

# THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS DEVELOPMENT: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT, INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR, ORGANISATION-INDIVIDUAL RELATIONSHIP AND CAREER ATTITUDES

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**Globálny pohľad na rozvoj pracovno-právnych vzťahov, organizačná štruktúra a prostredie, správanie jednotlivca, vzťah medzi organizáciou a jednotlivcom a prístupy ku kariére**

***Abstract:** The organisation of work within organisations and employment relationships are triggered by the changes in the external environment: information technology development, demographics and socio-cultural factors. Organisations are becoming flatter substituting or adding to hierarchical structures matrix, network and virtual work organisation solutions. Each of them requires different competences and attitudes from individuals working for the organisation. Macroeconomic factors demonstrate the economic development as a rather stable process where as unemployment significantly fluctuates along the course, indicating a necessity for individuals to adapt more self-centred, pro-active attitudes when pursuing their professional careers. The conceptual frame for the further research is developed, identifying various individual competences and attitudes required by organisations adopting different work organisational structures.*

***Keywords:** employment, individual – organisational relationship, behaviour, career attitude, organisational environment and structure*

**JEL Classification:** J 00

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## 1 Introduction

Employment relations are collaboration between an individual and an organisation. The Oxford Dictionary suggests that “collaboration is the action of working with someone to produce something or traitorous cooperation with an enemy” [26]. In the case of employment relations both explanations are true – an individual and an organisation exchange values to produce value for the consumer [10], whilst on the other hand, the contradictory value perception makes both to argue over terms and conditions.

Research of the development of employment relationships requires the understanding both of an individual’s perspective towards the employment relationship and the organisation’s situation. Both of them and their interaction are affected by the development of the external environment which is characterised as uncertain today, with the future prospect of even greater uncertainty [19, 21, 30].

The aim of the paper is to develop the frame for further research of employment relations focusing on factors defining organisational – individual relationships within the context of a changing economical, technological and sociocultural environment.

To reach the aim, the context of external environment is described as identifying the impact of technological development within the economy, leading to unemployment and urbanization creating a foundation for sociocultural changes in society.

Further, the organisational perspective is analysed distinguishing the changes of work organisation, different organisational structures and different expectations towards employee behaviour. Finally, the individual’s perspective towards organisational-individual relationship is characterised determining the major career patterns and attitudes.

## 2 External Environment Context

The two actors of employment relationship are the organisation and the individual. The organisation presets the organisation of work to achieve defined goals in the most efficient way to secure the sustainability of the organisation. On the other hand, an individual provides the competences required to complete the task. Neither organisations nor individuals are static; both change and develop by interacting with the external environment and with each other.

The nature of employment relationships throughout time has mostly been triggered by the development of technology and innovation. The automation, mechanization and robotisation have substituted for the physical workforce. On the other hand, it has created demand for completely new skills, competences and attitudes [15, 16, 21]. There has been recorded movement from the “blue colour workers” to “white colour workers” assuming that nowadays the physical work is done by machines; however, the “management” of machines is done by people [31], allowing businesses significantly to improve productivity.

The improved work efficiency creates surplus of the value produced. The inabil-

ity of the market to consume everything produced leads organisations to be incapable of employing the same amount of people as before, thus making some people unemployed. The unemployment demonstrates both the economic strength and the organisation's capability to deal with technological and organisational changes. Unemployment fluctuates between 4–18% within last twenty years, reaching the peak in 2010 [35].

