This paper was one of two I gave in July 1994 at the National Nurses' Forum, Celebrating the UN International Year of the Family, in Dunedin.

As I upload this paper in 2014, an explanation of the personal and professional context seems appropriate. In 1994, I'd just completed my MPhil study and moved from Auckland to Gisborne to coordinate the introduction of a clinical career path at Tairawhiti Healthcare. Clinical career path programmes were being introduced throughout New Zealand, at a time when health sector reforms consequent to the State Sector Act of 1988 had dispatched nursing administration as we knew it. Since no other paths for development and advancement in the practice environment seemed immediately obvious, the loss of the hierarchical nursing structure was much lamented.

But as I'd read a great deal of career theory in the course of writing my thesis, and having had some funding from professional nursing sources, it seemed important to pass on ideas about career development that didn't involve ascending a hierarchy. My abstracts for the forum were accepted, and given the theme of the forum and the opportunity, six of us headed south from Gisborne, to Knox College - there to be rewarded with a beautiful snowfall (the first ever for some in our group).

Two trustees of the Nursing Education and Research Foundation (NERF), Jocelyn Keith and Gay Williams were present at the forum in Dunedin and saw the enthusiasm for new ways of thinking about careers, and consequently, NERF asked me to be the 1995 Travelling Nurse Scholar with the theme 'Where will you be in the year 2001? Careers, nurses and organisations in change'. In preparation for that, I sought funding from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for a study tour, thinking that since we were basing our career path programmes on models such as Benner's novice to expert and Beth Israel hospital's programme, it would be useful to know what lessons they had learned. As the NERF Travelling Scholar, I took time out to travel to ten centres in New Zealand and had the privilege of sharing with nurses what I had learned in my masterate and as a Churchill Fellow.

In 2014, compared to 1994, it seems that career development possibilities now offer innumerable ways for nurses to advance in direct practice roles or roles supporting practice and the quality of care - proof that commitment to what is at the heart of nursing can be a definition of 'success'.

Careers and other commitments: some comments on wholeness

Shelley Jones RN BA MPhil

To start with, I'd like to make some comments about the two presentations I am making this year. Both arise out of my recent study and research towards a Master of Philosophy degree. But my study and research arise out of my practice as a nurse, which has largely been in inservice education roles. Those roles have shaped my abiding interest in how people learn and come to take on new roles at work, life in organizations (especially women's experience of their careers), how organizations manage the work of professional groups, and related to that, whether health professionals might have skills and perspectives that could usefully be brought to the management of health services.

Over the last few years I have studied part-time to complete an unfinished BA, followed by an MPhil. In the BA my main focus was on adult education, and the MPhil was a vehicle for exploring the interests I have outlined. In the thesis required for the degree I looked at the question of career transition from a health professional role to a health service manager role by means of seven in-depth case studies with people who had recently made such a transition. I was interested in what had happened in their careers to bring them to the point of making such a transition; how the transition was experienced - what they brought forward from the old role to the new role, and what had to be let go; and in the process of telling me about that transition, the research participants outlined a common interpretation of their role in a common organizational space - at the boundary of professional and management cultures, which is also the boundary at which matters of strategy and operations meet. This boundary lies at middle management level, and the research participants interpreted their roles around a core value of service, which in relation to their staff, took the form of managing meaning in the work of the organization.

Well, that's a summary of my findings in the research - the process of which also led me through a lot of reading and thinking about careers - and it's from this reading that I have some things for you. This isn't, by the way, a big academic paper. I see myself here as a broker between writers on careers and yourselves, and rather than saying, "Here's a piece of my mind", my purpose is to say, "Here are some pieces of other people's thinking" - thinking you may find helpful in understanding careers in general and your own in particular.

Since we usually see careers as the property of individuals, and I've already signalled that we'll be

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thinking about our own careers - how come these papers have surfaced at a conference focusing on nurses' work with families-as-clients?

First, I'd like to link thinking about careers and thinking about family (since the Forum is directed to families) by pointing out what I'm sure we will hear again and again over the weekend - family takes many forms, and at least one speaker has identified nurses themselves as a family. Having recently experienced moving from an academic environment (the then Department of Management Studies and Labour Relations at the University of Auckland) back into working in the health system and with nurses - I have recovered and rediscovered a sense of identity, of support, and of belonging with nurses. These papers are a contribution that acknowledges membership of that family, and hopefully, a contribution to building it up.

