

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS  
WHO REJECT OFFERS OF ADVANCEMENT

by

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# AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WHO REJECT OFFERS OF ADVANCEMENT

by

Elena Marie Papavero

## ABSTRACT

Employees and employers have a transitory relationship based on insecurity and low commitment. However, employees continue to be asked to take positions with increased responsibility. The purpose of this study was to develop a detailed description of how six software engineers who rejected advancement offers viewed their experiences and their organizations. Through interviews they shared their understanding of the advancement choices available to them, their experiences of making and living with decisions based on these choices, as well as their understanding of the culture where these choices were made. A qualitative design and phenomenological theoretical framework guided the investigation. The research had a unique aspect in that the researcher was employed as a software engineer at the same company as the participants during the study. A detailed narrative described the findings and participants' quotes were used to further enrich this description. Several significant value misalignments were found which influenced advancement rejection. Success was questioned as defined by advancement on a management ladder demanding sacrifice of families, personal lives, and sometimes, personal integrity. Fully employing the energies of those who reject advancement offers (as well as other employees who share their values) may require a

redefinition of success. However, those most likely to engage organizations in this redefinition may be the same employees who reject leadership positions. This study lends itself to further research about how individuals, organizations, and society at large can benefit when organizations support leaders who foster and practice values in alignment with a new definition of success.

# AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WHO REJECT OFFERS OF ADVANCEMENT

## Chapter I: Introduction

Reducing the inordinate rewards of ambition and our inordinate fears of ending up as losers would offer the possibility of a great change in the meaning of work in our society and all that would go with such a change. To make a real difference, such a shift in rewards would have to be a part of a reappropriation of the idea of vocation or calling, a return in a new way to the idea of work as a contribution to the good of all and not merely as a means to one's own advancement. (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996, pp. 287-288)

### Context: The New Psychological Contract

The nature of the psychological contract between employee and employer is changing rapidly. It is characterized by a transitory relationship that ends when it ceases to be mutually beneficial. This contract is transactional rather than relational and implies a shift in responsibility from employer to employee. Employees must now take full responsibility for their futures. In today's workplace the career path is no longer tied to one organization, or even to one function. The term "career" has taken on a whole new meaning, reflecting the precedence of self-development and individual survival over organizational loyalty. The choices to be made concerning careers are more complex than ever. The right decisions regarding movement into positions with increased responsibility become less clear. The new psychological contract has brought a "corresponding drop in the career aspirations of those who work in corporations" (Hall & Mirvis, 1996, p. 18).

Today's employee is caught in a massive transition. The workplace of today, especially in very large corporations with strong existing cultures, presents a multitude of alternate realities. Changes occur asynchronously. Visions of independence and career choice, learning opportunities and psychological success live in tenuous counterbalance with demands for increased productivity and the related increase in self-sacrifice. Employees are challenged to keep their perspective, while questioning their values and priorities. They must determine the appropriate level of commitment to give to an organization that may not value their long-term contributions. In today's workplace, employees are still asked to take positions with increased responsibility and commitment. However, their decisions must be made in an entirely new context, one with which they are neither familiar nor comfortable; a context empty of promises and beyond the illusion of just reward. Nonetheless, organizations continue to seek out leaders who are committed solely to the corporate mission.

This situation presents a paradox unique to our times, where employees require a level of personal security that the corporation cannot possibly provide, and corporations require a level of commitment and contribution that employees are not in a position to give. The tension produced by this conflict demands our attention. It provides a unique set of circumstances under which life decisions are based on issues that didn't exist in the near past. Exploring the attitudes and experiences of employees who decline advancement in this environment is necessary and important. Only they can bear witness to the growing conflict within themselves and their organizations, and the characteristics of the relationship that is its source.

## Background

This research explores the subjective experiences of six people who have rejected advancement offers in a corporate environment. It focuses on the process of rejecting advancement offers and the meanings ascribed to it as told by a group of people who have experienced this phenomenon. The participants in this study were identified by the organization for which they work as qualified to advance to a position requiring leadership qualities. The offer made clear the organization's belief that the employee's contribution at an advanced level was required. Nonetheless, the employee declined the offer.

All of the participants in this study work as software developers in research and development. They are all employed at the same high-tech company, which is both very large and very well known. In fact, I also work as a software developer at this same company. My insider status was important to this study. It was valuable as it allowed me access and a level of trust that may not have been easy to obtain otherwise. My immersion in our shared realities helped me to work with the participants with deep understanding on a mental level. My commitment to open myself to their individual experiences in a nonjudgmental way connected me with them on an emotional and spiritual level in ways that I had not anticipated. Through working with the participants my eyes were opened to truths that existed, but were not always expressed. As they told me their stories I became sensitized to the culture that we share and the decisions that we make every day in the context of that culture. I felt (and continue to feel) honored to be so clearly in the position of being both knower and known.

## Research Questions

This study investigates:

The experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and issues that lead to advancement offer rejection.

The experiences surrounding actual advancement offer rejection.

The experience of continuing to work in an organization after advancement offer rejection.

General views regarding advancement, organizations, and leadership.

## Motivation

I became interested in this topic while working in research and development at small, medium, and large companies. I myself have turned down advancement offers. I know of others who have done the same. In many organizations the entire process of offering a promotion to someone is formally shrouded in secrecy under the guise of protecting the individual. As Steele (1975) notes, "...informal norms permit open discussion of career decisions, but formal policy does not" (p. 104). It was through informal conversations and first-hand experiences that I gained a sense of the difficulty in making and living with such a decision.

People who reject advancement offers are of interest for a number of reasons. First, their behavior is outside of the expected norm. The assumption, at least in the United States, is that advancement is good. Making more money is better. And, as the opening quote of this section points out, no one wants to end up a loser. One has only to note the wonder expressed in the many media reports and books regarding those who opt to simplify their lifestyle. The "more is better" assumption is being challenged and alternatives are touted. However, the

people participating in this research have demonstrated their position through action. Second, unlike those who opt to leave the corporate world all together, they remain in the organization. They are, in a sense, declaring their priorities, making explicit the inconsistency between their interests and the organization's. Additionally, their relationship with the organization is often affected by this revelation. Steele (1975) observes, "... executives often get very angry when an employee rejects a planned move, for the rejection can be seen as either employee ingratitude or a poorly designed decision process" (p. 106).

### Significance of the Study

There is a lack of attention to the area of advancement rejection. There is a great deal of literature in related areas, such as leader development, leadership theory and practice, lifestyle choices, career planning, organizational culture, value misalignment, and role motivation. However, it is difficult to locate studies involving persons who rejected advancement offers. This study of the realities experienced by those who reject advancement contributes to a neglected area in organizational theory.

The experiences of those who reject advancement may not be common. But they are nonetheless important because they reveal details of the promotion process that are formally considered "taboo." Additionally, people who reject advancement offers are viewed in a different light than those who do not. I have come to realize that they form a subculture that, although not actively running counter to the needs of the organization (as a true counter-culture would), definitely does not entirely espouse its value system. This fact makes the experiences of the members of this subculture especially valuable. Because they have been forced to confront

the differences between their views and that of the organizational culture, their insights are useful in determining organizational motives and values. They also provide an alternative view to the one presented by the organization. This in turn generates areas on which the organization can focus in order to align its values more closely with those of its employees.

This study found several significant misalignments between organizations and employees. The great majority of the reasons given for rejecting advancement are value-laden. One of the major reasons cited was the inordinate amount of time and emotional investment that is required for management work. This illustrates clearly an organizational failure to value people and respect their personal lives. Other reasons given included a refusal to compromise integrity and principles to serve organizational goals, and a discomfort with politics and the social distinctions that exist between management and nonmanagement employees. The participants also reported a belief in internal or intrinsic motivation rather than the external reward system that they would have to enforce as managers.

Participants' experiences of their management and organizations revealed much about the systemic relationships that perpetuate these value misalignments. Success is measured by advancement on a management ladder by both the organization and society at large. However, advancement requires sacrificing families, personal lives, and perhaps, personal integrity. When asked their opinion of the motivations that drive others to accept advancement, the participants cited external power, control, and money. Considering these conditions, it is not unexpected that the participants also described many of the managers they have worked with as self-promoting and poor leaders. A system that defines success as control over others at the cost of

family and personal well-being would mainly attract people who: (1) do not understand the ramifications of their choice; (2) think that they have no choice in the matter; or (3) believe there is nothing amiss with this contract. The participants in this study exercised one other option by saying no. They would prefer a system with less management, more leadership, more respect, and more honesty. They see empowerment as an empty promise that simply brings responsibility without power or influence. Perhaps if they were empowered to change the organization rather than just a few peripheral processes, real change could take place.

### Theoretical Framework

The current study examines people's experiences of rejecting advancement offers from a phenomenological theoretical framework. Here, realities are seen as multiple, constructed, and holistic. The knower and known are interactive and inseparable. Idiographic approaches are just as valid as nomothetic, and it is impossible to distinguish causes and effects. Inquiry is necessarily value-based in method, topic, and results (Braud & Anderson, 1998).

Phenomenology involves the in-depth description of human experience and meanings. As mentioned previously, this research is concerned with the experience of advancement rejection. However, care was taken to include information about "what led up to that experience, what its outcomes or consequences might be, and what the concomitants and other factors associated with the experience are" (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 265).

Transpersonal phenomenology also guided the research. Although the experiences studied were not strictly transpersonal in nature, transpersonal inquiry is well suited to the study of human experience in general and it is especially useful when working with issues of meaning,

purpose and identity (Anderson & Braud, 1998). The transpersonal paradigm expands phenomenological theory by allowing for the extension of the information and patterns revealed through studying individual lives to laws of the world at large. Anderson & Braud describe this process:

Because the themes and variations of individual lives do reflect, mirror, and instantiate more general, universal principles and laws, however, a nomothetic end is reached nonetheless. In this case, the universal becomes known through the deep and intensive study of the particular and through a holographic process whereby even small but carefully chosen research samples reveal knowledge and principles that can be generalized validly to the population at large. (p. 240)

The purpose of this study was to uncover the meaning of the participants' experiences. Qualitative research inside the organization was a natural choice to reach this goal. As described by Jones (1988), qualitative research focuses on individual motives, as well as shared symbols, sentiments, and meanings. Qualitative studies provide more in-depth knowledge than quantitative studies, which focus on the quantification of human experience and ignore emotions, feelings, and passions. Jones states the necessity of using qualitative methods in organizational research, "The reasons for employing qualitative methods are that this mode of inquiry addresses some fundamental issues recurrent in organizations that quantitative research alone is unable to deal with or even quantify" (p. 46).

The means of gathering data for this study was qualitative (also known as intensive, in-depth, depth, open, unstructured, nondirective research, or free) interviewing (Creswell, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Weiss, 1994). This method is used to learn about people's interior, as well as exterior, experiences around the phenomenon being studied. It is also used to

understand what these experiences mean to them. It is appropriate to use qualitative interviewing to learn “about events and activities that cannot be observed directly” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 89).

In the context of this study, the literature review was not used as currency or as a building block, as is often the case with studies in the tradition of scientific inquiry. Instead, the literature review was used as a research tool for finding where others have (or have not) been before at the onset of the study. It was also used as a mirror by incorporating my reactions to the literature into the research. It also provided ideas and a framework that were used to generate a substantive frame for the interview guide. Massey's (1996) ideas on the purpose of literature reviews in qualitative research influenced my decision to use this approach.

### Organization of the Report

This report is organized around five chapters. The first chapter gives a general introduction to the issue under study, and describes the purpose, significance, and theoretical framework of the research. Chapter II provides the preliminary biases, suppositions, and hypotheses that I formed in the early stages of the study. This chapter also gives a review of literature relevant to the findings. Chapter III provides a detailed description of the methods and procedures employed. Chapter IV presents findings from the study, while a summary and discussion of the study is presented in Chapter V. Implications of the study for organizations and for future research can also be found in this final chapter. The report concludes with a short personal post-script.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

This literature review is presented in two sections. The first section examines the biases, suppositions, and hypotheses with which I approached the study. The second section reviews literature relevant to the study findings.

### Preliminary Biases, Suppositions, and Hypotheses

I came to this study with a bias towards value misalignment as a cause for advancement rejection. Value misalignment can occur for many reasons. A variety of things can be “valued” over advancement: family, friends, hobbies, nature, democracy, fairness, honesty, comfort, etc. I hoped that this study would reveal not only the causes of advancement rejection, but would also provide some clues as to how to reduce the conflicts that are their source. As Senge (1990) points out, “Only then [when the organization fosters values in alignment with peoples' own core] will it be possible for managers to stop living by two codes of behavior, and start being one person” (p. 312).

I reviewed much literature to create a knowledge base for the research experience. However, it was not expected that the phenomenon could be understood until the study was completed. The following are candidate areas that I assumed would relate to some of the experiences uncovered during the study.

### Autonomy or the Protean Career

Hall (1988) describes the new “protean” careerist as someone who takes care of him or herself first. Given the context of the new psychological contract described in the previous

chapter, it seems reasonable to assume that the participants in this study may be seeking autonomy. A result of this autonomy is a new attitude towards career moves, "With the new protean orientation, employees are more likely to question and reject moves (even promotions)" (p. 10).

### Self-development and Identity

Sims, Fineman, and Gabriel (1993) argue that the protestant work ethic is disintegrating. They see the achievement-motivated middle-class as more interested in developing self to attain meaning and identity. However, work continues to dominate as a source of identity in Western middle-class cultures. As Sims, Fineman, and Gabriel note, "The time has still to come when people introduce themselves as avid readers of Proust, as owner of a Gold GTI, as 'being in analysis' or as proud father of two delightful children, rather than by referring to the work that they do" (p. 218).

