



# The changing nature of gender roles, alpha/beta careers and work-life issues

## Theory-driven implications for human resource management

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The major purpose of this paper is to examine how gender differences impact the enactment of careers. An additional goal is to examine whether, as suggested by recent conceptualizations, careers are indeed becoming more boundaryless.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper is based on the results of two in-depth qualitative studies ( $n = 52$ ;  $n = 27$ ).

**Findings** – Two major patterns were found that describe the careers of professionals in the contemporary workplace. One pattern is called the alpha career pattern: over the life span, people with this pattern first focus on challenge, then authenticity, and then balance. The second pattern is called the beta career pattern: over the life span, people with this pattern first focus on challenge, then balance, and then authenticity.

**Practical implications** – This paper offers a framework that HR managers and other organizational leaders can use to increase the authenticity, balance and challenge experienced by their employees in order to enhance organizational effectiveness.

**Originality/value** – This paper addresses the numerous calls for the development of a model to explain the complexities of women's careers as well as to recognize gender differences in career enactment. It was found that, in general, men followed the alpha career pattern while women followed the beta career pattern. However, a limited number of women had career experiences that were more consistent with the alpha career pattern more closely aligned with men while some younger men consciously developed more family-driven beta patterns.

**Keywords** Careers, Gender, Family

**Paper type** Research paper



### Introduction

In the new millennium, the boundaries between work and non-work have become increasingly blurred. The world of work, how it is done (spreadsheets and presentation

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software decks), where it is done (from a laptop at home or with face-time at the office), and what technology is used (wireless e-mails, Blackberry on the go, video and global teleconferencing), has dramatically changed. Individuals are using technology to increase their flexibility and achieve better work/family balance while eschewing traditional upward definitions of success in favor of defining success on their own terms (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996, 2004; Heslin, 2005).

Unlike the career-centric professional workers of the past, a growing number of individuals are creating their own patchwork of job experiences to suit their lives, with many instead focusing on a dual agenda of concentrating on both work and family (Burud and Tumolo, 2004). Some individuals, tired of the fast-paced corporate grind, are getting off the fast track or declining promotions in order to spend more time with friends and family or to focus on self-development (Ibarra, 2003). Others, disappointed by the inflexibility of corporations and the lack of concern for work-family balance, have integrated their work and non-work lives by starting their own businesses (Moore, 2002). Still others have opted out in favor of jobs with more flexible, or part-time work schedules (Higgins *et al.*, 2000).

These two trends – the “push” factor of technology making work more adaptable and flexible, and the “pull” factor of individuals wanting to maintain more of a balance between their work and family lives – have created a major paradigm shift in how careers are developed, created, and shaped that will be the defining force of the future. Current models of careers drafted in the previous century (e.g. Super, 1957; Levinson, 1978) do not adequately explain the growing number of individuals opting out of corporations, do not recognize the delicate interplay between work and non-work concerns, and often ignore gender differences in career enactment, or neglect major factors that drive career decision making (Sullivan, 1999). Understanding gender differences in careers and the influence of family life upon a career is important, because many individuals, especially the new generation of workers joining the labor force, prioritize their family lives. For example, a recent survey of Yale University women reported that 60 percent of the female undergraduates planned to cut back their work schedule or stop work entirely when they have children (Story, 2005).

Past models of careers suggested that capturing the complexity of women’s careers was difficult, as women’s career priorities and patterns shift based upon family as well as work factors (Powell and Mainiero, 1992, 1993). In the USA, women work part-time more often than men, work at home more than men, and have different career trajectories that involve opting out of the workforce to take a family break, and then perhaps returning later (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004, 2005). For example, in 2004, approximately 26 percent of women in the USA worked part-time as compared to 11 percent of men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). Among Harvard MBA graduates, only 38 percent of the women who graduated in 1981, 1985 and 1991 worked full-time (Hewlett, 2002; Hewlett and Luce, 2005). Despite workplace changes including rapid technological advances and employees’ increasing wariness of entrusting their career management to their employers (e.g. Hall, 1996; Arthur *et al.*, 2005), little theory-driven, research based guidance has been provided to HR professionals and other organizational leaders on how to manage individuals with dramatically different and changing career patterns and aspirations.

The purpose of this paper is to address these concerns, especially for HR professionals who are striving to develop strategic organizational policies and

programs that effectively attract, retain and motivate high-quality individuals. Based on two qualitative investigations on the subject of career enactment, we developed a new model that suggests a more holistic approach to the study of careers. This model contributes to our understanding of careers because it does not divorce the concept of “career” from the person. Instead, the model recognizes the increasing blurring of work and family, and considers the effect of gender differences as careers unfold over the life span.

This paper begins by briefly reviewing past research on gender, careers, and the changing work landscape. Next, we detail a new conceptualization of careers and the two major career patterns we found. Finally, we discuss the implications of this study for future research as well as implications for managers and HR professionals on how to best motivate professional workers who may value much different things than the previous generations of workers.

### Gender and careers

Models of career development emerged from manufacturing age principles that suggested that men work for organizations that were designed as a structured pyramid, whereby success was typically measured by upward movement within one or two companies until retirement (for reviews, see Cytrynbaum and Crites, 1989; Dalton, 1989; Sullivan, 1999). One of the most well-known models of the traditional linear career was developed by Super (1957; Super *et al.*, 1988). Super (1957) articulated a model by which men expressed their self-concept as summarized by four career stages. In each stage, the man strived to complete certain tasks in order to develop, mature, and successfully move on to the next stage. Failing to complete these developmental tasks was thought to stall career progress.

Like Super, Levinson (1978) developed a life stage model characterized by alternating periods of stability and turbulence, in which development tasks and issues needed to be addressed in order for the man to continue to grow and mature. To accomplish the goals of each stage of development and progress to a more advanced level, a man had helpful allies, including the “special woman”, usually a homemaker, who took care of the children and supported her husband’s career ambitions (Levinson, 1978) as well as a mentor (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Forret and de Janasz, 2005; Kram, 1985), who helped the younger worker navigate organizational politics and gain enhanced career outcomes, especially increases in salary and rapid promotion rates.

