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Why academics attend conferences? An extended career self-management framework☆

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ABSTRACT

Academics, like many other professionals, such as accountants, lawyers, and medical doctors, are primarily responsible for their own ongoing professional development. One of the ways academics are expected to pursue their professional development is by attending conferences structured around their professional associations. However, professional development is a broad construct and we lack a framework for understanding the numerous, specific motivations and goals related to why professionals choose to attend these conferences. To address this issue, we extend King's (2004) career self-management framework in three ways: a) we apply and extend the positioning behaviors of King's model for the situation of academics, b) extend the antecedents of these positioning behaviors from a single to a multi-level framework (including individual, university, and national level antecedents), and c) discuss cross-level effects of these antecedents. Implications and guidance for HR practitioners and future research are also discussed.

Ongoing professional development involves formal and informal learning that improves employee competence (Bednall, Sanders, & Runhaar, 2014; Brockbank, Ulrich, & Beatty, 1999; Rothwell & Arnold, 2005). Because professionals, such as university faculty, lawyers, accountants, and medical doctors, often work independently and autonomously within their organizations (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), they are primarily responsible for their own ongoing professional development rather than relying on their organization's internal career development efforts (Baruch & Hall, 2004). One of the ways professionals can pursue development is through conference attendance (Ferman, 2002; Jones & Fear, 1994). Such conferences are typically attended on a discretionary basis, primarily structured around professional associations, and enable pursuit of informal and formal learning opportunities (McCabe,

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Poole, Weeks & Leiper, 2000). These conferences help professionals maintain shared professional identities, address developmental goals, build social networks, and maintain, develop, and disseminate knowledge related to the discipline or occupation (Evetts, 2003; Noordegraaf, 2011). In this paper, we focus on the various developmental goals related to professional international and domestic conference attendance because of the important role they play in professional learning and development.

Professionals are defined as those who have completed some form of advanced instruction and training in a specialized field of knowledge and who perform intellectual work involving high levels of discretion and expertise based on both abstract knowledge and practical apprenticeship (Hickson & Thomas, 1969). Lengthy periods of training and education socialize professionals into the values of a broader professional community, and over time the professional community continues to play an important role in professional development and identity formation. Such influence extends beyond an individual's place of work (Austin, 2002; Hickson & Thomas, 1969). While fulfilling the mission of the employing organization is required, advancing professional knowledge, skills, and abilities relies to a large extent on individuals' discretion (Austin, 2002). In this paper, we focus on university faculty or *academics* as a "strong" profession (Noordegraaf, 2011).

Although considerable attention has been devoted to the professional development of practitioners (Gubbins & Garavan, 2016; Jones & Fear, 1994; Quin & Brockbank, 2006; Sadler-Smith, Allison, & Hayes, 2000; Thite, Budhwar, & Wilkinson, 2014), research on the ongoing professional development of academics is rare. This is surprising given that academics are the core group of employees that fulfill not only the primary mission of all institutions of higher education, that is, to educate and prepare the future workforce, but also fulfill the strategic mission of research universities (i.e., to create and disseminate new knowledge). For academics to successfully perform these teaching and research functions, they must continually engage in professional development throughout their careers. Understanding the professional development of academics is also important because universities are significant contributors to society. For instance, in Australia the higher education sector contributes nearly AU$ 40 bn every year to the Australian economy and the sector is often listed as the third most important industry in terms of income for the country (TEQSA, 2018). In the USA, institutions of higher education are the largest employers in ten states, and overall, employ almost four million people; from 1996 to 2015, technology transfers from universities contributed $591 billion to the national GDP; and the approximately one million international students attending US universities contribute $36.9 billion to the economy (AGB.org, 2018). With this type of impact on society, it is important to understand the strategies that facilitate academics' ability to successfully perform the teaching and research missions of universities. We focus on attending professional conferences as one such strategy.

Research related to professional development through conference attendance is sparse and scattered through various disciplines and although various motivations for attendance have been proposed, this work does not clearly reflect the range of possible motives, particularly for academics. Further, previous research often fails to consider how individual motivations to attend conferences may be influenced by organizational, institutional, and cultural values level factors, or how the motives may change over the course of one's career. To resolve these issues, we develop a theoretical model of academics' ongoing professional development through conference attendance in which we propose a broad set of developmental goals and several antecedents influencing these various goals. In this model, we draw on King's (2004) career self-management framework, which focuses on *how* people engage in career self-management through strategic behaviors and what accounts for individual differences in these behaviors.

We contribute to research on career self-management in three important ways. First, we apply and extend the positioning behaviors outlined in King's (2004) framework in the context of academics' motives for attending conferences. King identified four positioning behaviors: strategic choice of mobility opportunity (related to initiation of job moves), strategic investment in human capital (investment in training or educational qualification), active network development (investment in one's social capital), and job content innovation (the development of significant changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks). We apply and then extend this framework to academics by adding a strategic dimension to some of the developmental goals in recognition that academics can be more or less strategically driven to undertake these developmental goals (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Greenhaus, Callanan, & Kaplan, 1995). We also identify two new positioning behaviors: achieving "productivity enhancement goals" and "academic mentorship."

Second, King (2004) elaborates on individual's self-efficacy and desire for control over career outcomes as antecedents to positioning behaviors. We extend the antecedents to include additional individual-level characteristics (e.g., career stage) as well as organizational (university) and country level antecedents. In particular, developmental goals are likely to differ for early, middle, and late-stage academics, and universities differ in their focus on research or teaching and in the resources available to support faculty development. At the country-level, we argue that three cultural values (collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance) may influence academics developmental goals in conference attendance. Because academics' career trajectories are increasingly global (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013; Jepsen et al., 2014; Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie, 2009), with collaborations and job opportunities frequently spanning national boundaries, it is important to understand how antecedents at the individual, organizational, and country level may affect professional developmental goals and thus academics' career management. We discuss some cross-level effects of these antecedents as previous research (e.g., Lin & Sanders, 2017) has shown that behaviors, including decisions to attend a conference, can be influenced by an interplay of antecedents at different levels.

