Introduction

Theory used in careers research is more diverse than ever. The range of theories reflects the diversity of scholars who recognize the importance of careers to many questions from across the field of management. Hughes (1937) observed 80 years ago that careers connect individuals and larger social structures. Individuals make career choices in institutional environments that enable, constrain, and give the choices meaning. At the same time, these choices reproduce and reinforce institutions (Barley, 1989; Jones and Dunn, 2007; Hughes, 1937). Management scholars have long recognized the unique potential of careers research as a hub to illuminate processes and outcomes at multiple levels of analysis (Gunz, 1989), and have called for fulfillment of the promise of careers research to become a predominant element of studies of organizations and work (Arthur et al., 1989a; Jones and Dunn, 2007; Van Maanen, 1977). Because careers link individuals to organizations, occupations, institutions, and society in general, they speak to both micro and macro concerns. Accordingly, careers research appears across virtually all of the sub-fields of management, from organizational behavior to strategy, as well as in the sub-field that specializes in careers studies.

Recently, there has been an uptick in interest about careers across management sub-fields, driven in part by increasing interest in micro-foundations of organizational phenomena (Felin et al., 2015) and in part by increasing availability of matched employer-employee data that enable better understanding of careers within and across organizations (e.g., Campbell, 2005). Careers work is being presented at the annual Wharton People and Organizations conference that started in 2007 and the Strategic Management Society’s Strategic Human Capital Interest Group, founded in 2011, as well as across many divisions of the Academy of Management. The broadening base of interest has resulted in a stream of recent work in the management literature that speaks to careers issues from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Representing a range of disciplines, these studies are a step toward a more central place for careers research in the field of management. At the same time, we echo Arthur et al. (1989b) in proposing that the strongest contribution that careers research can make to the understanding of work and organizations is in developing interdisciplinary theory that can explain complex phenomena.
In this chapter, we discuss the use of theory from multiple disciplines in careers research. To provide a framework to organize our discussion, we reviewed recent literature with an eye toward identifying themes. We inductively derived three major areas of interest to careers scholars: career success, job mobility, and career patterns and progressions.¹ Though several studies address multiple categories, we find these categories encompass most recent research conversations in Management. Career success refers to research about objective and subjective outcomes of careers (e.g., salary, promotion, and career satisfaction). Job mobility refers to questions about the causes and consequences of career moves (i.e., what causes individuals to make a job or career change) and how change affects mobile individuals and their employers. Career patterns and progressions is about the shape of a whole career, and refers to questions about why people’s careers might follow particular sequences of jobs, and the consequences of having certain careers (e.g., boundaryless, erratic careers, or careers with spells of unemployment). For each of these areas, we discuss how theories from the main disciplinary perspectives that inform careers research in the field of management (i.e., psychology, sociology, and economics) have been used. Though careers research can be found across the social sciences, in fields as diverse as anthropology, philosophy, communications, education, social work, and others (Agergaard and Ungruhe, 2016; Care, 1984; Kramer, 1995), each with their own disciplinary bases, we focus on the disciplines most central to the field of management (Agarwal and Hoetker, 2007). We primarily consider studies published in roughly the last 15 years, acknowledging similar previous reviews (e.g., Arthur et al., 1989a; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). We also emphasize empirical work in order to show theory in use. Finally, we discuss the continuing need for interdisciplinary theory and research in careers.

Career success

Career success is a central concern of careers research (see Ng et al., 2005 for a meta-analysis). Understanding the sources of career success and what careers success means to individuals can enrich our understanding of the role that careers play in individuals’ lives. The careers literature has conceptualized career success as having both objective and subjective aspects (Arthur et al., 2005). Objective career success is about the tangible aspects of a person’s career situation, such as salary, promotions, and high-status occupational attainment. By contrast, intangible factors like career satisfaction are subjective, primarily from the point of view of the career holder. A great deal of attention has been paid to career success by careers scholars (Chudzikowski, 2012; Mayrhofer et al., 2016; Verbruggen, 2012) and also in the broader management literature. It is interesting to note, though, that researchers using different disciplinary perspectives do not necessarily consider both aspects of career success. Those using theory from economics or sociology almost exclusively study objective career success, while those using psychological theories are interested in objective and subjective success. In addition, the specific career success outcomes of interest vary across disciplinary perspectives. Economics-based studies use wages and promotions almost exclusively as measures of career success, while sociology-based studies also consider occupational or job attainment, and psychologists might view an unsatisfactory new job as even worse than being unemployed (e.g., Feldman et al., 2002).

