

Chapter 2 – Assignments

1. Interview a friend, acquaintance, coworker, or relative who is in a different career stage than you are. What career-related tasks and activities is this person currently undertaking? What are the issues and concerns that are uppermost in his or her mind? In what ways are these issues and concerns consistent or inconsistent with the approach to life development and career development proposed in this chapter?

Purpose/Perspective: Related to the material on career stages in latter part of Chapter 2, this exercise allows the students to compare and contrast the important concerns and issues that take place at different career stages. In addition, it allows the students to confirm or disconfirm the “standard” issues that would be expected in each career stage versus what the students actually find through the interview process. Small group and full class discussion can then ensue based on these findings.

2. Chart the career histories of a male and a female friend, acquaintance, coworker, or relative. Are the two career histories parallel and similar to each other? Are they similar to Levinson’s model? Do employment gaps exist in either career history? If so, ask if these employment gaps have had any effect on the individual’s career.

Purpose/Perspective: This assignment is somewhat similar to the prior one, but this assignment allows for a comparison of career histories based on gender and in relation to Levinson’s model. It also allows for a discussion of what happens when employment gaps occur over a person’s career. This assignment works best either in an undergraduate setting where there is a solid number of older adults already established in their careers or with graduate students who are already established in the work world.

Chapter 2 Case: Kevin at the Crossroads

Purpose

This case is intended to embody the material in the Chapter 2 concerning the boundaryless and protean career concepts as well as the different meanings of career success. Kevin is a highly accomplished executive with a multi-national engineering company. After many years with the company, Kevin is bored in his job, hates the overseas travel, envies his wife’s career in teaching, and daydreams about doing something different with his life and his career. As with the Richard case at the end of Chapter 1, Kevin longs for more. But Kevin is different because he wants more time for his family and more fulfillment in his life. In this sense, he is looking for more

“subjective” success as opposed to the “objective” success that he has already achieved. One of the primary questions is whether Kevin could be classified as “boundaryless” in his career management even though he has not actually moved into a different career direction.

Perspective

This case should get the students thinking about the meaning of the boundaryless and protean career perspectives and what it means to be successful in one’s career. Kevin wants more out of life, but feels trapped by his objective career success. He knows he wants to do something different and more meaningful with his career, but the loss in salary and future wealth and the potential negative reaction from his wife causes psychological conflict. This conflict is compounded by the offer of a major promotion and an expatriate assignment to another country. Although Kevin is in a “traditional” career, his willingness to consider the possibility of moving in a different direction could indicate a boundaryless/protean attitude on his part.

Case Questions

1. Based on the definition and the description of the boundaryless perspective of careers as provided in this chapter, do you think Kevin has adopted this approach to his career? Why or why not?

The students should be able to articulate the common attributes that define the boundaryless perspective. Given that Kevin has not yet shown an absolute willingness to pursue inter-organizational mobility (or a mobility pattern that departs from his current traditional career), it would be difficult to label him as boundaryless in his perspective. However, the students could note that Kevin has become protean in his career management since he does display an orientation or approach to his career that indicates a willingness to move in a new direction.

2. Do you think Kevin sees himself as successful in his career? Why or why not?

This question allows the students to engage in a discussion of the differences between objective and subjective career success. Clearly, Kevin is successful in an objective sense given the tangible accomplishments in his career. However, given the message in the case, it is likely that he would not see himself as successful because he is measuring his own success in subjective terms. The reason he envies his wife’s career is that he views her as subjectively successful since she is able to devote more of her time to her family and leisure pursuits. Kevin wants more balance and he daydreams about trying to achieve it.

3. What social factors are influencing Kevin’s career choices?

The students should recognize the effect of Kevin’s family on his decision making. One of his major concerns is that he would face a negative reaction, especially from his wife, if he were to pursue a career in teaching.

More broadly, the “normal” expectations of society would be that a successful executive like Kevin does not just toss aside a career where he has a good chance to someday be the CEO of a multi-national engineering organization.

How big a role should social factors play in the career decisions of an individual? Should they play a role?

The students could answer this question in at least two ways. First they could say that career management is a fundamentally individualistic pursuit and as such a person like Kevin must stay true to his values, interests, and desired lifestyle. While he should take other people’s opinions into account, ultimately he is responsible for his career and life. On the other side, the students could say that he should never make a career decision that in any way jeopardizes the financial well-being and happiness of his wife and children.

