Demographic and Societal Factors Affecting the Linear Career Crisis

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Based on a symposium presentation at Eastern Academy of Management, Binghamton, New York, May 1981.

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ABSTRACT

The basic premise is that most managers and organizations are defining careers as a linear progression up a career ladder. This Linear career concept is headed for great difficulty given major societal and demographic trends: (a) population patterns have produced a boom generation which will saturate all management positions from the 1980s onward; (b) movement away from early retirement further blocks any routes to upper management; (c) slow economic growth retards new openings. What is needed are managers with nonlinear career concepts. Yet trends show a resurgence of linear concepts among those in school and entering the work force. Remedies may include organizational, educational, and individual reorientation to nonlinear model of careers.

INTRODUCTION

Many emerging trends in career theory have focused on internal psychological structures which guide the career choices of individuals. Schein (1971), Holland (1973), and Hall (1976) have all postulated "inner gyroscopes" affecting a person's career evolution. In some cases, attention has been paid to the fit between inner processes and organizational factors (e.g., Holland 1973; Rounds, Shubsachs, Davis, and Lofquist, 1978) but as Vardi (1981) has pointed out, rather little research on this interaction has occurred. Still less attention has been given to the three-way fit between individual career orientations, organizational forces, and societal trends.

A Career Concept model will be employed here to examine current trends in individual/organizational career patterns on the one hand and societal forces on the other. The basic premise will be that there is a widening gap between current social trends and individual/organizational career concepts which can lead to very serious problems. The detection of this gap can be facilitated by the use of a common career concept model at individual/organizational and societal levels of analysis.

The Career Concept Model

Many models of career orientation have been developed which focus on the motivational or competency aspects of a person's career attitude. Less heavily emphasized have been the definitions of career as a pattern of movement in time which each person constructs. Hall (1976) has presented a multiplicity of possible career definitions. The Career Concept Model suggests that a critical variable in individual career choice is precisely the definition of career pattern adopted by a person.

Theorists of career development stages have noted varying career definitions at different life stages (e.g., Miller and Form, 1956; Hall and Nougaim, 1968; Thompson and Dalton, 1976; Von Maanen and Schein, 1977). Others have noted that at any age there may be critical distinctions in career definitions based on occupation (Kornhauser, 1968; Tavsky, 1970. Finally, some models have proposed general definitional differences in the population which focus on direction of change (Nosow and Form, 1962; Ginzberg and Yohalem, 1966), time of choice (Hall, 1976) or time horizon of planning (Roth, 1968). Von Maanen (1975) has developed a model of career themes integrating definitional aspects (time frame, direction of movement) with the motivational anchors of Schein.

The present model was developed to incorporate three critical definitional dimensions:

1. Frequency of movement across fields
2. Duration of time in each field
3. Direction of movement

These three dimensions incorporate the focus on direction of career movement found in stage theories with the time and frequency of movement sections of some more recent models. Motivational constructs were not included in Career Concepts but are seen as related processes allowing subtyping of career concepts. Research to date has supported the validity of this approach. (Driver, 1976, 1979, 1980; Hoffman, 1978; Olson, 1979; Prince, 1979, Driver and Hoffman, 1979). Using the three basic dimensions, four career concepts can be defined as seen in Table 1.

Each concept seems to be a widely held and subjectively valid view of the meaning of a career:

The Steady State concept is possibly the oldest concept to receive conscious attention. It underlies the definition of career as a vocation or calling. The idea of a career here is a lifelong commitment to a field. Prominent examples of fields which probably exemplify this concept would be professions like medicine or engineering and skilled crafts like carpentry. The crucial task for a person using this concept is correct field identification early in life. It is in the context of this concept that early "vocational" counseling makes eminently good sense. And it is to holders of this concept that obsolescence is most threatening.

The Linear career concept is also a familiar one in our culture. The idea of success and career as hinging on continued upward movement is probably endemic to fields such as management or politics. This concept is so pervasive that it frequently is advanced as the only career concept--particularly in management contexts. This would leave no room, for example, for a foreman who finds this position an optimal fit and a lifelong challenge. Conversely, Linear concepts can crop up in professions. Consider the physician striving for AMA presidency as an example. Less obvious might be the case of the academic striving for ever greater influence as measured by editorial committees, grant review positions and the like.

The Transitory concept is at first sight somewhat contradictory--it is a consistent pattern of inconsistency. It seems to generate a "random walk" as seen from the outside. Sometimes it may operate unconsciously and produce conscious confusion even inside the person (the "things just happen" syndrome). Nevertheless, this concept seems as valid in its way as the others. It is characterized by nearly constant and apparently

erratic movement. It is probably often found in semiskilled work groups, minorities, and youth. It is often badly misunderstood, particularly by those operating with Linear concepts. It is a concept whose time may be coming with the growth of part-time and temporary work forces.

