EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THWARTED CAREER AMBITION

Ashly Pinnington and Nithasha Bhanu
The British University in Dubai
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Employability of Graduates & Higher Education Management Systems Conference

WU University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria 22nd-23rd September 2011.

EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION

- General Area of Research Study
  - Young people who graduated over the last two years and are not employed in a job specialising in their area of undergraduate study

- Specific Context of the Research Study
  - Individuals who may be described as somewhat unhappy with their current job or jobless situation, and are generally de-motivated with the work they are doing

EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION

- This paper focuses on the thwarted career plans of young Indian men and women living in the UAE who embarked on undergraduate studies in a variety of chosen subject disciplines, but since graduation have felt under pressure to seek, accept and remain in employment working in a job that is definitely not their first priority of choice.

Individual Development and Career Theories

'**Adult development perspectives** suggest that individuals are likely to encounter characteristic concerns about **self, career, and family at every life stage**.'

(Baird and Kram, 1983, p.63)

Life Stage and Career Stage Theories

'During the **establishment phase**, at the outset of a career, people are most likely to need guidance and support to launch their careers. It is generally *a period of great uncertainty about one's competence and performance potential*.

The person who is in the establishment phase is *dependent on others for learning, support, and guidance*, and at the same time is likely to resist dependence as attempts to establish competence are made. It is a period of building new roles both at work and in one's personal life.

Questions about competence, *whether to commit oneself to a particular organization, and what kind of family relationships* to develop are primary concerns at this stage.'

(Baird and Kram, 1983, p. 47)

Table 1. Levinson's Life Stage Development Model

(In: Ornstein, Cron and Slocum, 1989; based on Levinson, 1978)

Life stage (Age)	Tasks to be accomplished
Early adulthood (20-40)	
Early adult transitions (17-22)	To begin thinking about one's place in the world separate from the institutions of youth (e.g. parents, school) To test one's initial choices about preferences for adult living
Entering the adult world (23-28)	To develop a sense of personal identity in the world of work and nonwork (e.g. family, community)
Thirties transition (29-33)	To evaluate accomplishments of the 20's and make adjustments to the life structure adopted
…	…

Table 2. Super's career development model

(In: Ornstein, Cron and Slocum, 1989; based on Super, 1957)

Career stages	Psychological tasks that characterize each stage
Trial	To identify interests, capabilities, fit between self and work, and professional self-image
Establishment	To increase commitments to career, career advancement, and growth To develop a stable work and personal life
…	…

Career Theories under Uncertainty

- Protean Careerists (Hall, 1996, 2002)
  - Transfer between more objectively insecure jobs, flexible, value freedom, believe in continuous learning, seek intrinsic rewards
- Boundaryless Career workers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996)
  - Move between separate employers, marketeable outside of present employees, sustained by external networks, sustained by valuable internal information, work across organisational boundaries

Career Theories under Uncertainty

- Career Development and Knowledge Appropriation (Kamoche, Pang and Wong, 2011)
  - Due to the prospect of resistance, which manifests itself through agency and 'pragmatic opportunism' in the quest for employability, and the possibility of withholding knowledge as leverage for career advancement, the individual ceases to be the helpless victim of the tyranny of disciplinary power. As Clegg at al (2006: 264) point out, 'the modalities of power that can operate on the self are many and varied (including at least authority, seduction, coercion, and manipulation), and thus should not be reduced to any essential category, such as domination.'

Competence Development

- Individuals encounter and enact multiple and conflicting identities inside and outside of work. Everyone faces physical, technical and social demands at work

- Competence viewed as a specific way of being and understanding (Sandberg and Pinnington, 2009; Pinnington, 2011):
  - Ontological orientation and involved way of being that is integrated with a specific sense of self
  - Existential meaning of ways of being distinguishes and integrates the individual's understanding of self, work, other people and tools/things into distinct forms of competence in work performance

Competence Development

- Sandberg and Dall'Alba (2009) argue that the phenomenological concept of life-world is central to explaining competence and competence development.

- Their representation of "life-world" is one that involves:
  - social-material entwinement with practice worlds,
  - ways of being (a basis for human agency),
  - a lived body (embodied practice),
  - a social being termed being (with) others (practice as social), and
  - a technical plethora of tools and equipment and body extension (inclusion in practice of objects and everything 'non-human').

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- The interview research methods focus on narrative and episodic approaches, seeking to characterise interviewees' life stories and emergent career narratives in contexts of disappointment and unfulfilled, early ambitions.

- The reported interviews consist of three meetings held over a period of two months.

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The Participants

- P1 has a BSc in Biotechnology, MSc in Medical Biotechnology, Postgraduate Diploma in Patent Law and MBA (Pharmacology Business Management and Marketing)

- P2 has a BA Commerce and

- P3 holds a BSc in Engineering.

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RESULTS

- P1 does not have a Ministry of Health licence to practice in her field of specialisation and has been unable to find work in the disciplines of her qualifications. P1 earns income from an on-line academic writing job assisting students and companies with their essays and presentations.

