THE SHIFTING NATURE OF CAREERS IN CANADA: A FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH

Research is needed to empirically document the changing nature of careers among successive generational cohorts in Canada. This paper offers a conceptual framework for the study of shifting careers. We argue that in the Canadian context, generational differences are confounded with gender and immigration effects, and therefore all three effects need to be considered simultaneously.

Career researchers have long been concerned with the changing nature of careers and their implications for employers and policy makers. Scholars have argued that changes in the nature of employment relationships, career progression patterns, and career expectations are changing the ways in which careers unfold for successive generations of workers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Burke & Ng, 2006; Hall, 1996). The complexity of these changes is compounded in the Canadian context by a number of trends that are changing the composition of the Canadian labour force. Canada’s richly diverse labour force continues to grow more diverse with increasing percentages of older workers, immigrant workers, Aboriginal workers and a growing divide between regions as well as urban and rural Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003). These changes have impacts on the ‘typical’ career patterns of Canadians that have not been documented empirically.

Shifts in the nature of careers over time are most appropriately viewed as a generational phenomenon: to understand how careers are changing, one must determine how the careers of members of successive generational cohorts differ from one another. Although there has been a great deal of speculation about the ways that careers are changing from one generational cohort to the next, there is insufficient empirical evidence to document this phenomenon. Even less is known about the diversity within generational cohorts. Research on generational cohort trends frequently obscures important demographic heterogeneity within the cohorts. Within the context of career shifts, significant perspective is lost when we ignore the impacts of other demographics that impact on career expectations and outcomes. The impact of omitting such variables from generational research is compounded when one considers the effect of the interaction of these variables with generation. One cannot truly appreciate how careers have changed from one generation to the next without simultaneously considering how these changes have differentially affected men and women. Furthermore, one cannot assume that the influences that create a generational cohort have the same impact in different cultural contexts. Further still, one cannot assume that generational changes in career-related gender roles are universal across cultures. In sum, one must simultaneously consider the confluence of these important factors to fully appreciate the changing nature of careers.

Such research would provide actionable knowledge to employers seeking human resource solutions that address the differing needs and expectations of various demographic subgroups. This is a particularly prescient concern in Canada’s current demographic landscape, in which almost one third of the Canadian population belongs to the baby boom cohort, the majority of whom will reach retirement
age by 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2006). A number of commentators have warned that employers will have
to face an impending skill shortage as the Baby Boomers retire and a smaller cohort of workers is left to
replace them (Burke & Ng, 2005; Capelli, 2003; Statistics Canada, 2003). Successful recruitment and
retention requires a better understanding of changing career expectations, experiences and attitudes than is
presently available. Public policy makers would also benefit from a greater understanding of the evolving
nature of careers and retirement in Canada, specifically the way in which people approach, move through
and transition out of their careers in their senior years. Employers and governments must adapt to
changes in the nature of retirement itself, as Baby Boomers are expected to transition out of their careers
through self-employment and contingent work arrangements (Statistics Canada, 2006), necessitating a
more flexible view of the retirement process than has previously been the case. It has been argued that we
are in the midst of significant changes in younger workers’ expectations and career choices that call into
question traditional assumptions about work and careers (Capelli, 2003). A deeper understanding of the
changing nature of careers in Canada will be instrumental to career counselors and career development
professionals who work with students and employees to plan and develop their career paths. Finally,
researchers who study career development and work-related values and attitudes would benefit from the
wealth of normative data that this research would generate. Such data would provide an important
benchmark against which future shifts in career expectations, experiences and attitudes could be
compared to track broader trends.

The objective of this paper is to outline a framework for the study of the shifting nature of careers
that considers the simultaneous impacts of generation, immigration and gender on the evolution of
individual careers. This framework is intended as a starting point for future research on career shifts in
Canada. As such, we are concerned with immigrants to Canada who are part of the Canadian labour
force. The paper begins by outlining a conceptual framework for studying changing careers. We then
consider the independent and combined impacts of generational cohort, gender and immigration on
individual careers. We conclude with directions for future research.

