Career stages are typically defined as evolutionary phases of working life. The concept of career stage evolved as psychoanalysts (Erikson), developmental psychologists (Buehler, Levinson, Piaget), and sociologists (Form, Miller) independently studied stages of life and work (Super, 1957). Developmentalists concentrated on stages of psychological development while sociologists identified periods of individuals' working lives, and by combining these two foci career stages first emerge in the literature. For example, the Exploratory Stage defined by Buehler (1933), a German developmentalist, and the Initial Work Period classified by sociologists Form and Miller (1949) both describe the experience of adolescents' exploration of work. As a developmental stage, the Exploratory Stage represents the time period in which adolescents define their adult identities through spousal, social, and career choices, while the Initial Work Period describes the first jobs adolescents take to explore the world of work. In this way, the contributions of both psychologists and sociologists created a framework for understanding careers using the concept of career stage. However, while these early models of career stage provide a useful structure to conceptualize career development, many of the early theorists assumed career stages to be linear and stable. Current researchers (e.g., Hall and Schein) have updated the concept of career stage to encompass modern, varied patterns of career development. These patterns tend to be more fluid and dynamic.

Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

Career stage is one way of thinking about career development, and in the work/family context it is most related to the career development of women [see entry, Career Development of Women]. It is widely recognized that women's career development is significantly affected by family responsibilities, and it follows that women also experience career stages uniquely as a result of work/family conflict. An understanding of career stage helps to frame the career development challenges women face as they
progress from the early stages of career exploration and career choice to pre-retirement and retirement decisions.

Women progress through careers at different rates and in varied succession depending on a number of unique factors, such as family status. For that reason, it may be more useful when studying work/family issues to use stage theory that is independent of age rather than to use age-based stages. For example, while men typically enter and exit the career exploration stage during adolescence, women may experience this stage during mid-life for the first time, or they may re-enter exploration as childcare responsibilities decrease. Similarly, the retirement stage is based on the premise that a man has a lifelong career while women may "retire" or intermittently leave the labor force as pregnancy or other family obligations arise.

Further, family life stage often parallels the career stage of the individual. For instance, the demands made at work as one moves through career establishment occur concurrently with the demands made on the family as children are born and begin school. As Yohalem (1980) pointed out in a follow-up study of Ginzberg's educated women, career progress is often dependent upon full-time, full-year employment. Thus, family members who are equally committed to career and family often fit the "interrupted" career pattern described by Super. Schwartz (1989) aptly identified this phenomenon in "The Mommy Track," while Evetts (1994; in Nicholson, 1996) noted that careers which do not follow a steady pattern of continuous service and regular and steady promotion are likely to be considered "imperfect."

Increasingly, men are also adapting their careers to participate more fully in the parenting role. As the work/family field in general becomes less gendered, progressively more men will enter the discussion of how family demands affect their career development, and thus, career stages.

State of the Body of Knowledge

Career stage theory differs from other models of career development in that the assumption is made that stages are discrete, that they build on former stages, and that there are one or more developmental tasks appropriate to each stage. For the most part, stage theory has been applied to men, and little longitudinal research has been done to validate specific career stage theories. (Only the Career Pattern Study conducted by Super and his longtime colleague was designed to test stage theory.) As in other types of stage theories, theorists differ in how they demarcate stages. Some authors use chronological age as bounds, whereas others use task or more generic markers. Naturally, career stages which are closely related to age or life stage are more strongly associated with developmental theories, while age-independent, task-relevant stages are derived from a more sociological or economic foundation. Further, as one would expect, the focus of interest shifts from the individual to the organizational or societal level, depending on the discipline of the theorist.
Initial work on career stage was developed by sociologists Form and Miller (1949) who posited the preparatory work period, initial work period, trial work period, stable work period, and retirement. Super (1957) borrowed from that sociological approach as well as from Buehler's (1933) more general developmental theory, to posit and test his initial career stages: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline.

