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The Experience of Women Who Advance Through Careers in the
Absence of Job Development Framework
A Grounded Theory Approach by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

In

Organizational Psychology

at

John F. Kennedy University

June, 2009

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Introduction

Women in the Labor Market

The number of women in the workplace continues to rise. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 1970 and 2004 the participation of women in the labor market (ages 16 and older) increased from 43% to 59% (total 2004 employed population was 223,357,000; Women: 115,647,000; Men: 107,710,000). Statistics indicate that in 2004, 33% of women age 25-64 held a college degree compared to about 11% in 1970 and, approximately 1.3 million women earned salaries at or below the Federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Whitmarsh, Brown, Cooper, Hawkins-Rodgers & Wentworth (2007) state that a research project conducted by Catalyst, (an organization that seeks to support and encourage women's career endeavors) in 2003 revealed that 26% of women who were on the verge of transitioning to senior levels did not want the promotion offered to them. These statistics suggest that further investigation of motivation and decision making processes of women are warranted.

What are the career development experiences of women? Do they feel they are earning an adequate salary? Are their careers advancing at their desired pace? Is their career advancement being supported by their organization and their family? What influences the decisions of women as opportunities are presented to them?

This project will explore aspects of early career development theory; identify some of the key contributors to career development and their application to the experience of women today. The study will specifically focus on female employees who have advanced from entry level positions into supervision, management or leadership positions within an organization

which lacks a formalized career development framework.

The Proposed Organization

This study will take place in an organization that has conducted scientific and engineering research for over 70 years. At the proposed organization, there are approximately 4,000 employees, (scientist/engineers, administrators, clerical assistants, technicians and students) where career paths are offered for scientists, but other segments of the population are ignored. At this organization there is a widespread feeling that salaries are not equitable, that promotion opportunities are limited and that the structured path from the entry level positions into supervision/management is nonexistent; and the journey, if accomplished, is difficult to maneuver. There are 821 women in career positions (excluding students). There are only 63 or 7.7% in Sr. Management or leadership positions.

At this organization there is no succession-planning program. The majority of the leadership is aging baby boomers, nearing retirement age, who are not thinking about who the future leaders might be. It would be devastating if even 5-10% of the current leadership decided to retire without appropriate successors identified. In the last 25 years there has been no organized focus on career development. There was no support for it. No one talked about the need for it and there had been limited resources available to prepare the next wave of supervisors, managers and leaders. However, efforts are being made to collaborate with a nearby university to obtain resources. Over the years, consistent leadership in Human Resources has been problematic because of high turnover in the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) position. The current CHRO has begun to introduce standard development practices, such as succession planning to the organization. In recent months there have been discussions

to provide resources to the scientific staff and provide supervision training to all current supervisors.

In 2006 the organization conducted its *first* annual Workplace Climate Survey (2006). The area of job satisfaction received the lowest overall rating. There were significant differences between the responses of men and women. On each of the following items, the women's perspectives were less favorable than the men's: feelings of being challenged, utilization of skills, reasonableness of workload, recognition for contributions, and access to advancement opportunities.

In a preliminary interview with a Sr. Executive, support for development of staff was not present. There was extreme support given to *hiring the best* but not to developing current staff *to be the best*. It was stated that development of employees was not central to the core mission of the organization, and development was best left to the university system or community colleges.

It is hoped that this study will provide insight into women's experiences, motivations, decision making processes and determine what relationship there is, if any, between employee motivation and organizational support for the careers of women. Because women do seem to succeed in their careers in the absence of structured career development tools, this study hopes to identify the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators that enabled these women to progress.

Summary

Much of the literature suggests that the majority of research was conducted on professional women and has excluded women in non-managerial positions. Available research focuses primarily on professional women; CEO's, professors, lawyers, and doctors. These

studies tend to concentrate on how they *maintain or operate* in their professional positions and do not usually center on their *journey* to the top. Hite and McDonald (2003), in their study of career aspirations of non-managerial women found that there are various intrinsic and extrinsic factors that directly influence career choices. In a study of employees (not just women) in technical and lower level supervision positions conducted by London (1983), he identified three domains of individual characteristics that could be used as indicators of career motivation: career resilience, career insight, and career identity.

This study will use quantitative methods to survey the participants' perceptions about their experience and to gather historical data (% increase in salary, time spent in various job classifications etc.). A grounded theory approach will be used to interview six to ten women to gain insights into their specific perceptions of their career experiences and to try to determine if there are similarities in the factors affecting their careers.

It is hoped that the outcomes of this proposed study will contribute much needed information about the experience of women as they journeyed from non-managerial to management positions, and that the outcomes will be able to be used as a direct intervention to build a career development program for women.

Literature Review

Women and Career Development Theory

Career development as defined by the American Counseling Association is, “The total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to influence the nature and significance of work in the total life span of any given individual” (Zunker, 2002, p. 9).

“Career planning and development activities are to the individual what strategic planning is to the firm” (Kaye, 1985, p. 2). Kaye believes that a company that does not provide career resources will not reach the full potential that their human capital *could* provide. She suggests that companies use strategic planning to assess their environment, looking for opportunities and threats, and that they assess their weaknesses and strengths in order to prepare strategies to ensure success. Kaye also states that career development, “Is not simply another human resource activity, but instead an integrating concept that systematically ties together and builds upon human resource programs that already exist, so that they simultaneously support individual and organizational growth.”

Frank Parsons, one of the key contributors to the career guidance movement, in 1909 identified a three-part formulation to career development that the employee must understand.

1. A clear understanding of yourself, aptitudes, abilities, interests, resources, limitations and other qualities. (*Studying the individual*)
2. A knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensations, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work. (*Surveying the occupations*)

3. True reasoning of the relations of these two groups of facts. (*Match individuals to job*)
(Zunker, 2002, p. 11)

This became known as the Trait and Factor Theory. “The key characteristic of this theory is the assumption that individuals have unique patterns of ability and traits that can be objectively measured and correlated with the requirements of various types of jobs.” (Zunker, 2002, p. 26).

Zunker (2002) highlights Donald Super’s work regarding the self-concept theory. Super defined this theory as one which, “Indicates that the vocational self-concept develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences. Ultimately, differences between self and others are assimilated. As experiences become broader in relation to awareness of the world of work, the more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed.” (p. 36). Zunker believes that the vocational self-concept is the driving force that sets the foundation for a person’s career patterns. Super created the vocational development stages, which provide the framework for vocational behavior and attitudes. They are placed side-by-side in Table #1 to show the correlation between the stages of life and the vocational development process as it relates to age.

Table #1 Super's Developmental Stages and Vocational Development Tasks

Developmental Stages			Vocational Development Tasks		
Stage	Age	Characteristics	Task	Age	Characteristics
Growth	Birth-15	Characterized by development of capacity, attitudes, interests and needs associated with self-concepts	Crystallization	14-18	A cognitive process period of formulating a general vocational goal through awareness of resources, contingencies, interests, values, and planning for the preferred occupation
Exploratory	15-24	Characterized by a tentative phase in which choices are narrowed but not finalized	Specification	18-21	A period of moving from tentative vocational preferences toward a specific vocational preference
			Implementation	21-24	A period of completing training for vocational preference and entering employment
Establishment	24-44	Characterized by trial and stabilization through experiences	Stabilization	24-35	A period of confirming preferred career by actual work experience and use of talents to demonstrate career choice as an appropriate one
Maintenance	45-64	Characterized by a continual adjustment process to improve working position and situation	Consolidation	35+	A period of establishment in career advancement, status and seniority
Decline	65+	Characterized by pre-retirement considerations reduced work output, and eventual retirement			

(Zunker, 2002, p. 37)

Super takes the information from Table #1 and illustrates how a person might cycle and recycle through the development tasks as they encounter life's situations. For instance at any point in their life, a person could possibly find their job situation unsatisfactory and may return to the exploration phase to learn about other job opportunities or careers. See Table #2.

