
3. Sprinters, marathoners and relay runners: profiles of women's career development over time

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INTRODUCTION

How do professional women's careers develop over time? What patterns encapsulate the career progression of professional women? What can women do to sustain their career progression over time? In this chapter we address these and other questions related to professional women's career development by using the analogy of running a race to describe women professionals in three distinct phases of their careers as identified by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005), sprinters in the idealistic achievement career phase, marathoners in the pragmatic endurance phase, and relay runners in the reinventive contribution phase. Based on biographical data collected from interviews with 60 women professionals, we create composite profiles illustrative of women in each career phase. We provide strategic actions that women can undertake in each phase of their careers in order to sustain their career momentum over time. We also describe organizational actions to support women's career development.

Women continue to gain entry into mid-level management positions and formerly male-dominated professions (Burke and Vinnicombe, 2005). Women comprise 40 per cent of workers in the global economy (Carter and Silva, 2010) and almost one-half of the current US labour force (US Department of Labor, 2011). The marketplace is now global and careers are defined as kaleidoscopic (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), boundaryless (Arthur, 1994) and protean (Hall, 1996). In order to continue to compete in the global economy, organizations will need to recruit and retain the best and the brightest of workers and women will play an important role in the labour force of the future. The changing nature of the workforce in the current context of the twenty-first century offers an opportunity to re-examine the concept of women's career development over the life course. Current employment conditions suggest that sustaining a meaningful working life over time will require thoughtful, strategic action.

In a review of the extant literature on women's careers, O'Neil et al. (2008) identified four patterns representative of the current state of research: women's careers take place in their larger life contexts, both families and careers are vital to women's lives, women's careers reflect a wide variety of patterns and paths, and both individual competence and the ability to connect with others are essential for women to succeed in their careers. An updated review (O'Neil et al., 2013) found the same patterns with an increased focus on the importance of human and social capital factors. These patterns reflect the notion that for women career is about more than paid work and that women's contexts, connections and priorities will ebb and flow over time, affecting all facets of their lives and careers (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005; Powell and Mainiero, 1992).

CAREER FACTORS FOR WOMEN

The notion of women striving to balance their obligations to career, others and self has been well documented. Powell and Mainiero's (1992) image of 'cross-currents in a river of time' proposed that women's careers take into account non-work issues, subjective measures of success and the impact of personal, organizational and societal factors. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) proposed the concept of the kaleidoscope career in which authenticity, balance and challenge take precedence at different points in time depending on life stage and life context. For women in early career stages, challenge is figural, and balance and authenticity take more of a back seat. For mid-career women, balance moves into the foreground with issues of family and relationships taking priority. Women in later career stages are more focused on issues of authenticity. O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) found that women's careers progress through three distinct career phases with differing priorities in each. The idealistic achievement phase of early career is focused on establishing self and positively impacting the world. Next is the pragmatic endurance phase, replete with negative professional environments, managing multiple life roles, and the re-examination of original dreams. Finally, the reinventive contribution phase reflects a redefinition of the relationship between career and life. In each of these studies, a desire to achieve and maintain balance over time is essential to the sustainability of women's careers.

Another key factor in women's careers is the impact of the often temporal nature of career circumstances that require both short and long-term perspectives and is related to the unique ways in which women manage their work lives over time. Hewlett (2007) reported that 60 per cent of

highly qualified women experience what she terms non-linear careers. She found that many women make arrangements over the course of their working lives that range from engaging in part-time and/or flexible work scenarios to refusing promotions because they cannot take on more responsibility given their other life obligations. Hewlett and Luce (2005) suggest that there are push and pull factors that result in women taking career off-ramps. They noted examples of push factors as meaningless or unsatisfying positions, and examples of pull factors as life circumstances requiring women's attention such as children, elder care and personal health issues. The authors also noted that when women are ready to return to full-time work they face many challenges, including a wage penalty that increases relative to time spent out of the workforce. Women hoping to sustain their careers over time will need to strategically craft work arrangements in support of their life responsibilities and find opportunities to engage meaningfully in the multiple spheres of their lives.