Economics

Despite a large number of studies in the field of labor economics that focus on objective career success outcomes like wages or promotions (see Gibbons and Waldman, 1999 for a review), relatively little of this research has migrated into the management literature. Though some earlier
management studies use theory imported directly from economics, like tournaments or signaling theory, to explain career success in internal labor markets (e.g., Cappelli and Cascio, 1991), more recent work using economic theory has focused on human capital as a determinant of objective career success. A human capital perspective holds that the knowledge and skills that individuals accrue through work experiences, education, and training can be considered a form of capital, because they are productive, like other forms of capital (Becker, 1962). A central aspect of human capital theory is the notion of specificity (i.e. accrual of expertise that is especially valuable to specific firms, industries, or occupations), which should lead to higher rewards in those contexts. Though numerous studies have shown a relationship between expertise, measured by firm or job tenure, and career success (Ng et al., 2005), recent studies have begun to unpack aspects of work experience that affect career success. Along these lines, certain types of experience, such as entrepreneurial experience or experience in similar firms, can positively affect subsequent earnings (Campbell, 2013; Sturman et al., 2008).

**Sociology**

Understanding career success in sociology has a long tradition, notably via the sociology of labor markets (Granovetter, 1995, 1974; Marsden and Gorman, 2001), and its attendant focus on social networks as means for career attainment (i.e., success in obtaining job offers). Management research has increasingly highlighted the mechanisms by which social contacts contribute to individuals’ job search success. Thus we have made great progress in understanding the role of referrers and other organizational insiders on chances of being offered jobs (Sterling, 2014; Yakubovich and Lup, 2006), the characteristics of social networks that have a differential influence on job search success (e.g., strong versus weak ties; Obukhova, 2012; Yakubovich, 2005) or centrality versus brokerage (Kilduff and Brass, 2010), and how different tie configurations may be beneficial in various stages of the job search process (Barbulescu, 2015). Interest is also increasing in how social networks matter to people’s career success beyond getting a job, such as for salary negotiations (Belliveau, 2005) or compensation, promotions, and career satisfaction (e.g., Seibert et al., 2001).

A second vibrant stream of sociology-based research on career success draws on theories of status and reputation in economic exchange (Podolny, 1993) to understand the effects of employer status on the career outcomes of employees. Phillips (2001) showed that the more likely a firm is to fail, the easier it is for people to get promoted internally. On the external labor market, having worked for a firm that failed has negative effects on status attainment in the future, but the effect is also moderated by other forms of status affiliation, such as educational prestige (Rider and Negro, 2015). Also, association with high-status firms seems to bring people qualified career benefits: high-status firms can hire higher ability workers without having to pay for the full value of their ability early in the career, but must raise wages relatively more rapidly for later career workers (Bidwell et al., 2015). There are also trade-offs between pecuniary benefits and the status of the employing organizations (Rider and Tan, 2015).

A third stream we identify also has a respected history in the sociology of organization—research on the impact of organizational structure, market structure, and demography on career outcomes (Lawrence and Tolbert, 2007; Rosenfeld, 1992). This stream is perhaps best known in management for its classic theory and research on internal labor markets (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). Though attention has mostly shifted to external labor markets instead of organizational ones, there has been a very recent renewal of interest in internal hiring practices and their associated career success outcomes, with studies that contrast the job attainment, performance, and wages of internal versus external hires (Bidwell and Keller, 2014; Gaba and Dokko, 2016).
external labor markets, brokers that mediate the employment relationship can also affect gender segregation, or the tendency for men to end up in better jobs than women, for example by enabling anticipatory gendered sorting (Fernandez-Mateo and King, 2011) and creating gendered consideration sets for top executive positions (Fernandez-Mateo and Fernandez, 2016). Inequality in distribution of rewards in organization is also being studied as a factor influencing career success (Bidwell et al., 2013), along with a revival of demography studies (Cohen et al., 1998), in which organizational demographic composition influences career outcomes, for example when women or racial minorities experience different promotion chances relative to white men (McGinn and Milkman, 2013).