Secondly, nurses are themselves members of families (in many interpretations and forms), and these papers offer a balance to thinking of families only as clients. Families, however defined and configured are contextual factors in the identity and meaning of work for nurses, and I want to suggest that careers need to be considered in life contexts, that we should take a holistic perspective on individual careers.

And these comments lead to the substance of the paper - career commitment - which is said to be:

> *...characterised by the development of personal career goals, the attachment to, identification with, and involvement in those goals* (Colarelli & Bishop 1990:159).

Now, the interesting thing is, what count as goals depends on how you view what counts as career. In other words, what we understand as career commitment depends on how we think of career. How we think of career in everyday conversation is quite revealing. Here's how seven people, not unlike us, talked about career when they talked to me when I interviewed them in my thesis research:

> *...my mother never really had a career as such ....we followed my father's career all around the North and South Island ....there was an expectation that whatever I did - and it didn't [necessarily] mean a career - but it was going to be good ....picking the right sort of career avenues when you are in your teens ....my first career ideas ....medicine would be a good career ....career guidance ....I thought it would be a good career to start with ....past the first bloom of a career ....still not really knowing where my real career path lay ...various career options ....throughout my working career ....in terms of career jumps or career moves or whatever it was stepping out into the unknown ....this wasn't a particularly good career move ....my career was drifting ....I think my career's been on hold in some ways ....I had gone along this career path and there are a limited range of things that I'm actually able to do now ....two or three possible career options in our lives ....a really sort of solid career ....pressure from my boss to think about my career development and I've actually never thought about it in a formal way ....I went and had a career consultation ....the next career decision ....and you think, holy heck, this could become my job and career ....then started my career here ....they were career women and they were women who were chronically tired ....started thinking of my career and where I was ultimately going to end up because basically I've been travelling through life working in the hospital, it's never really been a conscious decision ....what's been different for me about this career move is that I haven't initiated it ....I wasn't that focused on my career....they were very career oriented....I'm not desperately motivated by status and career advancement in the traditional sense ....he retired after a very long and illustrious career ....career opportunities ....career structure ....career pathway ....my career history ....career change ....career wise...*(Jones 1994:27).

And can we become any wiser by looking at meanings embedded in everyday usage of the term *career*? Here there was a sense of what careers ought to be like, pointed up by awareness of un-career-like behaviour. We might read between the lines that some forms of work constitute careers (a father's paid work outside the home) and others do not (a mother's unpaid work in the home); that career requires attention and commitment; that a longer term view should inform the first career decision; that subsequent career moves should be deliberate choices, indeed, that without deliberate decisions the career might drift.

What **counts** as a career is the first piece of thinking I'd like to lead you through, by pointing out that how we commonly talk about career is reflected in much research and writing on careers. This is a typical academic definition:

> *A career is a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more-or-less predictable) sequence* (Wilensky 1961: 523).

In other words, "...*real* careers involve significant promotional achievements in the work context" (Evetts 1992:7). Amongst those us here today, how many have careers that conform to Wilensky's definition? (Two women out of about thirty people indicated that their careers looked like this). So we know something about how common this sort of career is in this sample - a roomful of people, all but two of whom are women. You have to wonder, do the rest of us actually have careers according to this definition?

Note that this is an influential definition - Wilensky's attempt to delimit the meaning of career has successfully shaped most research on careers to give attention to prestigious occupations and advancement within them. But this definition of career mirrors everyday meanings of career. We talk of careers that are 'on hold', 'stalled',

'plateaued' or 'failed' when they are not doing what is normative according to this understanding of career. In other words, some things are implied by this idea of career, and when they are absent, we use a qualifier in conjunction with *career*.

Thus if we look at the assumptions underpinning both this definition and common use meanings of career, we might see that:

- career movement is upwards
- which presupposes organizational or occupational hierarchical structures
- careers exhibit a logical uninterrupted progression from job to job
- thus careers are predicated on formal structures of employment.

I'm going to call this a structural model of career. Advancement is either through a series of increasingly important jobs with one employer - an **organizational career**, or a series of increasingly important jobs within one occupation but moving from employer to employer - an **occupational career**. But is a structural model of career an adequate model when you hold up your own career against it? Is it sufficient to explain your career?

What does this sort of understanding or framing of career create? For Julia Evetts, if this is the idea of career that is reified, then we are in trouble. What she means by reification is this - *"a successful effort to construct a particular mental reality that can constrain people who accept it as true*" (Evetts 1992:6).