Handy (1996) notes that "professionals believe in what the Japanese call 'self-enlightenment,' knowing that if they do not continuously invest in their own learning and development they will be a wasting asset. What they ask of the organization is that it facilitates and encourage this process of continual learning by paying any costs and providing leaves of absence. In return, they owe a loyalty to the larger state, the organization" (p. 54). However, there is very little time for self-development in organizations, especially at the management level. Even at the line level full utilization is needed for company survival. Perhaps employees at the line level have more control of their own time. Those who reject advancement may be more interested in challenges that develop them as opposed to promotions that increase power and

status. They may also reject the belief that growth is derived from the hardship required of managers by most traditional organizations (Kovach, 1997).

### Entrepreneurship

As the rewards of the workplace versus the demands diminish, perhaps those who reject advancement in a large organization would be willing to lead in their own business. It might be easier for them to create an organization that reflects their values than to remain in a larger organization that is slow to change.

### Balance between Work and Family Life

Issues of time with family and the impact of relocating on the family most certainly affect decisions regarding advancement. London & Stumpf (1986) describe the situation, "Organizations should recognize that their decisions affect individuals' nonwork lives and that many employees are not willing to sacrifice family and leisure interests for their jobs" (p.46). Today, those who keep a balance between work and family probably experience conflict at work. Senge (1990) points out,

Very often, the person who takes such a stand will command the respect of their peers – many of whom may wish that they too could make a similar commitment. Nonetheless, such a stand can also generate conflicts, especially between managers who are committed to balance between work and family and those who are not. (...) Ultimately, the consequences of individuals' choices regarding work and family will depend, to a degree, on the overall organizational climate. (p. 310)

The increasing numbers of women in the workplace may have brought more attention to this conflict. "One of the implications of this dramatic change is that family issues spill over much

more into the managers' lives simply because there is no one else at home to whom the problem can be delegated" (Senge, 1990, p. 311). The increasing number of women in the workplace and the organizations' dependency on them makes the case to meet their needs stronger.

Family is not the only concern for employees. They value activities outside of the workplace that bring growth and pleasure. Organizations that are truly committed to their members and to developing the organization will make explicit the acceptability of committing to life outside work as well as inside.

#### Alternative Definitions of Success

Some people might prefer the opportunity to grow in their current position. As London & Stumpf (1986) state, "Career success needs to be redefined to include alternatives to promotion, such as indexes of competence, power, and status" (p. 44). This means that success, and the status that it brings, would be illustrated and recognized through skill and expertise. This benefits the company by exploiting the contributions of all employees, allowing the experience and judgment of people with more deep knowledge to influence important work and decisions.

It is time to question whether upward movement is the only movement essential to the success of the business. Are managers actually the most critical resource in organizations? For instance, is it not possible that key technical people and other individual contributors are just as important to the success of the business? If so, are they valued and rewarded as such by the organization?

Kovach (1997) explains that our assumptions about upward mobility are seriously flawed. There is no such thing as “arriving” as there is always something else to attain. Perhaps those who reject advancement offers do not see success as a linear pattern of successive “arrivings.”

### Discontent with Hierarchical Organizations and Leadership Hierarchy

There has been some reduction of hierarchy, but it has not been eliminated. Organizations are not willing to change their basic values and approaches. There are alternate structures that might make more sense to those who reject advancement in a hierarchical organization. Handy (1996) points out that “federalism reverses a lot of traditional management thinking. In particular, it assumes that most of the energy is out there, away from the center, and down there, away from the top. Power, in federalist thinking, is redistributed because no one person and no one group can be all-wise, all-knowing, all-competent” (p. 55). Someone with a more democratic philosophy might not be comfortable with advancing in the existing structure. However, they might be more amenable to leading in an organization that used the servant-leadership (The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991) model or the appreciative management (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990) model in a democratic or federalist structure.

### Class

The work one does carries a status level, creating class divisions in our hierarchical society. Sims, Fineman, & Gabriel (1993) refer to the fact that “class and work often reinforce each other” (p. 216). Class barriers can cause mistrust and misunderstanding. People who

reject advancement offers may not wish to leave their “home” class to enter another higher class, leaving the world they know best behind.

### Lack of Opportunity to Apply Feminine Principles

Helgesen (1995) underlines the importance of feminine principles of leadership such as “caring, making intuitive decisions, not getting hung up on hierarchy or all of those boring business-school management ideas; having a sense of work as being part of your life, not separate from it; putting your labor where your love is; being responsible to the world in how you use your profits; recognizing the bottom line should stay there – at the bottom” (p. 39).

Women are not just put at a disadvantage because their values are more holistic and integrative.

Women are also put at a distinct disadvantage because of the separation of work and home.

Their responsibilities are still seen as lying primarily with the family.

Change is occurring, but how quickly? Masculine values have dominated in society at large and in organizations for a very long time. It might be somewhat frightening and a little discouraging when a woman is faced with leading in an organization that does not allow values that are her way of being.

## Engineers and Career Advancement: Literature Relevant to the Findings

As the participants in this study are all software developers (also known as software engineers<sup>1</sup>), issues that are related to technical and engineering careers are reviewed here. More general work and organizational issues directly relevant to the findings are also included.

### Engineering

#### Engineers and Advancement.

Throughout the 1980s, there was much interest around the unique advancement issues faced by engineers. In a study of advancement in engineering careers, Bailyn (1982) found engineers "need alternative forms of recognition to keep them effective" (p. 45). The nature of their work causes engineers to face a contradiction between being effective and at the same time advancing their careers. Career promotion requires work to be visible, whereas technical work is often solitary and does not require contact with management. To remedy this situation, Bailyn suggests that management should not be used as a reward that represents status and recognition. Instead, engineers should engage in temporary managerial assignments that do not require a long-term commitment.

Bailyn and Lynch's 1983 study on engineering careers found many engineers would like to retain their involvement in technical work because they desire the "unambiguous and immediate gratifications obtainable from solving concrete technical problems" (p.281). However, engineers would also like to use their experience and wisdom to affect a larger part of

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity, software engineers will be referred to as "engineers" throughout this chapter.

the organization. Ritti (1971) also points out that engineers feel they could contribute more if they had a larger scope of influence in their organizations. Advancing to management will not meet both of these criteria. Remaining narrowly focused on a technical area gives autonomy, but reduces the engineer's ability to influence organizational decisions. Organizational forms that allow engineers to remain technical, but also successfully use their knowledge to further the organization's goals are needed. Additionally, temporary technical assignments and rewards based on length of service and professional demonstration should be employed. Assignments that involve reporting directly to higher level management, greater financial rewards, and "public signals of changed status" (p. 46) may meet engineers' needs. These alternatives to advancement are important in another respect as they give young engineers the message that there are choices other than the standard career pattern.

Bailyn (1991) later described two ambiguities and inconsistencies found in R&D career paths: (1) No unambiguous, agreed upon criteria by which to gauge a particular individual's performance, and (2) Contradictions embedded in career paths and procedures make it difficult to get the accurate self-understanding needed to shape one's career. She proposes a hybrid career where tasks consist of multiple work assignments with different evaluations and rewards. Careers consist of discrete, discontinuous chunks of five to ten years. Workers would also have a second, minor assignment to preclude obsolescence. The career discontinuities are preplanned and therefore not seen as failures. Because tasks are not given as rewards there would be no status attached to a particular task, such as supervision.

### Engineers and Dual Ladders.

Dual ladder models received much attention in the 1980s. Allen and Katz's 1986 study describes some failings of this approach. Because prestige is afforded only to those who move into management, engineers moved to a technical ladder may hear the message that they are not successful by organizational and societal standards. This can result in demotivation. The criteria for technical promotion often become corrupted, and failed managers are sometimes "dumped" onto the technical ladder. This results in a devaluing of technical promotion.

Dalton and Thompson (1986) note that dual ladders were expected to bring engineers "possibilities for respected contributions, influence, and organizational legitimacy" (p. 88) equivalent to those offered to managers. This expectation is usually violated because the dual ladder approach raises a false hope that "suggests that a person on the technical ladder can be highly valued by the organization by being a competent, solo, technical contributor" (p. 90). However, organizations make it difficult or impossible for engineers to play anything other than a narrow technical role. Organizations also promote reward systems that discriminate against highly contributive nonmanagers.

McKinnon's 1987 study of "steady-state people" shows that dual ladders fail because they are based on a faulty assumption that all engineers are motivated by advancement. He maintains that many engineers are "steady-state" professionals who are motivated by the challenge of unique problems. He suggests that organizations are ignoring this valuable segment of their employees and should establish systems that motivate them and "not leave them feeling defeated, left behind, or like second class citizens" (p. 32).

### Engineers and Motivation.

Schein (1975) defines someone who is motivated by the actual work being done as having a *technical-functional competence* career anchor. Link (1998) is a toymaker who describes himself in a way that resembles many engineers who reject advancement:

I don't want to be a manager. I want to be a woodworker. A lot of the work in these toys is tedious. (...) It could be done by someone less skilled. I could bring in five or six workers and increase my output quite a bit. Then I would have to spend more time marketing, traveling, wholesaling. Pretty soon I wouldn't be doing woodwork anymore. And that's not a bad direction, its just not one I've chosen. (p. 2)

As Schein notes, this type of person "will leave a company rather than be promoted out of their technical/functional area" (p. 15). However, they may feel guilty about their lack of traditional success and ambition. Engineers are pushed in the management direction early in their careers. In a study contrasting the careers of engineers in Japan and the United States Westney (1985) found that engineers in the United States are expected to move into supervisory roles much earlier in their careers than their Japanese counterparts. She suggests that American companies that are recruiting target high-caliber engineers who are being forced to move into management.

Organizations are interested in retaining the energies and motivation of engineers.

Badawy (1988) gives five conditions that demotivate engineers: (1) Communications gaps between engineers and managers resulting from differences in values, attitudes, goals, and career orientations; (2) Inappropriate managerial practices reflecting inadequate understanding of engineers' expectations as professionals; (3) Failure to develop task-related motivational systems; (4) Inadequate reward systems; and (5) Inadequate motivational systems for older engineers. Badawy sees motivation as a state of mind, not something you do to people.

Therefore, organizations cannot motivate people; only people can motivate themselves. Open opportunities for advancement, public recognition, and accomplishment are needed, as well as creative work climates with freedom, flexibility and autonomy.

#### Engineers and Values.

Some engineers may not share the values normally associated with managers. Dalton and Thompson (1986) describe two types of managers who began their careers as engineers. "Oriented" managers identify with economic and pragmatic values, and "conflicted" managers identify with the pursuit of truth rather than money and power. They are called "conflicted" because their values are incongruent with their roles as managers. Oriented managers are seen as having less potential than conflicted managers have. However, they move higher up in the organization than conflicted managers. Conflicted managers are dissatisfied with their careers, even though their subordinates are more successful than those of oriented managers are. It is interesting to note that Schein (1984) identifies cultural values as bases of career legitimacy. In the United States power motives are legitimate, whereas in other countries, such as Australia, this is not the case. Oriented managers might end up as conflicted managers in another country.

#### Engineers and Managers.

Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) describe the relationship between engineers and their managers. Engineers see themselves as artists and their manager's job is to keep them to schedules that they both agree are unrealistic. Engineers and higher management do not usually think very well of each other.

Card (1995) describes the relationship of management and programmers (or software engineers): "The environment that nurtures creative programmers kills management and marketing types - and vice versa" (p. 208). He describes the programmers' attitude towards managers: "Like soldiers or artists, you don't care about the opinions of civilians. You're building something intricate and fine. They'll never understand it" (p. 208). He also describes the manager's perspective:

Instead of finding assembly lines of productive workers, they quickly discover that their product is produced by utterly unpredictable, uncooperative, disobedient, and, worst of all, *unattractive* people who resist all attempts at management. Put them on a time clock, dress them in suits, and they become sullen and start sabotaging the product. Worst of all, you can sense that they are making fun of you with every word they say. (p. 209)

He likens managing engineers to "beekeeping" (p. 209). However, when managers attempt to control the bees productivity is lost.

## Work

### Advancement.

Metcalf and Briody's (1995) study on career advancement and organizational change showed an overemphasis on advancement, and an undervaluing of experience and performance. They found that nonmanagerial track employees are not viewed as "successful" and are far less valued in terms of rewards and recognition. Allen and Katz (1990) see the cause of this disparity based in a lack of visible power for nonmanagement employees, who do not have any subordinates to control. Metcalf and Briody suggest that creating and valuing generalist and

specialist career paths allow the organization to take advantage of individual strengths that may be wasted otherwise.

