



Research Article

## Human Capital and Career Self- Direction: An Economic Study of Individual Traits and Organisational Support

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20067945>

### Abstract

The concept of human capital has evolved beyond traditional measures of education and skills to include behavioural and psychological dimensions that influence career outcomes. This study examines the relationship between human capital and career self-direction, with a specific focus on the role of individual traits and organisational support. Drawing on insights from Human Capital Theory and Protean Career Theory, the paper develops an analytical framework to understand how personal attributes such as self-efficacy, adaptability, and career motivation interact with institutional mechanisms like mentoring, training, and organisational culture.

Using an empirical approach, the study analyzes primary data collected from employees across selected sectors, employing statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis to examine the strength and direction of relationships among variables. The findings indicate that both individual traits and organizational support significantly influence career self-direction, with organizational support acting as a facilitating factor that enhances the effective utilization of human capital. Moreover, the study highlights that individuals possessing higher levels of proactive personality and career commitment are more likely to engage in self-directed career behaviors when supported by conducive organizational environments.

The research contributes to the growing literature on career development by integrating economic and behavioral perspectives, offering practical implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and organizations aiming to foster a self-reliant and future-ready workforce. It also suggests that investment in human capital must be complemented by supportive organizational practices to maximize individual and institutional productivity.

### Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 05-04-2026
- Accepted: 26-04-2026
- Published: 30-04-2026
- IJCRM:5(2); 2026: 993-999
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

### How to Cite this Article

Singh J. Human Capital and Career Self- Direction: An Economic Study of Individual Traits and Organisational Support. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(2):993-999.

### Access this Article Online



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**KEYWORDS:** Human Capital, Career Self-Direction, Individual Traits, Organisational Support, Self-Efficacy, Career Development, Economic Analysis, Protean Career, Workforce Productivity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of human capital has emerged as a cornerstone in modern economic and organizational analysis, emphasizing the role of education, skills, and competencies in enhancing individual productivity and economic growth. Rooted in Human Capital Theory, the idea suggests that investment in human abilities yields measurable returns in terms of income, employability, and career advancement. In today's knowledge-driven economy, human capital extends beyond formal education to include behavioral attributes, adaptability, and continuous learning capabilities.

In parallel, the notion of career development has undergone a significant transformation. Traditional career paths characterized by organizational control and long-term employment have gradually been replaced by more flexible and dynamic career models. The emergence of Protean Career Theory and Boundaryless Career Theory highlights the growing importance of self-directed career management, where individuals take primary responsibility for shaping their professional trajectories based on personal values, goals, and competencies.

Career self-direction, therefore, represents a critical dimension of modern workforce behavior. It reflects an individual's ability to proactively plan, manage, and adapt their career in response to changing economic and organizational environments. This ability is not solely dependent on formal qualifications but is significantly influenced by individual traits such as self-efficacy, resilience, and motivation. These traits enable individuals to navigate uncertainties and seize emerging opportunities effectively.

At the same time, the role of organizational support cannot be overlooked. Organizations play a vital role in facilitating career self-direction by providing training opportunities, mentoring, career guidance, and a supportive work culture. The interaction between individual traits and organizational support creates a synergistic effect that enhances the effective utilization of human capital. In this context, organizations are no longer mere employers but active partners in career development.

Despite the growing recognition of these factors, there remains a need to integrate economic and behavioral perspectives to better understand how human capital translates into career self-direction. Most existing studies tend to examine these variables in isolation, without adequately capturing their interdependencies. This study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing the combined effect of individual traits and organizational support within an economic framework.

Therefore, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive analytical understanding of how human capital, when complemented by favorable individual and organizational factors, contributes to the development of self-directed careers. It seeks to offer insights that are relevant for policymakers, educational institutions, and organizations striving to enhance workforce productivity and employability.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Existing literature on human capital primarily focuses on the relationship between education, skills, and economic outcomes. Gary Becker, in his seminal work *Human Capital* (1964),

emphasized that investments in education and training enhance productivity and earning potential. Later studies such as Jacob Mincer (1974) further quantified returns to education through earnings functions. Subsequent research has expanded this perspective by incorporating non-cognitive skills such as emotional intelligence and adaptability (Heckman & Kautz, 2012), highlighting that human capital is multidimensional.

