Chapter 8

Conclusions and discussion
8.1. Introduction

The goal of this study is to gain a greater insight into the factors that determine the success of critical transitions in managerial careers. More specifically, its purpose is to identify the characteristics of transitions – in particular the magnitude of the transition – and the characteristics of the ‘manager in transition’ that explain and predict the success of career transitions. In addition, the study analyzes the effectiveness of management development activities (e.g., coaching, mentoring, training, education etc.) in enhancing the possibility that critical career transitions in managerial careers will be successful. The main research question in this study is therefore two-fold. First, *what are the factors that determine the success of critical career transitions in managerial careers?* And second, *which management development activities are most effective during a transition process?*

The main research question was explored on the basis of the following specific questions:

- What is management and what is meant by a management role?
- What is a career?
- What is a critical career transition and what types can be distinguished?
- What are the main stages in the process of a critical career transition?
- When is the process of a critical career transition completed?
- Which managerial levels or layers can be distinguished and what are the main job elements at each level?
- How can the magnitude of critical career transitions be defined and operationalized?
- What is meant by a successful critical career transition and what criteria can be used to measure the success?
- What is meant by management development (MD) and which management development activities can be distinguished?

In chapter 5 (see figure 5.1), a conceptual model designed to answer the main research questions is described. It is based on the assumption that the success of a critical career transition is determined by both *personal* factors (e.g., socio-demographic aspects and personality traits) and context-bound or *situational* factors (e.g., characteristics of the transition and sources of support).

The focus of this study is on critical transitions in managerial careers. Management is defined as “*the process of working with and through individuals and groups and other resources to accomplish organizational goals*” (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993, p. 5). The study covers transitions at the levels of lower management, middle management and top management and transitions within and between organizations, between (business) functions and upwards and downwards in the hierarchy.
The conceptual model in this study makes a distinction between the objective and the subjective success of critical career transitions. The first part of the main research question of the research is therefore formulated more precisely as: \textit{what are the factors that determine the objective and subjective success of critical career transitions in managerial careers?} In answering this part of the main question, a distinction is made – in accordance with the studies by Judge et al. (1994) and Lortie-Lussier & Rinfret (2005) – between demographic, human capital and organizational factors. The organizational (or situational factors) include both the characteristics of the critical transition itself and the various forms of support. With regard to the characteristics of the critical career transition, the study identified the impact of the magnitude of the transition on the objective and subjective success of critical career transitions.

The objective magnitude of critical career transitions was measured using three independent methods: (1) determining the change in the manager’s income; (2) ranking the transition in terms of the dimensions novelty, learning and transfer; and (3) Jaques’ time span measurement. Respondents to the survey carried out for this study were asked to assess their perception of the extent of ‘newness’ they experienced (the subjective magnitude of the critical career transition). They were also asked to indicate to what extent they received a number of different forms of work-related and non-work-related support. The second part of the main question is therefore formulated more precisely as: which work-related and non-work-related forms of support are most effective during transition processes? The work-related forms of support are subject to the management development activities of organizations. Management development refers to “ developing employees in a prudent and structural way in order to guarantee the future occupation of managerial and staff functions” (Huijgen & De Nijs, 1993, in: Jansen, Van der Velde & Mul, 2001, pp. 106-107).

A career is a sequence of related work experiences and jobs or formal roles through which a person passes during his or her lifetime. Between these jobs or formal roles, there are the critical career transitions. A critical career transition is the process in which a major change of formal work role requirements or work context (location, organization, organizational unit or department) occurs during an individual’s professional career. A successful critical career transition is a transition in which the person making the transition and the organization in which the transition occurs achieve the specific goals of the transition. These goals can be ‘hard’ or ‘soft’. There are different phases in a critical career transition (Nicholson, 1986; Nicholson & West, 1988): preparation, encounter, adjustment and stabilization, which is completed when the individual (the ‘transitioner’) has built up a certain degree of routine in the new role and the role and personal development are completed.
8.2. Overview of the results

The objective success of a transition depends mainly on the socio-demographic factors ($\Delta R^2 = .126$); the subjective success is mainly determined by the human capital factors ($\Delta R^2 = .231$). The characteristics of the transition, in particular the magnitude of the transition, only predict 3.2% of the objective success and 5% of the subjective success ($\Delta R^2 = .032$ en $\Delta R^2 = .050$, respectively). The conceptual model explains almost 36% of the total variance of the objective success ($F = 1.905$, $p = .008$), and nearly 63% of the subjective success ($F = 5571$, $p = .000$). In particular, the objective success of critical career transitions depends on the manager's educational level and conceptual skills.

Conceptual skills are particularly important during the encounter, or confrontation, phase of transition processes. Setting priorities and understanding the complexity of the job, the organization's strategy, structure, and culture, and the social networks are relevant factors (Louis, 1982). The change in the time span (the change in the length of the period that the manager should be able to look ahead in his or her new job) and the associated task complexity (Jaques, 1990) do not affect the success of career transitions.

There is a negative and significant relation between the age and educational level of the manager and the objective success of critical career transitions. This means that critical career transitions made by older managers are less successful than critical career transitions made by younger managers. The main reason for this is that critical career transitions made by older managers are regarded as less desirable by the managers themselves. However, the negative influence of age is compensated in part by the older manager's managerial experience. The study shows that critical career transitions that are undesirable in the view of the managers are less successful than transitions that are regarded as desirable, which implies that the success of critical function transitions depends on the degree to which the transition fits in with the career path that managers have mapped out for themselves. Critical career transitions made by older managers should therefore take place in thorough and timely consultation with the manager concerned. Furthermore, organizations should pay attention to the interests both of the organization (organization development, OD; see § 2.6.1) and the individual manager (personnel development, PD).