Stoner, Ference, Warren, and Christensen (1980) found that some people are self-plateaued because they see the costs of advancement outweighing the benefits. Organizations may view such individuals as less committed, whereas others accept and respect the decision. As Jackall (1988) describes the decision to plateau, he says "they are unwilling to sacrifice family life or free-time activities to put in the extraordinarily long hours at the office required in the upper circles of their corporations" (p. 43). People may also have a realistic idea of the limited opportunities available to them. Additionally, they may not think that their personal style and social skills match those of higher management. Promotion to management often depends on meeting social criteria and ethos "established by the authority and political alignments" (p. 43) of the corporation. Jackall describes how this affects the ethics of those at the top:

The ethos that they fashion turns principles into guidelines, ethics into etiquette, values into tastes, personal responsibility into an adroitness at public relations, and notions of truth into credibility. Corporate managers who become imbued with this ethos pragmatically take their world as they find it and try to make that world work according to its own institutional logic. They pursue their own careers and good fortune as best they can within the rules of their world. (p. 204)

He further describes how managers' moral compromises preserve the institutional culture:

As it happens, given their pivotal institutional role in our epoch, they help create and re-create, as one unintended consequence of their personal striving, a society where morality becomes indistinguishable from the quest for one's own survival and advantage. (p. 204)

Kofodimos (1993) points out that through our own quest for an ideal self, we subordinate our needs to those of the organization. We are willing to allow the organization to define the terms of our personal development. We "subordinate our own internally derived visions for ourselves to organizationally derived requirements" (p. 78) in order to advance. Ambition originates from "the interplay between our shadow-side fears and feelings of inadequacy, and the promise of alleviation of these psychic pains if we gain advancement in the organization" (p. 74).

Hammer (1996) thinks that there is no longer a need for titles. He calls for the elimination of managerial layers. Outstanding achievements are publicly acknowledged with rewards, but not promotions. Ladders are replaced with a series of concentric circles. Careers mean personal growth. He points out that only a few people rise to the top of a company. Success needs to be redefined not by "putting yourself into the position of commanding others but of achieving the highest level of professional growth and personal performance of which you are capable" (p. 63). He gives an example of a company that uses this model by having three tracks: writers, product and technology specialists, and business leaders. The leadership track is not preferred in any way, including compensation.

#### Gender and Race.

According to Valian (1998) success in men and women is interpreted differently. When a man succeeds, he is seen as more competent. When a woman succeeds, her success is attributed to luck, ease of task, or great effort. This attribution takes place to preserve the observer's original gender schemas. Women are less successful than men because they are given

less credit for their achievements. The negative aspect of this situation for men is that they are required to move to high professional levels, and when they fail, their masculine identity is compromised. Women see success as "due to random or uncontrollable factors" (p. 183) and this weakens the "causal chain between ability and success" (p. 183). Men become overly committed to professional success, while women inappropriately devalue their own abilities. Valian suggests that women change their views on success and failure, seeing failures and rejections as normal, while men should place less focus on work. Valian also found that men and women with business careers have very similar values, although women place a higher value on a well-rounded life and men tend to overinvest in salary, prestige, and achievement.

Freeman (1990) notes that men sometimes withhold cooperation from female managers. Also, newly promoted female managers face many obstacles involving gender. However, "gender is not acknowledged as an element in the competence equation by either the men or the women in the corporation" (p. 202). Women must "prove themselves despite being female and as though they are not" (p. 203). As a result of these conditions women opt to leave corporations in greater numbers than men: "...if corporate women are dropping out, it is not because of unmet, subconscious needs for connection but rather because of structural obstacles and persistent, albeit subtle discrimination" (p. 221).

Graves (1997) notes that African Americans experience more stress at work due to the fact that they must modify their behavior in order to conform to culture of the majority. As they move to management, they often find that they are not as well prepared as "dominant white males" (p. 113). They must not appear threatening, but at the same time they are sometimes

accused of not being assertive enough. Black women experience both racism and sexism as barriers to success. All in all, Graves states that blacks "must always be superior just to compete" (p. 113).

Malveaux (1998) considers the increase in technology jobs to be a mixed blessing for African Americans who have less access to computers at home and at work. She also sees the move towards promoting the rights of individual workers who have skills that are in demand, over those of groups of workers who do not, as very dangerous. She sees a "new set of inequities, based overtly not on race or gender, but employer size and access to technology" (p. 2). The less hierarchic the labor market, the less security and protection present, with a loss of the power of collective bargaining.

Eisler (1998) presents two patterns of human interaction called the *partnership* and *dominator* models. The partnership model is characterized by an egalitarian social structure, where the "distinction between male and female is not regarded as the basis for rankings of superiority and inferiority" (p. 20). The dominator orientation is towards a "hierarchic, top-down, or authoritarian organization; the view that males are superior to females; and a high degree of tension, fear, and institutionalized violence" (p. 20). She sees societies assumed to be very different as inherently similar in that they all use one of these models. In dominator societies diversity is viewed as superiority or inferiority. The "male-as-master/female-as-subordinate model" (p. 21) moves to group vs. not-group judgement, which in turn is generalized to anything that is different: race, religion, or ethnicity. She further suggests that dividing humanity in half by gender creates a "basic template" (p. 21) that is used to devalue diversity. Partnership societies

do not consider difference to be "an appropriate reason for excluding members of one gender, race, or other type of group from positions of social governance" (p. 21). Eisler also notes that societies where there is a definite male preference tend to "persecute those who are different" (p. 21). Here, men and boys equate their identity with domination, conquest, and success.

Some organizations are beginning to follow a partnership model. As they willingly employ and promote women and minority members they begin to naturally move towards new organizational models. There is less authoritarian management, more intrinsic motivation, less punishment, and more leaders who elicit "from others their highest creativity and productivity" (p. 22). She suggests that using diversity to dominate and exploit is a cultural pattern that reflects our entire social system and belief system. She looks forward to moving towards a partnership model where: (1) differences are valued; (2) no one is seen as below or above another, and (3) living and working become less tense, more interesting, and more creative.

Vanderkolk and Young (1991) note that in the United States "white males are projected to dwindle to a single digit percentage of new entrants to the work force by the year 2000" (p. 11). However, most senior executives are white males whose values are out of sync with the future workplace. To remedy this situation Vanderkolk and Young call for changes that "assure access by women and minority men to positions at every level in the organization" (p.11).

#### Values.

According to Natale and Neher (1997), work is no longer honorable. Our "fears, warped aspirations, maimed self-images, and general self-centeredness" (p. 240) create this

situation. Profits take precedence over human costs. They cite four reasons for working: (1) intrinsic satisfaction, (2) survival, (3) social connectedness, and (4) positive self-perception. Self-expression enables positive self-perception. Natale and Neher propose that profit must be measured in more than productivity, dollars, and power. Decisions and actions should be based on "mutual responsibility, accountability, honor, and pride" (p. 246). To accomplish this, values should be clarified and negotiated continually at work.

Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1996) view technical competence as "enclosed in a life pattern that we have designated 'career'" (p. 149) where rational problem solving and social contribution are subordinated to standards of success measured by income and consumption. The intrinsic value of the work is then doubted, especially when the employee must operate in a large bureaucracy where energy is used to manipulate rules and roles to get anything at all done and to advance. They describe how in bureaucratic individualism "freedom to make private decisions is bought at the cost of turning over most public decisions to bureaucratic managers and experts" (p. 149). The consent of the governed "has been abandoned in all but form" (p. 149).

### Ethics.

Goodpaster (1995) coined the term *teleopathy*, which means the unbalanced pursuit of purpose. Symptoms of teleopathy include fixation (where the goal owns the person), rationalization (in the form of loyalty and legality), and detachment (separation of head and heart). Business ethics are a response to teleopathy. This brings the following consequences: alienation, stress, unreasonable demands on work time, loss of creativity, and loss of

community. Individuals can become telepathic simply by participating in an organization that exhibits it, and organizations can contract teleopathy because of the values of key managers. The root cause of the symptoms is "adopting counterfeit sources of moral legitimacy" (p. 45). He believes that it makes no sense to embrace teleopathy's opposite (unfocused, empowering, long term). Rather, the elusiveness of wisdom must be recognized, as well as its resistance to capture by any paradigm. Partiality (self-fulfillment) and impartiality (objectivity) must be managed and balanced. He describes this balance: "Leaders who understand this will no doubt seek to be servant leaders - but they will not relinquish their responsibility to guide those they serve. They will listen and empower, but they will not hide behind these ideals as shields against accountability" (p. 46).

#### Work and Personal Life.

According to Kofodimos (1993) it is more acceptable for professional life to invade personal life than for the reverse to happen. However, Rifkin (1995) cites studies that show that a growing number of people want to devote more time to their personal lives. These people are willing to advance more slowly or not at all in return for more leisure time. Rifkin believes that the business community needs to be challenged by communities of like-minded interests to shorten the workweek. Hochschild (1997) also calls for collective action, where workers challenge the organization to limit work time.

Galinsky, Bond, and Friedman (1993) found that when workers' needs align with workplace goals there is more job satisfaction, commitment, loyalty, hard work, and initiative. These results all benefit the company and improve the work-family balance.

## Organizations

### Politics.

Cropanzano and Grandey (1998) define politics as "behavior directed toward obtaining or maintaining social control" (p. 134). Political influence tactics are used to acquire power, or legitimate and rationalize a decision. They view politics that are sanctioned by the organization or benefit the organization as positive. However, most people do not like being manipulated, especially for someone else's benefit and they have a negative view of politics. Cropanzano and Grandey point out that ethical dilemmas concerning politics come about when economic ends clash with human concerns. This happens when a person's moral code emphasizes human well being, while the person must operate in an environment that puts profit first.

### Trust.

According to Ryan & Oestreich (1991) the root of fear in organizations is the distrust that supervisors and employees have for each other: "Each side assumes that the other operates from a philosophy of self-interest. Each is expected to try to achieve its self-interest at the expense of the other party" (p. 86).

Steele (1975) describes a "Great Lie" theory used by higher level managers when they lie to subordinates "for the good of both them and the world" (p.25). The purported aims of this type of lie are to: (1) project an optimistic image of the future so that people continue to give their best efforts, and (2) protect lower-ranking people from anxiety and burdens handled by higher level people. The premise is that when the truth is revealed, the lower-level people will be grateful. This is far from what actually happens. This type of lie creates mistrust, and gives what

Steele calls an *insanity signal* that makes subordinates question their leader's connection with reality. Additionally, keeping the truth from people blocks them from developing their abilities to handle reality in a natural way. In fact, leaders use the "Great Lie" not to protect the masses, but to protect the leader's image. Most importantly it is used to control and to retain plans of action that might disappear if subordinates knew what was happening.

Shaw (1997) sees the need for alignment between words and actions. Words and actions must also be consistent across situations and over time. He cites a survey that found that a majority of employees do not believe what management says and they do not believe they are well informed about company plans. He suggests that managers define a clear purpose, confront reality, have open agendas, and follow through.

#### Control.

In their study on emotional expression and organizational culture Van Maanen and Kunda (1988) define different levels of "culture control" used by managers in organizations to control object, body, mind, and emotions. They point out a positive of this situation:

...individuality seems to depend most on those moments when we move in different directions from the crowd, modify the calls of others, or experience emotions seemingly deviant from those around us. An organization is, in this light, something of a foil against which we can shape our identities and sharpen our emotional wits. (p. 93)

Kunda (1992) describes a company culture where bureaucratic control was replaced by a more insidious normative control. First, policies are introduced to minimize the use and significance of traditional bureaucratic control. These are complimented with policies that increase employee involvement, maximize a sense of ownership, remove barriers to

communication and movement, and remove symbols and realities of status and formal control. At this point, bureaucratic control is replaced by a decentralized and deeper control that demands proper member role behavior, as policed by other members. This normative control is maintained by "creating and selectively applying and interpreting ambiguous definitions of reality" (p. 222). People in this company become "submerged in a community of meaning that is to some extent monopolized by management" (p. 224). Finally, in the "name of humanism, enlightenment, and progress" (p. 225) the intense efforts of employees are elicited "not by stirring their experiential life, but, if anything, by degrading and perhaps destroying it" (p. 225).

According to Bailyn (1993) empowerment cannot happen without rethinking beliefs on control: "Only if a significant degree of operational control is relinquished by managers will true empowerment be possible, and only if employees' operational autonomy includes control over their time will their needs be met" (p. 96).

Roberts (1997) is a *horse whisperer* who trains horses using a philosophy that can be applied to the workplace:

People must be allowed to fail, but do not protect the lazy or incompetent; above all, people must be allowed to succeed and be rewarded if they meet or exceed the terms of the contract. (...) For centuries humans have said to horses *you do what I tell you or I'll hurt you*. Humans still say that to each other, still threaten and force and intimidate. I am convinced that my discoveries with horses also have value in the workplace, in the educational and penal systems, in the raising of children. At heart I am saying that no one has the right to say *you must* to an animal—or to another human. (pp. 244-245)

### Commitment.

Bailyn (1993) argues that a definition of commitment that does not recognize that people have other obligations in addition to their jobs is not based on mutual respect and trust. She points out that commitment "transforms an instrumental, contractual relationship into an open-ended moral bond. High-commitment organizations co-opt for the public sphere the private feelings of full responsibility and total personal involvement" (p. 107). She believes that individuals should be able to limit commitment to the "responsible completion of tasks" (p. 131). Alternating times of low and high commitment should be welcomed. Those who wish to work longer hours than the work requires should do so for intrinsic reasons: "This would ensure that it is only intrinsic pleasure that motivates such an excessive input of time to work" (p. 134).

Regarding the high commitment that seems to be required of managers, Bailyn (1993) points out that the excessive demands of management are "assumed to reflect the requirements of the work" (p. 47). However, these demands could be constructed as a way of "measuring individual worth in situations where performance criteria are difficult or impossible to specify" (p. 47). She notes that managers must be seen giving their all to work; their sacrifices must be visible. She also adds a cautionary note on how increasing career flexibility might interact with this situation: "We must therefore be careful that we do not change corporate careers by increasing apparent flexibility while at the same time increasing the unboundedness of expectations" (p. 53). She further states that the goal should be to work smart, not long. Face time should no longer be a valid indicator of performance.