The Spiral concept is one that became most evident in the late '60s, with the growing interest in mid-life crises. Stories of middle-aged executives becoming artists or engineers turning into therapists began to surface with great frequency. Our research has shown Spiral individuals who consciously or otherwise make major career changes in 5-10 year cycles. One most likely finds Spiral career concepts very frequently among such fields as consultants, writers, and therapists.

Measurement of career concepts has been approached in two ways: specially developed resume forms (cf. Hoffman, 1978; Olson, 1979; Driver and Hoffman, 1979) and questionnaires (cf. Driver, 1976; Prince, 1979). Both methods seem to possess validity, although they must be regarded as experimental at present. A brief look at this validation research follows. (See Driver, 1980).

While not directly involving motives, career concepts do seem to relate to certain underlying personality factors. For example, Career Concepts relate to more pervasive cognitive styles (Driver and Rowe, 1979). For instance, Spiral career concepts are correlated with complex, multifocused "Integrative" decision styles (Driver & Rowe, 1979) whereas Steady State career concepts are related to a simpler, more focused "Decisive" style. (Prince, 1979; Olson, 1979.)

Career concepts also relate to motivational factors. Prince (1979) found that the motivational aspects of Schein's (Von Maanen and Schein,

1979) career anchors showed meaningful correlation with career concepts. For instance, the Steady State concept correlated with technical competence as did the Linear concept. The Linear concept correlated with security as did the Steady State (at a trend level). The Transitory concept negatively tied to technical competence and tended toward autonomy. The Spiral concept tended towards creativity and autonomy.

Based on data and theoretical considerations, a relationship between career concepts and motives is proposed as shown in Table 2. Motivational patterns suggest the possibility of two types within each career concept. Two types of Steady State do seem to exist--one focused on security, the other on the display of competence.[1] Research has shown Steady State concepts relating to both the focused, security-oriented Decisive Decision Style and to the non-security oriented Integrative style (Olson, 1979). The latter type of Steady State may especially be found among creative professionals who grow by increased competence in their chosen field.

Similarly, there seems to be a predominant Linear who basically seeks power and status as well as a rarer variety driven by advancement and recognition. Data shows clear distinctions between extremely successful (in salary terms) Transitories who seem to thrive on challenge and a very low-paid group of Transitories who may be in search of their identity (Hoffman, 1978; Driver and Hoffman, 1979). Finally, some Spirals seem to look inward to an inner growth of self-actualization or expanded awareness, while others turn to relationships as their key focus. Most Spiral shifts seem to involve either expanded new capacities or relationships.

Individuals seem to operate mainly with one career concept at a time. However, some evidence suggests that people often harbor a second concept which may occasionally affect choices or career satisfactions. For instance, many Linear persons seem to be "closet Spirals" in the sense that they inwardly wish to adapt this concept but fear it is impractical or "crazy." These secondary concepts may provide valuable clues on possible transitions across career concepts at different life stages. For the present they provide useful distinctions within given concepts.

Organizational Career Culture

While exact parallels between individual and organizational career concepts are not expected, there are patterns within organizations which resonate with individual career concepts. Most evidently the actual career patterns within an organization can be examined in terms of direction of movement, tenure in positions and frequency of movement. Rosenbaum (1979) has clearly shown how a linear pattern was consistently pursued in one corporation.[2]

Another factor of great importance is the Career concept in use by senior management, particularly the CEO. Given the nature of management one expects and does find strong Linear concentration (Hoffman, 1978; Driver and Hoffman, 1979; Olson, 1979) in managements. This cannot help but pervade the values and practices of a company. Not all companies are totally Linear at the top--e.g., Olson found Linear frequencies at 30% and Steady State at 42% in a Public Utility Company. Hence, one expects to find variance in this critical factor.

A comprehensive model of career culture dimensions relating to the four career concepts has been developed (Driver, 1979). A summary of these factors appears in Table 3.

A consistent Steady State career culture organization would be a traditional, flat organization with a very large number of specialized departments and offices. There would be very little upward or lateral mobility. Rewards would focus on security items such as tenure and benefits (e.g., insurance and pensions). But competence would also be rewarded by training in current expertise to offset obsolescence. Performance evaluation would be focused on current quality of output. Pay would parallel longevity and professional competence not just managerial level. One thinks of professional partnerships as Steady State, but also these patterns have been found in large organizations such as public utilities and defense industries closely tied to the government.