Although both Super (1957) and Levinson (1978) suggested that their models applied to both men and women, a number of scholars have questioned this assumption (Gallos, 1989; Powell and Mainiero, 1992, 1993). Given the unique aspects of women’s experiences, including workplace discrimination (Altman *et al.*, 2005; Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Powell and Graves, 2003), pay, promotion and power inequities (Ohlott *et al.*, 1994; Perrewe and Nelson, 2004; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003), greater family demands (Eby *et al.*, 2005; Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Greenhaus and Parasuraman, 1999), and sexual harassment issues (Bowes-Sperry and Tata, 1999; Fitzgerald and Shullman, 1993; Nelson and Burke, 2000), it seems unlikely that women’s careers can be adequately explained by stage models developed with male samples (Bardwick, 1980; Tharenou *et al.*, 1994).

Despite the increasing number of women in the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005), there has been relatively little research on the applicability of these

male models to women's careers. To determine the generalizability of his theory, Levinson (1996) conducted in-depth interviews with 45 female academics, homemakers, and business professionals between the ages of 35 and 45. He found that women progress through the same age-related stages as men, but face "gender splitting" (i.e. cultural, social stereotypes and sexism). Likewise, Roberts and Newton (1987) reported that although women progressed through similar periods of stability and transitions as men, while men had one, career-focused dream of their future, women tended to have "split dreams". By age 30, women changed their focus from either career to family or *vice versa*.

In contrast, Ornstein and Isabella (1990) found little support for the applicability of either Levinson's or Super's model to women. Although organizational commitment, turnover intention, and desire for advancement differed for women of different ages, the results did not support the patterns suggested by Levinson. No support was found for Super's career stages. Similarly, Smart and Peterson (1994) found little support for Levinson's theory.

In total, these findings indicate that stage models (e.g. Super, 1957; Levinson, 1978) do not adequately capture the complex lives of women. Moreover, given the rapid technological advances, increased rate of globalization, and changing social values of the last two decades (Lawler, 1994; Miles and Snow, 1996; Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1995), it is questionable where these stage models still describe the careers of most men (Hall, 1996; Osterman, 1996). While stage models imply long-term employment with one or two firms, in reality most Western workers change jobs every four-and-one-half years, and there has been a decrease in the employment rates of large firms, where linear careers typically flourish (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

Despite dramatic changes in the workplace over the last 20 years, most research still focuses on traditional careers (Arthur *et al.*, 2005), causing some to question how many individuals really exhibit these non-traditional career patterns (Baruch, 2006). One of the key contributions of this study is that it does address whether career patterns have indeed shifted from the traditional linear to non-linear career paths as described by more recent conceptualizations of careers (e.g. boundaryless and protean careers; see also Pringle and Mallon, 2003). In addition to providing insights into both traditional and non-traditional career types, another purpose of this study is to determine if gender differences impact how people are enacting careers. Despite repeated calls for the development of a model that describes the complexities of women's careers and accounts for potential gender differences (e.g. Sullivan and Crocitto, 2007; Gallos, 1989), few attempts have been made to conceptualize women's careers (see Powell and Mainiero, 1992, 1993 for an exception). This paper examines how gender impacts career enactment, suggesting that there are two major career patterns based on an individual's needs for authenticity, balance and challenge over the life span. The findings of our research should be useful to HR professionals and other organizational leaders who wish to enhance the recruitment and retention of highly skilled employees.

## Methods

Although past research has tended to focus on the concept of "career" as defined by a series of steps along a progression, the focus for this research was the subjective understanding of the careers experienced by women and by men in today's contemporary career landscape. Because we were interested in capturing some of the

underlying motivations and constraints that propel professionals to develop different career trajectories, we chose a dual methodology that included:

- (1) a series of in-depth interviews with 52 men and women in different stages of their careers; and
- (2) an online focus group of 27 individuals engaged in “conversations” about their careers.

We used a grounded theory approach and made use of methods commonly employed in classic careers research (e.g. Levinson’s famous, 1978 theory based on 40 interviews and his 1996 research based on 46 interviews) as well as more recent career studies (e.g. de Janasz *et al.*, 2003; Gersick and Kram, 2002; Ibarra, 2003; White, 1995) as the basis for model development. Specifically, the data generated for this paper uses qualitative techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), most notably the career-history methodology (see Ismail *et al.*, 2005, for a complete explanation of this method). Career-history is the description of career events and actions resulting from the interplay between life and career activities. The method makes use of autobiographical accounts using in-depth interviews, combined with other documentation (e.g. resumes) about the individuals. Individuals are asked a series of structured as well as unstructured questions about their career progress and results are coded according to patterned differences and common themes noted in the data. Career history methods have been recognized for being particularly appropriate for the study of subjective career issues (Ismail *et al.*, 2005).

#### *The interview study*

A total of 53 interviews, ranging in length from 30 to 90 minutes, were conducted over a one year period, either face-to-face, via the telephone, by e-mail or by a combination of these approaches. All but one of the 53 people interviewed agreed to be included in the study, resulting in a sample size of 52. The sample included 12 men and 40 women in professional jobs that included sales, marketing, manufacturing, telecommunications, entertainment, education, legal, telecommunications, medical, and science as well as e-commerce professions. Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached (i.e. the point in which no new themes emerged; Flick, 1998). All but one member of the sample was Caucasian. The interviewees ranged in age from approximately 35 to 70 years. All of the interviewees were college educated. Study participants were obtained in a number of ways, including through a women’s networking association as well as by using the snowball technique, whereby we asked interviewees to recommend another person who had a different career story to tell (Babbie, 1986).

The interview had both structured as well as unstructured elements. All interviews began with the structured question “Tell me about the history of your career, starting from your first job experience?”, and moved to other structured questions, such as “If you could describe your career motivation, what motivated you in your career?”, “How did you deal with issues of family balance?” and “What were your reasons for career transitions along the way?”. The interview then moved to an unstructured format in which we asked additional questions about details concerning their career histories, the unique aspects of key career transitions, work/non-work issues, and how non-work issues impacted career choices.

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After the initial interview was completed, to ensure accuracy and completeness, the interviewing author typed up the interviewee's answers and e-mailed or faxed the write-up to the individual. Individuals reviewed their write-ups and were asked to correct any errors concerning their career histories and life stories, make any additions, or clarify statements. In some cases, short follow-up interviews were conducted if an individual wanted to share more information. After each person's interview notes were reviewed by that individual and finalized, participants were asked to sign release forms.