There does not appear to be any difference in terms of success between critical career transitions involving female managers and male managers. The only difference found in this study is that management education or management courses are only effective in the case of critical career transitions by female managers.

Surprisingly, the influence of the manager’s educational level on objective success is significantly negative, although the opposite had been expected on the basis of the
literature. The negative effect on the objective success of the critical career transition is also partly compensated by the level of managerial experience with respect to the level of education; the educational level and the level of managerial experience are negatively related. No further explanations could be found from the data for the negative relationship between the level of education and objective success.

Furthermore, the study shows that conceptual skills play a central role in predicting the success of critical career transitions. Conceptual skills affect both the objective success of critical career transitions and the individual’s level of ‘readiness for change’. ‘Readiness for change’ is strongly correlated with the subjective success of critical career transitions. ‘Readiness for change’ is defined as ‘the extent to which someone is ready to make the transition to the new job (see also § 6.4.1.3). The level of ‘readiness for change’ depends on (1) the manager’s own assessment and his or her colleagues’ assessment of his or her competenc(i)es, and (2) the time the manager has to prepare for the transition. In addition to conceptual skills and the readiness for change, the manager’s adaptability affects the success of critical transitions: adaptability and the level of subjective success of the critical career transition are positively related. Moreover, the subjective success is related to the duration of critical career transitions: the longer the transitional period lasts, the less successful the managers’ assessment of their career step.

The perceived or subjective magnitude and the objective magnitude of critical career transitions are strongly correlated. The increase in income and the need for new and relevant skills (‘learning’) are also good predictors of the perceived magnitude of critical career transitions. Remarkably, interfirrm career transitions were found to be more successful, objectively and subjectively, than intrafirm career transitions.

Providing work-related support (management development activities) during a career transition makes scarcely any contribution to its success. The level of support explains just over 5% of the objective and subjective success (ΔR² = .032, ΔR² = .050, respectively). Some forms of organizational support are in fact negatively, although not significantly, related with objective and subjective success (mentoring, coaching, training and introduction programs). Only the support of friends and acquaintances showed a significant relationship, but contrary to what was expected, the relationship of support of friends and acquaintances to subjective success was negative (β = -.140, p = .035). This could suggest a reverse causality: managers ask for support from family and friends when they are already experiencing problems during the transition process.

Although the level of support provided by a person’s life partner does not contribute to the success of the transition, having a life partner does contribute to the objective success of critical career transitions. This applies for both men and women.
According to managers who make a step to a higher level in the hierarchy, support from their immediate supervisor is the most effective form of support during the transition process, followed by support from their life partner, friends and acquaintances, management education and training (see table 7.8). In comparison to middle managers and first-line managers, a relatively large number of top managers attend management courses during their career transitions. This may be the result of the substantial increase in the (perceived) task complexity (Jaques, 1990).

Managers at the upper middle management level perceive the support of their immediate supervisor as most effective, while top managers regard the support of their life partners as most effective (see table 7.7). Furthermore, top managers make only limited use of internal and external coaching during their transition periods. It is also striking that top managers in particular make use of support groups and peer learning. At the lower managerial levels, support groups and peer learning are used less frequently. Apparently, sharing experiences is seen as more valuable at the higher levels than at the lower managerial levels.

In conclusion, the manager in transition has the greatest impact on the success of the critical career transition. Investing in work-related support during transition processes has been found not to be very effective. Furthermore, most of the predictors of career success that were used in this study had scarcely any effect in predicting the success of critical career transitions. In most cases, these predictors were not found to have any effect, and in the case of age and education, negative relationships were found.

8.3. Theoretical implications

The results presented in section 8.2 prompt a number of theoretical considerations, which are discussed below.

8.3.1. Age

The regression analysis shows that there is a significant negative relationship between age and the objective success of critical career transitions. Based on the earlier studies by Gould & Pensley (1984) and Judge et al. (1994), a positive relationship was expected. In the Pearson correlation matrix, the negative relationship between age and objective success was masked by the level of management experience. Age and experience are, not surprisingly, strongly positively related ($\beta = .645$, $p = .000$). This means that older managers can compensate for the negative impact of their age with their experience as a manager.

A logical explanation for the negative relationship between age and the objective success of critical career transitions can be found in the data. The desirability of the transition,
one of the items that was used to determine the subjective magnitude of the transition, has been found to be negatively and significantly correlated with age (r = -.148, p = .044). In addition, the desirability of critical career transitions is positively related to objective success (r = .257, p = .001): the more desirable the transition, the more positive the contribution to the quality level and financial results of the manager’s own organizational unit. In other words, critical career transitions are often seen as a necessity by senior managers rather than as a desirable step in their careers, which is reflected in objectively less successful transitions.

What is also striking is that the level of ambition is significantly negatively correlated with age: the ambition of managers decreases as they get older. This decreasing ambition could lead to less motivation during transition processes. Another explanation for the negative correlation between age and objective success can be found in the Peter Principle (see § 5.4.1.2 and § 6.2.2.1). In the case of critical transitions in the maturity stage of the career (see § 2.3.4 and figure 2.12), the chance of reaching the level of one’s own incompetence increases considerably, and hence the chance of making a less successful transition increases. However, older managers do not evaluate their last critical career transition as more difficult. In fact, although not significant, the magnitude of the transition and age are negatively correlated (r = -.074, p = .195). This makes the Peter Principle a less likely explanation.