**Psychology**

Psychological research on career success generally seeks to understand people’s perceptions about career success, in particular the various factors that influence career success. A key departure of the psychology perspective from that of economics and sociology is that people themselves define what it means to be successful rather than having success defined by an objective standard. Subjective career success is by definition psychologically determined, yet the same holds for objective career success (Gunz and Heslin, 2005; Seibert and Kraimer, 2001).

Psychological inquiries into what factors contribute to career success often start with stable individual differences, such as personality and cognitive ability. Along these lines, a comprehensive meta-analysis by Ng and colleagues (2005) found that “Big Five” and other personality characteristics, such as proactivity and internal locus of control, influenced salary, promotions, and career satisfaction. Further, these stable individual differences were more strongly related to subjective than objective career success. Recent work has extended these findings by considering additional traits, such as occupational self-efficacy, which predicted salary and status increases (Abele and Spurk, 2009). Several studies have also examined how the changing career context might redefine career success (Arthur et al., 2005; Grote and Raeder, 2009).

A second stream of research stems from the notion that career success is defined in relative rather than absolute terms (Gunz and Heslin, 2005). This research builds on self-categorization theory, which posits that people evaluate their outcomes in part by comparison to relevant others (Festinger, 1957). Research along these lines has sought to understand which reference groups will be salient and why (Heslin, 2005), whether upward or downward social comparisons are beneficial (Eddleston, 2009), and the types and functions of career reference groups (Grote and Hall, 2013).

A third thriving area of study considers “extreme” subjective career success: work as a calling (Hall and Chandler, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). People who experience work as a strong calling feel that it is a deeply meaningful, consuming passion (Dobrow and Tost-Kharas, 2011). Research has considered both the antecedents (Dobrow, 2013) and consequences (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) of perceiving work as a calling. While a strong calling is typically viewed as positive for employees and organizations, scholars have recently explored the “dark side” of calling, such as the potential for mistreatment by employers (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009) and overestimation of one’s objective abilities (Dobrow and Heller, 2015).

**Job mobility**

Job mobility is an interest area that has received substantial attention from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Modern career theories are based on the observation that job mobility can occur at all stages of a career and in all directions (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). While the causes of job
mobility and the ease of transitions continues to be an important area of research (e.g., Ng et al., 2007), recent years have seen an increase in studies that consider consequences of job mobility. Because job moves represent change, mobility events can represent changes in occupation and identity for individuals, and capabilities and social networks for organizations. In addition, the mobility event is the point where the relationship between people and organizations is most clear. It is at the point when individuals change jobs that we can understand the nature of their attachments to larger social structures like organizations or occupations, as well as the implications of changing affiliations. Moreover, unlike career success studies, job mobility studies are also concerned with organizational or institutional outcomes and individual level outcomes beyond obtaining job offers. Because of mobility’s direct implications for individuals, firms, and larger social structures, the study of job mobility is of interest to scholars from all disciplines of management, and theories from multiple disciplines have been used to understand mobility and its implications (for recent reviews, see Dokko and Jiang, 2017; Mawdsley and Somaya, 2016).

**Economics**

Like studies of career success, job mobility studies use human capital specificity as the primary theory from economics. Job mobility, especially across organization boundaries, potentially disrupts human capital, as skills that are tailored to jobs, firms, industries, and so forth lose value. Accordingly, numerous studies using human capital theory have focused on the consequences of mobility for individuals. For example, Groysberg et al. (2008) and Huckman and Pisano (2006) showed that job performance degrades as individuals move across organizational boundaries, suggesting that mobility can have negative consequences for individuals; however, it can also lead to greater career success in terms of wages (Sturman et al., 2008). For firms, changing job function can be beneficial to innovation outcomes, as mobile workers carry diverse knowledge into new firms (Dokko and Wu, 2017). There have also been recent advances in human capital theory that consider the value of human capital for competitive advantage in terms of constraints on mobility (Campbell et al., 2012).

Another economic theory used to show the effects of job mobility is matching theory. In a matching framework (Heckman and Sedlacek, 1985), mobility occurs when individuals’ preferences better match employers’ willingness to pay for their skills. This framework has been used to explore matching in internal versus external moves that lead to promotions within firms, but increased wages when moving to another firm (Bidwell and Mollick, 2015) and when individuals move into independent contracting versus permanent jobs (Bidwell and Briscoe, 2009).