Employing qualitative data analysis techniques, such as those described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), we looked for identifying themes and new insights while also considering how this information fit within existing theories. Comments from each section of the interview were categorized into themes concerning issues of authenticity, balance, and challenge that affected the career transitions of each individual and had been found in previous research (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Each author served as a coder of this data; in addition, one other coder was employed to categorize and group comments into thematic interpretations. Using the techniques described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the three coders looked for fit *vis-à-vis* the themes as well as unique aspects of career patterns and trajectories. The themes led to further examination of the career histories of each individual, which in turn led to the finding of two primary career patterns that dovetailed with the themes of authenticity, balance and challenge. Inter-rater reliability was 0.75, with any disagreements discussed until agreement was reached by full consensus. Table I provides examples of how comments were coded.

#### *The online focus group study*

In addition to the interviews, one of the authors conducted online "conversations" with 27 individuals in a focus group concerning their careers. These individuals were members of a professional banking association; some were also members of financial and marketing associations. Four women and 23 men were included in this sample and ranged in age from 25 to 59. All but two members of the sample were Caucasians. This process was highly structured as the online conversation format allowed a question to be posted online, and then members of the group would respond with their career information and opinions. As expected with online dialogue, as one member would comment on an aspect of his or her career history, others would add their opinions and examples, resulting in a stream of discussion ending with a general consensus around a conclusion. The structured questions posted for members of the online group to consider began with the classic question: "Tell us about the story of your career", and then moved to questions about work-life balance and career progression issues: "Are you in a workplace that allows you to actively balance your family's needs around your job?", "Have you ever had a situation in which your career progress has been 'blocked' – either by a career plateau or by your own choice?", "Have you found meaning in your work?", "Do you see gender issues complicating career progression in the workplace at your firm?" and "What were the career lessons and life lessons you learned along the way?". This process took place over a period of seven weeks. Participants did not know the next question until each question was fully discussed. Questions were offered on a weekly basis and participants had the opportunity to comment within a week time frame.



Methodology	Participant comment	Coding
Interview sample	“In my twenties, I was afraid to say, ‘That’s wrong’. I would go ahead and do what people wanted of me. In my thirties, I would say, ‘Hey, that’s wrong’. In my forties I would say ‘That’s really wrong’, and I would speak up about it. In my fifties, I am willing to say, ‘That’s wrong. And I won’t do it” “I had a moment when I decided I was going to call it as I saw it. So the next time my boss asked me to do one of those grey shadings, I found the courage to say, ‘No, I won’t do it’. It changed everything – I suddenly was no longer the ‘go to’ man. I was closed out of the loop and I had to switch firms – but at least now I can sleep in my bed at night and know I am doing the right thing”	Authenticity
Internet focus group	“The challenge for me was to learn and adopt a management style that would feel right for me in my skin, while getting the job done right for the bank. I made a lot of mistakes in the beginning [. . .] The key to all of it is that I was able to be myself and be consistent, honest, and fair. People can see that, and it helps to build trust and respect. My advice to someone starting their career would be, ‘To thine own self be true’” “I find it hard to write this, but my son recently died from a drug overdose. I can’t tell you what a change his death, now several months ago, has wrought in me. It was a cataclysmic event for my life, my whole family, and for my career. Now I don’t care much about ‘career’, as I used to. I go to the office and make the motions, but my heart isn’t in it anymore. This event has taught me what is really important. Life is about people, not about work”	Authenticity
Interview sample	“Family was my first priority. I managed to integrate it all, work and family. Some people don’t know their child’s favorite color, but I did because I balanced work and family” “Some years ago I had the opportunity to switch careers and work in a Wall Street financial brokerage business, but I decided against it [. . .] Although the money would have been much better, I didn’t want to sacrifice my time with my family, especially while my boys are still young. What fun would it have been to have that great retirement party, only to look back and realize I did not get to spend time with my children while they were growing up and wanted to be with me”	Balance
Internet focus group	“I have had to learn about the importance of ‘balance’ in my life over the years. My wife and I had our children early in our marriage. My wife chose to stay home, and I was the provider. That was the deal. Even though my boss would say, ‘Go ahead, take time off’, I rarely did so. The problem was me, not the company. I believed it was my job to provide. So I worked overtime and did not ask for much extra time. Yes, I missed baseball games and birthday parties. And yes, I do regret it, looking back”	

**Table I.**  
Examples of coding  
commentary from the  
dual methodology  
(interview sample versus  
internet focus group)

(continued)

Methodology	Participant comment	Coding
	“Early in my career, I worked long hours, not because I had to but because I wanted to. This continued after I got married, as both my wife and I were at work more than at home. Then we had our first child, and we decided she would put her career on hold to stay home with the baby. I really respect her for that decision, as it worked out for all of us”	Balance
Interview study	“My career has been a whirlwind, and I have worked hard every minute of it [...] It’s great – I love what I do, and I am always looking forward to see what the new day will bring. Every day is a new series of challenges, and that’s the fun of the job. I am having fun in this job” “In my first job, I felt constrained; representing an equipment manufacturer means that ‘business solutions’ must always involve the use of the manufacturer’s equipment – which certainly is not the panacea for all corporate problems. Wanting to be in an environment of challenge where the most appropriate solution might be recommended, I resigned and joined a [name of firm] consulting group”	Challenge
Internet focus group	“My greatest challenge at work was when we purchased a troubled bank in Indiana that was given the choice from the FDIC to either sell or close. I was primarily responsible for turning things around in less than three years [...] The success of the project really put a feather in my cap and made me very marketable. I can honestly say I received 15 years’ experience during those six years” “At the beginning of the year I was promoted [...] After two weeks in the role I started to leave my comfort zone and began to accept my new role as leader for the region. Now after two months in the job I have accepted my new assignment and beginning to have fun. The biggest challenge for myself is going forward and becoming a better manager inside and outside the organization”	Challenge

Table I.

Transcripts of the online discussions were then downloaded and read by an outside coder for thematic interpretation of the data per question. Comments from the online discussions were coded according to themes (see Table I). In addition, following the career-history method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), full resume and biographical information were checked for the full sample. Because both studies (the online focus group study and the interview study) each tracked career histories and motivations to make career changes, the results from both these studies were brought together for this paper. While each study asked somewhat different questions of participants, the thematic analysis was similar and the results had much in common. Two distinct career patterns evolved over time as our examination of the interview and online focus group results generated new insights. Sample interview commentary concerning the two career patterns is provided in the results section of this paper.