The Linear career culture organization would be a tall pyramid. Rosenbaum has noted that the tall pyramid is suited to the intense upward mobility pattern he discovered in one company. The key reward is promotion although recognition or even increased power are also in evidence. Evaluation emphasis logically should be on management potential although current performance cannot be ignored. Those with potential are specially designated (e.g., "fast trackers") and given training in managerial skills plus special assignments. As Rosenbaum asserts, automatic promotion is not usual; rather competition is rife with an increasing army of losers plateauing out at each successive level. Sometimes the loser is simply dealt with by dismissal, sometimes by lateral transfer and almost always by less approval and poorer performance ratings (see Dalton, Thompson & Price, 1977).

The Transitory career culture organization is often so ephemeral that it is hard to examine. Names, titles, offices come and go as focus

shifts. Groups are put together for relatively brief times and purposes. People avoid fixed roles, often shifting jobs daily. Performance is evaluated on immediate "bottom line" output. Rewards often include tolerance of absenteeism or lateness, flexible scheduling and time off. Training, if any, is on the job and seeks to enhance flexibility. One finds this type of organization often in creative fields such as restaurants and the arts, but also in certain financial firms and even in some large conglomerates, especially outside the Western culture.

The Spiral career culture organization is also more evident outside the U.S., although it is at least in part found in high technology or research oriented firms in this country (Jenkins, 1973). The least extreme form is the well-known matrix organization with its mix of stable professional unit and varying project. Movement is mainly lateral as projects change. Rewards emphasize time off for education in new areas of interest or new types of assignment. Performance stresses maximum potential for lateral movement, especially into newly emerging creative fields. A more extreme form is related to Open Systems models (McWhinney, 1973). In this type of organization there is virtually no vertical hierarchy--all participate in making decisions; all employees move systematically through all jobs . . . and may go out of the organization at times, then return. Rewards are based on breadth of competence not level or current output. Several organizations inside the U.S. have successfully used this approach--including manufacturing facilities.

A Career Concept Questionnaire has been developed to assess perceptions of career culture in organizations by employees. It taps the major career culture dimensions of organization as well as issues such as

supervisor and peer career concepts, job presses toward career concepts, and professional association career concepts (Driver, Brousseau, Prince and Von Glinow, 1980). At another level, actual organizational practices and employee-movement data can and are being analyzed to establish career culture at a more objective level. The expectation is that, like individuals, organizations will rarely exhibit a purely monolithic, single-concept culture. However, it is expected that one or two cultures will be so pervasive (at the unit or total-company level) that the idea of organization career culture will prove viable.

Societal Career Culture

A final level at which the Career Concept Model may be useful is that of a society or nation. One can argue that entire cultures have exhibited dominant career concepts (see Driver, 1979). For instance, it is possible that power blocks and norm setters in a national society share a given concept which is then reinforced generally--e.g., through laws.

A second aspect of this issue is that a society may have forces at work in it which support one type of career concept. It is this second sense in which society will be examined below.

Three-Way Career Concept Congruence

It can be asserted that only when individual, organizational, and societal Career Concepts are in synchrony will career processes operate smoothly. Previously, individual/organizational congruence issues have been examined (Driver, 1979, 1980). The model provides considerable leverage in examining actual problems--e.g., the Steady State engineer being coded as a loser when refusing a promotion in a Linear organization. However, it is the incongruence of both organizations and people with

societal forces that is the present main concern. To put this incongruence into focus, trends in societal forces affecting career concepts will be reviewed followed by a look at individual and organizational career concept patterns.

Societal Trends Affecting Career Concepts

The most significant factor affecting career concepts would seem to come from population trends. Table 4 presents birth rate data, youth and older population data, and ratios of young to old from 1900 to 1970. It is quite evident that birth rates declined steadily to a low point in 1940 creating what is popularly called "baby bust" generations in the '20s and '30s. A "baby boom" phenomena began in the '40s and peaked in the '50s. In the '60s a trend toward decreasing fertility began which seems to be continuing into the present.

From the point of view of demographics boom and bust conditions strongly affect work mobility. When youth is plentiful, mobility and demand are maximum for older workers. When youth is scarce, greatest mobility is with youth, leaving older workers stagnant (Easterlin, 1978). These effects are believed to be carried by a generational cohort throughout its life. Thus the bust generations born in the '20s and '30s carry an image of high mobility and demand. The present '40s and '50s generation have faced a world of fierce competition, low demand and mobility. The coming generation of '60s and beyond should again see the world as one of demand and movement. The long-range forecast of demographics is that the current bust will reverse and we can expect a return to a boom in the '80s and '90s.[3]

How does this translate into organizational career movement dynamics? Table 5 summarizes the age patterns of the three types of cohort over the next fifty years. For each type of cohort we can specify a leading edge, a modal point, and a trailing edge. For the '20s-'30s bust group the leading edge would be those born in 1920; the mode, those born in 1930; the trailing edge, those born in 1939. Similarly, the leading edge of the boom are those born in 1940, the mode, those born in 1950, and the trailing edge, those born in 1959. The leading edge of the current bust are those born in 1960. We can arbitrarily set the mode at 1970 and possibly see a trailing edge in 1980 if demographic forecasts are accurate. These dates are somewhat arbitrary but will serve to illustrate the point.