8.3.2. Gender

The manager’s gender does not affect the success of critical career transitions. With regard to the objective success of transitions, the Pearson correlation matrix (see Appendix M) showed a significant difference between male and female managers: r = .180, p = .017, which indicates that female managers are slightly more successful than their male colleagues. However, the hierarchical regression analysis showed no differences between men and women. In the different subsamples, 8% (construction and engineering company), 17% (global energy consultancy company), 5% (HR consultancy firm) and 41% (business school alumni) of the respondents were female. Combined with the differences between the four subsamples in terms of objective success, the modest differences between males and females in the correlation matrix were partly ‘straightened’.

With regard to the predictors of objective success, no differences were found between male and female managers in this study. With regard to subjective success, only the effect of management education differs significantly between male and female managers (p = .001). It can be concluded that women benefit from management education during critical transitions (β = .134), while men do not (β = -.010).
8.3.3. Marital status

Having a life partner contributes positively to the objective success of critical career transitions ($\beta = .237$, $p = .015$). However, having a partner does not affect the subjective success. In the sample, the effect of marital status was ‘masked’ by the managers’ level of education. It appears from the sample that having or not having a partner is associated with the level of education ($\beta = .312$, $p = .000$): the higher the educational level, the greater the chance of having a partner. In addition, the presence of a partner does contribute to the objective success of critical transitions. This is consistent with the earlier findings of Judge et al. (1994), Pfeffer & Ross (1982) and Ganster et al. (1986), who found a positive relationship between having a spouse and career success.

Interestingly, the perceived support provided by the life partner does not contribute to the objective success of the transition ($\beta = -.058$, $p = .296$). Apparently, having a partner is associated more with stability, responsibility and maturity (Pfeffer & Ross, 1982). Whether the partner offers a lot of emotional support does not matter. This conclusion is consistent with that of LaRocco et al. (1980), who concluded that support from family and friends is not predictive of work-related outcomes (see § 2.6.3.2). The role of the partner and of a stable family situation was an important issue during the interviews with the HR experts. According to Marga Veenendaal (see § 4.2.3), it is important that the partners support the manager’s decision to make a (critical) career transition. Having a stable family situation is of great importance.

8.3.4. Level of education

The level of education does not affect the subjective success of critical career transitions. However, contrary to what was expected, the relationship between the level of education and objective success is strongly negative ($\beta = -.268$, $p = .003$). The Pearson correlation matrix also showed a negative correlation ($r = -.108$), but this relationship was not significant. The negative influence of level of education was masked by having a partner and, to a small extent, by gender and the manager’s level of experience. Having a partner, which has a positive relationship with the level of education, partially offsets the negative effect of the level of education on the objective success of critical career transitions. The higher educational level of women in the sample also compensates for the negative correlation between objective success and level of education: female managers are objectively more successful than male managers ($\beta = .137$, $p = .089$).

The level of managerial experience appears to have a negative relationship with the educational level of managers ($\beta = -.310$, $p = .021$). This means that older managers can compensate for their lower educational level with more experience as a manager. Because managerial experience is positively, but not significantly, related with objective
success ($\beta = .109$, $p = .162$), the negative influence of education on the objective success of critical career transitions is partially compensated.

Based on the extensive literature in this field (e.g., Deary, Beach, Smith & Fernandes, 2007; Bartels, Rietveld, Van Baal & Boomsma, 2002; Brody, 1992), a positive relationship between educational level and conceptual skills can be expected. That is also the case in this study. The educational level and conceptual skills, as part of the overall intelligence, are positively related ($r = .160$, $p = .030$).

Excessive expectations might be a good explanation for the negative relationship between the level of education and the objective success of critical career transitions. This explanation is in line with the assumption that a particular level of objective outcomes will become less satisfying as the level of education increases, because of the higher expectations associated with a higher educational level (Judge et al., 1994; see also § 5.4.2.1). These higher expectations could have affected the managers' perception of their contribution to the performance (financial results and product/service quality level) of their own unit, department or team. In short, the higher the educational level, the higher the expectations, and the more critical the manager's assessment.

Another possible explanation for the negative relationship between the level of education and the objective success of critical career transitions is underestimation. This could be reflected in the higher score on ‘readiness for change’ of the more highly educated managers; the relationship between education and readiness is positive and significant ($\beta = .155$, $p = .049$). In addition, there is no significant difference in how more and less highly educated managers perceive the magnitude of their critical career transitions. The feeling of being ready for the new job might lead one to devote less energy to the transition process, thus diminishing the positive effect the transition could have on the organization's performance.

### 8.3.5. Readiness for change and personality traits

Readiness for change, adaptability, ambition and conceptual skills are positively correlated with both the objective and subjective success of critical career transitions (see the Pearson correlation matrix in Appendix N). Nevertheless, after carrying out the regression analysis, only readiness for change ($\beta = .350$, $p = .000$), and adaptability ($\beta = .146$, $p = .039$) appeared to be significantly related with subjective success, and only conceptual skills were significantly related with objective success ($\beta = .286$, $p = .013$). With regard to objective success, the (bivariate) correlation with readiness for change ($r = .195$), adaptability ($r = .244$), and ambition ($r = .270$) is caused almost entirely by the relatively strong relationship between these three variables and conceptual skills. It appears that conceptual skills play a central role here: readiness for change, adaptability,
and ambition are only significantly correlated with the objective success of critical career transitions because they are linked to the level of conceptual skills. As mentioned in section 7.3, a factor analysis was carried out to determine the extent to which ‘readiness for change’, ‘adaptability’, ‘interpersonal sensitivity’, ‘ambition’ and ‘conceptual skills’ must be regarded as independent constructs. The factor analysis showed that the structure of the constructs was quite unambiguous, although conceptual skills and adaptability overlap for the most part. However, it was decided, for a number of reasons, not to combine the two scales to form a single predictor (see § 7.3).