Research on career self-direction has been significantly influenced by Douglas T. Hall (2004), who introduced the concept of protean careers, emphasizing individual responsibility and value-driven career choices. Similarly, boundaryless career perspectives proposed by Michael B. Arthur and Denise M. Rousseau (1996) highlight mobility and flexibility as key characteristics of modern careers. These theories reflect the shift from organizationally managed careers to self-managed career paths.

Empirical studies have also examined the role of individual traits in shaping career outcomes. Research by Judge and Bono (2001) found that self-efficacy is strongly related to job performance and career success. Similarly, Seibert, Crant, and Kraimer (1999) demonstrated that proactive personality significantly influences career success and innovation. Career motivation and adaptability have also been identified as key determinants of career self-management (Savickas, 2005). These traits enable individuals to actively engage in career planning and decision-making processes.

On the organizational front, studies indicate that support mechanisms such as mentoring, training, and developmental opportunities significantly impact employee career growth. Eisenberger et al. (1986) introduced the concept of perceived organizational support, emphasizing its role in enhancing employee commitment and performance. Further, Allen et al. (2004) found that mentoring relationships positively influence career outcomes. Organizational culture and leadership have also been recognized as critical factors in fostering an environment conducive to career self-direction (Schein, 2010). However, while these studies provide valuable insights, there is limited research integrating human capital, individual traits, and organizational support into a unified analytical framework. Most studies tend to examine these variables in isolation rather than exploring their combined effects. This gap necessitates a comprehensive approach to understand how these dimensions interact to influence career self-direction, particularly in the context of emerging economies.

## 3. Research Gap

A critical review of existing literature reveals that most studies have examined human capital, individual traits, and organizational support independently. There is a lack of integrated research that analyzes how these factors interact to influence career self-direction within an economic framework. Furthermore, limited empirical studies focus on the combined effect of psychological and organizational variables, particularly in the context of developing economies like India. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a holistic analysis of these interrelated dimensions.

#### 4. Need of the Study

The rapidly changing economic environment, characterized by technological advancements and shifting employment patterns, has increased the importance of self-directed careers. Individuals are now required to continuously upgrade their skills and proactively manage their career paths. At the same time, organizations must adopt supportive practices to retain and develop talent. Understanding the interplay between human capital, individual traits, and organizational support is essential for designing effective policies and strategies. This study is needed to provide insights that can enhance employability, productivity, and sustainable career development.

#### 5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the concept and components of human capital in the modern economic context.
2. To analyze the relationship between human capital and career self-direction.
3. To evaluate the impact of individual traits (self-efficacy, adaptability, motivation) on career self-direction.
4. To assess the role of organisational support in facilitating self-directed career behaviour.
5. To analyse the combined effect of individual traits and organisational support on the effective utilization of human capital.

#### 6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on analyzing the relationship between human capital and career self-direction with specific reference to individual traits and organizational support. The scope is limited to employees across selected sectors, considering both behavioral and economic dimensions. The study primarily relies on primary data and statistical tools to derive conclusions. While the findings provide valuable insights, they are context-specific and may vary across different industries and regions. Nonetheless, the study offers a foundation for further research in the area of career development and human capital management.

#### 7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

##### 7.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study begins with descriptive statistics to understand the distribution of responses across key variables: Human Capital (HC), Individual Traits (IT), Organizational Support (OS), and Career Self-Direction (CSD).

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Human Capital	3.85	0.62	Moderately high skill & education level
Individual Traits	3.92	0.58	Strong presence of self-efficacy & motivation
Organizational Support	3.67	0.71	Moderate institutional support
Career Self-Direction	3.88	0.60	High tendency toward self-managed careers

##### Interpretation

The mean values indicate that respondents possess relatively high levels of human capital and individual traits, which

correspond with a strong inclination toward career self-direction. However, comparatively lower organizational support suggests a potential constraint in fully realizing self-directed career behavior.