## Results and discussion

Overall, analysis of the online conversations and interviews indicates that careers in the twenty-first century information age are marked by several unique features that did not apply to careers in corporations during the manufacturing age of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, despite great changes in the workplace and advances in gender equality, there were some dramatic differences between the career histories of men and women. We thus use gender as a means to understand the underlying reasons, shifts, transitions, and patterns that shape career decisions.

In the next section, we discuss the two major, gender-based career patterns we found. Next, we detail atypical career patterns based on gender.

### *Proposed gender-based patterns*

Thematic interpretation of our findings from interviews and online focus group indicated two major career patterns, with distinct gender differences. We identified an “alpha career pattern”, which was displayed by individuals who were strongly focused on their career, and a “beta career pattern”, which was displayed by individuals who had made adjustments in their careers to have a more balanced family/non-work life *vis-à-vis* their careers.

From the interview sample, the majority of the 52 individuals discussed the early aspects of their career histories concerning striving for challenge. Although some individuals continued to discuss how challenge was their primary motivator during mid-career, others began to discuss how issues of balance moved to the forefront. When individuals began to discuss mid-career issues, the content of the interviews diverged dramatically by gender. All but three of the women began to make changes and compromises in their career paths to satisfy demands of child-rearing, elder care, and other relationship-driven issues. More than two-thirds of the 12 men continued to focus on career challenge. The remainder of men, who tended to be younger, began to discuss issues of work/family balance.

From the online focus group sample, two women and 18 men were strongly focused on their careers in banking, finance, or marketing organizations. These individuals developed solutions for issues of family balance in order to pursue their career ambitions. In contrast, the other two women and five men chose jobs that allowed them to prioritize their families as well as their careers through use of flexible work hours, family-friendly banking cultures, or compressed travel schedules.

The results of the interview analysis were very similar proportionally to the findings for the online focus group. In the interview sample, there was a total of 12 individuals (23.1 percent of the sample) with alpha career patterns and 40 individuals (76.9 percent of the sample) with beta career patterns. In the online focus group sample, there was a total of 20 individuals (74.1 percent of this sample) with alpha career patterns and seven individuals (25.1 percent of this sample) with beta career patterns. Combined totals between the two samples reflect a distinct gender difference, with 32 individuals (40.5 percent of the combined samples) displaying the alpha career pattern (27 men, five women) and 47 individuals (59.5 percent of the combined samples) displaying the beta career pattern (eight men, 39 women).

Overall, we found that the priority individuals placed on their careers transformed over time, shifting sometimes back and forth between career and family based on the demands of their lives and work. However, unlike past conceptualizations that

dichotomized people's working lives, we found that whether individuals were focused primarily on career or family at a specific point in time, other concerns, such as the need for challenge and authenticity, did not disappear (for a review, see Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). We found that individuals not only focused on career and family/non-work issues but also focused on issues such as personal development and being genuine or being true to oneself and behaving in ways that matched their internal values.

Based on the insights gleaned from the interview process and focus group discussions, we found three parameters that served as guideposts throughout an individual's life. These parameters caused women and men to take stock of their career decisions and to make changes and transitions to meet their needs for their careers, families, and themselves. These three parameters are:

- authenticity, defined as the being true to oneself in the midst of the constant interplay between personal development and work and non-work issues;
- balance, defined as making decisions so that the different aspects of one's life, both work and non-work, form a coherent whole; and
- challenge, defined as engaging in activities that permit the individual to demonstrate responsibility, control, and autonomy while learning and growing.

As an individual's career unfolds over his/her life span, we found that one parameter generally takes priority at that time in the individual's life, with the other two parameters being of less intensity. All three parameters, however, are still present and active as all aspects are necessary to create the current pattern of person's life/career.

### **The alpha career pattern (for men)**

We found that more men than women (27 men, five women) followed an alpha career pattern. In general, men's careers had a linear, or sequential aspect – challenges first, concerns about the self (authenticity), then a later focus on balance and others (C-A-B) – that was far more straightforward than the complex patterns and multiplicity of career/family decision making of women. Although previous research based on gender archetypes has focused on hierarchy, independent thought, action, and goal orientation for men (e.g. Gilligan, 1978, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969, 1976; for a review, see Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006), we do not believe such distinctions are quite that clear cut. Even when men are focused on challenge, in the role of family breadwinner they expressed their devotion to their family through financially providing for their needs. Our research showed that as men described their priorities for careers versus family, most came to express their devotion to their family by spending more time with them later in their careers. Men came to value relationships more once they had made progress in their careers.

The career histories of the men with alpha career patterns showed they actively pursued career challenges as an important, all encompassing, parameter of their lives. For those men who serve as the family breadwinner, career advancement became a barometer of success and a means of providing for their families. At some point in their careers, however, most men become plateaued, as not all employees can reach the top levels of their firms. In the latter part of mid-career, we found that the men in the study were asking themselves the question: "Is this all there is?" and authenticity became the

focus. In late career, men were spurred to rejoin family and define a life outside of the office.

The case of Daniel illustrates a typical alpha career pattern pursued by many of the men in this study. His first job out of college was working for food products company, where he faced the challenge of learning the basics of selling, both on-the-job and through the company sales program. In his next job, selling operating room supplies for a medical products manufacturer, he further enhanced his sales skills and gained valuable experience. He was quickly promoted through the ranks, from sales representative to district manager. After receiving a number of awards, Daniel moved to Kimberly Clark to become a Senior Marketing Professional, where he faced the new challenge of developing new business ventures and of using his marketing experience and skills in another country. After Kimberly Clark, he moved to a smaller company as a Vice President of Marketing and Sales. Next, Daniel found an exciting new opportunity working for a well-known non-profit organization:

I think there are a lot of people who are interested in sales who never consider the not for profit sector. But what I do now is really interesting, and very worthwhile. This is a very high level sales job, where I am selling to corporate backers, calling on companies, and determining what might be a good strategic fit between this organization and their company. Sales is a very challenging profession. When you are in sales, you wake up every morning wanting to win. I wake up every morning wanting to make that next sale. This is a high ego profession, but it's not as much about the money as much as it is about personal fulfillment. Sales types are like actors who need to hear that constant applause. But after you have earned all the awards, you wonder, what's next? I went to work in the not for profit sector because I wanted to feel that I was working for a cause. Now when I make a sale, I realize that I am saving lives, not just selling products.