Although career patterns are not always related to stage, they often are associated. For example, when Super talked about women's career patterns (stable homemaking, conventional, stable working, double track, interrupted, unstable, and multiple trial), it is evident that stage is implied. It is apparent that Super made the assumption that homemaking should be the primary life role for women, and that entering into the labor force would be somewhat unusual and likely to parallel the less successful career patterns described for men.

**Career Stage Research by Theorist**

**Erik Erikson (Psychoanalytic psychologist)**

Erik Erikson (1950) described eight stages of the human life cycle, from infancy to old age, with each stage marked by a crisis that individuals must resolve before continuing to the next stage. The fifth stage, identity versus role confusion, is designated as most central to developing an occupational identity, whereas his seventh stage, middle adulthood (40-65), has as its conflict generativity versus stagnation, which refers to a person's ability to care for another person. The most important event in this stage is parenting. Does the adult have the ability to care and guide the next generation? According to Erikson, "A person does best at this time to put aside thoughts of death and balance its certainty with the only happiness that is lasting: to increase, by whatever is yours to give, the good will and higher order in your sector of the world". Generativity can also be seen at work; it is during this stage that individuals are more likely to become mentors and leaders and begin to think about succession planning if the work calls for it.

**Douglas T. Hall (Organizational psychologist)**

Hall documented the transition of the classic, linear model of career stage to a modern view of careers as a series of dynamic, interrelated experiences in his book, The Career is Dead, Long Live the Career (1996). He coined the term "Protean Career" which refers to the concept of the individual as the driver of the career rather than the organization [see Protean Career entry in the Work-Family Encyclopedia]. Hall's work describes the changing contract between employer and employee and its effects, such as an increased frequency in job and career changes and ultimately, less organizational commitment. This transformation has permanently altered how individuals (male or female) move through their careers, and how modern theorists define career stages.
Daniel Levinson (Developmental psychologist)
Daniel Levinson (1986) focused on relatively universal, age-linked developmental periods that unfold in an orderly sequence and cluster around four eras of the human life-cycle: pre-adulthood, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. Each era (sometimes referred to as "seasons" or "times of life") is characterized by both stable and transitional periods in which there is either pursuit of life values or questioning of the status quo leading to a reappraisal of one's life. Levinson has taken a stage approach to career development in adulthood, and has written about both men and women. One of his major contributions to stage theory is the identification and explication of transitional stages (1978). Transitions are likely to occur more than once and permit us to think about re-exploration and re-establishment. This idea of recapitulation is echoed in other general developmental stage theorists' work, such as Erikson (1963), and is more inclusive of women's career development.

Edgar Schein (Organizational psychologist)
Although not a model of career stage, Schein's "career anchors" have provided a conceptual understanding of individual career development within the current reality of impermanent organizational ties. Schein posits that an individual's self-concept, basic values, motives, and needs serve to provide a foundation from which to make difficult life choices, including decisions regarding career and family.

Gail Sheehy (Journalist, popular author)
In her book Passages, Gail Sheehy (1976) appealed to a wide audience and popularized life-stage theory. Informed by Levinson's work, she identified life stages as Pulling Up Roots (18-22), the Trying Twenties (22-29), Catching Thirty (approaching 30), Rooting and Extending (early 30's), the Deadline Decade (35-45), and Renewal and Resignation (mid-40's). She describes passages as the transitional periods between life stages. Although they are difficult for most adults, they also provide the necessary impetus for growth as one gives up the securities of one stage in order to move on to the next. Sheehy's life stages are highly relevant to the discussion of career stage because she marries developmental tasks with corollary career tasks, such as the duality of the search for identity and career.

