Chapter 7
The Impact of Diversity on Career Transitions over the Life Course

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ABSTRACT

There are many aspects of diversity that impact career transitions over the life course. Whereas traditional conceptualizations of career stages emphasize a clear career path for the majority of people, modern career transitions are better characterized by both the multitude and variety of potential mobility paths. Modern career trajectories have also been linked to early developmental activities, which are similarly related to increases in diversity and other societal changes. This chapter discusses the impact of different forms of diversity on career transitions from both psychological/developmental and sociological life course perspectives, as well from a dynamic perspective where one's career transitions are dictated by lesser-planned socio-contextual and personal circumstances. The authors conclude this discussion by outlining some trends that are likely to influence career development in the future, including suggestions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The definition of *career* and the nature of career transitions are constantly in flux. A recent statement by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2014) highlights this: "The BLS never has attempted to estimate the number of times people change careers in the course of their working lives. The reason we have not produced such estimates is that no consensus has emerged on what constitutes a career change" (FAQ about National Longitudinal Surveys, para 23).

Seemingly gone are the days when one began working for and then retired from the same company with a pension in hand. Those entering the workforce today can expect to experience multiple changes in their work lifetimes -- not just job changes, but career changes. College students

do not expect to stay in a career tied specifically to their chosen major in college. They do not expect to stay with their first job for more than two years. They *do* expect that they will take a break from work at some point, maybe to pursue other interests or maybe to raise a family, or both. They *do* expect to work, in some capacity, well beyond the typical retirement age. Anecdotally, a recent discussion with college seniors reveals notable changes in concept of the career. Indeed, the response of one student is particularly relevant in this regard; "How do I know what type of career I want to have; I am only about to finish college" (S. Steiner, personal communication, December 2, 2013)? Clearly, career expectations have shifted to meet this changing landscape.

The concepts of the career and career transitions have changed over time. Careers are much more fluid, and career boundaries are much less defined. One reason for these changes is the overwhelming increase in the diversity of the workforce. With a greater variety of people pursuing employment, organizations and individuals alike are faced with the realization that we need to change our expectations of what it means to have a career.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the impact that different aspects of diversity can have on career transitions over the life course. We will discuss not only how diversity impacts individuals and their career decisions, but also how organizations can actively adapt work arrangements and career development initiatives to best capitalize on these changes. Thus, the chapter addresses the following objectives:

1. To outline the importance of recent and future societal changes on career development and career transitions;
2. To discuss the differences in traditional vs. modern career stage theories and perspectives;
3. To cite specific demographic changes in today's workforce, which exemplify how career trajectories have changed in recent years;
4. To provide guidance to individuals exploring personal career transitions;
5. To provide guidance to organizations in their talent development programs, discouraging the "one-size-fits-all approach" to career development; and
6. To discuss future trends in personal career development and organizational talent management with regards to changes in the diversity of the workforce.

Conceptualizing Diversity

Diversity can be abstracted in both surface- and deep-level terms. Surface-level diversity refers to biologically determined demographic diversity (e.g., race, sex, age, sexual orientation) whereas deep-level diversity may refer to diversity of attitudes, beliefs, values, or the results of accrued developmental experiences (e.g., knowledge & skills) (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995). Surface-level diversity is often immediately recognizable insomuch as it reflects differences in biological characteristics that are overtly reflected in physical features (e.g., sex characteristics, skin tone). Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez (1993) suggest that surface level diversity is generally immutable. Furthermore, with some notable exceptions (e.g., sexual orientation), surface level diversity is generally observable, can be measured in simple and valid terms, and possesses a degree of social consensus (e.g., within a reasonable range, one's age, sex, or race can be readily observed and agreed upon by others; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995; Milliken & Martins, 1996).

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