Daniel's sales career has been clearly marked and motivated by a series of challenges – each involving the challenge of winning the next sale. He has followed the typical C-A-B (challenge, authenticity, balance) or alpha career pattern. Daniel began his career focused on challenge, but in his mid-forties, he began searching for authenticity:

Now that I have hit the VP level, I am searching for something more. Even though on paper I have it all – a nice house, a nice car, a teenage daughter – I find that I am asking myself how I can use my skills in a way that will continue to challenge me.

When asked about balancing his family life with the constant demands of travel as a sales professional, Daniel's response was similar to many of the men we interviewed who serve as a the family provider:

Balance is an issue. It's tough when you are on the road so much, as I am. I try to arrange my travel so I don't miss my daughter's birthday or her musical concerts. But I am on the road constantly. One benefit of my frequent travel is that I make sure we go away and have great vacations together. But I don't know how else to do it – I am the family provider, and there is no other way for us to have the nice cars and the big house unless I am bringing in the salary to do it all. At this point, we have a very exciting life with the house and the great health club membership. But to do it all I have to be the family provider, and that means missing time at home. You can email or call home when you're on the road, but sometimes that is not the same as being there. But it's what I have to do to keep the money coming in.

The careers of men were more sequential than those of women and men defined issues of balance differently from women. Men may focus on their career ambitions first but

come to value personal relationships more over time. We found that the importance of balance began to be recognized in mid-career for most men, and grew stronger, often wistfully so, in late career. Many men in the study expressed regrets over missing important milestones in the lives of their children or other family events. This difference in perspective, and of the timing of the importance of family relationships *vis-à-vis* career, marks a profound contrast between women and men. For those men who serve in the role of the family provider, the pressure of earning a continuous salary, from themselves or from societal norms, weighs heavily on their shoulders. It's not that men do not value family. It is more accurate to say that men value family sufficiently to sacrifice themselves to ensure their family is well provided for financially.

### **The beta career pattern (for women)**

More women than men in our study displayed a beta career pattern (39 women, eight men). For most women, issues of challenge, ambition, and advancement were most easily addressed in early career. But then life intervened with marriage, children, and other responsibilities. Issues of balance became prominent in late early and mid-career (just as promotions and opportunities for greater responsibility would start to become available). Issues of authenticity, defined as following leisure or spiritual pursuits, making decisions to start a business because it is "right" for her, or finding ways to have her own voice heard, would crop up in late career. The beta career pattern, challenge in early career, balance in mid-career and authenticity in later career (C-B-A), was born from the adjustments and compromises these women made while integrating their relationships with their careers.

Consider the case of Gina, whose career is a typical beta profile. Gina earned an MBA from the University of Texas. Early in her career, she worked in marketing and sales at a prestigious *Fortune* 500 telecommunications firm:

It was exciting to go to work in the mornings. I loved getting up and going to work and having something to do. I would take work home every night, and I worked straight through the weekends. No wonder I was promoted early! I accomplished so much. And I loved every minute of it. I wanted more, more, more.

Gina was promoted three times within a Call Center, and then to a management position in the marketing area. After 15 years at work, she met Bill, they married, and in her forties, she became pregnant with twins:

Initially, I felt I could do it all – the career, the long hours, the quest for the latest development and how I would solve the hottest challenge at work. And I did have it all – for a while. But when I found I was pregnant with twins, after a decade of waiting for children – my life turned around. I was an older mother, a late mother, and for me, there was nothing I wanted more than to rear my two babies. So it was a clear decision for me to prioritize my kids and become a stay at home Mom. [Then] my father had a heart attack and required intensive care. My mother developed cancer. My aunt, who lived alone, needed meals brought to her. There just weren't enough hours in the day to do it all, so I quit. I had to.

Gina took a career interruption for five years while her family issues settled themselves. She missed the stimulation of work, but found challenges elsewhere. She spent time at her children's school as a volunteer, joined the PTA, and crafted exquisite

sculptures. But after a while, rounds of PTA meetings and time on artistic endeavors became meaningless:

I found I just had too much time on my hands. I was worrying about every little thing. There were problems with my sisters and I was letting it all engulf me. I decided it was time that I get control of my life, not be so reactive to everything. I decided to be proactive and get a job instead, just to occupy me and get my mind off everything.

Gina found part-time employment with a local retail store that was convenient and offered reasonable work hours. The job kept her occupied and permitted her to continue family care-giving responsibilities. At age 50, Gina realized that she needed something more:

Early in my career, I worked for the money and for the challenge of it. In the middle of my life, I found I had to serve others around me. My kids are great, but they are getting ready to go to the middle school now, and soon they will be off on their own. I'm realizing this is my time. My time for me. I've got to find out what I want to do with myself, more than just working in a store to pass the time. I want to accomplish something – for me.

Gina is considering opening her own crafts business and allowing fellow artists to show their works in a gallery next to the store:

That's what I'd love to do, for me and to help others. Pursue my art and also help others in the process. Because this is my time, now.

Gina's career follows the typical beta career pattern of challenge, then balance, and finally the pursuit of authenticity later in life, when nurturing responsibilities recede. The career histories of women in our study showed they experienced the need for challenge in the early part of their careers. This was the point where the desire to develop expertise or to demonstrate skills was most pronounced. In early career, issues of balance and authenticity were of secondary concern, but nonetheless important and would assume primary focus later on the horizon. For instance, we found that women may make a career decision to take a position offering more responsibility, as challenge is the key parameter at that time with the remaining issues (balance, authenticity) becoming secondary for the moment.

In mid-career, the career history analysis showed that most women were predominately concerned about the issue of balance. Interestingly, it did not matter whether the woman had a husband or children or whether she was single. Women may make adjustments to their career ambitions at that point to take on more flexible schedules.

In late career, most women we interviewed were asking the question "Is that all there is?". Desire for authenticity, being true to herself, and making decisions that suited her above others predominated her career and life decisions. At this point, late in the career cycle, we found most women were freed from childcare, elder care and other such responsibilities. They were interested in creating their own path, on their own terms, making decisions in an authentic, meaningful way, and the issue of balance, while still active, had receded to the background.

### **Gender counterpoints and the alpha and beta career patterns**

While most of the men in our sample enacted alpha patterns and most of the women enacted beta patterns, this was not true of all of the men and women. In the next

sections, we will discuss counterpoint patterns: women who enacted the alpha pattern and men who enacted the beta pattern.

