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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Individuals' career perceptions in different institutionalized contexts: A comparative study of career actors in liberal, coordinated, hierarchical and mediterranean market economies

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## Abstract

Leveraging Weiner's attribution theory of intrapersonal motivation at the micro level and varieties of capitalism theory at the macro level, we conduct a multi-country and cross-level study examining whether individuals' career goals (i.e., perceived importance of learning and development), behaviors (i.e., proactive career behaviors), and outcomes (i.e., perceived employability) as well as the relationships between these variables, differ between different market economies. We challenge extant literature that focuses on the agentic role of individuals and understates the role of context (i.e., market economy influence) in an individual's career development. Using multilevel structural equation modeling, we draw on a survey of 15,201 individuals between 2014 and 2016 from 22 countries representing four different varieties of capitalism. The results showed that workers in hierarchical (HME) and Mediterranean (MME)

**Abbreviations:** AI, Artificial Intelligence; AVE, Average Variance Extracted; CFA, Confirmatory factor analysis; CFI, Comparative Fit Index; CME, Coordinated market economy; CR, Composite Reliability; df, degrees of freedom; GNI, Gross national income; GTCI, Global Talent Competitiveness Index; H, Hypothesis; HL, workplace hierarchical level; HME, Hierarchical market economy; ILD, Perceived Importance of Learning and Development; LL, Log-Likelihood; LME, Liberal market economy; MME, Mediterranean market economy; PCB, Proactive career behaviors; PE, Perceived Employability; RMSEA, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR, Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual; VUCA, Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous.

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market economies systematically differed from individuals in coordinated (CME) and liberal (LME) market economies in proactive career behaviors and perceived employability. Moreover, while the positive relationship between perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors was stronger in CMEs and LMEs compared to HMEs and MMEs, the positive association between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability was weaker. Our study bridges the micro-macro gap in career studies, adding new insights into the ongoing conversation of contextual influence in individuals' career development.

#### KEYWORDS

attribution theory of intrapersonal motivation, career, market economy, perceived employability, perceived importance of learning and development, proactive career behaviors, varieties of capitalism theory

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

"Capitalism will always create contradictory understandings and experiences because capitalism does not exist in a vacuum—it absorbs, shapes, and is shaped by its social, economic, and political context. Just as we cannot define the shape of water without reference to the container in which it exists, we cannot define capitalism without reference to the society in which it operates" (Scott, 2022)

For decades, from the individual level to the societal level of analysis, learning, development and employability have been important areas of focus for many scholars (see Bhaerman & Spill, 1988; Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Sung & Choi, 2018), practitioners (see McKinsey, 2019; Senge, 1990; Tamkin & Hillage, 1999) as well as international organizations such as the UN (UN DESA, 2022; UNESCO, 2020; UNICEF and WBCSD, 2021) and the World Economic Forum (Schwab et al., 2020). However, how the relationships between learning and development goals, proactive career behaviors, and employability as a career outcome, primarily micro level phenomena, are nonetheless influenced by more macro level societal contextual factors remains elusive and requires more exploration. And, as the quote above points out, in spite of the widespread acceptance of the importance of concepts like lifelong learning, relationships between learning and development goals, career behaviors and career outcomes should not be studied as universal maxims but must instead within the context of the capitalist market economy in which they operate—a system that both shapes and is shaped by the motivation and actions of institutions, organizations and individuals.

ALDI, the German-based international hypermarket, provides an excellent example of how macro-level environments shape organizational approaches and contextualize the career landscape of individuals. ALDI has over 9000 stores in a range of types of market economies – including in CMEs (e.g., Australia, Austria, Belgium, and Germany), LMEs (e.g., Ireland, Switzerland, UK, and USA), and MMEs (e.g., Italy, Portugal, and Slovenia) (Alonso, 2022). Developing employees is critical to maintaining ALDI's competitive position (CareersHelp, 2019). ALDI offers standard training and development practices offered across country locations (ALDI, 2023) while

also tailoring training programs to fit specific country contexts. For example, ALDI's store assistant apprenticeship that earns graduates a National Vocational Qualification (CareersHelp, 2019) is only offered in the UK, a LME country, but not in other market economies. By contrast, in Italy, a MME country with a national training fund, ALDI leverages its legally obligated contribution to this fund to provide Italian language training and a customized negotiation course for its purchasing team (HRD Connect, 2023). The example of ALDI's multi-level approach to learning and development highlights the importance of aligning organizational training practices with specific country and market contexts that transcend national cultural considerations (Edwards et al., 2022). However, to bridge the micro-macro gap (Bamberger, 2008) in how individual careerist goals, behaviors, and outcomes are influenced by macro level variables requires cross-level empirical examination that takes into account how different business systems and their economies influence these types of variables (Witt et al., 2018).

While scholars have raised concerns that the agency and career success of some groups of workers within a given national labor market may be constrained to a larger degree by contextual factors than others (e.g., Forrier et al., 2009; Inkson et al., 2012; Ng et al., 2005), research examining similarities and differences in workers' career perceptions and behaviors across countries as a function of national context is scarce. Some exceptions are career studies that elucidate career actors' goals, behaviors, and outcomes (micro level) with reference to single institutional variables (macro level), such as unemployment rate (e.g., Dello Russo et al., 2020), income inequality (e.g., Bagdadli et al., 2021) or a cultural dimension (e.g., Kaše et al., 2018; Smale et al., 2019). Much less frequently, we find explanations based on bundles of institutional variables (macro level aggregation) that are relatively similar within countries (e.g., Andresen et al., 2020) or groups of countries, such as by market economy, but these are even rarer. More generally, although the need to contextualize career goals, behaviors, and outcomes has increasingly been highlighted in career research (Jiang et al., 2023; Kovalenko & Mortelmans, 2016), macro-variables that drive individuals' careers have hardly been recognized, and their potential cross-level influences have rarely been explicitly highlighted, theorized, or applied (Gunz & Mayrhofer, 2017).

In this study, we specifically focus on three individual variables: the perceived importance of learning and development as a career goal, proactive career behaviors, and perceived employability as the outcome. We argue that how much organizations and individuals should focus on enabling individual employability (see Forrier et al., 2018; Hyman, 1996) and how much individual proactive career behaviors (Smale et al., 2019) should be expected depend on country context, in part based on the type of market economy in place. We follow the logic of market economies in which career actors are embedded and introduce varieties of capitalism theory (Hall & Soskice, 2001a) as a complementary theory to better contextualize the variance in individuals' learning and development goals, proactive career behaviors, and employability perceptions across country groups. Market economies, differing in terms of corporate governance, vocational training and education, national industrial relations, pay setting arrangements and intra-firm relations, shape the norms of national career systems, which inform career behaviors likely to work best to achieve specific career outcomes (cf. Evans et al., 1989). To empirically examine the influence of market economies on the relationship between learning and development goals, proactive career behaviors, and perceived employability, we used survey data from 15,201 individuals from 22 countries, representing four different market economies, as detailed in varieties of capitalism theory (Hall & Soskice, 2001a; Hamann & Kelly, 2008; Schneider, 2009).

This study contributes to both theory and practice. With regards to theory, we aim to narrow "the micro-macro gap in management research" (Bamberger, 2008, p. 840) by integrating Weiner's theory at the micro level (Weiner, 1985a, 2012) with varieties of capitalism theory at the macro level (Hall & Soskice, 2001a; Jackson & Deeg, 2008) to contextualize our study based on the different market economies. We build on Weiner's attribution-based theory of intra-personal motivation (Weiner, 2000, 2019), which explains how career goals, behaviors, and outcomes are related, as people act on their understanding of both themselves and their context. However, in this theory, the role of the

macro-level context is not subject of the theory itself. To gain a systematic understanding of the influence of a multitude of macro-level factors on career actors, we show that varieties of capitalism theory, which has so far been used predominantly to predict organizational/firm behavior (Farndale et al., 2008; Schröder, 2019), can be leveraged as a promising career theory that helps enhance our understanding of the influence of macro level factors on micro-level individuals' behaviors and careers.

With regard to practical contributions, our findings highlight that understanding the external market economy in which individuals and organizations are embedded may be central to their success. This is particularly important for individuals with ambitions for global careers because although an agentic developmental approach may make sense in certain market economies, this same approach may be perceived as self-serving and even contrary to company goals and practices (Edwards et al., 2016; Goergen et al., 2012). For multinational companies, mimicking employment policies from abroad may prove difficult and/or counterproductive given differences between market economies. In other words, what is good for the (UK) goose may not be good for the (Italian) gander.

## 2 | DIFFERENCES IN CAREER GOALS, BEHAVIORS AND OUTCOMES BETWEEN MARKET ECONOMIES

In this research, we examine differences among market economies in three important areas. First at the micro level, a key career goal for individuals lies in the related objectives of competence and self-development (Shen et al., 2015), thus emphasizing the importance of *learning and development* in individuals' careers (Dries et al., 2008). Similarly, Sturges (1999) and many scholars since, have identified competence as a key element of internal careers, while Lee et al. (2006) suggested that learning is a key personal theme in individuals' careers. Individuals' learning and development has become even more important in what many have described as an increasingly VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world (Baran & Woznyj, 2020).