Third, our extended conceptual model has important practical implications. Our framework offers a new approach to understanding the variety of developmental opportunities that conference attendance provides for academics. Managers and directors of research can use this framework for a better understanding of the unique developmental context for academics and act upon it. This can help sponsoring universities make informed decisions about whether and how to support requests to attend conferences for career development purposes. Because participation in such activities represents a considerable financial outlay for sponsoring organizations, we hope our conceptual framework helps both academics and their employing organizations allocate resources more productively. We also discuss the design of many academic conferences and offer suggestions to help these conferences become more inclusive for academics with different developmental goals. This point is especially clear in considering the question of why academics attend

conferences in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to virtual conferences due to widespread travel bans and prohibitions against face-to-face attendance. This may have led some academics to become more aware of their developmental goals or, at the very least, become more aware of the relative importance of their various goals. This increased awareness and the consideration of other outlets to achieve those goals may change their interest in attending one conference over another that might better fulfill their goals given the virtual format.

In the following, we first propose the various developmental goals that academics may have as motivations for attending conferences, then further elaborate on how the antecedents at the individual, university (organization), and country levels can influence the developmental goals of academics. The theoretical model, including the propositions, is presented in Fig. 1. While focusing our work on academics, we ultimately suggest that this model can also be applied to other professionals, such as lawyers, teachers, accountants, consultants, and medical doctors.

1. A typology of learning and developmental goals

In response to the need for a better understanding of individual career management, King (2004) developed a framework for career self-management drawing largely from Crites' (1969, 1976) model of vocational adjustment. King identified three broad types of career self-management behaviors. *Influence behaviors* are active attempts to influence key decision-makers and desired outcomes. *Boundary management behaviors* are attempts to balance the demands of one's work and nonwork domains. *Positioning behaviors* ensure one has the skills, experience, and contacts to achieve desired career outcomes. Because conference attendance is most likely to support the development of human and social capital via positioning behaviors, we build on these behaviors to identify various developmental goals for attending conferences.

Specifically, King (2004) elaborated on four types of positioning behaviors, which we adapt here. First, *strategic investment in human capital* refers to pursuing and making investments in training or educational qualifications to enhance one's skills and knowledge. For academics, we propose two developmental goals which represent *investment in human capital (a) relevant to research,* and *(b) relevant to teaching.* In departing from King, however, we argue that investment in research and teaching human capital during conferences can be strategic or serendipitous. Examples of how academics can strategically pursue human capital developmental goals include preregistering for a professional development workshop (PDW) to improve teaching skills that will be needed in the upcoming teaching semester or to learn a new research method necessary for a current research project. Human capital investment may also occur serendipitously during conferences when, for example, in a research session in which one is a presenter, they learn about a research method from one of the other presenters.

A second positioning behavior proposed by King (2004), *strategic investment in social capital,* refers to establishing an external network of personal ties which can offer instrumental benefits such as information, career guidance, and advocacy for promotion or employment. We suggest that academics may attend conferences to invest in social capital, however, this again may or may not be strategic. For instance, an individual (person A) makes an a priori plan to attend a specific social event, such as an editorial board meeting or a plenary, with the goal of introducing oneself to person B because person A knows person B may be asked to write an external evaluation of their scholarship for an upcoming promotion. Serendipitous investment in social capital may also occur for person A by attending that same meeting and person B introduces person A to another colleague (person C) who subsequently recruits person A for a job opening at person C's university. We also extend the social capital investment category by suggesting a related developmental goal of conference attendance, *social network maintenance*, which we define as activities intended to re-connect with professional colleagues already in one's social network. This would include activities such as reconnecting with former classmates or current co-authors over coffee/meals or attending business meetings where one primarily socializes with colleagues previously met.

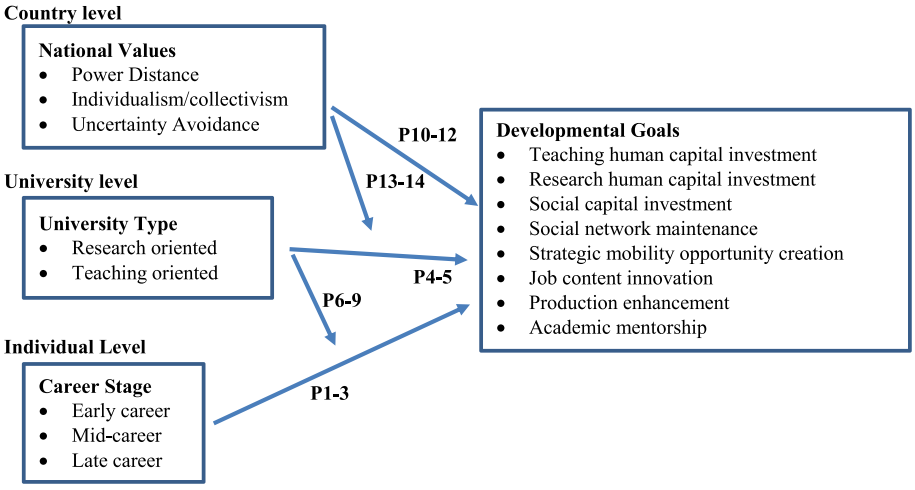

Fig. 1. The theoretical model, including the propositions to explain why academic attend conferences.