Table #2 Super's Developmental Tasks Through the Life Span

Life Stage	Age			
	Adolescence 14-25	Early Adulthood 24-45	Middle Adulthood 46-65	Late Adulthood 65+
Decline	Giving less time to hobbies	Reducing sports participation	Focusing on essential activities	Reducing working hours
Maintenance	Verifying current occupational choice	Making occupational position secure	Holding own against competition	Keeping up what is still enjoyed
Establishment	Getting started in a chosen field	Settling down in a permanent position	Developing new skills	Doing things one has always wanted to do
Exploration	Learning more about opportunities	Finding opportunity to do desired work	Identifying new problems to work on	Finding a good retirement spot
Growth	Developing a realistic self-concept	Learning to relate to others	Accepting one's limitations	Developing non-occupational roles

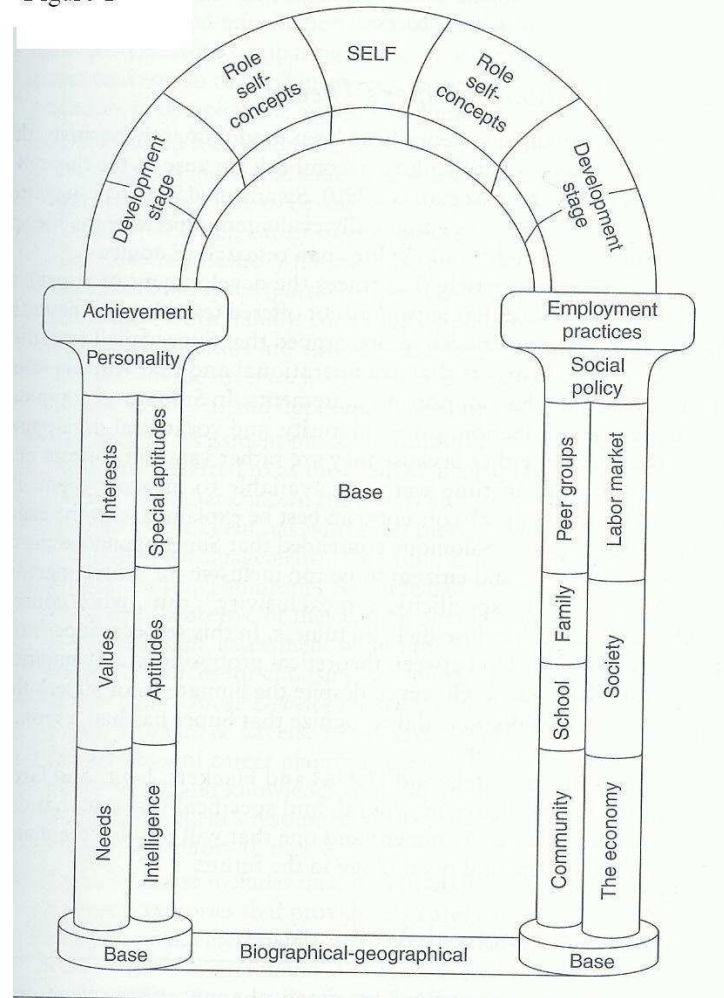
(Zunker, 2002, p. 38)

Super's theories can be summed up as:

1. Career development is a lifelong process occurring through defined developmental periods.
2. The self-concept is being shaped as each phase of life exerts its influence on human behavior (Zunker, 2002, p. 41).

In 1990, Super developed the archway model. See Figure 1. Two pillars support the Self, at the top of the archway. The left pillar is comprised of the person's physiological characteristics and the right pillar is comprised of the societal aspects of life. The basic principles are, "That societal factors interact with the persons biological and psychological characteristics as he or she functions and grows" (Zunker, 2002, p. 41). Super suggests that, "Interactive learning is the

Figure 1



fundamental concept that forms the keystone (self) of the archway as the individual encounters people, ideas, facts and objects in personal development. Career guidance programs that incorporate developmental concepts, must address a broad range of counseling techniques and intervention strategies" (Zunker, 2002, p. 41).

Adult Lifecycle and Career Stages

One facet of knowing oneself is to understand the stages of life and how they apply to the person's current situation. Levinson identifies ten life stages that can be correlated to

Cummings and Worley's career stages. (See Table #3) During the early to mid twenties, persons just entering the workforce are not confident in their skills, abilities and potential, especially if they are not attending college. During this period, they are gaining awareness of self, their likes and dislikes about life and the work world. At 30, they may have made some decisions, selected a career path, and may be focusing on advancement and the career ladder. During their 40's and 50's they may have achieved success and are now looking for opportunities to give back to others. This is a time when a person becomes more secure in who they are as a person, or they could experience a midlife crisis. If so, a re-discovery phase would begin.

Common themes found in the literature express the importance that a person knows and understands what is going on within themselves and their connection to their external environment to adequately know what decisions to make about their careers. Levinson's life stages and Cumming and Worley's career stages can be used to assist in this effort. See Table #3.

Table #3 Life Stages and Career Stages

Levinson's Life Stages			Cummings & Worley Career Stages		
Period	Age	Tasks	Stage	Age	Characteristics
Early-adult transition	1-22	Terminate pre-adulthood taking steps into the adult world. Explore possibilities and make tentative commitments	Establishment Stage	21-26	Onset of career. Uncertainty of competence and potential. Dependent on others, especially bosses and more experienced workers. Making initial choices re: career, organization, job
Entering the adult world	22-28	Create a first major life structure. Attempt to pursue a dream. Separate home, attempting to pursue dream			
Age-30 transition	28-33	Become aware of the flaws in the first life structure and re-assess it. Reconsider choices and make new ones as needed.	Advancement Stage	26-40	Employees become independent contributors concerned about achieving and advancing in chosen careers. Learned to perform autonomously & need less guidance. Settling down stage-attempts to clarify range of long term career options
Culmination of early adulthood: settling down	33-40	Create second adult life structure, invest oneself in work, family friendships, community. Establish a niche in society and strive to make it, achieve the dream.			
Midlife transition	40-45	A bridge from early to middle adulthood: Asking basic questions – “What have I done with my life?” or “What do I want for myself and others?”	Maintenance Stage	40-60	Leveling off and holding on to career successes. May have achieved greatest advancements and are now concerned with helping less-experienced subordinates. If dissatisfied with career progress, this time can be conflicting and depressing (mid-life crisis). Reappraise circumstances, search for alternatives, redirect career efforts. Success can lead to continued growth, failure can lead to early decline
Entering middle adulthood	45-50	Create a new life structure, often with a new job, or marriage, or change in nature of work life.			
Age-50 transition	50-55	Similar to age-30 transition; a minor adjustment to the middle-adult life structure.			
Culmination of middle adulthood	55-60	Build a second midlife structure, analogous to settling down in middle adulthood.	Withdrawal Stage	60+	Concerned with leaving career. Letting go of organizational attachments and preparing for retirement. Imparting knowledge to others. If satisfied with career can result in feelings of fulfillment and a willingness to leave job behind
Late-adult transition	60-65	Termination of middle adulthood and bridge to late adulthood. Prepare for retirement and physical declines of old age			
Late adulthood	65+	Create a new structure in life that will suit new patterns in retirement and the increasing physical declines. Cope with illness. Deal with psychological issue of loss of youth			

(Bee & Bjorklund, 2004, p.45)

(Cummings & Worley, 1985, p. 397)

Career Development for Men vs. Women

“Career counseling as widely practiced today, evolved at a time when the typical career client was young, male, White, able-bodied, publicly heterosexual and ethnically homogeneous (White immigrants from Western Europe) (Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2002, p. 291).” Current career development concepts continue to reflect male worldviews such as the separation of work and family roles in people’s lives; a reverence for individualism and autonomy; the centrality of work in people’s lives; a linear, progressive, and rational nature of the career development process; and the structure of opportunity (Cook et al 2002; O’Neil and Bilimora 2005).

Women tend not to adopt the framework identified above. Studies have shown for women, that career paths often are not linear, that family situations influence career choices, and that current career counseling methods, in general, focus on work roles and do not always consider the other roles in which women might operate, such as, family and community. Before making career decisions, women often consider whether or not a career choice will negatively impact their future state of marriage, their mate, or their children (Cook et al 2002).

Careers of Non-Managerial Women

Much of the research with women is conducted with professional women; CEO’s, professors, lawyers, and doctors. These studies tend to focus on how they *maintain* or operate in their professional position but they do not usually focus on their *journey* to the top.

Hite & McDonald (2003) conducted a study using focus group methodology to examine the career aspirations of twenty-six non-managerial women. They chose this method because they believed that, “Focus group discussions provide a forum where subjects can interact with

one another in a non-threatening manner” (p. 225). Six questions were asked inquiring about their career plans, changes to these plans, how their current job fit with their career plans, what had helped and hindered the fulfillment of their career plans, and how their organization had assisted in these plans.

Career Motivation

London (1983) defines career motivation as, “The set of individual characteristics and associated career decisions and behaviors that reflect the person’s career identity, insight into career factors affecting his or her career, and resilience in the face of unfavorable career conditions” (p. 620). Noe, Noe & Bachhuber (1990) conducted a study using a 26 item survey to measure career motivation. They found that career motivation for employees may have been linked with the employee’s capacity to obtain support from a the supervisor. This research suggests that supervisors can supply specific types of support that are directly beneficial to the employee.

Mentoring

There are various definitions of mentoring; however it can be distilled into a simple sentence: “Mentors are influential people who significantly help others reach their major life goals” (Lee & Nolan 1998, p. 4). Catalyst (an organization that seeks to support and encourage women’s career endeavors) identifies the lack of mentoring and exclusion from informal career networks as one of the 14 barriers to retaining and advancing women (Advancing Women in Business, 1998). A subsequent study conducted in 2003 by Catalyst cited the top barrier to advancement as the, “Lack of significant general line experience.” In 2006 women made up 46% of the labor force. Catalyst believes that the reason women are not being promoted is not

because they are in short supply. It's because they aren't being *perceived* as equipped to step into the higher level positions (Catalyst, 2003).

In a study of 269 women administrators conducted by Lee & Nolan (1998) 45% of the respondents identified having at least one mentor. Of that group, 37% had more than one mentor. An interesting note is that 47% of the original group did not have mentors. The organization studied identified 48% of its national workforce as female and only 10% of its state directors were women, and only 25% of administrators had been women in its entire 79 year history. A survey conducted by White, Cox & Cooper (1992), found that women stated that not having a mentor impacted their careers negatively, and they believed that mentors could have helped: in dealing with company politics, in obtaining access to information, in providing career development opportunities and in giving emotional support. Simonsen (1997) states that, "Mentoring relationships are typically a contributing element in a development culture" (p. 157). She also suggests that it doesn't matter if the relationship is formal or informal, but when a formal facilitated program is sponsored by an organization a message is conveyed that the organization values the insight and institutional knowledge of its employees. Grzeda (1999) suggests that when an organization provides career development programs they are demonstrating true concern for its employees.