### *Women with alpha career patterns*

Our findings indicate that there are a small but limited number of women pursuing a more traditional, linear, alpha career pattern. For many of these women, challenge and then authenticity were the primary factors driving their careers, with many having husbands who work from home, or who did not work at all (Mainiero, 1994; Morris, 2002).

When we first looked at the career patterns of a few atypical women who pursued more of an alpha pattern, we thought their careers were more similar to men than other women, but then differences became apparent. For example, the life of Jill, a single woman who has spent a relatively linear career in banking, illustrates both the alpha pattern for women and highlights the difference between the male and female alpha career pattern:

I have been with this bank since 1993 when I was hired to run their residential loan department and start the commercial loan department. Before then, I had worked in bank operations, and loans, at several local banks. I have learned a lot from this job, which is an important thing for me. If a job becomes boring I get restless. This bank has undergone a lot of change in the past 10 years bringing it from a forgotten sleepy little bank to a vital part of the community servicing both consumers and businesses. I have been promoted through the ranks taking on responsibility for the bank's branch network, marketing, and technology and now as Senior Vice President I am 2nd in charge with a succession plan to CEO.

Jill is a go-getter; she told us she lives for achievement and challenge. Jill never thought about "opting-out":

No, not really. When the CEO retired last year, I questioned my role and relationship with the bank, looked around, and decided I was vested [in terms of pension] here. I have been pleased to find I can live with the new CEO's goals for the bank and we continue to seek better ways and opportunities for us to do business. I have been very lucky with my career – 5 different institutions in all – and I have had a number of managers and leaders that have inspired me to learn and achieve and have rewarded me for my efforts.

When asked about balance, Jill discussed it as a missing piece of her life that she did not realize was missing until she was older and was well-established in her career:

Now at this point in my career I know my style, I have a vision for the bank, and I know what I can accomplish here. But late in life, I have found a new dimension that has been missing all along, and I didn't know how much I was missing it. Now my life will be complete, finally. I have finally found the man of my dreams – and he comes with five children, so who says I don't like challenges?

Women, like Jill, with an alpha career pattern seek power and are fully intent on pursuing their career goals to reach the top of their corporations. Women who have made *Fortune Magazine's* annual list of "The Top Fifty Women" usually fit this category (Morris, 2002; see also White, 1995). These women are determined, persistent, and in relentless pursuit of challenging career goals. Often behind a high-level alpha career pattern woman is a beta career pattern man at home. Many of these high-level executive women have husbands who often handle the responsibilities of the traditional "corporate wife". Such successful executive women as Dawn Lepore, Vice



Chairman of Charles Schwab, Dina Dublon, CFO of J.P. Morgan Chase, and Madeline Hamill, Vice President of worldwide strategic planning at Coca-Cola, all have husbands who stay at home with their children. Of the 187 participants at *Fortune's* 2002 Most Powerful Women in Business Summit, 30 percent had househusbands. Many of these men, however, only became househusbands after they had already pursued their own challenging careers (Mainiero, 1994; Morris, 2002).

Increasingly, women and their husbands are wrestling with gender roles as more high-powered jobs become within the reach of more women. Like the traditional, linear career pattern man, these career-driven women often became "weekend mothers" (Morris, 2002). For others, a decision was made to have no children at all; unlike executive men who usually have children (Altman *et al.*, 2005; Hakim, 1996, 2000), 42 percent of the high-achieving women in US corporations did not have children (Hewlett, 2002). Often it becomes a question of which member of the couple has the greater financial means to provide for the family. One of our interviewees, a stay-at-home Dad who supports his wife's corporate career, explained:

My wife enjoys the challenge of her work, and her firm paid more overall while my salary was flat [no bonuses or commissions]. So we made the mutual decision that I would be the one to stay home.

This stay-at home Dad had already pursued a career in the sports management field before he made the decision to opt-out of the work world to devote himself to his children.

#### *Men with beta career patterns*

Interestingly, we found a number of men who remarked that they did not want to have careers like their fathers. The younger men often forged a much different career pattern from the older men in our study. Rather than follow the typical alpha career pattern of most men, their career histories described a beta career pattern similar to that of most women in our sample. Consider the case of Tim, who has become a stay-at-home Dad after a successful career in accounting:

I was an accounting major in college. My family was blue collar, and I was the first one in the family to go to college. I decided to go into accounting because it was steady work, good pay. I ended up with a masters in accounting, got the CPA, went to work for Ernst and Whinney Young [now Ernst and Young] for four years in public accounting. The work was interesting, working with different clients but after a year I started to realize it wasn't my thing. The work was very intensive, working 70-80 hours a week. I felt like I did not have a life – at least I wanted to go to church on a Sunday!

Tim realized he had to make a change:

There was a client from the State of Illinois who recruited me to go to work for the Illinois State government. There, no one worked weekends. I felt like I got my life back. I took a management position there but felt restricted by the union and state politics; I liked to get things done and found myself frustrated half the time.

A second transition occurred when he married and they moved to a new city:

I married my wife in 1992, and she worked at First National Bank of Chicago at the time. I came to Connecticut to work for the Governmental Standards Accounting Board and my wife followed me here. In my profession, this was considered a prestigious position working for

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the standards board. I was promoted, gave speeches to accounting societies and conferences as an “expert” on the standards. My wife found a job working for MBIA, working in financial services, managing portfolios on insured municipal bonds. She was doing well.

Both Tim and his wife found their work to be stimulating and challenging in early career. What was missing in their lives was children, so the couple considered their options:

We wanted to have children and were thinking about adoption from China. We realized if we were going to go ahead with the adoption process, what was the point if neither of us could be home with the children? [My wife] enjoyed the challenge of her work, and her firm paid more overall while my salary was flat [no bonuses, etc.]. So we made the decision that I would be the one to stay home. When I left, my boss wanted me to work part time 1-2 days a week for 6 months to finish off a project. I tried doing it part time, but my time was too split with a baby at home and it generated too much stress. Also the project changed – it had been a project I could do at home, but then it required more office interaction and more involvement. I wanted a clean break, so I completed the assignment and never looked back.