If we define career in this way and operate on these assumptions, Evetts says that we have four problems:

1 other career patterns are deficient and imperfect beside the supposedly normal career pattern, no matter how common other career patterns might be (and where does that leave the majority of people in this room?);

2 only one orientation - getting ahead, being promoted - in the career counts, which frustrates both men and women who want things other than advancement from organisational career structures

> *The hierarchical career model has dysfunctional aspects, especially when the socialising messages of the organization and the expectations of the individual are not matched by the ease with which the pyramid can be ascended. Organizational inequalities in power are protected by the rhetoric of hierarchical careers* (Cawsey & Inkson 1992:6).

3 the focus is exclusively on what happens at work - that's paid work of course

> *Careers are only constructed or developed at work. Activities other than paid occupation cannot contribute to promotional skills or promotion entitlements. Of course, there is an important gender dimension in respect of this. The wider responsibilities of men (say to do military service) have been regarded as positive advantages in career terms compared with the wider responsibilities (such as to family and home) which women undertake.... The **positive** implications of a break in paid employment and a subsequent return to an occupation or entry to a new occupation, necessitated by the pursuit of motherhood goals, have not been explored* (Evetts1992:7,8).

4 an assumption of rationality on the part of the individual, who is assumed to be in control

> *The tendency in careers research is to assume that individuals plan their career, weigh-up career moves, assess particular positions and judge according to career progress goals. Clearly, such an assumption totally misunderstands and misrepresents the chance, luck, coincidence and serendipity that are apparent in many careers* (Evetts 1992:8).

There are a few problems if we say that a structural definition of career is the only way to define or do career. And we saw some resistance to this as a way to do career amongst my thesis research participants, for instance, "*...I'm not desperately motivated by status and career advancement in the traditional sense...".*

How many of you can identify with this? Increasingly, a 'getting ahead' model of career is being questioned - although we should be aware that much of the popular literature on careers for women subscribes to this model. There **are** more ways to be motivated in the career than towards 'getting ahead' in terms of more status and prestige - and Brooklyn Derr (1988) has proposed a diversity of orientations within the career:

- **getting ahead** - making it to the top of the hierarchy and status system
- **getting secure -** achieving recognition, job security, respect and 'insider' status
- **getting free -** obtaining maximum control over work processes
- **getting high -** getting excitement, challenge and adventure and 'cutting edge' opportunities
- **getting balanced -** achieving a meaningful balance among work, relationships, and self-development, so that work does not become either too absorptive or too uninteresting.

In relation to careers in the helping professions, public service organisations, or indeed, any service industry, I'd add two more orientations to success in a career - and they are not about getting, rather about giving:

- ***making a difference***

- ***making a contribution***

Of course it's possible that one's orientation within the career changes over time, or that a person made hold two or more of these values or orientations in a dynamic tension.

In relation to possible orientations in the career, I'd like to present some findings and conclusions from a couple of pieces of research on female health professionals' career patterns which suggest motivations in the career to other than *"...status and career advancement in the traditional sense...".*

Lewin and Olesen (1980), in a longitudinal study of two groups of degree-prepared female nurses with continuous work histories over 10-14 years, believed they had a suitable population in which to study patterns of movement and motivation in women's careers - in an environment not particularly characterized by competition with men for senior positions. As a generalization, when women's career movement and motivations are compared against those of men, women supposedly look unambitious in terms of aspiring to 'getting ahead' careers which are about vertical movement in organizational or occupational structures. The importance of Lewin and Olesen's findings is that we are alerted to some *"viable and meaningful*" (1980:626) alternatives to vertical career patterns.

While two thirds of the sample (of 36) had experienced some upward mobility, which were described as 'advancing' careers, one third had 'lateral' careers, which were found to be characterized by rewards of intensification. Nurses with lateral careers were typically found in public health and school nursing, whereas those in hospital settings - because of their advanced preparation - were subjected to pressure to take supervisory positions. Note that while the public health settings and the more senior positions afforded the nurses more autonomy, the lateral careers only developed when the work setting permitted significant autonomy in practice. Lewin and Olesen suggested that, *"[f]or lateral nurses, in particular, personal satisfaction and a sense of work well done become the central dimensions of ambition, transforming the definition of success"* (1980:624). They concluded that:

> *People do not always strive to move 'ahead' or 'up', but may well take elaborate measures to maintain the situations in which they find themselves and with which, for some strategic reason, they are content. The factors which may enter into the latter behaviors are not yet well understood, but more seems involved than mere failure to produce or lack of ambition* (Lewin & Olesen 1980:627).