Second, *proactive career behaviors* include deliberate, concrete, and self-directed actions (e.g., proactive networking, career crafting, career planning) that individuals take to achieve their career goals (De Vos et al., 2009, Hall, 2002; for an overview on career proactivity, see Jiang et al., 2023). Career scholars argue that individuals are primarily responsible for managing their own careers often requiring increased proactivity in their career development (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Parker et al., 2006; Smale et al., 2019). Studies conducted by Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1998) and Andresen et al. (2020) have found that proactive career behaviors are related to various individual—such as one's employment and mobility experiences—and contextual factors—such as national culture.

Finally, *perceived employability* is an individual's subjective evaluation of the “possibilities of obtaining and maintaining employment” (Vanhercke et al., 2014, p. 594). It relates to individuals' assessments of their competencies and skills for potential employability while tacitly and/or explicitly considering contextual factors such as external labor market opportunities, constraints, and government policies (Berntson et al., 2006; Rothwell et al., 2009).

We build on Weiner's attribution theory of intrapersonal motivation to explain differences in career goals (i.e., perceived importance of learning and development), behaviors (i.e., proactive career behaviors) and outcomes (i.e., perceived employability) among individuals from different market economies. Attribution scholars advocate that future behavior is in part determined by the perceived causes of past events (Weiner et al., 1976). Past success and failure can be explained as a function of three different dimensions—locus, controllability, and stability—which shape expectations about future success and failure. *Locus* indicates whether the attributed cause is internal (e.g., ability or effort) or external (e.g., ease of work tasks) for the career actor.

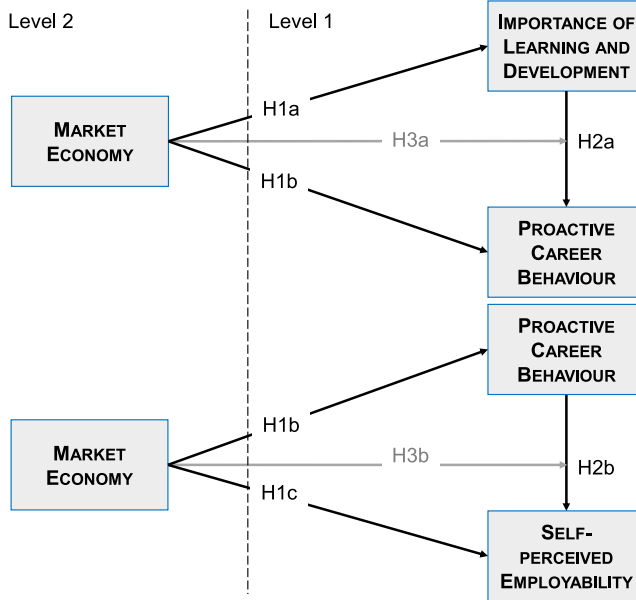


FIGURE 1 Conceptual model. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

*Controllability* refers to actor's beliefs regarding having control over a particular outcome (e.g., luck cannot be willfully changed). *Stability* refers to the duration of a cause (e.g., dynamic adjustments in market economies).

Career actors regularly make attributions about prior career successes and failures (cf. Weiner, 1985b; Wong & Weiner, 1981), which help make sense of their career environment (Weiner, 1976) and shape their subsequent career-related expectations, motivation, and goal attainment behaviors (cf. Weiner, 1985b, 2012). We therefore suggest that the more individuals attribute their previous career success and/or failure in terms of experienced employability to learning and development as being *internal* and *controllable*, the more they will perceive investment in their own development as important and the stronger the link they will tend to build between their proactive career behaviors and their perceived employability. Thus, the relationship between career goal, behaviors, and outcome is explained by individuals' *attributions* of success and failure. However, it is important to place such attributions in the context of market economies, in which all such actors operate, to better understand the context of how such goals, actions and behaviors take place (Witt et al., 2018).

Drawing on Weiner (2000, 2019), we argue in this paper that this agentic view of employability (Goller & Harteis, 2017) is not only based on individuals' personal understanding of themselves, but also of the context they are in. We suggest that, because the *stability* of labor market opportunities and conditions potentially varies between market economies (e.g., Almond & Menendez, 2006), differences in actors' *expectancies of success* from their behaviors are likely to emerge. Thus, we expect market economy type is an important source of differentiation in context between countries. Figure 1 outlines our conceptual model.

At the macro level, we use comparative institutionalism (Schotter et al., 2021) and, specifically, varieties of capitalism theory (Amable, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001a; Jackson & Deeg, 2008) to help explain differences in the importance of learning and development, proactive career behaviors, and perceived employability between individuals from different market economies. In comparative institutionalism, social systems are seen as varying in the formal and informal rules or institutions to which agents adapt and within which actors interact in different spheres (Jackson & Deeg, 2008; Schotter et al., 2021). Hall and Soskice (2001b) conceptualized these into five categories:

industrial relations; vocational training; corporate governance; inter-company relations; and the firm's own internal structure. Depending on institutional characteristics, countries can be clustered into different market economies (Amable, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001a, 2001b; Schneider, 2009). Seeking a range of market economy types and based on the countries in which we were able to gather data, our research focuses on coordinated market economies (CMEs), liberal market economies (LMEs), hierarchical market economies (HMEs), and Mediterranean market economies (MMEs).

To further explain substantive difference in these market economies, in CMEs, such as Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Japan and Norway, coordination relies on well-established institutions, with an orientation to long-term strategic interaction between economic agents (Hall & Soskice, 2001b). There are high levels of employment regulation and protection, making the labor market less fluid and job tenures longer (Ferragina & Filetti, 2022; Hall & Gingerich, 2009), alongside networks of powerful employers' associations, work councils and strong trade unions. Individuals therefore have higher levels of stability and security in employment (Kinsella et al., 2022). These make the development of industry-specific skills important (Hall & Soskice, 2001b). In these economies, the state enables organizations through collaboration between industry and government and collective activity such as wage bargaining, industry training and standards (Mariotti & Marzano, 2019). Firms have less agency for unilateral actions, and decisions tend to be coordinated (Schneider & Soskice, 2009).

In LMEs, such as Canada, Ireland, Switzerland, United Kingdom and USA, economic agents mainly rely on competitive market mechanisms to coordinate activities. LMEs are dominated by shareholder ownership, focus on short-term profit maximization, and prefer a minimal role for government (Mariotti & Marzano, 2019). Relationships between the firm and other agents are arms-length and characterized by formal contracting (Hall & Soskice, 2001b). Employment regulation is low and trade unions are relatively weak, leading to a fluid labor market characterized by low security of tenure (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Higher education systems provide good generic skills and firm-level training focuses on developing skills salient for the firm itself (Busemeyer & Vossiek, 2016). Job-seekers are incentivized to acquire the necessary competencies to increase their employability and the likelihood of being retained (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). Wages in LMEs are typically set between firms and employees (Hall & Soskice, 2001b).

HMEs, consisting of Latin American countries (Schneider & Soskice, 2009) such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico, are often characterized by strong hierarchical social arrangements, especially in the labor market sphere, diversified business groups, atomistic labor relations and the limited and ineffective quality of the education and training system (Fonseca, 2020; Schneider & Karcher, 2010; Schneider & Soskice, 2009; for an intraregional view see Bogliaccini & Madariaga, 2020). These factors, together with a large informal market sector, shift the balance of power to employers (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). The highly segmented labor market with low union density and powerful atomized business groups results in job insecurity, high employee turnover and low levels of firm investment in developing workers' skills (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). The strong links to large companies may lead governments to initiate fewer labor market reforms and to provide fewer incentives for investing in developing employees' skills (Bogliaccini & Madariaga, 2020; Martínez et al., 2009).

MMEs, such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey, have a distinctive coordination mode (e.g., Amable, 2003; Özel, 2022) characterized by many state-owned firms and high levels of state intervention (Hall & Gingerich, 2009; Hancké et al., 2007; Schmidt, 2002). MMEs have more rigid governance and organization of employment than other market economies (Amable, 2003). The relations between economic agents are mainly mediated by the state, and industries rely more on the state for financial access (Schmidt, 2002). Therefore, state priorities matter more than firm profit. High levels of employment regulation and protection hinder quick adaptations such as the upgrading of workforce competences, which in turn, can hamper innovation and productivity (Dilli, 2021). Further, high levels of employment protection are achieved by a high but fragmented trade union density, relatively low levels of market competition and a medium-term view for investment due to centralization of the financial system (Hall & Gingerich, 2009; Hancké et al., 2007; Schmidt, 2002). Fragmentation and coordination problems between actors may exacerbate these issues (Doner & Schneider, 2016; Glassmann, 2016).

In line with the aim of this paper, we argue that a country's market economy has a direct effect on the attributed importance of learning and development, proactive career behaviors and perceived employability and moderates the relationships between them (Figure 1). Our focus here is not on the relationship between attributions and employability per se, but rather on the influence of contextual conditions on the variables and relationships between them, as will be explained below.

### 3 | IMPACT OF MARKET ECONOMIES ON INDIVIDUALS' PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT, PROACTIVE CAREER BEHAVIORS, AND PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

#### 3.1 | Level of perceived importance of learning and development in different market economies

Learning and development is perceived as an important career goal across most countries (Shen et al., 2015); however, the emphasis that governments and organizations place on the need for individuals to learn for greater employability varies between different market economies. CME employers co-invest in employee training (Schneider & Soskice, 2009), and some (e.g., Germany) have well-developed industry-and-state-linked vocational training systems that cultivate specialized skills for specific occupations or industries (Busemeyer, 2009; Goergen et al., 2012; Stroud et al., 2014). Highly defined vocational training content means that individuals may perceive little choice or control over their skills acquisition content and timing. Other CMEs (e.g., Norway) attach importance to lifelong learning and aim to equip employees with skills throughout their careers (Goergen et al., 2012). The prevalence of national education and vocational training systems that provide workers with skills that are broadly applicable together with long-term employment and job security (Hall & Soskice, 2001b; Kinsella et al., 2022) reduces the need for agentic behaviors and significantly lessens the need for individuals to invest in themselves beyond those activities provided by the employer (Goergen et al., 2012; Harcourt & Wood, 2007). Thus, on average, individuals in CMEs are likely to attribute their learning and development to external factors (i.e., external locus) with limited controllability, and reduced perceived importance of learning and development.

