Chapter 15
Re-Examining the Career Anchor Model:
An Investigation of Career Values and Motivations among Women in the Information Technology Profession

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ABSTRACT

Despite the shortage of information technology (IT) professionals in the global economy, women are largely underrepresented in the IT workforce. Prior research on gender stratification demonstrates that this underrepresentation is a reflection of organizational and social structures. As a result, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the IT workforce, and in particular, the opportunities and constraints that influence career choice of IT professionals. For these reasons, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the career anchors of women in the American IT workforce. The data for this examination comes from a quantitative survey conducted with 210 women. The findings make a theoretical contribution to the career anchor research of women in the IT workforce.

INTRODUCTION

The shift to an information-based economy has caused the information technology (IT) workforce to become one of the fastest growing labor markets in the world. A persistent issue facing the IT workforce is the continued shortage of highly educated and technically trained workers necessary to succeed in a highly global, competitive and dynamic environment. For example, employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that the American IT workforce is comprised of nearly five million workers, making it one of the nation's largest and most lucrative industries (National Science Foundation, 2000). Moreover, the demand for workers in the IT profession is

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predicted to increase three times faster than all job categories through 2014, with the creation of over two million jobs in the field (Deagon, 2004).

Despite the shortage of IT professionals, women are largely under represented in the American IT workforce; a phenomenon typically termed the IT gender gap. In 1983, women comprised 43 percent of the full-time IT workforce, a figure slightly higher than the 40 percent female representation rate for all full-time non-IT careers at that time (Rosenbloom, et al., 2005). Female participation in the U.S. labor force has held steady over the past several decades with women accounting for approximately 40 to 47 percent of the labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005. Yet, the share of women in IT employment has dropped sharply in recent years. Female representation in the IT workforce fell from 28.9 percent in 2000 to 26.2 percent in 2006 according to a study produced by CIO Insight (Chabrow, 2007).[1] The statistics for 2006 are particularly alarming because it was a year in which overall IT employment hit a record high of nearly 3.47 million employees. Yet, female employee participation dropped 7.7 percent from 2000.

In order to address the IT gender gap, and subsequently contribute to a reduction in the shortage of IT professionals, it is imperative to establish an understanding of the opportunities and constraints that influence career choice and retention of IT professionals (Trauth, 2006; Trauth et al. 2008). One particular line of investigation along these lines has come from the study of career values and motivations or career anchors. Researchers have argued that career anchors can be used to investigate the characteristics that influence the selection of and retention in occupations. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to *examine career anchors of women in the American IT workforce.*

The structure of this chapter is as follows. The literature review provides an overview of the scholarly research related to career anchors among female IT professionals. The research and methodology design section describes the quantitative survey investigation of 210 women employed in the American IT workforce.[2] This is followed by the findings section where an analysis of the career anchors and career orientations of women in the study are discussed. In the conclusion, the study is reviewed and the findings are synthesized with the literature.

BACKGROUND

Schein (1971) first introduced the concept of a career anchor or career orientation as "that element of our self-concept that we will not give up, even if forced to make a difficult choice" (p. 158). Hence, career anchors describe a self-perceived pattern of talents, values, needs, abilities, attitudes, and the evolved sense of motives that attract individuals to particular occupations. Schein (1982) writes:

"Talents, motives and values come to be interrelated into a more or less congruent total self-concept through a reciprocal process of learning to be better at those things we are motivated to do and value, learning to want and value those things we are good at, and avoid those things we are not motivated to do or do not value, resulting in loss of abilities or skills in those areas" (p. 2).

Schein (1987) identified eight career anchors: managerial competence, technical/functional competence, entrepreneurship/creativity, autonomy/independence, sense of service/dedication, pure challenge, lifestyle integration (i.e., desire to balance career with family and personal growth needs) and security/stability. DeLong (1982) extended the career anchor discussion by adding identity (i.e., desire to have status and prestige derived from working at a powerful or prestigious organization) and dividing security/stability into the two independent anchors: organizational stability and geographic stability.

Schein selected the term career anchor because it serves as a stabilizer throughout an individual's career regardless of the number of occupational changes. He argues that only one career anchor