4. Do you think Kevin’s age and the fact that he is at mid-career are having an effect on his “daydreaming” and the questioning of his future career direction? Why or why not?

This question highlights the impact of career stage on career decision making. With Kevin in his late 30s, he is moving out of his early career and transitioning into mid-career. Borrowing from the work of Levinson and his colleagues, the students should recognize that many individuals facing mid-life will question the direction of their lives and careers and re-evaluate their future. Thus, they should conclude that Kevin is doing what would be expected given his age.

5. If Kevin sought your help, what advice would you give him in terms of the management of his career?

The students could give several different answers here. First, they would likely recommend that Kevin discusses his feelings with his wife even before he broaches the offer of the promotion. Kevin can not consider all of his alternatives until he knows his wife’s opinion on the prospect of him leaving the engineering company. Depending on his wife’s reaction, he would then need to weigh the pros and cons of each of his career options and get her feedback. He would also need to conduct substantially more research on the job of being a teacher in terms of requirements and challenges. The students might also recommend that he get professional career help from a counselor who could advise him on his options.

If you had to make a prediction, what career choices do you think Kevin will make?

This is an open-ended question. On one hand, the students could predict that he throws caution to the wind and leaves the engineering firm for a career as a teacher. On the other hand they could predict that the obstacles are so great that he could not seriously consider moving out of his current career path. Both answers have merit, but the students would need to speculate as to why they see one choice over the other.

Chapter 2 – Discussion Questions

1. Using Levinson's model as a framework, in what stage of adult life development do you see yourself? What concerns are uppermost in your mind at this time? Are these concerns consistent with Levinson's model?

This question gives the students the opportunity to reflect on their career and life stage. Using Levinson's framework, the students can "test" whether their life/career fits the framework of stable periods that are interrupted by stressful transitional periods. In a group or full class discussion, the students can compare answers and decide whether there is general consistency with Levinson's framework.

2. Some people experience a crisis during their early or middle forties. What factors are responsible for a midlife crisis? Does everybody experience a midlife crisis? Why or why not?

The students can give their opinions on the factors that underlie a possible mid-life crisis and whether the crisis is universally experienced by individuals in mid-life. If older adult students are in the class, their descriptions of their experiences could provide important insight. Younger students could also describe the experiences of their parents that they have witnessed.

3. Do you think everybody follows the same developmental path through adulthood? Is Levinson's model applicable to women as well as men? To single people as well as married people? To working-class adults as well as upper-middle-class adults? Why do you feel that way?

These questions allow the students to give their opinions on whether the concept of career/life stages, in general, or Levinson's model, in particular, are still relevant in today's ever changing work environment. The students can also give their opinions as to whether the career/life stage theory of development is consistent across such sociological variables as gender, marital status, or socio-economic class. Again, students can cite their own experiences in making the case for or against these common experiences and groupings.

Chapter 2 – Essay Questions

1. Briefly describe the boundaryless and protean concepts of career management.

The chapter gives clear definitions/descriptions of these two concepts. For the boundaryless career, the students should be able to identify the three different

perspectives or themes that denote this concept: it involves mobility patterns that depart from a traditional career, it requires the use of competencies or strategies that are different from those used in a traditional career, and it involves the need for individuals to maintain a high degree of self-responsibility for their career choices and to follow personally-meaningful values in making career decisions. For the protean career, the students should note the two primary dimensions: it is proactively *self-directed* where the individual feels responsible for managing his or her career and it is *values-driven* in that individuals make career decisions to meet their personally meaningful values and goals, resulting in feelings of psychological success.

2. Briefly describe the different ways for individuals to look at career success.

The chapter gives clear definitions on the different categories of career success, including the objective form and the subjective form.

3. Discuss the key underlying principles associated with a stage-based view of life and career development.

As stated in the chapter, the underlying principles of the stage-based view is that the experiences, needs, values, and situations of all individuals change over time as they age, which makes it appropriate to view a career as a series of relatively unique stages or phases. In this sense, individuals face a variety of career tasks and developmental issues at different life stages. Further, changes in the nature of career motivation are likely to occur over the course of an employee's life. An understanding of the tasks and developmental implications of different career stages can help individuals manage their careers more effectively and can help organizations manage and develop their human resources.