With regard to the subjective success of critical career transitions, after the hierarchical regression analysis it was found that ambition is not significantly related with subjective success. This is due to the fact that ambition is related primarily to conceptual skills, the extent of peer support, age, interpersonal sensitivity, and novelty. Furthermore, there are several minor differences between the four sub-samples: the level of ambition within the global energy consultancy company was slightly higher than in the other three sub-samples. But because subjective success is almost significantly correlated with age (β = .124, p = .091) and peer support (β = .108, p = .076), these two variables seem to be the most logical. That the regression analysis shows that conceptual skills do not determine the level of subjective success can be explained by the mediating role of readiness for change; readiness for change is a relatively good predictor of subjective success.

Conceptual skills are essential for making critical career transitions. Conceptual skills have a direct impact on objective success and are also predictive (through readiness for change) of subjective success, irrespective of the manager’s age and level of experience. Hence, the importance of intellectual skills during critical career transitions differs from the importance of intellectual skills within the career as a whole. Jansen (2006) found that objective career success during the early career is primarily associated with intelligence. In the case of critical career transitions, intellectual skills remain crucially important for a manager’s success. Nevertheless, according to Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries & Pepermans (2014, p. 51), intellectual skills “may well be a nonsignificant predictor of who wins the CEO succession contest”. The positive effects of intellectual skills on managerial performance “are likely to be ‘cancelled out’ in interpersonal comparisons, not because there is no variability among executives (…) but because at the very top [intelligence, GM] is not what makes the difference”.

According to Jansen (2006), ambition is an important predictor of objective career success in mid-career (see § 5.4.3.3). However, ambition appears to have no significant effect during critical career transitions, although ambitious managers will make critical transitions – especially transitions to higher levels of management – more often than less ambitious managers. Ambition also appears to be positively related with the extent
of support by peers ($\beta = .244$, $p = .002$). Ambitious managers apparently need more support from their peers than less ambitious managers. The larger network of ambitious managers could also be an explanation for the more extensive support from peers.

The regression analysis showed that readiness for change is an important predictor for the subjective success of critical career transitions. The feeling of ‘being ready’ for making a critical career change apparently has a positive effect on the manager’s perceived success ($\beta = .350$, $p = .000$). This is consistent with the phenomenon known in the literature as ‘self-efficacy for development’ (Maurer, Weiss & Barbeite, 2003; see also Melker & Jansen, 2013 and Melker, 2015). ‘Self-efficacy for development’ or simply ‘self-efficacy’ is the person’s own judgment of his or her skills or competences for development. Perceived self-efficacy is described by Bandura (1994, p. 71) as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave”. In other words, the higher the level of self-efficacy, the higher the motivation to act. In terms of (critical) career transitions: a realistic assessment of one’s own skills and the feasibility of the transition are good predictors of a manager’s perception of the subjective success of the transition. Based on the above, it can be concluded that conceptual skills (1) contribute to making a realistic assessment of one’s own competences, and (2) have a positive influence on the manager’s motivation and behavior.

The manager’s adaptability influences the subjective success of critical career transitions. Nicholson and West (1988) regard the adaptation phase (adjustment) as one of the main stages in the transition cycle (see § 2.3.6). Within the adjustment phase, both personal and role development can occur (Nicholson & West, 1988). It can be assumed that (1) the level of adaptability has a particularly strong impact on the degree of personal development (Nicholson & West, 1988), and (2) the chance of a positive transition cycle is greater as the manager is able to adapt to the situational factors.

According to Nicholson and West (1988), the manager’s ‘psychological readiness’ determines to a large extent the ‘degree of reality shock’ during the ‘encounter’ phase. This type of ‘readiness’ has a major impact on how the changes are experienced by the manager (Louis, 1980b). Louis makes a distinction between three conceptual categories of ‘entry experiences’: (1) the change or the ‘objective newness’; (2) the contrast or the ‘subjective newness’; and (3) the ‘surprise’ (see § 2.3.6). In this study, the ‘readiness for change’ appears to affect the subjective magnitude of the transition: the higher the level of readiness for change, the smaller the subjective magnitude of the transition. This

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2 According to Louis (1980b), ‘newness’ refers to the difference between the old and the new role. In this dissertation ‘objective newness’ and ‘subjective newness’ are referred as the objective and the subjective magnitude of the transition.
means that the feeling of being ready for the career move increases the chance of (1) a positive transition cycle (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005), and, thus, of (2) a subjectively successful career transition.

### 8.3.6. Characteristics of critical career transitions

The characteristics of critical career transitions (see the conceptual model, figure 5.1) explain less than 5% of the objective and subjective success. Only the degree of novelty (‘novelty’) of the transition has a negative (and significant) influence on the objective success of the transition ($\beta = -.216; p = .024$). Learning ($\beta = .624, p = .000$) and transfer ($\beta = .376, p = .000$) appeared to be good predictors of the level of novelty. This means that a larger difference between the old and the new job is associated with (1) a greater need to learn important new skills, and (2) fewer opportunities to use previously acquired skills in the new role. These findings are certainly not surprising. What is striking is that only novelty shows a negative relationship with objective success; learning is almost significantly negatively related with objective success ($\beta = .156, p = .075$) and, together with transfer ($\beta = .123, p = 147$), compensates for the negative effect of novelty on objective success.