Also germane to our discussion of women's careers is women's desire for achieving success while engaging in meaningful work. Hopkins and O'Neil (2007) reported that women's definitions of career success incorporated multi-faceted interactions among personal, relational and organizational factors. Hewlett (2007) found that women seeking to re-enter the career arena reported multiple reasons, including desiring a personal source of income, finding satisfaction in having a career and desiring to give back to society. Generation X women in technology fields (Feyerherm and Vick, 2005) defined success in terms of making a difference, relationships, learning and growing, and opportunities to excel. In each of these studies, success is defined in broader terms than hierarchical career advancement and increasing monetary rewards, demonstrating the importance of holism to women's careers.

RUNNING THE CAREER RACE

A three-phase, age-related model of women's career development was identified by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005). The authors found that women in early career, a phase they termed idealistic achievement, based their career choices on goals of achieving career satisfaction and success, as well as their desires to make a positive impact on others. The early career women in their study acted agentically towards their careers and were found to be proactive and strategic in determining career progress. These women described their futures as limitless and believed they could 'do and have it all' (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005: 182). Women in mid-career were identified as being in the pragmatic endurance phase. The authors

described this phase as a time of managing multiple responsibilities and relationships, being impacted by negative and unsupportive work environments, and often being suspended in middle management positions with increasing doubts about the meaning of work in their lives. Women in later career, a phase termed reinventive contribution, were focused on contributions to their families, communities and organizations. The central concerns for these women were realigning their priorities and more fully integrating their personal and professional lives.

Using the analogy of running a career race over time, the present work seeks to extend O'Neil and Bilimoria's (2005) model by examining the strategic actions necessary for women to manage the important career factors (that is, to seek balance, employ both short and long-term career perspectives, and utilize broad definitions of success) at each phase. Life phases and the impact of personal and professional contexts require different strategies for effectively developing a career over the course of a working life.

Given the reality for women of changing life contexts over the course of their careers, we characterize the process of sustaining a career as analogous to engaging in distinctly different types of running events. At various times over the course of a career circumstances may call for sprinting to the next finish line, running a marathon or engaging in a relay with other runners. In the *idealistic achievement* career phase women are engaged in running as fast as they can to establish themselves in the professional world, analogous to 'sprinters'. This phase requires a determined focus on self; gaining competence and confidence. In the *pragmatic endurance* career phase, women are engaged in the long haul, facing changing and challenging terrain, analogous to 'marathoners'. They have to contend with 'hitting the wall', and they need to muster their physical and mental resources to make it through the huge demands being placed on them as a result of their multiple life responsibilities and often demanding organizational contexts. This phase is characterized by an almost total focus on others, to the detriment of self. The *reinventive contribution* career phase represents an opportunity for women to redefine the relationship between their careers and their lives and bring themselves back into the picture. This phase is characterized by an understanding of interdependence and interconnectedness, and a willingness to work in concert with others, giving and accepting hand-offs, analogous to 'relay runners'.

METHODOLOGY

Our intent in this research was to investigate the development and sustainability of women's careers by examining work-related experi-

ences over time, the personal and professional factors and relationships impacting and shaping those experiences and the belief sets underlying those work experiences. Accordingly, this study employed a qualitative research design in order to derive career stories from the perspective of the participants. The inquiry comprised a process of understanding women's career development based on building a complex, holistic picture by reporting detailed views of the study participants' lives (Creswell, 2003).

As described in O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005), the sample was randomly drawn from convenience populations associated with two educational institutions in the United States, one in Ohio and one in New York. The primary sampling criterion was age; targeting women in their 20s through their 50s in order to ensure a range of career experiences over time. The final sample comprised 60 women ranging in age from 24–60 years old. The mean age of the sample was 42.

