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How careers change: understanding the role of structure and agency in career change. The case of the humanitarian sector

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how agency and structure interact to influence the changing nature of careers in the French Humanitarian Sector – a sector that is undergoing a significant shift towards increased professionalization. Drawing on Giddens structuration theory, the study uses the concept of career script as a dynamic framework to understand both career stability and change. Data was collected at both an individual and organizational level to identify three careers scripts in operation in the field and examine the ways in which they evolve over time. The paper provides an analysis of the power relations involved in the development of career scripts and the professionalization of the humanitarian sector, suggesting a potentially greater role for agency than is typically acknowledged. Finally the paper concludes with a consideration of the wider implications for the study of career change in the future.

Introduction

There is widespread agreement that career is a useful concept to understand the linkage between individuals and institutions. Yet, to date, there are few studies which empirically examine how career operates as a mechanism connecting the two. As a result, the career field suffers from the lack of a unified framework that can theorize the overall role of careers in the process of institutionalization (Barley, 1989). To cope with this fragmentation of career studies, some scholars have proposed the application of grand social theories to the career field, for example developing the concept of career field and career habitus based on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, & Meyer, 2003; Mayrhofer, Meyer, Steyrer, & Langer, 2007)

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or using the concept of careers script based on Giddens' structuration theory (Barley, 1989; Barley & Tolbert, 1997). In both of these approaches, careers mediate the relationship between individuals and institutions. We argue that the career script concept is particularly useful as it offers a more dynamic framework to understand both career stability and change.

A career script can be defined as a set of "interpretive schemes, resources, and norms for fashioning a course through some social world" (Barley, 1989, p. 53). They are a set of "guidelines" (Dany, Louvel, & Valette, 2011, p. 975) that people have in mind when they think of their career and that help them to make sense of their professional situations. Defined as a "schematic knowledge structure held in the memory that specifies behaviors or event sequences that are appropriate for specific situations" (Gioia & Poole, 1984, p. 449), underpinning the concept of career scripts is the idea that career stability and change (and as a result institutional stability and change) are the result of an interplay between structure and agency. While a number of papers utilize the concept of scripts (Dany et al., 2011; Duberley, Cohen, & Mallon, 2006; Valette & Culié, 2015), few of them actually explore empirically the way in which they change.

Based on a case study (the French humanitarian sector), this paper aims to address this gap in knowledge by studying career script changes in practice over time. As we will show, the humanitarian sector provides an ideal context for this research because for the last ten years it has been undergoing significant transformation as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian workers adopt more professionalized forms of organization and career. From a theory building perspective, this enables our study to go beyond the work of Dany et al. (2011), Valette and Culié (2015) and Duberley, Cohen, and Mallon (2006) by providing an examination of the complex interplay between structure and agency involved in the creation and modification of career scripts and suggesting a greater potential role for agency over time than has been proposed in previous structuration studies. More specifically, data is collected from both an individual humanitarian worker and organizational (NGO) perspective in order to track the interactions and their mutual influence upon career changes. The study also examines the impact of these changes on NGO's practices.

The paper begins with a brief overview of the literature on the central role of career in linking individuals and institution, justifying the focus on scripts. After describing the methodology, the findings are presented in two ways. First, we outline three humanitarian worker career scripts. Second, we explain how career scripts have changed in the sector in recent years and examine the interplay between humanitarian workers

and NGOs in the change process. Finally, after detailing the contribution of this paper, we question the impact of scripts on actors' empowerment and examine the practical implications of our study for the humanitarian sector.

Literature review

Career at the nexus between individuals and social context

The idea that careers occur at the "intersection of societal history and individual biography" (Grandjean, 1981, p. 1057) is well rehearsed. As long ago as 1937, Hughes (1937) wrote "careers in our society are thought very much in terms of jobs, for these are the characteristic and crucial connections of the individual with the institutional structure" (p. 413). Likewise, Becker and Strauss (1956) claimed that "the agenda of a sociological theory of career should be 'a fairly comprehensive statement about careers as related to both institutions and to persons'" (p. 253). Yet, this dual influence of individuals and institutions on careers has been largely neglected in empirical studies in the career field. This is because careers studies sits at the nexus between different disciplines and different levels of analysis leading to "an extraordinary amount of compartmentalization in research and writing" and "a great deal of theoretical confusion about the phenomenon of career" (Gunz, 1989, p. 225).

However, in order to cope with the excessive voluntarism of some career theorising and to better account for the economic, social and cultural context in shaping career experiences, some academics have called for a focus on both individuals and institutions when studying careers (e.g. Guest & Rodrigues, 2014; Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Rodrigues, Guest, & Budjanovcanin, 2015). Some papers encourage interdisciplinary studies, suggesting that while there is a split between research focusing on individuals (based on psychology) and research focusing on society (based on sociology), it would be fruitful to study careers in an interdisciplinary way, favouring cross-pollination and new analytical frameworks (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Inkson & King, 2011; Khapova & Arthur, 2011; B. Lawrence, 2011). Others suggest that careers need to be studied to both an individual and an organizational level (Gunz, 1989; Van Maanen & Schein, 1977) or at micro and macro levels (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007; Mayrhofer et al., 2007), developing the notion of co-construction of career (Jones, 2001; Nicholson, 2007).

