rienced more facilitation between work and family roles than did men. Moreover, women reported higher job performance when they felt that their home life was providing them with new skills and psychological benefits at work. And men reported higher job performance when their home life energized them for work.

Van Steenbergen and her colleagues hope that these findings will help organizations understand that the demands of juggling work and family roles are not always an impediment to workplace success. As a matter of fact, in many cases employees who combine roles may be more energized, motivated, and efficient. That said, companies should not ignore work-family conflict. As a matter of fact, organizations would be wise to help employees reduce feelings of work-family conflict to reduce stress and burnout. Moreover, firms should take steps to spark the experience of facilitation—something that may increase feelings of satisfaction and enhance productivity. In a nutshell, the stress of juggling work and family may keep employees up at night, but those who experience facilitation will still be eager to get out of bed in the morning to face their jobs and families.


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**Are Leadership Positions with High Turnover Rates “Haunted”?**

*Research Brief by Stuart D. Sidle, Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, University of New Haven*

Isn’t it odd that many successful organizations have specific leadership positions with higher than expected turnover rates? Perhaps at some organizations it’s the Chief Operating Officer, while at others it’s the Vice President of Human Resources or even the CEO. It’s almost as if the executive position that keeps turning over is haunted—not by a ghost, but by the former occupant of the position. In other words, perhaps that position is “haunted” by the lingering expectations associated with the unique manner in which the first executive who held the position defined and performed the job.

As a matter of fact, new research shows that the legacies left by the first incumbents of particular executive positions can seriously affect the day-to-day work lives of subsequent executives who follow in their footsteps. Indeed, M. Diane Burton (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and Christine M. Beckman (University of California, Irvine) address this topic in their recent study. These researchers explored how the functional experience of a person who creates a senior leadership position in a company influences the turnover rates of successors through what are known as “position imprints.”

The first person to hold a position in an organization establishes key expectations regarding how the position holder should conduct his or her job. These expectations remain imprinted in the minds of organizational members and often customers. As a result, after the original executive departs, the newly hired successor will be constrained by the position imprints that linger in the organization. And, as successors continue to cycle in and out of the job, they will all face the constraints of the initial executive’s position imprint.

These position imprints develop during the early stages of an emerging organization, when company leaders start allocating tasks and dividing up roles. Often, new entrepreneurial companies do not have executives with the experiences that best match all of the typical positions that need to be filled. As a consequence, members of the initial leadership team may have to take on roles and responsibilities outside of their functional experience and expertise. In fact, these early leaders may craft the positions they take on in ways that reflect their personal skills, experience, and interests rather than following the organization’s needs for those positions to the letter.

And as early leaders spend time in their roles, other organizational members and stakeholders...
begin to grow accustomed to what can be ex-
pected of the people who hold positions such as
Vice President of Sales or Vice President of Hu-
man Resources. Moreover, these expectations,
particularly given the impact of early office hold-
ers, may be somewhat atypical compared to how
the functions are performed at other organiza-
tions. Incidentally, once the original leaders de-
part, the successors who follow will be cycling into
a job—title notwithstanding—that may come
with atypical duties and expectations associated
with it as a result of the position imprints left
behind.

To investigate how position imprints affect the
turnover rates of successors, Burton and Beckman
began with archival data from a study of entrepre-
nrepreneurial firms in California’s Silicon Valley. They
sifted through company documents, web pages,
and interviews with CEOs and human resource
professionals. In doing so, Burton and Beckman
examined the career histories of more than 1,400
executives holding 169 unique positions in 169
unique firms representing 11 different functional
areas.

In studying these executives, Burton and Beck-
man assessed whether each had typical or atypical
functional experience. For example, a human re-
sources executive with very little experience in
human resources and a lot of experience in sales
and marketing would be classified as atypical. On
the other hand, a human resources executive with
substantial experience in human resources or a
sales executive with substantial experience in
sales would be labeled as typical.

Burton and Beckman also determined if each
executive studied was a position creator or a suc-
cessor. A position creator is the first person to
hold a given functional position in company (e.g.,
the company’s first VP of Operations). A succes-
sor could be the next person to hold the position
after the position creator leaves or even someone
several steps removed from the original position
holder.

Burton and Beckman found that position cre-
ators have a significantly lower rate of turnover
than position successors. This lower turnover rate
is not just the result of position creators being
highly invested in the blossoming entrepreneurial
venture. Instead, it may also be that position cre-
ators mold their jobs into a hybrid reflection of
their talents, their preferred tasks, and organiza-
tional needs.