Compared with CMEs, LMEs focus more on the development of general insights and generic skills enabling individuals to move relatively easily across industries and occupations (Hall & Soskice, 2001b). Employers in LMEs have little interest in a protective environment for employees (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). When jobs in LMEs such as the United States are often insecure due to low labor protection (St-Denis & Hollister, 2023) and the labor market is highly fluid (Walker et al., 2019), individuals in LMEs, on average, may have to be more agentic and take more initiatives and efforts in acquiring general skills, such as getting a tertiary degree. Exposure to external market pressures means that individuals in LMEs are more concerned with taking measures to enhance their external employability (Kinsella et al., 2022). HME governments spend far less on training unemployed workers compared with CMEs or LMEs (Bogliaccini & Madariaga, 2020; Schneider, 2009). Most HME sectors feature short-term labor stints and low skilled labor demand, which in turn, makes individuals less interested in cultivating skills that are company-specific (Schneider, 2009). In this environment the onus is more on the worker to provide the learning and development that they need for future jobs. In MMEs, individuals often assume the main responsibility for acquiring transferable skills (Hamann & Kelly, 2008) as company-sponsored training tends to be low investment and often firm-specific. Thus, taking into account both macro and micro perspectives, individuals in HMEs, MMEs, and LMEs are likely to attribute their learning and development mainly to their own efforts (i.e., internal locus) with increased controllability and see their learning and development as important. Thus:

**Hypothesis 1a.** Individuals in HMEs, MMEs and LMEs attach greater importance to learning and development than those in CMEs.

### 3.2 | Level of proactive career behaviors in different market economies

CMEs tend to have high levels of union density and employment protection (Barbieri & Cutuli, 2016; Furåker, 2020; Hall & Soskice, 2001b), which contributes to high job, labor market, and employment security (Dixon et al., 2013; Goergen et al., 2012; Kinsella et al., 2022). Individuals in CMEs may therefore have comparably less motivation to engage in proactive career behaviors because they tend to perceive their jobs as secure and relationships with their employers as long-term. Though LMEs feature less job and employment security, they have a highly flexible and deregulated labor market (Hall & Soskice, 2001b; Myant et al., 2016) in which individuals enjoy greater mobility with fewer constraints and more abundant opportunities should they lose/quit their employment. Consequently, they may also feel comparably less pressure to engage in proactive developmental career behaviors due to the fluid labor market. Thus, on average, individuals in CMEs and LMEs are likely to show comparably fewer proactive career behaviors given the comparably favorable external conditions (locus) despite exerting limited control.

HMEs and MMEs are characterized by shorter job tenures and more job insecurity (Schneider & Karcher, 2010) as many individuals in HMEs and MMEs work in the informal and small business sectors without unions and with little legal protection (Schneider & Soskice, 2009; Wilkinson & Wood, 2017). Their employment is often characterized by short job tenures, weak enforcement of labor protections, and limited availability of stable and secure jobs in the fragmented labor market (e.g., Schneider & Soskice, 2009). The impact of the financial crisis (2008–2013) and the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a further drop in job security in some MME countries (Herod et al., 2022; Ingellis & Ingellis, 2017). Thus, taking into account both macro and micro factors, individuals in HMEs and MMEs are likely to show comparably more internal and external-oriented proactive career behaviors given the lack of adequate organizational and institutional support. They often must rely on their own efforts (internal locus) while seeking leeway to change the situation (controllability). A recent study with Latin American Chief Executives indeed highlights the importance of being proficient in career self-management practices (especially network development and job mobility) in unstable environments, typical of Latin American countries (Blanco & Golik, 2015).

**Hypothesis 1b.** Individuals in HMEs and MMEs engage in more proactive career behaviors than those in CMEs and LMEs.

### 3.3 | Level of perceived employability in different market economies

Most CMEs provide systematic and ongoing investment in employees' development of industry- or firm-specific skills that are highly valued by employers whereas LMEs focus on skills applicable to various employment settings (Amable, 2003; Wilkinson & Wood, 2017). Given the extensive provision of vocational and life-long learning opportunities in CMEs and LMEs, individuals are likely to perceive agency (control) over whether to take up such opportunities. Initial vocational training and life-long learning provision is a strength of many CMEs and LMEs (Roosmaa & Saar, 2017) and individuals who have engaged in upskilling activities are highly likely to find that these provide employment benefits. Therefore, they are likely to consider their choices in relation to vocational investments and to attribute their employability to their own resources (internal locus).

By contrast, training and education systems in MMEs may fail to match and satisfy employer and industrial demand through either low or misguided provisioning thus creating gaps in skill development (Bogliaccini & Madariaga, 2020; Goergen et al., 2012). HMEs often suffer from ineffective and limited education and training systems (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). Moreover, most HMEs and MMEs have lower job security than CMEs and lower labor market flexibility than LMEs (Amable, 2003; Hall & Soskice, 2001b). Thus, if we factor in both macro and micro perspectives, those in HMEs and MMEs are less likely to attribute their employability to their own resources (external locus) and under their own control (uncontrollability), thus leading to lower self-perception of their employability.

**Hypothesis 1c.** Individuals in CMEs and LMEs experience higher levels of perceived employability than those in HMEs and MMEs.

## 4 | RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKET ECONOMIES, PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT, AND PROACTIVE CAREER BEHAVIORS

### 4.1 | Relationship between perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors

Scholars have suggested that individuals use proactive career behaviors (e.g., career planning, career drafting) to actively steer their careers toward achieving their career goals (e.g., Akkermans & Tims, 2017; De Vos et al., 2009; Sturges et al., 2005). Proactivity has indeed been found to be an important determinant of career success (Smale et al., 2019; Spurk et al., 2019). Therefore, we argue that individuals that value learning and development are more likely to employ proactive career behaviors to get access to learning and development opportunities (Saar & Ure, 2013). Considering the increased importance of an enterprising, agentic self in managing one's career development (Hirschi & Koen, 2021), this positive relationship between perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors is expected to hold across contexts. This means that at the micro level, the individual will always have some self-motivation—both in situations where little external support is available (Goergen et al., 2012; Meardi, 2012), and in macro contexts where there are many opportunities. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2a.** The perceived importance of learning and development is positively related to proactive career behaviors.

### 4.2 | Market economies moderating the relationship between perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors

Weiner (1985a) argues that when employees' implicit attributions are disconfirmed, they may consciously attribute differently and adjust their *expectancies of success*, which may then change their behaviors. These attributional changes impact subsequent cognitive and affective outcomes (Weiner, 1985a, 2012). Thus, while we expect the perceived importance of learning and development to be higher in HMEs, MMEs and LMEs than in CMEs (hypothesis 1a), and proactive career behaviors to be higher in HMEs and MMEs than in CMEs and LMEs (hypothesis 1b), the relationship between the two is hypothesized to be stronger in CMEs and LMEs. In HMEs and MMEs, employees generally receive fewer protections and experience higher job insecurity (low stability). The short termism and a low demand for skilled labor indicates that an individual's investment in training and development may not often lead to secure employment (Schneider & Soskice, 2009). The supply of developmental programs in MMEs is relatively restricted compared to those in CMEs or LMEs (Amable, 2003; Busemeyer & Vossiek, 2016; Dilli, 2021). Even when individuals have invested in their development, the experience of layoffs may change their behaviors and result in fewer educational efforts. While these individuals may be driven by the high importance they attribute to learning and development and see the need to exert proactive career behaviors to advance, their experience of negative career outcomes leads them to believe that the structural barriers they encounter lower their expectancy of success. Following Weiner (1985a) therefore, we argue that the importance individuals in HMEs and MMEs attach to learning and development and proactive career behaviors are less strongly related.

At the macro level, in CMEs and LMEs, by contrast, there is a greater supply of learning and development opportunities (Amable, 2003; Culpepper, 2003; Dilli, 2021) and a closer connection between learning outcomes and labor markets (for example, occupational credentials issued by educational and training establishments). The nexus

between the perceived importance of learning and development, and proactive career behaviors at the micro level, is much tighter and the connection between these two variables is stronger.

**Hypothesis 3a.** The relationship between the perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors varies between individuals in different market economies (cross-level interaction), with the positive relationship being stronger among individuals in CMEs and LMEs rather than those in HMEs and MMEs.

## 5 | RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKET ECONOMIES, PROACTIVE CAREER BEHAVIORS, AND PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY

### 5.1 | Relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability

Proactive individuals actively manage their careers; they select, create and influence work situations that increase the likelihood of positive career outcomes (Akkermans & Hirschi, 2023). Perceived employability is a positive career outcome that results from the individuals' evaluations of their employment chances in internal and external labor markets (De Cuyper & De Witte, 2008). Thus, employability reflects perceived success in the labor market and brings about positive feelings (e.g., occupational health and well-being; Vanhercke et al., 2015) and events (e.g., job transitions; Nelissen et al., 2017). Consequently, individuals are motivated to implement proactive career behaviors (cf. Weiner, 1985b, 2012).

