



**SLOAN WORK AND FAMILY  
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## *Conversations with the Experts*

### **Career Management and Work-Life Integration**



**Brad Harrington**

**Bio:** Brad Harrington is the Executive Director of the Boston College Center for Work & Family (CWF) and a research professor and faculty member in the Organization Studies department of the Carroll School of Management. In his role as the Center's Executive Director, he is responsible for the Center's research, convenings, and corporate partnership strategy. Previous to his present role at the university, Brad served as Associate Director of the Center for Corporate Citizenship.

Prior to arriving at Boston College, Brad was an executive with Hewlett-Packard Company for twenty years. He served in a wide range of leadership assignments in the US and Europe. His roles included Corporate Director of Global Management and Organization Development, Chief Quality Officer and Member of the Executive Committee for HP's Medical Products Business, Quality Director for HP United Kingdom, Ltd., Education Manager for European Operations (Agilent Technologies), as well as a number of division human resource management positions in the US. Brad began his career in the public sector as a counselor in Department of Labor job training programs. He has consulted with many major corporations and healthcare organizations in the areas of strategic planning and organizational change.



**Douglas T. (Tim) Hall**

**Bio:** Douglas T. (Tim) Hall is Professor of Organizational Behavior and Director of the Executive Development Roundtable in the School of Management at Boston University. His research and consulting activities have dealt with career development, the new employee- employer contract, executive succession, management of diversity, and work/life issues. He is a fellow of the Academy of Management and the American Psychological Association and is currently serving on the board of governors of the Center for Creative Leadership, and as a visiting scholar at the Boston College Center for Work & Family. He is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's James McKeen Catell Award (now called the Ghiselli Award). Hall is a recipient of the Everett Cherrington Hughes Award from the Academy of Management for his research on careers. Hall holds an Erskine Visiting Fellowship at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand.

## An Interview with Brad Harrington and Douglas T. Hall

By Judi Casey and Karen Corday

**Casey:** Why did you focus your book on career and work-life integration?

**Harrington:** Our perspective is that among many workers, particularly academics, there is a partition between the two fields. When there are career courses offered at universities, we find that work-life tends to be a very small part of the course; the topics are not viewed as two sides of the same issue. Our intent was to write a book to help people manage self-directed careers, which is the wave of the present as well as the future. Organizational careers are disappearing. Self-directed careers must be seen in the context of people's life goals; there can't be a career strategy that is separate from the other important aspects of one's life. We wanted to give our readers a guide that was hands-on enough that they would consider concepts about careers and work-life in tandem and be able to apply them to their own lives.

**Casey:** What are some of the significant changes at the workplace and within families that impact the careers of today's working families?

**Hall:** One change is that there does seem to be more acceptance of flexibility and alternative working arrangements by private-sector organizations. However, I don't think people's jobs have become any simpler, so it's still often a challenge to make flexibility work. In terms of changes within families, we see more accepting of dual-career families. Survey data indicates that men are taking more responsibility for home tasks.

**Harrington:** The two-career issue is probably the biggest single challenge. Forty years ago, one out of three women worked full-time. Now it's sixty percent or more. By 2008, women are expected to make up 48 percent of the workforce. Another huge issue is the number of single-parent households compared to twenty or thirty years ago. Whether it's a single-parent or two-parent household, in most cases there's no one exclusively taking care of domestic issues, volunteering in the school or community, or caring for children.

Parents and children also have high expectations in terms of activities and involvement. One aspect that makes the balancing act so tough is that kids are often very overscheduled; coming home and just hanging out doesn't seem to be the norm these days. This places a burden on parents to spend a lot of time transporting kids to and from activities as well as coaching and getting involved in the activities themselves. Expectations, particularly for middle- and upper-class families, are that kids are going to be involved in developmental and structured activities at much higher rates than in the past.

**Hall:** If there are more options for flexible arrangements and therefore less work stress, that can be offset by an increase in financial stress. Today's real estate markets are very challenging for a lot of workers; add in the costs of child care and elder care, and even affluent couples are often just one or two paychecks away from financial hardship.