**Conceptual Framework: Career Experiences, Expectations and Attitudes**

The term ‘career’ has many varied meanings. Therefore, any effort to identify a viable
framework for studying the shifting nature of careers in Canada must begin with a consideration of the
pertinent dimensions of the career concept. Although the literature on careers has considered a wide
range of concepts, we have identified three broad categories of concepts that are particularly salient to
studying shifting careers: career experiences, career expectations, and career outcomes. Each is
considered below.

| Table 1 |
|---|---|---|
| Career Expectations: | Career Experience: | Career Outcomes: |
| • Pay expectations | • Career path (i.e., education, work | • Career commitment |
|   o At time of career | history, life role history) | • Career satisfaction |
|   entry | • Work-life interface (i.e., | |
|   o At career peak | balance/conflict) | |
| • Career path expectations | | |
| • Career success definitions | | |
| • Work values | | |
| • Role Salience | | |
Career Expectations

As a starting point for studying individual careers, it is important to consider the individual’s subjective career reality (Collin, 1998). Career expectations relate to people’s subjective beliefs about what is appropriate and fair in their careers, how they envision an ideal career unfolding and what they view as important in pursuing their career goals. Research is required to determine what career expectations were formed by members of the various birth cohorts early in their careers, how those expectations differ for men and women and among immigrant sub-groups, and how those expectations have shifted, if at all, over the course of their careers.

As seen in Table 1, our framework includes expectations related to: (1) one’s pay, both at the beginning of one’s career and at the peak of one’s career (Jackson, Gardner, & Sullivan, 1992); (2) one’s career progression pattern, i.e., the career path, (Jackson et al., 1992); (3) one’s personal definition of career success, i.e., the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one’s work experiences (Seibert & Kramer, 2001); (4) one’s work-related values, which represent the importance that people place on various work goals and work attributes (Brown & Crace, 1996); and (5) the salience that one places on various roles in life, such as employee, parent, spouse, which is critical to understanding how people make career choices (Super & Sverko, 1995).

Career Experience

We use the term career experience to refer to the objective and subjective reality of one’s career. As shown in Table 1, our conception of the career experience includes two components: (1) the seminal educational, work, family-related and leisure activities that constitute one’s “career-in-life” history (cf. Ituma & Simpson, 2006); and (2) the work-life interface – i.e., the interplay of work and other life-roles and the degree to which they have conflicted with each other or balanced over one’s career.

Until recently, career theory has been largely predicated on the assumption that the “normal” career pattern involved entry into the labour market following one’s education, followed by a linear upward progression in a small number of organizations (Hall, 1996). Sullivan (1999) noted that this “normal” career pattern” is inadequate for two reasons. First, it may never have been the norm for women, whose career patterns have historically involved delayed entry or short-term hiatus from the labour market for the purposes of child-bearing and child-rearing. Second, it is no longer applicable in the modern employment context. Adamson et al. (1998) have suggested that three significant employment trends have shaped modern careers: (1) the death of long-term employment relationships has resulted in a short-term perspective on careers; (2) hierarchical career advancement has given way to less predictable patterns of career progression that involve lateral and even downward progressions of duties and status over time; and (3) there is no longer a logical sequence of jobs that can be deemed a “normal” career.

Recent literature on career patterns has surmised a shift away from linear, organization-based careers toward “boundaryless careers” which span across organizations and even professions (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Sullivan, 1999). Similarly, Hall (1996) has predicted the rise of the “Protean career,” which involves an individual’s progression through a number of learning cycles within and across organizations over the span of his or her career. Furthermore, Cawsey, Deszca, and Mazerolle (1995) proposed that modern careers might be characterized as “portfolio careers” in which individuals develop sets of skills that they sell to various clients on a contractual basis.
Despite the seeming consensus that modern careers are dynamic and span multiple organizations and occupations, there is insufficient empirical evidence to date to support the existence of such a shift in general (Briscoe, Hall, & DeMuth, 2006) and in the Canadian context in particular.

The seminal work of Super (1980) suggested that the career be viewed as a broader interactive pattern of life roles that are played out in our homes, workplaces, schools and communities. The various roles change in their relative salience over time and may conflict with one another when they place contradictory expectations on the individual. Most notably, work and family roles may conflict in making career-related decisions (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). We have therefore included the construct of work-life conflict, an inter-role conflict in which the pressures and expectations of two or more roles are incompatible (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

**Career Outcomes**

A full consideration of careers must also incorporate perceived career outcomes. A basic tenet of the theory of met expectations holds that if people’s work-related experiences fail to meet or exceed their expectations, they will experience negative attitudes such as dissatisfaction and low commitment (Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). Our framework contains two attitudes related to one’s career: career satisfaction and career commitment.