Yet, despite these calls for more integrative frameworks, little theory development has been done so far to account for both the individual and institutional impact on careers (Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Jones & Dunn, 2007; Nicholson, 2007) and Barley's statement that career theory relies

on "findings of a variety of studies that were never systematically ordered under a theoretical umbrella" (Barley, 1989, p. 52) remains current. However, sociology offers two grand theories that could be fruitful to aid understanding of the positioning of career at the nexus between individual and institutions. These grand theories put forward the notion of duality of agency and structure suggesting that "agency and structure, far from being opposed in fact presuppose each other" (Sewell, 1992, p. 4).

Careers and the duality of agency and structure

Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) and Giddens's theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) both propose a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between people and their social environment. Based on the notions of structure and agency, they posit a reflexive interaction of individuals and society, in which individuals actively enter into the constitution of their social environment while being affected by it. Giddens (1984) defines structure as rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems. It is "the memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action" (p. 377). Structure has therefore a virtual existence (Sewell, 1992) but is embodied in social systems (Nizet, 2007). This is why, in order to operationalize the concept, some authors propose using the term structure as synonymous with institutions (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Agency refers to the efficacy of human action (Sewell, 1992). It is constituted by the purposes, habits and judgments on which individual action is based (Whittington, 1992).

For Bourdieu and Giddens agency and structure must be regarded as a duality. Therefore, they are the two faces of the same coin: social practices (Schatzki, 2001; Nicolini, 2012). As Layder explains: "social practices reflect the ability of humans to modify the circumstances in which they find themselves, while simultaneously recreating the social conditions (practices, knowledge, resources), which they inherit from the past" (Layder, 2005, p. 166).

It has been argued that these theories can renew our understanding of career theory (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). First, Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) has been used through the concepts of career fields and career habitus (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Iellatchitch et al., 2003; Mayrhofer et al., 2007) where fields shape habitus - how individual perceive their careers, how they think and act upon them. Habitus therefore explains regular career patterns over time. However, since individuals are constantly adjusted to their context, habitus can be modified and, in turn, can modify career fields (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). In

that sense, individual and social context are embedded in a circular relationship (Iellatchitch et al., 2003).

The second use of grand theory is structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and the concept of career script which has been developed from this (Barley, 1989). Like the notions of career fields and career habitus, the career script concept "offers an integrative framework to explore careers at the nexus between self-consciousness and social structure" (Nicholson & West, 1989). However, the career script "may be viewed as a larger concept (than habitus) […] that takes into account 'individuals' room for maneuver" (Valette & Culié, 2015, p. 15). While the concepts of career fields and career habitus have largely been used to explain the reproduction of career patterns, the career script concept allows a more dynamic perspective, focusing on both reproduction and change. Careers scripts therefore provide an interesting starting point from which to study the roles of individuals and institutions in career change or stability.

Career scripts: a dynamic framework to illuminate duality of career

As discussed earlier, career scripts can be defined as sets of interpretive schemes, resources, and norms (Barley, 1989, p. 53) people use to organize the sequence and meaning of their career experiences such that they are consistent with institutionalized forms of a career (Vough, Bataille, Noh, & Lee, 2015). They are, in other words, guidelines coming from a variety of institutions such as the employing company, the profession, industry interests or from family and social contexts that individuals use to make sense of their situation and to behave in ways that they see as appropriate (Abelson, 1981; Dany et al., 2011; Gioia & Poole, 1984). These guidelines can be seen as rules presented to individuals that constrain agency. But beyond rules, importantly they are also resources that enable agents to act upon structural features (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). Hence, encoded by structure, career scripts are enacted by individuals who, making sense of their professional situation, operationalize and potentially transform them thus acting in return upon structure (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Weick, 1996). Career scripts can therefore be presented as mediators of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Barley, 1989; Giddens, 1984).

The career script concept enables a multi-level perspective where both agency and structure have a role to play in careers changes. As a result, changes in the career scripts which individuals enact can lead to changed understandings of what constitutes a legitimate career in particular contexts. Dany et al. (2011) put forward this double role of structure and agency in their discussion of French academic careers, showing how

scripts are set up by promotion committees and are chosen by academics who can decide whether to follow these formal scripts. Likewise Mallon, Duberley, and Cohen (2005) in their study of English and New Zealander academic careers show that academics had space to impact back upon institutions by choosing and changing the script they refer to and transforming it over time through the incremental actions of everyday life.

However, while authors recognize that agency and structure can change scripts, few of them actually explore the ways in which they are changed. The aim of this paper is to address this issue by studying career script changes in practice. Our study thus goes beyond the work of Dany et al. (2011), Valette and Culié (2015) and Duberley, Cohen, and Mallon (2006) by providing an examination of the interplay between structure and agency in career. Based on a case study of the French humanitarian sector, the paper shows, more specifically, the dynamics of the relationship between humanitarian workers and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in humanitarian career changes

The case of the French humanitarian sector

The humanitarian sector provides an important context for this study as it has undergone significant change in recent years. NGOs have developed new commercial activities (Kim, 2005), changed their strategy developing strong-performance driven orientations (Frumkin & Andre-Clark, 2000), modified their structure to include marketing and HRM services and, above all, changed their human resource profiles, rebalancing their staff towards skilled and experienced employees instead of volunteers (Cunningham, 2001; Hwang & Powell, 2009).