That ‘learning’ is positively correlated to objective success is remarkable: the need to develop new skills apparently leads to greater success during the transition. This might be explained by the positive effects of learning mentioned by Ohlott et al. (1994), see also § 2.6.2. According Ohlott et al. (1994), challenging tasks for managers, including career transitions, lead to greater motivation and a better performance. In addition, ‘learning’ is positively and significantly correlated with the desirability of the transition ($r = .318, p = .000$). Apparently, managers regard learning opportunities within a new job as positive. These opportunities appear to motivate managers to work harder and to perform better during the transition. Thus, motivation and working harder appear to compensate for the negative influence of ‘novelty’ on the objective success of the transition.

The change of the time span, the period that a manager should be able to look ahead (Jaques, 1989; 1990), appears to have no effect on the perceived or subjective magnitude of the transition. The objective ($\beta = .063, p = .237$) and subjective ($\beta = .061, p = .182$) success of a critical career transition are also not related to the change of the ‘task completion time’. This is remarkable, because since the 1960s Jaques’ theory has been applied in the academic literature (see, for example, Popper & Gluskinos, 1993), as well as in practice, for example in the Shell competence matrix, or MITRE model (Evans et al., 2002; De Leeuwrek, 1990) and – implicitly – in the model of Charan, Drotter & Noel (2001). The question is whether Jaques’ ‘basic structure of organizational levels of work’ is (still) valid in the twenty-first century and for all types of organizations. No evidence was found in this study for Jaques’ ‘sharp discontinuities in complexity’.
The finding that managers making an interfirm transition are more successful during their transition than managers making an intrafirm transition was unexpected. The impact of an interfirm transition is greater and this type of transition is usually accompanied by more problems such as stress, negative experiences, surprises, and regret (Latack, 1984; Kahn et al., 1964). The positive correlation can be explained by the learning opportunities in the new position: there is a significant correlation between ‘learning’ and changing employer ($r = .349$, $p = .000$). Another explanation is based on the findings of Latack (1984), who found that people who consciously choose ‘major’ career steps are inclined to experience these steps as less radical than colleagues who make minor transitions or who avoid transitions altogether (see § 5.5.1.3). This means that there is already a sort of ‘natural selection’ before the critical transition is made. This explanation is in line with the positive correlation that was found between ‘readiness for change’ and subjective success.

The fact that the Pearson correlation matrix (see Appendices M and N) shows no significant relationship between ‘novelty’ and objective success ($r = -.081$, $p = .172$) can be explained by the positive (but not quite significant) influence of ‘learning’ ($\beta = .156$, $p = .075$) and ‘transfer’ ($\beta = .123$, $p = .147$) on the level of objective success. The negative effect of novelty on objective success is compensated by these two variables. The level of novelty is also related with the extent to which managers were supported by introduction programs during their last career transition: the greater the differences between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ job (i.e., the higher the level of novelty), the more introduction programs are offered. The effect of these types of program on the level of objective ($\beta = .104$, $p = .149$) and subjective success ($\beta = -.017$, $p = .413$) appears to be very limited.

The subjective success of the critical transition is significantly related with the duration of the transition: the longer the transition period, the less successful the transition is in the manager’s eyes. This may be the result of the judgment of stakeholders inside and outside the organization: the sooner the manager feels appreciated and accepted in the new role, the more successful managers perceive their critical career transition. Managers will obviously compare the duration of their own transition with the duration of their colleagues’ transitions. According to Heslin (2005), managers use subjective and other-referent criteria to assess the success of their own critical career transitions (see § 2.4.3 and table 2.12).

### 8.3.7. Work-based and non-work-based sources of support

Several work-based sources of support (immediate supervisor, education and peers) were found to be positively and significantly correlated with the objective and/or subjective success of critical career transitions (see the Pearson correlation matrices in appendices M
and N). However, after performing the (hierarchical) regression analysis, these significant correlations disappeared almost completely. Only ‘education’ (β = .177, p = .071) and ‘peers’ (β = .108, p = .076) appeared to be almost significantly related with objective and subjective success, respectively, but the relations are relatively weak.

Education during critical career transitions and the age of the manager were found to be significantly related (β = -.156, p = .024). This means that older managers are often less inclined to follow relevant education programs than their younger colleagues, despite the favorable effect of ‘education’ on objective success (β = .177, p = .071). The fact that older managers perceive their career transitions as less desirable than younger managers could play a role here. Managers who support the career decision might attend an educational program as a matter of course. It also appears that education and training are often combined (β = .415, p = .000). Nevertheless, training did not appear to be effective during critical career transitions.

Peer support is positively and significantly related with ambition (β = .244, p = .002), introduction programs (β = .251, p = .002), change of ‘task completion time’ (β = .245, p = .001), age (β = .230, p = .005) and gender (β = .168, p = .042). In other words, more ambitious managers are more motivated to ask peers to share experiences and ideas (see also § 8.2.5).

Meeting peers during these programs could be a logical explanation for the positive relationship between peers and introduction programs. Furthermore, combining introduction programs and peer support could contribute to the effectiveness of socialization processes within organizations (Louis et al., 1983). The relationship between the ‘task completion time’ and peer support was also discussed during the pilot studies (see chapter 4). The top managers in particular (pilot study 3; § 4.4.3) regarded support from peers in their own network as effective during critical career transitions. Nevertheless, table 7.7 does not confirm this (extent = 1.42, effect = 2.17). These peers have experience with similar situations and can serve as a sounding board. Having ultimate responsibility within an organization often involves a major change in the time span. Top managers seem to be aware of this change and are motivated to discuss relevant experiences with their peers.