Proactive career behaviors seem to matter across a variety of macro-level country contexts (see Smale et al., 2019), for example, when individuals engage in career planning, skill development, and consultation with more senior colleagues (Tharenou & Terry, 1998). These behaviors are likely to increase individuals' employment options (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998), are positively associated with perceptions of higher employability (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; Lin, 2015) and contribute to successful job search (Brown et al., 2006). Following Weiner's (1985a) argument, when individuals believe their proactive career behaviors lead to enhanced employability, they will further strengthen such attributions regarding this relationship. Thus:

**Hypothesis 2b.** Proactive career behaviors are positively related to perceived employability.

### 5.2 | Market economies moderating the relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability

In CMEs and LMEs, the high levels of union protection (Hall & Soskice, 2001a) and generally higher levels of job security (Dixon et al., 2013) in both systems put a lower onus on agentic behavior (Goergen et al., 2012; Harcourt & Wood, 2007), likely producing a weaker impact of proactive career behaviors. Based on individuals' causal reasoning and responsibility inferences (Weiner, 1985a), we therefore expect the relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability to be weaker in CMEs and LMEs than in HMEs and MMEs.

In MMEs and HMEs, generally shorter tenures (Schneider & Karcher, 2010), lower labor protections (Wilkinson & Wood, 2017) and greater dominance of small businesses and family-owned firms reduce capability-building opportunities often due to market fragmentation (Meardi, 2012; Schneider & Soskice, 2009). Such effects potentially increase the importance of proactive behaviors to help workers perceive themselves as more employable. Consequently, the relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability is likely stronger in HMEs and MMEs, given their greater need for proactivity versus CMEs or LMEs (Amable, 2003). Moreover, in terms of the macro context, some HME and MME employees who experience negative career outcomes may come to believe in the importance of proactive, agentic career behaviors to enhance their employability (Núñez et al., 2005; Oghojafor

et al., 2012). Lastly, with the increased possibility of higher Gini coefficients (indicating higher income inequality) and increased poverty in HMEs and MMEs, workers may need to be more proactive to enhance employable self-perceptions in such economic systems especially when shocks occur (Cornia, 2014; Moser et al., 2005). Thus:

**Hypothesis 3b.** The relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability varies between individuals in different market economies (cross-level interaction), with the positive relationship being stronger among individuals in HMEs and MMEs rather than those in CMEs and LMEs.

## 6 | METHODS

### 6.1 | Sample and data collection

This study is part of a large multi-country study of careers (Briscoe et al., 2021<sup>1</sup>). Data were gathered by a questionnaire first created in English and then translated and back-translated to the languages of the participating countries following standard procedures (Brislin, 1970). Data were collected during 2014–2016, a period when the career landscape across the globe was relatively stable without dramatic interruptions by major world events such as pandemic, or technological advancement in artificial intelligence. We used predetermined screening criteria to achieve heterogeneous within-country samples with regard to respondents' work experience, age, gender and occupation. Therefore, each national sample targeted at least 400 respondents with at least two years of post-educational work experience and approximately equal tripartite age distribution—under 30 years, 30–50 years, and over 50 years—50/50 gender distribution, and quadripartite occupational distribution—managers, professionals, clerical/service workers, and skilled workers.

The sub-sample used for this study is comprised of 15,202 individuals from 22 countries representing four different market economies: CME, LME, HME, and MME. Participants averaged 40.98 years old with 17.42 years of work experience, while 51.6% were females; 25.2% were managers, 35% professionals, 20.3% service workers and 15.6% skilled workers. Their hierarchical level was on average in the middle of their organizational hierarchy (i.e., mean 5.29 on a 10-point scale, where 1 = highest and 10 = lowest). Finally, 28.2% of the participants had upper secondary education or below, 19.4% post-secondary or short-cycle tertiary education, 25.6% tertiary education and 26.8% postgraduate education.

### 6.2 | Measures

#### 6.2.1 | Primary/individual-level data

*Perceived Importance of Learning and Development (ILD)* was a cross-culturally invariant 3-item subscale of a newly developed career success scale (Briscoe et al., 2021) used for measuring ILD ( $\alpha = 0.79$ , Composite Reliability (CR) = 0.80). A sample item is "Thinking about my career success, I consider this career aspect: 'continuously learning throughout my career'" (1 = not important at all, 7 = very important).

*Proactive Career Behaviors (PCB)* were measured using the shortened version (Andresen et al., 2020; Parker & Collins, 2010) of Tharenou and Terry's (1998) scale for Enacted Managerial Aspirations; the reliability score of the shortened version was higher than the score of the original construct ( $\alpha = 0.86$ , CR = 0.86). A sample item is "I have engaged in career planning" (1 = never, 7 = very frequently).

*Perceived Employability (PE)* was measured by a 3-item reflective scale based on work by Janssens et al. (2003) and Trevor (2001) ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ; CR = 0.81). A sample item is "It will be difficult for me to find new employment when leaving the organization" (reversed) (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

**Control variables.** Based on the literature on the antecedents of career goals and success (Ng et al., 2005), we used the following control variables: gender (1 = male, 2 = female), age, educational level (1 = primary education, 7 = doctorate), and workplace hierarchical level (1 = highest, 10 = lowest); we grand-mean centered educational and hierarchical level to give meaning to the value of zero.

## 6.2.2 | Secondary/macro-level data

*Market economies* were measured using a four-category variable (CME, LME, HME, and MME). To assign each of the 22 countries in this study to one of the four categories, we performed hierarchical cluster analysis (using within-group linkage and squared Euclidean distance). To cluster the countries, in line with Hall and Soskice (2001a, 2001b) and Hall and Gingerich (2009), given the research focus of our study, we used six country-level measures representing education and training and labor market conditions in each country. Specifically, we used three indicators from the Global Talent Competitive Index (Lanvin & Evans, 2015), that is, *Brain Gain*, *Brain Drain*, and *Pension System*, and one indicator from the Global Talent Competitiveness Index (GTCI) (Schwab, 2015) on *Hiring and Firing Practices*, to represent the labor market conditions in each country. Regarding education, we used one indicator from the GTCI measuring the *Extent of Staff Training* and one indicator from the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015) measuring *Public Expenditure on Education as a Percentage of GDP*. The performed analysis assigned the countries in our sample to the clusters of market economies following the process described in previous research (Witt et al., 2018); Table 1 shows the clustering of the countries into the four categories of market economies. For the analysis, we created three dummy variables of *market economies*, and used the fourth category as base for comparison (Blalock, 1979).

*Gross national income* (GNI) was used as a level 2 control to test the robustness of the hypothesized independent and moderating effects of market economies and was measured as gross domestic product, plus net receipts from abroad of compensation of employees, property income and net taxes less subsidies on production (<https://data.oecd.org/natincome/gross-national-income.htm>; last accessed on 25/11/2019).

## 6.3 | Preliminary analysis

First, we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess our individual level measurement model. The results indicated an adequate fit for a measurement model of the constructs ILD, PCB and PE (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.037, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.940, and Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) = 0.05). To rule out the possibility of common method variance of our cross-sectional individual data, we performed a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in which all items loaded onto a single latent factor. The results demonstrated a poor fit of the model (RMSEA = 0.093, CFI = 0.597, and SRMR = 0.187). Based on the first CFA, we calculated Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which were at or above the 0.5 threshold for all constructs, that is, 0.50 for ILD, 0.56 for PCB and 0.58 for PE; the AVE values in combination with the above reported CRs indicate convergent validity of the measures we used (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra & Dash, 2011). To test for the divergence of our constructs, we calculated the square root of AVE for each construct (ILD = 0.71; PCB = 0.75; PE = 0.76) and compared it with their correlations ( $r$ (ILD, PCB) = 0.286,  $n$  = 13,775,  $p$  < 0.01;  $r$ (ILD, PE) = 0.186,  $n$  = 13,805,  $p$  < 0.01;  $r$ (PCB, PE) = 0.220,  $n$  = 13,986,  $p$  < 0.01); the square root of all AVEs were higher than the respective correlations, strongly indicating that our constructs are divergent from each other. As the data for the latent constructs of ILD, PCB and PE are nested within countries we tested for independence of all items comprising the three constructs (Heck & Thomas, 2015); we constructed three intercept-only models (Model 1 in Tables 3, 4 and 5; Geiser, 2013) and tested them using Mplus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The intra-class correlations for the four items of ILD ranged between 0.096 and 0.132, for the five items of PCB between 0.030 and 0.098 and for the three items of PE between 0.029 and 0.079. The intra-class correlations for the composite scales were 0.176 for ILD, 0.066 for PCB and 0.069 for PE indicating that 17.6% of ILD, 6.6% of PCB and 6.9% of PE variances were attributed to country-level differences; this allowed us to model country-level effects in our research.

