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Enabling the new careers of the 21st century

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Abstract

The new careers of the 21st century are turbulent compared to the ideal corporate climb of the 1950s. Owing to the greater presence of women in the workforce, diminished job security, and increased focus on psychological aspects of success, many workers have moved onto non-traditional career paths. The new careers involve changing organizations, lateral rather than vertical moves, and often include interruptions in employment. The expectation is that employees will manage their own careers, choosing to work for companies that provide opportunities to meet their objectives. Organizations need to embrace the realities of 21st century careers and recognize the importance of programs and policies that enable the careers of their employees. Career-enabling programs address time-control issues (e.g., part-time options, job sharing, flextime, telecommuting, and leaves) as well as knowledge and skill development (e.g., training, job rotation, tuition remission, mentoring). Such programs help employees meet both career and life goals and will promote the long-term success of the organization.

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Introduction

Careers today are turbulent, often involving changes in employer, geographic location, and even occupation. They may take place in or out of organizations, but this paper focuses primarily on organizational careers. In this paper, we present a half century of prior thinking on careers, the current views of careers, and expectations regarding the future. The underlying paradigm is to help organizations to acknowledge the altered nature of career paths and understand the need to develop practices to support and reward new careers. This material will also be helpful to managers as they journey on their own careers and as they work to enable the careers of their subordinates.

The past: the ideal career

The word career derives from a French word for racecourse. The definition in mid-20th century was “a profession or other calling demanding special preparation and undertaken as a life work” (Webster’s, 1949). A career was the pattern of work preparation and experience for people in professional fields (e.g., medicine, law) and implied a race to the top of the field. Fifty years ago there was a reasonable consensus about what the “ideal” career looked like. It fit well with the “American Dream” of a continuous rise to the top of your profession over the course of your lifetime of work. In the

managerial field, the ideal was described by Whyte (1956) in the classic book *The Organization Man*. To be hired, the person had to have an appropriate education, make a good impression in a job interview, and score well on psychological tests. The man who was chosen to join the large, bureaucratic business organization was set for life. He received good compensation, job security, and respect in exchange for hard work and loyalty. He was expected to be completely committed to his job throughout his working life during which he climbed the organizational “ladder,” rising in status and income with each rung. Clearly not everybody achieved this “ideal” career but it was what people desired.

The person in the “ideal” career of the 1950s most often had a traditional family where the man was the breadwinner and the woman was the homemaker (Moen and Roehling, 2005). Men were rewarded at work; success was measured by the height of the ladder climbed. Women were rewarded by being wives and mothers, supporting men’s careers and raising children. In the family, men did the paid work, women the unpaid work. The family lived in a lovely new suburb with the families of other organizational men (Whyte, 1956).

One big problem with this ideal career (often called “traditional” or “bureaucratic”) is that it was only open to men. Moreover, it was only open to men who fit the mold (Whyte, 1956). The bureaucratic model discouraged individuality. While Whyte wrote about this ideal career, he also questioned whether it was actually in the best interest of the individual, the organization, or society. There were people who were rejected by these organizations and had to fend for themselves. Regardless, the bureaucratic organizations that hired organizational men expanded and were very profitable and thus they were widely lauded. Many appreciated the predictability and stability of the system of employment (Arthur *et al.*, 1999).

The model for ideal careers fit well with the prevailing theories of adult development and occupational choice (Ginzberg *et al.*, 1951; Super, 1957). At the same time that Whyte was writing about the “organization man,” Super (1957) was proposing a process of career development (for men) that brought together development, ages, and stages. He viewed people as moving through five career stages: *growth* – preparation for work (ages 0–14), *exploration* – trying out different work options (ages 15–24), *establishment* – choosing and

progressing in a career (ages 25–44), *maintenance* – continuing your chosen career (ages 45–64), and ultimately *decline* – retirement (ages 65+). This concept of career stages captured the career paths that most men were experiencing in the 1950s and 1960s.

Careers in transition

In the 1970s the nature of career paths began to change. By the end of the 1980s, Arthur *et al.* (1989a) adopted a new definition of a career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time.” We can see that this is a broader definition than in the 1950s as it no longer is limited to people advancing in professional fields. This view of careers includes all people who are working regardless of the type of work they do. Thus, from an individual’s perspective, a career describes the course of paid-work activities over a lifetime.