This has created a demand for skilled professional workers who, in contrast to volunteers, are often looking for a career structure which offers promotion and organizational career opportunities (Nickson, Warhurst, Dutton, & Hurrell, 2008; Pitt-Catsouphes, Swanberg, Bond, & Galinsky, 2004). The French humanitarian sector is particularly concerned by changes in the nature of humanitarian careers. A recent consultancy report indicates that the sector has experienced "a movement of professionalization" (Coordination SUD, 2011, p. 11) that has enhanced the role of human resource management in organizations. As a consequence, 90% of French humanitarian NGOs consider HRM to be a key focus for their organization and 60% of them feel that career management is one of the main areas they need to improve (Coordination SUD, 2011). French NGOs are therefore keen to develop career management and retention policies to offer professional careers to (some) humanitarian workers. Quoting the former HR director of *Action contre la Faim*

(one of the larger French humanitarian NGOs), the Etikuma report indicates "We are now recruiting professional humanitarian workers, and professionals often mean people who project themselves forward, and as a result this means we have to consider careers" (Etikuma, 2005, p. 15).

The French humanitarian sector has therefore been chosen for this study as it is witnessing a fundamental change in the nature of careers which makes it a revelatory case (Yin, 2009) to study career script change in practice. Since only limited theoretical and empirical knowledge currently exists with regard to career script changes, we posit that an inductive research strategy based on a case study is an appropriate approach (Siggelkow, 2007). It is our contention that the French humanitarian sector "emphasize[s] the rich, real-world context in which the phenomena [of career] occur" (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p.25), and, therefore, enables the development of theory concerning how career scripts are created, altered or modified.

Method

Data collection

Acknowledging current changes in the French humanitarian sector, our data collection had several aims. First, we aimed to identify the career scripts employed by humanitarian actors. Second, we aimed to account for potential changes in humanitarian career scripts and elucidate the interplay between humanitarian workers and NGOS in these changes. Following a comprehensive research tradition, we intended to understand humanitarian workers' career representations and experiences (Duberley, Cohen, & Mallon, 2006; Dany et al., 2011) by studying their perceptions and more particularly how they "make sense of their careers as they unfold through time and space, attending to both the holistic nature of career as well as to specific career transitions" (Cohen & Mallon, 2001, p. 48). For that purpose, a qualitative approach was both relevant and necessary.

In accordance with the case approach, the data collection was based on two data sources: interviews (formal and informal) and observations. The first author has a longstanding interest in the French humanitarian sector and has been involved as a volunteer for four years in the association *Résonances Humanitaires*. This is a French nonprofit organization that helps humanitarian workers to find a job in France. Created in 2002 by former humanitarian workers, this organization works collaboratively with the larger French humanitarian NGOs. This provided a good opportunity to enter in the French humanitarian environment and to develop networks. As her role was to welcome new arrivals to the association and explain it's function, she had the opportunity to meet many

Table 1. The humanitarian worker sample.

Name	Gender	Age	Scripts used	Scripts mentioned
Luck	M	43	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Jimmy	M	33	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
Sophia	F	36	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Gregory	M	42	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Peter	M	33	Professional, Switcher	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
Sara	F	41	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Robert	M	42	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Lisa	F	42	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Clair	F	35	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Anna	F	33	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Frank	M	45	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
Elisabeth	F	29	Professional	Professional, Fixed-term
Nicole	F	45	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Charles	M	35	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Pierce	M	30	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Alexander	M	29	Professional	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
Louis	M	41	Professional	Professional, Fixed-term
Mary	F	38	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Stephanie	F	35	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Tom	M	26	Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Christina	M	47	Professional, Switcher	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
Emily	F	29	Professional	Professional, Fixed-term
Patricia	F	43	Professional, Fixed-term	Professional, Fixed-term
Philip	M	56	Professional, Switcher	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher

humanitarian workers who gave her contacts for possible interviews. She also used the database of humanitarian workers held by this association to contact potential participants and ask them to take part in the study. The sample was developed with a concern to identify indiciduals with experience working for large humanitarian organizations and to maximize variety regarding, age, gender and skill/profession. In order avoid ethical dilemmas, new arrivals she met as part of her role were not interviewed. Through contacts given by the director of *Résonances Humanitaires* she also had the opportunity to interview HR managers of several French NGOs.

In total, forty four semi-structured interviews were undertaken. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. In line with Dany et al. (2011) study and in order to have "numerous and highly knowledgeable informants who view the focal phenomena from diverse perspectives" (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p.28), interviews were collected in two rounds and each phase addressed a particular level of analysis. In phase 1, 24 interviews were conducted with French humanitarian workers. These respondents had spent several years in the humanitarian field, working for a variety of NGOs (mostly French NGOs). Some of them were still working in the humanitarian field while others had changed jobs and worked in other sectors. Table 1 outlines the sample of humanitarian workers. In this phase our aim was to identify the different career paths that they took (e.g. which NGOs they worked for, mission posts,

Table 2. The NGOs HR manager sample.