Overall, Burton and Beckman found that turn-
over rates increase when successors follow posi-
tion creators who have atypical backgrounds.
They point out that although the position creators
may benefit by their uniquely crafted positions,
their successors will most likely be disadvantaged.
Indeed, the unique position imprint will remain a
dark cloud over the position for many years—
increasing the likelihood of turnover for all suc-
cessors.

Another interesting finding is that turnover
rates increase when successors have different func-
tional experiences and expertise than position
creators. For example, if the founding CEO of a
company had a sales background, successors who
have backgrounds in finance, strategy, or engi-
neering will have a higher rate of turnover than
successors with a sales background.

The implications of this research are compel-
ling in that they provide a fresh look at execut-
tive turnover. Typically when executives leave
an organization, current events are cited as ex-
planation for the departure. Rarely are histori-
cal trends such as position imprints discussed
when explaining executive turnover. And, ac-
cording to this research, historical events such
as how positions were originally defined will
certainly affect the likelihood that newly hired
executives will enjoy a long tenure in the orga-
nization.

Essentially, Burton and Beckman demon-
strate the long-term consequences of the early
decisions new companies make when assigning
roles and allocating tasks. While it may be con-
venient at first to have a person with atypical
experience fill a functional void in a new orga-
nization, in the long run it may prove challeng-
ing to find successors who can thrive in the face
of the unique position imprint that has become
so embedded in the minds of those in and
around the organization.

Consequently, when recruiting executives for
positions it’s important to consider firm history.
The organization and the new executive may have
to face unique internal and external expectations established by an original position holder. In short, the legacy of a position creator may linger to haunt future successors.


The Bureaucratic Logic of Entrepreneurial Firms: Providing Opportunity for Women or Just Window Dressing?

Research Brief by Brett P. Matherne, Assistant Professor of Management, Loyola University New Orleans

Can firms that provide the best opportunities for women be identified? As troubling as it may sound, there’s no definitive answer to this question to date. Naturally, that presents women who seek professional growth opportunities with a quandary and a challenge about where to look. Sure, everyone wants both larger firms and entrepreneurial start-ups to have better opportunities for women. But where should women start? Which direction should professional women consider when searching for outstanding opportunities?

Fortunately, a recent study by James Baron (Yale University), Michael Hannan (Stanford University), Greta Hsu (University of California at Davis), and Özgecan Kocak (Sabanci University) addresses these questions using a sample of younger high-tech firms. In doing so, Baron and his colleagues provide some answers to assist professional women contemplating their options. At the core, their advice is to size up companies by looking deeper into the underlying logic of the organization—including the cultural logic imprinted on a firm by its founders.

Building on previous work, Baron and his colleagues recognize the critical role of bureaucracy in organizations. But how and when will bureaucracy rear its head in an organization? Moreover, how will that affect career options for women? The arguments for bureaucracy’s influence on opportunities for women revolve around formalized procedures. Simply put, as organizations grow they become more bureaucratic and create more formal procedures that are more objective. Such procedures typically help to rule out sex-based inequality in the workplace. On the other hand, entrepreneurial organizations, which are more flexible and have fewer resources than larger firms, should be able to quickly recognize talent. And that, in turn, should lead to more opportunities for talented women. Moreover, when bureaucratic procedures for finding and retaining talent are established in large, mature organizations, they may, in effect, be little more than “window dressing.” In essence, they may be nothing but rational and technical systems built upon a masculinity substructure. As such, bureaucratic procedures may do relatively little to advance the cause of talented women seeking professional growth. In other words, it’s important to look beyond and behind the procedures themselves.

To study the role that corporate bureaucracy plays in opportunities for women, Baron and his colleagues focused on 75 younger, high-tech companies in the Silicon Valley. In doing so, they went past an examination of superficial manifestations of bureaucracies, such as the extent of formalized procedures and structures. Instead, Baron and his colleagues employed sophisticated statistical techniques to look at the “cultural logic” behind such procedures. They examined bureaucratic logics such as universalism and meritocracy and their impact on opportunities for women. They also compared this against firms that embraced the “logic of affiliation”—whose cultures emphasized interpersonal trust, providing support, and “fitting in.”

Examining cultural logics across high-tech firms within a single region allowed Baron and his colleagues to make comparisons while ruling out other factors. Also, using entrepreneurial firms meant that the founding “imprinting blueprint” for each company’s culture could be assessed. This was especially important as company founders im-