King's (2004) third positioning behavior is *strategic choice of mobility opportunity*, which she defined as behaviors that initiate, or create opportunities for, internal or external job moves. King referred to them as strategic to convey the idea of a deliberate action in which one is choosing between alternatives at a career transition point; we believe the strategic intent of this positioning behavior is key in making it distinct from serendipitous social capital investment (e.g., the example above where a chance meeting of person C leads to a job opportunity for person A). Examples of how an academic may create strategic mobility opportunities through conference attendance is by participating in the "career fair," pre-arranging job interviews held during the conference, or attending a PDW on "becoming a Dean" for someone considering this career transition.

The final position behavior proposed by King (2004) is *job content innovation*, which involves the "development of substantive changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks and the enlargement of one's effective task environment" (p. 120). As she notes, job content innovation may also involve investments in human capital and social capital; what makes it distinct from these two positioning behaviors is the focus on innovation. Academics may indeed attend conferences with the expressed intent of learning innovative methods for teaching (e.g., simulations or on-line teaching) and/or research (e.g., new statistical analyses). This developmental goal tends to be more strategic in that the academic is likely to a priori plan to attend specific sessions to help achieve job content innovation.

Based on the authors' personal experiences, discussions with colleagues, and past models of vocational adjustment, we propose two additional developmental goals of conference attendance: 'productivity enhancement' and 'academic mentorship.' Although these developmental goals are not included in the career self-management behaviors identified by King (influence, boundary management, or positioning behaviors), they do represent career self-management behaviors. As Crites (1976) argued in his model of vocational adjustment, individuals are motivated to master various career tasks appropriate to their career stage and beneficial for their career advancement, such as "position performance" during early to mid-career stages, and to achieve prestige and recognition in later career stages. Although, Crites did not use the term career self-management, King (2004) points out that Crites' model of vocational adjustment describes behaviors and motivations that are consistent with contemporary definitions of career self-management. Drawing on Crites' (1976) idea that individuals are motivated to master certain tasks throughout their career, we believe 'productivity enhancement' and 'academic mentorship' are relevant career self-management goals.

Productivity enhancement goals refers to behaviors that are intended to help academics make progress on their research or teaching tasks. Examples of productivity enhancement through conference attendance includes work-related meetings with colleagues and co-authors (to work on such things as manuscripts or grant proposals) or meeting with book publishers to discuss current or potential book projects. The goal of *academic mentorship* refers to behaviors to promote and support others, such as junior colleagues or doctoral students. This is a career self-management behavior because effective mentoring can contribute to one's own personal reputation and prestige. Conference activities in this category consist of participating as a panel member in PDWs and doctoral consortia, providing social support to one's doctoral students who may be presenting a paper for the first time, and helping one's junior colleagues and students to network at social events.

In sum, we propose eight developmental goals that may motivate academics' conference attendance: teaching human capital investment, research human capital investment, social capital investment, social network maintenance, strategic mobility opportunity creation, job content innovation, productivity enhancement, and academic mentorship. We excluded personal reasons for attending a professional conference, such as having a family holiday, or visiting relatives or friends who live near the location of the conference, as these activities are not focusing on professional development. The eight developmental goals and their explanation are presented in Table 1.

2. Individual level: career stages

It is useful to view developmental goals for academics attending conferences in light of different career stages as each stage in one's career presents unique needs, goals, and challenges. A number of career scholars (e.g., Crites, 1976; Super, 1980) have argued that no matter the occupational field, people progress through a sequence of stages in their careers. Though the nomenclature differs, career scholars typically acknowledge three distinct stages that occur after one has explored occupational and organizational choices

Table 1
Eight potential developmental goals for academics to attend conferences.

Developmental goals	Explanation
Teaching human capital investment	Pursuing and making investments in teaching to enhance one's skills and knowledge in teaching
Research human capital investment	Pursuing and making investments in research to enhance one's skills and knowledge in research
Social capital investment	Establishing an external network of personal ties which can offer instrumental benefits such as information, career guidance and advocacy for promotion or engagement
Social network maintenance	Activities intended to re-connect with professional colleagues already in one's social network
Strategic mobility opportunity creation	Behaviors that initiate, create opportunities for, internal or external job moves
Job content innovation	Development of substantive changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks and the enlargement of one's effective task environment
Productivity enhancement	Behaviors that are intended to help academics make progress on their research or teaching tasks
Academic Mentorship	Behaviors to help promote and/or support junior colleagues or doctoral students

(Greenhaus et al., 2009; Super 1957): early career establishment, mid-career maintenance, and late career maintenance.

The two dominant themes in the early career stage are establishment and achievement (Greenhaus et al., 2009). In this stage, individuals focus on acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful at their jobs; the primary developmental activity is focused on learning about the job and the organization so as to be recognized as a competent contributor to the organization (Greenhaus et al., 2009). For academics, where early career would be defined by assistant professor and equivalent job titles, mastering the technical aspects of the job and displaying competence involves proficiency in both research and teaching. As such, early career academics should be more likely to attend conferences to invest in human capital relevant to research and teaching because it will contribute to their establishment, achievements, and accomplishments. Further, a large degree of success in academia is determined not only by what one knows, but who one knows. Research productivity in particular is positively associated with more productive advisors (Williamson & Cable, 2003) and academic origin and affiliation (Long, Bowers, Barnett, & White, 1998), both of which suggest that the early career academic's current network (i.e., doctoral advisor and fellow classmates) can influence early career establishment and achievement. Research has demonstrated that having a large number of coauthors positively relates to publications in the highest-quality journals (Seibert, Kacmar, Kraimer, Downes, & Noble, 2018). Thus, early career stage academics may be motivated to attend conferences to invest in social capital as a means of increasing research productivity and gaining acceptance into the profession