The Business Scene

The contract between employer and employee has paralleled the history of our country. Packer (2000, p. 42) states that, "The sociology of the employment contract has been altered. During the past century our employment culture in the United States has moved from exploitation to paternalism to free agency." Historically the workforce was exploited by forcing

employees to work long hours in horrendous conditions. Then the unions entered the situation and moved the work scene towards paternalism, where the company is responsible for the health and well being of their workers. Lifetime employment became the expectation at some companies. Or, long-term employment and loyalty was the norm where the employee worked for 40-50 years at one company with the expectation of receiving a gold watch on their last day of work. Kaye (1985, p. 3) points out that, "Today's workers do not show the blind faith or undying loyalty to their employers that those of a decade or so ago demonstrated. Their loyalty seems to be to themselves."

Changes to the Business Scene

Simenson (1997) points out that with this changing business relationship that employers are looking at employees to assess how marketable or adaptable the employee has been to the changing organizational needs. The days of being the *good worker* (someone who has a long history of showing up to work on time, is dependable and doesn't cause trouble) just isn't enough anymore. "Longevity of employment is no longer valued for its own sake, and employees must continue to add value to the organization." (p. 31). She also suggests that employers need to develop policies that support marketability instead of longevity and that employees need to connect to the organization's changing needs, and adapt to meet those needs. Kaye (1985) created a list of benefits to the organization, supervisors and employees, which can be used to educate the decision makers about possible non-tangible outcomes. Table #4 identifies the possible benefits of the availability of career development programs to the organization, the supervisor and the employee.

Table #4 Benefits of Career Development

Benefits to the Organization	Benefits to Mgrs/Supervisors	Benefits to Employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill Building-Increasing the abilities of employees in their current jobs and enhancing their abilities to adapt to task changes and technological advances • Talent Matching-Providing information about employees' abilities and aspirations to establish a match between organizational needs and individual capabilities • Productivity and morale-Reducing counterproductive forces i.e. turnover, absenteeism, grievances resulting from morale problems among employees who view themselves as having little opportunity to advance • Motivation-Stimulating increased employee effectiveness among those who value a climate of growth, challenge and shared organizational responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication-Increasing communication between managers and employees about their current and future performance • Information-Providing managers and supervisors with better information about staffing needs and the possibilities for addressing them by developing skills or changing the patters of using talent • Developmental Responsibilities-Assisting managers in acquiring skills to counsel and coach employees about developmental concerns • Identification-Supporting efforts to identify employees who can be moved to other responsibilities • Special Projects-Providing inventories of talents that may be called upon when projects require assembling a task group to meet temporary needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-knowledge-Understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, desires and needs for life and career integration • Organizational knowledge-Gaining current information that provides greater understanding of personal possibilities and future opportunities within the organization • Sense of Purpose-Focusing on clear multiple goals for the future and developing ways to meet those goals • Organizational Identity-Feeling a greater commitment to organizational purposes • Skill Building-Learning new skills that can aid in accomplishing current tasks and providing wider options for the future • Personal Satisfaction-Developing self-esteem from growth and learning

(Kaye, 1985, p. 16)

Waterman (1994) suggests that instead of focusing on *employment* that the new focus should be on *employability*. This means that employees should now focus on having competitive skills to lend to various types of employment opportunities, because the time of *one job, one company* is long gone.

One of the principles in Jim Collins' book *Good to Great* (2001) is that a leader should look at the current skills *and* potential skills that an employee brings to the work environment, and then determine how to best use those skills. He calls it *First Who...Then What*. Which means get the right people on the bus and in the right seat. He suggests that if a leader begins:

“with *who rather than what* you can more easily adapt to a changing world” (p. 42).

Meeting Business Needs

Employers must understand their current and future business needs in order to maximize the potential of their current and future employees. Kaye (1985) states that, “A company cannot succeed in meeting its corporate goals if it is plagued by high turnover rates and low productivity, or if it has an inadequate base from which to draw fresh management talent. How to attract, keep and fully use talented innovative employees who have their own personal concerns has become a basic corporate need” (p.4). Most managers do not have this mindset.

Retention/Recruiting vs. Career Development

Fiscal benefits are gained by developing employees versus hiring from the outside. The American Society of Training and Development’s (ASTD) 2004 state of the industry report states that the average annual training expenditure per employee in ASTD’s broadest sample of organizations was \$995 per employee. Rosenberg (2000, p. 3) suggests the average cost of recruiting for a new position is \$79,000 based on an annual salary of \$50,000. Recruitment costs for managers and hi-tech positions would be higher. This takes into account the cost of interviewing, the loss in having a position vacant, training and orienting the new hire, loss of productivity of those conducting the training, cost of processing the hire paperwork through human resources, and advertising costs.

Employee Motivators

Kaye (1985) lists several motivators related to career development, which can help a supervisor suggest or create opportunities for their employees (pg 2). See Table #5.

Table #5 Career Motivational Factors

- Increased personal responsibility for their careers
- Increased career opportunities
- Increased participation in decision making
- More meaningful work, leading to a feeling of contribution to society
- Increased job challenge and satisfaction
- More opportunities for self-actualization
- More on the job learning experiences
- More openness and honesty from management
- More return on their investment in the organization. Wanting to know that it cares

Summary

Originally career counseling practices were developed to assess and develop white, able bodied, heterosexual men whose career trajectory was a linear experience. Research has shown that women's career experiences tend to differ from their male counterparts and tend not to follow the familiar linear path and are impacted by family and community. Much of the current research with women focuses on professional women; however more attention is now being given to non-managerial, non-professional women. Efforts are underway to understand what intrinsic and extrinsic factors impact career motivation and how mentoring affects career progression.

Methodology

Much of the research concentrating on the career paths of women focuses on professional women after they have attained success. Reviewing the careers of women before they became managers is a necessary step towards understanding how to help women reach the higher level positions in an organization. Organization based initiatives can assist in this process (Hite and McDonald 2003). Motivation seems to be a key contributor in career success and a survey measuring career resilience, insight and identity will be a part of this study. This research project will use a grounded theory approach and interview six women who have essentially grown up within an organization that does not provide a formal career development framework.

Sample

The sample will consist of six to ten female employees of a single organization in the San Francisco Bay Area. The sample will include women who have advanced from clerical, entry level positions to positions of supervision management/leadership. The criteria for the participants will include: they must be women who are employed at the selected organization and who began as Administrative Assistants and have advanced to a position of supervision or leadership. Participants will be contacted by the researcher (me) directly in person, by phone, or by email. I will confirm that each individual meets the criteria for the study and place those who do on a selection list. Those who do not meet the criteria will be advised accordingly and thanked for their consideration.

Data Collection

The qualitative research design consists of a formal semi-structured interview process, in which the researcher will ask the selected participants to answer certain pre-defined questions, along with possible follow-up and clarifying questions that arise as the information from the participant unfolds. All participants will be asked the same questions, but the interview may be modified as it is delivered, to fit the participant's unique experiences. Participants will also be asked to provide a timeline of their career path identifying their classifications and educational pursuits, and the possible interventions that may have influenced their career choices. Demographic data will be obtained through the use of a simple questionnaire.

Interviews

Participants will be interviewed individually. Each interview will be recorded in its entirety, with the permission of the participant, and it will be transcribed by the researcher or a third party transcriber. The researcher will review the data, develop codes, and define emerging themes and relevant categories. Data will be compared and contrasted and conclusions may be drawn. A hypothesis may be formed for later evaluation.

Each participant will be interviewed once, with the possibility of a follow up phone call for clarification or expansion of a thought or view expressed by the participant. All questions will be open-ended and will be asked in a non-leading, neutral manner that allows the participants to express themselves in their own words. Participant questions are listed below.

Interview Questions

Primary questions are in bold. The others are follow-up questions that will be asked if the interviewee does not address them in her response to the primary question. Additional questions may be asked, depending on the participant's own story and responses.

- 1. What were some of your early career plans?**
 - a. What influenced your choosing a certain career path?
- 2. How have these plans changed over the years?**
- 3. What are your current career plans?**
 - a. How has your family influenced your choices?
- 4. How does your current job fit your current career plans?**
- 5. What has helped you fulfill these career plans?**
- 6. What has hindered you from fulfilling these career plans?**
- 7. How has this organization supported your career plans?**
- 8. Have you ever had a mentor? If yes, how has mentoring relationships impacted your career? If not, why not? How do you think not having a mentor has impacted your career?**
- 9. What regrets (if any) do you have regarding any career decisions you have made?**
- 10. What specific successes do you celebrate regarding any career decisions you have made?**

These questions will be use as a launch point for this study with additional questions being added which relate to perceptions about decisions that were made and the impact of mentoring or lack of mentoring on their career. In the interviews, the participants will be asked to describe their experience as women who have advanced within the organization or not. The participants will be asked to give examples of interventions that influenced their career decisions. The research will be open to all possibilities in order to discover the participant's perspective of career development. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed by the

researcher or a third party transcriber. Field notes will be recorded at the end of each interview.