The interview protocol was designed to investigate participants' life histories and career stories. This methodological approach was fashioned after Levinson's (1996) model of intensive biographical interviewing. One to two-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. During the interviews, participants described their career histories and the processes by which they had developed their careers, choices they had made, contextual factors affecting their career actions and reflections, and the ongoing interaction and intersection of their personal and professional lives. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

A combined approach of grounded theory (Locke, 2001) and thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was used to code the data. The coded themes were then analysed and used to create composite profiles of women developing their careers over time. These findings are presented using a methodology of 'found stories', which extends the concept of the 'found poem' (Dillard, 1995), in which poems are created by combining common thematic elements of others' words. This methodology relies on the narrative mode of thought which is focused on illuminating the desires and goals of individuals (Bruner, 1990).

Creating found stories from the career and life histories of the women in our study allowed us to represent the experiences of these women in their own words, resulting in the following three composite profiles of women in the idealistic achievement, pragmatic endurance and reinventive contribution phases of their careers. To the greatest extent possible we have used the exact words and situations of the women we interviewed, combining them to create these composite profiles of women running the career race over time.

COMPOSITE PROFILES AND STRATEGIC ACTIONS FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Idealistic Achievement Career Phase Profile: Sara the Sprinter

My name is Sara. I am 29 years old, white, and in a long-term relationship with a man I met my senior year of college. We have talked about getting married in the next year or so and hope to have children a few years after that. I am quite concerned about how I will juggle children and career, but am determined that both work and family will be a part of my life. I don't know whether I will work part-time when I have children or whether I will return to full-time work after maternity leave. I guess that remains to be seen, given where I am in my career when I become pregnant. I have a bachelor's degree and will be starting a masters programme next year, if I can get my organization to pay for my tuition expenses. I want to get my masters done before I have children.

I work in the private sector, in a large financial services organization in a staff function. I would like to stay in my current profession. I really like my job. I sort of think that I'll always be in a two-income family. Work is important to me. It's part of who I am; it gives me a place to feel confident and capable. On the other hand, although I really like my work, I sometimes feel dissatisfied with the job, with corporate America. I feel sometimes like I'm just making money for other people, I'm not giving back to society in any way. I haven't quite figured out how to reconcile this pull between needing and wanting to make enough money to have a comfortable life and working more in service of the 'greater good'. I've often thought about working for a non-profit organization, but am concerned about making less money. So for now I have reconciled this by volunteering with a children's organization. This way I can feel like I am contributing while still advancing in my profession and affording my current lifestyle.

My current organization is the third company I have worked for since I graduated from college five years ago. I was recruited by a consulting firm who interviewed on my campus and I started working with them a month after graduation. I worked there for three years and was promoted to project manager level. I liked my projects but was looking for more input into the work to which I was assigned. I really felt like I wanted more control over my career.

A family friend mentioned an opportunity at a start-up company and my boyfriend really encouraged me to check it out. I interviewed for the job and got it. It was a great place to work; everyone was young, energetic, creative, which is an important criteria for me in choosing an organization – good people to work with. I worked for the head of research, and she was awesome, very bright, and very cool. Probably the best boss I've ever had – amazing woman. I was managing a big project and a staff of 10 and making good money. My career was going great! Then the bottom fell out of the dot-com business and the organization started to go downhill. I had only worked there for a year, but I knew I had to get out before the business went under. My boss left and I decided I had better do the same.

I started networking and found my current job in financial services, where I've been for a little over a year. As I said, I like my job, but I'm working with all men at the senior level and I'm getting the sense that they aren't taking me all that seriously. It's little things, like talking to me like I didn't understand something or making off-colour comments in front of me. There's not one thing that I can put my finger on, but something's there that I need to pay attention to. I don't want to stay in an organization that isn't supportive of my career goals and me as a person.

I am eager to continue to advance in my career and to be successful, which to me means being personally fulfilled and happy with myself and in my key relationships. I think of career as like a passion that you put yourself into, like a path with passion and something keeps you moving along that path, like determination. It is something that you're always hot about you know, for whatever reason it gets you excited, and it makes you think. And it's an identity; it's an independence. It is so much more than just something you go and do every day. I also feel like my career is a way to impact the world in a meaningful, structured way, to help society as well as support myself. I really feel that so far my career has definitely been serendipitous, getting a great consulting job out of college, moving into the dot-com world, now in financial services. It just seems so random to me but happily random. I can't wait to see what's next! I know whatever it is, it will involve both work and family. I imagine it won't be what I expect, but I know it will be interesting. And every year I'll look back and say, 'wow, that was great!'