As Greenhaus et al. (2009) noted, the early career stage "reflects a concern for, if not a preoccupation with, achievement and accomplishment" (p. 36). The pursuit of accomplishment through job advancement is somewhat complicated for academics given the limited chances for upwardly mobile moves within one's university. Instead, academic careers more closely resemble boundaryless conceptualizations, where career advancement occurs in moves between, rather than within, universities. Early career scholars are particularly likely to see conferences as chances to create strategic job mobility opportunities that may enable them to achieve their career goals. This may be done through formalized job services offered through the conferences or more informal social network channels. Last, in keeping with the themes of achievement and accomplishment, early career academics are likely to attend conferences to pursue productivity goals. By striving for additional achievement through undertaking various forms of work at conferences, they are able to establish themselves with their career and gain acceptance as a valued contributor – both at their universities and within the profession as a whole. Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 1. Academics in the early career stage are more likely to attend conferences to (a) invest in research and teaching human capital, (b) invest in social capital, (c) maintain social capital, (d) create strategic job mobility opportunities, and (e) achieve productivity enhancement.

The mid-career stage, such as for associate professors and related job titles, is characterized by a reappraisal of the demands and goals of one's earlier career. While there is no established definition of the mid-career stage for academics, it is often considered to be the lengthy period of time after one has mastered the fundamentals of what is required for effectiveness, is ready to seek the next set of challenges, has earned tenure, and before one starts to prepare for retirement (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, & Moretto, 2008; Baldwin, Lunceford, & Vanderlinden, 2014). In this stage one typically engages in efforts to consolidate one's career progress and maintain levels of contribution to the organization and profession. Remaining productive in this stage requires individuals to update and integrate their skills (Greenhaus et al., 2009); however, because the material relevant to increasing research and teaching proficiency at conferences is usually aimed at those in earlier stages, mid-career academics are unlikely to see conferences as an opportunity to invest broadly in human capital development through gaining information relevant to research and teaching. Instead, mid-career academics are likely to attend conferences to invest in social capital, maintain social networks, achieve job content innovation, and achieve productivity enhancement.

For mid-career academics, strategic investment in social capital and maintenance of social networks are ways to consolidate their place as a competent contributor to the organization and the profession (Greenhaus, 1987). Because collaboration with others has a positive impact on researchers' productivity and performance in academia (Lee & Bozeman, 2005), continuing to develop and maintain these resources enables an academic to maintain their levels of achievement. Although both investment in social capital and maintenance of social networks may relate to productivity and achievement, maintenance of social networks can also serve additional goals. In the mid-career stage academics can experience feelings of relief after earning tenure (becoming established as a teacher and/or researcher), as well as increased workload and higher expectations (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2017). Mid-career faculty face increased stressors due to maintaining high levels of performance that earned them tenure, while also taking on new roles and duties related to service, leadership, and advising (Baldwin et al., 2008). Activities that maintain social networks at conferences may likely target faculty at the same or even later career stage, who can offer career and psychosocial support as the academic navigates the unique stressors of the mid-career.

Mid-career academics are also likely to attend conferences to achieve job content innovation. As mentioned above, King (2004) distinguishes between job content innovation and investments in human and social capital through a focus on innovation, or substantive changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks. This type of positioning behavior is, in essence, a more focused form of investment in human capital. For example, while an early-career academic may attend multiple PDWs on teaching or research methods to gain knowledge, a mid-career academic is more likely to attend a specific PDW, or strategically engage with a particular scholar, in order to innovate in a very specific area of research or teaching that is meant to advance one's career. Last, mid-career academics are likely to attend conferences to achieve productivity enhancement. Similar to early-stage academics, achievement and accomplishment are still important goals for mid-career academics who wish to avoid what Greenhaus and colleagues (2009) refer to as mid-career plateauing. Using conferences as an opportunity to increase productivity enables these academics to capitalize on their resources and continue their productivity. Hence, we propose that:

Proposition 2. Academics in their mid-career are more likely to attend conferences to (a) invest in social capital, (b) maintain social networks, (c) achieve job content innovation, (d) and achieve productivity enhancement.

The late-career stage is still defined by a need to be productive, although the nature of the productivity shifts along with university expectations. Academics in the late-career stage have often become settled into their career role, therefore the focus in this stage is on maintaining performance in that role but also on other aspects of work – such as service to the field or their university. It is expected that with increasing career stages, academics find that investing in the future of one's own work is less critical and central compared with earlier stages, hence the shift to a maintenance and service orientation. Anticipating and planning for a meaningful and satisfying retirement is also associated with this stage (Greenhaus et al., 2009), however those considerations are unlikely to be associated with conference attendance, so we do not discuss them further here. Instead, we argue that late career academics are likely to attend conferences with the goals of maintaining social networks, creating strategic job mobility opportunities, and academic mentorship.

Late-career academics will attend conferences with the goal of maintaining social networks for many of the same reasons as mid-career faculty. Existing social networks are likely to contribute not only continued achievement and productivity within one's role, but also general support. For example, Kram and Isabella (1985) found that peer relationships offered important developmental support for professional and personal growth across early-, mid-, and late-career stages. In this study, the dominant type of peer support for those late in their careers was from peers of the same age with similar organizational histories. For academics in particular, there may be few such peers at their institution, therefore conferences represent a unique opportunity to maintain these social relationships.

