

## Chapter 6

### Learning

The measurement of multiple loyalties, multiple identities, multiple citizenship relating to cities, nations, regions, and ultimately the world, all promise to challenge the prior ways of thinking about immigration, ethno-cultural diversity, and work.

*Source:* A. J. Marsella (1997: 43)

Souls of nations do not change  
Merely stretch their hidden range  
As rivers do not sleep  
Spirit of empire runs deep.

*Source:* B. Okri (poet)

In the previous chapter, we explored the glocality of broken promises in self-managed work teams. In the current, final chapter of the book, that exploration is extended. In the same way that we are free to view organizations as communities (e.g., of self-managed teams), we are free as well to view the wider communities in which they sit as forms of organization. From this extended perspective on work, just as teamwork is sometimes an over-promise to its constituents about empowerment, so too is the promise of a better life and a better job, tendered by some “countries Inc.” who wish to capture the talents of skilled migrants for their economies (Atkins & Fletcher, 2003). These migrants’ subsequent travel may broaden the migrants’ own minds, thereby boosting their countries-of-destinations’ levels of latent human capital (Inkson & Myers, 2002). Those potentials may not be fully realized, however, unless the same migration has an equally mind-broadening effect on the community *toward* which the migrants travel. Reducing that risk is the central issue for this chapter, and a crowning glocality for the book as a whole. Our starting point for analyzing that overall glocality is the concept of “boundary-less careers” (Arthur, 1994).

#### 1. Boundary-less Careers

The historical origin of these vocational journeys has been traced to widespread corporate downsizing operations conducted during the 1980s and 1990s (Imel, 2001). According to Imel’s overview of those changes, downsizing on a mass scale changed the way that people inhabiting the relatively prosperous economies of the world think about work – shifting it permanently away from “lifetime employment” to, instead, working more as a “free agent.” Unlike their more “bounded” predecessors in wealthier countries, and to some extent as well perhaps their contemporaries in poorer economies, those free agents are relatively unattached, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally, to any particular organization or employer (Stroh & Reilly, 1997). Instead, and without any specific loyalties to anchor them down, free agents will tend to move, as regards working, to wherever

they can best metaphorically invest their own “career capital” (for an excellent review, Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

### **1.1. The focus of boundary-less careers**

Initially, the idea that a career could and should be boundary-less focused not on national boundaries but rather at the level of firms within the same nation (De Fillipi & Arthur, 1994). Even the term *migration*, for example, was reserved predominantly for movement from one national locality to another (see, for example, Kraatz & Moore, 2002). Nonetheless, careers were visualized as knowledge-based, and boundary-less in the sense that knowledge acquisition is neither anchored nor bounded by a particular employment relationship (Bird, 1994). Under that form of psychological contract, a key to vocational and human capital development is being able to cultivate interdependent networks of human relations, and a resulting sense of community (Rousseau & Arthur, 1999). This particular skill is termed *knowing whom*, which implies that the skills apply in a context that is largely intra-communal, -national, and cultural (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003). In Rousseau and Arthur’s paper, however, and rather unusually for its time, it is suggested as well that communities can also be *inter-national* in kind, and to that extent, by logical extension, *inter-communal*.

### **1.2. Thinking beyond national boundaries**

Since the new millennia, the meaning of boundary-less careers has, inevitably perhaps, extended outward from its earlier occupational and vocational base, to include as well career expansion that is, literally, geographical (Mahroum, 2000). The migration literature is a case in point. There, for example, it has been explicitly argued that the new worker is less constrained today than ever before by national borders and immigration limits (Naim, 2000). At a relatively micro level too, the literature on vocational development/behavior increasingly features new measures of “geographical barriers” to career progression (e.g., Donohue, 2003). In this theoretically “wide-open” jobs market, skilled migrants cluster not just in their own “local” urban centers, i.e., in a national movement toward the city; they also tend to cluster, from all over the world, in new “global” cities (Beaverstock & Smith, 1996). In that way, the new jobs market, as regards boundary-less careers, increasingly fits the vision of future work life portrayed for us in Marsella (above, 1997).

## **2. Boundary Conditions**

As well as envisioning global cities, Marsella also speaks of competing identities, including the retention of local values and norms. For example, our concept of a broken promise, and of glocality generally, suggests that global migration will spur local backlashes (Chapters 1 & 5, this volume). By definition, these backlashes will be anchored predominantly in the communities in which migrants seek to build their new lives. Yet once again they can also only ever be understood by considering how they interact with the expectations that skilled migrants, themselves, bring with them to the new country and city. Those expectations, and the interactions they nourish, have already been studied, indirectly,