Strategic Actions for Career Development for Women Sprinters

Although women in the idealistic achievement phase of their careers are very career-focused, they are already anticipating the need to balance their professional and personal lives. This is a critical time for women to find coaches, mentors and sponsors as important support structures for establishing successful careers. For example, seeking to learn from the experiences and personal stories of select mentors and how they have attempted to achieve balance in their lives can provide perspective and cogent advice for women in the idealistic achievement career phase. Women sprinters must start building a network of 'critical friends' who can help guide and mentor them over the years to ensure their continued career growth and development.

Our composite example of Sara illustrates the conflict that many women experience in establishing organizational careers. They desire to achieve and be well compensated for their work, while at the same time they want to engage in work that gives back to the community and creates a better world. One of the ways women manage this conflict, as demonstrated in the profile of Sara, is by volunteering in the non-paid work domain. This may eventually lead to the non-linear career path that Hewlett (2007) describes, as Sara confronts future choices about family and career. A strategy for sustaining career momentum in the idealistic achievement phase is to ensure engagement in multiple life spheres, that is, work, volunteer, relationships, and so on, to ensure a well-rounded portfolio of experience at all times.

While the main focus for women in this phase of their careers is the development of self-confidence and the establishment of a career identity, they are also seeking ways to contribute in the world. These women view the future as replete with possibilities. They are exploring their capabilities and forming their professional identities. This is a crucial time as these women build career foundations on which they will rely throughout the course of their working lives. Women in the idealistic achievement phase of their careers must continue to identify their personal definitions of career success and meaningful careers. For Sara, the composite sprinter, working in service of the greater good as well as personal relationships were two important elements of her career success model. It is also important for her to recognize that her identification of a meaningful career is an evolving process. Establishing an ongoing process of values clarification is a recommended strategy to combat the possibility of diluted focus over time.

Women in this phase of their careers need access to challenging work assignments that will provide them with opportunities to develop their

skills and their strengths. Women first need to identify those skills that they want to develop. Then, they must be proactive and outspoken about their desires to grow and succeed in their careers, and they must seek opportunities to demonstrate and develop their skills in order to sustain meaningful and successful careers over time. These women will need to be vigilant to ensure their desires to combine meaningful work and success do not get sidetracked as they make progress in their organizations and their careers.

Pragmatic Endurance Career Phase Profile: Marissa the Marathoner

My name is Marissa. I am a 41-year-old white woman. I work in a mid-sized manufacturing firm in middle management. I have worked here for the last 12 years, after moving from one organization to another during the earlier stage of my career. I started in an engineering position after college at a large firm and worked there for about two years. I didn't get along well with my manager. He was a petty man not given to developing his employees. Also, the organization kept sending me out into the field. I was the only person they ever sent out on long jobs because I wasn't married. A lot of the other people were married or had families, so they'd send me instead. I was really overworked and on the road all the time. I was 25 years old and already had an ulcer. I really didn't want to move to another company so soon, but a friend offered me a job at a small organization in a different industry. It was a lateral move but it would get me out from under my lousy manager and meant less constant travel, so I took it.

I worked in that new firm for almost three years. The first year was good, but it went downhill quickly after that. At first because of the project I was assigned, I had senior managers calling me and asking me for my input. That made me feel successful, that I was deemed knowledgeable and had a certain expertise. All that changed when I was put on a new project that had me out on the shop floor with some pretty tough characters. It was a very rough environment. The climate wasn't exactly conducive for a woman. During the first month on that project, I was sexually harassed by one of the operations managers. I reported it to Human Resources, but nothing happened. And so I had to live with it, I had to work side-by-side with this person every day. And that really put me down a couple of notches confidence-wise. I really thought when I took the job that there was potential for me in that

firm, but after that I knew I had to get out of there. I started calling head-hunters and found a position at my current organization, and I've been here ever since.