Academics attending conferences in their late career are often focused on productivity and active engagement in their careers. Because of this, much like mid-career academics, they may be likely to capitalize on conference attendance for job mobility opportunities. Whether the potential job may increase productivity, represent an opportunity to move into administrative leadership roles, put them closer to family, or be a target location for retirement, late-stage academics may consider conferences as an ideal place to explore strategic job mobility opportunities.

Last, in line with an increased focus on service and developmental opportunities to others, late-stage academics are likely to attend conferences to mentor other academics. This may consist of participating as a panel member in PDWs or consortia, providing social support to PhD students who may be presenting a paper, or helping junior colleagues and PhD students network at social events. Although much work has examined the role of mentors in protégé success (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2004; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2008) including specifically the academic context (Green & Bauer, 1995), there is somewhat less focus on how mentoring benefits mentors. Yet, it is likely that academic mentorship of others provides late-career academics with several benefits important to their career stage. This includes a sense of personal fulfillment and meaning as the mentor passes on skills and wisdom to others as well as a level of "professional rejuvenation" (Johnson, 2007) wherein a late-stage academic is energized and motivated by working with younger academics. There are also potential benefits from the protégé's connections, in the same way that the protégé benefits from the mentor's connections. Together, the positive benefits of academic mentorship for late-stage academics are likely to make this an important goal for conference attendance. Accordingly, we propose that:

Proposition 3. Academics in late career stage are more likely to attend conferences to (a) maintain their social network, (b) create strategic job mobility opportunities, (c) and to mentor other academics.

3. Organization (university) level: type of universities

Higher education institutions around the world can be categorized into different types that vary by size, ownership, history, mission, and disciplinary mix. At a broad level, universities can be categorized as research-oriented institutions or teaching-oriented institutions. This categorization is also applicable to institutions which confer degrees in management and business administration (generally referred to as Business Schools[1]). For example, in the UK, the focus of traditional polytechnics, which were converted into universities in 1992 (generally referred to as post-1992 institutions), primarily delivered vocational courses and are known as teaching-led institutions where staff deliver large number of courses with lower (or no) expectations associated with conducting original research. Interestingly, staff in these institutions are increasingly expected to do research as well, along with teaching a large number of courses. In contrast, the majority of the pre-1992 institutions are categorized as research-led, where staff teach fewer courses and conduct considerable amount of research. These institutions also tend to have established doctoral programs, where academics are regularly involved in supervision of doctoral student research.

A similar distinction exists in the US educational system, with universities classified according to their level of research activity (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2020, https://carnegieclassifications.iu.edu/). Although the Carnegie Classification system provides a very fine-grained categorization system (e.g., there are three distinct categories for doctoral universities, three categories for master's colleges and universities, and so on), the classification revolves around the extent to which a university emphasizes and financially supports research activities. Those at the highest levels (e.g., "R1: Doctoral Universities – Very high research activity") have the greatest emphasis on and support for research (and thus are the most research-oriented) whereas those in other categories are less research-intensive (and thus are more teaching-oriented). Accordingly, the professional developmental needs and organizational support available to staff working in these two types of institutions vary.

In research-oriented institutions there is often considerable financial support available to help staff pursue their ongoing

[1] For details on the emergence of Business Schools and their orientation along the above broad categorization, see Kaplan (2018).

professional development centered around research, including support to present their research at relevant conferences. Such support allows staff to travel, attend key developmental workshops related to research (e.g., novel statistical methods) and develop research networks. Ultimately, the goal of such organizational support is to help staff develop research human and social capital. On the other hand, staff from teaching-oriented institutions are also provided financial support, but significantly less in comparison to research-oriented institutions to pursue professional developmental goals and develop teaching human capital (e.g., latest innovations in pedagogy and best practice in teaching delivery).

Professional association also publish research-based journals and organize opportunities for scholars to interact with the editors at their major annual conferences to help them develop their research human and social capital. For example, virtually every conference will have panel discussions staffed by journal editors wherein they describe their journals and offer advice about how to conduct research that might be worthy of publication in their respective journals. In addition, a large percentage of programming content at these conferences is devoted to "scholarly" activities, which are typically focused on the presentation and discussion of original research. Based on the above understanding, we propose the following propositions:

Proposition 4. Academics from research-oriented universities, compared to teaching-oriented universities, attend conferences to (a) invest in research human capital, and (b) invest in and maintain social capital, and (c) achieve job content innovation.

Proposition 5. Academics from teaching-oriented universities, compared to research-oriented universities, attend conferences (a) to invest in teaching human capital and (b) job content innovation associated with teaching, and (c) less to invest in research human capital.

In the following we elaborate on the effect that the university type (whether teaching or research led) may have on the developmental goals of academics across the three career stages (early, mid, and late) described above. Early career academics can be categorized according to their need for establishment and achievement (Greenhaus et al., 2009). Although the broad developmental tasks and challenges to be overcome are similar for all professionals at this early stage (King, 2004), the developmental goals of early career academics are likely to vary somewhat according to the university they are from. Those early career researchers from institutions that attach particular value to education and teaching are likely to see conferences as an opportunity to develop their human capital in ways that promote good teaching. This means that they are likely to seek out learning opportunities that help them to become better in this respect, for example, motivating students in the digital space, academic program management, assessing an individual's performance in a team or personalizing learning to meet the needs of individual students. By contrast, those from institutions that attach particular value to research will be more inclined to seek out opportunities to increase their research knowledge. This might entail attending events that provide new insight into specific research areas of interest; help learners to develop research-funding bids; improve conceptual framing; refine or develop data analysis skills or conduct research to meet the needs of policy bodies and practitioners (Van de Ven, 2007). These activities as well as building human capital are likely to make the early career academic more productive by improving work performance, whether that be in research or teaching.

