

# Getting Balanced : Korean Women Employees' Career Success Orientation

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## Abstract

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Perceptions of career success for Korean women employees were examined through the framework of career success orientation. A sample survey was designed to answer research hypotheses. Results include: (1) Women employees predominantly pursue a balance between work and life; (2) Married women employees place more value on a balance between work and life than unmarried women employees; and (3) There was no association between women employees' pursuit of a balanced life and age.

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Keywords: career orientation, women development, human resource development

## I. Introduction

Recent dramatic social change has influenced many aspects of human behavior in organizations. Market changes in business often necessitate substantial transformation in organizations through reorganizing, restructuring, or downsizing (Gutteridge, Leibowitz, & Shore, 1993). In Korea, similar phenomena have been observed since the national economic crisis in 1997. Many Korean companies have gone through mergers and takeovers. As a result, the long-term relationship between organizations and employees has

eroded, and these changes, in turn, have negatively impacted employees' careers (Bremmer & Moon, 1998; Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, 1997). Especially, women workers have become more vulnerable in terms of job security (Kim & Moon, 1999). The rate of a women population participating in economic activity was decreased from 49.5 in 1997, when the economic crisis started, to 44.3% in 1999 whereas the rate of their counterparts was 75.6 in 1997 and 72.4% in 1999. Also, it is striking to know that a big Korean company which consists of 12,952 male workers and 5,100 female workers before economic crisis fired 1,627 male workers and 1,932 female workers as of 1999 (Layoff of married women, 1999).

In addition to changes initiated by environmental forces, the characteristics of employees have changed as well. Traditionally, Korean companies used to be male-dominated, with a few female workers serving under male supervisors. However, these days many firms are beginning to open up their positions to female workers. Diverse people pursue different things in their working life. In particular, it is known that women place higher value on internal aspects of their job, rather than external aspects, such as salary or social prestige (McGovern and Hart, 1992). They also pursue balance between personal and occupational life (Watts, 1992). To cope with these issues, organizations must find a way to manage and develop this female workforce from the perspective of human resource development.

## II. Theories of Personal Orientations towards Career Success

There are several researchers who pursue understanding of personal career perceptions and work values as their research interests. For instance, Schein (1978), identified a concept, "career anchor", which is occupational self-concept or self-knowledge that serves to guide, constrain, stabilize and integrate the person's career (Schein, 1978, p.127). He first identified five types of career anchors: managerial competence, autonomy, security, technical/functional competence, and entrepreneurial creativity and added: service/dedication to a cause, pure challenge, and life style. Delong (1982) proposed the term, "career orientation", meaning the capacity to select certain features of an occupation for investment according to one's own motives, interests, and competencies. He found three new types of career orientations (identity, service, and variety), in addition to Schein's (1978) original five career anchors. Driver (1982) found four career concepts--transitory, steady-state, linear, and spiral--from their self-perceptions based on habits of thought, motives, and decision-making styles. These become the foundation that guides a person's long-term career choice. Derr (1986) developed useful dimensions for describing career success orientation, such as getting ahead, getting free, getting secure, getting high, and getting balanced. The uniqueness of Derr's model is its focus on career success aspirations, instead of career orientation in general.

As a result of comparison of career anchor, career orientation, career concept, and career success orientation with each other,

Kim (2002) identified five types of career orientation that are commonly identified in theories as follows. In this study, Korean women employees' career success orientation is explored based on this typology.

- Type 1 : Individuals who exhibit type 1 characteristics pursue technical or functional expertise in one area and want to test one's talents and skills. Excitement is very important to them. The examples include Schein's technical/functional competence or pure challenge anchors; Delong's technical/functional competence; Driver's spiral career concept; and Derr's getting high.
- Type 2 : Individuals who exhibit type 2 characteristics value stability, predictability, or security at work. Guaranteed long-term job security is desirable. The examples include Schein and Delong's security/stability anchor; Driver's steady-state career concept; and Derr's getting secure.
- Type 3 : Individuals who exhibit type 3 characteristics pursue a balanced professional and personal life. The emergence of this career type reflects the diversity of the workforce and work values in recent decades (Derr, 1986). The examples include Schein's life style anchor; and Derr's getting balanced.
- Type 4 : Traditionally, type 4 was assumed to be typical career orientation for most people who want to succeed in their career (Derr, 1986). This type pursues upward mobility. Advancement in status and increased responsibility, authority, and

opportunities are also attractive. The examples include Schein's general management competence anchor; Delong's managerial competence; Driver's linear career concept; and Derr's getting ahead.