**Sociology**

Job mobility has been of significant interest to scholars who take a sociological view of careers. The most commonly used sociological perspective in job mobility studies is imprinting. Theories of imprinting hold that job experiences, especially those in sensitive periods of a person’s career, can have a lasting influence on work and outcomes, as individuals carry mental models about appropriate behaviors or modes of organizing into new contexts (Dokko et al., 2009; Higgins, 2006; Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013). Accordingly, scholars have considered how individuals’ job mobility affects the employers they leave and join. For example, studies of entrepreneurship have shown that founders carry models of organizing and employment relationships from their prior job experiences into their new ventures (Beckman and Burton, 2008; Phillips, 2005).

Another stream of work has used social network theories to explore the implications of mobility. When individuals move between firms, they can carry social relationships with them.
Individuals’ careers choices, then, can affect interfirm relationships. Individual relationships that are maintained after job moves can lead to organizational learning, such that knowledge flows increase between old and new employers (Corredoira and Rosenkopf, 2010; Ganco, 2013). Individuals can also carry social capital as they move across firms, enabling their new employers to benefit from the social position of the ex-employer (Dokko and Rosenkopf, 2010). Exiting employees can even break links between firms altogether (Broschak and Block, 2014), though this effect is contingent on whether the individual moves to competitors or clients (Somaya et al., 2008).

**Psychology**

From a psychological perspective, two main questions surround job mobility. The first question is what makes people likely to initiate job change, and the second is what factors facilitate mobility when people decide to change jobs. To answer the first question, a comprehensive review identified several dispositional factors related to the likelihood of seeking mobility, including personality traits, career interests, values, and attachment styles (Ng et al., 2007). For example, people high in neuroticism may exhibit nervousness and emotional instability that makes them unlikely to seek upward transitions (Ng et al., 2005), yet they might seek external lateral transitions due to low self-esteem (Judge and Bono, 2001).

The decision to search for a new job can also be analyzed using decision-making theories. The theory of planned behavior identifies the factors that lead to behavioral intentions, which are predictive of subsequent behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This theory has gained traction as a means to explain efforts around job searching and job mobility (see Ng et al., 2007 for a review). More recently, cybernetic decision theory has been employed to posit that people have a sense of their own employability, which in turn drives their job search and voluntary turnover behavior (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011). An emergent finding across studies, then, is that people construct a sense about their own mobility potential that contributes to their desire to turnover above and beyond feelings of fit (Wheeler et al., 2007).

Individual differences also factor into addressing questions about determinants of successful job changes. Job mobility is facilitated when the new position is a match for the employee’s personality, career interests, and values (Ng et al., 2007). Additionally, there is initial evidence that identity theories may play an important role in job moves. Relational identity may inform post-mobility job performance in determining how hard to compete when former employers become current rivals (Grohsjean et al., 2015). Identity is also a useful, though largely untapped, lens through which to understand whether people decide to leave a job or not (an exception is Rothausen et al., 2015).

**Career patterns and progressions**

While job mobility research encompasses the causes and effects of discrete career changes, a related stream of recent research considers career patterns and progressions across a broader time span. Perhaps the most generative and influential perspective in recent careers research is the boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Boundaryless careers, along with related concepts like protean careers (Hall, 2002) and kaleidoscope careers (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), describe patterns and progressions of modern careers that depart sharply from older conceptions of careers in terms of the direction and speed of movement over the course of a career (see Sullivan and Baruch, 2009 for a comprehensive review). These new characterizations have described a phenomenon of less predictable careers that researchers are just beginning to explore. Building on these ideas, recent research has explored the consequences of these less orderly careers.
Though the upper echelons literature has a history of explaining firm outcomes via CEOs’ careers (Higgins and Dillon, 2007), recent work has considered a broader set of workers, using more readily available and comprehensive biographical career data from sources like LinkedIn (Bidwell and Mollick, 2015; Gaba and Dokko, 2016) or more standardized and objective records of work experiences (e.g., online labor markets; Leung, 2014). The increasing availability of these data provides increasing opportunities to explore career patterns and progressions.