Site

The site for this study will be at a location suitable for the participant, possibly a conference room, their office or the office of the researcher, or alternatively, by telephone, with the participant and the researcher in their respective offices or homes.

Data Analysis

This is an exploratory study. Data from interview transcriptions and field notes will be categorized and coded. Interviews will be transcribed and field notes maintained. The researcher will pay particular attention to patterns that may develop, and apply additional codes and categories accordingly, if applicable.

To begin, three interviews will be conducted. They will then be analyzed to discover whether or not additional questions are necessary to improve the data and to determine what questions should be added or revised for the remaining interviewees. Each interview will be analyzed separately. Upon completion of all interviews, the data will be cross-analyzed. Similarities and differences will be noted. Patterns will be coded (using open coding) to identify common themes and categories. When information is in response to probing questions outside the standard questions, the researcher will indicate that in the analysis. Each of the participants will be described, and quotes taken from their interviews will be applied to illustrate common themes and responses.

Participant Introduction to Project/Invitation to Participate

Participants will be selected from the list of interested individuals who meet the criteria during the confirmation process. If more than ten people qualify, priority will be given to those who are willing to talk openly about their experiences. Participants will be invited to participate in the proposed study via email invitation:

1. After identifying the potential list of participants, an individual email will be sent to each potential participant (see Appendix A). Candidates will be invited to respond to me directly, via email or telephone, if they choose to participate.
2. Participants who respond affirmatively to the invitation to participate will be contacted by the researcher directly, via phone or email, to confirm that they meet the criteria for participation, and if so, they will be sent the preliminary questionnaire and timeline to complete. An interview time and location will be discussed. If a phone interview is to be conducted, the researcher will confirm the preferred phone number where the participant can be reached. If an in-person interview is to be conducted, the location for the interview will be determined and agreed upon.

Informed Consent

Human participants will be protected in accordance with the ethical standards taken from the APA Code of Conduct (1992). A consent form (see Appendix B) emphasizing confidentiality will be forwarded to the participant for their review, prior to the scheduled date of the interview and will be discussed in detail prior to the interview. The consent form includes a clause explaining that participation in the study is voluntary and that participants are free to

change their mind at any time, even after signing and submitting the consent form. The form confirms that the information provided during participation in the study will be confidential and anonymous.

Participants who will be interviewed by phone will be asked to sign and submit the consent form, via confidential fax or U.S. mail, prior to the scheduled date of the interview. Those who will be interviewed in person will be given a copy on site, and asked to sign it prior to our proceeding to the interview. The researcher will verify that the participant understands the documents and the process. Participants will be given time to read and sign the consent forms. The researcher will assign participant numbers to each participant to insure confidentiality and anonymity. All coded notes and participant identifications will remain anonymous.

Data will be stored in a secured, confidential location, accessible only by the researcher and a third-party subscriber. All data and notes will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office for the duration of the research process. All tapes of interviews will be destroyed upon completion of the final paper.

Debriefing Procedures

At the conclusion of the study, individual participants will be given the opportunity to debrief with the researcher. Each participant will be given time at the end of her interview session to ask questions or express any concerns she may have. The researcher will respond to her questions and concerns at that time. If, at any time after the interview, session participants wish to address any outstanding issues or questions regarding the interview or final report, they

will be invited to call or email the researcher directly to schedule a follow up session. A summary of findings will be made available to them, upon request.

Participants will be invited to contact the JFK University Project Advisor if they have questions or requests for additional information regarding this study and the interview process:

Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator/JFK University

Email: SAMulgrew@aol.com Telephone: 510-450-0378

Researcher Bias

The researcher conducting this study has a bias toward the importance of career development opportunities. In addition, the researcher is herself, a female leader working within the selected organization, and has personally experienced the impact of advancing within an organization that is lacking a formal career development process. The researcher recognizes that it is in her best interest to remain neutral in order to learn more from other perspectives and will remain open to all data as it is presented. Due to the criteria of the research method, bias awareness is particularly important, and an awareness of that bias will be maintained by the researcher.

Limitations

The findings of this study will be tentative. The sample size and procedures for participant selection are appropriate for qualitative research. They will not, however, due to the small scope of this study, support generalization to a larger population of women within the selected organization.

Results

This is a study of women who have advanced from clerical positions into supervisory and managerial positions in the same scientific research organization. This organization is without a formal job development framework. The purpose of this study was to find out what helped or hindered their journey to their current positions; how their family impacted their career decisions and how the organization participated in their success. A specific question about mentoring was asked to gain an understanding of how mentoring impacted their career.

A grounded theory approach was used to interview six women between the ages of 33 and 63 who worked in the same organization between 10 and 25 years. The participants gave narrative responses, which were digitally recorded then transcribed. Participant's direct quotes were used in this study.

Here are some of the characteristics of participants who will be referred to in this abbreviated fashion: P1 represents participant 1; P2 represents participant 2; P3 represents participant 3; P4 represents participant 4; P5 represents participant 5; and P6 represents participant 6.

	Classification	Age	Industry	Years at Company	Race	Education
P1	Principle Administrative Supervisor 4	41	Scientific Research	15	White	Some College
P2	Sr. Administrator 3	59	Scientific Research	21	Asian	BA
P3	Administrator 2	48	Scientific Research	14	African-American	AA, Certificates
P4	Principle Administrative Supervisor 4	33	Scientific Research	15	White	AA in progress
P5	Sr. Administrator 3	45	Scientific Research	25	African-American	Some College, Certificates
P6	Sr. Administrator 3	63	Scientific Research	10	Asian	BA, Teaching Credential

Data from all participants was pooled together and sorted by each of the eleven primary interview questions. From the data six themes emerged.

Theme 1: EXPERIENTIAL ATTITUDE ALLOWED WOMEN TO BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS

A common theme is that the majority of the women in the study did not have concrete career plans. Those who did have initial plans did not continue with those plans and followed a different path. The experiential attitude allowed the women to be open to new ideas and experiences.

Theme 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES GUIDE CHOICES

Most of the women in their early years were primarily guided by external influences as opposed to internal influences. Participants reported obtaining advice from career counselors, parents and friends. In their later years as they became wives and mothers their decisions were guided by the needs of the family.

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: SOMETIMES PRESENT, SOMETIMES LACKING

The participants attributed the majority of organizational support to supervisors and peers. Four of the six participants took advantage of the only formalized form of support which is a tuition reimbursement program. Participants were frustrated with the lack of recognition, lack of mentoring and the difficulty it took to achieve their success.

Theme 4: INCREASED SELF AWARENESS LEADS TO IMPROVED DECISIONS

Through their journey, the participants seemed to gain an increased sense of self which aided in decision making. Participants reported higher goal clarity and the desire to help others.

Theme 5: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING OR LACK OF MENTORING

None of the participants had formal mentors who they were accountable to. They all reported

having informal support through supervisors, peers and friends. They felt that having a formal mentor early in their careers would have been beneficial to their career success.

Theme 6: SPECIFIC SUCCESS FACTORS NEEDED TO ENSURE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about the importance of taking charge of your own career while learning, growing and adding value to the organization.

Theme 1: EXPERIENTIAL ATTITUDE ALLOWED WOMEN TO BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS

The majority of the women in the study did not have concrete career plans to follow at the beginning of their careers. P2 was not sure what type of education or career to pursue and says, “What I really wanted to be was a teacher, a singer and a scientist and then I didn’t have any career plans. I wanted to maybe be a photographer [or] something. I started as hostess at Charley Browns.”

The experiential attitude allowed the women to be open to new ideas and experiences. Some of the participants diverged from their original plans to pursue other options. Both P1 and P2 had clear goals initially, however as they were exposed to new experiences their primary foci was impacted and their directions changed. P1 states, “When I was in High School I wanted to be a clinical psychologist. But that didn’t work out for me because I’m not that much of a student.” P2 also made a transition and says, “When I first started going to college my major was nursing. ...Then I transferred over to CAL and I wanted to go into physical therapy, but they didn’t have physical therapy so I went into Psychology.” And then, when I was going to CAL I was working half time in the math department as an administrative assistant. Then they started training me to do technical papers, mathematical papers, typing equations. It was actually very fulfilling once I started doing it.”

Those who did have initial plans did not continue with those plans. P3 says, “I always wanted to be a court recorder. I went through the whole court reporting school, did my internship and was certified and decided that was not what I wanted to do.” Through P2’s exposure to a specific task a new passion was identified. “I started going to CAL and working part time being a technical typist. I just loved it. I have a creative side, an artistic side, and when I’m able to design a PhD thesis and set it up and make it look nice I really like that. Having this experimental attitude continues to impact career choices, P3 states that, “I have decided to start my own business. All of the skills that I have acquired throughout the years of working in this, administrative field I can [use for] myself and make some money. Work for myself. Choose my own hours. Choose my own clients. For many years P4 believed that being a supervisor was her primary career goal. However, a subtle suggestion from her supervisor opened up undiscovered possibilities which are now leading to new opportunities. She says, “Just 6 months ago I thought I still wanted to learn more about supervision. And then like a month or so ago my boss thought, ‘what would you think if we took supervision away from you?’ And I thought, you know what, I kind of like that.”