Although I've been promoted during my tenure here, my career has moved pretty slowly. I think I have progressed in spite of myself. What I mean by that is I liked the work I was doing and I thought I did a good job, but I was never really confident and I don't think I was assertive enough. I was always afraid of doing the wrong thing, especially given the negative experiences I had in my last two organizations. I didn't have a mentor or role model as I was trying to make my way through the organization. I really had no one to talk to or to learn from. In fact, I have worked for some fairly negative managers here over the years. However at this point I have learned how to work within the organizational system, which basically means knowing to whom to go to get things done.

In my current position I don't see much potential for further advancement. It really is an old boy's network and I've stalled at the middle management level. We've also had lots of lay-offs over the last couple of years, so the organizational environment is pretty shaky. I'm not sure what's next for me. Thinking about the future is where I get into this transition thing, and the fact that I've been here now 12 years, almost 13. So, I'm at a position now where it's difficult for me to move somewhere else, because I have so much time here with no move. I think if I stay in this job much longer it will be difficult for me to go to another company, because I will have been here too long. I have a fear that things are not really any better anywhere else, from talking to other people and being exposed to people in other companies through my work. I had told myself that I was going to have another job by now, and I haven't, and I am not sure exactly why I haven't. Part of it is that I have worked here for so long and I don't want to go to something else, just for the sake of going to something else. Although this organization isn't always a supportive place, right now it feels safer than starting over someplace new. My track record for finding good organizations has been pretty dismal so far. You know that saying 'the devil you know is better than the one you don't?'

The economy is really bad now, so I am trying to keep that in perspective and be thankful for what I have. My career has

always been a big part of who I am, it helps define me. But maybe at this point I need to get better at saying 'okay, my job is one part of my life, it doesn't have to be the main part of my life'. Maybe it's time to focus on other things instead of my job. I don't see a lot of options here but I'm not sure the options elsewhere are any better. I'll probably bide my time for a while and hope the economy turns around and the job market opens up before I get permanently stuck here.

On the personal front, I have been married for five years. I don't have children but my husband and I are currently discussing whether we should try to get pregnant or not. We know that there is not much time left to make this decision. I am really ambivalent about becoming a parent because I want to continue to advance in my career. I am not sure it is possible to do both, although my husband is pretty supportive of my career goals. On the other hand, I am very involved in the lives of my nieces and nephews and grateful that I can be instrumental in their growing up to be happy, successful people. I have a strong network of friends and family and I count on them for emotional support. I am pretty comfortable with myself although at work I feel compelled to be much more guarded than I would like.

When I look back on my career, I think I've gotten where I'm at because of some of my skills, mainly perseverance and dedication. It's been a challenge and I think I could have gone further if I didn't have so many roadblocks, but I've worked hard and I'm proud of my accomplishments. Success to me is really about being happy, and being . . . I don't know if stabilized is the right word. I guess living comfortably. Being able to take care of things yourself. Being situated. Being comfortable. Just finding happiness, you know?

Strategic Actions for Career Development for Women Marathoners

Striving for balance among the often competing aspects of their lives can seem overwhelming for women during the pragmatic endurance career phase. For many, current relationships between personal and professional lives are being re-examined and lost opportunities are being contemplated. Our composite marathoner, Marissa, has invested a great deal of herself in her career and is wondering whether to focus on other aspects of her life before it is too late. Marissa's experience suggests that she is currently

struggling with both push and pull factors (Hewlett, 2007) that are impacting her current career reflections. She is not feeling wholly satisfied with her current work or her opportunities for advancement in her organization (push factors), and is simultaneously feeling time pressure to choose whether or not to have a family (pull factors), and the potentially negative impact that may well have on her career (Hewlett, 2002). Marissa's struggles to attain a better balance in her life are reflective of a beta career pattern which Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) propose has individuals seeking first challenge then balance then authenticity.