**Casey:** Please describe the new career model of the protean career.

**Hall:** The short answer is that the employee has responsibility for his or her career. We can't rely on employers to provide career paths and help us with career planning; we have to take charge on our own and figure out where we want to go and how to get there. The good news is that people may have more freedom and more options, but on the other hand, this means a lot more responsibility as well.

**Harrington:** The good news is you're now in charge of your career. The bad news is you're now in charge of your career!

**Casey:** Could you describe some career development strategies?

**Hall:** One method is to consider internal and external strategies. The exercises we discussed above are an example of internal strategies—looking inside and getting a sense of your values. In a family context, such as a dual career relationship, you can do those exercises as a couple. A lot of the exercises can be done with family members to discover areas of agreement and disagreement.

External strategies deal more with exploring and finding a job, a place to live, and a family context that's a good personal fit. External strategies also refer to getting from here to there or changing one's current work arrangements. We discuss options such as downshifting, plateauing, and various flexible work arrangements.

There's also the concept of the kaleidoscope career; people can have different career patterns at different times in their lives. They may not permanently plateau, but they may decide to plateau while their children are young and then take advantage of new career opportunities again a few years down the road.

Another strategy is to get relational help, which is help from other people in the form of mentoring and other developmental relationships. We discuss not only how people can find a mentor, but also how they can make themselves valuable to potential mentors, making it a mutually beneficial relationship that may be easier to find and maintain.

**Harrington:** In the book, we try to attend to the popular belief that career development means moving up in the organization. We discuss vertical career paths and organizational advancement, which is the traditional career development strategy and is still very popular, but as Tim mentioned, we also discuss more contemporary options such as downshifting and the portfolio career. Charles Handy of the London School of Economics wrote a book about this in 1989 called *The Age of Unreason*. The scenario is that people have a portfolio of customers rather than one employer, and they have different kinds of work depending on their customers' needs.

We want people to stop equating career development with organizational advancement, particularly up through a hierarchy, and open up to the possibility of a self-directed and possibly self-employed career path.

**Casey:** What are some of the career issues faced by working couples and dual career families?

**Hall:** It can be difficult to find two jobs that provide all of the rewards that each person is looking for AND are in the same location.

**Harrington:** It can also be hard to find jobs that complement each other. If one person has a job that's incredibly demanding, the other might want to have a job that can accommodate that level of intensity.

**Hall:** There are also often issues of relocation—just when a couple has settled into their jobs and everything is working relatively well in their lives, one of them will be offered a career-enhancing opportunity that requires a move. There can be pressure from the organization to make the move, and that can be hard for couples. There's also the difficulty of caring for children; just when you think you've gotten on top of, say, caring for pre-school children, all of a sudden it's time for them to go to school. To add to this, many people having aging parents that also need their assistance and care. There are always new sets of personal, professional, and family challenges.

**Casey:** What can organizations do to be more supportive of the changing notions of careers?

**Hall:** They need to see how the new career models can benefit the organization. Currently, a lot of senior executives might look at something like the kaleidoscope career and say that it's nice that people want to live and work that way, but we're not social workers, so what's in it for us? Workplaces must recognize the importance of employee learning in maintaining an adaptable organization. If employees feel engaged and excited about the work they do, this keeps projects lively and products innovative. If you think about demographics and the upcoming retirements of many key people in organizations, a lot of organizational knowledge is going to walk out the door. How can this information be maintained? How is the organization helping Boomers produce mentoring and development for younger workers? Is the organization working at retaining Boomers in key roles? Boomers will be able to work for much longer than older workers from previous generations, and many of them either can't afford to retire fully or just don't want to quit working entirely. Organizations must be proactive in managing these longer working lives if they want to protect their own vitality.

**Casey:** How might your book be useful to workplace practitioners?

**Harrington:** We just finished the Work Life Evolution Study, in which we talked to work-life practitioners about the future of the field. We've come to the conclusion that it's fine for human resource departments to develop innovative policies and practices, but they must be done within the context of a culture and leadership who see this as the wave of the future. Furthermore, even if there is a supportive culture, if workers don't feel well-schooled in how to take charge of their own career and manage it effectively, that's a big missing piece of the puzzle. Workplace practitioners need to help employees better prepare career plans and work their ways through difficult career choices. The book could be used in workshops as a how-to guide for employees to take

charge of their own careers rather than expecting the organization to do so for them.