- Type 5 : Individuals who exhibit type 5 characteristics avoid any restrictions and pursue personal freedom at work. People in this type often like to create their own service or product, enjoying a variety of different experiences. The examples include Schein's autonomy/ independence or entrepreneurial creativity anchors; Delong's autonomy, creativity, or variety orientations; Driver's transitory career concept; and Derr's getting-free type.

### III. Women's Career Orientation

Sociologists suggest that careers should be viewed as social roles. Each society has its own social structure regarding gender roles and individuals in the society are anchored strongly to it. Therefore, the meaning of career and career success appears to be different by gender (Melamed, 1995). When researching careers, men and women cannot be treated as one group since women's career development is different from their counterparts' due to the intertwining issues of work and family (Fitzerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995).

Some researchers have focused on dominant patterns of career orientation observed by gender. Korman et al. (1981) reported that men have higher aspirations of job success than women and

determinants of having feelings of being successful at work are generally different between men and women. McGovern and Hart (1992) researched effect of gender on psychologists' career experiences. Men rated prestige and salary as more important than women did, whereas women rated flexibility of work schedule as more important than men rated this variable. Similar findings were reported by Igbaria et al. (1991) and Watts (1993) as well: women predicted lower top positions and lower expected salaries than men, and value the balance between their work and personal life. Therefore, the literature leads to a proposition that women are more oriented to a balanced life.

Contrary to this argument, however, some scholars have raised questions regarding whether there are real differences in a pursuit of a balanced life between men and women. Kim (2002) found that a mediating variable, age, was the reason of the phenomenon. However, this result might have been distorted by a severe inequality of the sample size between men and women in this research. There is not an enough empirical evidence which supports that age affects women's career success orientation.

Marital status plays a major role in women's career success prospects compared to men's case. Actually, marriage for men is viewed as a positive sign of responsibility and stability to employers (Gattiker & Larwood, 1990; Pfeffer & Ross, 1982). However, employers often regard married women workers less productive. Due to the possibility of career interruption, they are hesitant to hire married women, especially who are mothers (Adler, 1993; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 1993). The fact that women executives tend to marry late, and have small number of children (White & Cooper, 1994) supports the women's high

likelihood of career interruption. Martin and Hanson (1985) found that married women workers tend to respond differently to careers and select their jobs that allow them to accommodate expected women's role at home. Since unmarried women, especially who are young, do not have to feel family responsibility as a mother or a wife, they may place more value on their work rather than other relationships. For instance, even as early as in 1980, young-mostly 10s or 20s-women workers working in Korean manufacturing companies answered that their job is the most important in their lives (70.6%) while 18.5% of respondents commented family, and 9.3% friends (Kim & Chang, 1980).

Relating to mediating variables, one may argue that there is a possibility that age intervenes the relationships between pursuit of balance and marriage, assuming that the time of being married is generally correlated with age. However, traditionally, the career literature shows that the effect of marriage for women is considered huge than that of age. It is still likely to happen a gap in married women and unmarried women's career orientation even after the age is held constant.

In summary, the theoretical arguments and empirical results discussed previously suggest several research hypotheses. The purpose of this study is to test those hypotheses with a sample of women employees.

*H 1 : Women employees place highest value on balance between work and life than any other values.*

*H 1-1: Women employees place highest value on balance between work and life with age held constant.*

*H 2 : Married women employees place more value on balance between work and life than unmarried women employees.*

*H 2-2 : Married women employees place more value on balance between work and life than unmarried women employees with age held constant.*

#### IV. Methodology

A quantitative sample survey was designed to examine the research hypotheses. The data were collected from a sample of women employees in a large Korean bank. A survey instrument was randomly distributed to 800 women employees, and 478 useable surveys were returned. A 59.8% response rate resulted.

