory behaviors that accompany a group’s change in relative standing present additional career challenges and opportunities that may, too, cause deliberation about one’s next career move. This implies that career shocks research needs to take into account social groups as the prevalence and impact of career shocks may differ across social groups. At the same time, the temporal lens implied in career shocks research would benefit diversity research as sudden shifts in relative standing of social groups may have major impact on the careers of people within those groups.

Second and relatedly, external events may alter the subjective importance of or threaten individuals’ social identity in ways that cause reflection about and action in one’s career. External events witnessed collectively are experienced differently based on the extent to which they may threaten individuals’ social identity (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). For example, an unexpected layoff may cause a major career re-assessment for someone who considers their job as a key element of their social identity, whereas it may have relatively low impact on someone who has their primary social identity outside of work. Similarly, when an external event occurs that suddenly makes one’s social identity highly salient, this may cause career deliberation and, potentially, action. One relevant line of work might be to examine how external events selectively cause vicarious trauma, a transformative experience that comes from empathic engagement with trauma material (Bell et al., 2003), in ways that affect work and career decisions. McCluney et al. (2017), for example, explain how racially traumatic events (e.g., police brutality toward Blacks) affect black employees’ absenteeism by increasing racial identity threats. Burgeoning theory in this area could extend into careers research, by examining events that affect individuals of a wide range of identities. Using the concept of career shocks, diversity researchers might be able to explain patterns of individuals’ career trajectories by examining how triggering external events shape career decisions. Further, because external events have the potential to alter the subjective importance of individuals’ social identities and can be identity threatening or strengthening, they may cause changes in the dynamics of diverse teams. Since work events such as micro aggressions and differential treatment cause polarization in work teams (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2009), it stands to reason that larger scale external events may also disrupt the functioning of diverse groups.

5. Concluding note

In this article, we have formulated interdisciplinary opportunities to study career shocks in terms of career choice (i.e., job search), career development (i.e., HRM and entrepreneurship) and career adaptation (i.e., diversity). Although we focused primarily on mutual enrichment between career shocks research and each of the four domains, there are also opportunities across all of them. For example, we have discussed the important role of social and career identity, both of which could influence how someone deals with career shocks, but also how those identities might be affected by such shocks. In turn, career shocks could trigger a job search process that leads to a career transition between paid employment and entrepreneurship. Another example would be how individuals self-regulate their cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behaviors when faced with career shocks related to searching for new employment, navigating their career path in an organization or their own business, and changes or threats related to the salience of one’s social identity. Taken together, our analysis has made it clear that many opportunities for interdisciplinary research on career shocks exist, and we hope that our article will inspire scholars both from within and outside of the field of career studies to capitalize on those connections and further integrate career shocks into studies on how people work and develop their career.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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