Because early career academics are often keen to create strategic job mobility, that is, to seek out new opportunities relevant for their career goals, social networking is likely to be important. Although those from research-intensive institutions are likely to seek out social networks that enhance their chances of securing advancement at another research-intensive institution, the position for those from teaching-oriented universities is less clear-cut. While many early career academics from teaching-oriented universities will continue to progress upwardly in this space, it is by no means unprecedented for early career academics to transition from an education and teaching setting to an environment known for its research, especially if the academic's achievements in the teaching domain stand out. This is because research-intensive universities are usually committed to providing a top-quality education as well as research of high quality (Forster, 2018). Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 6. Early career academics from research-intensive universities are (a) more likely to attend conferences to invest in research human capital, (b) more likely to attend conferences to create strategic job mobility opportunities.

Proposition 7. Early career academics from teaching intensive universities are more likely to attend conferences to invest in teaching human capital, and (b) may attend conferences to create job mobility opportunities.

Mid- and late career stage academics need to consolidate, update and integrate their skills (Greenhaus, 1987). Because whether from teaching or research university types they are likely to have more leadership responsibility at this stage, time pressures may be acute; hence, conferences are opportunities to improve productivity (whether that be in teaching or research). Similarly, those from teaching and research-intensive institutions are likely to use conferences for job content innovation in order to avoid a career plateau (Greenhaus et al., 2009). Because strategic investment in social capital and the maintenance of social networks is especially important at this career stage (to allow for progression to the next level), conferences are likely to be used to foster allegiances that help develop the academics' specific areas of interest (in teaching or research).

Similar to early career academics, the way in which mid- and late career stage academics from the two university types use conferences to create strategic job mobility opportunities may not be straightforward. While those from teaching intensive universities are perhaps less likely to transition to research intensive ones at these career stages (with notable exceptions), pathways may open the other way round. Mid- and late career academics from a research-orientated institution may actively seek job opportunities in teaching-oriented institutions given promotion prospects and associated benefits. Mid- and late career stage academics from research-oriented universities may therefore use conferences to create strategic job mobility opportunities in teaching as well as in research. Those from teaching institutions are likely to see conferences as opportunities to create strategic mobility in teaching. Hence, we propose that:

Proposition 8. Academics at mid-and late- career stage from teaching intensive institutions are more likely to attend conferences to create strategic job mobility opportunities in teaching.

Proposition 9. Academics at mid- and late-career stage from research intensive universities are more likely to attend conferences to create strategic job mobility opportunities in research.

4. Country level: national values

We look at national values of the country to elaborate on the country level influence on the developmental goals of why academics attend conferences. The values embedded in the national culture shape the norms and behaviors of individuals within settings such as universities where academics are employed (Budhwar, Woldu, & Ogbonna, 2008). We suggest that national culture influences academics' developmental goals related to conference attendance.

Researchers investigating the links between cultural values and learning posit that differences may be explained through assessing differences in individuals' cultural backgrounds (see e.g., Holtbrügge & Mohr, 2010). House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) define national culture as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (p. 15). Culture has an impact on how members view learning barriers, solve problems and the way they gain and share knowledge (Abramson, Keating, & Lane, 1996; Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling, & Studemann, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001; Hutchings & Michailova, 2004). For example, research from Hwang and Francesco (2010) showed that individualism–collectivism and power distance values influence individuals' choice of feedback-seeking channels and ultimately their learning outcomes. Learners who are more individualistic are more likely to seek feedback from their professors either in or outside of class but are less likely to participate in the electronic discussion board. Those who are more collectivistic or who are higher on power distance tend to seek feedback from other students. In addition to the power distance and in-group collectivism dimensions we take the dimension of uncertainty avoidance into account as avoiding uncertainty can have an influence on the willingness to engage in the related risks of social networking. In sum, we propose that these three national culture dimensions (power distance, in-group collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance) of the academic's country of residence will be differentially relate to various development goals for attending conferences. We focus on their current country of residence because Hofstede (1980) notes that cognitive patterns are rooted in the demands and patterns of the environment within which one is raised or currently living.

One of the most frequently examined cultural dimensions, power distance, refers to the degree to which members of a culture agree or expect that power should be stratified and concentrated at higher levels of an organization. House et al. (2004; p. 536) define power distance as "The degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally." Although inequality exists in any culture, power distance refers to the extent that it is tolerated and accepted especially with reference to less powerful people. In high power distance cultures, such as Malaysia, Mexico, and China, superiors and subordinates consider themselves different from one another and there is a general belief that powerholders are entitled to privileges. In low power distance countries, such as the Scandinavian countries and New Zealand, superiors and subordinates believe they are similar and there is a general belief that no one should be entitled to special privileges (House et al., 2004). Conferences offer the opportunity for academics to pursue and maintain social capital. Because academics from high power distance cultures generally maintain greater hierarchical social distance because role expectations compel employees to show deference, respect, loyalty, and compliance to authority figures (Tyler, Lind, & Huo, 2000), they will be less likely to initiate contact with others out of fear of violating the expectations of the subordinate – authority roles. In contrast, those from low power distance countries will be less constrained by role expectations. These academics are not just more willing to network, based on cultural norms, but also more motivated to network because they perceive the power gap between academics of different ranks or status to be small and accordingly seek out networking opportunities from multiple conference attendees. Accordingly, we propose that:

Proposition 10. Academics from high power distance countries, compared to those from lower power distance countries, are less likely to attend conferences to (a) invest in social capital and (b) maintain social capital.