Some decisions were influenced by frustration in the lack of growth opportunities within the organization which led to changes in career focus. P5 states, “I looked outside of the [organization] as I got frustrated by the [organization’s] growth structure and where I was in relation to that, and I started going back to school. I switched paths in terms of going into more project management which is still business related, but I like the idea of project management because it just gave me a different skill set than what I had, and it was rare that females were in project management. So it gave me an edge.”

Theme 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES GUIDE CHOICES

Most of the women in their early years were primarily guided by external influences as opposed to internal influences. P2 says, "I had some friends that were in nursing and I thought it was kind of enticing and then I also had friends in psychology." After deciding to leave one career P3 says, "I didn't say, I want to be an executive assistant... whatever job I felt that I fit into I took it and ran with it."

Three of the participants ended up at this organization, but not because it was their goal to work there or because they intentionally set out to be employed there. They are primarily there because of external influences; someone suggested that they apply for a job. P2 says, "A person that I knew who was working at the [organization]... called me and said there's an opening ... would you be interested in applying. So I applied and I've been at the [organization] ever since." P6 supports this premise, "Someone here at the [organization] asked me to come over as a contract worker. So I took a leave from my job at the high school, came over here and really liked it and after about 3 months I was asked to become a permanent employee."

Three of the six participants acknowledge their supervisors as another external influence. These supervisors either provided guidance and support or offered alternative work assignments that began to influence the participant's self perception and career choices. P4 says, "I worked with [my supervisor] and there I saw her doing a lot of process improvement stuff and so I just sort of absorbed that and when I came to [my current department] I could see where we needed to do things and I had a manager who believed in me enough I guess to say, 'Yeah go work on that you can do that.' And then the boss that I have right now is really much like that too. He says, 'I don't have anybody else to give this to, you do it. You do this too.'" P1

states, "I have had supervisors who were really supportive ...and that is the part of the organization that really has made the biggest difference." P2 supports this assertion, "The supervisors and managers that I worked with when I was in the scientific divisions were very supportive. I would have either an administrative manager or a scientific manager who would support me in going in a different area of expanding my skills."

One participant chose a career path primarily because she was counseled to take a job that was traditionally for women and not because the suggested career was of interest to her. P6 says, "Well when I was in high school I wanted to go into business [school], but I was advised in those days [in the 1960's] that you should either be a teacher or a nurse because you had to spend time with your children and that was the culture at that time so I decided to go into teaching. ... So I went to college and got my teaching credential. ... I only taught for about a year and then I had 3 children. And then what I did was I only worked part time as a teacher... But I truly didn't like it all that much, and I only did it because it was convenient. But when my youngest son went away to college I just decided that I wanted to do something else."

In their later years as they became wives and mothers their decisions were guided by the needs of the family. Family situations often influenced career decision regarding job selection or departure from the workforce. P3 reports that, "When I found out how the whole court system worked, I didn't like it. So I decided at that time to take 2 years off because my middle daughter was 2 years old." Another family need identified was the need to provide financial support for the family. P4's job choices are impacted by the need to care for children and provide financial support. She states, "Just the fact that I have a family that I have to support; I'm the breadwinner in our family. I couldn't just up and decide to go somewhere else

because, what if we lost all of our benefits, life insurance all that? So, that kind of makes me less willing to look outside of the [organization]. I'm like, OK, I've been here 15 years and I'm just going to stay here until I retire. No. That's not going to work. But it's making sure that I take care of them, and I couldn't take a job where I travel." Depending on where the participants are in their career cycle the importance of finance has varying degrees of significance and impacts their decisions. P5 states, "Money was one factor." P3 views her salary as a means to support her children's future. She says, "I have to pay for college and room and board and all expenses [for the children]. I'm divorced now. I'm a single parent... And that has also made me want to become a small business owner. And working at the [organization] does not pay. The money that I want to make I couldn't make at the [organization] because they wouldn't allow me to because they [only] let African American women to get to a certain level at the [organization]. There's one [in a senior position] and that's it."

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: SOMETIMES PRESENT, SOMETIMES LACKING

The participants attributed the majority of organizational support to supervisors and peers. The participants all began their careers as clerical, Administrative Assistants. P2, P4 and P6 credit their supervisors or customers (usually scientists or operations managers) with helping them in their careers by recognizing their skills, talents and abilities. P2 says, "I had a lot of people supporting me along the way because they saw that I had some skills and experience. When I was an administrative assistant my supervisor saw that I was good with people and she said, 'Have you ever thought of being a supervisor?'" Supervisor support is not always automatically given. P4 identifies the importance of supervisor support and how it

helped improve self awareness, and says, “[It’s important to have] a supervisor that likes me. You know I’ve had supervisors who couldn’t care less about me and supervisors who really are willing to sort of even let me go. That’s the biggest thing is having people who help me kind of see my own potential too, because I’m not good at that. I’m better at it now, but I wasn’t ever good at that.” P6 says, “I started as an AAll [Administrative Assistant] and what is really interesting is that when I first started I was in [X department] but I was recruited actually to come to the [division] because of my personality. [They thought] it would really be [a] good fit for me to become the receptionist [in] the [division], because it was a new position and they wanted somebody with a certain type of personality to do it. Luckily in my career, other people have kind of been looking at me and saying, ‘Why don’t you come over to this position.’”

Some participants were frustrated with the lack of recognition, lack of mentoring and the difficulty it took to achieve their success. P6 says, “I’ve had to kind of fight to be promoted, in the sense that, even as an AAlll [Administrative Assistant] I was given more responsibility than other AAlll’s, and it took, again being offered a position in Administration before I was reclassified as an Administrative Specialist. And then the PI [Principal Investigator] I was working for really pushed to get me promoted again.” P2 left a position with one department because of the unsupportive environment created by her supervisor. She says, I went to [the Unit] and I actually really enjoyed that job a lot. I believe to this day that it was my niche...because I enjoyed organizing and working with all kinds of scientists throughout the [organization]. And then because of the management who was there in [the Unit] at the time, who left soon after I did, she made it very difficult for me to do my job [while I worked there].”

Four of the six participants took advantage of the only formalized form of support which

is a tuition reimbursement program. The program has paid between 66% and 100% of tuition costs. “[The] organization pays for school and that’s huge when you want to go and you may not have the money to do that.”

Theme 4: INCREASED SELF AWARENESS LEADS TO IMPROVED DECISIONS

Through their journey, the participants seemed to gain an increased sense of self, which aided in the decision making process. Participants reported higher goal clarity and the desire to help others. The participants have identified a variety of goals. As the youngest of the participants, P4 wishes to pursue her education. She says, “I’m really not focusing on the career piece. I’m trying to get schooling out of the way because I think not having the degree kind of holds me back even though I know I’m smart; and most of the people I work for know I’m smart. If I got laid off I’d be really screwed because I don’t have that piece of paper to prove that I’m smart. So it’s really trying to work the system long enough before I say am I sick of the [organization].”

Over the years, P1 has developed a set of core values which direct her actions and decisions. She states, “My current career plans continue to be learning, growing and adding value. I’ve reached a place in my current career that is a little bit; sort of topped out is how I feel. I’ve done what I can do. Still trying to keep it interesting, and learning and growing and staying interested while I’m learning and growing is the hard part. So right now I’m looking at ideas for how to become an independent business person outside of my current job. [I’m] working on different initiatives outside of my current career; starting over again basically.” Similar to P1, P3 has obtained goal clarity. She says, her goal is, “To be a small business owner. That’s my next career plan.” P2’s goal clarity is leading her towards the latter stages of her

career. She says, "Well, if all goes well I want to retire in a couple of years. I actually enjoy where I am. It's not at the level that I had wanted to be, [It's one level lower] but it's fulfilling because I'm working for a Division Director. So I'm able to have opportunities to mentor other people which I enjoy doing. After I retire I want to volunteer for, Make a Wish Foundation or some kind of non-profit that works with children who are ill because I really admire them."

P5 has gained enough clarity to have short term and long term goals. She says, "before I leave the [organization my goal] is to be a business manager. Right now I'm a Sr. Supervisor. [My second goal] would be to have [my] financial services [business] be the end all, to do all, in terms of bringing in enough money to cover all of my expenses ... and [another goal] is [to be able to] travel and preach and teach the gospel." And P6 has achieved goal clarity in finally doing the type of work that interests her most. She says, "Going forward. I actually like what I'm doing now. So I would say just continue doing that."

When compared to their decision making processes early in their careers which were primarily driven by external factors; the women are now primarily driven by internal factors. The participants now are able to recognize how their current jobs fit into their future plans. P4 states, "[My job] fits perfectly because I get to do all the process improvement stuff and I'm the only one in the division really. So right now I'm pretty cool because everyone only has me to go to. It's giving me the information I need. I have great management who really has faith in me and trusts me to do things." P1 says, "My current job ... is really broad in it's responsibilities in a lot of ways. It's not so clearly defined that it's limiting. So, supervision and administrative management, looking at business systems all works into any business that I would go into. If I was to work on my own I would have that background to help me understand what systems

and what kind of people I would need to draw upon and what kind of resources to find.” Goal clarity and job satisfaction can be attained by gaining awareness of not only the work that most interests you but also the work that does not. P6 says, “Luckily what is good for me is that I have a huge amount of responsibility with nobody that I supervise.” [She is a program manager for various scientific programs and has no direct reports.]