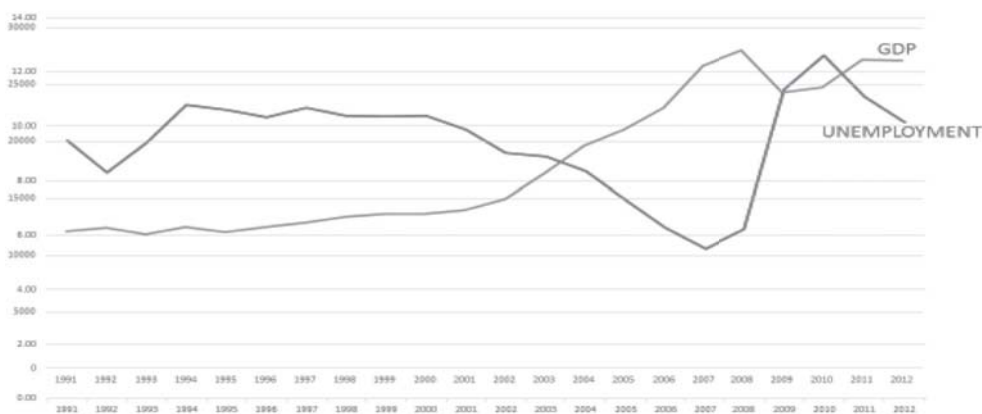
The authors would argue that a rather high unemployment rate can be explained not only by an overall economic situation, but also by the fact that new principles and techniques for work organisation require completely new people's competences. The organisation's incapability to foresee these required future competences and develop the workforce accordingly lead to involuntary unemployment, whereas new competence acquisition becomes the responsibility of either the State or the individual themselves.

When the competence level is regained then unemployment decreases until new competences and attitudes are again demanded by the market.

Another macroeconomical indicator – GDP growth rate is much more stable than unemployment rates, demonstrating rather stable growth throughout period of the time (see Fig. 1) [38].

Figure 1

### Unemployment and GDP per capita trends coherence



**Source:** own processing based on data [34, 35].

As demonstrated in Figure 1, the unemployment and GDP rates do correlate; however, they are not simultaneous, suggesting that people are reacting to the fluctuations within the economy's and organisational performance. Unemployment seems to be a consequence caused by changes in the economy and leading to the basic challenge of an individual and organisation relationship – it is dynamic throughout time,

and cannot fully be captured by static models.

Also the unemployment fluctuates more often than the overall economic development, leading to the conclusion that individuals within labour markets are accepting a more active role than the organisations in the last twenty years.

Unemployment not only makes people acquire new competences but also forces them to migrate to the places where the work possibilities are higher – cities (urbanisation) or other countries where their particular competence is still demanded. Urbanisation is high, up to 80 % in developed countries (USA, Great Britain), and still growing all over the world by 2–4 % per year; however, in the Baltic states it stagnated or even decreased in the last decade [36].

The authors are inclined to explain the stagnation of urbanisation by two facts. One is improving infrastructure, which in combination with rather small area size of Latvia allows inhabitants to commute to work more easily. The second factor definitely is the development of information technologies (all the Baltic states rank within the top twenty countries having the fastest and best internet coverage) [2] allowing people to use flexible work opportunities.

There is a correlation between unemployment and urbanisation. High wage cities tend to have high unemployment, which draws people into informal employment [20] and facilitates competitive behaviour of the workforce fostering individualism [19]. The individualism in lifestyle (one-person households in the USA and the UK had increased by 70 % since 1980-ies, in Latvia by 47 % during 2000 – 2010) [29, 37] impacts on individuals behaviour in the work place [19, 21] creating competitiveness between employees.

The authors agree that on the other hand the competitive behaviour and individualism create a foundation for creativity and innovation in the marketplace (the proportion of creative jobs in the USA has increased from 13 % in 1900 to 33 % in 2010) [25], generating new employment possibilities by changing and adding to job content. This process generates organisational changes demanding new skills and competences of individuals.

The change process is strongly associated with the sociocultural factors such as demography (age, gender and education) and culture (individual and national values). All these factors characterise the society from which individuals come from. Society is becoming older and more individualistic. The birth rates in the European area significantly dropped at the beginning of 1990-ies and since then have never reached the previous levels, e.g. in Latvia the birth rate in 1990s dropped by 35 % compared to the 1980s [38].

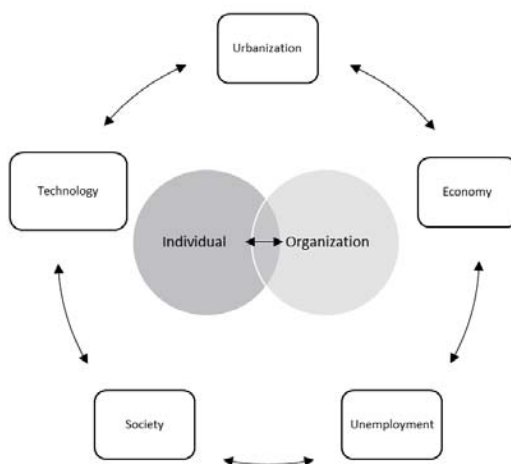
The birth rate drop by almost twice in 1990s intensifies the discussion about the work organisation in companies and institutions, and the employment relationship as such, sometimes even exaggerating the discussion about the consequences for consumerist behaviour in society. The perspective of the next coming years is the reduction of accessible working force, while baby-boomers will leave the labour market, and the generation substituting them in developing countries is almost 50 % less [34].