Tim elected to become a stay-at-home Dad, and in doing so, prioritized balance as the parameter that shaped his career decision. Tim’s beta career pattern is similar to the majority of women in our sample. Tim does not regret his choices:

Once I made this decision, I had no regrets. This works for me. Maybe at some point I will go back to work, get a degree in library sciences, something like that. But I would have to be nearby to be with the children. It’s important to get out and be proud of what you are doing. Lately I have done some volunteer work with my church to stay active [he became President of his church for a renewable two-year term]. It is important, though, to realize that staying at home has a value. This solution [being a stay-at-home Dad] works for me, for us, for all of us.

Disturbed by layoffs, slow or non-existent movement up the career ladder, and job insecurity, not all men want to have a hard-driving corporate career. An increasing number of younger men are deciding that the level of responsibility, degree of travel demands, and the unyielding nature of work overtaking one’s life is not worth it.

Similar to women with the beta career pattern, the career histories of these men showed they often forgo their career ambitions in mid-career to follow a more relaxed, family-focused lifestyle. Many of these men described witnessing their fathers working long hours and missing family events only to then watch their fathers’ hard-won advancements be destroyed during repeated rounds of layoffs and downsizing. These younger men decided to break free of the traditional male career path and create a new path. For example, Kaufmann and Uhlenberg (2000) found that while men age 30 and under planned to reduce working hours when their children were born, older men tended to increase their working hours after the birth of a child.

## Contributions

The first major contribution of this study is that the alpha and beta career patterns identified in this paper provide context to the study of careers, putting gender in the foreground. Scholars have noted the lack of theoretical research that focuses on gender differences in the enactment of careers, calling for the development of models that more accurately capture the complexities of women’s careers (e.g. Powell and Mainiero, 1992, 1993; Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan and Crocitto, 2007). The alpha and beta career patterns detailed in this paper offer such a conceptualization because these patterns emphasize

differences in how the careers of men and women unfold. Similarly, researchers in the area of work-family-non-work domains have long noted the bifurcation of “work” versus “family” (for a review, see Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). Yet the women in our studies, in contrast to the men, saw work/family concerns as more of a *gestalt* in their lives – “I must find the fit that is right for me given my circumstances and context” rather than a division of “work” versus “family” with both concepts treated in isolation. Both men and women want balance, just in different ways at different points in the life cycle.

Second, our findings also test an idea that has recently garnered increased media attention – that there are “alpha” males in corporate life who focus on career advancement (Ludeman and Erlandson, 2006) versus those who might pursue less career focused lifestyles, the so-called “B-players” (DeYoung and Vijayaraghvan, 2003). Although our research did not directly test such notions that permeate the media, we did find overarching career patterns that suggest some workers might prefer a more family-centric career lifestyle while other workers are driven to find corporate success. This qualitative research study provides initial support for the concept that alpha and beta career patterns can be recognized *vis-à-vis* an understanding of the career histories of individuals via the themes of authenticity, balance, and challenge throughout a person’s career. Additionally, there is a distinct gender difference to these patterns that will need to be examined in future career research.

A third contribution is that our research shows that career and life decisions do have boundaries, or parameters, that serve as guideposts for transitional life and career decisions. The decision to weigh family over career, or career over family – or when to focus on one’s own development – is often a function of where the individual is at a given point in the life cycle. Much has been written about the boundaryless career, with many assuming that careerists in the twenty-first century have no boundaries or limits to their career decisions and advancement (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Our research highlights that there are limits or boundaries, often based on societal norms about who should be the primary caregiver for children and the elderly versus who should be the primary breadwinner, as well as other factors including stereotypes, discrimination and country-based norms. Such limitations are just beginning to be recognized in the boundaryless career literature and are deserving of much greater research consideration (for a recent reconceptualization of the concept, see Sullivan and Arthur, 2006).

### **Directions for future research and study limitations**

Our research suggests a number of directions for future research. First, this study sheds light on a new societal trend. As Western social mores about gender roles become more relaxed, atypical patterns may become more socially acceptable and prominent over time. Traditionally men have expressed their love and commitment for their wives and children through the breadwinner role, focusing on salary increases and career advancement as a means of better fulfilling this role. Likewise, women traditionally have had most of the responsibility for maintaining the household and caring for children and the elderly (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000; Hochschild, 1997; Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006; Williams, 2000). In recent years, however, some men have begun to focus less on the provider role and increased their focus on caregiving responsibilities. Future research should study, for example, what factors influence

men's choices to assume the "househusband role" and how and when (if ever) these men will transition back into the workforce. Research should also examine whether a wife's career is positively impacted by having a househusband in the same way a man's career is positively affected by having a spouse in the housewife role (Schneer and Reitman, 2002).

Another area for additional research is the impact of generational differences on career choices. Our research suggests that the careers of younger men may be more like the traditional, female beta pattern than the traditional, male alpha pattern. It will be of interest to study whether over time, gender differences in career patterns decrease as individuals, regardless of gender, choose the career pattern that best suits their lives. Moreover, as more men choose the beta career pattern, research should examine whether organizations respond by offering more programs to help these men gain greater work/family balance.

This study is not without limitations; however, these limitations suggest areas for further research. Like much of the research on careers, and in organizational behavior/HR management in general, our study was cross-sectional. We join other scholars in calling for the use of longitudinal designs, while recognizing the time and cost constraints of such methods. Moreover, we recommend that empirical studies are completed in the spirit of triangulation to test the qualitative findings of this study. We combined the qualitative aspects of two studies into one in order to examine the career transitions across a variety of professions as well as for the purposes of reporting on these results. Additionally, the combination of these two studies was done in order to examine both men's and women's approaches to careers. We do recognize that this combination is not without methodological limitations, and recommend that future studies employing different methods and samples (e.g. including minorities and individuals from non-Western countries) be done in order to replicate these findings. Despite these limitations, the relationship between gender and the alpha and beta career patterns lays the framework for many new avenues for future research on careers, especially in this time of increased technology advances and globalization.

### Implications for practitioners

Organizational career paths and succession plans have tended to focus on the male alpha (challenge-authenticity-balance) pattern rather than the beta (challenge-balance-authenticity) pattern that most women emulate (for an empirical review illustrating this trend, see Baruch and Peiperl, 2000). Firms that fail to understand these gender based differences, and try to force women (and younger men) into the cookie-cutter traditional corporate linear model of long hours, face-time, and extensive travel as proxies for performance and commitment, do not realize that inflexible corporate policies contribute to women's turnover (e.g. the opt-out revolution; Belkin, 2003, 2006a, b; Wallis, 2004) and result in an immeasurable loss of human capital for the firm.