Career satisfaction represents the individual’s positive internal evaluation of his or her career, including his or her ability to meet career goals related to overall success, income, promotion, and personal development (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). Career commitment refers to one’s level of dedication to the pursuit of one’s career. Carson & Bedeian (1994, p. 240) argued that career commitment is comprised of three components: (1) career identity, establishing a close emotional association with one’s career; (2) career planning, determining one’s developmental needs and deciding on career goals; and (3) career resilience, resisting career disruption, even in the face of adversity.

**Understanding Shifting Careers**

Shifting social patterns are normally studied by investigating differences in the experiences and perceptions of successive birth cohorts (Glenn, 1977). Each cohort, provided by history with its own unique set of challenges and possibilities, develops a unique set of career expectations, experiences and outcomes. However, these generational shifts belie a rich diversity of differences related to other factors. In order to truly understand how careers are changing from one generation to the next, one must make every effort to disentangle the confounding effects of other factors that are influencing shifting careers. In the Canadian context, this set of factors might include such things as language, regionalism, the urban-rural divide, and Aboriginal status. Although many demographic factors might contribute to our understanding of career change, we consider here the two factors that are arguably the most salient to fully understanding intergenerational changes in careers: gender and immigration. We begin with a discussion of birth cohorts, followed by discussions of the impacts of gender and immigration.

**Birth Cohorts**

Social scientists have long employed birth cohorts as units of analysis in the study of broader social change. The concept of generational cohorts was introduced in the work of sociologist Karl Mannheim in the late 1920s. Mannheim (1952) posited that a cohort’s unique identity is forged when important historical events or periods of rapid social change disrupt continuity and challenge the perception of what is ‘normal’ (Eyerman & Turner, 1998; Cavalli, 2004). While adults seek to make
sense of the disruptive change by integrating it into their existing cognitive schema, young people who are still in the formative years of their developmental life-cycle will have their cognitive schema shaped by the change and its social and historical repercussions (Pilcher, 1994; Scott, 2000). The shared formative experience of a cohort of people born and raised in the same historical era thus becomes the basis for shared values and common personality traits (Twenge, 2006).

The important birth cohorts that coexist in Canada today have been ascribed a variety of names and birth-year boundaries. Although few authors employ identical cohort boundaries, there is a broad consistency in the dates that are chosen to delineate birth cohorts. The most commonly used birth-year boundaries are as follows: Matures were born prior to 1945 (Adams, 1998; Foot, 1998); Baby Boomers were born between 1945 and 1964 (Adams, 1998; Barnard, Cosgrave & Welsh, 1998; Statistics Canada, 2006); Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1979; and Millennials were born in 1980 or later (Foot, 1998; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke, Raines & Filipcza2000).

A growing body of literature documents differences among the various generational birth cohorts in terms of their values, attitudes toward jobs, organizations and careers, and have differing expectations with respect to career paths and career success (Burke & Ng, 2007; Lancaster & Stillman, Lyons, 2003; Shelton & Shelton, 2005). A number of popular press publications have reported on the career expectations of individual cohorts. For instance, Shelton & Shelton (2005) surveyed over 1,200 young Americans (Generation X) and found that these workers’ expectations on 14 of 15 work-related factors (e.g., opportunities for advancement, opportunities for learning, interesting work) were not being met. Smola and Sutton (2002) found that Generation X placed greater emphasis on being promoted quickly and on the importance of hard work than did Baby Boomers, while Baby Boomers placed more emphasis on the centrality of work to one’s identity. However, apart from anecdotal evidence presented in popular press (e.g., Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Zemke, Raines & Filipcza2000) there has been little attempt to compare the work expectations and values of various cohorts. One exception was the study by Lyons (2003), which compared the work values of all four generational cohorts and found that the they differed significantly in the importance placed on altruism work values (doing good through work), social work values (affiliation aspects of work), intrinsic work values (psychological aspects of work), and prestige work values (status of work), even when life-cycle factors (such as child-rearing and marriage) were held constant. Lyons’s sample of Millennial respondents was largely limited to university students, as the representation of that cohort in the labour force was limited at the time of his study. Now that this cohort has largely entered the world of paid work, it would be useful to replicate the research.