> *...getting better at her job constitutes a central source of satisfaction and success for the lateral nurse. The pattern which emerges shows that this factor of intensification - the sense of importance which grows from heightening the attributes of the job, becoming more skillful, and relating more sensitively to patients - not only is reflected in stated job satisfaction, but also may become an element in the definition of advancement.... an almost craftswomanlike attention to the details of the job and to relationships with clients or patients produces rewarding professional experience* (Lewin & Olesen 1980:627).

There is something to be learned here by those who manage the organizational environment in which nursing takes place - that to support nurses' autonomy in practice and nursing practice itself, provides for rewards to be derived from the practice itself.

In another study, Westbrook and Nordholm (1984) further explored vertical and lateral movement in female health professionals' careers. They defined a third category as stationary - which was distinguished from the laterals in that whilst the laterals had plans to specialize by undertaking further qualifications, the stationaries had no such plans. An important point that they make is that an orientation to excellence and development in those whose careers exhibit a lateral direction, may prepare such people for vertical career moves:

> *We also question whether the laterals, as they acquire more qualifications and become more eligible for promotion than many of the verticals, will maintain their ambitions to develop only in a lateral direction. Alternatively, some people's patterns of career development are probably characterized by periods of vertical aspiration followed by decisions to intensify laterally. Such patterns need to be distinguished from failures to attain higher status goals* (Westbrook & Nordholm 1984:754).

The point is that you have to get inside a person's values and motivations to understand what counts as commitment and success in their career, and that career movement in other than a vertical direction is not, by definition a 'failed' career. Getting inside a career to see what counts is a totally different approach to Wilensky's idea of what counts as a career - for him, what counts is an observable and unmistakable progression in a hierarchy of prestige... Whereas, Meryl Reis Louis is suggesting a totally different approach. She describes career as

> *...a concept attributed to the set of events, activities, experiences and decisions that occur over the course of an individual's work life, [and Louis adds that career] ...is not what one lives, but rather how one* ***thinks*** *about what one has lived or will live* (Louis 1982:69).

Note that this perspective on careers is not based on any of the assumptions underpinning Wilensky's definition.

I'll call Louis' approach an interpretive approach to career - it's about the meaning of work in a person's life and it requires an holistic approach to the study and understanding of careers. Now I think this is important, because an holistic approach to what counts as career, and how careers might be managed - is also what individuals and organisations require.

One of these definitions of career refers only to work, and a fairly one-dimensional idea of success, whereas the other definition allows for the career to be seen in a context, and success to be defined as personally meaningful in that context. To draw some comparisons between these two ways of understanding career (while also recognising that there is not necessarily as clear a distinction between them as I am sketching here):

sequence of positions or **work history**	meaning of one's work or a **life story**
titles grading salary responsibility seniority	identity interests needs relationships learning
organizational context	**life context**
EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE *observable*	**INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE** *felt or experienced*
formal expectations of particular job positions	self-perceived talents, motivations, and work values of the individual
OBJECTIVE CAREER	*SUBJECTIVE CAREER*
oriented to or measured by	
extrinsic rewards	intrinsic rewards

In a twist on subjective careers - instead of a perspective on career, some writers propose the subjective career as a way to **do** career. Can we make a distinction between individuals who direct their career to externally defined measures of success and those who direct their careers by internally defined goals? (Which is also perhaps a question about the difference between those whose careers move in vertical or lateral directions). Weick and Berlinger (1989) say that

> *For a person to be governed by the subjective career means that the adequacy of performance is defined by the person's own criteria of good performance; attitudes emphasize work satisfaction, achievement and job involvement rather than organizational commitment and loyalty; identity is sought through activities that raise self-respect and heighten self-awareness, and adaptability is used as the measure of work experience (e.g., a person asks, what flexibility can I develop by doing these tasks and how can I maintain the flexibility I already have?)* (Weick & Berlinger 1989:321).

In other words, these writers are making a direct link between subjective career orientations and careers directed to personally meaningful intrinsic rewards. To outline some implications for organisations:

- For Weick and Berlinger (1989), when environments grow more complex and varied, organisations need to mirror that complexity and variety, but inevitably, organisational structures lag behind environmental changes.