## Management and Leadership.

Managing and leading are seen as two different roles in much of the literature. Huber (1998) views the management and leadership roles as different but not mutually exclusive. The roles form a continuum with some overlap. She uses the analogy of management as the left brain and leadership as the right brain. The right brain (leader) comes up with ideas, and the left brain (management) executes them. In discussing leadership she points out that power is ethically neutral until it is used in a context. The shared power of relational leadership can lead to positive use of power and transformation. She describes servant leadership, which was introduced by Robert Greenleaf, as a philosophy where leaders sometimes follow and followers sometimes lead. Servant leaders aim to replace competition with community. She also contrasts characteristics of Newtonian and Quantum organizations to show the path of change that is occurring: Certainty - Uncertainty, Continuous - Discontinuous, Linear - Nonlinear, Reductionist - Creative, Isolated - Contextual, Hierarchical - Nonhierarchical, Either/Or - Both/And, Actuality - Potentiality. To Huber, leading means affecting change that creates a better world.

Boyett and Conn (1991) also see differences in management and leadership roles:

Managers have employees. Leaders have followers. Managers command and control. Leaders inspire and empower. His or her position or title legitimizes the manager's authority. His or her vision and ability to communicate that vision to followers legitimize the leader's authority. Managers seek stability, predictability, and to be in control. Leaders seek flexibility and change. (p. 146)

Hollander (1993) sees leadership as a process involving followership. Followers give leaders legitimacy, which in turn gives the leader influence and power. Legitimacy comes through credibility, trust, loyalty and the leader's effectiveness in exercising power and influence.

Followers are leaders in a way because they can take part in a two-way influence and power exchange.

Block (1993) cautions that in the midst of moving to flat organizations managers should not merely stay in place and become labeled "coaches." This continues to keep the managing and doing of things separate. He sees management skills such as coaching, teaching, and communicating as important, but from a staff position, in support of those who receive these services. He also believes that wealth must be redistributed in organizations: "It becomes difficult to espouse partnership, empowerment, and a service orientation while those at the top enhance their wealth at the expense of those at the lower levels" (p. 165). Group outcomes should be rewarded rather than individual outcomes, and pay systems must no longer be kept secret.

#### Teams.

Boyett and Boyett (1996) make some important distinctions between self-managed teams and self-leading teams. Self-managed teams work within boundaries set by others. Self-led teams set their own goals and gain intrinsic satisfaction from their accomplishments. Self-leading teams are small (four to twelve people). The team chooses the leader and defines the leadership role. They are provided with information on overall organizational strategy in order to make their decisions.

Koch & Godden (1997) argue that corporations need individual leaders and small, driven teams. Organizational complexity needs to be reduced. No one is to be primarily a manager; everyone is a doer. They do not see management work as valuable unless present in a classical, large, hierarchical corporation. They think that management is not necessary as a

separate activity, even in large corporations. Goal setting can be handled by those closest to the customers, and new initiatives and changes can be achieved by a handful of leaders. Self-managed teams do not need to be organized and supervised, and less management reduces the need for managers that manage managers. Empowerment has not been used successfully in concert with hierarchical management in any large corporation because it is an "inefficient way of running a large corporation that benefits from market power and economies of scale..." (pp. 60-61). They think that it is an approach that can only be used in small-scale enterprises.

### Summary of Literature Review

I began this study wondering why someone would reject an advancement offer and what information this decision might reflect about the individual making it and the organization and society to which the individual belongs. The literature provides some answers. A new psychological contract is described that is transient and transactional. This contract moves employees to regard their self-development as primary so that they can retain their skills, security, and mobility. At the same time organizations are asking employees to sacrifice personal time and self-development, especially at the management level. Engineers are especially concerned with retaining their skills, but they are also looking for alternative definitions of success that allow them to contribute more fully to their organizations.

Employees are also concerned about upholding their personal values and are especially conflicted regarding the balancing of work and family priorities. They are carefully weighing the cost of success and questioning its definition. This in turn causes current corporate values that consider profits as paramount at any human cost to be challenged. Hierarchical organization is

being questioned, which brings with it a questioning of the need for management at all. Engineers experience an especially difficult situation where their successes are not rewarded or recognized unless they move into a management position. However, they will not be able to exercise their technical skills as managers. Dual ladders did not remedy this situation, as they never brought the status, reward, recognition, and influence promised.

Women experience unique circumstances regarding success and advancement. Their successes are not recognized as their own doing, but their failures are attributed to their gender. Often when they do advance, they experience increased conflict and their position and authority are not recognized and often resented. Members of minority groups must overcome high levels of stress at work, and face special problems as managers due to the fact that they must change their behavior to match the culture of the corporation in order to succeed. They must temper their assertiveness, while at the same time prove that they are superior and exemplary. The experiences of women and minority group members can be attributed to a society that lives a dominator model. Organizations that employ and advance women and minorities tend to move naturally towards a partnership model where differences are valued and honored.

In the midst of all of this change, a special kind of leadership model is being brought to the forefront that recognizes the honor in all work and the importance of all contributions. Hierarchy brings with it class distinctions that run counter to notions of self-leading teams, trust, respect, open communications, and the equitable sharing of rewards. This is another area where engineers find it especially difficult to "fit in" with their organizations. They prefer a model of

creative freedom and internal motivation that is team-based and very difficult (perhaps impossible) to implement in a hierarchical organization.

There are some alarms being sounded that observe the replacement of overt control in organizations with a more insidious type that plays to people's internal needs and motivations. These new forms of control create a number of conditions that produce an environment rife with cognitive dissonance. People are given a sense of community and belonging, while at the same time peer "policing" is encouraged. They are told that their management respects and trusts them while they are routinely not informed or misinformed. They are told that people matter in one sentence and then told that they must sacrifice their well being and that of their loved ones for the corporate mission in the next. Commitment continues to be forced, but more elusive tools are used.

## Chapter III: Methods

### Design of the Study

The purpose of this research was to discover how six engineers who rejected advancement came to their decisions, and how they are experiencing these decisions and their workplace. The literature review in the previous chapter described a context that could affect the career decisions and work experiences of any employee, including these engineers.

This study used a qualitative design to gather information in order to relate and analyze the personal experiences of the participants. During semi-structured, in-depth, qualitative interviews participants were asked about various aspects of their experiences of advancement, advancement choices, advancement rejection, and work. Qualitative interviewing is open-ended, and this allowed unanticipated data to emerge that later became the basis for further inquiry.

### The Participants

The participants form a convenience sample. Generalization from this sample was not the intention of this study, although it was considered a possibility. Six participants, three white men, two white women, and one woman of Asian descent, who have rejected advancement offers were selected based on referrals. The participants range in age from 37 to 41. They have from 13 to 19 years of experience in their current line of work, and seven to 18 years of experience with their current organization. Five of the six participants are married, and four of

the married participants have from two to five children. The children range in age from one to fifteen.

The participant referrals were made from my network of associates at a large research and development corporation. Their position on advancement, although not formally publicized, is well known informally in their working community. The participants have a varied order of experiences around advancement offer rejection. For instance, some went on to accept offers later in their careers, while others accepted offers early in their careers and then rejected offers later in their careers. Still others never accepted an advancement offer. The majority of the offer rejections took place at the organization where the participants currently work. However, several of the offer rejections occurred at organizations where the participants previously worked.

This research had a unique aspect; this being the fact that I had access to the research context as a full participant (or observing participant) because I am an employee doing similar work at the same organization that employs the participants. According to Czarniawska (1998), "Research techniques that help grasp the social drama as it appears to the actors, their views of their roles, and their assumptions about the unfolding plot are needed" (p. 24). She continues by recommending that to execute this model the researcher should assume the role of an organizational member. However, superior to that model in her view, is one where the employee is a researcher. It is through what she describes as "detached involvement" that this model was used successfully in this study.

All data collected was kept confidential. Only the transcriber and myself viewed transcripts of the interviews. It was considered important that the participants remained anonymous throughout the process. The data is presented in an integrated form. Therefore, the identity of any one participant is not discernable in this report. Quotes do not contain information that could be used to identify its originator. An informed consent form (see Appendix A) was presented to each participant, and the participant and myself signed it.

I engaged in research collaboration with each participant. Together, we worked to produce useful information. I introduced initial topics from an interview guide, but I was also very open to following topics that emerged during the interview process.

### Researcher Tasks

In the transpersonal phenomenological paradigm the knower and the known are one. My role in this study was that of an observing participant and an interviewer. Further, the research was informed through my compassion and that of the participants as described by the discipline of intuitive inquiry. Intuitive inquiry is often used to explore transpersonal experience and aims to include the "full dimensions of human awareness and experience" (Anderson, 1998, p. 71). Certain aspects of intuitive inquiry were appropriated during this study to fully appreciate and express the participants' experiences. Compassion allowed the value and significance of the data to emerge. The unique and personal voice of the individual researcher was emphasized, as in heuristic methods. The recognition of social and political consequences of the participant's actions, as in feminist theory, was considered. Anderson sees an understanding of the personal-political-universal circle as essential to compassionate intuitive inquiry. Other aspects of intuitive

inquiry used during this research were reflective listening, ritualized intention, and intuitive synthesis of results.

## Procedures

### Data Collection

Data was collected via audio taping, post-interview notes of researcher impressions, and transcripts of the audio taped conversations. An interview guide (see Appendix B) provided a substantive framework for the interviews. Process notes, including day-to-day activities, methodological notes, and decision-making procedures were kept. Personal notes were kept related to intentions, reactions, motivations, and experiences with participants. The interview guide was reviewed and revised as areas of concern emerged.

The interviews, which ranged in length from one to two hours, took place in January and February 1999 in private meeting rooms at the participants' place of work.

### Data Analysis

This study was carried out in an iterative fashion. Data analysis was done using guidelines from Creswell (1998) and Weiss (1994). Data was analyzed throughout the data collection phase, interviewing continued during the data analysis phase, and analysis continued during the reporting phase. During the process of ongoing discovery themes were noted, and concepts and propositions were used to interpret the data collected after each interview to improve the research focus. Interview statements were horizontalized. The data was then coded after collection to organize it according the themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and

propositions found during the discovery process. The data was then sorted into the coding categories found. A word processing tool (Microsoft Word) was used to search, organize, and manipulate the data. Data was then discounted by searching for solicited statements, indirect data, and researcher bias.

### Reporting

The resulting report was written in what Van Maanen (1988) calls a realist style. The researcher acted as a viewpoint presenter for the participants. A process known as reflection was used to increase the report's quality. At the end of each interview, the researcher reflected and summarized impressions of the interview content and process. The participant then reflected on the interview and researcher reflections. This process of integrating reflection information into the research process created an immediate feedback loop. This process was used rather than member checking due to my agreement with theoretical and ethical concerns raised by Sandelowski (1993). She sees stories as "time-bound interpretive, political, moral acts" (p. 5) that cannot be corrected at a later time without a complete reanalysis. I was also concerned that member checking might compromise participant anonymity despite my best efforts to integrate the findings and disguise identity.

As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state, "All observations are filtered through the researcher's selective lens" (p. 160). As an engineer in the same organization as the participants, I could not help but relate to their stories with compassion and understanding. Their views sometimes surprised me and sometimes confirmed my own experiences. The sum of what they shared with me is presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter IV: Findings

### Introduction

This research project was undertaken to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of people who reject advancement offers. All of the participants in this study work in the field of software development (also known as software engineering<sup>2</sup>) and have at some time rejected an advancement offer. They represent experienced engineers, men and women of similar ages, married and unmarried, parents and non-parents.

Six engineers were interviewed to discover how they experienced rejecting an advancement offer. Additionally, other experiences surrounding advancement rejection were explored in the areas of career choice, advancement options, and views on advancement, organizations, management, and leadership. This was done to produce a deeper understanding of the contexts in which the decisions were made and lived.

Similar themes run through all of the interviews. As categories emerged, I contrasted the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs found in the interviews to form a progression that would represent the rejection decision as a process consisting of a series of experiences rather than a single event. This led to the discovery of the following category threads:

*Choices* - Why the engineers chose their work, their view of their advancement choices, and their memories of past management experiences.

*The Offer* - The context of the rejected offer, reactions to the offer and the rejection, and the results of the rejection.

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<sup>2</sup> For brevity, the participants will be referred to as "engineers" throughout this chapter.

*Experiences of Organizations* - Work satisfaction, contrast of the engineers' personal commitment and values with those of the organization, and observations and experiences of the organizational culture including management quality; the affects of gender on leadership; differences between levels of employees; and power in the organization.

*Ideas on Organizations, Leadership, and Management* - The engineers' ideas on ideal organizations, including descriptions of the roles of leaders and managers.

*Leading a Balanced Life* - The engineers' assessment of success, self-development, and balance in their lives.

*Future Plans* - The engineers' hopes and desires for the future.

These threads represent the organization of this chapter. Each section begins with a short introduction and ends with a summary. Distinguishing characteristics have been changed when the engineers' views and experiences are expressed to maintain confidentiality for them. However, I have included their words when necessary to express the reality of their experiences and the energy behind their thoughts. In most cases their experiences have been integrated to present a composite view. This was done to protect their identities, which was a definite concern for the engineers. I would venture to say that this fact alone reveals much about the organizational culture.

### Choices

The engineers in this study chose to reject advancement away from their current work. But why did they choose their current work in the first place? Did they choose it simply because they liked it, to make money, or for some other reason? The motivations that drove these first choices relate to the choices that came later as they considered moving into management.