The solution of this problem would be to increase the migration from developing countries or the work organisation shall be revisited changing the foundation of individual – organisational relationship in the work context, making organisations even more dependent on the employees and sustaining the purchasing power of individuals consuming the products delivered by the organisations [30].

To summarise, the authors propose that individuals and organisations are interdependent reacting and creating the changes in external environment, whereas changes in society would have a higher impact on individuals; however, changes in the economy would first affect the organisations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

### External environment context of employment relationship



**Source:** own processing.

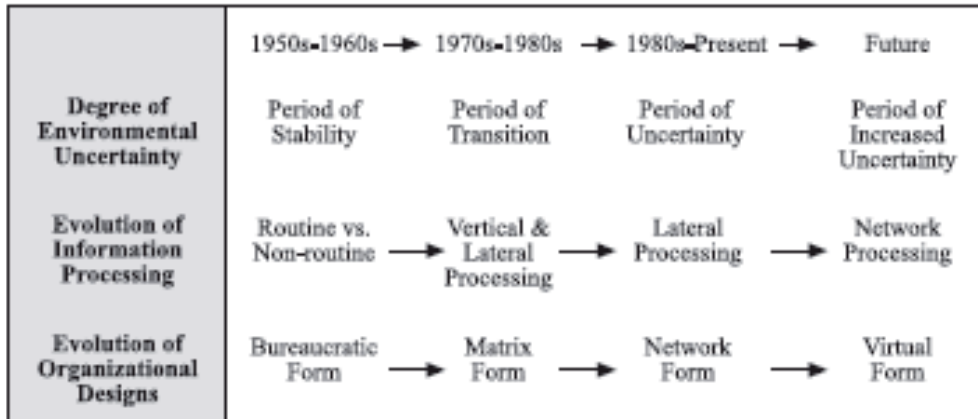
The economy more directly influences the performance of organisations, and movements in society more directly influence the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. Technology development is driving the overall changes, opening new possibilities for organisational efficiency. Since the increased efficiency leads to unemployment, it creates a requirement to obtain new competences and attitudes, and urbanisation brings the emergence for new consumer demands.

### 3 The Organisational Perspective

The development of technology, in particular that of information technology, enables simultaneous lateral and vertical processes of information and changes work organisation principles; this leads to increase in organisations' efficiency. The evolution of organisational design under pressure of technology development is succinctly captured by Dibrell and Miller (2002) as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

### The organisation design development



Source: [11].

The traditional models of organisational structure were hierarchical and secured the production of the standardised products and services. Organisations were designed as machines with predefined processes, clear routines, focused on themselves, and looking to find the one best solution to an issue [27, 40].

The functional hierarchical structure secures an adequate information flow and is appropriate for the stable external or internal environment. Authors therefore suggest that the environment of a hierarchical, functional structure can be characterised as stable.

These types of organisations demanded full-time employment with complete obedience to rules offering routinised work and predictable incomes [32].

The design and characteristic of an organisation drives the required workforce competences. The stable hierarchical organisation requires personnel adhering to the rules, following predefined procedures and capable of doing routine work [7]. However, the tough control under the strict rules “dehumanized the vast majority of the workers [32], making them be just a replaceable part of manufacturing business machine”. Considering the inactive, stable role of an individual in hierarchical organisation, the authors believe that the core competence of employee is rigidity, allowing organisations and individuals to rely on the long term status quo.

The technological advancement allowed information processing to happen both laterally and vertically, now putting the impact on teamwork, better customer service, and work organisations became much more flexible, which led to requirements towards the working force becoming more flexible, being able to communicate, take risks and think politically [1]. The organisational structures adopted a matrix type work organisation, developing flatter organisational structures. [1]. Also, it drew some negative perspectives as employees became more competitive on the individual level, more short-term focused and their loyalty to the organisation subse-

quently declined.

