INTRODUCTION

The Career Achievement Project (CAP) is an ongoing research project started by Dr. Rick Cotton over 10 years ago, compiling data on more than 30,000 individuals from 242 different professional and occupational national or international halls of fame. The study aims to examine the nature of extraordinary career achievement in order to identify the key factors that contribute to the development of exceptional success by the top 1-2% of role incumbents in different fields, helping to inform excellence going forward.

During the VKURA internship, I collected and analyzed 8416 profiles from 14 public hall of fame websites. Additional in-depth analysis will be needed to fully answer the research question going forward.

Inductee profiles from the following halls of fame were collected and analyzed during my internship: American Police, American Furniture, Canadian Aviation, Fixed Income Analysts, Accounting, National Inventors, Art Directors Club, Canadian Medical, and Canadian Sports.

ACCOUNTING HALL OF FAME

Demographic overview:
- 110 inductees
- 95% male (104 inductees)
- 96% white (106 inductees)

Common employers:
- Companies (e.g. EY, Deloitte, KPMG)
- Universities
- Accounting organizations (e.g. AICPA, AAA)

Career pattern:
- 32% Linear: started as an accountant or an assistant professor and worked one’s way up to a leadership or full professor position.
- 28% Linear-Spiral: subsequently or simultaneously worked in two or more related fields, climbed up the ladder in two or more fields.
- 25% Spiral: switched between working in a corporate environment, teaching, and starting one’s own ventures.

ART DIRECTORS CLUB HALL OF FAME

Demographic overview:
- 172 inductees
- 88% male (151 inductees)
- 94% white (162 inductees)

Common employers:
- Magazines (e.g. Harper’s Bazaar, Times, The New Yorker)
- Advertising agencies (e.g. N. W. Ayer & Son, DBB, Reba Sochis Studio)
- Art schools (e.g. School of Visual Arts, Parsons School of Design)

Career pattern:
- 37% Expert: devoted one’s whole life to a field, independent or signed.
- 37% Spiral: switched between related fields such as photography and design.
- 18% Spiral-Expert: subsequently or simultaneously worked in two or more related fields, with more than 10 years experience in each field.

CANADIAN AVIATION HALL OF FAME

Demographic overview:
- 237 inductees
- 96% male (226 inductees)
- 95% white (234 inductees)

Common employers:
- The Royal Canadian Airforce
- Airlines (e.g. Western Canadian Airlines, Imperial Airways, Trans-Canada Airlines)
- Aviation manufacturers (e.g. de Havilland Canada, Fairchild Aircraft, Canadianair)

Career pattern:
- 42% Spiral: was both pilot and a flight instructor. Some founded their own firms.
- 27% Expert: dedicated to flying throughout one’s life.
- 18% Spiral-Expert: subsequently or simultaneously worked in two related fields, with more than 10 years experience in each field.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Even though researchers and practitioners over-privilege careers of advancement (i.e. Linear) over careers of achievement, career patterns differ in prevalence from field to field. This internship and the CAP illustrated that there are different predominant career patterns depending on what an individual deems important in terms of career success. Further research by Dr. Cotton and colleagues revealed that individuals across countries and industries find the following “Super Seven” career success dimensions to be important.

POSTER FOCUS

- Describe research performed on inductees of three halls of fame: Accounting, Art Directors Club, and Canadian Aviation
- Highlight similarities and differences in career patterns within and across these three halls of fame
- Leverage the career concepts developed by Brousseau et al. (1996) to further examine inductee’s career patterns

The career concepts framework:
The article “Career Pandemonium: Realigning organizations and individuals” by Brousseau et al. divides career patterns into four concepts - Linear, Expert, Spiral, and Transitory, depending on the “direction and frequency of movement within and across different kinds of work over time.” Each career pattern has a key associated career-related motives and features:

- Linear: Strengths are in knowledge, experience, and time.
- Expert: Strengths are in expertise, depth of knowledge, and quality.
- Spiral: Strengths are in multiple roles and diverse experiences, with focus on the variety of work.
- Transitory: Strengths are in multiple roles and diverse experiences, with focus on the variety of work.

My analysis also showed that the vast majority of inductees have been white men, demonstrating inequality and unequal access to human and social capital across fields. Further research should examine different career patterns between and within groups (e.g. male vs. female professionals, white vs. black professionals, etc.).