Several social and economic developments influenced the expanded concept of careers. One big factor was the entry of women into a workforce in which they had not previously participated. Legislation against discrimination in the US in the 1960s opened the door for women in organizational life. Researchers and journalists began paying attention to women’s organizational careers which did not match the “ideal” career path. There were many ways in which women’s lives made it especially difficult for them to climb organizational ladders (Kanter, 1977; Gutek and Larwood, 1987). It was clear that jobs in traditional organizations required complete devotion, and women rarely had a stay-at-home spouse to permit that to happen. Women had to devote their time and energy to children and household demands. This led some women to believe that the only way to achieve the “ideal” organizational career was to remain single and not have children (Hennig and Jardim, 1977). Unfortunately, even sacrificing marriage and family was not sufficient to allow women to achieve the success that men had on the traditional managerial career path (Schneer and Reitman, 1993). The media called attention to women being placed on “mommy tracks” by organizations (Ehrlich, 1989) or “bailing out” of corporate life (Taylor, 1986).

Women’s entry into the workforce changed the career situation for many men. Men no longer were guaranteed that their wives would stay home and take care of the household responsibilities. Thus even some men found it difficult to achieve the



ideal career that required long hours, working weekends, frequent travel, and relocation. Dual-career families had to negotiate the responsibilities for work and household demands.

At about the same time as women were entering the workforce in large numbers, changes in social values led theorists to challenge the importance of the traditional (bureaucratic) career as the ideal. In the 1970s, the baby boomers (children of the organization men) were entering work life and were interested in more freedom and individual choice. Influenced by the movements of the 1960s, they were more motivated by psychological success measures (e.g., meaningful work, helping others, staying true to core values) than the objective measures of success (e.g., money, status) that motivated their fathers (Hall, 2004). They were looking for and finding or creating “non-traditional” careers.

Economic critiques of organizational careers escalated in the 1980s and 1990s due to numerous and large-scale downsizing, flattening, and restructuring of organizations (Uchitelle and Kleinfeld, 1996). Many employees lost their jobs through no fault of their own. For the first time, these layoffs hit managerial-level employees. The career ladder disappeared. Seniority did not matter. Thus, the implicit psychological contract between the organization and the employee – security and advancement in return for hard work and loyalty was broken (Rousseau, 1995). Employment gaps became common and people were forced to find new employment after layoffs. Thus they were pushed off the “ideal” career path and had to forge alternate paths involving a lateral or downward move with a new employer or possibly even a career regression from maintenance stage back to exploration stage.

These three factors – women in the workplace, motivation by psychological measures of success, and the breaking of the psychological contract – moved many workers onto alternate career paths. No job was secure; therefore, work should not be the only important part of life. People began to want jobs that met more of their life needs, not only the work needs. Without the promise of job security, people were not willing to sacrifice family due to work demands. No longer was the traditional career the “ideal.”

The present: the new careers

An examination of work histories revealed a new non-traditional career path. Hall called this new

path “protean,” after Proteus, the Greek sea-god who could assume many shapes (Hall, 1976). The new career paths included changes in employers, and perhaps occupations, over time, lateral rather than vertical job moves, and often included interruptions in employment.

The proliferation of non-traditional career paths continued through the 1980s and 1990s when organizations no longer promised promotions and security for good employees; employees no longer expected to offer loyalty. Rousseau (1995) described the new paths as “boundaryless” referring to the existence of career paths out of the bounds of a particular organization. The traditional career is stable and linear in a single organization; the non-traditional is dynamic and transitional in multiple organizations and occupations (Baruch, 2006). The traditional career is directed by the organization, the non-traditional is self-directed (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

The measures of career success also appear to differ for individuals on the different paths. Those on a traditional path have always focused on extrinsic measures of success (compensation and managerial level). Other benefits (e.g., health care, vacation, preferred location) might be welcome, but were not the essence of success. People on alternate paths may value these extrinsic measures, but usually have other requirements for a successful career (Bailyn, 1989). They may wish to do challenging work, but also work that matters to them. They may wish for organizational programs which will help them enhance their career while managing satisfactory work and non-work integration (Moen *et al.*, 2003; Powell and Graves, 2003).