Descriptions of the advancement options available to the engineers reveal the opportunities and barriers that they encountered when making their rejection decision. Any past

experiences that the engineers have had doing managerial work must also have a bearing on their decision to reject advancement. For this reason, descriptions of these experiences and their impact on the engineers are also included.

In summary, this section describes why the engineers chose their work, their view of their advancement choices, and their memories of past management experiences.

### Choosing technical work

Most of the engineers made a conscious choice to work with computers at an early age. When remembering their initial experiences, they expressed feelings that could be characterized as "love at first sight":

"Wow, ... I want to do this."

"It was the first computer I had ever seen and I was completely wowed."

"I always knew that I wanted to do development."

"I took the intro to computer science class and that was it for me."

"...[I] have been hooked on computer programming ever since then."

For the majority, the choice was a passionate one because they enjoyed the work.

Although one of the engineers was not quite as enthusiastic, she did have a strong interest as well as an attraction to the dynamic nature of the work. Still one other chose the work solely for financial reasons but found, as all of the others did, that she had an interest and an unusually strong aptitude and talent.

## Advancement Options

### The promotion process.

The engineers did not give much thought to climbing the management ladder as they began their work. Even if they had this goal in mind they did not consider it paramount. However, there did seem to be some pressure to advance quickly: "...if you hadn't been promoted by the time you'd been there three years, forget it." They were aware that this path was available to them, but saw the promotion process as mysterious and absolutely not under individual control. Engineers described being placed on secret "promotable lists" without giving consent: "This is just something that happens to you and then you don't know anything about it until the first time you're told you're promotable." However, being placed on the list seems to have little or no bearing on actually being promoted. Stories of people who "sit" on the list for three years are common. The more likely promotion scenario involves cases of "being in the right place at the right time."

### Technical advancement.

But what about those who want to go forward and advance in a different way? Is an alternate or "technical" ladder available, and if so what is the means of climbing it? None of the engineers believe this ladder exists, and in fact it doesn't. No means of technical advancement is offered that comes close to matching the status, power, prestige, or monetary rewards that are given on the management ladder.

## THE TECHNICAL LADDER

One engineer describes a past time when technical members of the company were considered a "community of peers." Extraordinary achievement was rewarded with the designation of DMTS (Distinguished Member of Technical Staff). At some point, a ladder was created with several levels added below DMTS. In one engineer's words, the meaning of DMTS was "twisted into something to do [promote] a percentage of people from different departments." The DMTS promotion process is another area illustrating the intense ambiguity characterizing the advancement options available to engineers. The procedure reflects the designation's heritage as an uncommon and prestigious honor and is described by one engineer as "mystical." The rules imply selectivity, enough so to make the experience of the process "ghastly and humiliating" for another engineer. However the application of the rules appears to be uneven. Some people are promoted for writing classic books, others simply for staying in one place for the right period of time. Additionally, the promotion criteria are not consistent across the organization.

## STRUCTURE, FREEDOM, AND EQUITY

One engineer expressed a preference for a process encountered at another company. In this plan, engineers received a series of regular technical promotions based on experience and professional demonstration. Interestingly enough, this arrangement resembles the military model mentioned by another engineer as unattractive due to a lack of self-direction and freedom. Yet

another engineer described the mixed signals sent in the context of a coercive advancement offer:

Sometimes I've heard them say you have to be in control of your own career. And then sometimes you feel like they're paving this road and forcing me to walk this way. Instead of me choosing which road I walk on.

Structure removes ambiguity, but precludes self-direction. A less rigid approach allows freedom, but also permits inconsistent and unfair application of unclear rules. An engineer feeling the pressure to take an uninvited promotion sums up this confusing state of affairs: "The truth is what's more convenient to say to that person at the time."

Research: One other alternative.

Another alternative to management or technical advancement available to outstanding engineers is a transition from development to research. At least two engineers exercised this option, citing reasons such as increased freedom and more dynamic work: "Once I made that decision not to become manager, I kind of always had my eyes set on research because I wanted to keep learning things and doing different things...." However, this type of move is unusual, very difficult, and comes with a price. Engineers have less status in research and are rarely promoted to DMTS. There are no first line managers there. So an engineer moving into research loses all chance of being promoted in the near future.

## Experimenting with Management

### Observing others.

The engineers notice others moving into management around them. However, they do not always share their motivations. These dissimilar motivations involve money, power, and control: "some people just do it for the money" or they do it to "get power and control." One engineer points out that we are all "programmed" to climb the ladder, making the decision an unconscious one that is not really a decision point at all for most people. Yet another notes a more pragmatic reason to advance, stating that "...some managers do it because it's what they're good at." Another common belief is that most people who move into management have a poor understanding of what the job entails. This seems to infer that understanding the nature of the job might disincline someone from taking it.

### Management experiences.

Several of the engineers have held management positions in the past. Their experiences had some positive results such as growth in non-technical skills and positive feedback on accomplishments. One engineer enjoyed the aspect of being "able to make a difference in people's lives." Another managed at smaller companies where there were "less politics."

Some of the experiences were less positive. One engineer described a first management position as "a horrible experience" due to a lack of formal authority and power. Still another refused to compromise technical skills and attempted to continue technical work while managing. This resulted in severe overcommitment and stress.

Many of the tasks required of a manager do not appeal to the engineers. One source of frustration was the task of motivating low-performers. They also disliked the in-person and phone meetings that took up the majority of their time. The political aspect of managing was also very unpleasant. One described pressure to "carry the party line" as "distasteful" and "unsettling," and found that higher management became "quite uncomfortable" when these thoughts were expressed. The overall picture of management that they painted portrayed a "fight" requiring "pushing back" on unreasonable demands.

#### Summary: Choices

The engineers chose their work because they enjoyed it. The options they found when they considered achieving further recognition and moving forward technically were severely limited. One option available to them, the DMTS designation, does not carry as much meaning as it used to due to the fact that it was merged into a "technical ladder" some time ago and some see its application as very uneven. These engineers enter this ladder at the MTS level (one level below DMTS), so there is only one promotion possible in any case. It seems that the entire promotion process is confusing, and that the only real option for someone interested in "moving up" is to jump onto the management ladder, an event that is expected to happen at the beginning of one's career. However, most of the engineers have tried management, either formally or informally, and do not prefer this work. It appears that the engineers would like another way to progress other than management that enables them to receive recognition for advancing technically and professionally.

## The Offer

All of the engineers rejected an offer to advance to the management ladder. The situational aspects of that offer are meaningful, e.g. the engineer's work at the time, why the offer was given, and the conditions under which the offer was presented. These aspects reveal information about the openness of the promotion process and whether or not the organization educates their new managers about the job being offered before promoting them. Failures in these areas indicate a less than optimal promotion process, and may cause confusion and frustration for those subjected to it.

Details of the engineers' reactions to the offer, including why they rejected it, tell much about the organizational culture. The reactions of others around them to the rejection as well as their experiences in living with the decision tells even more about both the organizational culture and the larger societal culture.

In summary, this section describes the context of the rejected offer, reactions to the offer and the rejection, and the results of the rejection.

### Context of the Offer

#### Work situation at the time of the offer.

Several engineers were already managing informally, meaning they had a project leadership role with no formal authority or control over the people working with them. Sometimes this situation happened naturally, without upper management initiating the arrangement. Other times the engineer was assigned to the role. In either case the job entailed

coordination and scheduling, but implied no formal power over the people on the project. The remaining engineers were performing technical work with no management responsibilities.

Reasons the offer was made.

Most often, the engineers were offered advancement because they were seen as having managerial attributes. They were seen as hard working, responsible, organized, and forceful; and as having clarity, initiative, and a "management style." Past technical performance also drove the advancement offers, as well as simply being "liked" by the manager. Sometimes the engineers were not told why the offer was given.

Conditions of the offer.

Several of the engineers found the conditions of the offer highly uncomfortable. One engineer was told that in order to retain his current salary he had to accept a promotion to management. This was confusing because he was previously made to feel that he deserved his current salary. Management had given a raise and excellent feedback months before. Further, he had been placed on a promotable list without his knowledge or consent, and felt pressured to take a job in which he had no interest. Two of the engineers received repetitive offers over time even though they continued to reject them. They experienced this situation for periods of two to three years. Another engineer described the context of an offer as a "blitzkrieg," which sounds rather unpleasant.

Often, the job offered involved managing a group that was in chaos or in a "desperate" situation, which did not attract these potential managers. The engineers generally felt they had too little information to make a serious decision or a commitment to the job being offered. They

did not understand what the job entailed. They did not see why it was better than the job they already enjoyed: "You're doing really well as a developer. Why should you go be a technical manager?" They were also uncomfortable with the fact that they were not part of the decision process: "They don't explain things to you, and you're not brought into the decision process, so a lot of it's just mysterious." One engineer expressed this general sense of frustration well: "Why don't they ask you what you want to do? Why don't they tell you what it would mean? I think if they really wanted you to, they would."

The conditions of the offer were more comfortable for one of the engineers. She was asked before being placed on a promotable list, and given ample time to consider the decision in her own time. She was also given a mentor who would show her "the ropes" and was sent to management classes.

### Reactions to the Offer

#### Initial reactions.

When the engineers first received their offers they felt surprised, flattered, happy (sometimes with reservations), and uncertain. One engineer pointed out a difficulty in refusing such an offer:

... it's harder when there's really an offer on the table to say that's not what I want. That's human nature. If you can say, "Oh, well, I don't really want to win the lottery because I'm happy the way I am now." But, you know, somebody comes to your door with a million dollars, it's harder to say no.

One engineer felt extreme discomfort, worrying about what detrimental effect saying no might have:

I think about this quite a bit, cause I worry about how it will affect me. Then they would just think that I'm not the top performer or something. All of sudden, because I was performing real well developing--as a developer. And they tried to push me into management and I kind of didn't turn out to be what they wanted, or I didn't do it. And then now I'm no good, you know. I'm--junk. I don't know.

Reasons for rejecting the offer.

The engineers feel that they considered the decision of whether or not to advance more carefully than most. Ultimately, they turned down the advancement offer for a number of reasons:

1. They did not think they had the proper technical or interpersonal skills.
2. They did not wish to make the time and emotional investment required of managers.
3. They believe that people should work because they want to, and do not wish to motivate people to work by using their authority and power.
4. They believe they may not be able to uphold their principles because they see managers as having to "bend the truth," and lay people off.
5. They do not believe that they can protect their people against unreasonable organizational demands.
6. They do not want to become involved in personal or organizational politics.
7. They are uncomfortable with the social distinctions between managers and nonmanagers.
8. They do not see first line management as a good value proposition, and see engineering as a better value proposition.
9. They see the engineering as more flexible and financially secure than management.

10. They have already made an investment in their professions and do not want to lose their technical skills.

Below is a more detailed description of the engineers' thoughts and feelings regarding these reasons and their decisions.

## SKILLS

A few of the engineers think they do not have the skills to move into management, especially interpersonal skills. Most hold a strong belief that "good technical people don't always make good managers." Further, one engineer believes that forcing a technical person into management is not the way to "produce a good manager." There is also a general belief that a good manager must be expert in the specific technical domain of the work to be managed. However, according to the engineers, the managers making the advancement offers did not share this belief.

## TIME AND EMOTIONAL DEMANDS

All of the engineers hesitate to commit to the extra time that management positions require. This refers to the rigidity of scheduling and to the amount of time. They are not willing to sacrifice outside interests and obligations, such as hobbies and parenting. Even more of a concern than increased time requirements is the increased emotional investment that management entails. One engineer explained: "It's not just physics. It's not just physics. It's all this emotion and the soft stuff that nobody wants to talk about." The engineers are concerned

about handling group and interpersonal conflicts and dealing with the personal problems (such as addictions and marital difficulties) of the people to be managed.

### INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Often the assignments offered involved managing groups that were floundering, which the engineers saw as risky and "not suitable for a first-time supervisor." These projects were usually unorganized. The groups sometimes consisted of underachievers. The engineers feel that they would have problems managing the people in such a group. As one engineer explained, "Not everybody can be above average, right? So how do the people who are above average deal with these people? A lot of times they have trouble dealing with those people." This may sound egotistical, but there is more to it than meets the eye. Another engineer explained that, when managing a group of talented and motivated people, a manager does not have to rely on wielding power in the form of salary reviews in order to produce good work. The engineers prefer working with people who do good work because they want to, not because they are being forced to. This was a common theme for all of the engineers. They are not interested in persuading or manipulating people: "I tend to prefer to have people do what they want to do because they want to do it rather than because you're telling them."

### UPHOLDING PRINCIPLES

Another common reason that the engineers gave for rejecting advancement is that they do not want to be forced to go against their principles. One engineer explained the situation:

I do think it's important to have some principles and that kind of thing. I actually feel

good that I've been able to hang on to those. When you go through all this, especially if you try management. I'll tell you the things... remarkable. People don't realize.

The engineers do not want to compel people to sign documents that they do not believe in. They also do not want to tell people things that they do not believe are true. When the "management line" is crossed, the engineers believe that lying or bending the truth may be required or expected.

The engineers especially do not want to fire people or lay them off: "I don't think they got paid enough for it, for something that awful, affecting peoples' lives." One engineer left a previous management position because he refused to lay people off. Downsizing has surrounded all of the engineers for most of their working lives, and this has had a profound affect. One even described managers as "hatchet men for failed corporate plans" and related this typical scene:

I would come in late in the morning, like around 10:00, which is about the time they started laying people off, so I would see people walking out crying. It was just a horrible thing. And it never was the big guy that ever came down and did it. It was always the line manager who had to work with these people all the time.

