

MASTER'S THESIS

The impact of work, family, and internal attributes on career advancement Law, Hau Yee

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The Impact of Work, Family, and Internal Attributes on
Career Advancement

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for the degree of

Master of Philosophy

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop a theoretical model for career advancement in the context of Hong Kong. This model covers both internal attributes, such as an employee's traits, abilities, and qualities, as well as external attributes, such as job developmental opportunities, job nature, networking, and family responsibilities. It is assumed that both of these kinds of attributes contribute equally to career advancement. The study was based on semi-structured interviews of 29 middle and senior managers in three listed local companies in Hong Kong, using the modified Repertory Grid technique and a modified version of Dorfman's checklist. While masculine traits have long been seen as particularly valuable, an even better profile is somewhat gender-neutral, incorporating certain favorable qualities such as commitment to work, sense of responsibility, and persistence. This may be attributed to the fact that most of the managers' bosses were not supportive and therefore the managers stressed hard work and being competent. Organizational characteristics such as occupational differential (line versus staff managers), technology application, developmental opportunities, and networking were seen as potential external influences on promotion. Given that these organizations remain collectivistic, employees face the constant burden of learning to build relationships. Some employees placed an emphasis on peer relationships; however, these relationships were very instrumental and worked only when there was no direct competition for promotion. The study also challenges prevailing conceptions about work-family conflicts. Family responsibility was not found to be a major barrier to career advancement when an external source of help was available. Limitations and areas for further research are discussed.

Table of Contents

	Page	
Declaration	i	
Abstract	ii	
Acknowledgements	iii	
Table of Contents	iv	
Tables and Figure	vi	
Chapter		
1	Introduction	1
2	Statement of Problem	3
3	Literature Review	5
	Work Attributes	7
	● Job Developmental Opportunities	7
	● Job Nature	9
	● Networking	10
	Family Attributes	13
	● The Work-family Relationship	13
	● Sources of External Support	15
	Internal Attributes	16
	● Traits, Abilities, and Qualities	16
4	Methodology	21
	Research Method	21
	Sample	23
	Procedure	25
	● Interview Questions	25
	● The Interviews	29
	Data Analysis	30
	● Open Coding	31
	● Axial Coding	31
5	Results and Discussion	34
	Work Attributes	34
	● Job Developmental Opportunities	34
	● Job Nature	40
	● Networking	44
	Family Attributes	51
	Internal Attributes	55
	● Traits, Abilities, and Qualities	55
6	Limitations and Areas for Further Research	60
7	Conclusion	64

Appendix 1	69
Appendix 2	71
Appendix 3	72
Appendix 4	73
Appendix 5	75
Appendix 6	76
Appendix 7	77
References	82
Curriculum Vitae	101