- P2 is employed as an administrator in an area of work outside of her interests in commerce and accounting. P2 works in an advertising company engaged mainly in secretarial tasks.

- P3 is currently working not as an engineer but deployed on tasks within her father's company which is a software development firm. P3 works in generalist roles including seeking new business, representing the firm to clients and prospective clients and pursuing non-payment and debt issues.

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They focused on their studies in their final year at university:

P1: "I haven't really looked for a job during the last year of my university as I was under the impression that I would get a job really quickly, so was just waiting to complete my education completely to get a job."

P2: "I have not done anything during my last year of my university as I was keen in completing my under graduation and then pursue my MBA in finance and marketing. I was under the impression that my qualification will lead me to the job that I have always dreamt about."

P3: "I have not done anything to get a job during the last year of my university as I have heard from others and I have seen in classifies regarding the job offers that is there in my field therefore I was hoping to get a job soon after my graduation."

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They all say that they turned down relevant jobs due to low pay offers:

P1: ".., I have been trying my level best to get a job in my research field, but due to lack of experience and MOH license I have been unable to find one. Offers that I have received for the qualification that I have got is very limited and these limited ones where either rejected by me because of the salary or because the organization was not willing to pay me."

EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION

They all say that they turned down relevant jobs due to low pay offers:

P2 has received a large number of offers from banks and construction companies but she felt the low pay and working hours obligations outweighed the career benefit of accepting the positions:

P2: "I have got a lot of offers from banks, construction companys, etc but the pay that the companies were offering was not sufficient enough to take up that job and moreover being the eldest in the family I have got certain responsibilities towards my family which I would like to fulfill that's why I have been waiting to get a better job with a good pay. ... Along with getting a lot of offers I have also been rejected by various companies some of them reject by saying that I am overqualified or most of the time its lack of an experience."

EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION

They all say that they turned down relevant jobs due to low pay offers:

P3 has similarly received a number of offers but in sales and some in computer engineering, but again reportedly for very low pay:

P3: "I have got a lot of offers as sales engineer but the offers that I have received to work as computer engineer has been very limited or the pay was really bad. Rejection was numerous because of lack of experience."

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Discussion

- Consistent with Baird and Kram's (1983) adult development perspective they are in need of greater guidance and support to launch their careers in their preferred direction of specialisation.

- Unfortunately, in relation to Levinson's (1978) life stage development model, they are in a state of limited growth and transition away from the institutions of youth (parents and school) and are making somewhat interrupted and hesitant moves towards the development of a satisfying sense of personal identity in the world of work.

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Discussion

- From the perspective of career stage models this trial stage of work is not offering sufficient opportunities for identifying their interests, capabilities, fit between self and work, and professional self-image.

- Following the assumption of Super's (1957) career development model such slow progress will delay the establishment stage said to be characterised by increased commitments and stability.

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Discussion

- These first two years following graduation do not appear to be typical of Protean Careerists since all three have not changed their job.

- Likewise, they do not appear to be consistent with Boundaryless Career workers since they have few marketable skills to offer employers and they are not "job hopping".

- Neither are they behaving with much apparent guile or opportunism, as suggested by Kamoche, Pang and Wong (2011).

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Discussion

- P1 appears to be deferring knowledge appropriation (Kamoche and Mueller, 1998) to doctoral study, P2 is seeking to make a job transfer into the desired area of work and P3 has been developing a number of entrepreneurial business management skills, but is unable to relate these to technical and career development in an engineering occupation.

- P1 may embark on successful PhD research and obtain a relevant job afterwards; P2 may make the move into accounting and finance and thrive in this new functional work environment and P3 may find a position as an engineer and develop rapidly in project teams partly by having already obtained relevant entrepreneurial and small business management skills.

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Discussion

- Competence development in these contexts of relative under-employment is problematic.

- Their competence as an ontological orientation and involved way of being is integrated with a specific sense of self that they partly want to disown.

- Their difficulties are compounded by the incompatibility of their limited knowledge and understanding of what they should be doing with what they are doing, leading to ways of being that are not developing a positive and motivating understanding of self, work, other people and tools/things.

- A consequence of this limited and dissatisfying way of being is under-developed distinctive forms of competence in work performance (Sandberg, 2000; Sandberg and Targama, 2007).

EARLY CAREER EXPLORATION

Discussion

- Their life-worlds at work are comparatively unrewarding ones involving insufficient social-material entwinement with relevant practice worlds, consequently they can exert only very limited human agency in their job situation leading to under-developed ways of being.

- The implications for practice are a lack of material, technical and social development in work competences.

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Conclusion

- We conclude that these three participants require more support in establishing and developing their careers.

- While they may not all be able to obtain work in their area of undergraduate specialisation, it is clear that they could have increased their opportunities to do so
  - through a focused initial job search during their final year at university
  - a clearer system of appraising job opportunities and job offers
  - once in their first job deploying a less ad hoc and more structured approach to finding employment of their choosing.

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Recommendations

- More systematic careers guidance

- Advice on selection and recruitment practices and

- Data on current labour market opportunities should be made available to young graduate job seekers and their families.