Although empirical evidence of inter-generational differences in career expectations has not yet been attained, a number of studies from the fields of education and career counselling have documented the career expectations of adolescents and university students (e.g., Armstrong & Crombie, 2000; Helwig, 2004; McNulty & Borgen, 1988). Using the technique of cross-temporal meta analysis (cf. Twenge & Campbell, 2008), it would be possible to gather extant data on career expectations over time and attribute them to the various generational cohorts. However, comparable sets of data from Canadian samples over time may be insufficient at this point to allow for such analysis.

Although there is an abundance of speculation about the changing nature of careers (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall, 1996) there is limited empirical evidence concerning the career experiences of different generational cohorts. Authors have written that consecutive birth cohorts have placed a greater respective emphasis on balancing work and life roles (Barnard et al, 1998; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). This is said to be especially true for working women (Orenstein, 2000; Shelton & Shelton, 2005). There is some evidence of this trend in Great Britain (Charles & Harris, 2007), no study has yet examined the Canadian context. There has been even less research concerning career attitudes among generational cohorts, let alone within the Canadian context.
What we do know about the careers of the various Canadian generational cohorts is that they have been influenced by very different economic and social conditions. For example, when the earliest of Canada’s Baby Boomers entered the full-time adult labour force in the mid-1960s, unemployment rates hovered around 5%. By the early 1980s, when the first of Canada’s Generation Xers entered the labour force, unemployment rates were almost double that (Gower, 1992). The Millennial generation, entering the labour force in the late-1990s and early 2000s, has faced unemployment rates lower than 8%, the most favourable labour market since the late-1970s (HRSDC, 2009). Between 1981, when the majority of Baby Boomers were in their early 20s, and 2001 when the first Millennials were entering the labour force, the percentage of Canadians aged 15 and over who held a university degree increased from 8% to 15.4% (Statistics Canada Census Data, 2001). According to 2006 census data, 23% of Canadians aged 25-64 now hold at least a university bachelor’s degree. These data illustrate how job opportunities and career requirements have shifted over time. What remains to be investigated, is how these factors have impacted on the careers of individuals from the various generational cohorts.

Gender

The participation of women in the labour force has increased steadily since the turn of the 20th century, rising from around 18 percent just after World War I and doubling to nearly 50 percent from the period extending from World War II to the beginning of the 1980s (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999). At the time of writing, that number has risen to 62.8 percent for women 15 years and older. Women now make up roughly 47 percent of all Canadian workers (Statistics Canada, 2009). Previous studies on women in the workforce have been devoted to issues of equity and wages (e.g., Chaykowski & Powell, 1999; Gunderson, 1989; Leck, 2002), and few, if any, studies have examined the careers and working lives of women, particularly from different birth cohorts.

Historically, women stopped work when they got married, and when they bore children. Increasingly, in recent decades, married women and women with children entered the workforce in greater numbers. Over a 20 year period, from 1978 to 1998, the labour force participation rate increased from 47.1 percent to 62.3 percent for married women, and from 48.2 percent to 72.8 percent for women with children (Chaykowski & Powell, 1999). This upward trend can be attributed to changes in attitudes toward women at work and the functioning of the family unit. It is now more culturally acceptable for women with children to work because of family-friendly policies made possible by firms. The widespread affordability of technology (e.g., washers and dryers, microwave ovens, dishwashers) has also reduced the amount of time in which women devote to housework. Furthermore, preferences for greater consumption of goods have also contributed to dual-income family necessitating women to work. Bulbeck (2005) found strong support for role reversal for men’s participation in housework, among younger people, when both partners are in paid employment. There also appears to be a trend toward gender-equal housework arrangement and increasing normality of “househusbands” (women working and men raising children) among the younger generation.

As women began entering the workforce, they are also subjected to gender-role stereotyping. Gender-role stereotyping occurs when society believes that an individual’s choice of occupation should be related to one’s gender (Koberg & Chusmir, 1991). There is a general perception that men possess more of certain attributes such as dominance, aggression, and endurance, while women are seen as exhibiting greater nurturance, succorance, and sympathy. Therefore, certain jobs such as management positions, and science and engineering jobs are considered to be men’s work, while child care, teaching, and clerical work are seen as women’s work. Reavley (1993) reported high percentages of Canadian women in clerical work (80%), nursing and healthcare (79%), teaching (62%), and service occupations (57%). The influx of women into the workforce during World War II has seen women increasingly willing and able to take on men’s work (e.g., starting from making bullets and bombers). Changing attitudes in the workplace has also seen an increasing number of women in men’s work. For example, Ng
and Burke (2007) found young Canadians were more willing to hire women over men as police officers, which is seen as men’s work, as long as they are equally or more qualified. This should not come as a surprise given that the younger generation is constantly exposed to messages on equal treatment for all. However, Loughlin and Arnold (2007) cautioned that negative comments about women can dispel any thoughts that younger generations will be more willing to accommodate diversity.