A particularly good point was made regarding the imbalance between line management power and responsibility:

You're affecting peoples' lives, and their families with these things. That's what I think I really found offensive. You don't really have the power to make things better for them, but you have the responsibility for being the one that hits them with it, whether it's a bad salary or whether it's a layoff.

There was also some concern expressed about being ostracized and becoming the object of people's anger after being forced to lay people off.

## PROTECTING PEOPLE

There are additional management behaviors with which the engineers are uncomfortable. They do not want to be forced to commit their people to unrealistic schedules. They do not think it is right to force people to work unreasonable hours, especially when this impacts children. They feel that a manager has to protect their people. Most have suffered from the affects of having supervisors who did not do this, and feel that if people are anxious or stressed because they have too much work, it is the manager's fault. These engineers take this commitment seriously: "If you're not going to be an effective leader, if you're not going to go in there and take care of your people, then don't do it because you'll be screwing up other people's personal lives." They are not comfortable with being in charge of other people's lives. They do not want to be responsible for getting people the raises, bonuses, and promotions that they deserve because they are not sure that the organizational policies that control these rewards are fair.

## POLITICS

All of the engineers expressed a dislike for politics. They know that it is hard to move quickly and make decisions in a large organization because affirmation is required from too many levels. One engineer used an interesting metaphor when describing this situation by calling a large corporation "a bigger animal." They dislike the idea of fighting political battles: "I didn't feel like I would actually want to trade this that I was doing for the more political domain kind of business aspect." Several are not sure if they can "stand their ground" and not be "annihilated" in

a culture of "survival of the fittest." They would consider it very stressful to have to defend themselves and their group when the "finger pointing" starts.

## SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS

The engineers are not interested in the intense competition that they see at the higher levels of management. They are more interested in doing collaborative work. Also, they have no interest in crossing the social line that divides managers and engineers:

When you cross that line, it really kind of defined the people you can be friends with. You know, the managers always ate here, and the nonmanagers ate here. And it wasn't really that they weren't friendly. It was more managers tended to have meetings together. And it tended to run long. And so they tended to be eating around the same time. They had so many meetings. And there are things that you can always tell other managers. And so, they are more comfortable.

One engineer refers to how the power that managers have to lay someone off prevents them from being friends with those below them: "...you can't be friends with people when you have that kind of power, and you have to exercise it."

## VALUE PROPOSITION

Another interesting point is that the engineers do not regard the first line management position as a good value proposition: "There's like some sort of barrier of which I would overcome if the money was enough." Another engineer said: "If you look at it as a reward type of thing, it's just not there. I believe the difference isn't enough to get me to do that job." One particularly entertaining comment on this aspect follows:

When they first said about the management thing, I said, "I'm not old enough to stop

having fun," and I haven't had all the fun I've had. To me, managers were people that didn't get paid that much more, as far as I knew, and they stopped having fun immediately, because nothing that I saw in their job description was fun. Going to meetings, schmoozing other managers, telling—rating other people in their work, none of this seemed like any kind of fun to me. I enjoy my work to the extent—I love going into something and working on it, and then, boom, it works. That is fun. If they were paying me four times as much, or something, to not have fun, I'd have to seriously consider it.

There is very little chance of going beyond first line management, and the engineers realize this:

...corporate ladders tend to be structured as pyramids and that the farther up you go, the less opportunity there is to advance. So I think that's one of the other depressing things about climbing the corporate ladder is they tell you direction is up, but they don't tell you that the base of the pyramid is a lot bigger down here than it is up here. Everybody is not going to be able to go all the way up.

#### MOBILITY AND SECURITY

The engineers think technical work offers more mobility and security than management work. They believe that managers "become more tied to the company." They appreciate the freedom that comes with being able to change jobs at will:

I'm pretty confident that if I left here I could get a job in any city in the country I wanted to without a problem, cause I believe I have the skills. As a manager, I think that would be much more difficult finding another job somewhere else. (...) So I viewed it as not a good career move in some sense for flexibility.

#### LOSING INVESTMENT

Most of the engineers have advanced degrees. It took them years to get into the work they love: "Maybe if I become a manager, then I'll be doing something that I don't want to

cause I really like development, and I spent so many years in trying to get there. I finally got here." The freedom and security that they enjoy took some effort to attain and they do not take the decision to leave it behind lightly:

You can't just say well I'm going to throw away everything that really got me this far, which is the technical skills and there's training skill and all this. I always felt that at some point I could be in jeopardy if I just went into the management path by itself. ... for me was I couldn't let this go.

They already have a large investment in work that they enjoy and would probably need a very good reason to give it up.

### Results of Rejecting the Offer

#### Reactions of others.

After rejecting the offer, several of the engineers felt that their standing on the job was affected. One engineer reported being passed over for good projects for which he was well suited and thought he was not being seen as a "team player" any longer. Several were given the management position anyway, without a formal promotion: "I was effectively the technical manager but I didn't have the title, which I think is a big mistake." One accepted a promotion to DMTS instead of a management position.

None of the engineers felt that the decision negatively affected their relationship with their co-workers. One engineer reported a mutual respect among people who do make this decision:

But I believe the people who know respect me more, and ... the people I know who have put in that situation I respect more. And the people who have been supervisors

and have stepped down I respect that decision. It's a very difficult decision to make.

Some of the managers making offers reacted to the rejection with understanding. Others thought the rejection was strange, and were disbelieving or intrigued: "In fact, they ... were actually quite intrigued by this. Cause it was like, well, why wouldn't you?" While in the midst of the situation the engineers hoped for understanding, but they were not always sure that it was forthcoming. They worried about "upsetting" the offering manager or worse being forced or persuaded to take the job:

They don't like it, and I may be forced do it. And if that's the case, then I have to leave the group. And then the other occasion maybe they would understand and just back off. But I think it might be something in the middle. I think they could try. They wouldn't let me off the hook that easily. That's what I think that they would try to talk me out of what I'm thinking, what I want.

Sometimes the managers' reactions were decidedly negative. They sometimes became "distraught" and took the rejection personally:

But I think certainly amongst the manager who I said no to, I was persona non grata. (...) He took it very personally when I said no, certainly the second time. He also thought I was the right person for the job, and so me thwarting him was something which he found very uncomfortable.

#### Living with the decision.

The engineers recognize that their decision is difficult and unusual:

I think it's just so ingrained in our society that when people really stop and take a look and say this isn't for me, and decide to go the opposite way on a one-way street, that it takes a lot of guts. And people ... who have done that, it's hard to go against the grain.

They also reported feeling less conscious of levels because they see many people climb the ladder who are not as competent they are. They sometimes find it difficult to watch this: "And it's hard to watch people that you know are terrible be promoted." It is troublesome for the engineer to be a minority surrounded by people who think, "going up the ladder is a good thing." They sometimes judge themselves and feel judged by others. One engineer sees herself as less than "courageous." Another thinks that people who sacrifice their personal and family lives to climb the corporate ladder may judge him as unsuccessful, thinking that theirs is the only right decision. There is a concern that people who did not witness the conscious decision to reject advancement might not understand:

... especially people who you haven't seen for a long time. "Oh, how you doing."  
"Fine." "Oh, yeah. Just--" "Well, what are you doing?" "Oh, you know, a little MTS [Member of Technical Staff, the career position of engineers who do not move into management], you know." Even though you know that you could do circles around this person in more ways than one. So it's tough.

The engineers often reconsider the decision: "You know, just as you made that decision once doesn't mean you don't think about it any more." Some engineers continue to struggle with the decision because they would like to be seen as keeping pace with others. The only way an engineer who refuses management can measure their success is through their salary, which is often quite good, however this success cannot be shared: "The only thing you have to show for it is your hidden salary, which nobody knows. And there'd be mutiny if everybody knew." Because it is not proper in the organizational culture to disclose information about one's salary, the engineer considers this particular proof of success as not demonstrable or "hidden."

Several of the engineers just don't have a desire to go somewhere and are "doing it [their work] more out of academic interest or fun...." Others may not feel a need to climb, but they do feel a desire to achieve. These engineers describe themselves as lifelong overachievers who have a "definite desire to achieve and definitely achieving in this." They are looking for an alternate place to channel this energy:

... to me channeling that need to achieve and doing something other than climbing the ladder to me means getting into research, working on new ventures, finding interesting work. I would love to come up with some patents or things. I would love to be a DMTS. To me that would be something that would fit the achieve category without channeling it through the ladder. So those are things that I've told myself. You're achieving down this direction without going that direction.

It is of utmost importance to the engineers that they enjoy their work: "One of the reasons when you decide not to do that is you kind of decide you like what you're doing, and this is what you enjoy more. And so you've gone more for enjoyment than for other things." One engineer has an "alarm clock test" where a negative first reaction when the alarm clock goes off means it is "time to do something else." This gives no time to rationalize a decision later on in the day. The engineers consider having a manager with whom they get along to be most important, and the mobility that technical work gives them basically allows them to move jobs at will to fulfill this requirement:

I believe the alarm-clock test passes more often when I'm not going to be a manager. I think I'll be happier because I have more time to do this thing. I'll be happier because I have more flexibility as an MTS to go wherever I want at the base of the pyramid. There's lots more jobs at the base of the pyramid than anywhere else. So I have a flexibility to go and find a manager that I like working for that hopefully has something.

### Summary: The Offer

The engineers were offered advancement because they were already performing in management capacities informally, or because they displayed management attributes. The conditions of the offer were sometimes uncomfortable, and the offer was sometimes coercive. The job offered was most often not understood, or understood but undesirable. Comfortable offer conditions do not appear to be the norm.

The engineers' first reactions were usually positive, as the offer was seen as an honor. Later, concerns rose over whether or not a choice was actually being offered. In other words, they wondered what would happen if they said no. They gave a number of reasons for rejecting the offer such as (1) unwillingness to sacrifice family and personal time, (2) belief in internal motivation, (3) dislike of politics and dishonesty, (4) hesitation to leave work that they like, and (5) unwillingness to leave behind work in which they are already invested that offers mobility and security. There were some ramifications from the rejections. Good work was withheld and the engineers were sometimes no longer seen as team players. Peer relationships were not affected, with a certain amount of respect given between colleagues who are like-minded. The offering managers, for the most part, did not understand the rejection and some reacted negatively.

The engineers see their decision as difficult, unusual, and courageous, but sometimes judge themselves and feel judged by others. Although they do not necessarily want to climb the management ladder, they are interested in achievement, recognition, and legitimization. However, they find it difficult to find ways to channel their energy and have difficulty measuring

their success in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. It is very important that the engineers enjoy their work. They enjoy technical work and do not think that they would enjoy management work.

Most of the engineers prefer technical work to management work. They prefer self-defined goals and autonomy. They do not like to attend meetings. They like the feeling of accomplishment that developing software brings. They do not see management as providing a real sense of satisfaction: "But I don't think you get the real sense of satisfaction that I'm looking for in my job from doing that." They want to continue doing the detail-oriented technical work that they like: "Realizing that really nothing there was going to make me happy was the bottom line, that what I really enjoyed was writing code. I just didn't feel like I would be happy doing that job."

#### Experiences of Organizations

The engineers worked before they rejected advancement and continued to work afterwards. Details of their work experiences provide more information regarding advancement offer rejection. For instance, their work satisfaction contrasts their current work experiences with management work. Additional reasons for rejecting advancement are found when considering the "fit" between the values and commitment levels of the engineers and the organization.

The organizational culture, such as the quality of the managers, disparities between levels of employees, expressions of power, and the effects of gender on leadership must affect

their lives and their decisions. The engineers' experiences in these areas are provided to give a picture of the greater context in which they made and live with their decision.

In summary, this section contains information about work satisfaction and contrasts the engineers' personal commitment and values with those of the organization. It also includes some observations and experiences of the organizational culture: management quality, the effects of gender on leadership, differences between levels of employees, and power in the organization.

### Work Satisfaction

#### Enjoyment.

One engineer summed up the general consensus concerning job satisfaction very well: "I'm very happy with my job. I love to code. I mean, I come in every day happy." Engineers enjoy "mental exercise" and are sure that they are happier in their work in engineering than they would be if they managed. The engineers enjoy learning and advancing technically, and they find their work very interesting and absorbing, but also somewhat exhausting. They also enjoy the social aspects of their work, and those who are parents appreciate the opportunity to interact with adults. One engineer described a simple strategy for remaining happy in his job: "... finding a job you like in the company, finding work you like to do, finding a manager you like for work for and finding inner peace of saying this is what I need, this is what I want."

The engineers reported that they work for financial security. They work close to home and are not required to travel often. All in all, they see their job as a good value proposition

where they make enough money, but they do not have to engage in work that is not enjoyable:

"I work to make money, and I want to have a job that doesn't drive me insane."

#### Hard skills.

The engineers take great pride in their work and describe their culture as one where proving yourself is easy, that is if you are truly talented:

And the other thing I liked about computer sciences, it's not soft in the sense—it's clear to me that simple ability would be recognized by default, so that I didn't have to keep presenting myself over and over again, like you would in a sales job or something.

They appreciate and enjoy this aspect. People who try to get by on something other than ability are not tolerated for long:

Well, you're with some guy, for instance, who's tall and good-looking and bullsh\*tting you. And he can't do work for sh\*t, and everybody in two weeks knows it. You're in the club. He's out. It's pretty black and white. People actually get fired for being incompetent, not because people don't like them, but because they don't do work. There's measurable concrete goals. It seems like a good thing to me.