The first "bust" group is in the age bracket identified with middle to senior management at present. This group followed a birth rate declining from 1900 and entered management in the boom years of 1940-50. Their rise in management occurred in the high-growth period of the '50s (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics). It seems scarcely any wonder that a strong Linear view would characterize this group. Furthermore, it is highly congruent that MBA programs with their strong Linear focus should have emerged at this time.

Pursuing this group is the leading edge of the boom generation--now on the edge of upper management. Although demographic models might suggest a "low mobility-low demand" psychology, many factors operate in an opposite direction. This group was raised in an atmosphere of boom by an upwardly mobile group. They entered the work force during the still optimistic Kennedy years. Ahead of them were the thin ranks of the prior

bust cohort. Opportunity was there for movement. Hence, a Linear orientation would be no surprise in this leading-edge boom group for perhaps 3-5 years into the cohort, e.g. to those who are currently 35 or older.

However, it is with the modal and trailing-edge group in the boom generation that pressures would build, i.e. for those currently between 21 and 35. For these people a saturation effect can be expected. Ahead of them are a surplus of the hard-striving leading-edge boom cohort, around them a still larger surplus. It is here that a non-Linear career orientation might well be expected to emerge. For to be Linear in this group is to press against a job market already saturated with the leading edge of the boom. At present this group is entering first-level management only to see middle management saturated and candidates for senior management in great supply among the leading-edge boom group.

The new "bust generation," in demographic theory, should experience high demand and expect high mobility. Yet a glance at Table 5 urges caution. Where would this group find their mobility? All levels of management would be saturated until 1990, when lower management might open up. Middle management would not even begin to be free of the boom group until 2010 and upper management would not see a scarcity until 2025. Particularly in the coming decade, Linear concepts among those entering the work force would seem highly inappropriate unless organizations can develop special methods to deal with this problem.

Demand among youth by hiring organizations would probably be for nonmanagerial professional, technical, and service positions with little prospect for significant upward managerial mobility. However, if

organizations continue to foster Linear cultures--especially "fast track" practices, this could lead to bypassing of boom cohort middle managers by highly prized, new bust cohort members. Such a state could only create even greater stress for the boom generation currently in organizations.

There are several other societal factors which would seem to compound the pressure against Linear career concepts. For example, although on the increase until recently, early retirement may be losing force. Supreme Court rulings on retirement plus inflationary pressures on inadequate pension and social security systems are likely to lead to delayed retirement. A recent poll by Harris (1979) confirms this expectation showing more than half of the currently employed would rather continue employment than go into retirement. Delayed retirement would further slow the clearing out of the boom generation, which might continue to saturate senior and middle management until the middle of the 21st century.

Perhaps some support for Linear concepts lies with economic growth. If the economy were to grow rapidly, new ventures might absorb the boom cohorts and open up mobility routes for the new workers. However, as is well known, economic markers such as GNP have not been increasing. Labor statistics show a productivity growth rate of 3.3% for the period from 1965-1973 as the boom group began to enter the work force. In the period from 1973 to 1978 the rate dropped to 1.2%, and in 1979 it fell to -.9%. The GNP shows a similar decline over the decade showing a very weak 1.2, -9.6 and .9 in the first three quarters of 1980. (Council of Economic Advisors, 1980.)

There are indeed hopes that this trend can be reversed in the '80s. It is possible that revised tax and fiscal policies can produce positive

growth again. However a return to extremely high levels of productivity and growth may be seen only in the most optimistic scenarios. Current economic views do not hold out much hope that the potential crisis for persons with a Linear career concept can be alleviated by a massive return to rapid growth economy. (Cf. Kahn & Phelps, 1979; Goldstein, 1980.) These views are perhaps best summarized by Sharp (1980) who states that "It seems generally agreed that the world economy in the 1980s and early 1990s will experience slower growth than in the earlier post war decades . . . " (p. 32). Sharp and others stress the even poorer prospect for rich nations such as the U.S.

Perhaps room for Linear concepts may be found in the potential shift in the form of the economy. Shifts to service, information, biotechnology, and other fields are already evident and are expected to grow (Sharp, 1980). As new areas expand some Linear managers can grow by shifting to growth areas. Others however will still be left in more stable or declining industries. This phenomena suggests once more that the younger bust generation now in school just might find outlets for some Linear orientation, but that the stagnation problem of the majority of the boom generation may be all the worse, since it is the youth who may most easily move into new areas.