Table 1. Sample Composition by Demographic Characteristics (n=478)

Demographic	Category	Frequency	%
Age (M=27.38, sd=4.74)	Less than 20 years old	1	.2
	20-29 years old	343	71.8
	30-39 years old	128	26.8
	40 years old and above	6	1.3
Marital status	Married	134	28.0
	Unmarried	344	72.0

The instrument used was originally designed by Kim & McLean (2002) to explore Korean employees' career success orientation. They modified Derr's (1986) Career Success Map Questionnaire' (CSMQ) and examined the face validity and construct validity of this Likert-type questionnaire in a series of three-round pilot tests and instrument revisions in a Korean setting. Reliability, measured by Cronbach's coefficient alpha, was

between .56 and .79 in the research: Getting High (.78), Getting Secure (.72), Getting Balanced (.79), Getting Ahead (.59), and Getting Free (.56).

In the process of data analysis, to test Hypothesis 1, first, descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and standard deviations, were calculated for each item for all of the respondents. Then, whether there are significant differences among the mean scores was explored using repeated measures analysis. For Hypothesis 1-2, repeated measures analysis was conducted with holding age variable constant. To test Hypothesis 2, t-test was performed. Finally, for Hypothesis 2-2, ANCOVA was conducted with holding age variable constant.

## V. Results

When compared the mean scores and standard deviations for all items for each career success orientation, the mean score of Getting balanced was the highest. Next was Getting high and Getting secure. Getting ahead orientation was the lowest. Repeated measures analysis showed significant differences in mean scores (Wilk's Lambda=.973,  $F=3.325$ ) at the .01 level across the five types of career success orientation. According to the post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test, Getting balanced was significantly scored higher than any other orientations. It represents that the respondents primarily pursue a balance between work and life rather than excitement in their areas or interest, job security, autonomy at work, or hierarchical success. This result supports Hypothesis 1. Also, this result was still same

even when age variable was controlled. This means that respondents' pursuit of a balanced life was not influenced by their age. Hypothesis 1-2 was supported by this data as well.

Table 2. Career Success Orientations of Respondents (n=478)  
(Repeated easured Analysis)

	Getting High	Getting Secure	Getting Balanced	Getting Ahead	Getting Free
<u>M</u>	5.31	5.31	5.46	4.47	4.70
<u>Sd</u>	.73	.81	.76	.77	.88
Pairwise Comparisons	Getting Balanced > Getting High, Getting Secure > Getting Free > Getting Ahead (P<.01)				

When compared the mean scores and standard deviations of getting balanced orientation between a married group and an unmarried group, a significant difference was found. That is, married respondents significantly scored higher than unmarried respondents. This result shows that marriage in women's life influences their desire for keeping a balance between their personal life and professional life. Hypothesis 2 is supported. And, even when age variable was controlled, this result was not changed. In this regard, age does not mediate the relationship between marriage and having a getting balanced. This result supports Hypothesis 2-2.

Table 3. Getting Balanced Orientation by Marriage

	M	Sd	SE	t (t-test)	F (ANCOVA)
Married (n=134)	5.57	.69	.06	2.07 (p<.01)	7.42 (p<.01)
Unmarried (n=344)	5.41	.78	.04		

## VI. Discussion of the Findings

The present research finding that a pursuit of a balanced life was the most dominant type of career orientation of women employees is consistent with other recent research findings. Watts (1993) found that Getting Balanced was the most prevalent type of career success orientation among non-managerial female workers. Miguel (1993) found that a work-family balance was chosen as the primary goal for career success among U. S. employees. Hardin (1995) also found that almost half of the CPAs participating in his study held a dominant life style anchor (corresponding to Getting Balanced). However, according to Kim & McLean (2002), Korean employees, both men and women, hold Getting high similarly with Getting balanced. Interestingly, in this study, there was a significant difference between Getting balanced and Getting high. The desire for Getting balanced was significantly higher than that for Getting high. This implies that there could be more men, than women, who cherish personal interests and excitement as their career orientations.