On the other hand, some engineers feel that this culture judges certain engineering work that is seen as more "soft" or "fluffy" (such as systems architecture, systems engineering, testing, and technical documentation) as less important because it not as "hard." These disciplines are different from coding in that they require a more holistic view of systems, and different skills and talents that may not be appreciated by those who mostly work with code.

#### Appreciation.

Hard work is the norm and engineers are often required to work overtime, but they do not necessarily believe that anyone notices or appreciates their efforts: "I don't think appreciated

or noticed is in the vocabulary any more." Any recognition of their work would be appreciated, even if it were not monetary (although monetary reward is still seen as best). Management expects heroic effort: "... this time-to-market thing has really cut that out. It's more expected. We need this to be successful, and you need to do this." This makes the engineers feel that their private lives are being "invaded" and they perceive that this "could damage the type of work they're doing." Some have developed strategies for handling this situation.

### Commitment

The engineers are not as committed to the organization as they used to be. One engineer describes his feelings toward the company as "stagnant." Another thinks that it is impossible for an individual contributor to make a difference in such a large organization:

I don't think there's anything I could have done in any one of the projects that I've worked on that if I had worked twice and hard that would have made any difference. (...) My attitude is to work hard but keep it in perspective.

The engineers find it much easier to commit to their projects than to the organization as a whole. At best they have a short-term commitment to the organization, but are willing to work very hard during this time period. It is difficult for them to determine whether the harsh demands that are placed on them during their time of commitment are balanced with the rewards that they receive. They find it hard to determine how much their commitment is worth relative to the organization's commitment.

They hold no belief that the organization is committed to its people. The engineers recognize that the organization is unwilling to make a long-term investment in them. Although

they would like the organization to succeed, they know that there is no longer any promise of security:

I may be a little jaded over the years seeing downsizes. The person didn't matter as much as the bottom line, so you wondered. You sort of took some hits in that area. I am loyal to this company in the sense that I think it would be great if they succeed.

One engineer commented: "... I'm never going to buy the reverse loyalty thing. That doesn't exist. It doesn't even exist in Japan anymore, apparently. And of course a lot of what they're doing, they don't really want loyalty anymore." They do recognize that changes in benefit structures reflect a new, short-term employment contract. They appreciate stock options, but wonder if losing their pension is actually in their favor for the long-term: "I don't know dollar wise if it's an improvement or not. I tend to imagine no, but I don't know." In some ways they find the new model attractive, but still feel vulnerable because they do not think the company has "their best interests at heart." As one engineer said: "... it is so strange there is both of those, the feelings."

They are acutely aware that being laid off is a real possibility. One engineer described a scene that happened after a lay-off at a similar organization:

They actually called us in and had this psychologist say to us, "Well, I guess you thought that if you were loyal, they'd be loyal to you. That's not true. So how do we feel about that?" I think we were all so p\*ssed off by that time that it was just sort of insult to injury that we had to go listen to this guy be paid to tell us this.

Another engineer heard a new term for lay-off that disturbed him: "I think there's another horrible term I heard recently about companies ... need to ventilate. It's horrible. (...) Some get stuck and others don't. You know, they just go right through."

## Values

The organization's main objective is to "succeed at all costs." At the same time the engineers do not see the organization putting much value in "people's well being" and they see both as being important. The company also appears to value new people over their current employees (see the term "ventilate" above).

The organization values trust and respect but there seems to be some difficulty applying these values globally. This is an important point. The engineers recognize that it is very important to find and work with managers that support their values. They see this as especially important for those who do not intend to climb the ladder. There seems to be some disconnect between the espoused values of the organization and the actual application at the local level. The engineers do not see the proclamations of top people as being easily translatable to their level. So, even though top management may espouse the value that "people's lives matter," this does not mean that this value will be placed into action at the line level: "So I think at the highest level people is on the list. Whether people becomes on the list of your supervisor or department head pretty much depends upon which kind of person they are." It is interesting to note that one engineer knows that the organization is starting to do "health checks" that include checking these values at the lower levels, so this may be a known problem.

The organization does espouse a standard set of values. Again, the application of these values is completely dependent on the individual manager. None of the engineers could think of one of these values. One engineer notes that perhaps the organization has no values because she could not think of any. The engineers feel that even though the organization "talks a lot" about

values, nothing is ever really done about it. One notable exception is a group that requires that everyone employ general behaviors supporting the organizational values, such as creating a collaborative environment where everyone is encouraged to do his or her best.

The personal values mentioned by the engineers include honesty, hard work, helpfulness, and listening skills. Upholding personal values is very important to them. One of the engineers states that upholding personal values was so important that he would lose sleep if he had to go against them. This engineer added that managers might have to compromise their values.

### Organizational Structure

The engineers perceive their organization as attempting to become flatter. One engineer noticed that: "There's even been some complaint of micro-management from on high, which is kind of interesting." They recognize that this is a very difficult transition for such a large organization. However, one engineer said that a hierarchy was being put into place in her organization. This is yet another example of the unevenness of the application of organizational policy.

According to the engineers there is a lack of good leadership in the organization. I sensed that they just do not think that their leaders have a plan. At some point there was some "sort of a decree that went out from upper management that said let's find bureaucracy and weed it out. I've actually heard that... the top people say that." There is a big difference between bureaucracy and structure, and the engineers perceive a great danger in dismantling everything without leaving some structure in place. There is a recognition that structure can be

both "violating and unifying." However, they think a certain amount of structure is needed for support and protection. Structure in the form of planning, well-defined goals, and focus can protect people's personal lives from being consumed by the organizational mission. With no structure (less management, less planning) everyone is responsible for his or her own defense, and individuals may not be as good at defending themselves as managed groups. There is a general perception that these changes are supposed to encourage trust and empowerment, but the engineers also wonder: "what am I giving up for this?" One engineer speculated on how it will all turn out:

I don't think it's healthy at all. But I don't know if it's sustainable for long... a lot of people said look at the Japanese. ... they come to work early to do exercises. They do this, they do that. Their whole life revolves around work. What happened when the economy went bad and all that stuff? Just, you know--it's really-- [remarkable].

### Observations of Managers

In general, the engineers' reports on managers were not positive. Many of them think that the wrong people move into management:

I think one of the fallacies in business today is anybody can be a manager, and that's just simply not true. You have to have the personality for it. You have to have the discipline for it. And a lot of people just aren't disciplined enough to do that. And it's a big responsibility. A lot of people don't take it as a responsibility. They take it as a job. Whereas, you're really taking on a responsibility of the people that are working for you.

One engineer states that 50% of the managers were very good and 50%: "didn't have a clue or just didn't care or just were not very effective leaders." Another observes that some managers come to their jobs because their "promotion was basically political."

The engineers would prefer managers who are better mentors, an ability which one engineer described as a gift. Another engineer described this simply as someone: "caring that somebody else does better than they have been doing." However, many of the managers that the engineers have worked with were just "interested in their own careers and not the people on their teams, and that was wrong." They see their managers as using line management as a "stepping stone" to higher level management:

...it was clear they were motivated by power and control. You see these people ... And, the interesting thing is generally they are not good leaders. (...) But a lot of times they're just--they're upward focused. They're controlling this effort so that they can promote themselves externally or to the next level.

All of the engineers feel that managers who do not have a good understanding of the work to be done cannot possibly understand the effort that it takes. This has a detrimental effect on the engineers' lives: "... by not understanding that, then you're making people sacrifice their personal life to get a job done." They have had managers who were technically incompetent, and as mentioned before, they believe that a manager has to be technically good to be effective. However, they also think that less technical managers can get by if they know their technical limitations and trust their people.

The engineers have also worked with managers who micromanage and who do not trust their people to do their jobs. On the other hand, some managers who appear to be very well balanced are completely disengaged: "Hey, you know--like, wake up because, it was like nothing really mattered." Another failing of managers was the tendency to be threatened by others having leadership ability in the group.

## Gender and Management

Most of the engineers think that women do not have enough opportunities to move into management. They also think that it is harder for a woman to manage once she gets there due to the beliefs of the people in her group and others around her. It is hard for women to have their authority accepted. One engineer reported a case where people just told a woman manager that they would not work for her. Several of the engineers noted that women find it hard to garner respect because of their small size.

Some of the engineers think that they were asked to manage partly because they are women. This is not a comfortable situation. One woman engineer describes a lunch meeting where she was introduced as an acting manager to the other managers in the department.

Instead of discussing the work to be done, the conversation centered on affirmative action:

So how did we get into this? How did it get brought up? It was brought up to make me feel like—I feel like it was brought up to make me feel like I was there on sufferance, as somebody's favor. That I wouldn't be here if somebody hadn't picked me out of an affirmative action program (...) Supposedly it was a lunch-time meeting to discuss things about issues. It was supposed to be like getting to know each other.

There is a general consensus that there are not enough women managers. Several of the engineers think women make better managers than men because they are organized, detail-oriented, and good consensus builders. One engineer sees men as confrontational and competing just for the sake of winning. Whereas he sees women as more interested in building teams. One engineer thinks that men are expected to get "caught up" in their jobs, but women are not. This perception might not bode well for women who would like to be taken seriously.

## Organizational Levels

### Social differences.

The engineers definitely think that there is a "we/they" condition in their organization.

One engineer gives this view of how higher management regards the engineers:

I think, to some extent, certainly higher management sees people at our level as marks in a book. I think we're very faceless, and I think that as long as the right stuff comes out from us, that they're happy. And they'll do the minimum which is required for feeding and nurturing us.

Several of the engineers have observed managers treating lower-level employees badly.

They tell stories of watching secretaries and other engineers being insulted in public. They do not think this is right. One engineer has little respect for this type of behavior:

...it's stupid to think of people as different than yourself in a fundamental way to the extent that you can't talk to them as a person, or you can't—I've seen directors insult people in front of other people. And you're like, "Are you treating your wives and daughters this way? How can you not have the common sense..." It's like when you see a real politician make a racist joke, and you're like, "How stupid can you be?" You're off in some sort of land—you're basically this little island of privileged people, and you're looking at everybody around you, and not realizing that you're part of that.

Another engineer describes a conference room scheduling conflict where a manager's "we/they" attitude was apparent:

...he's a couple of levels higher than we are. And he actually felt that he had earned the right to have some respect, so we would leave immediately and get out of his place. Hey, I was supposed to have this room, and, hey, by the way-- Yeah. I know this guy quite well actually. But he was on a schedule, see. And this is one of the things that is really odd. And it's all consuming actually. --the mission consumes you. Very disrespectful. The mission consumes them. It overrides the emotional aspect and the

human aspect sometimes. And this is something that I find quite uncomfortable about when you take a role like that--because almost you have to submit cause there is so much that's thrown in front of you.. So those guys a couple of levels up--get--you know, hey, I got this room. Get the heck out of here.

The engineers are all aware that they are treated differently by people on higher levels, and that they treat people on higher levels differently. One engineer pointed out that deferring to a manager out of respect is healthy, whereas deferring because of rank is not. Some of the engineers recognize that the power that comes at higher levels works against the "collaborative" environment that people at those levels are actively "espousing." While some engineers are trying to collaborate, others are trying to control in order to impress management:

People withhold information. To make them look better than you. Or to control things. To control the project. To control the way that they want things to work out. [To look better] to the managers. To other people. Some people want to be that leader, and they want everybody to look at them. "Oh, he knew that. She didn't." you know. Knowledge is power.

Impressions are managed at the higher level too. One engineer sees managers as treating each other like they were in the same family, but he also notes that they are cautious about what they say to each other because of the intense competition.

Some of the engineers think that high level managers are accessible to them. Others think that high level managers "don't like that." One engineer defines levels of management by how often he sees them:

...so the supervisor in general is a daily person in your life. A department head is probably like a weekly or monthly person. It's also someone you see regularly enough to know who they are. Above that, you don't see them, so like why do you care.

### Cultural differences.

Some of the engineers see managers as more concerned with status than engineers. One engineer sees a concern with status as against anything that is "common sense and good."

Another tells a story of being harassed to do another person's work by a manager. While trying to persuade, the manager in question looked around the engineer's office and started comparing it to his:

So he's standing in my office, telling me to do things, telling me to log into his machine and debug his system. (...) And I'm like, "Get away from me." I'm starting to get sore because he's breaking into my time, telling me to do his work because he's in a crunch situation and he couldn't hire the right people, and then he starts blathering about the red carpet.

The engineers also note that when companies merge, one of the things that are considered is the management culture and perks. Engineers watch as managers from merging companies compare each other's clothes, ties, and executive parties. This is a composite of the engineers' reactions to this behavior:

It's just all this stupid stuff about the trappings of executive power, and then about the presidents. "Oh, maybe we're fated to meet because each company had our president's retreat in Hawaii in the same hotel." I'm like, "What are you even talking about?" This is in the whole merger thing. Because that is what they think about as part of their jobs, is going to parties, having perks, wearing ties.

One of the engineers conjectured that, like it or not, it is important to be status-conscious to impress people in other companies, which counts because "...it is just basically your old-fashioned white male culture of privilege."

### Job differences.

The engineers find it hard to understand what high-level managers do. No one has ever explained what the job entails and the engineers doubt that high-level managers do any "real" work:

It seems like you lose your common sense because you go off—the farther away you are from work, real work, the more you're in some never-never-land where you're just talking to each other all the time and comparing things.

One engineer sees high-level managers in "parasite land" which is a place where you do "mergers and things" and live off something else that is functioning.