Young women’s view of their roles and careers are also changing. Women are increasingly found in managerial and professional jobs such as information technology, which has traditionally been male-dominated (Armstrong-Stassen & Cameron, 2005; Jubas & Butterwick, 2008). Opportunities to start their business, contribute to science, technology and engineering are increasing, as women are being encouraged to enter these fields (Madill, Montgomerie, Stewin, Fitzsimmons, Tovell, Armour, et al., 2000). Twenge and Campbell (2008) found women have become more assertive over the years, and younger women displayed no significant difference on measures of assertiveness compared to men. Many women were raised by their mothers who were first generation feminists, and while they may not be feminist themselves, they are better equipped to break any glass ceilings they encounter having been given very high self-esteem by their parents (Fuller, 2008). Consequently, younger generations of women are more ambitious and career driven compared to women from earlier generations (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigall, 2000).

There is also growing awareness that women’s approach to leadership and differing perspectives such as participative management, enhancing others’ self worth and energizing followers (Rosener, 1990) make them uniquely qualified to assume leadership positions. Tung (2004) suggested that in the era of globalization, women are especially suited to undertake expatriate assignments. She found that women are indeed willing to undertake international assignments; they are equally successful as men in culturally tough environments; and women, in fact, possess certain attributes that render them particularly suited to succeed in international assignments. These attributes are rooted in their ability to cope with isolation and in their interaction and communication with local nationals. Top business schools are already offering women focused programs and developing women business leaders for global management (Ibeh, Carter, Poff, & Hamill, 2008).

In terms of career outcomes, it appears that women continue to define career success differently from men. Women tend to emphasize balance and relationships when measuring career success, while men focus more on material success (Dyke & Murphy, 2006). However, this pattern of difference may change as young women also display a stronger sense of entitlement than previous generations. In a study of post-secondary students in Canada, Ng and Sears (forthcoming) reported that women espoused essentially the same values as men in terms of extrinsic, social and altruistic work values, and they want the same rewards and recognition as men. According to Fuller (2008), young women will expect promotions, raises, and fairness in the workplace, given their increased assertiveness and strong sense of self-worth. These women will also not let motherhood be an obstacle to their success, and will demand that employers accommodate them when they want to have children.

Immigration

Canada is known for its open immigration policies, boasting the highest rate of immigration in the G8. Seen as a key to economic growth and a response to Canada's declining birth rate, Canada has pursued aggressive immigration policies. In 2006, almost one fifth of Canada’s population was foreign-born (19.8%) and immigrants represent more than two-thirds (69.3%) of Canada’s population growth between 2001 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007b). In addition to the declining Canadian birth rate, Canada’s unique demographic profile means that as the baby boomers retire, immigrants will become an even greater proportion of the labour force. In the 1990s, Canada’s immigrants represented 70% of the growth in the labour market. That rate is expected to reach 100% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2005).
Since the 1990s, Canadian immigration strategies have been geared towards answering the domestic demand for skilled knowledge workers through policies that are geared towards admitting a greater number of immigrants in the economic class; immigrants having higher education, greater language skills and more work experience (Saunders & Maxwell, 2003). In 2005, over 56% of Canada’s immigrants were admitted in the skilled economic class, a significant increase from 29% in 1992 (Statistics Canada, 2007c). As a result, Canada’s recent immigrants are even more educated than their Canadian-born counterparts: immigrants are now twice as likely as Canadians to have a university degree and four times as likely to have a graduate degree (Statistics Canada, 2007d). These highly educated and skilled immigrants represent an important sector of the Canadian workforce and the knowledge workforce in particular.