The pragmatic endurance phase can reflect a perfect storm of pressing career and personal concerns likely to occur at mid-life, which may equate to mid-career (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Levinson (1996: 370) notes that this is when the 'myth of the successful career woman' meets the realities of organizational life and societal strictures resulting in a process of questioning and reevaluating work, relationships, and life in general. Also women in mid-life may disproportionately find themselves doing psychologically unsatisfying work and perhaps even work that is 'demeaning, empty, and damaging to the self' (Levinson, 1996: 375).

Women marathoners can likely benefit from a broadening perspective of success that looks beyond the paid-work domain. The women in this career phase must actively seek a multitude of personal interests in all aspects of their lives, focusing simultaneously on self-development, relationship development and career development. Allowing one of these three aspects of their development to become too dominant may contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction and regret about the road not taken. In addition, maintaining a future orientation – both short-term and long-term – with an optimistic view looking towards future possibilities will better serve these women.

While there are benefits to be gained from the cross-over of multiple life roles (Ruderman et al., 2002), there is also the reality that for many women in this career phase an overload of responsibilities, particularly those involving caring for others, takes precedence, leaving precious little time for self (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Managing multiple life roles is a reality for these women so they must solidify their networks of support. Reliance on solid relationships can help women in this career phase surmount the myriad issues inherent in juggling the personal and the professional. Personal and professional advice, coping strategies, reality checks and honest feedback are examples of some of the reasons women in this career phase call on their networks to help them with the ongoing struggle to achieve balance.

Marissa, our composite marathoner, equates success to being stable, comfortable and finding happiness. Continuing to investigate opportuni-

ties for connection and contribution to others both within and outside the domain of paid work, and striving towards integration between self and career will be necessary to sustain her momentum through this challenging career phase.

Reinventive Contribution Career Phase Profile: Renee the Relay Runner

My name is Renee. I am white, 56 years old and divorced, with two children. I currently work as a regional sales director in the health care industry although I took a rather circuitous path to get here. I was a liberal arts major in college, but I ended up with a bachelor's degree in biology – pre-med. And then I decided after school was out that I didn't want to go to medical school, which as I look back now was an immature decision. I had the qualifications, and I could have done it, but I guess I just saw it as being so time consuming. And the other thing I've thought about looking back is that I never knew a woman physician. I never knew one. And I think that was a huge thing for me. I knew I could do it, but I never knew anyone who had done it. It just seemed like there were a lot of messages that as a woman, if I were interested in medicine, nursing would be a better option, but I really wasn't interested in being a nurse.

College though was a heady time. When I was an undergraduate in the 1960s, the ratio of men to women, especially in the sciences, was four to one. And yet some of the leadership in the Dean's office were women. The Dean of students at the time that I was a senior in college was a woman. And much of her staff explored the ideas of Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, and all of that. And they used this timeline, saying that in your lifetime, after you graduate, you may find ebbs and flows. You may be doing certain things at some times, and other things at other times, and it will go back and forth. And as a result, you should think about it as a path that you can change as you go. And that has really been true in my life.

I got married shortly after graduation to my college sweetheart. He took a position as Dean of students at a boy's school and we moved to another state for his job. For the first couple of years of our marriage, I worked in a cardiovascular laboratory and I applied a lot of the biology and science stuff that I'd learned in college, and I actually liked it quite a bit. I applied to the masters

programme at a local college at night, and worked during the day. My organization paid for about half of my courses, college wasn't as expensive then as it is now. So during the day I worked and at night I took classes and I got my degree in two years. Then I got pregnant with my first child. After my son was born I took a few part-time jobs for a couple of years so I could spend as much time with him as possible. Four years later my daughter was born and at that point it was time to get my son enrolled in pre-school. So I started to look around and found out about Montessori schools. I signed him up for that, and got extremely involved for the next 13 years in Montessori. We had hardly any money, and you could get money off your tuition if you volunteered. So I volunteered a lot. And I eventually wound up being the administrator of the school. I think that's really where my career started.