##### 7.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables.

Variables	HC	IT	OS	CSD
HC	1			
IT	0.62**	1		
OS	0.55**	0.60**	1	
CSD	0.68**	0.72**	0.65**	1

The correlation results provide strong empirical support for the central premise of the study that career self-direction is a multi-dimensional construct shaped by economic, behavioral, and organisational factors.

Firstly, the positive and significant relationship between Human Capital and Career Self-Direction ( $r = 0.68$ ) indicates that individuals possessing higher levels of education, skills, and competencies are more likely to engage in self-directed career behaviors. This finding aligns with the propositions of Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that investments in knowledge and skills enhance an individual's productive capacity and decision-making ability. In the context of this study, individuals with strong human capital are better equipped to identify career opportunities, adapt to labor market changes, and make informed career choices. However, the correlation value, while strong, is not the highest among the variables, suggesting that human capital alone is not sufficient to fully explain career self-direction.

Secondly, Individual Traits exhibit the strongest relationship with Career Self-Direction ( $r = 0.72$ ), highlighting the dominant role of psychological and behavioral factors. Traits such as self-efficacy, proactive personality, adaptability, and intrinsic motivation significantly influence an individual's willingness and ability to take charge of their career. This supports the arguments of Protean Career Theory, where career success is driven more by personal values and self-management than by organizational structures. Individuals with strong internal traits are more likely to set career goals, seek opportunities, and persist despite challenges. Thus, individual traits act as a driving force that activates and channels human capital into actionable career outcomes.

Thirdly, the significant correlation between Organizational Support and Career Self-Direction ( $r = 0.65$ ) underscores the importance of institutional mechanisms in facilitating career development. Organizational support in the form of mentoring, training, career guidance, and supportive leadership creates an enabling environment where employees can effectively utilize their skills and capabilities. This suggests that even highly skilled and motivated individuals may not achieve optimal career self-direction in the absence of supportive organizational structures. Therefore, organizational support acts as a catalyst that strengthens and sustains self-directed career behavior.

Taken together, these findings clearly demonstrate that career self-direction cannot be explained through a single dimension

such as education or skills alone. Instead, it emerges from the interaction of human capital (capacity), individual traits (motivation), and organizational support (opportunity). The relatively higher influence of individual traits indicates a shift from traditional economic models toward more behavioral and self-driven career frameworks. At the same time, the significant role of organizational support highlights that self-direction does not imply isolation, but rather a collaborative dynamic between individuals and institutions.

Thus, the analysis reinforces the study's core argument that career self-direction is an outcome of a synergistic relationship between economic investment in human capital, psychological readiness of individuals, and the supportive role of organizations, making it a comprehensive and multi-dimensional phenomenon in the modern employment landscape.

### 7.3 Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was applied:

$$\text{CSD} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{HC}) + \beta_2(\text{IT}) + \beta_3(\text{OS}) + \epsilon$$

Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Significance
HC	0.28	4.12	0.000
IT	0.41	6.25	0.000
OS	0.33	5.08	0.000
$R^2 = 0.64$			

The regression results provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how different dimensions of human capital translate into career self-direction. The model explains 64% of the variation ( $R^2 = 0.64$ ) in career self-direction, which indicates a strong explanatory power in social science research. This suggests that the combined influence of human capital, individual traits, and organizational support offers a robust framework for understanding self-directed career behavior. At the same time, the remaining 36% variation indicates the possible influence of other factors such as labor market conditions, personal circumstances, or external economic forces.

The coefficient for Individual Traits ( $\beta = 0.41$ ) being the highest among all variables highlights that psychological and behavioral characteristics play the most critical role in shaping career self-direction. Traits such as self-efficacy, proactiveness, adaptability, and intrinsic motivation enable individuals to actively manage their careers, set goals, and respond effectively to dynamic work environments. This finding strongly aligns with Protean Career Theory, which emphasizes that modern careers are driven by individual values and self-management rather than organizational control. In the context of this study, it indicates that even when individuals possess adequate skills, their internal drive determines whether those skills are actually utilized for career advancement.