Matrix organisational structures create a flexible working environment and demand flexibility from individuals working for this kind of organisation.

Further development of information technology dismantled the necessity for higher levels of information processing since 1980s the information processing became just lateral – creating the network form of an organisational design. The network organisational structure is considered to be the next level above the matrix structure, proposing not just two or three reporting lines but several reporting centres for each worker. The network structure allows organisations to share the unique competence of high skilled workers, demanding them to be able to work under high stress as the work is organised around projects, but it also brings stress as workers are not sure where their internal loyalties should lie.

The network organisation demands employees to be committed to the organisations being project based and sharing the valuable knowledge of individuals [3] and ability to work autonomous on the other hand (employees work individually up to 60 % of their working time) [19].

In such kind of an organisation, individuals are expected to maintain working under high stress, possess a certain level of freedom, personal value driven growth, mobility, openness, adaptability, and identity (or self-awareness) [5, 18].

The authors suggest that the network organisational structure creates an entrepreneurial environment within an organisation, demanding high adaptivity from the individuals.

The work environment future is predicted to become even more uncertain, foreseeing that individuals and organisations will collaborate as independent partners sharing risks, costs and rewards in the global market. The focus of virtual organisations is a fast delivery of a high quality product. Virtual organisations tend to be short-term, and actors might come from different organisations (including competitors, suppliers, and customers).

Virtual organisations are founded on an equal partnership of members sharing risks and incomes and blurring boundaries between traditional roles of customers and suppliers [39]. The focus is not so much on specific characteristics of an individual as on the relationship between individuals (partners), expecting this relationship to be highly interdependent, requiring a high level of trust, cooperation and communication [14].

The organisational environment of such an organisation can be described as agile, and it demands high mobility of individuals in collaboration.

What is important to stress is that when discussing future requirements, then the main focus is on the expectations towards the relationship itself rather than on the requirements demanded of individuals. This brings up a new perspective in individual–organisation work relationship models, as it is not no longer about how each of the actors perform, but about the quality of interaction itself.

The organisational environment description, operating various structures and the expected employees competences and attitudes are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4

**Organisational environment description and expected employee competences and attitudes**

Time	1950-1960	1970-1980	1990 - 2010	2010 - future
Organizational structure	Hierarchical structure	Matrix structure	Network structure	Virtual structure
Organization description	Organization as machine Hierarchical, stable Internally focused Mass production Routinized work processes Full time employees Direct supervision Control, predictable To find the best possible solutions Escape uncertainty	Organization as open system Decentralized People oriented Customer focused Team work Flexible working environment Problem solution on spot Individual approach Manage uncertainty	Organization as flexible tool The activity matters not the form Effective and innovative Time to market Entrepreneurial units The rules doesn't matter Focus on change, quick decisions Responsive reaction Discovers uncertainty	Share risks, costs, and rewards in pursuit of a global market Purpose Short term Innovation
Organization environment	Stable	Flexible	Entrepreneurial	Agile
Employee competencies and attitudes	Obedient to rules Predifined work content Order Loyal Routinized work Predictable income Discipline Subordination of individual interests to collective interests Equity Advancement	Not clear competence Communication Flexibility Participation in local networks and social relationship – out of work Risk taking Competitive individualism Short term vision Failure is socially acceptable Anxiety Political skills Declining loyalty to the firm Systems thinker	High stress resistance Freedom Growth (personal value driven) Mobility Openness Adaptability Identity (or self-awareness)	Interdependent relationships Trust Communication Coordination
Employee behaviour	Rigidity	Flexibility	Adaptivity	Mobility

Source: own processing.

The chronological review of developmental phases of business structures might be heavily challenged; as in any today’s organisation we can find the elements from each period, and their structure might be very different depending on the type of business, size of the business, geographical location, etc. This could be due to the reason that forms of work organisation do not just simply succeed each other but the next form builds on the previous one [13].

This frames further research questions:

1. What are the expectations of individuals and organisations towards each other, acknowledging that different organisational structures, environment characteristics and employee behaviours may be co-existing within one organisation?
2. What is the performance of virtual organisations which today still lack scientific and empirical data to be analysed?