We also consider the influence of in-group collectivism as an important factor that may influence the academic mentorship goals when attending conferences. In-group collectivism is defined as the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families (House et al., 2004, p. 30). Countries that are high on in-group collectivism, such as India and Turkey are characterized by beliefs that duties and obligations are important determinants of social behavior, a strong distinction between in- and out-groups exists, and people emphasize relatedness with groups. On the other hand, countries low on in-group collectivism (i.e., high individualism), such as Denmark, Australia and the Netherlands, can be characterized by the importance of personal needs and attitudes for social behavior, little distinction between in- and out-groups, and emphasizing the rationality in behavior (House et al., 2004). Academics in high in-group collectivistic countries are more likely to define their identity based on their group membership, with their in-group or the organization for which they work (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003; Erdogan & Liden, 2006), and have a tendency to "view in-group outcomes as having personal relevance" (Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011, p.94). Cross-cultural findings show that members of high in-group collectivism countries tend to be open and willing to share their knowledge with members of their in-group such as friends or colleagues (Chow, Deng, & Ho, 2000), but could be distrustful of out-group members. Assuming academics view other academics as members of their profession as 'in-group' members, which may be especially true of doctoral students in their own department's program, we argue that those from high in-group collectivism cultures are more likely to attend conferences for academic mentorship. Hence, we propose that:

Proposition 11. Academics from high in-group collectivistic countries, compared to individualistic cultures, are more likely to attend conferences to mentor other academics.

Finally, we elaborate on the relationship between uncertainty avoidance of a country and academics attending conferences for job content innovation and creating strategic mobility opportunities. Uncertainty avoidance of the country is the extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate the unpredictability of future events (House et al., 2004). Uncertainty avoidance expresses the degree to which members of a society feel comfortable with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk taking (Hofstede, 1980) and it explains whether and to what extent tense and vague situations are tolerated or avoided. This dimension is described by Hofstede (1996) as "what is different, is dangerous". For example, some recent studies by Nam, Parboteeah, Cullen, and Johnson (2014) and Zhang and Zhou (2014) provide support for this assertion and found support for the impact on uncertainty avoidance on innovative behavior. We suggest that those in low uncertainty avoidance cultures may be less concerned about confrontation and are more likely to challenge the status quo. To avoid uncertainty, people in these cultures will adopt and rely on rules to minimize ambiguity, which in turn may constrain the opportunities to develop new solutions. Therefore, we suggest that people from high uncertainty avoidance countries are less likely to attend conferences for job content innovation, because they are less likely to innovate via their jobs. Further, we posit that uncertainty avoidance have an influence on academics' attending conferences for creating strategic mobility opportunities as these activities are related to risk and because individuals from high uncertainty avoidance culture would be uncomfortable going out of the box when the consequences of losing are more significant. In contrast, people in low uncertainty avoidance cultures can more readily cope with uncertainty in their environment, which means they will be more likely to engage in exploration behaviors as part of their professional development. Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 12. Academics from high uncertainty avoidance countries, compared to low uncertainty avoidance countries, are less likely to attend conferences to (a) create strategic mobility opportunities, and (b) achieve job content innovation.

Following the logic highlighted above, we suggest that national cultural values may influence the developmental goals of academics at early, mid and late career stages. In countries where collectivism is high, investing in the development of social capital is likely to be extremely important, to a greater extent than might be the case for early career academics from countries where collectivism is low (high individualism). This is because, as discussed, networking with similar others is integral to career progress in high collectivist countries. Furthermore, mid-career academics from high power distance countries are likely to be resistant to the opportunities for building and maintaining social networks that conferences present. This is because deference, respect and compliance to authority figures means that initiating contact with others may be perceived as violating the expectations of those lower- or higher- in the power hierarchy (Tyler et al., 2000). Finally, we make some observations about the effect of national culture on the conference attendance goals of late career stage academics. Although generally late career stage academics are interested in attending conferences in order to maintain social networks, to allow strategic job mobility and to mentor others, cultural values might have an amplifying effect on these goals. For example, those countries high on collectivism are more likely to value the opportunities for mentoring other academics that conference attendance presents. For those from countries where power distance is high, the developmental goal of maintaining social networks may be less emphasized than is the case where the senior academic is from a country low on power distance, for the reasons articulated above. These observations lead to the following propositions:

Proposition 13. High collectivism at country level influences the developmental goals at all three levels, by making it more likely that early and mid-career academics will attend conference to invest and maintain social capital (networking), and senior career academics for academic mentorship.

Proposition 14. High power distance will shape the conference attendance goals of mid and senior level academics by making it less likely that they will attend conferences in order to invest and maintain social networks. On the other hand, those from low power distance countries are likely to attend conferences to invest and maintain social networks.

5. Implications and guidance for future research

To answer the question of *why academic attend conferences* we re-define and extend King's (2004) framework. Our first contribution to this framework is that we apply and extend the positioning behaviors in the context of academics' motives for attending conferences and suggest that academics differ in terms of developmental goals for attending conferences. In addition to the four positioning behaviors identified by King (2004) – strategic choice of mobility opportunity (related to initiation of job moves), strategic investment in human capital (investment in teaching human capital, and investment in research human capital), active network development (investment in one's social capital), and job content innovation (the development of significant changes in methods or procedures used to perform job tasks) – we added three developmental goals to attend conferences: social network maintenance, productivity enhancement, and academic mentorship.

Our second contribution to this framework is that we extend the antecedents and include additional individual-level characteristics (e.g., career stage) as well as organizational (university) and country level antecedents. We also consider some cross-level effects of these antecedents as previous research (e.g., Lin & Sanders, 2017) has shown that behaviors, including the decision to attend a conference are influenced by an interplay of antecedents of different levels.