In his seminal work on culture and work values, Hofstede (1984) identified five dimensions on which cultures can differ: power distance; individualism/collectivism; masculinity/femininity; uncertainty avoidance; and long/short term orientation (added later). Canada is considered to have relatively low power distance (equality between classes), to be highly individualistic (independent and self-reliant), to have a moderate differentiation between masculine and feminine roles, to have an average level of aversion to uncertainty, and to have a short-term orientation (concerned with meeting obligations and respecting cultural traditions) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Until the 1960s the majority of Canadian immigrants emigrated from countries which were very cultural and racially close to Canada. Changes in immigration policies caused a shift away from Europe as the primary source of immigrants toward other continents. Europeans represented over 80% of immigrants to Canada in the 1950s. This number fell to 28% in the 1980s and is now at about 15% (Statistics Canada, 2007a). As a result, more recent immigrants to Canada are much more likely to be culturally distinct and visible minorities. Currently, the majority of Canada’s immigrants originate from Asia. According to Hofstede’s cultural research, Asian cultures differ from Canada’s on every dimension. The Asian world is considered to have high power distance (inequality of power between classes), to be highly collective (committed to the social aggregate or group), to have a feminine culture (less assertive and competitive), to have a high level of aversion to uncertainty, and to have a long-term orientation (concerned with thrift and perseverance).

It is also recognized that different cultures seek different things in their careers. For example, Bauder (2006) notes that South Asians value social status, whereas individuals from the former Yugoslavia value a leisure lifestyle. Different cultures also represent different gender role structures, which are manifested in the types of careers that are considered suitable or desirable by each gender (Salaff & Greve, 2003). The definitions and structure of Canadian career and labour markets can be considered to be socially constructed and therefore potentially ill-fitting for immigrants (Salaff, Greve & Ping, 2003).

It is well-documented, that most new immigrants face a career set-back when entering the workforce in Canada (Worswick 2004). Highly educated and skilled newcomers face challenges of language (learning English/French), differences in educational credentials and a devaluation of their foreign work experience (Worswick 2004). As an example of the latter, management ability is perceived in Canada to be an experientially and culturally based skill, two qualifications which disqualify most immigrants (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The shifts in Canada’s immigration profile have been accompanied by changes in the immigrant labour experience, as documented by the two major labour force outcomes measured by Statistics Canada: unemployment and wages. Immigrants have higher unemployment rates, and have lower wages than their native-born Canadian counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2005). These differences are most prevalent for the skilled and university-educated immigrant group.

The age distributions of immigrants differ from that of native-born Canadians. Although immigrants represent only about 20% of the Canadian population, their representation in the labour force
is growing and will one day have a significant effect on the birth cohort distributions in Canada. In general, Canadian immigrants arrive in Canada at a relatively young age. Although the proportion of youth (15 to 24) immigrating to Canada is similar to the Canadian population (about 15%), almost three quarters of recent immigrants (between 70 and 73%) are between the ages of 25 and 54, whereas this age group represents a little more than half of the native born population (54.3%). In contrast, only four percent of new immigrants are in the older, working age group aged 55 to 64. This is less than half of the native-born representation in this age group (10.7%) (Statistics Canada, 2007a).

There is a prevalent perception that immigrants have different attitudes towards work than native-born Canadians do (Bauder, 2006). Notwithstanding their native cultural and work value differences, immigrants experience entry into a foreign labour market, a market which very often does not recognize their skills and credentials. For some immigrants the immediate purpose of working is to feed their family, rather than pursuing their expected career or seeking advancement (Bauder, 2006). When faced with extreme difficulties in obtaining employment at their previous level or status, immigrants may seek out any job, rather than face unemployment (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001). Immigrants may also seek employment for the purpose of integration into the Canadian society and workforce and as a means of improving their language skills or alternately, as a means of connecting with other immigrants from their homeland (Bauder, 2006). The work experiences of immigrants have also changed over time as more recent immigrants have faced a much greater difficulty integrating effectively into the Canadian workforce.

Initially, even those immigrants finding employment in their chosen field, often accept employment far inferior to their previous positions, leading to a highly overqualified sector in the workforce. In the past, it has been expected that in time, they overcome these barriers and enjoy upward mobility in their careers. There is evidence, however, that immigrants never fully eliminate the setbacks experienced upon their arrival in Canada (Kazemipur & Halli, 2001). In particular, more recent immigrants seem to have greater difficulty closing the gap between themselves and their Canadian-born counterparts. These difficulties are posited to be linked to changes in immigration policies, which have led to a much greater proportion of immigrants who are also visible minorities (Bloom, Grenier & Gunderson, 1995).