What proportion of the relevant work force is on a traditional or non-traditional path? Current materials on career paths emphasize the new alternate career paths. However, they point out the traditional career still exists, although security is not guaranteed to the individual (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000; Baruch, 2004; Harrington and Hall, 2007). In 1989, the protean career was barely mentioned in a widely used handbook of career theory (Arthur *et al.*, 1989b). In 1999, the *California Management Review* published two articles: one insisted that the traditional career was passé (Cappelli, 1999) while the other argued that it still existed, even though employees were assuming more risk (Jacoby, 1999). Martin and Butler (2000) summarized studies in the US and the UK that indicated the establishment of new paths but that hierarchical ladders still existed. Baruch (2006) also

sees the existence of both types of careers. A study of senior managers in the Australian public sector found traditional ladders the dominant path, although women were tending to the protean path (McDonald *et al.*, 2005). The US Government still provides some hierarchical career paths in its civil service positions and the military.

The authors, in their longitudinal Managerial Career Path Project (MCP) studying MBAs (degrees from 1976–1980), found that one-third of the cohort, who were surveyed three times over a 13-year period, worked full-time for the same organization over that period and were therefore on a traditional path (Reitman and Schneer, 2003). Over a third of the cohort had worked full time for multiple organizations over the time period and were considered on a non-traditional path. Twenty eight percent of the MBAs had moved from full-time corporate employment to alternate paths including self-employment, part-time employment or no employment. It appears that there still exists a bureaucratic career path for some managers such as was promised in the past, although more diverse career paths are the norm.

New careers from the individual's perspective

How people respond to the changes in career paths may be related to their age and consequent expectations. The non-traditional career came into mainstream vision in the 1980s as (1) more women entered the workplace with more families having two wage earners, (2) the baby boomer culture emphasized psychological measures of success such as meaningful work and individual freedom over extrinsic rewards granted by employers, and (3) the psychological contract between employer and employee was broken as job security was no longer granted for devoted hard work. Career paths and expectations for career paths vary for people depending upon where they were in their career paths when these changes occurred.

People who were mid-40s or older were already well established in their careers in the 1980s. They had grown up with the promise of a career ladder and expected the organization to aid their ascent by providing training, mentoring, transfers, and promotions. They were rewarded with retirement benefits at the end of a lifetime of service. This group is sometimes referred to as the traditional generation. Many people in this generational cohort probably managed to continue on with one employer and advance over the previous 20

years despite the changes in employment conditions over this period. Some have made it to top management positions while others are retired with good pensions. The new programs (e.g., flextime, parental leaves) that organizations instituted to support the alternate career paths by the late 1990s were not very valuable to this older cohort as their children were already grown. Clearly some in this cohort faced job loss in the 1980s or 1990s. Those who lost jobs when they were over 50 often had difficulty readjusting. They may have decided to retire early, or had to change fields to gain employment. As this cohort continues to face retirement, they may have alternate choices available (e.g., a variety of phased retirement options, switching to different work) as well as previous choices of volunteering, hobbies or traveling.

People who were 20 to 40 in the 1980s grew up with the ideal of the traditional career path, but they saw it disappearing in the late 1980s through the 1990s. This cohort falls into what many classify as the baby boomer generation. They were in the process of establishing themselves in their careers when the nature of careers started to change and have probably had to adjust to very diverse career paths over the past 20 years. The baby boomers were not handed a lifetime employment plan by their organization as their fathers had been. This is the cohort that really lived through the changes implied by the alternate career paths, most of them found it necessary and desirable to integrate all of life with work.

Family structure also changed in this period as dual-earner couples became predominant to meet financial needs and/or career aspirations. In our longitudinal MCP of MBAs (Schneer and Reitman, 2002), we documented this trend as the percent of MBA men with children who were in dual-career families increased dramatically from 37% in 1987 to 61% in 2000. It was difficult for those in these new family structures to meet the demands of work and still manage family responsibilities, considering that dual-career families spend many more total hours engaged in work than single career families. In one study of middle class, dual-career families (Moen and Sweet, 2003), 39% of the families worked an average of 88 hours per week. The average number of hours worked per week was as high as 110 hours for 21% of the families studied.