TABLE 1 Countries of four different market economies included in the study.<sup>2</sup>

	CME	LME	HME	MME
Argentina			x	
Australia	x			
Austria	x			
Belgium	x			
Brazil			x	
Canada		x		
Colombia			x	
Finland	x			
Germany	x			
Greece				x
Ireland		x		
Italy				x
Japan	x			
Mexico			x	
Norway	x			
Portugal				x
Slovakia				x
Slovenia				x
Switzerland		x		
Turkey				x
UK		x		
USA		x		

## 6.4 | Analytic procedure

To test our hypotheses, we used multilevel structural equation modeling, as it calculates simultaneously all hypothesized paths and “dramatically reduces bias due to the conflation of between and within-group effects and unreliable cluster means” (Preacher et al., 2011, p. 177) in Mplus 8. Specifically, we developed three multilevel models for each of the hypothesized dependent variables, that is, ILD (Table 3), PCB (Table 4) and PE (Table 5). First, we estimated the null model (Model 1 in Tables 3, 4 and 5), then a multilevel model with all the hypothesized relationships (Model 2 in Tables 3, 4 and 5) and, finally, a multilevel model where GNI was added as control of the country-level hypothesized relationships to test the robustness of the latter (Model 3 in Tables 3, 4 and 5). The three multilevel models also provided estimates of the incremental individual (within level) and country (between level) residual variance explained by each step. Grand mean centering was used in all except the null model for all continuous variables.

## 7 | RESULTS

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and sample sizes) and the bivariate correlations within each set of variables (individual/level 1 and country/level 2) are shown in Table 2.

Table 3 shows the findings regarding ILD. The estimated null model, where only the country random effects were included (Model 1), yielded significant intercept and within and between country variances (intercept = 4.259,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  within = 0.331,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  between = 0.070,  $p < 0.01$ ). To test Hypothesis 1a, we constructed Model 2 in Table 3. Comparing Model 2 with the null model (Model 1), the Log-Likelihood (LL) difference shows that the

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Level 1								
1. Gender <sup>a</sup>	1.52	0.500						
2. Age	40.98	11.500	-0.032**					
3. Education <sup>b</sup>	4.42	1.422	0.016	-0.031**				
4. Hierarchical level <sup>c</sup>	5.29	2.529	0.112**	-0.150**	-0.227**			
5. ILD	4.23	0.626	0.048**	-0.058**	0.180**	-0.067**		
6. PCB	3.83	1.513	-0.014	-0.244**	0.212**	-0.103**	0.286**	
7. PE	4.65	1.504	-0.045**	-0.179**	0.109**	-0.091**	0.186**	0.220**
Level 2								
1. LME	0.23	0.429						
2. CME	0.32	0.477	-0.370 <sup>+</sup>					
3. HME	0.18	0.395	-0.256	-0.322				
4. MME	0.27	0.456	-0.332	-0.418*	-0.289			
5. GNI	38.20	15.29	0.505*	0.462*	-0.687**			

Note: Level 1  $n = 13,500$  to  $15,202$ ; Level 2  $n = 22$ ; + Correlation is significant at the 0.10 level (2-tailed); \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

<sup>a</sup>Gender (1 = Man; 2 = Woman) (dummy variable).

<sup>b</sup>Education = (1 = Primary school; 2 = Lower secondary; 3 = Upper secondary; 4 = Post secondary; 5 = Bachelor; 6 = Master; 7 = Doctorate) (ordinal variable).

<sup>c</sup>Hierarchical level (1 = Highest; 5 = Middle; 10 = Lowest) (ordinal variable).

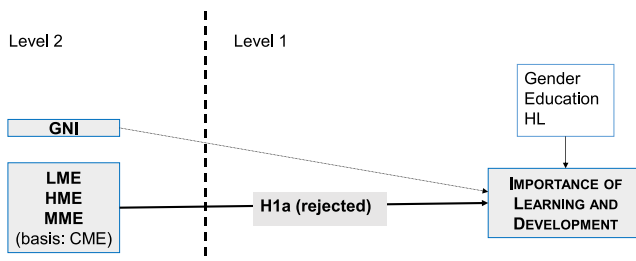
latter is significantly worse than the former (estimate = 30.250, 7 degrees of freedom [df],  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus we adopt Model 2 to test Hypothesis 1a. Regarding the relationship between market economies and ILD (Hypothesis 1a), Model 2 in Table 3 shows that in MMEs ILD is significantly higher than in CMEs (estimate = 0.345,  $p < 0.001$ ; standardized estimate = 0.579), while in LMEs (estimate = 0.127,  $p > 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = 0.201) and HMEs (estimate = 0.223,  $p > 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = 0.325) ILD is not significantly different than in CMEs (MME > HME = CME = LME) and, thus, partially support Hypothesis 1a (HME = MME = LME > CME). Adding GNI as country-level control (Model 3) does not have a significant impact on ILD (estimate = 0.000,  $p > 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = 0.00), but it renders the relationship between MME and ILD non-significant (estimate = 0.346,  $p > 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = 0.200); therefore, Hypothesis 1a is rejected (HME = MME = LME = CME). At the individual level, women, and those with more education and at upper levels of work hierarchy value learning and development more as compared to men, those with less education and at lower levels at work (Figure 2).

Table 4 shows the findings regarding PCB. The estimated null model, where only the country random effects were included (Model 1), yielded significant intercept and within and between country variances (intercept = 3.898,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  within = 2.147,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  between = 0.151,  $p < 0.001$ ). To test Hypotheses 1b, 2a and 3a, we constructed Model 2 in Table 4. Comparing Model 2 with the null model (Model 1), the LL difference shows that the latter is significantly worse than the former (estimate = 134.370, 11 df,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, we adopt Model 2 to test our hypotheses. Regarding the relationship between market economies and PCB (Hypothesis 1b), Model 2 in Table 4 shows that in HMEs (estimate = 1.602,  $p < 0.001$ ; standardized estimate = 0.470) and MMEs (estimate = 1.209,  $p < 0.01$ ; standardized estimate = 0.508) PCB is significantly higher than in CMEs, while in LMEs (estimate = 0.305,  $p > 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = 0.093) PCB is not significantly different than in CMEs. Hypothesis 1b is thus supported. Furthermore, the difference test between the estimates of HMEs and MMEs showed no significant difference (HME = MME > CME = LME). At the individual level, those younger in age, with more education and at upper

**TABLE 3** Estimation of two-level models predicting importance of learning and development (ILD) (standard error in parenthesis) (H1a).

Controls/Independent variables	Model 1 (Null)	Model 2	Model 3 GNI as control
Intercept	4.259 (0.057)***	4.012 (0.106)***	4.008 (0.369)***
<b>Level 1</b>			
Gender		0.056 (0.013)***	0.056 (0.013)***
Age		-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Education		0.070 (0.012)***	0.070 (0.012)***
HL		-0.010 (0.005) <sup>+</sup>	-0.010 (0.005) <sup>+</sup>
<b>Level 2</b>			
GNI		-----	0.000 (0.006)
LME		0.127 (0.113)	0.127 (0.101)
HME		0.223 (0.196)	0.226 (0.348)
MME		0.345 (0.121)**	0.346 (0.202)
<b>Residual variance</b>			
ILD (within)	0.331 (0.025)***	0.317 (0.023)***	0.317 (0.023)***
ILD (between)	0.070 (0.026)**	0.052 (0.019)***	0.052 (0.019)***
R <sup>2</sup> within		0.035***	0.035***
R <sup>2</sup> between		0.262 <sup>+</sup>	0.262 <sup>+</sup>
BIC	24,197	22,765	22,775
LL difference test		30.250	0.00
		7 df, <0.001	1 df, p > 0.05

Note: <sup>+</sup>p < 0.10; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001; LL: Log-Likelihood difference test; df: degrees of freedom; Level 1 n = 13,356 to 13,887; Level 2 n = 22.



**FIGURE 2** The relationship of LME, HME and MME (compared to CME) and ILD. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

levels of work hierarchy display more proactive career behaviors as compared to those older at age, with less education and at lower levels at work (Figure 3).

Regarding the relationship between ILD and PCB (*Hypothesis 2a*), Model 2 in Table 4 shows that, as hypothesized, individuals who attribute higher ILD also show higher level of PCB (estimate = 0.679,  $p < 0.001$ ; standardized estimate = 0.216). This relationship is moderated by the different market economies (*Hypothesis 3a*); in particular, as shown in Table 4, Model 2, the relationship between ILD and PCB is significantly lower in HMEs

TABLE 4 Estimation of two-level models predicting proactive career behavior (PCB) (standard error in parenthesis) (H1b, H2a, H3a).

Controls/Independent variables	Model 1 (Null)	Model 2	Model 3 GNI as control
Intercept	3.898 (0.084)***	0.972 (1.126)	1.628 (1.182)
Level 1		H2a	H2a
Gender		-0.084 (0.056)	-0.084 (0.056)
Age		-0.033 (0.003)***	-0.033 (0.003)***
Education		0.149 (0.027)***	0.149 (0.027)***
HL		-0.045 (0.013)***	-0.045 (0.013)***
ILD		0.679 (0.037)***	0.683 (0.039)***
Level 2		H1b	H1b
GNI		-----	-0.014 0.007*
ILD		-0.011 (0.287)	-0.006 (0.305)
LME		0.305 (0.277)	0.366 (0.275)
HME		1.602 (0.332)***	1.199 (0.418)**
MME		1.209 (0.459)**	0.960 (0.431)*
Cross-level interaction		H3a	H3a
ILD*LME		-0.013 (0.070)	-0.015 (0.071)
ILD*HME		-0.269 (0.071)***	-0.281 (0.075)***
ILD*MME		-0.220 (0.098)*	-0.226 (0.096)*
Residual variance			
PCB (within)	2.147 (0.087)***	1.803 (0.071)***	1.803 (0.071)***
PCB (between)	0.151 (0.036)***	0.093 (0.111)	0.081 (0.097)
Slope variance		0.006 (0.006)	0.007 (0.005)
Intercept-Slope Covariance		-0.016 (0.024)	-0.016 (0.023)
BIC	76,014	68,140	68,147
LL difference test		134.370	0.07
		11 df, $p < 0.000$	1 df, $p > 0.10$

Note: + $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; LL: Log-Likelihood difference test; df: degrees of freedom; Level 1  $n = 13,254$  to  $14,467$ ; Level 2  $n = 22$ .