At the current stages of their careers, the participants were now able to identify contributing factors that helped propel their careers. P3 identifies her internal motivators as critical to her success. She says, “[What motivates me is my drive; my goals to be successful. I’m driven by ambition, pure ambition to be somebody and do something that I like to do.” Along those same lines, P1 says, “I have an internal desire to grow and add value. I have a sense of what is the right thing to do and [I] try to have integrity and do the right thing. But separate from what is internal to me, I think that I’ve been given a lot of opportunities and I have had very supportive supervisors who have allowed me to expand my realm of influence.”

Another factor that improved decision making was the ability to say no, to an opportunity. P1 says she attributes her success to, “Not going through some of the doors that were opened to me. I think I chose the right doors. I’ve looked at other opportunities; changed my mind during the process or right before submitting my resume for a job. [I would say to myself], ‘No, this is not the right time. It’s not the right place.’ It would be a success outwardly if I got that position, but internally it would possibly be damaging to me for a number of reasons. So learning to follow my internal compass and trusting that I know what’s right for me and praying. I just feel that I’ve stepped through the right doors that were opened to me.”

P6 also acknowledges how making the right choices can impact a person’s career. She

says, "I feel that I've made the right choices in the people that I have gone to work with, and these people [the scientist] are very supportive and if I need anything they've supported me." Unlike P1, who learned which doors *not* to open, P3 gained clarity after making a decision to accept the wrong job. She says, "I worked at this company ... it was one of the worst jobs I have ever had. And I knew then, that whatever job I take it would be a job that I like to do and not just because they wanted to pay you a certain amount of money."

Through the years, P4 has learned to listen to her internal voice. She says, "I think I'm really happy to listen to myself about going to work in [the division]. When I interviewed I wasn't really sold that I wanted the job until after my interview. I interviewed ... and I said, 'I want that job.'" She was concerned that she was not going to get it because there were other people who were more qualified applying, but she did get it.

P5 credits, pursuit of an education as having a major impact on her career growth. She says, "Going to school has been huge. Going to school is an answer because it then puts you in an environment where you have access to people, and resources, and information, and knowledge that you didn't [have] before that you can now come back and then use and explode."

Two of the participants were able to identify behaviors that negatively impacted their careers, P1 reports that she has, "a lack of confidence at times and a lack of discipline. Probably...lack of opportunity comes up [also]. When I'm ready for something, sometimes there's not the opportunity to take it on. Lack of education; I haven't finished my degree, so some of the things that I might want to try out and do I don't have the education behind me or the experience." P5 attributes self doubt as having the capability of negatively impacting her

career. She says, “Only the thoughts [that are] in my mind would tell me I can’t do it. I’m not good enough.”

Although having achieved a senior level administrative position P1 identified the lack of obtaining a secondary education as having a negative impact on her perception of success. She says, “I regret not finishing my degree when I originally started college. I think that had I finished my psychology degree it would have opened up many other doors to me; just because I would have already had a degree I would have been able to go to a master’s program. I don’t think it’s hindered me in what I’m doing now and where I work. In the field that I’m in it’s not required. It’s not even questioned.”

Theme 5: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING OR LACK OF MENTORING

None of the participants had *formal* mentors who they were accountable to as in the traditional mentoring relationship. They all reported having *informal* support through supervisors, peers and friends. However they did have opinions about how having a mentor might have aided in their success. P5 says, “I think [mentoring is] huge. It kind of increases, [and] widens your vision so that you begin to see that there is more than what you thought there was. You stretch. It makes you stretch. It makes you grow. It kind of puts excitement back in life because you are growing. You are moving and not staying still. And [it’s] encouraging if other people see something in you, if there’s something enough in you for them to take time out of their schedule to encourage you, and keep growing and moving and even offer suggestions to how you could do that. Because sometimes you see a goal and you want it, but you don’t know how to get there. And to have somebody who’s already there to give you pointers on how to reach it without them being threatened by your growth [is great].”

Having a mentor often provides an additional source of support and encouragement. P1 says, “Maybe it would have been good for me to have [a mentor] at certain points because it would help me get a little more focused by having accountability within the relationship.” The availability of mentoring support early in a person’s career can impact their journey. P2 says, “I think it would have been nice to have someone be my mentor for several years especially when I was a young administrator. Because I think I could have used someone to throw ideas at.”

Theme 6: SPECIFIC SUCCESS FACTORS NEEDED TO ENSURE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Throughout the interviews, participants talked about the importance of taking charge of your own career while learning, growing and adding value to the organization. P1 says, “When I think about why I’ve been successful and what is different for me than for other people, I think it’s really ... that I really tried to figure out how to add value. So I saw something that needed to be done. I thought of a way to do it. I either suggested it or did it myself, and once you start doing that, people start recognizing that in you. So they start giving you more opportunities.” Another key success factor that was identified was taking charge of your own destiny. P5 says, “You know I think that one of the biggest things that people don’t do with their careers is they don’t take charge of their careers and maybe just because that’s the way my Mom and Dad raised me; is that I’m in charge and I need to take charge of it. It’s not my supervisor’s responsibility to grow me. It’s my responsibility to grow me. It’s not anyone’s responsibility to groom me for a position. But it’s my responsibility to groom me. I’m in charge of my career.”

P6 supports this assertion by acknowledging that it is not solely the organization’s responsibility to prepare its employees for future career opportunities. She says, “I would say if you just leave it to the organization you won’t necessarily get very far. Because I do know

people who work very, very hard and are waiting to get recognized instead of being a little more proactive. So I think if you just sit there and do your job, and don't try to get recognition, and don't make waves, you're just going to sit there. I think it's important to be out there. And the one thing I do is I volunteer for things. I don't just sit in my office and expect people to say, 'Oh yes this woman is really smart.' I try to get out there and shine my own light. I think there are people who are really smart people here who are sitting wondering why they're not getting promoted. But I think if you just sit there and do your job, unless you have a good mentor, you're not going to get anywhere. That's just my perception."

Opportunities can arise from adversity and if a person is keenly aware they will recognize them. P4 says, "I got laid off. That's another great opportunity that I had. They put everyone that was getting laid off through training of how to write a resume, how to do an interview, and that really helped me kind of learn how to present myself in a different way, and how to negotiate a little bit more."

The participants felt that the lack of formal mentoring impacted their career and P2 states that, "I would like to see the [organization] have a mentorship program...even volunteer because I know some people who would do it. And yes it would take time, but I feel many people would benefit from it. I think it's really needed."

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the experience of a sampling of women to determine how they were able to advance in an organization that lacks a formal career development framework. Through this research six major themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Experiential attitude allowed women to be open to new ideas
- Theme 2: External influences guide choices
- Theme 3: Organizational support: sometimes present, sometimes lacking
- Theme 4: Increased self awareness leads to improved decisions
- Theme 5: The impact of mentoring or lack of mentoring
- Theme 6: Specific success factors needed to ensure career advancement

Theme: 1: EXPERIENTIAL ATTITUDE ALLOWED WOMEN TO BE OPEN TO NEW IDEAS

One of the primary themes which arose is that the women's experimental attitude allowed them to be open to new ideas and experiences. When it came time to make the first career decision the women in this study tended not to have concrete career goals. Previous studies have shown that women tend not to follow linear career paths. They will obtain a position, try it, test it and determine if it is a positive fit. If it is not, they will embark down another path seeking to find fulfillment and satisfaction.

As a young woman at 17 or 18 I did not give much thought to deciding on a career and subsequently what to study in preparation for that career. Today, as I am in the middle of my career I have not sat down to precisely dissect the journey that I took to get where I am today. I considered having an experimental attitude as being an indecisive failure, unable to determine a desired career. Was this because I was conditioned to apply models to myself that were

primarily designed for males? The answer is yes. I was biased to think that the widely used career development models were equally applicable to both men and women; that career paths were to be a linear progression from high school, through college to that destined career; that upon leaving high school you knew what you wanted to study and what field you wanted to pursue. Women often do not follow a linear trajectory. This study supports that assertion.

It was an interesting realization to me that women measure their career success against models that were designed for men. Women subject themselves to negative self talk by saying, “I’m X age and I should be at Y stage in my career.” These models don’t necessarily take into consideration that women will have career interruptions which include bearing and raising children and caring for family members or that interests might change. “Developmental theory suggests a process of achieving certain career development tasks within a certain age category and consistent uninterrupted movement from one career stage to the next. This description however is inconsistent with women’s experiences” (Schreiber, 1998). As is seen Cumming’s and Worley’s career stages there are four stages with correlating ages (see Table 6).