**Casey:** How might academics and researchers use the book?

**Harrington:** From an academic standpoint, outside of schools of management, there haven't been a lot of courses to help undergraduate and graduate students consider how they will enter into the new career contract and navigate their way through their careers and work-life issues. We do hear that more and more professors are going back to offering career courses because they see the need for them. More colleges and universities should offer these courses for arts and sciences students as well as professional schools; regardless of the career you enter, you have the burden of responsibility to manage it effectively.

**Casey:** It's hard for students to think ahead and consider a lot of these issues. It would be helpful if they were pushed to consider their options and choices before they have to make them.

**Hall:** I've seen students read about the difficulties faced by dual career couples and work-family conflict and dismiss it as being research about a different generation and therefore not applicable to them. If they had a course where they had to deeply consider the issues, it would motivate them to come up with their own solutions.

**Casey:** How might the book be useful to state public policy makers?

**Hall:** At a recent conference in Europe, there was a discussion about the Flemish government's public policy supporting career training and self-assessment. By law, every citizen is entitled to a certain number of hours of career coaching a year. This is a preventative way of dealing with unemployment. They have done some analysis and figured that the money they save on welfare and unemployment benefits is greater than the money spent on career development.

I'm not sure if this program still exists, but Arizona had a program where they took money from their unemployment benefit budget and directed it towards career retraining and self-assessment work. I believe they also saw some good returns.

**Harrington:** State policy makers need to understand that workers must be prepared for the dynamic ups and downs of industries. If their citizens don't know how to cope with these cycles, this creates a burden on the government in terms of unemployment insurance, welfare, a lack of taxes collected from the gainfully employed, and so forth. The more workers can deal with fluctuations proactively and quickly, the less likely it will be that the government will need to step in and provide after-the-fact support.

**Hall:** Some colleagues did a study on unemployed workers in Melbourne, Australia that tested the effect of a protean career orientation on dealing with unemployment. Findings showed that six months after the workers lost their jobs, those who found new jobs most quickly were those with the protean career mindset. Anything organizations or governments can do to help people become more self-directed and clear about their values will have positive effects on their employability.

[\*Career Management & Work-Life Integration: Using Self-Assessment to Navigate Contemporary Careers\*](#) is available from amazon.com

## Protean Versus Traditional Careers

**Source:** Harrington, B. & Hall, D.T. (2007). *Career management & work-life integration: Using self-assessment to navigate contemporary careers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

### Additional Resources Related to Career Management and Work-Life Integration

**Career Development and Free Agent Workers:** This 2001 article by Susan Imel for ERIC Digest no. 288 discusses the career development of “free agents,” workers who do not attach themselves to one company, but go where their skills and talents are needed.

- To access the article: <http://www.cete.org/acve/docgen.asp?tbl=digests&ID=111>

**Career Stages: An Entry from the Sloan Work and Family Research Network Work-Family Encyclopedia:** “Career stages are typically defined as evolutionary phases of working life...Current researchers (e.g., Hall and Schein) have updated the concept of career stage to encompass modern, varied patterns of career development. These patterns tend to be more fluid and dynamic.”

- To access the entry: [http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia\\_entry.php?id=222](http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/encyclopedia_entry.php?id=222)

**Dan Pink: Pink Blog:** The blog of Dan Pink, author of *Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working for Yourself* and *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the World*.

- To access the site: <http://www.danpink.com/index.php>

**The Opt Out Revolt:** The web site accompanies the book *The Opt-Out Revolt: Why People are Leaving Companies to Create Kaleidoscope Careers* (Davies-Black Publishing, 2006) by Lisa Mainiero and Sherry Sullivan. Includes an interview with the authors, a family-friendly “company audit,” and several recommendations for organizations.

- To access the site: <http://www.theoptoutrevolt.com/index.html>

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