

A NEW ENTREPRENEURIAL CAREER MODEL BASED ON THE LIFE AND CAREER DECISIONS OF STEVE JOBS

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The meteoric rise, dramatic fall, and spectacular comeback associated with Steve Jobs' career path is a vivid example of the risks and rewards associated with following an entrepreneurial career. Steve Jobs' life and career combine to create a compelling story on many levels. There is the rags to riches story of an adopted child who achieves cult like adoration from the customers who buy his products. There are spectacular failures along with undreamed of successes. There is a hero who bravely battles cancer and a genius whose work is cut short at the age of fifty-six. At the heart of the story, there is an entrepreneur.

While there is much research on the factors leading to an individual's decision to become an entrepreneur [17], there is less research on how they live out their entrepreneurial careers. Some research has focused on entrepreneurs' growth intentions [2], but very little has examined the career stages of entrepreneurs as their careers evolve. Other research has explored how different variables at different stages of a person's life may influence them to become entrepreneurs [18]. However, there is not much research on the influence of these variables on later career stages.

Individuals may make the decision to become entrepreneurs at different stages of their lives, including retirement [17], right after school [16], or after working for a while [7]. The decision to become self-employed is affected by different factors at various stages of an individual's life course [18]. Another important factor to consider is the co-evolution of the industry the individual works in.

Although most models of career development have been based on the careers of white middle class males, a few models have been developed for specific populations. A few examples are women [5], entrepreneurs with and without dependents [4], the MBA student [12], minorities [3], transnationals [15], Cuban-Americans [13] and for specific geographical regions such as Finland [1]. Few models exist which address the unique aspects of entrepreneurial careers. Plehn-Dujowich [14] has identified a model for serial entrepreneurs; these are entrepreneurs who repeatedly start new businesses across their careers, such as Richard Branson [20]. There is no model for *One Hit Wonders*, entrepreneurs who develop one successful company across their life span such as Sam Walton or Walt Disney although some have investigated entrepreneurs with one hit item fad businesses [11].

The purpose of this paper is not to explore the reasons why Steve Jobs may have become an entrepreneur [6]. The purpose is to examine Steve Jobs' broader career path to identify the stages and phases of his entrepreneurial career. As perhaps the world's most widely recognized CEO, Steve Jobs exemplifies entrepreneurs operating in the high tech-high touch arena of consumer electronics. This paper proposes to develop a model of entrepreneurial careers based on Jobs' career path.

Steve Jobs' career trajectory offers a fascinating glimpse into the career paths of high-tech entrepreneurs. Jobs' early career success, his ouster from the company he created, his work at Next and Pixar, and his ultimate return to Apple, offers management scholars an engaging, relatable, and contemporary version of a Horatio Alger case study. Studies on his success are likely to continue for years after his death. Steve Jobs was a very successful entrepreneur. His startups of Apple, Next, and Pixar created millions of dollars for him and his stockholders. However, it was not until his return to Apple that he began to carve out his own unique career path that suggests a new career model for entrepreneurs.

This paper presents a new model of entrepreneurial careers. There are three dimensions to the model: career stages, career phases, and career ages. Similar to other stage models of careers, entrepreneurial careers unfold across a series of stages. The model is similar to developmental models of career stages. Very little research has linked career theories to entrepreneurial careers [7]. However, unlike traditional career models which have linear progression, our model recognizes that entrepreneurs by their very nature, startup different businesses which forces them to keep cycling through the stages in many different orders. There are four stages in the proposed model. The first stage is reconnection. The second stage is transition. The third stage is reflection, and the fourth stage is death.

A second component of this model of entrepreneurial careers is the element of career phases. Since the primary focus of most entrepreneurs is on starting and building companies, we wanted the model to take into consideration the idea that entrepreneurial careers can be divided into identifiable career phases. Each career phases is usually associated with the specific company that the entrepreneur is focused on in that part of their life span. For example, Steve Jobs' career path included four phases. Phase one was at Apple (the computer company), phase two was at Next, phase three was at Pixar, and phase four was at Apple (the mobile devices company). Entrepreneurs may operate in more than one phase at a time, but there is usually one primary company that is the focus of the entrepreneur's time, money, and effort in each phase.

The third component of this model is ages. Many well-known career and developmental stage models such as Super (1980) and Levinson (1978) link the stages of their models to specific chronological ages. Some researchers have questioned whether specific ages should be linked to career stages [8]. Previous research on entrepreneurship has illustrated that entrepreneurial careers can happen at many different ages [7] [16] [17]. Our model incorporates this unique aspect of entrepreneurship. We propose that entrepreneurial careers can unfold at any age. Age does not correspond to the stages or phases in our model because of the unique nature of entrepreneurial careers.

Applying the model to Steve Jobs' career path, the following stages are identified. The first stage of his unique career path after returning to Apple is reconnection. His business comeback is unrivaled in industrial history. Jobs was forced out of the firm he created in 1985 and did not return to Apple until 1997 when the company purchased his new firm Next. The Apple he returned to was a dying enterprise then, and by the time Jobs died 14 years later, it had become the world's most valuable company. The second chance was essential. He reconnected with his old firm but he also reconnected the firm to what was important about Apple. Here Jobs used organizational identity to build his company into one of the top firms in the country and he created a whole new purpose for the organization.

The next stage is the transformation stage. Jobs reconnected Apple to its true purpose, innovation, to transform Apple's organizational image. He was able to use the transformation phase to convince Apple stakeholders to follow his vision for the firm. Jobs' dreamt of bringing new technology into the average household with his notion of an inexpensive, user-friendly personal computer. Through his series of blockbuster products from the MAC, the iMac, the iPod, iTunes, the iPhone, and 230 patents, not to mention his pioneering animation studio Pixar, Jobs reshaped several industries including telecommunications, entertainment, education, and how commercial transactions are conducted.

As he grew older and was diagnosed with cancer Jobs began the reflecting stage of his career. He began to speak more to the media about his career and personal life. He chose to speak at graduations and other venues where he hoped to have an impact on people's lives and careers. He agreed to a biography being written [6]. He opened up about career failures as well as successes in the hope of imparting wisdom that would help people to learn from his success and also from his failures.

Finally, Steve Jobs faced the fourth stage of the model by resigning from his duties as CEO of Apple and preparing for his death. What is interesting about this stage of Jobs' career and life is that so many people outside of his immediate circle followed his journey through this stage. Jobs' passing and reflections on his legacy were noted by the worldwide media. Businessweek devoted an entire issue to him, something they had never done in their history. Because of his inextricable relationship with Apple, questions were rampant about whether the death of its founder would also result in the death of his company. Entrepreneurial careers are unique in that the impact of losing the company's founder may be keenly felt and result in questions about the long term viability of their firm. Steve Jobs' career offers us a unique opportunity to explore the career stages and phases of high tech entrepreneurs.

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