Support from peers is positively related with age (β = .230, p = .005). Like managerial experience, peer support compensates for the negative effect of age on the objective and subjective success of critical career transitions. Nevertheless, the direct effect of peer support on objective and subjective success is limited, and women make more use of peer support than men. However, the effectiveness of peer support is not greater for women than for men (see also § 8.3.2). In addition, support from the partner and friends or family are significantly related (β = .406, p = .000). And the level of support from the partner is obviously positively related with having a partner (β = .453, p = .000).
The negative effect of support from friends and acquaintances on subjective success ($\beta = -0.140$, $p = 0.035$) might indicate that managers ask for support from family and friends when they are already experiencing problems during the transition process, in other words, when the manager seems to be locked in a negative transition cycle (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005; see also § 2.4.5). In other words, this may indicate that there is reverse causality: managers only ask for support from family and friends when they are already experiencing problems during the transition process. Section 8.4 discusses the insights from the research that apply directly to organizations.

8.4. Organizational implications

In our knowledge-based economy, work roles are less clearly defined than before (Demerouti, Bakker & Gevers, 2015). According to Demerouti et al. (2015) and Akkermans & Tims (2017), organizations trust that employees, including managers, will fill the ‘gap’ between the explicit job requirements and the competenc(i)es necessary to be competitive, such as creativity and flexibility. Another relatively recent development is that organizational structures have become flatter and organizations increasingly operate in flexible (virtual) networks (Al-Awamleh, 2009). These developments have implications for managerial careers: today, lifetime employment is an illusion and careers are becoming more customized (Valcour, Bailyn, & Quijada, 2007; LaPointe, 2011). Managers are no longer solely motivated by promotion; horizontal transitions are increasingly used as a form of management development (Michaels, Handfield-Jones & Axelrod, 2001). This means that traditional careers, as defined by Wilensky (1960; see § 2.3.1) no longer apply. Wilensky (1960, p. 54) defines a career as “a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence”.

Nowadays, careers are characterized by a combination of related and unrelated jobs, horizontal and vertical transitions and by unpredictability. It is therefore important to place the findings of this study as they relate to organizations in the new context. That context was precisely the reason for focusing on both intra-firm and inter-firm transitions and on vertical and horizontal transitions. The classification into twelve types of job change that was made by Nicholson & West is useful for the purpose. The following implications for organizations can be mentioned.

Recruitment and selection

For managerial practice, the importance of conceptual skills during critical career transitions implies that organizations should devote sufficient attention to intelligence, including conceptual skills, during recruitment and selection processes. For managers, intelligence is not only a condition for rapid promotion early in the career (Jansen,
2006), it is also essential for successful transitions later in the career, particularly in a labor market that is becoming increasingly 'boundaryless'.

It is important to determine whether candidates – often young people – possess the necessary management and leadership qualities right at the start of their managerial career, for example during trainee programs. Conceptual skills not only determine the success of objective critical career transitions, they also influence the level of 'readiness for change'.

**Clarity about the new role and limiting the degree of 'novelty'**

Although critical career transitions can be regarded as 'developmental components' (McCauley et al., 1994; Van der Sluis, 2000), this study shows that the degree of novelty is an important issue for organizations. Novelty and objective success are negatively correlated, which means that too big a difference between the old and the new role leads to poorer managerial performance during the transition period. On the other hand, with too few differences between the old job and the new one, there are insufficient learning opportunities. Considering the manager's potential for growth is important: the greater the managerial potential, the larger the career step can be and the more new challenges the manager can handle (see also Melker & Van der Sluis, 2008).

'Psychological preparedness' or 'readiness for change' contributes positively to the subjective success of critical career transitions. This means that it should be clear to managers what the new job requires before they start it. The same applies for the necessary knowledge and skills. This is contrary to the current trend among organizations to describe new managerial jobs less clearly, which might increase the chance of failure.

**Desirability of transitions made by older managers**

This study shows that older managers are faced with career transitions that they regard as undesirable more frequently than their younger colleagues. This might explain the negative relationship between age and objective success in critical career transitions, which means that the desirability of a career transition is a major issue for organizations, particularly in the case of older managers. Obviously, undesirable career transitions could lead to increased risks, with the motivation and performance of managers coming under pressure. This is not in the interests of either the managers or the organization. Especially now that the retirement age is being gradually raised, 'custom-made careers' for older managers will become increasingly important. It is up to organizations to develop age-related policies (see also Wognum, Veldkamp, De Grip & Sieben, 2006). It will be essential to listen to the needs of older managers especially. This is consistent with the trend towards age-related HRM policies. It is also important to take into account the characteristics and abilities of the manager during critical career transitions: 'do not try to teach a duck how to climb a tree'.
Tailored use of organizational support
The impact of work-related or organizational sources of support on the success of critical career transitions is limited. This applies for both men and women. According to managers, their immediate supervisor is the most effective source of support, but this effect could not be proven statistically. Furthermore, management education programs were found to enhance the success of critical career transitions of female managers (see § 8.3.2) but not of male managers. It can be concluded that organizational support should be applied carefully. For organizational support to be effective, it should be customized: organizational support should match the specific requirements and development needs of the individual manager. This finding corresponds with the trend towards more ‘bespoke’ career planning and career development (Melker & Jansen, 2013; Melker, 2015).

The regression analysis shows that providing support makes scarcely any contribution to the success of critical career transitions. The extent of support only explains slightly more than 5% of the objective and subjective success of critical career transitions. Where multiple forms of organizational support are provided (mentoring, coaching, training and introduction programs), it was found that the relationship is actually negative, although not significant. The negative relationship might be the result of perceived problems during the transition process: the manager, the immediate supervisor and/or the HR department might consider additional support in case of a negative transition cycle, see also Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005). This could also explain the negative and significant relationship between the extent of support provided by friends and acquaintances: the manager’s uncertainty during the transition process might be a reason to ask friends or acquaintances for help.