One might expect that organizations had to restructure work to address the changing responsibilities of their workers. However, the downsizing that occurred during this period actually led to



greater demands on the employees as organizations became leaner and employees who were not laid off had to take on the work of those who were fired (Jacob and Gerson, 2000). As a result of perceived needs of employees, organizations did begin to introduce new benefits to assist with family obligations. These benefits did not change the basic nature and demands of work (e.g., long hours, travel, relocation). However, they did provide temporary assistance (e.g., flextime, childcare assistance) to deal with the most difficult stages of childrearing. Using these benefits was often perceived to move women off the “fast track” and onto a “mommy track” where their career progress slowed (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Acceptance of alternate career paths and changing work norms remained difficult (Lewis, 2002) as the 1950s ideal career still influenced attitudes, stereotypes and understanding of work and workers.

There are clearly some baby boomers who had traditional families and were on traditional career paths. In our MCPP sample of baby boomer MBAs, we found that in the year 2000, almost a quarter (23%) of the MBA men with children still had a stay-at-home spouse (Schneer and Reitman, 2002). In terms of career paths, about a third of the MBAs had traditional career paths from 1987 to 2000 (Reitman and Schneer, 2003). The majority, however, had alternate career paths. Decisions during life midcourse had no script: stay in the job, change employer, change occupation, obtain more schooling, start one’s own business, take time out, move overseas. This was problematic for the baby boomers who had to figure out their own paths. However, in our MBA study, those on protean career paths were just as successful in terms of income, management level, and career satisfaction as those on traditional paths (Reitman and Schneer, 2003).

People who were under 20 back in the 1980s were just entering the work world. Restructuring and downsizing were the norm and thus they began their work lives with an understanding of the demise of the career ladder and the need to look out for oneself. This cohort is often referred to as Generation X. The questions of “when to marry, to parent, to work, to go to school, to move out of the family home, and sometimes to move back in” no longer had a clear answer (Moen and Roehling, 2005). The majority of people in this cohort experienced alternate career paths including working for several employers, perhaps in several occupations, or taking time off for an MBA or other schooling. They sought out opportunities for

advancement and challenge. The “new” careers were expected by this cohort and they learned how to navigate them on their own.

Currently, there are lots of suggestions for taking charge of one’s own career. Many career researchers (e.g., Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000; Baruch, 2004; Harrington and Hall, 2007) provide lists of details to be considered, including knowing oneself and assessing one’s opportunities, interests, values, and objectives. Drucker (2005) stresses knowing your strengths, your values and how you perform best. People are encouraged to look for lateral opportunities (lattice), not just vertical ones (ladder) (Harrington and Hall, 2007). Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) describe three factors that should be considered by everyone when evaluating employment: authenticity (Is it right for me now?), balance (Can I integrate all parts of my life?), challenge (Am I learning enough?). The relative importance of each of these factors differs for individuals and also changes over time with age and circumstances.

New careers from the organization’s perspective

The new careers do not require that the organization manage the employee’s career. The expectation is that the employee will manage his or her own career, choosing to work for companies that provide opportunities to meet the employee’s objectives. These objectives vary from the traditional pay and promotion to challenge, travel, flexibility, contribution, and autonomy. Given this switch to self-directed careers, the organization’s role in the careers of their employees has become unclear.

Organizations began offering some programs and policies that were helpful in managing the new careers in the 1980s, but they did not really take hold until the 1990s under the label “family-friendly” policies (Still and Strang, 2003). The basic impetus for these policies was to address the concern that the demands of work did not mesh well with the needs of families (Stebbins, 2001; Rapoport *et al.*, 2002; Kochan, 2005; Moen and Roehling, 2005).

We suggest, however, that organizations really should define these as “career-enabling” policies and programs, as family responsibility is only one factor that led people to be unable or unwilling to follow traditional career paths. Single people without children are on alternate career paths too. The question should be: How can programs assist all employees in their career pursuits?

The answer is programs to support the careers of employees in their various new circumstances. Many of these career-enabling programs address time-control issues such as opportunities for part-time work, job sharing, compressed hours, or flextime. Telecommuting options address time-control since they cut down on commute times, but go beyond this to allow employees to live far away from the company or work in an environment which they feel is more conducive to their work. Additional time-related programs are leaves for personal reasons. These allow employees to continue in their careers by providing a paid or unpaid break when family or medical situations make work impossible for a period of time. Leaves through the Family and Medical Leave Act in the US would fit under this category as well as maternity leaves or disability leaves. Other traditional programs that fit under the career-enabling umbrella provide opportunities for knowledge and skill development such as training programs, job rotation, tuition remission, mentoring and educational leaves (Stebbins, 2001; Still and Strang, 2003).