**4 An Individual’s Perspective**

The same as organisations have expectations towards their employees, employees have expectations towards their organisations. For the majority of individuals, work is the source of income, making them dependent on an organisation. The initial studies in 1980s proved that it is better to have a bad job than to be without job at all; however, later it was found that people who had a bad job, experienced the same psychological consequences as if they were unemployed [17].

Authors would explain this phenomenon with three reasons. First, nowadays employees can secure their income not only by being employed by one, single organisation but can also apply different employment forms: self-employment, solo entrepreneurship, NGO, etc. Second, the employment context changes [28], driven by the



power shift between the employer (organisation) and the employee (individual) driven by the development of knowledge extensive work and the lack of labour force in the market in the first half of 2000s. Third, it is the effects of the cultural development of society towards individualism and self-determination. Nevertheless, it was expected that the crises in 2008 would shift the labour market and power distribution back in favour of the organisations; however, a recent study shows that expectations of individuals towards ‘job content, training, career development and finance remains high.

The work or professional life of an individual is compressed under the concept of “career”, which is understood as the progress within an occupation throughout a significant period of time [26]. It could be said that as the requirements for the knowledge and skills changes through the time, the individual’s perspective of their relationship with the organisation also changes over the course of their careers.

Today, it is more likely that people will work for several organisations during their lives, or even change their occupations. The employment relationship now has a completely different meaning than it had in the industrial age; nevertheless, the goal of the employment relationship – to create value for customers – still remains true.

Intially, organisations assumed a high responsibility for the career development of individuals, often securing the job throughout a lifetime. Later organisations used career management as a tool to acquire and retain talents. As of the 1980s, the involuntary unemployment risk has put more pressure on individuals to adapt a more self-centered and proactive career management profile. Organisations still may take an active part in shaping an individuals career [23], or they can act in a more agile fashion, leaving the career at the discretion of the individual [23].

The development of employment relations and individual career attitudes is captured in Fig. 5.

Figure 5

**The individual perspective development of career attitudes**

Organization-Individual positioning (visualisation)	
Organization-Individual positioning (description)	The individuals career within single organization within single profession [Fayol in Wren 1994, Weber in Wren 1994]
Employment relationship	Organization oriented
Career	Traditional
	The individuals career within single organization within multiple professions [McGregor in Wren 1994; Arthur and Rousseau 1996]
	Organization – individuals oriented
	The individuals career within multiple organizations within multiple professions [Hall 2004, Inkson 2006]
	Individual –organizational oriented
	The individuals career within multiple organizations within multiple professions [K. Korotov, S. N. Khapova 2013, Godin 2014, Joel 2013]
	Individual oriented
	Boundaryless
	Protean
	Entremployee

Source: own processing.

The traditional meaning of an individual's career is emphasized by step by step linearity [1, 23] in terms of vertical success and monetary rewards, and assigning the whole responsibility for the career management to the organisation. The traditional career within specific occupations and one organisation still applies for stable markets and static organisations [33]. The employment relations are oriented towards the interests of the organisation.

Following the crises in the 1980s, the alienation of employees from organisations opened a new wave for careerism [8], assigning more power to the individual to pursue their own career.

The concept of the boundaryless career was developed by Arthur and Rousseau [1], predicting higher physical and psychological mobility and the central role of an individual in professional self-development. The role of the individual appeared but still the main player in career management remained the organisation; however, the balance of organisation – individual oriented employment relations was shifting more and more towards the individual.

The boundaryless career concept predicts high competitiveness of individuals within the labour market, as employees are not anymore framed within the limits of one organisation or one profession and can compete for all vacancies in the market. This creates new battlegrounds for talent management and for the “war for the talents” for the organisation. Employees especially in their early careers will change jobs and move more readily from organisation to organisation to develop their careers [6].

The socio-cultural development of society and more stress on individuals to be competitive within the labour market, allowed Hall [18] to develop the concept of protean career. This is very close to a boundaryless career; however it differs to the point that Hall calls “following the inner self”. This means developing the career according to the individual's values, bringing forward the freedom of being self-aware and acting according to personal beliefs, also within work relationships. Hall's concept supports the Arthur's et al. idea about the career which gives meaning to one's life [23].