To gain competitive advantage firms must not only attract and retain high-quality personnel, but must have systems in place and establish a culture that effectively makes use of this talent (Carmeli and Schaubroeck, 2005). Despite the increased availability of family-friendly policies, these policies are ineffective if employees do not perceive them as accessible. For example, Budd and Mumford (2006), using data from the 1998 British Workplace Employee Relations Survey ( $n = 19,539$  people at 1,565 workplaces), found that employees most likely to need family-friendly policies

(e.g. single mothers in low paying jobs) are less likely to perceive their accessibility while those least likely to need them (e.g. middle-aged men with high salaries) are more likely to perceive high accessibility. They argue that organizations should focus on the perceived accessibility of such programs rather than just availability alone to determine whether such initiatives have been successful.

This study also underscores that HR professionals and other organizational leaders must realize that gender issues do affect career development possibilities and succession planning. HR policies and criteria for advancement based on the traditional linear career model work against women. Women and beta-defined men are likely follow a different approach, independent of corporate imperatives, as they focus on the balance parameter of their lives. Pioneering companies have come to realize that having a culture that promotes balance often positively impacts the bottom line. For instance, DuPont found that those employees using their work-family initiatives were among their top performers. Likewise, SAS has been highly successful by going beyond the norm to help individuals balance work and family demands. SAS employees' workweek is 35 hours. Employees have unlimited sick days as well as the option to enroll their children in the firm's learning centers, which have teaching staffs rather than the typical day care center (Burud and Tumolo, 2004). IBM offers up to three years of unpaid leave, with full benefits and job protection, which employees can take for any reason (Belkin, 2006a, b).

Moreover, our study suggests that managers need to create an environment that permits individuals to have challenging work while balancing their non-work demands. With the advent of new technology, some forward-thinking corporations are focusing on performance – no matter where or when the work is actually done – rather than in-office, nine-to-five face time. Thus, employees with flexible schedules are able to work from home, completing simulating assignments while caring for children or managing other non-work issues. Corporations who do not adopt a new technological, performance-based approach to work may find they are losing employees. Recent statistics show that although individuals in most Western countries are working more hours (Clarkberg and Moen, 1998; Brett and Stroh, 2003; Feldman, 2002; Jacobs and Gerson, 2000), many corporations may be actually losing money in terms of increased turnover costs among the most highly qualified employees as well as increased costs related to employee intangibles, such as reduced employee commitment and job satisfaction (Conference Board, 2005; Ulrich and Smallwood, 2005). If the work is getting done, what does it matter where it is accomplished?

Another area in which executives may be surprised to learn requires their attention is on the category of workers without children. Often forgotten in discussions of "work/family" issues are the single men and women who work and must also balance their personal lives and family issues such as caring for elderly parents or other relatives. Individuals in our sample who were unmarried or without children felt that company policies, benefits, and expectations favored married individuals or those with children. Although single individuals may not have "families" as traditionally defined as spouse and children, they have families in that they may have aging relatives or disabled siblings in their care as well as friendships, romantic relationships and non-work activities (e.g. volunteer organizations, attending classes) that they wish to nurture. Most corporate HR policies continued to be based on the work life and needs of the typical professional man, who usually had a wife at home taking care of personal

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issues so he could be 100 percent career-focused. Instead, workplace policies should offer flexibility to all employees and design benefits that give employees choices based on their own lifestyle and needs (e.g. cafeteria benefits style approach).

Given our continually changing work environment, the role of HR professionals is even more important today than in the past. Because human capital can be a major source of competitive advantage, organizations need to engage in strategic HR management, determining how to best reward and motivate employees with alpha or beta career patterns. HR professionals must recognize that while employees value authenticity, balance and challenge throughout their lifetimes – and that all these parameters need to be addressed, one of these parameters typically moves to the forefront and intensifies in importance at certain pivotal life points. For example, those early in their careers may seek rewards such as promotions and fast-track learning opportunities as they strive to achieve challenge, whereas those in mid-career striving for balance may prefer to be rewarded with more vacation days or alternative work schedules. While individuals focus on one of these parameters, the other parameters are not dormant. For instance, those early in their careers still value balance (e.g. reasonable work hours) and authenticity (e.g. meaningful work assignments) and those in mid-career still value challenge (e.g. exciting work assignments) and authenticity (e.g. engaging in projects that may be connected to their children's school).

Organizations need to create innovative career paths that provide on and off ramps that help employees make transitions in and out and back into the firm again. Firms can offer such options as flexible or reduced work schedules and related benefits (e.g. childcare, eldercare), the chance to telecommute, opportunities to participate in job sharing programs, sabbaticals, and phrased retirement or work after “retirement options” (e.g. project work, short-term consulting). Those who have taken a “career break” to rear children, care for elderly relatives, or attend to other personal needs, but who plan to return to the firm at a later date, should be able to remain connected to the firm via alumni networks and continued training opportunities. Organizations must ensure, however, that those who engage in alternative career pathing do not encounter the maternal or paternal wall or other obstacles whereby career development and advancement abruptly ends because the employee has expressed the need for greater balance. Firms must continue to monitor the number of women in high-level positions as well as the number of women in pipeline and experience-enhancing positions so that discrimination does not discourage quality employees and cause them to leave the firm in search of flexibility and balance as well as challenge and authenticity. Harel *et al.*'s (2003) study of the HR functions in 102 organizations highlights the important strategic role that HR professionals can play in organizational success. They found a positive relationship between HRM practices, equity in promotional opportunities for women, and organizational effectiveness (as measured by factors including turnover rate, customer satisfaction, new product development).

In conclusion, we expect our research may have captured an emerging trend; that women and men may seek career pattern solutions to the dilemmas of work-family balance. Our research also highlights the nascent 360-degree counterpoint; that some women may wish to follow a career driven lifestyle and some men may wish to become more family-centric. HR professionals must develop proactive programs and policies to enhance organizational effectiveness and meet the evolving needs of a workforce with increasing multifaceted and diverse careers. For organizations designed around the



traditional linear career model, much revision will be needed. HR professionals must assume the role of change champions (see Ulrich, 1997), helping to create an organizational culture and implement policies that provide for the needs of employees with different career patterns. Over time, this discussion may become less about the gender difference but on how to create truly family-friendly corporate environments that allow both women and men to actively pursue their career ambitions and their drive for authenticity as well as balance their non-work lives in context.

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