Donald Super (Counseling psychologist)
Donald Super (1980) said that career development takes place across one's entire life-span and can be divided into five stages or "maxicycles": Growth (4-to13); Exploration (14-to-24); Establishment (25-to-44); Maintenance (45-65); and Disengagement (65 and over). Like Erikson, Super postulated that not everyone progresses through these stages at fixed ages or in the same fashion, and that within each stage are tasks whose mastery allows people to function successfully within that stage while preparing them to move on to the next task. Before entering the Maintenance stage, many individuals are in the process of asking the standard mid-life question, "Do I want to do this job for the next twenty years?" eventually deciding to either hang on or let go. If they decide to hang on, they enter the Maintenance stage. If they decide to let go and change job, company, or career, they recycle back to earlier stages,
crystallize new career development objectives, and move forward from there. For those who hold on, they maintain what they have, update their skills and knowledge, and innovate.

**Career Stage Research by Age**

**Childhood**
Gottfredson's theory of conscription and compromise (1996) is the only career stage theory applied to children. She defined 4 stages. During stage 1 (ages 3-5), children develop an orientation to size and power. In stage 2 (ages 6-8), children construct their tolerable -sextype boundary. Stage 3 (-13) entails orientation to social valuation, and in stage 4 (ages 14 and older) adolescents develop their orientation to the internal, unique sense of self (Swanson & Fouad, 1999).

**Early adolescence**
The developmental career task of early adolescence is exploration, typically done in conjunction with school and family. Little research has been done on this age group, and most of the literature is about programs that are designed to increase adolescent exploration of the world of work.

**Late adolescence**
During this period, the construct of career maturity is added to exploration, i.e., the idea that there are age-appropriate skills to be mastered at every career stage. Considerable research has been done on this construct. Findings of the research in this area have included the notion that career maturity increases with age (Patton & Creed, 2001), is positively correlated with optimism (Creed, et al. 2002), and is related to an extroverted adjustment style and positive orientation to social norms (Savickas et al., 2002).

A measure of career maturity that has been widely used by researchers in this area is the Career Maturity Inventory (CMI), which as developed by John Crites in 1973 and revised by Crites & Savickas in 1996. The CMI contains attitude and competence scales which are combined to obtain an overall career maturity score.

**Young adulthood**
During this period, the most significant developmental task is establishment. Young adults experience a series of "trial" jobs before more firmly establishing themselves in a more stable career. This process of establishing oneself is the primary task associated with young adulthood, and once stabilized, consolidation and advancement become the next developmental tasks. Several important concepts surface during this period of life, including career adaptability and career adjustment. In addition, gender differences become apparent as men and women choose whether or not to follow paths congruent with traditional gender roles.
Middle adulthood
Levinson's Mid-Life Transition era, characterized by reappraisal, stress, angst, or freedom, begins in middle adulthood. "What have I done with my life? or "What do I truly want?" are often questions asked during this period of time. For men, state of health or career accomplishment may predominate. Levinson posits that the reason for this fixation on reevaluation is based on three factors that occur around this period of time: first, a modest decline in body functioning that may be interpreted as a loss of vigor as well as a reminder of one's mortality; second, an age shift that occurs as younger people regard individuals aged in the 40's to be of "another generation"; and third, a reflective examination of their youthful dreams. Women, on the other hand, may perceive this era as an opportunity: one to pursue either personal or career development goals now that their childbearing role has peaked.

Older workers
Although little research exists on career stage as adults approach retirement, developmental stage in general is implicated. Older workers' psychosocial developmental stage, according to Erikson (1950), is ego integrity versus despair. The basic virtue is wisdom (Erikson, 1963). This stage implies self acceptance. As workers age, it is manifested through different career choices and changes to the definition of career success (DBM, 2001). Older workers are more likely to consult, seek self employment, perform community service, and they are more likely to work part time (DBM 2001).

Older workers' attitudes toward career development activities and mobility relate to such factors as current employment (experience or fear of lay-offs), tenure or stage in their careers, need for achievement, and need for growth. In addition, fear of stagnation, marketability perceptions, self esteem, and job market conditions play a role in career decision making. A decision to engage in training or retraining can lead an older worker to identity growth and enhanced self-esteem which in turn may result in greater commitment to future career-development goals.