In sum, most factors suggest a very stable, top-heavy management force in the coming decades. The inference is that Linear career concepts are inappropriate in organizations as well as individuals in the coming decades. As will be seen, Linear concepts predominate in organizations and are increasing among the population at present. It is this collision between societal forces and individual organizational concepts that is termed the Linear Career Crisis.

Trends in Individual Career Concepts

The first temporal trend in career concepts to be noted occurs from 1966 to 1969. In a study of entry-level college freshman (Astin/College Placement Council, 1970) it was found that student belief in goals such as administrative responsibility, leadership, and success steadily declined. As seen above, power-related goals are tied to Linear views, hence it can be inferred that Linear concepts were declining. Simultaneously, belief in activities to satisfy one's own needs gained strength--again suggesting Spiral-type goals were on the rise.

In 1969 Astin (1980) reported very strong Spiral-growth orientation among American Freshmen. As can be seen in Table 6, the Spiral objective of developing a "philosophy of life" was held by an overwhelming 85.8% of women and 78.5% of men to be essential or very important. Conversely, overtly Linear objectives such as having administrative responsibility rated high for only 16.4% of women and 29.8% of men. Even the issue of financial well being received a low rating from women and only a moderate approval from men. This group is just about at the modal position of the boom generation, confirming the demographic hypotheses that this group would be less Linear. What the data suggest is that in the late '60s, as the modal boom generation entered schools, a shift to a Spiral/ Transitory career concept occurred.

A second glimpse of trends is provided by a nationwide survey conducted by Tarnowiewski (1973). The survey included 2,704 executives, managers, professionals, and self-employed. Some important findings appear in Table 7. A most revealing item asked whether people were seriously considering changing their occupational field in the near

future. Results showed 49% of all respondents saying they were contemplating change. Most important for the present discussion, 70% of those under 30 (the modal boom group) responded in the Spiral/Transitory mode, confirming trends seen earlier by Astin. It is also worth noting that even the leading edge of the boom group showed strong Spiral tendencies. Some cultural shift may be implied here, which even penetrated older groups who might have been expected to be Linear. In fact, in looking at Table 7 it seems revealing that only top executives (the first bust group) had a majority leaning in the Linear direction.

The education data in Table 7 are of considerable importance since they suggest that the Spiral orientation is directly linked to amount of education. Education must be seen then as a major factor affecting career concepts in any search for solutions to the Linear career crisis.

The second item in Table 7, dealing with preference for a different occupation appears to tap Spiral patterns more directly. It still shows 48% of the modal boom group leaning to Spiral ideas and a surprising 42% of the leading edge boom group as well. That this is not just rhetoric is revealed by item 3 where an overwhelming percent of both of the above groups expected to take action on career change. This Spiral trend clearly weakens in item two for the age 40+ group--suggesting that item 1 may reflect more of a "closet" pattern as opposed to item 2. The status and education patterns in these items resemble those in item 1.

A third view of trends is provided in 1978 in a study of major executives (Hoffman, 1978; Driver and Hoffman, 1979). Using the files of a major accounting firm, a combination of Career Concept Questionnaire and resume was sent to 8,062 persons. These individuals were middle to senior

executives with firms across the country as well as from Canada, Europe, Latin America, Iran, and Japan. They ranged over almost all fields. Mean age for males was 39; for females, 36. Mean compensation (1978) was $42,667 for males; $30,223 for females. Females constituted 4% of the sample.

Nine hundred and thirteen people responded with complete questionnaires. Table 8 summarizes the results. Clearly the Linear concept overwhelmingly dominates, as one would expect. However, Spiral frequencies were rather high and the secondary tendency of 50% of the Linears toward Spiral concepts suggests the presence of many "closet Spirals" in this group. Further evidence for the close ties of Spiral and Linear concepts is the extremely high frequency of Linear secondary concepts among Spirals. Evidently among executives in 1978 many people were contemplating careers from two radically different perspectives.

The study shows a predominance of Linear concepts among those in the '20s-'30s bust cohorts and the leading-edge boom generation. Yet a closer look at that data reveals a surprisingly strong showing for the Spiral concept. To find 20% outright Spirals in such a strong Linear field is surprising. Still more surprising is the 50% of Linears with "closet Spiral" tendencies, the 25% Spiral secondary concept among Transistories and even a small trace among Steady State persons. A majority of this group show either primary or secondary Spiral concepts. This kind of data plus that of Astin and Tarnowieski suggested that there might be a strong emergence of the Spiral concept in America--strong enough to call it a "Spiral Revolution" (Driver, 1976).

