

Origins of the Career Concept Framework:

A brief conceptual note

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The conceptual foundations of the career concept model on which the CareerView assessment system is based lie in several places. In the 1960s and early 1970s, writers began taking note of the apparent increasing tendency of some people to have multiple careers. Usually, the authors were referring to people who made fundamental changes in the nature of the work they performed, moving from one field into another quite different field to the extent that they appeared to be changing careers. For example, John Gardner, who had written about the dynamic nature of his and others' careers in his book *Self-Renewal*, was talking about a pattern of career experience fundamentally different from the more traditional up-the-ladder pattern. This contrast led to the identification in our work of what we now call the Linear and the Spiral career concepts.

Another influence on our thinking was the work of other career theorists, particularly those working in the field of occupational choice, and most notably among them, J.P. Holland. Holland posited that individuals differ in the motivational themes that underlie their choices of occupational fields. Besides establishing a framework for identifying differential motivational themes in people's careers, this literature on occupational choice suggested a conceptualization of careers different from both the Linear and Spiral concepts: some people choose not to move up any particular ladder and do not wish to shift from one type of work to another. This gave rise to the Expert career concept, which in our early work we referred to as the "Steady State" concept.

The fourth concept then simply fell into place. When we began systematically examining people's career histories and talking to people about their careers, it became clear that a significant number of people's career patterns followed no consistent pattern that could be understood in terms of the three concepts. In particular, we found some people whose careers seemed to follow a consistent pattern of inconsistency involving frequent career changes. Many of these people appeared not to think of themselves as having careers in a traditional sense, but nevertheless they were very work-oriented and seemed to be enjoying their working lives. Hence, we identified the Transitory concept.

Having identified four fundamentally different concepts of careers, defined in terms of direction and frequency of movement, we turned our attention to the motivational

foundations of these career concepts. For instance, we hypothesized that achievement would be the key motive underlying the Linear career, and indeed, several empirical studies confirmed that achievement motivation is a key motive in the Linear career, but not as important as another motive that we had missed: power and influence. Gradually, the constellation of motives associated with each career concept as presented in this paper emerged from our theorizing and related research.

Two large studies conducted in the early 1980s, still partially unpublished, contributed highly to our present understanding of career concepts and career motives. One was conducted in a large utility company and another was conducted in a major aerospace firm (for reading on the latter see, M.J. Driver & M.W. Coombs, "Fit Between Career Concepts, Corporate Culture and Engineering Productivity and Morale," in *Enhancing Engineering Careers: Conference Record of the 1983 IEEE Conference on Careers* (The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., 1983, also available as a reprint from Decision Dynamics Group, 615 Hampshire Rd., Suite 357, Westlake Village, CA 91361). These studies clarified career concept and career motive linkages and they further illuminated the impact of fit between attributes of organizational career culture and individuals' career concepts on organizational commitment, self-perceived performance effectiveness, work satisfaction, as well as various aspects of non-work life satisfaction.

The measurement of Career Concepts has been found to have satisfactory levels of reliability and predictive validity (see M.W. Coombs, *Measuring Career Concepts: An Examination of the Concepts, Constructs, and Validity of the Career Concept Questionnaire*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 1989).

As we are so far only in the process of developing an instrument for measuring the career-related behavioral competencies, the proposed relationships in Table 2 are currently based on largely anecdotal observations and deduction. The career culture and strategy relationships proposed in Table 3 and 4 are beginning to receive some more empirical support. In addition to the two studies mentioned above, three partly quantitative case studies of Swedish organizations identified mutually supportive as well as incongruent relationships between their strategies, cultural components, and employee career concepts and motives in accordance with the framework. Finally, some of the conceptual bases for our suggested pluralistic career cultures and management are outlined by M.A. Von Glinow, M.J. Driver, K.R. Brousseau, and J.B. Prince in "The Design of a Career Oriented Human Resource System," *Academy of Management Review*, 1983, 8(1), 23-32.

We initially arrived at our propositions about linkages between strategy and career culture (as described in our Career Pandemonium article) by considering the kinds of strategies that, if successful, logically could be expected to create organizational conditions supportive of each career concept. For example, if an organization increases its market share, the organization is likely also to grow in size to support the expanded levels of activity necessary to service a larger market. This should mean more jobs,

including higher level positions that would open up opportunities for the kind of upward movement that otherwise is presently threatened by organizational down-sizing. Accordingly, a strategy of expansion fits well with the Linear career concept. Conversely, individuals with strong attachment to the Linear career concept and with Linear motives of power and achievement should be most motivated to "score the big gains" that are needed for expansion that in turn would create the opportunities for upward motion. So, we see the linkages as a two-way street. The strategy supports the concept and the concept supports the strategy. Similar logic was used to develop linkages between strategy and the other concepts.

For more reading about the four career concepts and their associated motives, see K.R. Brousseau and M.J. Driver "Enhancing Informed Choice: A Career-Concepts Approach to Career Advisement," *Selections*, 1994, Spring, 24-31. The impact of demographic and organizational trends on careers from a career concept perspective is also discussed in K.R. Brousseau, "Career Dynamics in the Baby Boom, Baby Bust Era," *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 1990, 3(3), 46-58, and M.J. Driver Work-Force Personality and the New Information-Age Workplace, in *An Aging Workforce Competes* (Washington, D.C.: The National Planning Association and The National Council on Aging, 1994).