About this same time, my husband and I got divorced and I knew I had to find a job that would support my children and myself. A colleague told me about an opportunity in a local hospital for a staff administrator and I followed up and got the job. I was there about two years and they brought in a new director, and she began to give me more and more responsibility. She was an incredible mentor to me, in terms of just getting me to stretch and see the possibilities. She was great in building my self-confidence and in helping me build up a lot of strengths. She and I worked together for five dynamite years and made some really important changes in that hospital. One day she came into my office to tell me she knew of a great opportunity with a pharmaceutical company that would be perfect for me. I didn't want to leave her, but she convinced me that this would be a great career move. She and I are still friends to this day.

I joined the pharmaceutical organization in the position of sales manager. I learned a lot as a sales person and I was looking forward to being part of that organization for a long time; unfortunately, it wasn't in the cards. I'd been there almost two years and another pharmaceutical company bought us. For about three years we went along with very little change to our group. But three years after the merger they decided to lay people off. They virtually eliminated all the field positions and decided that instead of having permanent field people, they were going to contract work out. So we all lost our jobs. That's been the hardest thing I've had to deal with in my work life. I had always done a really good job,

I was a very hard worker. So it was really a wake-up call, and it has probably coloured my view more than anything else. Until that time I was sort of naïve about, not necessarily that organizations take care of you, but you know, that you do a good job, and you get to keep your job. That was a difficult time for me emotionally as I had to realize that my self-worth was not my title.

One of my former customers told me about another health care organization that was looking for sales people. I've been here now for six years. I have a really great manager who gives me all kinds of opportunities, I've been involved in a lot of things internationally; and he promoted me to my current position as sales director. It's interesting because I didn't get into this career until later in life and I feel really fortunate. It is fairly lucrative, and I feel like I am making a contribution. It's not just a business job. I mean, there are quality of life things that patients benefit from. I sort of feel that I am making a difference with patient's lives, and people's lives too. That's always been important to me. And respect is important too, being recognized. It doesn't need to be big recognition, but I do appreciate and value people recognizing me for a job well done.

The interesting thing about my life is I really do think I've changed with time; that ebb and flow. I think that's really what I've always lived. I just felt a need to have a continual learning process, to keep recreating myself. Like right now I feel like the personal and the professional sides of me are one and the same. There may have been a time when there was a difference. But right now I kind of think they're one and the same. I am the mother, I am the friend, I am the sales director, I am the colleague. It's all meshed together in this multi-faceted person, who's me.

At this point in my life, I'm thinking about the future and I don't know that the organization is going to have a place for me that I can aspire to. I'd like to retire in this position but I am not sure a 60-something female will be well received in the business market. This is a male-focused company, and it's a young company, and I'm a female over 50. That's a reality. So I ask myself, will they let me stay here, have a nice job, make a decent income, and be successful, or do I need to explore other opportunities? Do I stay or do I go? I just don't know . . .

Strategic Actions for Career Development for Women Relay Runners

Women in the reinventive contribution career phase are cognizant of themselves as multi-faceted individuals who have worked to integrate their multiple personal and professional identities. Renee, our composite relay runner, has acknowledged the 'ebb and flow' of her life stages, and explicitly stated the importance at this phase of her career of contributing to quality of life issues for people who benefit from her organization's products and services. Renee is a good example of Hewlett's (2007) non-linear career path, having begun working in the non-paid work domain, and working her way into a career from there. Throughout her working life she continued to be strategic about developing her skills and taking advantage of opportunities with the guidance of important mentors. This is a critical element of effective career development: finding and developing opportunities to engage.

Women in this phase of their careers should seek out younger women to mentor and sponsor even if their organizations do not have formal mentoring programmes (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). This action has a dual purpose – it adds value to the organization and promotes an organizational valuing of the contributions of employees more long-tenured in their careers. This action benefits individuals and their organizations for three distinct reasons. First, this provides women in earlier career phases with access to successful female role models. Women in this phase of their careers can serve as exemplars, and offer younger women guidance, advice and perspective. Second, women relay runners desire interdependence and connection at this stage of their careers. They have come to recognize the importance of self and others working in tandem in order to succeed in creating opportunities for meaningful work (O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Women in this stage of their careers have had a multitude of experience in relating to others in both their professional and personal lives. These are finely honed skills on which they can draw for mentoring, coaching and developing younger employees, both female and male. Third, women in this phase have the opportunity to proactively legislate for organizational policies and procedures that can ensure equity and fairness for their fellow employees. Since women at this point in their careers may likely have proven track records of accomplishment, they may be uniquely qualified to give voice to issues that other employees less established in their careers may be less able or inclined to advocate for.

Women relay runners describe success as respect, recognition and making a difference. As important as it was during the idealistic achievement career phase for women to identify their evolving model of career success, it is equally imperative for women in this phase to continue to

refine aspects of their career success. The significant difference between the two phases is that women in the reinventive contribution phase are focusing on a deep and granular understanding of meaningful careers versus a broader seeking of new learning opportunities by the sprinters. Women in the later phase of their careers see themselves being successful by engaging in work that provides them the opportunity to be themselves as well as contribute to others. The types of questions being considered by these women are the following: What is my legacy? What are my distinctive contributions? How can I remain authentic in my desires and my actions?

ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Career development occurs at the intersection of the individual and the organization. Thus, organizational actions are also required to enhance women's career development opportunities. Research strongly suggests that organizations need to understand, recognize and support women's career and relationship priorities in order to retain talented professional women. Yet in our study we found strong evidence that while organizations may agree on the importance of that support, they often fall short in practice, resulting in a lack of women who reach the higher ranks of management. Better organizational efforts are needed to ensure that women receive ongoing coaching and mentoring, work for managers who support and encourage their development, have access to organizational resources and relevant opportunities to develop their skills, are given challenging assignments, are acknowledged for their unique talents and contributions, and are recognized for aptitude learned through life experiences and 'non-traditional' work histories. It is imperative that organizations do a better job of matching resources to women's changing needs in order to allow women to continue contributing meaningfully during each phase of their careers. Below we provide examples of organizational supports for each career phase.

Women in the idealistic achievement phase of their careers particularly need access to assignments that will stimulate and challenge them and provide opportunities to develop their skills. Managers can encourage them in this creative process by employing a developmental perspective focused on coaching, mentoring and strategic skill development. In addition, organizational compensation programmes must consider both intangible and tangible rewards in keeping with these women's desires to be positive contributors as well as to be financially successful.

Women in the pragmatic endurance career phase may need flexible work hours, work arrangements and job restructuring to assist them in mediating the critical junctures of the many different roles they play in their lives. Without recognition and support for their multiple life roles, they may find themselves unable to fully embrace their work responsibilities. Managers must recognize that the careers of these women are embedded in their larger life contexts and work with female employees to identify the necessary resources that will allow them to do their best work. Organizations that create work environments that do not disadvantage women wanting to lead integrated lives will clearly have a competitive edge in keeping their most talented employees.

The unique talents and abilities of the women in the reinventive contribution career phase need to be recognized and utilized. These women have myriad career and life experiences on which to draw in support of organizational objectives. They require opportunities to coach and develop others as well as opportunities to continue to learn and develop their own skills and abilities and feel challenged in their work. Managers can tap into this well-spring of knowledge and highly evolved relational skills by providing these women with leadership opportunities, placing them in team or taskforce oriented roles, and by signing them up as mentors for junior members of their firms.

CONCLUSION

For this chapter we created composite profiles of women engaged in managing their careers during three distinct career phases. These profiles provided a creative and distinctive platform for communicating the issues, challenges, actions, supports and career progression needs of women in each of the career stages. By drawing on the exact words and situations of the women in our sample to construct these profiles, we illustrated the career stories of these women representative of women in each of these career phases. We suggested strategic actions that women can take to more fully realize their professional and personal potential as they run the career race over time, specifically as sprinters, marathoners and relay runners. Organizational actions to support women were also provided.

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