Those administering the programs find that it may be difficult to match the needs of the employee with the needs of the organization. For each program, management must answer some questions. Is it offered by our competitors? How many employees would use it? What barriers do employees see to using the program? Is there evidence on the success of the program in meeting the needs of the employees? What are the costs and benefits to the organization? We present some research exploring these questions for some of the career-enabling programs.

One of the most popular policies, in both the US and Canada, is flexible-time. Moen and Roehling (2005) found that over half of the companies studied offered flextime. A quarter of the employees, representing all ages and life stages, took advantage of flextime options (Moen and Roehling, 2005). This is similar to the 30% usage of flextime finding from a study of a Canadian bank (Spinks and Tombari, 2002). There were also some barriers to using the program, as flextime required approval from one's supervisor and thus could be denied if deemed too difficult to manage. Some employees were reluctant to request the flexible option for fear that they would be seen as less committed workers (Still and Strang, 2003; Valcour and Batt, 2003; Rose, 2007). Amazingly, employees are not always aware of the options available in their company. In one study, almost three-quarters of the employees

were unaware of, or mistaken about, one of five major company policies (Still and Strang, 2003).

Employees who used the flextime program were happy with the help the program offered in managing their work demands. Women tended to use flextime to reduce work family conflicts (Moen and Roehling, 2005). Men were more likely to use it to increase productivity. They do their work when convenient for them and this reduces absenteeism, sick time and overtime. Flextime does have a positive outcome for the employer as it seems to promote employee loyalty and the actual costs to the employer are small (Moen and Roehling, 2005). In the Canadian bank study the authors found no negative impacts on organizational efficiency, employee commitment, customer satisfaction, or the meeting of deadlines (Spinks and Tombari, 2002).

Another important option for workers who want to pursue a career, given other life responsibilities, is to reduce the number of hours worked. The rate of growth in part-time workers is 30% greater than growth in the labor force (Marler *et al.*, 2003). Of course, it is possible that some of these workers are unable to obtain full-time employment as opposed to opting for a part-time arrangement (Baruch, 2004). Our recent data on MBAs suggests that organizations are providing more part-time career options. We found almost three times as many women working part-time in companies in 2007 (14%) than in 1993 (5%). In prior periods, the primary method for finding part-time work options for these MBAs was through self-employment.

It makes economic sense for organizations to develop part-time opportunities for their employees. Employees are paid less, but often are able to accomplish the same tasks as before, actually reducing the cost of their employment to the organization (Moen and Roehling, 2005). The costs for the organization are minimal and there is some evidence that it increases commitment. Schmeer and Reitman (1997) found that while women MBAs working part-time worked more than half the hours for less than half the income, these women had greater career satisfaction than the men and women working full-time. For the employee, there is less income than a full-time job, but when it reduces stress, or when the only other choice is to stop working entirely, it is clearly a positive option. Another study found that 92% of workers who moved from full-time to part-time work said the change had improved their "morale," while 37% said without it they would have had to leave their job (Moen and Roehling, 2005). Within dual-career



couples, this provides an alternative work option for one person, thus reducing the total number of work hours in the family. Usually it is the woman who chooses that option for a while (Marler *et al.*, 2003). Often the part-timer is provided with the ability to return to full-time status in the same organization, maintaining continuity within their career path. At times barriers exist to choosing part time. While over 90% of major Boston law firms offered a part-time option, fewer than 5% of lawyers used it. The biggest barrier was the stigma attached to “breaking the norms of the profession” (Kochan, 2005). It is important to be aware that “part-time” work for professionals may mean a 40 hour work week (as opposed to a 70 hour week); thus it still requires a considerable commitment.