If this trend had continued to the present a partial solution to the Linear Crisis would be at hand. Most of the boom group now constituting middle management would have at least some Spiral/Transitory tendencies. If these tendencies could be brought to light and reinforced by senior management, nonlinear career paths might be substituted for many of these people. Rotation in a lateral direction with, of course, adequate pay increases, could begin to replace Linear progression (see Kanter, 1977; Von Maanen, Schein, and Bailyn, 1977; Hall, 1976; Driver, 1979).

However, the Spiral trend does not seem to be continuing. More recent surveys suggest an alarming phenomenon--a resurgence of Linear career concepts. Table 9 summarizes career concept frequency data from USC MBA classes in career management (as measured by the Career Concept Questionnaire). The 1977-78 data show only a slight Linear predominance. In the 1980-81 data however, the Linear frequency increases markedly with Steady State and Spiral decreasing. The Linear focus among the '80-'81 MBAs who represent the modal and trailing boom cohort is clearly approaching that of the early bust cohort seen in the earlier data.

Even more striking are the results of the 1979 College freshmen study seen in Table 6. Of particular note is the enormous decline in seeking a philosophy of life among 1979 freshmen. The entire set of objectives linked to Spiral orientation has shown a decline for this extreme trailing edge boom group. Conversely, the Linear focus shows a substantial gain (just the opposite to the 1966-69 trends). Steady State objectives also show a gain here (unlike the MBA sample).

The data suggest that the Spiral revolution of the late '60s or early '70s is over. The trailing edge of the boom cohort seemingly is turning

strongly to the Linear and possibly to Steady State concepts. The modal boom group may even be putting its Spiral orientation back into the closet.

What has caused this reversal is difficult to determine. Certainly, demographic models would predict the opposite. Education may play a role via the steady impact of declining quality of education as seen in college entrance scores. Possibly the stress of hyper inflation and loss of confidence in government has induced a basic cognitive shift to more structured, focused decision styles--Decisive and Hierarchic (see Driver & Streufert, 1969) which in turn would favor Linear career concepts. Whatever the reason the coming cohort seems to be employing a career concept which is on collision course with demographic and societal forces; and organizational career cultures seem geared to foster this collision.

Trends in Organizational Career Cultures

What can be said of organizational career cultures? Unfortunately, we lack any systematic empirical data. Some research on career movement (e.g., Dalton, Thompson, and Price, 1977; Rosenbaum, 1979) have clearly identified Linear patterns in corporations; but nothing like the Hoffman-Driver survey of individual concepts seems to exist for organization career cultures. Some evidence for Steady State cultures has surfaced (cf. Blumen, Kogan, & McCarthy, 1955; White, 1970; Olson, 1979). Descriptions of Transistory and Spiral organizations can sometimes be seen. On balance, however, it would be hypothesized that most U.S. corporations operate in terms of a predominantly Linear culture. This is partially based on high probability that most CEOs and senior executives will themselves be Linear (who else would suffer the costs of "climbing

the ladder"?). These senior Linears' values would then permeate company values and practices.

In particular, personnel executives, largely drawn from general management, would seem to be Linear as opposed to the more Spiral or Steady State experts one might find in specialist areas such as accounting, data processing or engineering. These Linear personnel executives would be expected to establish selection, training, evaluation, and reward systems consistent with Linear views.

If this hypotheses of Linear organizations predominance is valid, one might conclude that fit between executives and organization would be generally good since both are mainly Linear. In the sense that everyone is operating from a similar assumptions about careers the point is well taken: most managers should not be surprised at being in a Linear culture. However, this fit of individual and organizational concepts compounds the Linear Career Crisis. Organizations are geared to reinforce precisely the wrong Career Concept from a societal point of view.

Some Remedies

What can be done? Does anything need to be done? Will not managers see the light and develop procedures to cope? Will not individuals of a Linear view who experience plateauing themselves adjust and adopt new career concepts? Current evidence suggests that neither organizations or individuals will abandon the Linear approach without considerable heightening of awareness and external facilitation.

The Executive Study (Hoffman, 1978; Hoffman and Driver, 1979) reports that 82% of the Spirals who changed career concepts (e.g., from Linear) did so following a success experience (promotion, new job). Those

who changed to Steady State cited being fired (75%). Shifts to the small Transitory group were not clearly related to any one factor--but being plateaued showed only in a few cases mentioning boredom. Plateauing thus does not emerge as a significant precursor of career concept change.

Near (1979) reports similar findings. When asked what they would do on being plateaued, 50% of a management sample said they would work harder, i.e. not give up the Linear view. Only 38% said that they would seek a new job and 20% would focus on family or recreation.

Unfortunately, the dominant response of a Linear caught in Linear fallout appears to be to doggedly persist in Linear orientation. Given the saturation discussed previously this persistence can only lead to increased frustration for many and probably a loss of productivity. The problem of plateauing is already fairly severe--a recent survey (Near, 1979) revealed beliefs by managers that 60% of managers are now plateaued. Given the accuracy of the above societal scenario, this figure could leap to 80% or 90%.

Some corporations are aware of this coming crisis. An analyst at General Electric cited in Business Week (1978) stated: "The American idea (sic) of onward and upward--higher pay and more responsibility--will have to change for a while.[4] We are going to have to put increasing emphasis on alternate rewards such as lateral transfers, and convince people that there are different ways to get ahead." (p. 36, in Morgan, 1980). But a large number of companies are ignoring the problem (Cf. Business Week, 1978) or assuming they can deal with it by traditional means.

The analysis in terms of career concepts suggests that traditional means will not work. Simply introducing new reward systems, such as

lateral transfer are not likely to work since they are not rewards to the Linear managers involved. A change in career concepts to Steady State Spiral, or even Transitory is what seems necessary. Convincing people to change their career concepts may prove no mean task. A first step would be to raise awareness of all involved as to what career concepts are and what their own concepts are. Corporate career cultures would have to be analyzed and practices altered to systematically support nonlinear career concepts. (See Driver, 1979, 1980.) Inherent in any such plan should be senior executive overt approval (especially as seen in equivalent pay systems) for Spiral, Steady State, or Transitory individuals. Individual training programs and career counseling must also be instituted to aid in the self renewal process needed to shift a person to the Spiral concept (e.g., Gould, 1979). Intensive assessment would be useful to aid individuals to identify the optimal focus for a Steady State shift.

Schools must also be looked to for assistance--especially business schools. The present focus on producing young CEO's can only be aiding the Linear process.[5] It is apparent that if schools--especially business schools--were to focus more on professional identities (e.g., accountants), or on creative lateral movement across specialties, they could aid in offsetting this Linear explosion.

The movement towards managerial sharing of responsibility remains another possible alleviating factor. As more middle and lower managers share in senior policy and strategy functions, some frustrations of being plateaued might disappear. However, this mode of sharing is tied to the very organization form described as Spiral, and may require a Spiral type person to really make it operational.

The above participatory trends suggest still another solution--concious development of non-Linear organization cultures at least at lower levels of management. A thorough rethinking of reward, appraisal, training, and selections would be required (see Driver, 1979, 1980).

It might be asked whether a planned movement to foster Spiral or Steady State career options might not abet the very stagnation or even decline that is forecasted by doomsaying futurists for the U.S. This does not seem likely. If progress in the U.S. is to resume it is likely to be in league with enhanced creativity and scientific productivity. The Spiral and Steady State career concepts can provide just these ingredients. One can envisage Spiral managers moving in and out of creative fields bringing enhanced creativity as they move. Steady State professionals in fields such as planning and financial management might bring about a resurgence of excellence needed in our stagnant, short-run oriented economy.

Summary

A crisis is seen in the making concerning the Linear career concept. Organizations seem to strongly favor such concepts, and young people today appear to be turning in great numbers to this view of careers. But societal forces such as demographics, retirement trends and economic growth appear to argue that opportunity for Linear managers will increasingly disappear. We appear to be headed toward a vast encampment of plateaued, frustrated Linears who refuse to change. The solution would seem to involve organizational culture shifts, changes of emphasis in schools and above all increased informed choice by managers as to the shape of their careers.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Competence is defined as the exercise of skill at a high level as opposed to increasing one's skill.

2. He termed the pattern "tournament mobility." The identification with Linear is by this author.

3. Given trends in women's attitudes, use of contraceptives and dual career families, this purely demographic model seems questionable (Sundby, 1980).

4. Italics mine.

5. Although as one auditor of this paper remarked: "The B-schools did not stop the spiral revolution."

Table 1

Four Career Concepts

Concept	Frequency of Field Change	Duration in Field	Direction of Job Movement
Steady State	None	Life	None (lateral)*
Linear	Rare**	10+years	Upward
Transitory	Frequent	2-4 years	Lateral
Spiral	Moderate	5-10 years	Lateral

*Some movement within field is expected.
**Sometimes a person with this concept may shift field and continue to operate with a Linear concept.