NGOs	Age	Budget	Number of employees	HR managers	Gender	Age	Scripts mentioned
ONG 1	155	1,6 billion	12500	Ana	F	43	Professional, Fixed-term
				Erik	M	46	Professional, Fixed-term
				Philip	M	52	Professional, Fixed-term
				Cynthia	F	40	Professional, Fixed-term
ONG 2	39		4331	Oliver	M	40	Professional, Fixed-term
				Vanessa	F	31	Professional, Fixed-term
				Angela	F	32	Professional, Fixed-term
		296 millions		Timothy	M	34	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
				Garry	M	32	Professional, Fixed-term
				Nicholas	M	52	Professional, Fixed-term
ONG 3	47		8282	Patrick	M	45	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
		404 millions		Katherine	F	39	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
				Mark	M	50	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
ONG 4	36		3278	Michelle	F	35	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
		178 millions		Lisa	F	33	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
ONG 5	25		3998	Laura	F	28	Professional, Fixed-term, Switcher
		160 millions		Charlotte	F	39	Professional, Fixed-term
				Jean	F	34	Professional, Fixed-term
ONG 6	38	71 millions	1975	Nathan	M	42	Professional, Fixed-term
				Amanda	F	38	Professional, Fixed-term

headquarter posts, mission countries, type of activities in the humanitarian fields or in others sectors) and to understand the factors that they feel influenced these career paths. We also asked them to talk about their plans for the future and their goals. Some interviewees spontaneously talked about their friends and colleagues' career paths. We then asked them to describe these paths.

Phase 2 focused on an organizational level of analysis. In this round, we conducted 20 qualitative interviews with HR managers in six NGOs. In each NGO, we undertook between two and six interviews. NGOs were selected on the basis of their size and their importance in the French humanitarian sector. They are all well-known organizations with large budgets (varying from 60 million euros to several hundred million euros) and they send several hundred expatriates on mission each year. The respondents from Phase 1 had all worked for at least one of these organizations.

Phase 2 also aimed to examine NGO HRM practices and their evolution over time. HR managers were asked to describe the HRM practices of the NGO they work for, especially in terms of recruitment, mobility and remuneration. They were also asked to describe their own career path and to reflect on humanitarian workers' "typical career paths" and the evolution of these paths. Table 2 outlines the sample of HR managers.

In addition to the 44 semi-structured interviews, the first author's role at *Résonances Humanitaires* enabled her to undertake informal interviews with humanitarian workers over a four year period, to observe eleven meetings, to access the association's reports and to participate in four humanitarian trade shows.

Data analysis

To identify humanitarian career scripts, we analyzed the interviews from Phase 1 first. We studied all of the career paths elaborated by our respondents (meaning both respondents' own career path and those they evoked when talking about their colleagues) and examined the justifications they gave to explain career choices. The software Nvivo was used and the data analysis was ongoing throughout the research.

Analysis proceeded in two steps. The first aimed to identify recurrent humanitarian career paths. To that end we coded the career steps of each respondent. Coding encompassed the respondents' jobs, the related organization and sector, and when the jobs concerned the nonprofit sector, the nonprofit field was coded as well (humanitarian, healthcare, environmental, social, etc.). Then, we compared and gathered the different individual career paths in order to identify recurrent humanitarian career paths. This comparison process enabled us to identify six main career paths (the organizational career path, the humanitarian field career path, the regular switcher career path, the occasional switcher career path, the nonprofit career path and the inter-sectorial career path). We then examined the justifications interviewees gave to explain career choices (eg. interesting career perspective, feeling useful, commitment to organizational values, need to settle down, feeling fed up with field work, bad working conditions, physical or psychological tiredness, etc.). In order to account for regularities, we then examined similarities and differences between the main career paths. This comparison process enabled the identification of three career scripts: the fixed-term humanitarian career script (that brings together the nonprofit career path and the inter-sectorial career path and codings such as "need to settle down" or "bad working conditions"), the switcher humanitarian career script (that brings together the regular switcher career path and the occasional switcher career path and codings such as "feeling useful" or "need to settle down") and the professional humanitarian worker career script (that brings together the organizational career path and the humanitarian field career path and codings such as "interesting career perspective" or "feeling to be useful").

As can be seen in Table 1, each respondent identifies with at least one career script. Some humanitarian workers, as they changed plans and career paths draw from two career scripts. Regardless of their own path, respondents regularly articulated two or three scripts as they described their colleagues' careers or the alternative choices they could have made. Thus they identified alternative legitimate scripts in their career field that they themselves do not use.

Table 3. The three scripts.

	Fixed-term	Switcher	Professional
Basis of time in NGO	One off	Intermittent	Permanent
Commitment	Short term	Long term	Long term
Expectations	Experience/excitement	Skill development and application	Career
Resources	Low and high	High	High
Existing skills	Generalist	Specialist	Generalist and specialist
Perception of career	Hard to project into the future	Career is in France – this is time out from that	Projects career within NGOs either in the field or in HQ

The next stage of the data analysis process involved coding the interviews from Phase 2. This stage had two aims. First to confirm that HR managers identified the same career scripts as humanitarian workers and to check whether there were other humanitarian career scripts. To do so we coded, the reflection HR managers gave on other humanitarian career paths. Since the same codes emerged from this coding session we concluded that HR managers were sharing the same careers scripts as humanitarian workers. As can be seen in Table 2, all HR managers mentioned at least two of the three career scripts when they discussed humanitarian worker careers. The second aim of Phase 2 was to account for stability or change in NGOs HR practices. We examined HR manager interviews in order to identify NGO HR practices and their evolution over time. All of the HR managers described major changes in NGO HR practices (suggesting that while former HR practices did not aim to enable people to pursue their career in the humanitarian sector, current HRM practices encourage people to stay in the humanitarian sector), so two additional nodes "former HR practices" and "current HR practices" were created and we distinguished for each of them six themes that emerged from interviews: work conditions, career prospects, recruitment, remuneration, turnover and loyalty. Considering this major changes in NGO HR practices, we concluded that the professional career script was currently growing at the expense of the switcher and fixed-term humanitarian career scripts.