The main characteristics of the person pursuing the protean career is the willingness to grow, ability to be personally responsible, self-autonomy, ability to change with change, demonstration of high levels of adaptivity of an individual [18, 23].

A protean career approach sets up the individual as the main figure in the employment relationship, where developing the individual is concerned. The organisational relationship also includes and adopts the self-serving, self-focused facets of an individual's behaviour as part of itself. This may lead to a principal-agent relationship, which is less favourable to the organisation [4], as the individual now is more centred to achieve their own personal agenda rather than contributing to the collective interests of an organisation. However, if this approach adds to the value of the company and the client offering, then it is the right approach.

While studies show the individuals within the organisation are neither entirely independent nor boundaryless [23], the concept of career has developed further

advocating the professional career as a business [22], entrepreneurship, promising better work-life balance [12] and demanding that the individual acts even more energetically [16]. This concept looks at one's career as the form of entrepreneurship, making individuals take risks, bear full responsibility for their personal professional success, and to collaborate with organisations as equals.

This approach sees employment relations focused on the individual, whereas the individual is the central figure of an interaction between organisation and individual, now making organisations as dependant on individuals for value creation as initially individuals were dependant on organisations.

The research now shows that individuals taking a more active role in their own career planning and environmental scanning are more satisfied with their new employment, and organisations are looking forward to becoming more agile and adopting a start-up behavioural style [21]. Despite this, entrepreneurship lacks the empirical research within organisations exploring it while existing legislation, taxation and education systems are developed to support traditional model of individual – organisational relationship rather than new forms.

Not all organisations and not in all industries have experienced such a dramatic shift of roles [23]. We therefore argue that scientific studies focused on career development should take into consideration the context of the individual, organisations and industries [18, 24], however, the impact of growing individualism trend [16, 19] and information accessibility triggers the expectations of employees working for stable hierarchical organisations.

## 5 Limitations

The article does not look into such important characteristics of the individual – organisation relationship as the role of the leadership and the organisational culture from the organisational level, or to individual motivation and competence development from the individual's perspective.

## 6 Conclusions and Further Research Questions

The authors have designed the model of the individual – organisation relationship, considering major macro factors influencing them in the work context, such as technology, economy, unemployment, urbanisation and societal trends, and development.

Individuals and organisations interact with each other and with the external environment, changing each other and developing new levels of performance. Each level of performance is possible within a certain environment and requires appropriate competences and attitudes of employees, resulting in desired value creating behaviours. The work organisation principles (structure) defines the organisational environment, which further creates expectations of individuals. Individuals, on the other hand, react to the expectations of organisations and form their own career attitudes.

Altogether, it leads to the employment relations which are either the organisation, organisation–individual, individual–organisation or individual centric (Figure 6).

Figure 6

**The employment relations development, organisational structure and environment, individual behaviour, organisation–individual relationship and career attitudes**

Time	1950-1960	1970-1980	1990 – 2010	2010 - future
Organizational structure	Hierarchical structure	Matrix structure	Network structure	Virtual structure
Organization environment	Stable	Flexible	Entrepreneurial	Agile
Employee behaviour	Rigidity	Flexibility	Adaptivity	Mobility
Ornaization/Individual relationship orientation	Organization	Organization-individual	Individual-organization	Individual
Career attitude	Traditional	Boundaryless	Protean	Entreployee

**Source:** own processing.

Different work organisational principles emerged within different time frames, realising the value creation opportunities. The historical development of the individual – organisational relationship, where the employee was initially connected to one organisation and one person (functional structure) through changes towards the matrix structure (connected and dependent on two persons); then network structures (connected and dependent on various persons) and virtual structures (connected to many persons and many organisations primarily through Information Technology) raises the question whether an individuals' connection to the organisation they work for is of the same strength in all types of work organisation? [10].

Following the developed frame and acknowledging the research needs identified by other authors, the following are questions for further research:

- 1) What are the expectations of individuals and organisations towards each other acknowledging that different organisational structures, environment characteristics and employee behaviours may co-exist within one organisation?
- 2) What is the performance of virtual organisations, which up to now lacks scientific and empirical data to be analysed?
- 3) What is the empirical research of the entremloyment career attitude, while an individual collaborates with organisations [23]?
- 4) What is the individual's capability to adapt different behaviours and career attitudes at one given time [9]?

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