

The Notion of 'Career' in a Globalized Industry

The Case of Seafarers

Polina Baum-Talmor

baump@cardiff.ac.uk Seafarers International Research Centre [SIRC], Cardiff University
Supervisors: Prof. Helen Sampson, Prof. Phillip Brown, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University



Aim

This poster aims at presenting an ongoing PhD project at the Seafarers International Research Centre (SIRC) at Cardiff University. The research examines seafarers' career trajectories and identities, from individual and organizational perspectives. I am currently in my second year of PhD, on the verge of starting data collection.

Introduction

The *flexibilization of work and employment in the labor market* has been a well-established concern among researchers over the last four decades. However, there appear to be gaps in the current understanding of employment and career development in the labor market, and specifically in the shipping industry. This research aims at identifying the extent to which the existing literature helps us understand the career decisions and career identities among seafarers as one group with unique careers in the global labor market.

Background

The notion of career stands on the concept of bureaucratization in organizations. Bureaucratic careers have been the main type of career for decades, providing life-long, secure employment. However, as changes of flattening structures in organizations started occurring, more flexible career structures emerged, and careers have become less secure. This raises the question – to what extent will the notion of career remain relevant in the future?

Existing in the global context for decades, the shipping industry could be seen as an 'advanced' industry that has the potential to shed new light on the way other organizations will develop in the future in terms of careers and career planning.

Global processes have caused changes in the regulation and work conditions for seafarers worldwide. These processes led to the flexibilization of labor in the shipping industry, which means that employment in the shipping industry has become precarious and unstable, which also affected careers. Thus, this industry was chosen as a case study to learn more about careers in the global labor market.

Research questions

- To what extent does the flexibility of seafarers' employment undermine their career structure?
- Do seafarers perceive their occupation as a 'career'?
- How do seafarers envisage their occupational 'identity'?
- To what extent does the concept of 'career' makes sense to seafarers' choice of lifestyle?
- What are the push and pull factors for seafaring lifestyle?
- How might the structure-agency debate shed light on seafarers' career choice?



← Daily routine onboard the merchant ship

Research design

- **Research participants**
 - 30 active seafarers (15 officers and 15 ratings)
 - 30 retired seafarers (15 officers and 15 ratings)
 - 20 'office people' – recruiters and managers (10 shipping industry managers and 10 HRM employees/managers)
- **Conducting a pilot study, which includes:**
 - Interviews with 6-10 people ashore to test research design
 - Assists with modifying and refining research/ interview questions
 - Contributes to identifying possible problems with research
 - Enables a 'small-scale' research
- **Ethnography/Non-Participant observation on-board ships**
 - Enables access to research field
 - Two-three voyages of 2-4 weeks on-board merchant ships
 - More cooperation and rapport from seafarers
 - Informal conversations
 - Trust-based relationship
- **Semi-structured interviews**
 - Efficient way to answer research questions
 - Preparing an 'Interview guide'

Issues to consider throughout research – ethical and risk-related

- Access to field – might be problematic, not enough time ashore
- Isolated field – often no option to leave the ship
- Multicultural setting – different languages onboard
- Woman in a male-dominated setting – might cause problems
- Anonymity of participants – use of pseudonyms
- Validity and Credibility – using a research diary
- Bias and researcher's reflexivity

Potential contribution of research

- Provide empirical framework for career development among seafarers
- Contribute to career sustainability among seafarers
- Shed new light on the concept of 'career' in the global labor market

References

- Baruch, Y. 2006. Career development in organizations and beyond: balancing traditional and contemporary viewpoints. *Human resource management review*, 16, 125-138.
Brown, P. 1995. Cultural capital and social exclusion: some observations on recent trends in education, employment and the labour market. *Work, Employment & Society*, 9, 29-51.
Sampson, H. 2013. *International seafarers and transnationalism in the twenty-first century*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