Findings

Our results suggest that humanitarian workers in our sample mobilize three humanitarian career scripts. Table 3 highlights the key differences between each of these scripts. Table 4 gives illustrative quotes from each of them.

Humanitarian career scripts

The fixed-term humanitarian worker

"I don't think it's possible to pursue a career in the humanitarian field. Actually, humanitarian work is a kind of stage." (Gregory)

Table 4. The humanitarian career scripts: illustrations from the field.

Career scripts	Semantic descriptors	Quotes
The fixed-term humanitarian worker	NGO's HR managers acknowledgment of the fixed-term script	"We know that most people will not make a career out of working in the humanitarian sector." (Laura)
	Bad working conditions	"The mission context, the environment makes it very difficult … For instance, there are two teams that have just been evacuated, it's very stressful. There are a lot of people who wonder if they will go back on mission again." (Timothy, Agissons)
The switcher humanitarian worker	A script often used by medical professionals (doctors, nurses)	"They do not have a linear humanitarian career. They have breaks, they go on mission, and they come back to France, go back on mission again, then come back and stay in France, etcetera." (Lisa)
	Humanitarian work described as the main professional activity	"I think the best way to run a humanitarian career is to alternate humanitarian field mission periods with more serene periods in France where you can have a job, meet your friends … And once you feel ready, well you can go back on missions." (Mark)
The professional humanitarian worker	Enjoying nomadic way of life	"When you are on mission, it's comfortable, I mean you like your life, and your life is sweet. It can be stressful but still … You meet very interesting people, you travel, you are useful." (Alexander)
	Developing a career in one particular organization	"For instance after a first mission, you can have an administration position in the field, then having a coordinator position in a capital and then you can pursue you career in headquarter." (Timothy)
	Developing a career regularly changing organizations	"So the first career possibility is, as I said before, to stay in the organization […]. You can also say I want to stay several years on missions working for different organizations. A classical path is to work first for French NGOs, then you work for Anglo-Saxon ones and then you try to join an international organization." (Gregory)
	A script shared by NGOs HR managers	"We have a lot of expats on mission who are headhunted by fundraisers or the United Nations." (Vanessa)

Seventeen humanitarian workers classified themselves as Fixed-Term and this script was discussed by all interviewees in both phases of interviews. Fixed-Term humanitarian workers conceive of their humanitarian experience as a stage in their career path. Whilst they share humanitarian values with other humanitarian workers, they cannot envisage working in the humanitarian sector over the long term and plan to leave. This script is also acknowledged by NGO's HR managers who indicate that many humanitarian workers do not want to have a long term career in the sector.

Several reasons are suggested to explain why these workers choose to leave the sector including the physically and psychologically demanding nature of the job, the disillusionment with NGOs' roles and the incompatibility of humanitarian activities with a family life.

After one or several missions, fixed-term humanitarian workers plan to go back to their native country and gain a steady job, a stable family life and a social network. When leaving the humanitarian sector, they envisage a different kind of future career. Some, still attached to the nonprofit sector values, want to keep developing their career in the nonprofit area (for instance in the environmental, the education or the artistic area). Others prefer to find a job in the public or commercial sector.

The switcher humanitarian worker

"They do not have a linear humanitarian career. They have breaks, they go on mission, and they come back to France, go back on mission again, then come back and stay in France, etcetera." (Lisa).

Although the majority of interviewees did not classify themselves according to the switcher script, they did recognize it in the behavior of others and this script was mentioned by both humanitarian workers and HR managers. Hence, although this script is used only by three humanitarian workers in our sample, it is discussed by seven other humanitarian workers and seven HR managers.

Switcher humanitarian workers have sequenced career paths with periods of humanitarian work interspersed with time spent working in France. This script is often used by medical professionals (doctors, nurses) or technical professionals (logisticians, garage mechanics, etc.) who can find a job more easily when they go back to France than other humanitarian workers. Both humanitarian workers and HR managers account for these professionals' tendency to switch.

Switcher humanitarian workers vary in their views of the role of humanitarian activities in their career. Some of them consider humanitarian work as their main activity. They go back to France after missions in order to rest and to stay with family; however they regularly go back on mission and are committed to the humanitarian sector. For others, humanitarian activities are more occasional. They generally have a permanent position in France and go on mission for several weeks a year, taking leave of absence or having an agreement with their main employer in France.

The professional humanitarian worker

"All my life … why not?" (Elisabeth)

The professional humanitarian worker script was identified by both humanitarian workers and HR managers: it is used by sixteen humanitarian workers and by all of the HR managers.

Professional humanitarian workers want to work in the humanitarian sector for their whole career. Several reasons underlie this choice. First, they are attached to humanitarian values. Secondly, professional humanitarian workers enjoy their nomadic way of life and cannot envisage staying in France. They move from one country to another according to the missions available, constantly meet new people and often consider stable jobs to be boring. Finally, some workers perceive their skills to be very specific and find it hard to imagine transferring to another sector.

Professional humanitarian workers accumulate experience through field missions in several countries and develop different kinds of career paths. They can stay loyal to the same NGO and get promoted either on the field mission or in headquarters. They can therefore hold managerial jobs with high budget and human resources responsibilities in the field or move into supervisory positions in headquarters. Professional humanitarian workers may also regularly change organizations depending on the missions they find interesting. Gaining in experience, they can rise to positions of high responsibility in different NGOs and often finish their career in a large international organization. This evolution was also identified by HR managers.