Importance of a stable family situation
Personal social support – or non-work-based support – from the manager’s partner, family and friends is at least as important as the support offered by the organization itself. This is consistent with the finding that a stable family situation is a necessary condition for a successful critical career transition (see § 4.3.3). Having a partner who supports the manager’s choice to make a major career step is essential. The family situation should therefore be a factor that is taken into account when considering making a career change.

Sharing previous experience
Older managers in particular have a lot of valuable experience with critical career transitions. Organizations should make effective use of that experience. Sharing their experiences challenges older managers to help their younger colleagues, who can learn from their experience. Sharing experiences also contributes to the effectiveness of socialization processes. It appears to be essential, however, that the immediate supervisor maintains control during the socialization process to ensure that the ‘manager-in-transition’ does not receive conflicting advice.
Dealing with ambitious managers
Ambitious managers make particular use of peer learning during their career transitions. Accordingly, there should be talent management programs to enable managers to share experiences during critical career transitions. Helping managers to develop their internal network promotes peer support. However, although managers at every level of the hierarchy indicated that they benefit from peer support, the statistical analysis did not support that conclusion.

Creating learning opportunities
It is important to create learning opportunities that allow managers to develop new knowledge and skills during critical career transitions. By incorporating learning opportunities into career transitions, managers feel more challenged, while they also contribute to effective managerial learning. Managers who make a critical career transition are challenged to be open to new learning situations. In addition, by incorporating new learning situations into previous (managerial) jobs, organizations can assess whether a manager is ready to make a major career step.

A lateral career move appears to be an effective way of introducing managers to new learning opportunities. The pilot studies showed that managers benefit greatly from previous horizontal steps in their careers. Another way of preparing managers for a (major) vertical career move is to increase their level of responsibility and decision-making authority. This calls for flexibility in the design of managerial jobs. In other words, job crafting might be an effective instrument for preparing managers for future career moves. Managers in several of the organizations that participated in this study had performed the role of deputy in the absence of their immediate supervisor.

Monitoring critical career transitions
It emerged from the pilot studies that there is often a serious lack of monitoring during critical career transitions. If there was any 'concurrent control', the evaluation of the results often had an ad hoc character, and in almost every case, there had been no clear objectives or criteria for measuring success or effectiveness. Furthermore, agreements had rarely been made on the support managers would receive during the career transition. The results of this study reveal that managers need (1) concrete agreements on the period they will have to get used to the new job, and (2) ‘tailor-made support’ in the event of difficulties during the transition process.

Realistic assessment of the manager’s potential
Where possible, career choices should be in line with the ambitions, the career goals and the potential of managers (Melker & Van der Sluis, 2008). Not every manager can or wants to reach the position of CEO. The Peter Principle was discussed in section 5.4.1.2. This
principle partially explains the negative correlation between age and the objective success of critical career transitions. Evidently, the goal of the support for managers during a transition should not be to help every manager to succeed in the new job at any cost. It is therefore in the interests of both the organization and the manager that a realistic, and where possible objective, assessment of the manager’s potential for growth is made beforehand.

### 8.5. Implications for individuals

In addition to the implications for organizations (see § 8.4), the findings from this study also have implications for individual managers who are considering, preparing for, or making a critical career transition or who have recently completed one.

**Being aware of one’s personal ‘mental maps’ and unlearning ineffective behavior**

Managers making a critical career transition are confronted with their own mental maps – how they look at their work and at the world. Different behavior is often required to perform a new job effectively. It is then necessary to unlearn existing behavior and to learn other, more effective behavior. It is important for managers to be aware of their new role(s) and the expectations raised by the new job. For example, a transition to a higher hierarchical level demands less attention to detail and a greater focus on the main management issues. This does not mean that managers can do entirely without specific knowledge of the field in which they work (Keuning, Bossink & Tjemkes, 2010). During the preliminary interviews with managers in the global energy consultancy firm (sample 2) one of the managers stressed that knowledge of the market was essential if a manager was to have added value in higher management positions. According to this manager, it is impossible to manage the commercial process without that knowledge because customers expect a manager to have sufficient knowledge of the field and the relevant technology. The first pilot study (see § 4.2.3) showed that managers must be prepared to call existing paradigms into question and to be flexible and optimistic during critical career transitions. Flexibility and optimism are important for success in a career: ‘cherry picking’ seems to be an ineffective career strategy.

**Organizing one’s own support**

Managers have a responsibility to organize their own support during critical career transitions. Top and middle managers in particular are expected to be able to identify their own development needs and to meet those needs in collaboration with the organization. To that end, they must critically assess their own competencies in relation to the requirements of the new job. In that context, one of the former CEOs mentioned the importance of self-assessment (see the results of the second pilot study in section 4.3.3 and Melker & Van der Sluis, 2008).
Obviously, an understanding of the characteristics of the new role is essential in determining the most effective form of support. Top managers in particular appear to benefit from peer support - other senior managers in their network with whom they can brainstorm and discuss similar experiences (see the conclusions from the third pilot study, § 4.4.3).

**Importance of a stable family situation**

Before deciding to make a critical career transition, it is important for a manager to determine whether the family situation is sufficiently stable. The more stable the family situation, the greater the chance of a successful transition. In this context, the desirability of the transition is also a factor: taking an unwanted career step in an unstable home environment is an almost impossible task for managers.

**Transitions take time**

It is important for managers to realize that it takes time to become effective in a new job or organization. Although the change itself can occur overnight (a new location, a new job, another organization), the transition process takes longer to complete: “In other words, change is situational. Transition, on the other hand, is psychological. It is not those events, but rather the inner reorientation and self-redefinition that you have to go through in order to incorporate any of those changes into your life. Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, the change won't work, because it doesn't 'take’” (Bridges, 1991, p. 4). The research, and in particular the first pilot study, have shown that about 75% of transitions are completed within a year. It is important to be able to accept criticism and not take it too personally during that period.