Considering how antecedents at different levels (individual, organizational, and country level) relate to academics' developmental goals for attending conferences is important given the growing understanding that academics' career development, professional growth and their involvement in the professional association is shaped by the interplay of antecedents at different levels (Sparrow &

Hiltrop, 1997). By providing support for attending conferences, organizations and universities can signal their support for the development of academics (see Bednall et al., 2014). Such development can help academics to reflect on their experiences, adapt their approach to work, and ultimately enhance their performance (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

In this paper we focused on the developmental goals for conference attendance of academics. Although the situation of academics differs somewhat from other professions, we believe that our line of reasoning can be generalized to other professions like accountants, consultants, teachers and medical practitioners;All professionals are expected to attend conferences for different developmental goals to further work on their ongoing professional development. While the situation of academics is unique in their investments in teaching versus research human capital, there can be similar ways to divide human capital investment for accountants and consultants. For instance, the investment of human capital of consultants can be divided into a more people management human capital investment versus a more financial human capital investment. Future research, however, is needed to support this statement, and apply the career self-management framework of King (2004) to other professions and explore differences between different professions. We believe that the application of this framework for academics can be helpful in applying this framework to other professions.

6. Implications for human resource (hr) practitioners and conference organizers

Our considerations are of practical importance in a number of ways. Our conceptual study highlights the need to increase learners', teachers' and (HR) managers' awareness of the influence of antecedents at different levels to attend conferences in order to improve the ongoing professional development of employees within their organization (Antonietti, 1999). This awareness may be enhanced through discussion about developmental goals and involvement in the professional association, and might improve learning in work situations in which employees are made aware of existing differences in learning. For instance, academics from high power distance countries can be made aware of the effect of the influence of their country and change their behavior at conferences. Research has shown that people can be made aware of the influence of power distance orientations and can change their behavior.

In addition to enhancing the awareness of the existence of different developmental goals for academics and their organizations (universites) for conference attendance, HR practitioners and other decision-makers can guide academics in their decisions for which conferences they should attend. This can also be related to further career choices for academics and their position on the labor market. For instance, HR practitioners can discuss career ambitions with academics while taking into account the influences of the career stage, type of university, and country regarding their developmental goals. In addition, HR practitioners can advise organizations how to divide their training and development budget while taking into account that not all academics in their universities have the same developmental goals and that some conferences are more expensive in comparison to others in terms of fee, travel, and accommodation costs.

Finally, HR practitioners and (line) managers can enhance the 'transfer of training' effects by motivating academics within a university to share the insights gained from attending the conferences. In this way professionals with different developmental goals can learn from each other and can create a learning community despite their different developmental goals. For instance, professionals with research or teaching human capital investment developmental goals can be informed by academics with strong social capital investment developmental goals about what is happening in the field, and the other way around.

Our considerations also have some implications for the way many conferences are organized. First, the importance of the different developmental goals was based on the antecedents at different levels. This puts into question the potential for, and desirability of, convergence of the conference program (see also Holtbrügge & Mohr, 2010). If members from different backgrounds have different professional developmental goals, a one-size-fits-all model might be unlikely to help members achieve their preferred developmental outcomes. Conference organizers should seek to include a variety of programming content to fit the needs of the varying national cultures.

A second implication relates to the growing cultural diversity of professional associations. Related to academics, international academic exchange programs, countries with different cultural backgrounds, and the worldwide recruiting of academics all lead to culturally diverse (business) schools in which individuals may differ significantly with regard to developmental goals and involvement in professional associations (see also Jepsen et al., 2014). Organizations may consider pedagogical approaches geared toward a single learning style as ineffective and may develop 'toolboxes' (Adey, Fairbtother, & Wiliam, 1999) and coaching in order to enhance the cultural and institutional compatibility between learner and learning environment (Yamaushi, 1995).

While institutions and culture exist at many levels of social groups, including organizations and societies (countries), this study considers among others culture at the national level. We need to be aware of criticism on "overgeneralized" conclusions. It is important to bear in mind that the differences represent patterns that are characteristic of most people from a different environment; individuals within a given culture could vary to some extent. Scholars argue that country designation is not necessarily a good proxy to measure culture values background of individuals, as doing so assumes that individuals correspond to the cultural and institutional norms of the country they inhabit, also known as ecological fallacy. Individuals could, however, have been born in one country, and moved to another country only recently. In this case, we can assume that these individuals would likely show more similarities with individuals in the country they were born, depending on the age when they moved to the other country. Thus, future research might consider cultural values as an individual difference variable that influences developmental goals for attending conferences.

Finally, related to the COVID-19 crisis, future research is needed to help conference organizers know how to organize their conferences and decide how, when and what to offer in order to transmit the fields of knowledge and skills to professionals, and how these decision play out for professionals from different countries. Conferences organizers differ in their experiences to run a conference virtually. In addition, during the COVID-19 situation, many universities have restricted conference funding and national and/or international traveling.

In sum, this paper identifies several types of professional developmental goals that may motivate academics to attend certain conferences. We also proposed antecedents of developmental goals including one's career stage, university focus, and national cultural values of one's country of residence. Our model has important implications for helping academics better manage their careers by encouraging them to consider their professional goals and which conferences are more likely to help them achieve their goals, as well as better plan how to spend their time at the conference. By engaging in a more proactive approach to this particular professional development activity, academics may reflect on their learning experiences, adapt their approach to work, and ultimately enhance their performance (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

Authors statement

The authors agree that the article is not under review at another journal, and contain new information.

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