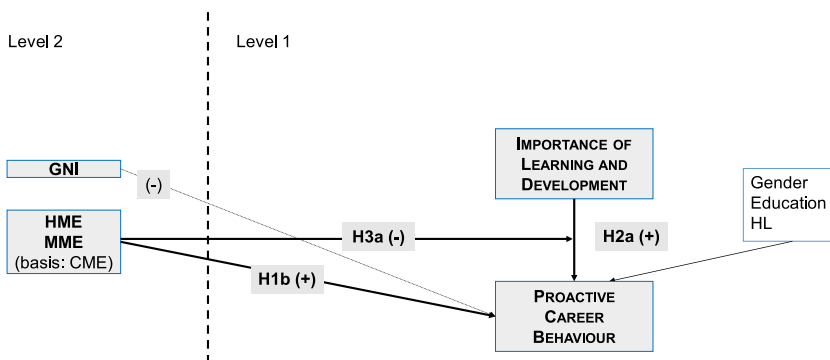


FIGURE 3 The relationship of HME and MME (compared to CME) and PCB. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

TABLE 5 Estimation of two-level models predicting perceived employability (PE) (standard error in parenthesis) (H1c, H2b, H3b).

Controls/Independent variables	Model 1 (Null)	Model 2	Model 3 GNI as control
Intercept	4.628 (0.086)***	0.125 (0.991)	0.543 (0.879)
Level 1		H2b	H2b
Gender		-0.171 (0.056)**	-0.170 (0.056)**
Age		-0.024 (0.004)***	-0.024 (0.004)***
Education		0.026 (0.019)	0.026 (0.020)
HL		-0.045 (0.017)**	-0.045 (0.017)**
ILD		0.376 (0.048)***	0.376 (0.048)***
PCB		0.204 (0.043)***	0.212 (0.046)***
Level 2		H1c	H1c
GNI		-----	0.022 (0.009)**
ILD		0.967 (0.218)***	0.789 (0.226)***
PCB		-0.125 (0.144)	0.007 (0.124)
LME		1.062 (0.295)***	0.566 (0.227)**
HME		0.233 (0.321)	0.513 (0.360)
CME		0.829 (0.292)**	0.446 (0.209)*
Cross-level interaction		H3b	H3b
PCB*LME		-0.102 (0.044)*	-0.110 (0.046)*
PCB*HME		-0.038 (0.060)	-0.046 (0.061)
PCB*CME		-0.080 (0.046) <sup>+</sup>	-0.089 (0.050) <sup>+</sup>
Residual variance			
PE (within)	2.115 (0.117)***	1.882 (0.104)***	1.882 (0.104)
PE (between)	0.158 (0.038)***	0.164 (0.073)*	0.098 (0.075)
Slope variance		0.003 (0.001) <sup>+</sup>	0.003 (0.001)
Intercept-SlopeCovariance		-0.016 (0.009) <sup>+</sup>	-0.009 (0.009)
BIC	126,769	114,121	114,126
LL difference test		150.335	0.07
		10 df, $p < 0.000$	1 df, $p > 0.10$

Note: + $p < 0.10$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; LL: Log-Likelihood difference test; df: degrees of freedom; Level 1  $n = 13,236$  to  $14,489$ ; Level 2  $n = 22$ .

(estimate = -0.269,  $p < 0.01$ ; standardized estimate = -0.368) and MMEs (estimate = -0.220,  $p < 0.10$ ; standardized estimate = -0.445), while it is not significantly different in LMEs (estimate = -0.013,  $p > 0.10$ ; standardized estimate = -0.002) as compared to CMEs. Further test showed no significant difference between the moderation estimates of HMEs and MMEs (ILD\*CME = ILD\*LME > ILD\*HME = ILD\*MME), in line with our hypothesis. Adding GNI as country-level control (Model 3) does not improve the model significantly (LL difference test = 0.07, 1 df,  $p > 0.10$ ) and does not render the hypothesized effects of market economies on PCB non-significant, while GNI has a significant negative impact on PCB (estimate = -0.014,  $p < 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = -0.169).

Table 5 shows the findings regarding PE. The estimated null model, where only the country random effects is included (Model 1), yields significant intercept and within and between country variances (intercept = 4.628,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  within = 2.115,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\sigma$  between = 0.158,  $p < 0.001$ ). To test Hypotheses 1c, 2 and 3b, we construct Model 2. Comparing Model 2 with the null model (Model 1), the LL difference shows that the latter is significantly worse than the former (estimate = 150.335, 10 df,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, we adopt Model 2 to test our hypotheses.

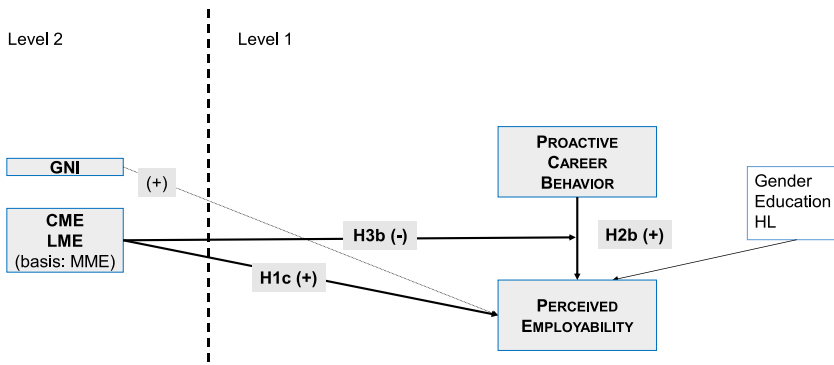


FIGURE 4 The relationship of CME and LME (compared to MME) and PE. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

TABLE 6 Summary of findings.

Hypotheses	Predictions	Findings	Confirmation
1a	ILD: HME = MME = LME > CME	HME = MME = CME = LME	Rejected
1b	PCB: HME = MME > CME = LME	HME = MME > CME = LME	Full
1c	PE: HME = MME < CME = LME	HME = MME < CME = LME	Full
2a	ILD positively relates to PCB	ILD positively relates to PCB	Full
2b	PCB positively relates to PE	PCB positively relates to PE	Full
3a	ILD*HME = ILD*MME < ILD*CME = ILD*LME	ILD*HME = ILD*MME < ILD*CME = ILD*LME	Full
3b	PCB*HME = PCB*MME > PCB*CME = PCB*LME	PCB*HME = PCB*MME > PCB*CME = PCB*LME	Full

Abbreviations: CME, coordinated market economy; HME, hierarchical market economy; ILD, perceived importance of learning and development; LME, liberal market economy; MME, Mediterranean market economy; PCB, proactive career behaviors; PE, perceived employability.

Regarding the impact of *market economies* on PE (Hypothesis 1c), Model 2 in Table 5 shows that in LMEs (estimate = 1.062,  $p < 0.001$ ) and CMEs (estimate = 0.829,  $p < 0.01$ ) PE is significantly higher than in MMEs while there is not significant difference for HMEs (estimate = 0.233,  $p > 0.05$ ); thus, *Hypothesis 1c* is supported. Furthermore, difference test between the estimates of HMEs, CMEs and LMEs shows significant difference between CMEs and LMEs on the one hand and HMEs on the other (CME = LME > HME = MME). At the individual level, men, younger at age, and at upper levels of work hierarchy perceive themselves as more employable as compared to women, older at age, and at lower levels at work hierarchy (Figure 4).

Regarding the relationship between PCB and PE (*Hypothesis 2b*), Model 2 in Table 5 shows that, as hypothesized, individuals who engage in PCB show higher levels of PE (estimate = 0.204,  $p < 0.001$ ; standardized estimate = 0.161). This relationship is moderated by the different *market economies* (*Hypothesis 3b*); in particular, as shown in Table 5, Model 2, the relationship between PCB and PE is significantly lower in LMEs (estimate = -0.102,  $p < 0.05$ ; standardized estimate = -0.332) and in CMEs (estimate = -0.080,  $p < 0.07$ ; standardized estimate = -0.311), while it is not significantly different in HMEs (estimate = -0.038,  $p > 0.10$ ; standardized estimate = -0.056) as compared to MMEs. Further test shows no significant difference between the estimates of CMEs and LMEs (PCB\*CME = PCB\*LME < PCB\*HME = PCB\*MME). Adding GNI as country-level control (Model 3) does not improve the model significantly (LL difference test = 0.07, 1 df,  $p > 0.10$ ) and does not change the hypothesized effects of *market economies* on PE. However, GNI has a positive significant impact on PE (estimate = 0.022,  $p < 0.01$ ; standardized estimate = 0.407).

Table 6 summarizes all predictions and findings.