Programs that allow employees to take paid or unpaid leaves, while giving people time off from work, actually are career-enabling as they allow employees to continue their careers despite temporary obstacles. The US government mandates one such leave program. The Family and Medical Leave Act was passed by Congress in 1993 after almost 10 years of debate (Dziech, 2007). It requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for a variety of family and medical reasons. Because of the decline in the traditional family where the father worked and the mother took care of the home, people were losing their jobs to meet a major family responsibility (i.e., taking care of a child undergoing chemotherapy treatments). Federal protection was needed to allow workers to take leaves from work without jeopardizing their employment. Statistics on use of the program show that only one half of eligible workers actually applied for leaves (Moen and Roehling, 2005). The main barrier to using the program is that it is unpaid and employees cannot afford the loss of salary. In addition, some feel that the company culture is not supportive of the leaves and they have concerns about job security and advancement upon return (Moen and Roehling, 2005).

Surveys in 1995 and 2000 indicated that a large majority of employees who used leave programs were satisfied (Dziech, 2007). However, Judiesch and Lyness (1999) found that men and women taking paid or unpaid leaves received fewer promotions and lower raises compared with those who took no leaves. Reitman and Schneer (2005) found that having a gap, voluntary or involuntary, in one’s career has a significant negative impact on one’s later career success (income and managerial level). In terms of organizational outcomes, there is

some evidence that there was reduced turnover, improved morale, and greater loyalty among women who took leaves (Dziech, 2007). Employers report that there is no reduction in profitability or productivity due to the leaves (Gornick and Meyers, 2003).

Most of the writings about firms that support alternate career paths focus on large firms. There is less information on smaller firms, probably because those arrangements are made as needed if both parties agree. Tsui and Wu (2005) suggest that smaller firms may actually do well on employee–employer relationships by adopting a “mutual investment approach.” The employer must respect the alternate path chosen by the employee, and the employee value the firm’s needs. Both must work to develop this mutual respect in a variety of areas, including a relatively long-term commitment to each other. This kind of commitment is usually not expected in the new career paths. Two examples of firms for whom this has worked are Southwest Airlines and SAS (Tsui and Wu, 2005). Konrad and Deckop (2001) also point out how smaller firms are attempting to compete for good workers by supporting employees careers. Most of the inducements are “traditional” with sign-on bonuses, higher wages, and health care benefits. However, flexible hours are also on the list.

Cooper (2005) notes that the changes described in the US are occurring in European firms. He is optimistic on the success of the alternate career path for individuals in organizations of various sizes. Of course, some programs which support alternative career paths are required by law in many European countries (Gornick and Meyers, 2003; Neidermeyer, 2007).

The future

It may be dangerous to predict the future, but it is impractical to ignore it. We start with the easy part. We expect that future careers will continue to be non-traditional. If there are traditional continuous upward climbs in one organization, they will be the exceptions to a myriad of alternative career paths that involve changing organizations, breaks in employment, shifts in hours, and transferring occupations. Even for those careers that are “traditional,” they will probably last for only a portion of an employee’s lifetime, require some lateral instead of upward moves, and lack the promise of job security. If we revisit the factors that gave impetus to the creation of alternate career paths – the increase of women and dual-career families in the

workforce, diminished job security, and motivation by psychological measures of success – we expect the trend to continue.

There will continue to be a high percentage of women in the work force, particularly in jobs that require more education. Women have been enrolling and graduating from higher education institutions in greater numbers than men (Dziech, 2007). In 2004 in the US, almost 10 million women were enrolled compared to a little over 7 million men. Women are unlikely to quit working when they have children due to their own career aspirations and/or the high costs of raising children. The staggering cost of college, along with the need to save money for retirement, puts pressure on both parents to work. This situation is exacerbated by the current societal pressure to focus on giving children all that life has to offer (i.e., designer clothing, the latest electronic gadgets, private school).

The values and views of workers will also continue to change as the baby boomer generation moves toward retirement and Generation X becomes a greater percentage of the workforce. The younger generation never grew up with the traditional career path as the ideal. They are interested in having more control over their work lives, valuing independence, demanding that jobs utilize their talents, and that company practices are ethical (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2000; Baruch, 2004).

Job security is not likely to increase as organizations continue to face a competitive, uncertain global business environment. Trends for downsizing, outsourcing and offshoring are likely to persist requiring employees to locate new employment. Managing one's own career to be sure that you have marketable skills and strong professional networks will be critical to career success. The continued lack of job security is also likely to increase the trend toward dual-career families as the risks of relying on one job for economic survival are too great.