These career setback experiences, whether major (falling off their career path and finding a job for survival) or moderate (experiencing a setback on a particular career path by accepting employment at a lower level than that obtained in their home country) can be expected to have an influence on the expectations and attitudes of immigrants towards their careers.

Individuals seek congruence between their values and identities and those of their employers. A perceived lack of fit may affect an individual’s attraction to an organization, their satisfaction with their job, their commitment and their turnover (Ng & Burke, 2005). Ng and Burke (2005) found that individuals who had experience working in other countries before coming to Canada were less satisfied with their jobs, had lower levels of commitment and were more likely to turn over. Perceived differential treatment leading to career setbacks or lack of advancement has also been found be a predictor of job dissatisfaction (DeConinck & Stilwell, 1996). In a study of Israeli immigrants, Krau (1984) determined that immigrants had lower levels of career expectations but higher levels of commitment and job involvement.

To date, however, there is no research which evaluates the career paths, experiences, attitudes and expectations of Canadian immigrants.
Integration

The labour market in Canada is experiencing a shift where an aging workforce is being replaced by a younger generation of workers. Complementing this trend is an influx of women and immigrants whose work values, career expectations and experiences will be significantly different from those of previous generations. Younger women are more assertive, have a greater sense of self-worth, and are able and willing to take on traditionally male roles. They also expect fair treatment, and are not afraid to make demands to accommodate their family worklife needs. At the same time, immigrant workers are being brought in to plug the shortage of skills. Most are highly skilled and educated but they are also unfamiliar with the Canadian way, resulting in underemployment and underutilization of talent. At issue is whether and how gender and cultural differences interact with younger generation of workers to affect the types of careers that they find meaningful and fulfilling.

Historically, older generation of workers respect authority and values tradition. In contrast, the younger generations demand flexibility and empowerment, and are a lot more informal in their work styles. However, increasing diversity in the workplace also requires sensitivity and respect on the part of all employees. For example, recent immigrants from high power distance countries (e.g., East Asian countries such as China and India) are more tolerant of unequal power distributions and more hierarchical organizations. Some (e.g., West Asians) will also exhibit more masculine behaviour in the workplace and oppose to working alongside or reporting to women superiors. It is anticipated that the younger generation of minority descent will have two sets of values, one at home (traditional) and one at work that conforms to the Canadian workplace culture.

The challenge for organizations is to manage the shifting values among the different generations of workers and accommodate the demands from women and cultural minorities. Should organizations provide employment experience based upon best practices or best fit? What are the ways in which organizations can bridge the knowledge gap between older and younger workers? To what degree does compensation play in motivating employees who place an increasing emphasis on worklife balance? Organizations that are able to understand the shift in career expectations, experiences, and attitudes among this new generation will likely gain a competitive advantage in attracting and utilizing the best talents in the new millennium.

Conclusion

Previous research on the changing nature of careers has focused on inter-generational differences without adequate consideration of other important demographic influences that engender significant diversity within generational cohorts. The research framework we have proposed here provides at least three advantages over previous research endeavors in this area. First, the research concerning shifting work experiences and attitudes among successive generations has tended to focus on isolated constructs, such as teamwork (Karp, Sirias, & Arnold, 1999) and work values (Smola & Sutton, 2002) rather than investigating differences in broader level career constructs. Although anecdotal evidence concerning the career expectations, experiences and attitudes of the various birth cohorts abounds (e.g., Lancaster & Stillman, 2002), no academic study has empirically examined these constructs to date. Our research framework provides a comprehensive set of career-related variables for investigation. Second, much of the inter-cohort research focuses on one or two cohorts, rather than exploring broader trends across all of the cohorts within today’s labour force. For instance, Smola and Sutton (2002) compared the work values and beliefs of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers and the study conducted by the PEW Research Centre (2007), focused on “Generation Next,” born between 1980 and 1988. A comprehensive study of all four generations in the current workplace is necessary in order to gauge the inter-cohort trends that are emerging over time. Third, although some research has examined the interaction of gender and generation as influences on career variables, there has been no attempt to integrate these variables with
immigration to gain a complete picture of how careers are changing in Canada for men and women, both immigrant and native-born Canadian. Such research will generate important knowledge about the rich diversity of the Canadian labour force and the trends that may be unfolding quite differently in different demographic subgroups.
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