Changes in career scripts

The data analysis suggests that we are witnessing change in these career scripts over time. More specifically, it suggests that the professional career script is becoming more dominant than in the past. Hence, while humanitarian careers were initially seen as a temporary interlude for voluntary workers, they are now becoming more professionalised and developed by ambitious and committed employees who want to stay in the sector. An HR manager describes this evolution:

> "We are moving away from the 1980's image of humanitarian worker, the 'French Doctors' and Bernard Kouchner (well-known founder of Medecins sans Frontières) with their bag of rice on their shoulders … Commitment is more professional, more mature, more long-lasting, more long term and more constructive." (Garry)

The humanitarian workers are, in other words, more inclined to stay in and to remain committed to the humanitarian sector than was previously the case. For both humanitarian workers and HR managers, this situation is completely new. Few people entered the sector in the past in order to pursue a career. Describing his own career, an HR manager indicates:

> "There are more people who enter the humanitarian sector to pursue a career …
> And I think that in the past, there were a lot of people, myself included, that

would never have bet when they entered the sector that they would still be there 15 years or 18 years later." (Nathan)

The emergence of the professional career script is also expressed at an organizational level by changes in HR practices. Interviewees indicate that NGOs are now developing career management strategies. One of the HR managers observes:

> "Ten years ago, when you applied for a humanitarian job you had to be motivated and committed but you were not there to pursue a career. I mean career was almost a swearword. But now, we say to people that there are career prospects both in the field and in the headquarters." (Katherine)

The data analysis suggests therefore the emergence of the professional career script and its growing importance relative to others scripts. As we will show below, the emergence of this career script is due to a complex interplay between humanitarian workers and NGOs.

An interplay between humanitarian workers and NGOs

Our findings suggest that through their interaction, workers and NGOs act upon career scripts and as a result promote the emergence of the professional career script. Figure 1 illustrates this process. Below we outline the different stages of this process.

Stage 1. As NGOs activities and mission have become more complex, NGOs have changed their recruitment practices. While they were once looking for young and motivated people willing to go on mission, they are now looking for skilled and experienced workers who are able to deal with these changes:

> "Our issue, but I think it's the same everywhere, it's that the greater professionalization has provoked an increasing need for specialized profiles." (Oliver)

NGOs are more specifically looking for technical skilled workers such as "hand plastic surgeons", mechanics who are able to manage a "five hundred cars car pool", or water engineers who can manage a "water network for cities from 100 000 to 270 000 people". Likewise, activity changes have generated a need for experienced humanitarian workers who can manage sophisticated and critical missions:

> "There are some missions where being head of mission is … For instance, in The Democratic Republic of the Congo, you have to manage 40-45 expats, an 8-9-10 million euro budget. It's heavy stuff. Plus different security contexts depending on the zone considered." (Nathan)

NGOs have therefore changed their recruitment practices, recruiting skilled and experienced workers rather than temporary volunteers. Doing so, they have modified humanitarian worker profiles:
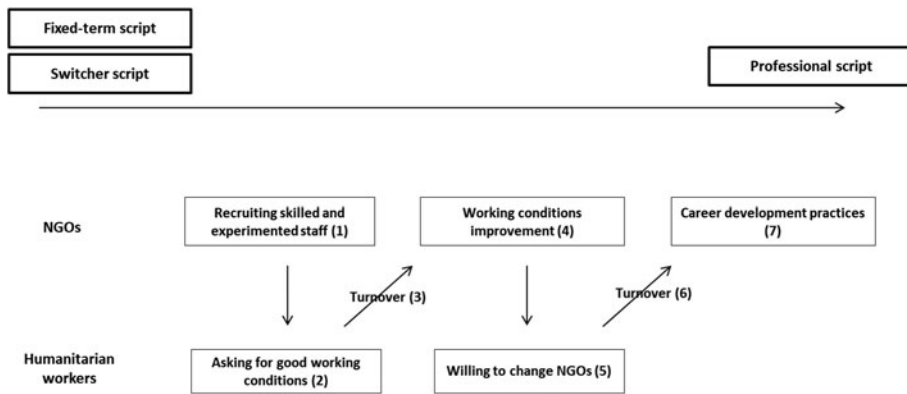
Figure 1. Interplay between humanitarian workers and NGOs.

> "Our staff today is completely different from 20 years ago where workers were volunteers, 22 years old, wanted to set off on an adventure and were prepared for or even motivated by extreme conditions because it was part of the humanitarian experience. Now it's completely different. Workers are on average 35 years old and we have more and more people who are going on mission with their partner or with their family." (Oliver)

NGOs human resources are therefore changing. While humanitarian workers of the past were mainly young and adventurous, they are now older, can have a family and are likely to be more demanding in terms of working conditions.

Stage 2. Thus as the humanitarian worker profile has changed, workers' expectations have also changed. Specialized and skilled workers demand better conditions. They want "good salaries", "good accommodation". Skilled and experienced workers thus require changes in HR practices.

> "You live in Afghanistan, you live with other expatriates, in the same house as your staff and you can't bring your family with you … if you want to attract experienced people, it cannot work with these working conditions or this salary" (Stephanie)

> "In my opinion, if you want to be taken seriously as an organization, you have to pay people seriously, period. But if you want tinkering, you can hire inexperienced interns and pay them 500 euros. And nobody stays in your organization and you have crazy turnover. (Jimmy)

Stage 3. As a result of high levels of competition for skilled workers, NGOs struggle to fill positions and want good staff to stay with them.