**Economics**

As in the previous sections on economic theory, human capital theory has been used to consider the consequences of career patterns and progressions. Interestingly, a great deal of this work has focused on the careers of entrepreneurs or organizational leaders, expanding human capital theory to include the idea of diverse skills (Lazear, 2004). Studies have shown that diverse career backgrounds and prior entrepreneurial experience are associated with becoming an entrepreneur (Astebro and Thompson, 2011; Shane and Khurana, 2003). Further, performance of new ventures, a career success outcome for entrepreneurs, is associated with prior entrepreneurial experience (Hsu, 2007; Paik, 2014), as well as within-industry experience (Chatterji, 2009; Dahl and Reichstein, 2007).

**Sociology**

From a sociology standpoint, probably the most influential perspective for scholars of career patterns has been Barley’s (1989: 53) adaptation of structuration theory to career studies. Building on the early Chicago School studies of careers, Barley proposed the notion of career scripts that “encode contextually appropriate behaviors and perceptions” as an intermediate link between the institutions that structure people’s work lives and the actions of individuals who enact those institutions. Using career structuration theory, scholars have examined the coexistence of organizational and global managerial career scripts (Cappellen and Janssens, 2010), career transitions (Duberley et al., 2006b), the construction of scientific careers (Duberley et al., 2006a), and patterns for promotion in academia (Dany et al., 2011). These studies share an interest in how pre-existing scripts influence people’s career actions and how people’s decisions and actions may in turn shape the scripts they use, making these studies among the most theoretically ambitious that career research offers today.

Another growing stream of research on career patterns originates from work in economic sociology on the valuation of social objects in critics-mediated markets (Hsu, 2006). Employers are seen here as critics, or evaluators, of an individual’s prior career, and their valuation of certain job sequences over others depends on what the employers are looking for when they seek a new hire. Scholars have applied this theory in particular to specialized versus diverse career patterns. While seminal work in sociology found that early-career individuals were rewarded more for specialism in a line of work and later career individuals for generalism across lines of work (Zuckerman et al., 2003), subsequent studies have nuanced this conclusion. Ferguson and Hasan (2013) found that specialism benefits workers throughout their career in the Indian Administrative Service. Leung (2014) identified coherence in career history as a key factor for subsequent success in a market for freelance programmers. In addition, Merluzzi and Phillips (2016) found that generalists may be preferred when specialists are the modal candidate rather than the rare one. In qualitative work, O’Mahony and Bechky (2006) also showed that contract workers engage in “stretchwork” to construct labor market identities that appeared coherent to potential employers.
Another stream of work draws on micro-sociological theories of cultural and social role-based beliefs, norms, and identities as influences on people’s decisions and actions, especially as these contribute to inequality in careers outcomes (e.g., Ridgeway and Correll, 2000). On the one hand, individuals choose courses of action consistent with norms and values implied by the identities they are committed to (e.g., Foote, 1951). Cultural beliefs about gender-appropriate jobs, for instance, are found to constrain women’s job application decisions, such that women’s and men’s propensity to identify with different types of jobs explains some of the difference in occupational choices (Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013). On the other hand, internalized beliefs about group differences and anticipation of how those differences will play out in the future career also shape individuals’ occupational aspirations; gay men and lesbians tend to concentrate in occupations that provide task independence or require social perceptions, or both (Tilcsik et al., 2015).

Finally, research on patterns in careers also draws on micro-sociological theory about social referents. Social referents affect the likelihood of changing careers (Higgins, 2001) and influence people’s notions about whom they might aspire to emulate (Gibson and Lawrence, 2010; Grote and Hall, 2013). Reciprocally, prior career patterns have been shown to influence employees’ subsequent positioning in informal social structures (e.g., people with atypical careers are more likely to become brokers; Kleinbaum, 2012) and managers’ reference groups for adoption and abandonment of practices (Gaba and Dokko, 2016).

**Psychology**

Scholars drawing upon psychological theories have examined what outlooks facilitate careers in the new economy. For example, protean career orientation is a career mindset in line with the flexibility, self-direction, and values that define some modern careers (Briscoe and Finkelstein, 2009). This orientation contains an attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral component and is thought to be somewhat stable, in that some people appear more naturally to embrace new career models.