These pressures leading to alternate career paths will thus continue in the future. The alternate career paths desired may be different than the ones we know now due to future shifts in the working population. Currently, more than half of the workforce is the baby boomer generation, born between 1946 and 1964. As the baby boomers age, so does the average age of the workforce. This situation is not likely to be rectified as birthrates have been very low in the US as well as other Western countries.

An additional factor adding to the aging of the workforce is that people are remaining healthy as they live longer, so they are likely to want to continue working longer. They may also need to continue working to supplement retirement income. People are not saving enough on their own, and employers are not contributing as they did previously to pensions or health care costs. Flexibility in work hours and work place will probably be desirable to accommodate health issues and other life interests as people age. These older workers might be interested in phased retirement options or reduced hours at points in their careers. They may look for new ways to earn money and contribute to society through changing occupations or starting their own businesses.

Tomorrow's workers will also be more diverse (e.g., disabilities, LGBT communities, new immigrant populations, diverse religions and cultures) and will have their own interpretation of career success (Konrad, 2006). As all employees seek to fashion their careers, organizations will need to provide career-enabling programs if they hope to attract and retain qualified employees. The traditional stereotypes for success must be modified due to the new career mix. Successful career paths need to be available to all employees not just white men with stay-at-home spouses, of a certain ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and citizenship.

There are several relatively new issues that may gain traction in the near future. One idea is to establish a limit for full-time work hours for salaried employees that will allow for work-life integration. This is in response to some evidence that Americans feel overworked (Schor, 1991). National data suggest that the work hour demands for salaried workers are actually increasing as the percentage of men working over 50 hours a week has gone up from 21% in 1970 to 26.5% in 2000 (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). The percentages for women working those long hours more than doubled over the same period (5.2–11.3%). In our recent survey of MBAs, we found that over a third worked more than 50 hours a week. Both men and women working over 60 hours a week would prefer to work about 21 hours less; those working from 50 to 59 hours would prefer to work 12.5 hours less (Jacobs and Gerson, 2000). This suggests that the preferred number of hours is about 40 per week. Other studies of workers and hours show similar findings (Clarkberg and Merola, 2003).

There is likely to be resistance to a new work hour limit because of a culture which has an established



norm of long work hours for salaried employees. These hours are viewed as evidence that workers are fully committed to their jobs. Everyone recognizes that changing the norm may be difficult as it would involve letting go of old assumptions and rethinking the nature of work (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Rapoport *et al.*, 2002). Epstein and Kalleberg (2004) ask us to consider how the “normal” hours were determined and ask whether they could be more flexible, giving workers more control of their time. For work reorganization to be successful, work culture also needs to change (Burke, 2002). Evaluations of performance should focus on achievements unrelated to “face-time.”

An additional problem in establishing more reasonable work hours is the 24/7 economy (Presser, 2004). Owing to technology advances (e.g., internet, Blackberry), employees are always reachable and thus are expected to be available to the organization outside of their official work hours. Globalization exacerbates this problem as work needs to be conducted at all hours in order to coordinate with employees working in various time zones around the world.

There are a number of benefits to reducing work hour requirements. If work redesign is done well, it will increase efficiency, thus reducing costs. Reduced hours would be an attraction for many good employees (Barnett and Hall, 2001). There should be reduced stress/health issues for employees which will diminish absences, tardiness, and turnover. Firms that establish such a norm will earn a competitive edge. We expect strong domestic and global competition for employees in the future and thus organizations will need to be able to successfully compete. Some EU countries already have work hour limits in place.

Another new issue is the acceptance of career interruptions as a normal part of career paths rather than an indication that the person is deficient. Owing to the realities of the competitive pressures on organizations resulting in closings, downsizing, and restructuring, many people have experienced interruptions in their career paths. In our MCPP study, we found that more than half of the MBAs had discontinuous employment histories (Reitman and Schneer, 2005). Despite the prevalence of alternate career paths that include gaps, there continues to be some bias against them. As we expected, two decades ago, MBAs (1975–1980 graduates) with career interruptions earned 22% less income than comparable MBAs with continuous career histories (Schneer and Reitman, 1990).

Unexpectedly, this penalty persisted throughout their careers (Reitman and Schneer, 2005). Even for a younger generation of MBAs (1990–1995 graduates), we found the same 22% income penalty for a gap (Schneer and Reitman, 2006).