Table 2

Career Concepts and Motives

Career Concept	Type 1	Type 2
Steady State	Security	Competence
Linear	Power	Achievement
Transitory	Variety	Identity Search
Spiral	Growth	Nurturance

Table 3

Dimensions of Organizational Career Culture Relating to the Career Concept Model

Concept	Dimension: Organization Structure	Job Mobility	Reward System	Performance Evaluation	Training Programs
Steady State	Flat, very broad Pyramid	Low	Tenure Benefits	Current, Long term	Competence Maintenance
Linear	Tall, Narrow Pyramid	High Upward	Promotion Recognition	Potential	Management Skills
Transitory	Temporary Teams	Very high Job rotation	Variety Time Off	Current, Short Run	OJT, Cross train-training in new jobs
Spiral	Open Systems; Matrix	Slow, lateral/ Project Change	Educational Support; Leaves of Absence	Crossover; Attainment of Potential	Cross Training in new field

Adapted from Driver, 1979.

Table 4

Varied Population Data from 1900 to 1990

Year	Crude Birth rate (per thousand)	Population (millions) Youth	Older (30-64)	Youth Ratio: Older
1900	31.6			
1910	29.6			
1920	26.1	14	20	.66
1930	21.5	15	25	.65
1940	18.3	17	27	.63
1950	24.5	17	30	.54
1960	24.6	18	35	.50
1970	18.1	21	36	.66
1975	15.9	28	38	.72
1990	--	27*	43*	.54*

From Easterlin, 1978

*Forecasted

Table 5

Ages of Three Types of Generational Cohort
(1980-2020)

First Bust Cohort	Time of Birth	Age in 1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Leading edge	1920	60	70	80	90	100
Mode	1930	50	60	70	80	90
Trailing edge	1939	41	51	61	71	81
Boom Cohort						
Leading edge	1940	40	50	60	70	80
Mode	1950	30	40	50	60	70
Trailing edge	1959	21	31	41	51	61
Second Bust Cohort						
Leading edge	1960	20	30	40	50	60
Mode	1970	10	20	30	40	50
Trailing edge	1980	1	10	20	30	40

TABLE 6

TWO SURVEYS ON COLLEGE FRESHMAN CAREER ATTITUDES: 1969, 1979[1]

PERCENT GIVING HIGH IMPORTANCE TO:	WOMEN 1969	WOMEN 1979	MEN 1969	MEN 1979
1. Linear objectives				
a. Administrative responsibility	16	34	29	39
b. Financial well-being	32	56	54	69
net change:		+42		+25
2. Spiral objectives				
a. Develop philosophy of life	85	54	78	51
b. Influence social values	37	33	31	29
c. Create works of art	21	16	11	11
d. Write original work	16	13	11	10
e. Help others	75	71	58	55
net change:		-47		-32
3. Steady State objectives				
a. Be an authority in a field	54	70	62	75
b. Recognition from peers	35	49	45	54
c. Make theoretical contribution to science	5	11	14	17
net change:		+36		+25

[1]Adapted from Astin, 1980.

Table 7

1973 Survey on Career Path Perceptions[1]

	1. Have you changed or considered changing your occupational field during the last 5 years?		2. Is there an occupational field in which you would rather be employed than in your present line of work?		3. If yes, do you expect to be searching for a way to make a career change in the foreseeable future?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
All	49	51	35	65	69	31
By Age						
Under 30	70	30	48	52	76	24
30-39	63	37	42	58	77	23
40-49	47	53	34	66	65	35
50-59	39	61	30	70	62	38
Over 60	18	82	21	79	30	70
By Status						
Top/executive	42	58	27	73	63	37
Middle management	55	45	44	56	70	30
Lower management	70	30	52	48	82	18
Prof./Tech.	61	39	50	50	72	28
Self employed	50	50	30	70	58	42
By Education						
Incomplete high school	27	73	27	73	50	50
Completed high school	25	75	24	76	47	53
Some college	47	53	36	64	65	35
College degree	46	54	32	68	65	35
Postgraduate work	71	29	54	46	76	24
Advanced degree	52	48	36	64	72	28

1. From Tarnowiewski, 1973.

Table 8

Frequencies of Career Concepts Among Executives

Career Concept	Primary Concept			
	Frequency	Percent	Secondary Concept	Percent
Steady State	64	7	Spiral	14
			None	86
Linear	630	69	Spiral	50
			Transitory	5
			None	45
Transitory	36	4	Linear	25
			Spiral	25
			None	50
Spiral	183	20	Linear	91
			Transitory	9

Adapted from Hoffman, 1978; Driver & Hoffman, 1979.

TABLE 9

Career Concept Frequencies for MBAs from 1977 to 1981

1977-1979:	Frequency	Percent
Linear	6	40
Steady State	6	33
Spiral	3	20
Transitory	1	6
	15	

1980-81		
Linear	20	63
Steady State	6	19
Spiral	5	16
Transitory	1	3
	32	