This study shows that being married means a change in personal life style as well as perceptions of career success to women. They seem to actively cope with their responsibilities for family and relationships brought by their marriage. However, it is not clear if this is gender specific phenomenon since the difference between married men and unmarried men was not examined. Also, since the data was obtained from Korea, where married women are still more responsible for house chores and childrearing, this result may be only applicable in similar cultures. In fact, although there are plenty of literature regarding work and family

issues, there is not much research which delves into the meaning of marriage for full-time women employees.

Based upon the finding that there is no impact of age on women's pursuit of a balanced life, it is said that career success orientation, in women's case, is interpreted as stable in terms of time. This supports that Schein's (1982) idea that career orientation as stable throughout one's career history once it is developed. Cognitive psychologists also believed that people's personality traits never change significantly after a certain development period. In contrast, developmental psychologists viewed that there is always a dynamic interplay between people and their environment (Krumboltz, 1979). Kim & McLean (2002) indirectly confirmed that there may be a change in career success orientation, when both men and women were included. This needs further theoretical investigation.

As a result, women's strong pursuit of a balance between work and life was confirmed in present study. Marriage appears to be a significant event which reinforces this trend. Also, these findings are not affected by age.

## VII. Limitations of the Study

First, this study is limited to one large Korean company. Therefore, it may be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to other organizations or very different cultures. Second, This instrument might contain culturally sensitive items that may not be detected since the instrument used was originally developed in the western context.

## VIII. Implications of the Study

Since employee career development is one of the major practice areas of human resource development, the findings of the present study can contribute to career research and practice. Theorists do not agree on whether career orientations can change or are relatively stable. This study supports the idea that they could be stable, in case of women, through cross-sectional data. This finding creates more rigorous theoretical debates on the stability and change of career orientation. In practice, at the organizational level, this study may help employers understand the characteristics of the current women workforce. When analyzing employees through the career success orientation framework, it is obvious that women workers do not necessarily want traditional way of incentives. Organizations do not need to feel pressure to offer everyone same career incentives such as salary or advancement opportunities since women employees can be motivated with different options. At the individual level, this study points out women workers' responsibility to find career strategies. In order to incorporate their personal orientation with organizational demands and expectations, they should be prepared to negotiate with given options, showing satisfying performance at work.

## IX. Recommendations for Further Research

First, the typology of career success orientation developed for this study was based on existing theory and research. In order to explore whether there are still undefined career orientation categories among specific samples, a qualitative research approach

(i.e., phenomenology, which requires in-depth interviews) can be used. Second, how to match women employees' orientations and organizational purposes can be a major issue to deal with from a practical as well as a theoretical standpoint.

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# 일과 가정과의 균형: 여성 직장인들의 직업적 성공에 대한 오리엔테이션

김남희(한국여성개발원 연구위원)

본 연구는 한국의 여성 직장인들에게 커리어에서의 성공이 갖는 의미를 알아보기 위하여 수행되었다. 그들이 개인적으로 갖는 성공의 의미를 성공 오리엔테이션이라 보고, 그 유형을 선행연구를 통하여 유출된 방식으로 분류하였다. 조사 방법으로 서베이가 이용되었는데, 한국의 은행에 근무하는 여성 근로자들에게 800부의 설문지를 무작위로 배포하여 그 중 447개의 설문지가 수합, 최종 분석되었다. 조사 도구로는 Kim & McLean (2002)가 Career Success Map Questionnaire(Derr, 1986)를 수정하여, 수차례의 예비조사와 타당도, 신뢰도 검증을 통하여 보완한 것을 이용하였으며, 조사 결과를 분석하기 위해서는 기술통계와 유의도 검증을 위하여 Repeated measures analysis, ANOVA, ANCOVA, t-tests 등이 이용되었다.

연구 결과, 한국 여성 직장인들은 일과 가정과의 균형을 성공에 있어 가장 중요하게 생각하고 있었으며, 결혼이후에 그러한 생각이 더욱 강해지는 것으로 나타났다. 그리고 이러한 경향은 그들의 나이와는 관계가 없는 것으로 드러났다.