## 8 | DISCUSSION

There is little doubt that learning and development, proactive career behaviors and employability will continue to be important considerations for individuals, organizations, countries, and their economies for years to come (Lanvin & Monteiro, 2021; Schwab, 2017; Schwab et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2020; WEF, 2020). Our study introduces a unique institutional context (market economies) and responds to Bamberger's (2008) call to address the micro-macro gap in management research through direct integration of macro-level context theories and micro-level behavioral theories as well as to more recent calls for "positioning context front and center in international human resource management research" (Farndale et al., 2023, p. 1). We develop the rationale to explain how different types of market economies directly and indirectly influence individuals' proactive career behaviors and perceived employability, and provide cross-level empirical evidence of how such situational, macro-level mechanisms (see Arrow 1 in Coleman's Boat Model, see Cowen et al., 2022) can affect micro-level outcomes. Our findings contribute to the career literature, which for years has been saying that context matters. Here we look at the context (the macro market economies), and empirically confirm that it does indeed matter, but in a more nuanced way than expected.

We find that the institutions of the different market economies, particularly between CMEs/LMEs versus HMEs/MMEs, are reflected in systematic differences in workers' career behaviors and outcomes but not in their career goals. More specifically, our study shows that CMEs and LMEs and separately HMEs and MMEs are similar in proactive career behaviors and perceived employability while the importance assigned to learning and development in each of the four sets of countries does not differ significantly, which is contrary to our hypothesis. Post facto assessment reveals that learning and development and a growth mindset are important across all 22 countries and the four types of economies represented in our study. This is very much in line with recent statements and publications that cut across economic and business system boundaries by the UNDP (2015), WEF (2020), and Global Talent Competitive Index (Lanvin & Monteiro, 2021), which themselves each include over 100 nations covering all four market economies. However, employees in HMEs and MMEs show more proactive career behaviors yet perceive lower employability than those in CMEs and LMEs. Moreover, all three individual variables are positively related, with the relationship between the perceived importance of learning and development and proactive career behaviors being weaker in HMEs and MMEs compared to CMEs and LMEs. In HMEs and MMEs the relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability is stronger than in CMEs and LMEs. Thus, all hypotheses except for hypothesis 1a are fully supported. These are important findings given the limited number of countries used in most careers studies (Smale et al., 2019), as compared to our study that includes multiple countries in each of the four market economies (CME-7, LME-5, HME-4, and MME-6).

Overall, the findings from our study suggest that individuals manage their careers similarly, but not identically, within externally located limits and norms of the national career system as defined, inter alia, by the conditions of the different market economies that impact everything from corporate governance to vocational training norms to pay setting arrangements (cf. Evans et al., 1989). This reinforces the idea that boundaries in contemporary careers have not disappeared (King et al., 2005), particularly those at the country and institutional levels that have been understudied both conceptually and empirically in the careers literature (Farndale et al., 2023).

### 8.1 | Implications for careers research

Our study provides new theoretical and empirical insights into careers research. From the theoretical perspective, we apply Weiner's attribution theory of intrapersonal motivation to careers (for rare exceptions see Daley, 1998; Harcourt & Wood, 2007; Houldsworth et al., 2019) and leverage Weiner's identification of the way that individuals' context affects their motivated behavior. We also test and extend the boundary conditions of varieties of capitalism theory which has predominantly been used to study organizational/firm behavior. Our findings echo what Hörisch et al. (2020) and Schröder (2019) claim that varieties of capitalism theory can be used to predict individuals' behavior and attitudes.

More importantly, by linking Weiner's attribution theory at the micro level with varieties of capitalism theory at the macro level, we are able to identify career norms of various country clusters and enhance our understanding of how the macro economic environment and micro level career goals, actions and outcomes interact. To our best knowledge, cross-level studies on careers and career norms have been limited to the country level (e.g., Andresen, 2021) or cultural clusters (e.g., Evans et al., 1989). Our study shows a new pathway to advance careers research by integrating micro- and macro-level theories, a link that "may not seem obvious at first" (Schröder, 2019, p. 61).

This novel theoretical approach provides new perspectives to explain the relationships between individuals' career goals, behaviors and outcomes. For example, the increasing need for lifelong learning and for maximizing what individuals do well and what technology (AI, robots, algorithms, etc.) does well (Schwab, 2017) seems to be resulting in additional demands on education, re-skilling, and up-skilling, reflective of both internal and external pressures to increase the *importance placed on learning and development* across market economies. This will influence individual attributions in terms of locus, controllability and stability affecting career outcomes (Galvin et al., 2018). If, however, structural barriers embedded in their market economies lead to employees' repeated negative experiences, such as lack of learning and development opportunities (Amable, 2003), limited access to job opportunities in the formal sector, and a short shelf-life of their human capital (for example, because employers shut down or change their business models frequently) (Schneider & Soskice, 2009), they are likely to perceive that these causes are highly external and can only be intentionally changed to a very limited extent, lowering their expectancy and thus motivation (Weiner, 1985a) to pursue *proactive career behaviors*. The extent to which individuals' learning and development career goal will drive their proactive career behaviors is, therefore, dampened by the structural barriers in HMEs and MMEs.

Moreover, *perceived employability* is not only related to individuals' assessment of their competencies and skills (internal locus), but also subject to the outcomes of various contextual factors such as the opportunities and constraints of the external labor market and government policies (external locus). Consequently, being confronted with less controllable opportunities and more constraints (external locus) in HMEs and MMEs, employees realize that their level of success in terms of employability is more dependent on themselves and demands more personal proactivity. In Weiner's terms, individuals' attribution to external and limitedly controllable causes will affect their behavioral response in terms of *proactive career behaviors* (Núñez et al., 2005; Oghojafor et al., 2012).

Although employees in HMEs and MMEs show stronger proactive career behaviors than individuals in CMEs and LMEs while perceiving their employability to be lower, the relationship between proactive career behaviors and perceived employability is stronger in HMEs and MMEs than that in CMEs and LMEs. This difference can be explained by a change in individuals' attributions (Weiner, 1985a). If employees in HMEs and MMEs repeatedly encounter structural barriers in their market economies in relation to employability, but at the same time believe—at least partially—that they could overcome these barriers by showing more proactive career behaviors (low controllability, internal locus), they are likely to expect the impact of their intensified individual initiative as it relates to their employability to be comparably stronger. Having the leeway to proactively manage their careers despite contextual barriers will increase the perceived impact that proactivity has on their employability, leading to a stronger relationship between the two variables. This is how the macro-micro influence process works, across the levels, here with the market economy at the macro level shaping, and potentially being shaped by, career behaviors and outcomes at the micro level.

As Weiner (1976, 1985a, 2012) notes, the stability of a cause (as defined in our case by the structural conditions in each market economy) is related to expectancy of success. If employees expect that conditions, such as career norms as defined by their market economy, will remain the same, they will expect the outcome experience based on past occasions (such as proactive career behaviors or employability) to recur (Weiner et al., 1976). In most of our confirmed hypotheses, the pairings CME/LME and HME/MME play an important role, suggesting that stability deserves a greater emphasis in contextual analysis than it has hitherto received. That said, it is also interesting to see how often our outcomes apply to both CMEs and LMEs and separately to both HMEs and MMEs. This finding implies that in some cases, the distinction between how employees behave and the career results they attain may be

feasibly met by combining the two sets of economies into higher order categories. It also helps to further define the boundaries of varieties of capitalism theory by showing how separately the similarities in CMEs/LMEs, in terms of, for instance, governance mechanisms (see Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2020), and HMEs/MMEs, for example, in terms of higher degree of state control (Hall & Soskice, 2001a), may sometimes outweigh their individual differences.

To summarize our contribution to theory, our study extends application of Weiner's attribution theory of motivation from the educational context to the field of careers (Daley, 1998) and explores the impact of additional contextual variables on attributions beyond national culture (Weiner, 1976). Moreover, we contribute to varieties of capitalism theory by directly linking career aspects with different market economies and reinforce the importance of "context theorizing" approach to understand lower-level phenomena nested within higher-level surrounding (Bamberger, 2008, p. 841). We show that market economies imply career norms that evoke consistent causes and, thus, may highly impact expectancy differences between groups of career actors.

From the empirical perspective, our study, to our best knowledge, is one of the first studies that includes both HMEs and MMEs in addition to CMEs and LMEs. Varieties of capitalism theory is more often applied to human resource management (see Farndale et al., 2008) than to careers research (see Harcourt & Wood, 2007; Houldsworth et al., 2019 for exceptions), with CMEs and LMEs as the more common study focus. Thus, our study expands the theory's extremely parsimonious separation into only two types of capitalism (Schröder, 2019, p. 62) and enhances our understanding of the four market economies by focusing on multiple countries in each category and empirically comparing individuals' careers across the four market economies in the same study. The multilevel structure, as implied in varieties of capitalism theory, has rarely been explicitly modeled and empirically tested. Our multi-level SEM approach in combination with cluster analysis to group countries into market economies answers Schröder's call (2019) for using multilevel models to address some important questions about capitalism diversity. In addition, we provide empirical evidence of how to classify debated countries, such as Japan and Switzerland, into corresponding category of market economies based on career-related institutional variables (Lee & Shin, 2021; Mach & Trampusch, 2011).