Table 6

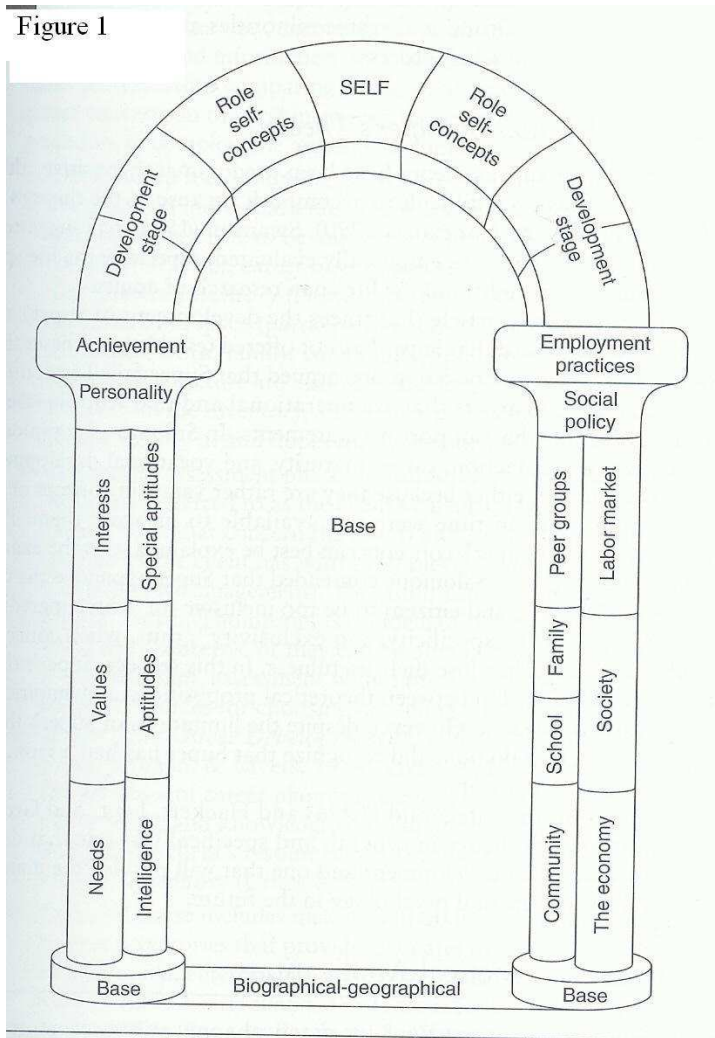
Cummings & Worley Career Stages		
Stage	Age	Characteristics
Establishment Stage	21-26	Onset of career. Uncertainty of competence and potential. Dependent on others, especially bosses and more experienced workers. Making initial choices re: career, organization, job
Advancement Stage	26-40	Employees become independent contributors concerned about achieving and advancing in chosen careers. Learned to perform autonomously & need less guidance. Settling down stage-attempts to clarify range of long term career options
Maintenance Stage	40-60	Leveling off and holding on to career successes. May have achieved greatest advancements and are now concerned with helping less-experienced subordinates. If dissatisfied with career progress, this time can be conflicting and depressing (mid-life crisis). Reappraise circumstances, search for alternatives, redirect career efforts. Success can lead to continued growth, failure can lead to early decline

Withdrawal Stage	60+	Concerned with leaving career. Letting go of organizational attachments and preparing for retirement. Imparting knowledge to others. If satisfied with career can result in feelings of fulfillment and a willingness to leave job behind
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(Cummings, 2005 p. 397)

I found it challenging to map the participants in this study to this model’s stages *and* age categories simultaneously. Because of women’s experiential attitude towards their career they could be at any of these stages at any age. If the age column were removed it could be a viable model to use with women.

After conducting this research and re-assessing Super’s Archway model it was easier to correlate the experiences of women in looking at how both pillars influence the creation of the keystone-self. This model asserts that, “Interactive learning is the fundamental concept that forms the keystone (self) of the archway as the individual encounters people, ideas, facts and objects in personal development” Zunker (2002) pg 42. I would suggest that this is an adequate model to use for women, *if* it is



explained that the two pillars are connected with dotted lines. The two sides are not

independent. There is a relationship that exists which helps to create and support the cornerstone.

Theme 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES GUIDE CHOICES

O'Neil and Bilmora (2005) describe a term called Career Locus that, "describes the focal point from which career orientation, motivation and success emanate" (p. 173). Rotter describes the locus of control in relationship to learning as, "skill vs. chance, an internal locus of control linked to such concepts as planning, persistence, and problem solving and an external locus of control linked to such concepts as passivity and dependency" (Rotter, 1992). Using Rotter's terminology, an external career locus is seen as life choices being more *other directed* than *self directed* where the individual believes that career opportunities and success are caused by chance or luck and are impacted by outside influences such as job loss or offers of promotions. Whereas an internal career locus is rooted in the belief that the individual is responsible for their own career and they make decisions based on what they *want* to achieve and not what they *might* achieve if someone decides to give them an opportunity.

In the early stages of the participant's careers, choices were made based on recommendations from counselors, family and friends as opposed to being made because of internal motivators to achieve a specific goal. Most of the women did not have concrete career goals which thus began their experimental journey towards their desired career. Many of the women are not working in the field that they originally trained for. All of the women are in the administrative field but their beginnings were broad and included court recording, psychology, nursing, teaching, or no career plans at all. Their decisions to enter these various fields were sometimes influenced by others; friends who were in already studying or working in those

fields.

Women in this study were influenced by their families as decisions were made throughout their careers. Women have multiple roles that include family, work and community. Balancing between these roles can be difficult at times. If there is a conflict between their work role and their family role, women tend to lean towards not making decisions that will negatively impact their families. If women are the breadwinners of the family, or if they are single parents they have the added pressure to succeed and balance the needs of work and home. Their decisions are guided by their need to provide a steady source of income, health benefits, funds to support their children's educations and at times support for aging parents.

Parson's trait and factor theory has been used by career counselors since 1909 to match individuals with their ideal occupation. It is a three part process which "Matches the individual traits with requirements of a specific occupation, subsequently solving the career search problem" (Zunker, 2002 p. 26). Some of the challengers to Parson's trait and factor theory oppose it because it theorizes that, "there is a single career goal for everyone and career decisions are based on measured abilities" (Zunker, 2002, P. 27). Schreiber takes the opposition even further to assert that Parson's trait and factor theory presents difficulties for women because women "don't have the opportunity to develop any and all social interests; often their choices are only those deemed acceptable and appropriate for the gender" (Schreiber, 1998).

To some degree all of this is true. I propose that for women, these tools should be used as a *snapshot* that identifies a woman's *current* interests and should not be seen as exposing the ultimate desired destination, because women have an experimental attitude that allows

them to try something and determine if it is suitable. If it is not suitable they should be reassessed to see where they are in their career cycle and determine if there has been a shift in their interests. To put it simply women's career exploration is reminiscent of a shopper's attitude. This may sound stereotypical but consider it. If women are given permission, by society, to experiment with careers instead of following the linear trajectory that men follow women wouldn't subject themselves to negative self talk and feel like underachievers.

One of the positive outcomes of Parson's trait and factor theory is that a multitude of assessment tools have been created to assess a persons likes and dislikes in reference to the skills required to fulfill the occupational requirements of specific jobs. I suggest that women be assessed annually to determine if new interests or skills have emerged.

After leaving high school most young women do not have a chosen career or if they do choose a career they often don't stay with it. The literature documents that women do not follow a linear career path. Through their education, life experiences and career changes women discover the work that will lead to what will ultimately satisfy them. Through this experiential attitude the participants in the study gained increased self awareness, a better sense of themselves, clarity of their goals, core values and their purpose in life. This experimental attitude leads to an openness to opportunities and possibilities and allows women to determine if and how they want to make their mark on the world. Another benefit from goal clarity is that as women experience life, move through their careers, and as they age their motivators shift from primarily being external to internal. Women are able to differentiate between the jobs that will bring them satisfaction and the jobs that others expect them to pursue.

Theme 3: ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT: SOMETIMES PRESENT, SOMETIMES LACKING

A traditional career development program supported by an organization can have many different components that might include career development workshops, assessment programs, a career library, career counseling, funding for internal and external training, internship programs, mentoring and coaching programs, new employee orientation, and tuition reimbursement.

The organization where these participants work does not have most of these components. A career library was developed in the last 5 years but most employees do not take advantage of it. Funding for internal or external training is left up to the department where the employee works and is dependent upon supervisor approval. The only other program provided is tuition reimbursement. During the last 25 years, there was a Training and Development Director for 3 years in the late 1980's. In a discussion with Sr. Management the sentiment was that they would prefer to *hire* the best and not train employees to *be the best*. It was expressed that developing employees was a great idea but that funding was not provided to do so and that development was best left to the community colleges.

So, it's safe to say that a comprehensive culture of development does not exist at this organization. Because of that, organizational support took on a different flavor. The women in this study received support from peers who acted as informal mentors and some supervisors who showed support by providing guidance, and opportunities. These women were successful because they sought out support and developed their own network. This network provided encouragement to seek job opportunities within the organization, support in writing resumes, mock interviewing, suggestions in selecting educational interests, listening and providing advice

about difficult situations that arose in the workplace. They took advantage of the opportunities, limited as they were, and continued their journey of experimentation in determining their career paths. Four of the six women participated in the tuition reimbursement program to obtain certifications and degrees.

All of the participants were frustrated by the lack of formal mentoring programs. The minority participants were also frustrated by the lack of recognition and the difficulty and length of time it took to advance within the organization. Minority women seemed to advance at a slower pace than their white counterparts. As the researcher and an African American Woman who worked at this organization I was not surprised by this, but what I did notice was the *difference* in experience of the minority women with the lack of opportunities available to employees.