The role of Organizational Support ( $\beta = 0.33$ ) as the second most influential factor suggests that institutions act as important enablers of career self-direction. Support mechanisms such as mentoring, training programs, leadership guidance, and a positive organizational culture provide individuals with opportunities to develop and apply their competencies. This reinforces the idea that career self-direction is not solely an

individual responsibility but is significantly shaped by the organizational environment. In practical terms, organizations that invest in employee development and create supportive ecosystems are more likely to foster self-directed and productive employees. Thus, organizational support functions as a facilitator that enhances the effectiveness of both human capital and individual traits.

Although Human Capital ( $\beta = 0.28$ ) remains statistically significant, its relatively lower impact compared to individual traits and organizational support provides an important insight. Traditional economic perspectives, particularly Human Capital Theory, emphasize education and skills as primary drivers of career success. However, the findings of this study suggest that human capital serves as a foundational resource rather than a decisive factor. In the absence of strong individual motivation and supportive organizational structures, the potential of human capital may remain underutilized. This reflects a shift from a purely skill-based understanding of career outcomes to a more integrated model that includes behavioral and contextual dimensions.

The overall insight that “skills alone are not enough” is strongly validated by the regression results. While human capital provides the necessary knowledge and competencies, it is the interaction with individual traits (which drive action) and organizational support (which provides opportunities) that ultimately determines career self-direction. This highlights a synergistic relationship where:

- Human Capital represents *capacity*,
- Individual Traits represent *agency*, and
- Organizational Support represents *opportunity*.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the central theme of the study that career self-direction is a multi-dimensional economic and behavioral phenomenon. The results call for a reorientation of policy and organizational practices—from merely investing in education and skill development to also fostering psychological capabilities and supportive work environments. Such an integrated approach is essential for developing a workforce that is not only skilled but also proactive, adaptable, and capable of managing its own career trajectory in a rapidly evolving economic landscape.

### 7.4 Mediation / Interaction Insight

The finding that Organizational Support partially mediates the relationship between Human Capital and Career Self-Direction adds an important layer of interpretation to the study. Mediation implies that human capital does not always translate directly into self-directed career behavior; rather, its impact is channeled and strengthened through organizational conditions. From an analytical perspective, partial mediation indicates two simultaneous effects:

1. **Direct Effect** – Human Capital independently influences Career Self-Direction (employees with higher education and skills are more capable of managing their careers).
2. **Indirect Effect (via Organizational Support)** – Human Capital becomes more effective when employees receive support in the form of mentoring, training, career guidance, and a positive work environment.

This means that organizational support acts as a transmission mechanism, converting potential (skills, knowledge, competencies) into actual career behavior (planning, decision-making, adaptability). In the absence of such support, even highly skilled individuals may face structural barriers such as lack of guidance, limited opportunities, or unclear career pathways.

The interpretation that “*employees with high skills perform better only when supported*” reflects the practical reality of modern workplaces. Skilled employees may possess the ability to grow, but without institutional backing, their growth remains constrained. Similarly, the idea that “*human capital remains underutilized without support*” highlights inefficiencies not just at the individual level but also at the organizational and economic level, where investments in education and training fail to yield optimal returns.

This finding is consistent with modern extensions of Human Capital Theory, which now recognize that contextual and institutional factors are critical in determining how effectively human capital is utilized. Thus, the study moves beyond traditional theory by demonstrating that human capital must be complemented by organizational ecosystems to produce meaningful career outcomes.

### 7.5 Structural Interpretation

The structural framework emerging from the study presents a three-dimensional model of career self-direction, where each component plays a distinct yet interdependent role:

#### 1. Human Capital → Foundation

Human capital serves as the base or foundation of career self-direction. It includes education, technical skills, knowledge, and competencies that determine an individual’s capability to perform tasks and compete in the labor market. Without this foundation, individuals lack the necessary tools to engage in meaningful career planning or progression. However, as the analysis shows, having a strong foundation alone does not guarantee self-directed career behavior.

#### 2. Individual Traits → Driving Force

Individual traits act as the internal driving force that activates human capital. Characteristics such as self-efficacy, motivation, adaptability, and proactive personality determine whether individuals take initiative in managing their careers. These traits influence goal setting, persistence, and the willingness to explore opportunities. In essence, individual traits convert potential (human capital) into action, making them the most influential factor in the model.

#### 3. Organizational Support → Enabling Environment

Organizational support represents the external environment that facilitates or constrains career self-direction. It includes mentoring, training programs, leadership support, career counseling, and organizational culture. This component provides the opportunity structure within which individuals operate. Even highly motivated and skilled individuals require access to resources and institutional backing to achieve their career goals.

### 8. Major Findings of the Study

The empirical analysis of the study provides several important insights into the relationship between human capital and career self-direction:

**1. Human Capital Positively Influences Career Self-Direction** The study confirms that individuals with higher levels of education, skills, and competencies are more likely to engage in self-directed career behaviors. However, human capital alone is not sufficient to fully explain career self-direction, indicating the need for complementary factors.

**2. Individual Traits are the Most Influential Factor** Among all variables, individual traits ( $\beta = 0.41$ ) have the strongest impact on career self-direction. Attributes such as self-efficacy, motivation, adaptability, and proactive personality significantly determine an individual’s ability to manage and shape their career path. This highlights the growing importance of psychological capital in modern career development.

**3. Organizational Support Acts as a Key Enabler** Organizational support ( $\beta = 0.33$ ) plays a critical role in facilitating career self-direction. Mechanisms such as mentoring, training, and supportive leadership create an environment that allows individuals to effectively utilize their skills and competencies.

**4. Strong Interrelationship Among Variables** Correlation results indicate significant positive relationships among human capital, individual traits, organizational support, and career self-direction. This confirms that career development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon influenced by economic, behavioral, and institutional factors.

**5. High Explanatory Power of the Model** The regression model explains 64% ( $R^2 = 0.64$ ) of the variation in career self-direction, suggesting that the integrated framework used in the study is robust and relevant in explaining modern career behavior.

**6. Organizational Support as a Partial Mediator** The mediation analysis reveals that organizational support partially mediates the relationship between human capital and career self-direction. This implies that skills and knowledge are more effectively translated into career outcomes when supported by organizational structures.

**7. Synergistic Relationship Among Core Variables** The study establishes a three-dimensional framework:

- Human Capital → Capacity
- Individual Traits → Agency
- Organizational Support → Opportunity

Career self-direction emerges from the interaction of these three elements rather than from any single factor in isolation.

### 9. CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The present study concludes that career self-direction is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon shaped by the

interaction of economic, psychological, and organizational factors. While human capital provides the foundational capabilities in terms of education and skills, it is the individual traits that drive proactive career behavior and decision-making. At the same time, organizational support acts as a critical enabling mechanism that facilitates the effective utilization of human capital.

The findings clearly indicate a shift from traditional career models, where success was largely determined by educational attainment and organizational structures, to modern frameworks where individuals take greater responsibility for managing their careers. However, this self-direction does not occur in isolation; it requires a supportive organizational ecosystem that provides opportunities, guidance, and resources.

The study also highlights that investment in human capital alone is insufficient for achieving optimal career outcomes. Without the presence of strong individual motivation and organizational support, the potential of human capital remains underutilized. Therefore, an integrated approach that combines skill development, psychological empowerment, and institutional support is essential for fostering sustainable career growth. The study is justified as it bridges the gap between traditional economic theory and modern career development frameworks by integrating human capital with behavioral and organizational dimensions. It provides a holistic understanding of workforce development, making it highly relevant for academic research, policy formulation, and organizational practice in the current dynamic environment.

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