In a recent longitudinal study, however, Roberts & Friend (1998) found that subjective career momentum (in contrast to objective indices of career plateau) in women in their early 50's (N=83) was associated with work as central to identity. These women were in high status jobs and had higher scores on measures of psychological and physical well-being. These findings are consistent with the idea that women's career stages may differ from men's.

Part-time work is an increasingly important phenomenon among older workers. More than a third of retirees want to work part-time for "interest and enjoyment" (Roper, 2002). This reflects a relatively new and increasingly common set of circumstances among late-stage workers, "bridge jobs." This category of jobs offers new experiences, provides flexibility, and bridges the gap between careers or before leaving the workforce permanently.
Implications for Practice and Research

The majority of the work written on career stage results from studies of men, and much of that research was done prior to 1990. While the career development of women has been explored, the concept of career stage as uniquely experienced by women is not addressed in the literature. With the exception of Levinson and early writers who wrote brief journal articles postulating career stages for women (e.g., Zytowsky, 1969 and Psathas, 1969), no serious attempts have been made to differentiate women's career stages from men's. Researchers have explored the differences that mark women's career development experiences but that uniqueness has not been adequately reflected in the study of career stage.

Women continue to perform the majority share of household and childcare duties, and the impact of those family responsibilities on career stage needs to be studied. Possible topics for further exploration include the formation of new career stages based on women's unique needs, varied career stage patterns of women, and the effect of modern family structure and dual-career families on men's career stages.

Stage theory is also traditionally based on the assumption that an ordinary career takes place over time in relatively few organizations. Hall's concept (1996) of the Protean Career (i.e., a boundaryless career based on skills and abilities that function independent of specific organizations) calls prior stage theory of adulthood into question. As the career becomes more internally defined, stage theory will focus more on internal, individual decision-making processes rather than the relationship of the individual to an employer.

References


**Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:**


Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Concepts related to adult development are relevant to all of the "Individual" domains in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Study. In addition, theories of adult development are relevant to Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings.

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry's topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains
About the Matrix

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
Resources for Teaching: Mapping the Work-Family Area of Studies

Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the work-family area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.
Process

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. Key Informants: The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants.

Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. Literature review: Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. Peer review: On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu

Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:
1. Our use of the word "family" refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term "work-family" to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term "work-family" (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word "family" continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word "family" to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver-caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, "Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study," on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a "work in progress." We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.

Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:
1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

**Work-Family Experiences:** The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

**Antecedents:** Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
- Workplace Antecedents
- Community Antecedents
- Societal Antecedents

**Covariates:** The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see
Column C in Table 1).

- Individual Covariates
- Family Covariates
- Workplace Covariates
- Community Covariates
- Societal Covariates

Decisions and Responses: The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

- Individual Decision and Responses
- Family Decisions and Responses
- Workplace Decisions and Responses
- Community Decisions and Responses
- Public Sector Decisions and Responses

Outcomes & Impacts: The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

- Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
- Outcomes & Impacts on Families
- Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
- Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
- Outcomes & Impacts on Society

Theoretical Foundations: The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain A: Antecedent Descriptives</th>
<th>Domain B: Work-Family Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain C: Covariates</th>
<th>Domain D: Responses to W-F Issues and Experiences</th>
<th>Domain E: Outcomes and Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Antecedents</td>
<td>Individual Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Individual Covariates</td>
<td>Individual Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Individual Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Antecedents</td>
<td>Family Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Family Covariates</td>
<td>Family Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Family Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Antecedents</td>
<td>Workplace Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Workplace Covariates</td>
<td>Workplace Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Workplace Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Antecedents</td>
<td>Community Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Community Covariates</td>
<td>Community Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Community Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Antecedents</td>
<td>Societal Experiences: Needs &amp; Priorities; Problems &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Societal Covariates</td>
<td>Societal Decisions &amp; Responses</td>
<td>Societal Outcomes &amp; Impacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains**