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0521389445 - Handbook of Career Theory

Edited by Michael B. Arthur, Douglas T. Hall and Barbara S. Lawrence

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Handbook of career theory

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Handbook of career theory

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scientists, accountants, bankers, and so on – and is reported in the book *Novations: Strategies for Career Management* (1986, co-authored with Paul Thompson).

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Preface

Back in the early 1970s, there was no established “field” of careers in organization and management studies. Tim Hall recalls that it was fun when he and a small band of organizational scholars, who viewed themselves as being on the cutting edge of theory, who liked to work on somewhat offbeat topics, and who would rather challenge than defend the academic “establishment,” embarked on their career studies. Anyone interested in examining the long-term issues associated with working in organizations was really on his or her own to find useful theory and research in a number of relevant social science disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and anthropology. To do good research, you had to scan and learn from a number of disciplines and you had to develop your own theoretical ideas. In organizational terms, the scholarly environment in which we operated was complex, dynamic, and nonroutine.

The down side of all this was that sometimes you wondered who your audience was. Many questions gnawed away at you: Is anyone out there interested in this “career stuff?” What journals would possibly publish papers on careers? Who is in my reference group? Everyone I trade papers with is in a psychology, sociology, or education department. Yet I work in a business school. Am I in the right place? But you had a sense that it was all new. And you *knew* it was important as you saw more and more evidence of the long-term influence of careers on individuals, the institutions in which they worked, and the societies to which they belonged. There was a sense of being on the “ground floor” of something important.

This sense was confirmed by interactions with scholars looking at careers from other vantage points. Psychologists and sociologists were interested in outside perspectives that would complement and enrich their own disciplinary views. Educationalists were anxious to look beyond consideration of “vocational choice” that so dominated their inquiries but only represented the starting point of people’s careers. But there was no accepted meeting place for views to be exchanged, and the exchanges that did take place tended to be fragmentary or to represent one-shot attempts at interdisciplinary theory.

So, what has changed? In a word (or two), career theory has “gone legitimate.” We (people who study careers) have become established. We have become a *field*. In the immortal words of Yvette Mimieux in the classic movie *Where the Boys Are*, “Who’d ‘a thunk it?”

The groundwork was laid by vocational psychologists and sociologists. Each of these groups, inspired by writers such as Don Super (1957) and Everett Hughes (1958), had already had their “fun” with the career concept. But although their definitions of career were similar, the two groups stayed largely apart. By the

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late 1970s organizational scholars' observations about career outcomes paved the way for new initiatives.

Three key books appeared (Hall, 1976; Schein, 1978; Van Maanen, 1977) that helped focus applied work on careers. Don Super organized what he called the "Mobile Career Seminar," which met in different locations semiannually, and which, significantly, reached out beyond counseling psychologists and educational researchers to those studying organizational behavior. Those of us who sat around the ornate living room at MIT's Endicott House in 1978 and began to discuss forming some sort of professional society devoted to careers had a sense that it probably would happen some day. This was followed up by a similar meeting in Asilomar in 1980 as well as by organizing meetings at the Academy of Management. Very rapidly, this loosely connected group of career enthusiasts became an interest group in the academy and then a full-fledged division. And the coverage of career issues in books and journals also grew in exponential fashion.

An important parallel initiative involved the development of teaching materials about careers for present and future managers in graduate and management development classes (Kotter, Faux, and McArthur, 1978; Sonnenfeld, 1984). This "career management" perspective prompted major changes in organizational practice. Careers came to be looked on as the products of individual-organization negotiation instead of as paths preordained by high-level "human resource planners." These changes were further recognition for the career theory behind them and provided fertile ground for new research. We joined and identified with these attempts to gain more effective application of our own ideas (Arthur et al., 1984; Hall and Associates, 1986).

However, as we become "legit," we established our own theories and paradigms related to careers. People studying careers now had a body of career literature to turn to in formulating their research designs. There was less need to discover or invent useful, relevant theory and research in various social science disciplines. We began talking to ourselves and writing for each other.

As we turned inward, our work took the form of processing and debating and applying existing theory. Less energy went into discovery. As a result, we soon reached a point where career practice threatened to catch up with the career theory that inspired it. Career counselors and organizational career program designers were putting into practice the latest ideas on adult development, internal labor markets, sense making, and so forth. Career academics were investing much more in theory testing than in theory development. Our recently formed field, which had seemed so open and welcoming, was beginning to appear closed.

So, we needed new blood – or rather, new theory – which is the lifeblood of any scholarly field. And that is what this handbook of career theory is all about.