**Manager’s added value**

In the first pilot study, one of the former CEOs emphasized the added value the manager brings to his or her new role. During the period of transition, the manager in transition has to continue searching for his or her own added value: how can I contribute to the effectiveness of my department or team or to the organization as a whole? That requires an understanding on the part of the manager of his or her own performance and of what the organization requires during the transition process.

**8.6. Limitations of the study**

A number of limitations with respect to this study should be noted, including the following:

- The quantitative part of the study is based solely on managers' own assessment of their last career transition and their personality. This means that they rated their
success and personal characteristics themselves. Due to practical considerations, in none of the four samples was it possible to have the questionnaires filled out by other stakeholders inside or outside the organization, such as immediate supervisors, employees, fellow executives, or customers. The participating organizations preferred not to entrust data collection to other stakeholders or parties. A 360-degree feedback method would probably have led to a more objective assessment of the success of transitions and personality traits.

- The managers who completed the questionnaire were – as far as is known – still active in the position resulting from their last transition. This could mean that the findings in this study concerning the success of their most recent career transition might give too positive a picture of the outcome of transition processes. It also has to be stressed that the organizations surveyed in sample 1 (the construction and engineering company), sample 2 (the global energy consultancy company) and sample 3 (HR consultancy firm) were explicitly asked not to select only managers who were thought to have been successful during their last career transition, but also managers who were unsuccessful or less successful. It is possible that managers who feel they have been less successful were less motivated to take part in the study than managers who believed they had made a successful transition. This might have influenced the results of the study but because the questionnaires were completed anonymously, this could not be verified after collecting the data.

- The respondents who participated in the quantitative part of this study were asked to give their opinion of the success of their last critical career transition at a specific moment in time. However, success can be perceived differently by managers at different stages or moments during the transition cycle (see figure 2.1). The perception of the degree of success can also be influenced by recent intrarole transitions (Louis, 1980): managers might assess their last transition differently because they take a different view of the current job. But recent positive or negative experiences in the new job could also influence the manager’s judgment.

- Assessing the success of critical career transitions objectively was found to be difficult. Objective measures of success within the first six to twelve months are difficult to determine. In addition, applicable information (including interim management reports and information about salary increases) differs between and even within organizations as a result of different appraisal, reward and control systems. In this study it was assumed that managers are able to assess their contribution to the success of their department or team, or the organization as a whole during the transition.

- A more objective method for determining the objective magnitude of critical career transitions, such as the ‘Hay method for job evaluation and profiling’, would have been preferable. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to apply this complex method,
which requires a lot of specific expertise and a comprehensive overview of job characteristics. Evaluating the so-called 'total job size' of both the former job and the new job for each manager was practically impossible. Therefore, three other independent methods were used: (1) percentage change in the manager’s income, (2) ranking the transition along the dimensions of ‘novelty’, ‘learning’ and ‘transfer’, and (3) Jaques' time-span measurement.

- The number of respondents in the quantitative part of the study was limited. The questionnaire was completed in full by 138 managers. Managers are frequently asked to take part in (academic) studies, and the willingness of organizations and individual managers to participate is relatively low. In addition, 73 managers made their last career transition more than three years previously and 26 managers had started in their new job less than three months before they received the invitation. These 99 (73 + 26) managers did not start filling out the questionnaire. Of the 151 respondents who actually started to fill out the questionnaire, 138 respondents completed it. The 13 (151 - 138) respondents who did not finish the questionnaire are not included in the study.

8.7. Suggestions for further research

The results of this study yield a number of suggestions for further research. For example:

- A longitudinal study is recommended to determine how managers experience the different stages of their critical career transitions (see also figure 2.1). This study should also consider the impact of critical career transitions on managers’ objective and subjective career success. This would make it possible (1) to determine the effectiveness of forms of organizational support and personal social support during the different phases of the transition cycle, and (2) to learn more about how to prevent managers becoming ‘locked into’ a negative transition cycle (Blenkinsopp & Zdunczyk, 2005, see figure 2.6, § 2.4.5);

- This study is confined to critical career transitions made by managers. However, its scope could be broadened to other aspect of relevance for organizations. Supporting employees during their career transitions requires the use of scarce resources (time, money, manpower), and a better understanding of the effectiveness of the various forms of support could (1) lead to greater efficiency, and (2) allow the break-even point of career transitions to be reached sooner (Watkins, 2003, see § 3.2 and figure 3.1). Obviously, the sooner people feel competent in their new job, the better.

- This study examined four personality traits in relation to the success of critical career transitions. In Blake E. Ashforth’s book ‘Role transitions in organizational life’ (2001), several other personality traits are mentioned, including identity style,
identity resolution, self-esteem, control beliefs and desires, need for achievement (nAch) and positive and negative affect. It would also be interesting to determine (1) whether it is possible to learn how to be more successful during a critical career transition; and (2) whether managers can share and learn from their experiences during transitions. In this way, it might be possible to enable peer groups or management training to play a more effective role in preparing, planning and guiding critical career transitions.

Organizations are faced with increasingly rapid and significant external and internal changes that make it more and more difficult for (top) managers to look ahead to the future. It is therefore questionable whether Jaques’ model, which is based on levels of work, task complexity, and a time span of more than 50 years, is still valid. Nowadays, even overseeing a period of more than five years seems practically impossible. In addition, this study shows that making a ‘jump in responsibility’ does not affect the perceived or subjective magnitude or success of critical career transitions.