> "For these kinds of profile, it's very hard to find. So when you have found someone, you are afraid to let them go. Because you know that you'll struggle to recruit someone else". (Laura)

As a result NGOs are largely dependent on skilled and experienced workers and try to limit their turnover by improving their working conditions:

"To avoid workers leaving their organizations, all NGOs have changed many of their HR practices. First, they have increased their wages - We increased wages. Actually, we revised the salary grid entirely." (Amanda)

Beyond the issue of pay, NGOs have also improved their mission living conditions. They have developed family accompaniment systems so that workers can take their family with them. Whilst not all the NGOs can afford the same "family package", and not all security contexts allow family missions, most NGOSs recognize the importance of enabling workers to take their family with them. NGOs have also improved living conditions on mission through the provision of individual housing where possible and encouraging workers to take breaks during their mission:

Finally, NGOs have also improved working conditions by changing worker's status. Although they still rely on some volunteers, most NGOs have increased their ratio of employees to volunteers. This can be more attractive for workers as it means that they can get a salary (rather than an allowance), pay pension contributions and can also receive unemployment benefit.

Stage 4. Humanitarian workers acknowledge these working condition changes. As discussed earlier, they consider the expatriate life as "comfortable" and appreciate having the ability to save money as salaries have risen and the cost of living in mission counties is low. However, despite these improved conditions, humanitarian workers tend to leave French NGOs to work in others. In particular, Anglo-Saxon NGOs or international organizations are popular as they are often larger, can afford higher salaries and offer more interesting working conditions than French NGOs as explained below:

"In my opinion, the typical career path is, you start as a volunteer in an NGO […]. Then, you work in another NGO as an employee. You earn 1,000, 2,000 euros a month. Then you can move to an Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian NGO. You earn 3,000 euros a month, even more. And finally, you end your career working for the UN [United Nations]. I mean, after ten or fifteen years you can be at the head of all the missions in a country or working for the UN. You have a well-paid job, earning 5,000, 6,000 euros, even more." (Jimmy)

Stages 5-7. As a result, despite their efforts to improve working conditions, French NGOs still suffer from relatively high labour turnover. They compete with other organizations, especially Anglo-Saxon NGOs and international organizations to recruit workers and struggle to fill some positions:

"There is a real competition in the sector. There are a lot of NGOs French or foreigners […] and you know that it's always I pinch your worker, another time you pinch mine. […] And as a result, you know that even if you try to get loyalty, workers leave." (Laura)

As they still have difficulties recruiting and retaining workers, NGOs have also developed career development practices and begun to provide workers with organizational career paths:

"At some point, we will not be able to raise our wages. Therefore, we need to develop internal mobility practices to improve worker loyalty. It's a real issue for us because we need be able to fill our positions to carry out our activities." (Oliver)

Organizational career development has therefore become a key objective for NGOs. To promote career development, NGOs have developed HR practices and career management tools. They have developed communication tools so that workers can be informed before the end of their mission of vacant positions and be able to apply for the positions they want. NGOs have also developed career management tools such as 'resources and competencies mapping', 'people reviews' and 'job mapping' and try to offer alternately high demanding missions and less demanding ones so that humanitarian workers can rest. The overall aim is to improve worker's ability to see a future for themselves in the organization:

"We want to have a more proactive management of our human resources. Our aim is to be able to give career visibility to our workers." (Erik)

The data analysis thus suggests that the development of a new professional humanitarian career script has evolved out of an interplay between workers and NGOs. As NGOs are changing their HR practices and individuals are changing their career expectations, they both promote the emergence of the professional career script and, as a result, trigger a change in humanitarian career models. Thus, it is possible to see the development of the professional career script over time.

Discussion and conclusion

Duality in practice

At an empirical level, this paper builds upon and extends the work of Dany et al. (2011) and Valette and Culié (2015) who argue the importance of understanding the way that scripts evolve within a particular field. By offering a contextualized understanding of three humanitarian worker career scripts (the fixed-term, the switcher and the professional career scripts), it highlights interactions between agency and structure. In doing so, our paper reinforces and develops Barley's work and particularly his recursive model of action and institution (Barley & Tolbert, 1997) which suggests that that structuration "is a continuous process whose operation can be obverse only through time" during which

structure constrains action and, synchronically, action maintain or modify structure (p. 100). Our paper highlights this mutual influence and goes further showing empirically this dynamic.

Further, the study proposes a multi-level methodology to illustrate the dynamic interplay between agency and structure in career changes. This is notoriously difficult to illustrate empirically and few papers have, to date, accounted for the interlinkage of agency and structure in empirical studies (Gregson, 1989). As Barley and Tolbert (1997, p. 112) explain: "structuration theory (and as a result career scripts) explicitly focuses on the dynamics by which institutions are reproduced and altered […]. Nevertheless, as it is currently formulated, structuration theory provides little guidance on *how* to investigate the way in which everyday action revises or reproduces an institution". This paper aims to overcome this limitation by collecting data from an individual and organizational perspective in order to track the interactions and their mutual influence upon career changes.