What was our plan for infusing new blood into the field? Our first tentative explorations (Arthur and Lawrence, 1984) convinced us we should return to our original scholarly "home," the basic social science disciplines. We felt that some of our best resources were people who would not claim to be associated with the field of careers in any way. We wanted to enlist the finest minds – from both career theory and beyond – in a number of relevant social science disciplines and have them join us to "think careers." As you look at the table of contents, you will understand our pride at having these particular contributors together between the covers of a volume devoted to career theory.

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That is how this project began. Next, we came up with a design for the handbook that would highlight the contrast between current approaches and new ideas in career theory, and we set out to find our authors. We enlisted the cooperation of a group of people who are leaders in the careers field to write what we call “review chapters with a point of view.” These chapters provide an overview of the very best the field has to offer today and generate new questions for exploration. The chapters represent Part I.

We next identified a number of intellectual leaders in their particular social science fields who expressed interest in the long-term effects of work on people but were not “career people.” We asked them simply to think out loud about concepts from their field that potentially would be useful to people studying careers. Very few of those we approached turned us down. Their chapters make up Part II. Parts I and II together represent the fertile ground that we hope will nourish a decade or two of career research and theoretical debate.

Finally, we asked four leading scholars of organizations to take the rich harvest of ideas in Parts I and II and simply “play” with them. Apart from requesting that these authors focus on different levels of analysis, we left their assignments quite unstructured. We wanted them to do what we hope every reader will do, namely, to become immersed in the diverse contributions from Parts I and II and come up with their own ideas about new potential directions and theoretical approaches for the study of careers. We think you will be intrigued with their thoughts.

In fairness to all our authors we should stress that this handbook is no mere anthology. Not only were they all asked to fall in with the handbook design as outlined, but also their work was subject to an exacting review schedule that would have driven lesser academics to despair! First, most authors joined a workshop that Barbara Lawrence organized for the 1986 Academy of Management meeting. The authors' drafts were read in advance by six to eight other scholars. Each paper was then the subject of a ninety-minute discussion among the readers during which the authors received feedback. To illustrate the intensity of these sessions, we can recall that Harrison Trice commented he had never had to work so hard for his living at a workshop in his life! After submitting drafts that accommodated workshop feedback, all authors received three lengthy and unsparingly critical reviews from the editors. A further draft of each chapter was read by an independent reader from Cambridge University Press, after which both the reader's and the editors' further comments were relayed back to the authors. All of this occurred before the usual copy-editing procedures for the handbook began. We deeply and sincerely appreciate the efforts all handbook contributors made in sticking to the task. We hope that they, and every other reader, will see these efforts fully reflected in their final product, this handbook.

We owe a great intellectual debt to Lotte Bailyn, Ed Schein, Don Super, and John Van Maanen, who did so much to demonstrate the potential of career studies during the 1970s. And as this project wended its way from a vague itch in the back of Mike Arthur's head, the early support of Lotte Bailyn, Gene Dalton, Dan Gowler, Dan Levinson, and Paul Nystrom was crucial. We humbly thank them, and other trusted friends and publishers in whom we confided, for believing in us when we most needed their assurance. Francis Brooke, then of Cambridge University Press, also shared both our vision and our enthusiasm for what the handbook could become.

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We have already mentioned the Academy of Management, whose officers graciously supported our endeavors in career studies within the academy's Careers Division. However, we have yet to acknowledge the extent of intellectual and interpersonal support we received from that quarter. The long list of Careers Division members who helped in some way with this enterprise, but who are not authors here, includes Don Bowen, Jim Clawson, Marcy Crary, Tom DeLong, Mike Driver, Mary Ann Von Glinow, Jeff Greenhaus, Tom Gutteridge, Meryl Louis, Bob Morrison, Suzyn Ornstein, Sam Rabinowitz, Jim Stoner, and Paul Thompson. We have also enjoyed productive links both directly and through handbook contributors with the Industrial and Organizational Psychology Division (Division 14) of the American Psychological Association and the Organizations and Occupations Section of the American Sociological Association.

We each owe thanks to our host institutions, Suffolk University, Boston University, and the University of California at Los Angeles, for granting us the necessary time and support services to undertake this venture. Rosemary Carroll, Nancy Croll, Mary Kelly, and Paula Rauschl (at Suffolk University), Marie Jean Curtenaz, Vince Mahler, and Victoria Selden (at Boston University), and Alice Hirata and Lucy Wallen (at the University of California at Los Angeles) all went out of their way to help us complete our task. We editors would also like to thank each other for the distinct contributions that made this handbook possible, for picking up the slack when one or another of us got bogged down, and for pressing forward in the face of the numerous trials and tribulations of shepherding a book such as this from idea to publication.

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Finally, our spouses – Cia, Marcy, and Charlie – and our children have accepted, almost always with good grace, the impositions and demands the handbook has made upon them.

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