A second active stream of research explores how people navigate their careers at pivotal junctures. Given the deeply personal and self-defining nature of work for many people, especially professionals, identity theories are often employed to understand how people handle both intended and unintended career changes. Some of the groundbreaking work in this vein is conceptual; for instance, the notion that people’s narrative identity work – their social efforts to craft identity-consistent self-narratives – may enable completion of major work role transitions (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Much of this work develops theory inductively by examining rich qualitative data situated within a specific population. For example, research has investigated how medical residents develop a sense of who they are in their profession (Pratt et al., 2006) and the identity shifts that occur as working women transition through pregnancy to motherhood (Ladge et al., 2012). Key studies have also examined how people navigate professional careers through gender (e.g., Reid, 2015) and race lenses (e.g., Slay and Smith, 2011). There has also been an examination of how people respond when their careers did not work out as planned, for example because of missed callings (Berg et al., 2010) or lost jobs (Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Zikic and Klehe, 2006).

**Discussion**

As we have shown in the preceding sections, the major disciplinary bases of management have all been used to explore questions about careers, reflecting the breadth and flexibility of careers
research. Table 3.1 summarizes our findings about the major theories used from the disciplinary bases of management. As the table shows, all three disciplines have been actively represented in career studies in recent years. Particularly notable is that many theories carry over across themes. Human capital was the dominant theory used for economic inquiries into careers, regardless of the interest area. Within sociological careers studies, social network theories were used to explore both career success and job mobility. In psychology, the dominant theories across all three themes were individual differences and identity. Thus we get a sense of what is being used as well as opportunities that exist.

We also note increased prevalence of sociological theories to explain career phenomena. One reason for this could be the changing context in which work is experienced. As career ladders become less prescribed, and the influence of a single organization weakens, other institutions may come in to help define modern careers (Osterman, 1996). These institutions might include occupations (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984) and communities of practice (Wenger and Snyder, 2000), as well as novel contemporary forms, such as co-working spaces, new venture incubators.

### Table 3.1 Key theories in recent careers studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Success</th>
<th>Job Mobility</th>
<th>Career Patterns and Progressions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td>Human capital (e.g., Ferguson and Hasan, 2013; Ng et al., 2005)</td>
<td>Human capital (e.g., Campbell et al., 2012; Dokko and Wu, 2017; Groysberg et al., 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Matching (e.g., Bidwell and Mollick, 2015)</td>
<td>Social networks (e.g., Broschak and Block, 2014; Dokko and Rosenkopf, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
<td>Social networks (e.g., Barbulescu, 2015; Seibert et al., 2001; Sterling, 2014)</td>
<td>Status and reputation (e.g., Rider and Negro, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status and reputation (e.g., Rider and Negro, 2015)</td>
<td>Organization/ market structure and demography (e.g., Bidwell et al., 2013; Fernandez-Mateo and King, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td>Individual differences (e.g., Abele and Spurk, 2009; Fang et al., 2015)</td>
<td>Individual differences (e.g., Ng et al., 2005; Judge and Bono, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity and social categorization (e.g., Grote and Hall, 2013; Heslin, 2005)</td>
<td>Identity and social categorization (e.g., Grohsjean et al., 2015; Rothausen et al., 2015)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Calling (e.g., Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011)</td>
<td>Decision-making theory (e.g., DiRenzo and Greenhaus, 2011; van Hooft et al., 2004)</td>
</tr>
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and participants in the sharing economy. The question of which groups are meaningful reference points for careers becomes increasingly significant even as it becomes harder to determine (e.g., Grote and Hall, 2013). Another reason sociological theories have become more relevant is that careers are becoming more diverse, not only in their patterns and progressions but also in the people developing careers. Accordingly, sociocultural lenses of gender, race, national culture, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic class become essential to understanding the forces that shape careers.