- Therefore, if individuals direct their growth to an externally defined career, i.e. the career structure of the organisation, individuals (and by extension, the organisation) are more likely to be restricted in their learning than when individuals are directed by an internal conception of a subjectively meaningful career.

- So, organisations could value and reward subjective career orientations embracing learning, exploration and change as a means of organisational learning.

- And, O'Connor and Wolfe (1991:338) note that those who undertake personal growth seek ways to create organisational settings which support their new levels of functioning.

Thus, there are some significant implications for organisational learning if subjective orientations, or a diversity of motivations in the career are welcomed.

But let's return our attention to the idea of career commitment as the "...development of personal career goals, the attachment to, identification with, and involvement in those goals" (Colarelli & Bishop 1990:159). It's important to remember that the centrality of work to one's life is also dependent on the extent to which identity is aligned with a work role, which may be in turn influenced by the range of roles a person holds. Hence, the need to consider career commitment in the individual's life context.

When we enter the sense a person is making of their career, commitment to career goals has to be seen in relation to other commitments - unless the person has only one commitment - to their work. But we know that for women, who in our society typically (although not exclusively) carry time-intensive responsibilities for dependents young and old, life is about getting a balance across a number of commitments. Finding a balance between major options of work, marriage, motherhood and a social life was an important concern for a group of female managers in the United Kingdom studied by Judi Marshall (1984). She found that

> *The [women] managers' main ambition was to ensure future opportunities for personal satisfaction and growth through work. Similarly, a 'career' was a sequence of jobs each meaningful and appropriate within an individual's whole life pattern at a particular time* (Marshall 1984:194).

Marshall suggested that the women applied values of *"...adaptability, authenticity, balance, cooperation, engagement, interdependence, health, openness, and wholeness"* (1984:196) to their decision-making. She also argues that ways-of-being-in-the-career are but reflections of ways-of-being-in-the-world, and she draws on the work of Bakan (who was influenced by Jung) to propose that a 'female' way-of-being-in-the-world, as **communion**, which is distinct from a 'male' way-of-being-in-the-world, as **agency** (Marshall 1989).

> *...communion is characterized as **being** and agency as **doing;** in this lies a paradox for those 'pursuing' careers. Agency engages in idealizations and tries to change the environment to match its own preconceived images. Doing is directed by internal, personal objectives. Communion is not inactivity in comparison, but its activity emerges from radically different roots - from its open contact with and appreciation of the environment. This orientation of 'being' is contextually motivated. Prior awareness as acceptance of the world as it is results in action that is in tune with the surrounding context but is not conceptually premeditated* (Marshall 1989:283).

For Joan Gallos (1989), the primary context in the adult life of women is relationship, and she supports her claim by drawing on the considerable body of work on the adult development of women that challenges theories of adult development based on studies of men's development. And so Gallos has something to say about what commitment to career goals means:

> *The ongoing process of attachment to significant others is an important source of identity, maturity and personal power for women. Women's career gains and professional accomplishments are complements, not substitutes, for strong interdependent relationships* (Gallos 1989:111).

If relationships are important, then sensitivity and interconnectedness with others demands that flexibility and adaptability are essential - because responsibilities and obligations (especially around family members) change in predictable and unpredictable ways. We might link the flexibility required around family commitments with the flexibility and adaptability Weick and Berlinger (1989) proposed as integral to an internally directed career. And we might link an individual's adaptability to openness to learning and then link that to organizational adaptability and learning. And we might ask how organizations recognise and reward career orientations that hold the potential for organization development.

In conclusion, what **questions and implications** might we bring forward from the ideas presented today to our thinking and planning on clinical career paths?

- We need to ask - what are the assumptions about careers that we bring to clinical career paths? Do we see movement in a clinical career path as vertical movement up a hierarchy or lateral movement of intensification within the career? Do our structures allow for male (uninterrupted) or female (interrupted) patterns of employment? For commitment to goals other than work goals?

- When we take a subjective or contextual or holistic perspective on career, we have to recognise that career commitment may well encompass and take into account goals and priorities outside one's job.

- When we consider that lateral career development patterns are motivated by intrinsic rewards (from the work itself) - we might applaud the potential of clinical career path initiatives in making available and intensifying intrinsic rewards, but not forget that extrinsic rewards, namely pay structures, also need our attention. That the privilege of caring should be sufficient reward for the nurse as an argument against appropriate financial reward is one we've heard many times before.

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