Another interesting note is that the white women are in the higher level positions but have the least amount of education and experience. So this suggests that there is possibly an issue of access at this organization. Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, (1998) describe the reality of women and women of color in the job market, "the obstacle of the glass ceiling affects the careers of women. Statistics show that once women make it through the door of their chosen professions, they linger at the lower echelons, occupying positions of the workers and lower-level supervisors. But the ceiling still has different meanings for different groups. According to Sokoloff (1992), despite the limitations of the glass ceiling, "glass is breakable: some White women will make it through the broken glass to top positions. Blacks [and other women of color] on the other hand experience a 'Lucite ceiling': Lucite is so strong that while you can see through it, you cannot break it like glass (Henriques, 1991)."

Theme 4: INCREASED SELF AWARENESS LEADS TO IMPROVED DECISIONS

London (1993) uses three major domains to describe career motivation

1. Career Resilience The ability to adapt to changing circumstances.
 - Welcoming job and organizational changes
 - Looking forward to working with new and different people
 - Having self confidence and being willing to take risks

2. Career Insight The realism and clarity of the individual's career goals.
 - Having self knowledge (knowing strengths & weaknesses)

3. Career Identity The degree to which people define themselves by their work and the organization they work for

Through their journey, participants seemed to gain an increased sense of self which aided in decision making. Participants reported higher goal clarity and the desire to help others. Most of the women did not have concrete paths. They experimented their way through schools, jobs and organizations to find a suitable career. It is my opinion that all of the women have achieved career insight, resilience and identity as described by London. They are able to make solid career decisions and have learned which opportunities to pursue or not to pursue based on their likes, dislikes, interest, family commitments and future. The youngest participant is just beginning to focus on creating a career path. Through various jobs and assignments she has discovered a new interest and has chosen an educational path that supports her new job focus. One participant has resigned from the organization to focus on having children while pursuing a new business venture. One participant has established an outside business and another is in the planning stages. One participant thoroughly enjoys the work that she does at the organization and plans to continue. The last participant hopes to retire in the next couple of years.

The participants in the study used various criteria to assess job fit. Most enjoy the recognition, flexibility in assignments, hours, and responsibility. The common theme is their belief in the possibility of transferring skills and knowledge to a future position or a personal outside business.

Theme 5: THE IMPACT OF MENTORING OR LACK OF MENTORING

“Mentors are influential people who significantly help others reach their major life goals” (Lee & Nolan 1998, p. 4). None of the women had formal mentors but informal support was obtained from peers and supportive supervisors. Not all supervisors were supportive. The organization did not encourage or support mentoring for administrative staff. There is no sustained mentor training for supervisors. At one time in the early 1990’s one division did create a mentoring program because they realized after a huge layoff, that a vast amount intellectual property was lost which impaired their ability to provide services. This program lasted one year and was not adopted institutionally.

White, Cox, and Cooper (1992) reported that women who lacked mentors felt that it negatively affected their careers. The participants in this study agreed. Mentors often have the ability to create opportunities for mentees inside the organization; they provide a unique organizational perspective and can share their experiences in successfully maneuvering in the organization. A peer often cannot provide the same perspective or support. Lee (1998) suggests that without a mentor that women are not able to adequately understand the realities of working in a male dominated business environment and that mentors help to change the organization’s perspective of the woman to one of a highly talented individual.

Theme 6: SPECIFIC SUCCESS FACTORS NEEDED TO ENSURE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The participants identified factors to ensure success as:

1. Taking charge of your career
2. Learning, growing and adding value
3. Making the best of the situation that you're in while you're in it
4. Access to mentors

(Hite and McDonald 2003 p 224) suggests additional success factors:

1. Obtaining stretch assignments
2. Taking on risky tasks
3. Demonstrating competence and performing well on the job
4. Being assertive and persistent
5. Having good mentors

Summary

- Women's careers indeed are not linear (as identified in most models). Their experiential attitude helped them to create their journey.
- Minority women had a different perspective on their journey than non-minority women. The minority women spoke of struggles in recognition and inequities in pay.
- Although most women did not have clear career paths, they were able to appreciate each job they were in and looked to obtain maximum benefits from each position. Although they did not always know how what they were learning or gaining would be used in the future.
- Career decisions are influenced by their family situations.
- Because institutional programs were lacking, organizational support took the form of encouragement and assistance from influential supervisors/peers and informal mentors.
- 4 of the 6 women took advantage of the tuition reimbursement program.

I began this discussion by talking about my early indecisiveness in determining a career path. I too have increased my self awareness. Because I have a keener understanding, I have a clearer picture of what I want the next phase of my career to look like. I now accept my journey as a success and not a failure. I know what my interests are. I know what my strengths are. I know what my passion is. I know it is up to me to determine my path and I'm satisfied with having an exploratory attitude towards my next successful career move. *I have moved from an external locus of control to an internal locus of control!*

Recommendations to the Organization

- Create a culture of development
- Offer growth opportunities through internships and stretch assignments. Value the growth of the employees by recognizing their progress and promoting a policy of hiring from within.
- Ensure that there is a network of mentors available
- Offer career development basics: Self assessment, interest inventories, interview preparedness
- Understand the career development models and consider applying them in a way that acknowledges the differences between the career cycles of women and men

Richard Knowdell offers a nine step model for implementation that might be helpful. It includes:

1. Define career development in the organization
2. Assess the organizations need for career development
3. Design a program for the organization
4. Promote the program internally
5. Acknowledge the individual employee's emotions
6. Guide employee's assessment process
7. Facilitate employee's exploration process
8. Participate in employee's goal setting and planning
9. Coach employees in implementing the career strategy

New Thoughts

As a result of this study and understanding more about the career journeys of women, I am curious to learn more about how women perceive their journeys against career models that were primarily created for men whose traditional career path is one of knowing the path they want to pursue upon exiting high school and are focused on obtaining an education to support

that goal, obtaining a job in that desired field and climbing the ladder of success. Women's paths are more organic and I'm curious to know if women are knowingly or unknowingly measuring themselves against these models and how that affects their perception of self.

Limitations of this Research and Suggestions for Future Research

There were biases by the researcher in that I previously worked at the organization where the study was conducted. It was difficult separating my experience from the experience of the participants. My experience mirrored the experience of the minority women.

I would like to continue to explore this topic by interviewing women in the organization who have not advanced, in order to obtain a sense of their experiences and attitudes. Another focus of research would be to pursue the issue of race as a factor in career success at this organization.

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Appendix A

Sample e-mail invitation to identified participants:

SUBJ: Invitation to Participate in Study: Career Development

I am a graduate student in Organizational Psychology at John F. Kennedy University. As part of the requirements for the completion of my Master's degree, I am conducting a small qualitative research study on female employees and their career experiences. I am requesting your consideration to participate in this study.

The proposed study will focus on the impact of career development support for women. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews of female employees; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own career development experience. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how the organization's support impacts career development.

Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind at any time and choose not to continue. Should you choose to participate, all information you give during the interview process will be confidential and your individual contribution will be anonymous. All data collected during the process will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me. I will also make a copy of the summary project report available to you at your request.

Thank you for your consideration. I sincerely hope that you will choose to participate! If you have any questions or would like to talk with me please feel free to contact me at 486-6331.

Delia Clark

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

My name is Delia Clark. I am currently a graduate student in the Masters of Organizational Psychology program at John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hill, California. The research project is a requirement toward the completion of my Master's degree. This research project is being conducted under the advisement of Sharon Mulgrew, M.P.H. – Organizational Psychology Research Coordinator. She can be reached a SAMulgrew@aol.com or 510-450-0378.

Project Summary: The proposed study will focus on the impact of career development support for women. The study will be conducted through a series of individual interviews with women in this organization; each interview is expected to be of 45-60 minute duration and will be tape-recorded. Study participants will be asked to describe their own career development experience within this organization. Data gathered in interviews will be analyzed and interpreted with the goal of enabling a more complete understanding of how support for career development impacts (if at all) the development of female employees. You may also be contacted by phone at a later date for clarification or follow-up necessary to insure accuracy of the data.

Voluntary Participation: Participation is completely voluntary and participants are free to change their mind at any time and choose not to continue even after signing this consent form.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: All information given by study participants is confidential and individual contributions are anonymous. All data will be stored in a secured, confidential location accessible only by me and a third-party subscriber. Each participant will be identified on the tape by first name and participant code only.

Availability of Results: A Summary of the results of this study will be available to participants upon request after completion of the study.

Consent: I hereby consent to participate in the above research project. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may change my mind or refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence. I may refuse to answer any questions or I may stop the interview. I understand that some of the things I say may be directly quoted in the text of the final report, and subsequent publications, but that my name will not be associated with this study.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: (Please Print) _____

Witness Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: (Please Print) _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. What were some of your early career plans?
 - a. What influenced your choosing a certain career path?
2. How have these plans changed over the years?
3. What are your current career plans?
 - a. How has your family influenced your choices?
4. How does your current job fit your current career plans?
5. What has helped you fulfill these career plans?
6. What has hindered you from fulfilling these career plans?
7. How has this organization supported? your career plans?
8. Have you ever had a mentor? If yes, how has mentoring relationships impacted your career? If not, why not? How do you think not having a mentor has impacted your career?
9. What regrets (if any) do you have regarding any career decisions you have made?
10. What specific successes do you celebrate regarding any career decisions you have made?