The recent discourse around careers has been lively, and the pool of scholars interested in careers questions has been widening; however, careers studies still have tremendous opportunities for cross-disciplinary work. Scholars focusing on careers studies have always been open to and inclusive of multiple disciplinary perspectives, despite the many barriers to interdisciplinary work (Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer, 2011). For instance, a recent review of global mobility covers research that goes from the individual level to the country level and from psychological to sociological to economic (Baruch et al., 2016). Similarly, the intelligent career framework (e.g., Arthur et al., 2017) explicitly considers three ways of knowing: how, who, and why, that cover multi-disciplinary considerations. Though cross-disciplinary research is hard to conduct and even harder to publish in top journals, careers research is well positioned to contribute in this way. Integrating disciplinary perspectives can yield insights that are qualitatively different than single-discipline or even multi-discipline studies. Consider Lawrence (2011), who analyzed career success through single, multi-, and interdisciplinary perspectives. She shows how a single data set and outcome construct can lead to different questions and conclusions when viewed through these different lenses.

Among the many papers we reviewed, a few already bridge disciplinary boundaries. For example, Crossland et al. (2014) showed that CEOs whose careers include a diversity of industry, functional, and firm experiences lead firms that are more strategically dynamic and distinctive. In linking career patterns of CEOs with firm-level outcomes, they combine theory on individual dispositions, social influence, and corporate governance. Another example is Barbulescu and Bidwell (2013), who use matching theory from economics as well as theory about gender roles from sociology in order to understand why men and women self-sort into different jobs. Examining how individuals’ careers interact with organizational or higher level conditions or outcomes seems propitious for using multi- or interdisciplinary approaches. Yet we also noticed how the scarcity of interdisciplinary research in our field slows progress. For instance, working at the intersection of individual differences and social networks, Fang et al. (2015) use meta-analysis to study the joint effects of personality and social networks on career success and job performance attempts. The authors set out to investigate both independent and interactive effects, but while they could show the interaction effects of personality and social network position for job performance, they could not do so for career success because of the paucity of relevant interdisciplinary research (Fang et al., 2015: 1256).

Finally, in a chapter dedicated to theory in careers research, we are bound to address the issue of whether or not it is useful to think in terms of “career theory” as opposed to theories that are used in careers studies. We believe this question arises because careers are both an important factor in many social questions and a valid arena for focused inquiry. Playing this dual role, careers can be implicated in theories of identity (e.g., Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Tosti-Kharas, 2012), institutions (e.g., Dokko and Gaba, 2012; Jones, 2001), work and occupations (e.g., O’Mahony and Bechky, 2006; Zabusky and Barley, 1996), human resources (e.g., Bidwell and Briscoe, 2010), strategy (e.g., Crossland et al., 2014; Gunz and Jalland, 1996), and many more organizational and social subjects, while still being itself a subject of theoretical inquiry. Volumes like the *Handbook of Career Theory* (Arthur et al., 1989b) and the *Handbook of Career
Studies (Gunz and Peiperl, 2007) contain essays and theoretical contributions that point to the breadth of theoretical interest and possibilities for research in careers. Therefore, rather than thinking solely about career theories that explain particular constructs with particular predictors, careers can be thought of as a perspective from which to examine social phenomena that can lead to questions or insights that have not been previously explored. For example, well-established streams of literature that have not incorporated careers, such as institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), structural holes (Burt, 1992), or prosocial motivation (Grant, 2007) when viewed through a careers lens might lead to new questions about the role of career experience in enabling action, or career goals in choosing when to act, and so forth. Similarly, ideas like boundaryless, protean, kaleidoscope, and intelligent careers have been called career theories but have acted more as powerful concepts or frameworks (as Sullivan and Baruch (2009) call them) that inspire specific research questions inside and outside of the careers community of scholars (e.g., Bidwell and Mollick, 2015; Briscoe and Hall, 2006; Joseph et al., 2012; O’Mahony and Bechky, 2006).

In this chapter, we have shown that the disciplines underlying the field of management have been well represented in recent careers research, with a renewed excitement and energy. The increasing number and diversity of scholars interested in careers as an object of study point to increased opportunities for joint research. More emphasis on inter- and multi-disciplinary research would advance the field of career research and also strengthen the field’s contributions back to the disciplinary theory bases on which it is founded, making careers more central to organization studies.

Note
1 Though we focused primarily on general field journals in management, the topics we derive are consistent with a recent review of trending topics in journals focused on careers research (Akkermans, J. & Kubasch, S. 2017. #Trending topics in careers: A review and future research agenda. Career Development International, 22, 586–627).

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Bridging micro and macro