## 8.2 | Limitations and directions for future research

Our study has several limitations. First, despite the significant findings of our multilevel study, there still remains a significant proportion of unexplained variance within and across market economies (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This suggests that additional contextual and individual determinants play a role and that there is a need to better understand the mechanisms through which CMEs, LMEs, HMEs and MMEs more directly affect careers and the relationship between career goals, behaviors and outcomes. Comparative researchers do not reject the notion of considerable variability *within* nations or regions (Walker et al., 2014; Whitley, 1999). Thus, agency is likely to remain significant (Gooderham et al., 2015). Moreover, variability exists *within* the four clusters (and sometimes even within a market economy), such as in the areas of employment protection and wage setting. Future research should identify and incorporate additional theoretically driven individual- and society-level factors that would further reduce the unexplained variances. Moreover, a further analysis of the diversity based on multi-level quantitative and qualitative evidence represents a fertile ground for future enquiry, especially in terms of better ascertaining macro-micro influences as well as micro-macro influences on careers as reflected in recent calls by Farndale et al. (2023) for better and deeper international HR research contextualization.

Second, as one important aspect of agency, a key component of this variance may be accounted for by bottom-up processes (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), or transformational mechanisms (Arrow 3) in Coleman's Boat Model (Cowen et al., 2022). Our data were collected in a relatively stable period which, on the one hand, reaffirms the salience of our study (Contractor, 2022). On the other hand, major world events since then, such as the pandemic, induced a big shift in terms of work practices (e.g., work from home, generative AI) and reshapes how individuals learn and develop personally and professionally. As Coleman's Boat Model suggests (Cowen et al., 2022), future research should explore

how such micro phenomena, like individual-level proactive behaviors or practices, when aggregated, can transform macro-level phenomena, such as organizational, industrial and even societal level learning and development policies and practices (see also Schneider & Paunescu, 2012).

Third, we focus only on the perceived importance of learning and development, proactive career behaviors and perceived employability in this study. To understand the relationship between market economies and careers more fully, additional studies are needed that consider, for example, other career goals (such as the importance of increases in pay) or career outcome variables (such as career satisfaction, career commitment or promotions). This will foster the identification and explanation of additional patterns in career-related attributions between and among market economies.

Another question regarding the different market economies is raised by the pairing that we observe between CME/LME versus HME/MME: What do these pairs of economies have in common, and how are they different? Thus, we call for more comparative career studies focusing on institutional comparisons between CMEs and LMEs versus HMEs and MMEs to further explore how market economies shape individuals' career goals, behaviors, and outcomes, as such studies may fine-tune market economy categorizations of relevance when it comes to careers. Additionally, although we were not able to unpack the black box of exactly how the type of market economy (macro) affects these behaviors and outcomes (micro), as is the case in studying cultural dimensions or country-level institutional variables, here the type of market economy as a contextual variable appears to engender logical enablers and constraints in these areas as theorized by Hall and Soskice (2001a, 2001b). One potential answer may be the degree of state control over economy, with HME/MME having more central control than CME/LME as put forth by Pucheta-Martínez et al. (2020). Or it could be more a matter of stability and predictability with the CME/LME economies historically being more stable, and HME/MMEs having, to varying degrees, less market-based labor relations (Hancké et al., 2007). Stability would be more in line with Weiner's theory, in that a more predictable environment allows for clearer personal attributions.

Fourth, our cross-sectional study cannot identify causalities. Analyzing individuals' causal search following success and failure events requires time-lagged effects, ideally by a combination of a qualitative study to understand causal search mechanisms as related to work behaviors in different market economies including individuals' subsequent emotions and behaviors and a longitudinal quantitative study over several years to identify expectancy shifts.

Finally, we recommend that future research identify systematic differences in the strength of the impact of the market economy context on individuals' careers. In particular, our data suggest that greater independence from national career norms may be present among individuals at higher hierarchical levels (higher scores on all three variables), high-qualified (related to the importance of learning and development; proactive career behaviors), and younger individuals (in terms of proactive career behaviors; employability), that is, groups of individuals that are generally known to be more advantaged in the labor market (Jaumotte & Osorio-Buitron, 2015).

### 8.3 | Implications for practice

Our study provides important implications for governments, multinational companies, as well as for individuals, particularly as it relates to learning and development. Our results indicate that individuals in HMEs and MMEs show the comparatively weakest position among the four market economies, by having lower levels of perceived employability. Considering stable structural conditions in a market economy are potentially positively related to individuals' expectancy of success, it would be preferable for governments, particularly those in HMEs and MMEs, to set up employment regulations and policies to avoid unpredictable and frequent policy changes. It is important to implement policies that provide employees with a sense of security (e.g., pension, unemployment insurance, etc.), reduce entry barriers to the labor market, and encourage mobility across different business sectors and geographies.

The case of ALDI described in the introduction illustrates that what appears to be expected proactive career behaviors by employees in an LME country like the UK, might, for example, be induced in an MME country, like

Italy, by instituting regulation for companies to make specific contributions to a nationally supported training fund (ALDI, 2023; CareersHelp, 2019). These perceived differences in causal locus, control and stability reflect differences in employees' attributions and behaviors between market economies as well as their perceived effectiveness of their own actions in the learning and development arena. Thus, while companies with an international workforce, like ALDI, can expect their employees around the world to develop similar understandings of career behaviors especially when the organization has a strong culture (see Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Demastus et al., 2022), they cannot expect their employees to invest the *same amount of discretionary effort* on proactive career behaviors, again illustrating macro-micro and micro-macro influences.

Consequently, companies operating in different market economies should enhance their understanding of the importance of context (Parry et al., 2008) and potentially develop a contingency-based HRM approach (Wilkinson & Wood, 2017) that leverages institutionally embedded career norms to their advantage, just as ALDI does with so many of its learning and development practices. For example, organizations should consider developing inter-firm or firm-based training in line with the market economy they are located in, and take employees' status into consideration, such as expatriates and employees moving between different types of economies, or frequent travelers who may be responsible for achieving career success in multi-country territories (see Solimano, 2008) that contain a mix of market economy countries.

Ultimately, to operate in multiple market economies that can span CMEs, LMEs, HMEs, and MMEs, elevating and extending best practices while meeting employee needs and factoring in proactive career behavior expectations and norms seem critical to success as ALDI illustrates (ALDI, 2023). Fortunately, though not as common as they should be, companies from Salesforce to EY and Scotiabank to Accenture deserve further investigation in understanding macro-micro and micro-macro influences as each have operated successfully in multiple market economies while also providing learning opportunities that their employees feel comfortable leveraging (Kitterman, 2022).

Individuals who aim to work in other countries with different market economies from their home countries should expect not only cultural adjustment (see the review by Kraimer et al., 2016) but also adjustment to different career norms (Andresen, 2021) as defined by market economies (Afonso & Devitt, 2016). Due to the stability of career norms in different market economies, companies may have little capacity to facilitate this institutional adjustment beyond offering training and coaching in market economy institutions. It is, instead, often primarily the individuals' responsibility to reflect on their attributions in terms of causal locus and controllability as learned in one market economy and adjust accordingly based on the conditions and logics in a different market economy. As Briscoe and Hall (2006), (p. 16) argued, "career actors need more specific understandings of their environment(s) to hope to truly find agency within them." Individuals should develop contextual intelligence, that is, a global mindset, that requires a good understanding of their knowledge limits and has the ability and confidence (internal locus and control) to adapt that knowledge acquired in one context to a new one with different institutional logics, norms, and maturity (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017; Khanna, 2014), particularly when globalization and international career mobility are increasing in relevance once again (Calabrò et al., 2022; Cascio & Collings, 2022; Contractor, 2022).

## 9 | CONCLUSIONS

Our study shows that some career norms appear to be valid across market economies, for example, individuals can become employable through focusing on learning and taking individual responsibility and initiative (Forrier et al., 2018). However, we also find, firstly, that contextual conditions in different market economies are systematically reflected in the *level* that individuals assign to career goals, behaviors, and outcomes, echoing recent findings that context matters in careers (e.g., Andresen et al., 2020; Smale et al., 2019) and calling for more studies applying varieties of capitalism theory to careers.

Secondly, not only do the levels of career goals, behaviors and outcomes vary between market economies, but also the *strength* of the relationships between the perceived importance of learning and development, proactive

career behaviors and perceived employability varies systematically between market economies, as can be explained by Weiner's attribution-based theory of intrapersonal motivation. We theorize that different contextual conditions in market economies make individuals attribute differently in terms of locus and controllability and see either a lower or higher instrumentality depending on contextual stability, which affects their motivation.

As a third point, we identify the pairs of economies (CME/LME vs. HME/MME) that cluster together in terms of their relationships with individual career process, and that we need more research to explain these differences and to better understand how and when combining market economies is more salient than keeping them separate and distinct and when using a more fine-grained typology could be more applicable as proposed by Witt et al. (2018) and their nine business system market types.

Finally, there has been almost no research to explore how varieties of capitalism theory relates to individual career behaviors. This study is a first step in that direction, and we encourage more empirical, cross-level analysis to further address the micro-macro gap as applied to careers and career outcomes and to better contextualize international human resource research writ large (Farndale et al., 2023).

All together, these findings not only reflect the importance of applying market economy type to better understand how individuals perceive the same career behaviors and outcomes differently, but they also emphasize the importance of having a nuanced understanding of how learning and development-related goals, proactive career behaviors and perceived employability play out differently despite widespread acceptance of the importance of continuous learning (Bersin & Zao-Sanders, 2019; Lanvin & Monteiro, 2021; WEF, 2020) in the larger context of market economies, the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2017) and a seemingly continuously VUCA world (Baran & Woznyj, 2020).

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The citation has been anonymized to preserve the blind-review process; the full citation has been provided to the editors of the journal.
- <sup>2</sup> For further information on the market economy most relevant to countries not included in this study, please contact the lead author

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