Scripts as a vehicle of power

Importantly, this research also highlights the role of agency in changing careers. Giddens' work (1984) suggests that individuals have the ability to make a difference in and on the social world and to transform the circumstances in which they find themselves. Individuals can, therefore, alter the balance of the power relationship with structure by drawing on the resources they have at their disposal (Layder, 2005). Yet, studies using career scripts to date appear to assume that whilst individuals have the power to adapt to changing career scripts, they do not have the power to trigger this change (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Duberley, Mallon, & Cohen, 2006; Fournier, 1998).

On the basis of this study, we propose another vision of the power relationship between structure and agency. We show that, over time in some contexts, individuals have sufficient resources to trigger career changes and thus influence structure. Hence, as humanitarian activities have become more sophisticated and technical, NGOs have become increasingly dependent on skilled workers who have consequently been able to put pressure on NGOs to develop new career possibilities.

Our paper addresses Jones and Dunn's call for works that "use careers as a lens to illuminate institutional change and stability" (Jones & Dunn, 2007, p. 438). They explain: "institutional scholars have given little attention to the process of institutions but instead have mainly focused on the properties that affect a qualitative state of institutionalization, treating structures as simply institutionalized or not and missing considerable

insights about the process by which institutionalization occurs" (p. 438). Showing individual (or collective) power in career script changes, our paper highlights the (albeit constrained) role of agency in the reinforcement or alteration of prevailing career paths and employment relationships.

In line with Inkson and King (2011), this paper posits also that careers result from negotiation between individuals and the organizations they work for. More precisely, it reinforces the idea that careers are the result of a power game between individuals and organizations. The literature suggests that a new balance of power over managerial and professional careers has favoured individuals with career self-management skills who can negotiate their interests and act upon organizational career practices (Blyler & Coff, 2003; Løwendahl, 2005). This paper extends this argument showing that individuals whose skills are scarce and much sought-after have considerable means to exert influence over the development of alternative career scripts.

We argue that career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) is a major source of power for individuals to change career scripts. The literature on nonprofit organizations suggests that humanitarian workers have high-level skills which they can use to find positions (knowing-how) (Hwang & Powell, 2009), they are highly motivated by their work (knowing-why) (Borzaga & Depedri, 2005; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006) and many have strong networks as they are highly mobile (knowing-whom) (Andresen & Gustschin, 2012). This career capital enables them to find interesting career positions and enjoy career success (Duberley & Cohen, 2010; Iellatchitch et al., 2003) while not depending on one particular organization to develop their career. The professionalization of the humanitarian sector has therefore promoted actors' capital development and their ability to negotiate with NGOs the rules and norms of humanitarian career and consequently alter humanitarian career scripts.

Thus our research addresses Inkson and King's (2011) call for studies that articulate the differences of interest between organizations and individuals and the conflict they generate in terms of career. Moreover, in showing that professionalization can alter power relations in favour of individuals, this paper takes a different perspective to much current literature on professions which suggests that professionals are at risk of losing power (T. B. Lawrence, Malhotra, & Morris, 2012; Petrakaki, Klecun, & Cornford, 2014) as a result of the deregulation of professional markets, increasing competition, change government policy and the development of new public management, globalization or technological change (Brock, 2006; Muzio, Brock, & Suddaby, 2013). Therefore, the paper highlights the potential scope to analyze further the evolving

nature of the power relationship in the humanitarian sector through the process of professionalization.

Implications for practice

It is clear from this study that career script changes can have far reaching implications for practice. In this case, the development of the professional career script for humanitarian workers is synonymous with stability. Having decent pay and career prospects means that they are more able to develop professional and personal projects (such as career development, buying an apartment, starting a family, etc.). However, the combination of higher salaries and improved working conditions has encouraged more workers to apply for jobs in the humanitarian sector. As a result, NGOs are seeing a larger choice of candidates and recruitment standards are higher than in the past. Like other organizations, NGOs "utilize their labour market power, financial incentives and accumulated capabilities to attract individuals prized for their individual knowledge, and to leverage this knowledge in combination with other resources to build strong and enduring repositories of the expertise on which their competitive position depends" (Inkson & King, 2011, p. 38).

The development of the professional career script and the recruitment of paid and full-time workers has, however, increased NGOs budgets and consequently their dependence on funders which has in turn pushed them to adopt increasingly business-like practices (Dart, 2004). The development of the professional career script can also impact upon on beneficiaries. While humanitarian workers used to have a voluntary sector ethos and to be intrinsically motivated and committed to humanitarian cause, they may now be less committed to their organization's missions (Cunningham, 2001, 2010). However, little research to date has studied beneficiaries' perceptions of NGOs activities (Wellens & Jegers, 2014).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to address a gap in the literature with regard to understanding how structure and agency work in practice to bring about organizational and career change. Its main contribution is a detailed exposition of the process of structuration in the development and transformation of career scripts within one sector, utilising data from both an individual and an organizational level. Building upon the work of other researchers who have pointed to the importance of considering structure and agency, here we have examined the process by which this happens, and in particular identify the potential for a greater role

for agency than has traditionally been assumed. Importantly, the study also highlights the power relationships involved in such processes of change and raises interesting issues with regard to the potential implications of these.

This study highlights the need for further longitudinal research to complete our understanding of the complex and interrelated nature of career and organizational change in the humanitarian sector and others. This study is limited by its focus on one sector and we encourage researchers to examine the extent to which the model change that has been put forward here applies in other contexts in order to develop more comprehensive understanding of the role of career scripts in the process of change. We also recognize the need for more longitudinal studies tracking change over many years in order to gain an enhanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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