Individual views on these discontinuous career paths have improved. We found that initially career satisfaction was lower for the older cohort MBAs with employment gaps than those without gaps, but over time their level of satisfaction recovered (Reitman and Schneer, 2005). The younger generation MBAs experienced no diminishment in career satisfaction due to employment gaps (Schneer and Reitman, 2006). This suggests that the negative psychological stigma for alternate careers has disappeared but the “ideal” continuous path is still most highly rewarded by organizations.

The new career paths are here to stay. Organizations and individuals need to embrace the concepts of the new careers. Work and the rest of life are intertwined and decisions and experiences at work are not separate from the rest of life. These changes in career concept should be considered in the context of overall changes in our world. They are responding to the shift from an industrial to a service economy, to the rapid pace of technological change, and economic globalization. They have also been impacted by changing demographics, politics, and culture. A change in societal philosophy might change the climate for adoption of new programs enabling alternate careers.

Management actions

What is the role for the organization in determining an employee’s career when the employee is advised to manage his/her own career? For the organization, this new implicit contract, in which upward mobility and security is not guaranteed, provides flexibility to respond to the changing business environment quickly. This has been manifest in the bouts of downsizing and restructuring of organizations in recent years. Today’s organizations have tended toward short-term optimization strategies rather than planning for the medium or long term. However, it seems more appropriate for the firm to think of its employees as its resources for the future instead of costs to jettison when times get tough (Brown, 2007).

Organizations will need to develop appropriate policies for enabling employees’ careers in the new circumstances for their own and the employees’ benefit. The role of the organization should be to support the careers of its employees, to help all

employees determine and establish their best possible career path – hopefully, but not necessarily in that company. Companies that have the reputation of doing this successfully should end up with the best employees. The inducements previously considered good practice offered to acquire and retain desired employees should not be abandoned. The specific policies and programs may be different, but the attitude of helping employees to fashion their careers in a beneficial way for them, should remain.

There would be a number of benefits for the firm. Employee perception of organizational support would help motivate the employees while they are working for the firm and increase the probability of retaining the best workers – including future leaders. Organizations should recognize that the best employees would be those most likely to heed the advice to manage their own careers and seek work that helps to achieve their career goals. Organizations would want those employees to find that their greatest opportunities lie inside the company, not elsewhere. Institutional memory will be better preserved due to lower turnover rates. Companies would also earn the reputation of treating employees well which will enable the firm to hire the best people. Getting this information onto the internet is critical as younger generation applicants look for career-enabling programs when choosing an employer.

In general, many companies have found implementing career-enabling programs was helpful to their continued success. Konrad and Mangel (2000) found that these programs have a positive effect on productivity, particularly among women and professionals. They also reduce conflict between work and other aspects of life. Workers will work harder to retain a job with these programs. The programs also enhance the social responsibility reputation of the firm (Konrad and Mangel, 2000).

Encouraging flexibility of thought in the organization will be important in hiring and retaining

desired workers. Organizations will need to accept that good workers may go elsewhere to gain new skills, and they should leave the door open for the employees to return. If all organizations are providing opportunities for their employees to develop, then all organizations will benefit even though employees switch companies.

What can the organization offer to replace the ladder? Organizations can provide lateral moves, offer training opportunities, encourage learning in the organization, or outside and support innovative ideas. What can the organization offer to replace employment security? Organizations can support workers' employability by offering training options, lateral moves, and short-term commitments on work schedules, salary, and benefits.

What can individual managers do? Even if the organization does not do very much to support alternate careers, managers can try to support their subordinates by negotiating arrangements to provide them with the flexibilities and other opportunities they desire (Barnett and Hall, 2001). The manager should try to understand what success means to each subordinate and help the employee design a career path that meets his/her needs.

When employees are supported in their career pursuits, they will be able to be more engaged and have a positive impact on the bottom line. Since every company is different with respect to work requirements and cultural assumptions, there is no blueprint to follow. However, support from top management is definitely essential. It is necessary, and possible, to enable employees to reach their career goals while increasing organizational effectiveness (Rapoport *et al.*, 2002; Kossek and Friede, 2006). The business case must be made clear as the importance of enabling new career paths cannot be ignored. It is essential that the organizational culture embraces these changes for the future success of the company and their employees.

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