The engineers see first level management (line management) as the most difficult job of all because that is where the "rubber meets the road." The first level manager must deal with engineers and managers and are often caught in between. They cannot delegate as readily as higher management because there is much work that is not appropriate for engineers that "falls between the cracks" and lands at their level. They also risk a large impact on their project if they delegate their work to their engineers. The engineers see high level managers as being very far away where they forget that they impact people on the bottom. However, they see first level managers being much more involved emotionally:

But I don't think that management really regards us in any way as real people, certainly not at the high levels. On the lower levels, I do think that many supervisors are very emotionally involved in their people. They care greatly about what they do and how they grow.

### Valuing the work.

The engineers think that technical work is valued by the organization. However, they do not think that it is valued highly enough. One engineer recalls a high-level manager complaining about paying engineers too high a salary:

...one of the quotes I remembered was from a vice president at [company], who said that ... when particular programmers were very hard to come by in this kind of market, ...they had to pay six-digit numbers for programmers. And that was the kind of money that he was making. And I thought it was kind of interesting that he thought by definition that a certain group of people shouldn't be making the same kind of money as him, just by the fact that they're obviously valuable commodities since they're rare. So it was interesting how the differentiating factor was the fact that he was a manager and they were nonmanagers. And so he had this perception of, "They shouldn't be paid the same as me because I'm a manager." It had nothing to do with intrinsic value of what that person did. It had to do with his perception of the role.

Another engineer has the same concern:

...it seems like they don't value that much about technical people or developers. (...) And why should technical work be rewarded less than people doing management? And it seems like it's technical-track stops right at the MTS where the management track can go much, much further.

The rewards given to first level management are not seen as fair by the engineers. They think that the position warrants more perks and compensation. The engineers tell stories of raises given to first line managers being less than those given to engineers and note that most of the rewards come in long-term stock options. They believe that this level of manager should get more immediate rewards.

Some of the engineers see the rewards given to higher managers as "cool," such as flying on company jets, riding in helicopters, and financial security in the forms of stock options and

"golden parachutes." As one engineer states: "You have job security no matter how rotten a person you are, and how badly you do."

#### Moving between levels.

The engineers feel that it is nearly impossible to get to higher management. This may not be common knowledge in the organization. One engineer noted that it is in the organization's best interest to keep the difficulty of moving up hidden. It may best for the organization to promote the illusion that everyone who works hard and is deserving will advance:

We can only conjecture, and I think in some ways I'm not sure it's in their interest to tell us because of the fact that it's a pyramid. And if they start advertising, this is the big carrot that everybody is after. And, oh, and by the way, only two of a hundred of you are ever going to get it. You know, I'm not sure it's in their best interest to get everybody to clamor about that. Oh, people get angry when (...) if you're both competing for the same job or something, and you think you're better, well--a lot of people think they're better than the other person. But, they get it, you don't. It's a tough pill to swallow. A lot of people have trouble with that.

#### Power

Some engineers do not think that they have much power: "To some extent at our level we don't see any power." All of the engineers see visible signs of power differentiation. Managers get much better offices, cafeterias, telephones, and administrative support. The engineers have no input into the design of their physical space, which is usually some form of a cubicle. One engineer described this difference: "[A] manager gets single office. And nonmanagement people [it] usually is two in the office. Or they're throwing people in cubicles."

One engineer sees things differently, and thinks that engineers have power that they are not using:

But the reality is, especially in specialized work and specialized industry, there's not enough people to go around. That's the reality. And people will wake up to this. People that know it know that they are in the driver's seat. Because I have the skills that other people demand and are highly sought after. I'm going to live my life according to my principles and my desires. And if you don't like it, and you don't pay me well for it, then I'll go someplace else. That's the reality.

#### Summary: Experiences of the Organization

The engineers enjoy their work and the financial security that it brings. They take pride in "hard" skills that are easily proven and measurable. They work very hard, and their work takes much talent and skill, and it is certainly difficult. But they do not think that this is understood or appreciated. Although they do not feel committed to their organization, they do feel committed to their projects and work very hard to make them succeed. However, because they do not believe that the organization is committed to them, they wonder whether the relationship is balanced. They wonder if the new short-term compensation models are fair, because they do not believe that the organization has their best interests in mind. They hear that the organization values its people but they do not see much evidence of this. They do feel that they work in an atmosphere of respect and trust, and find that the best way to be sure that they can live by their values is to choose a manager who shares them.

The organization is moving towards a flatter structure. The engineers have mixed feelings about this change. They caution that hierarchy cannot be displaced without a transition plan, and that structure can offer individuals protection.

The engineers do not think highly of many managers. Managers without sufficient technical expertise impact the engineers negatively because they underestimate the effort that technical tasks require. Most managers are seen as self-promoting instead of mentoring. Women are seen as having a difficult time moving into management and also in having their authority recognized. The engineers do not think there are enough women managers. They feel that women have some skills that are sorely needed in management, such as consensus building and team building.

The engineers see social differences between the levels in their organization. They have experienced high-level managers abusing lower-level employees. The engineers do not have much social interaction with high-level managers and the managers seem aloof to them. They see the social and power hierarchy as detrimental to collaborative work. High-level managers appear to be more concerned with symbols of status to the engineers. The engineers do not understand the work of high-level management and therefore, they do not appreciate it. The engineers do not think that the rewards of engineers, first line management, and high-level management are in balance with the work done. They see that management work is regarded as inherently most valuable and the engineers do not understand why. The engineers do not feel that they have much power, but one engineer sees the good labor market as a source of power.

## Ideas on Organizations

No one is sure what exactly constitutes a "good" organization. How do engineers who reject advancement offers describe their ideal organization? The engineers gave their opinions on what they think works. They also shared many ideas on managing and leading, and described why they think these two roles are so different.

In summary, this section describes the engineers' ideas on ideal organizations, including descriptions of the roles of leaders and managers.

### Organizations

#### Teams and leaders.

The engineers prefer a flat organization. One even suggested that everyone should have the same title and "then you would just know by reputation who was good and who wasn't." They like being part of a team: "I really enjoy being part of the team. I like the feeling of having the team succeed." There is a strong preference for building solid teams and keeping them together. Some of the engineers think that the organization has a philosophy of treating engineers as interchangeable parts and often breaks up strong teams. They are attracted by the idea of self-leading teams consisting of talented individuals who are self-motivated. This allows ideas to "percolate up." One of the engineers has had problems in the past with geographically dispersed teams, and thinks that good teams should be co-located. The engineers also think that the size of teams should be kept small so that "you feel like one team" and are "playing together."

They view many forms of leadership as essential. They see a project leader role as central. The project leader continues to do technical work, but they use their experience to learn the strengths and weaknesses of the members intimately in order to allocate work in an efficient way. One engineer explains the role: "In some sense you're responsible for the piece, but you're not watching the schedule, you're not writing the people's [reviews]--you're not involved with the management and some ways the people." A technical leader role was also mentioned, where someone understands the entire project and acts as a single point where engineers can get answers to questions. The technical leader makes all architectural decisions while being receptive to changes and questions. They also see a need for a very small and tight leadership team consisting of financial, marketing, and management leaders who communicate well and often.

#### Culture.

The engineers prefer an open, honest, and collaborative culture in a very friendly environment: "The ideal group is that people could really cooperate and really truly mean it and [be] genuine about it. That would be really nice." They would like realistic goals to be set for the organization. They do not think this will happen due to the intense pressures that short time-to-market requirements bring.

They think it is important to reward high contributors. One engineer particularly likes peer recognition awards because he thinks they are more reality-based.

One suggestion offered describes a model where management is a support function of technical functions: "I think everything should be run by technical people who hire other people

to do services for them, to do management services and marketing services." The organization recognizes a need for this type of change in some sense, but the cultural shift would be enormous: "But now they say supported by your division head, who supports you, which is the right thing to say, even if nobody believes it." Several of the engineers think that the organization should simply focus on results-oriented engineers and managers. They do not particularly care if the managers want to have a different culture, as long as they can recognize good people and motivate them. They see this as the common ground between engineers and good managers.

#### Ideal organizations.

Examples of "ideal" organizations were given. One model given is an organization that is more like the marines. The marines have the focus, organization, and well-defined missions and goals that are lacking in the current organization. However, individual and family needs might be denied in the marines. On the other hand, individual and family needs are already denied in the less structured current organization. The engineer who suggested this model sees this problem but had no solution to offer. He also suggests that there would be less "back-stabbing" and politicking for promotions in a marine-like organization because people are promoted regularly based on professional demonstrations.

A model mentioned by more than one engineer depicts a typical start-up company: "... a very small group of technical people that are very good, with a very focused goal, and one or two business types...." The organization would be centered on technical talent, a small group of experts, with simplified business and marketing and would be very focused. This ideal organization would stay small and technical.

Another model given is that of an ice-cream parlor: "People come in and so happy--so happy just to be there. They give you your money, and they are happy with the product. Everybody is happy."

### Leading and Managing

#### Natural ability.

The engineers described the difference between the role of leading and the role of managing. They see leaders as charismatic, unique, driven, courageous, visionary, and having a certain style and a strong personality. Most of the engineers believe that leadership cannot be taught, but rather, they see leadership ability as something with which one is born. One engineer mentioned that new managers are sometimes sent to "charm school" to learn to be a "sensitive and caring person," but he does not believe that a course is really going to change anyone.

#### Control versus vision.

Leaders step up "for a certain role for a period or time." A manager is "somebody who has been appointed to manage you, and that has really nothing to do with leadership." A leader does not have formal authority bestowed on them. Leaders are chosen by consensus. People follow leaders voluntarily because they are inspired and the decision to follow is an unconscious one. Managers are seen as people who control, whereas leaders provide vision or take "you further ahead than you've been before." Leaders "have something to say or some way of doing something which makes sense." Leaders teach and lead by example. They have ideas which

they act on, and for which they generate enthusiasm. A leader picks up the group and moves it forward with visions and ideas.

Responsibility and authority, respect and trust.

The engineers believe people follow leaders because they trust them and because they think that the leader cares about them. A leader is like a coach:

... because you entrust the coach to do the best thing for the team and for each individual player. And you also have respect for the coach because the coach can help you play that position, and he can also play, or she can play that position.

Leaders are motivational and can take any group of people and "whip them into a team." A manager has a specified administrative role whereas: "a leader is somebody who gets people to do things because they're showing the way." Managers work through responsibility, authority, and control, but do not necessarily require respect or trust:

I'm there to manage and to control, and I have the responsibility and the authority to make this happen. I don't necessarily have to trust this manager. Or maybe I don't even trust this manager. I might not even respect the person. But they're my management.

Leaders can help people balance personal and company goals. They can "lead people in the direction which will be beneficial to the company." A leader trusts and respects their people. Their people respect the leader's opinion and judgment. One engineer sees one aspect of this respect for people as: "protecting them against the corporate animal...." Leaders protect their people and respect their personal lives:

I think just realizing what some of the pressures are outside of work on the people in your group can make a large difference. (...) if you're very heavy-handed and aren't willing to look at your people as real people, you're not going to see the opportunities

that are there.

#### Administrating and motivating.

Leaders are good organizers and motivators. They care about people. Managers handle administrative tasks and make sure that they track the performance of their people so that they can get them the raise they deserve. Managers make sure their people have the resources that they need. They take care of the "machinery, all that stuff has to be watched after and taken care of." Managers organize and pay attention to details and schedules. In one engineer's words: "Managers watch milestones go by." A manager has to track things and is responsible for making sure things are on time and done in the right order.

#### Working together.

The leadership role is seen as much more necessary than the management role by several of the engineers: "I don't think there is a need for the manager part. By in large I think most people manage themselves. If they were given an interesting assignment and challenging work, they would do it." Managers and leaders can work together, with a caveat: "... there has to be some level of maturity on both ends because whoever is in the leadership position would have to have respect for the management capability and need and vice versa and so on. Respect for each other."

#### Summary: Ideas on Organizations

The engineers see teamwork as paramount and think that self-leading teams allow ideas to flourish. They believe that many leadership roles are necessary in the project management,

technical, financial, and marketing areas. One proposal was that management should be a support function rather than a level of authority. There is a preference for an open and collaborative environment. Realistic goals and peer recognition are also important components. The engineers are looking for structure in the form of good planning and less political promotion. They mention start-up companies and small organizations in general as ideal.

Leadership and management are seen as two different roles. Leadership is seen as a natural ability. A manager is appointed and is seen as more concerned with control and administration, whereas leaders have a vision that motivates followers. People follow leaders because it makes sense and the choice to follow is voluntary. Leadership requires trust, respect, and caring, and leaders are good at balancing personal and organizational goals. A leader and manager can be the same person, or a leader and a manager can work together. However, the engineers see the leadership role as more essential.

#### Leading a Balanced Life

People are often driven to accept advancement because they would like to feel successful. The engineers' relationship with success affects their ability to decide against advancement. Also, they have a choice to look to work or personal life as an arena for self-development. Looking outside of work makes advancement rejection an easier choice.

A central theme, given all of the reasons one might have for rejecting advancement is that accepting it may cause an imbalance in one's life. Imbalances caused by conflicts in work and non-work obligations already exist in the engineers' lives to some extent. These existing

conflicts most definitely affect their decision to accept added responsibility in the form of advancement.

In summary, this section presents the engineers' assessment of success, self-development, and balance in their lives.

### Success

The majority of the engineers are not concerned with success. Moreover, they have much difficulty defining success: "But I feel successful. You know. I mean, I don't know how I'm measuring that. So I really feel in life I feel successful. But I don't know how you define it." One engineer points out that a successful life may be the sum of many small successes rather than one big one. Another noted that she feels "wildly" successful. However, she does not think that she pursued success aggressively in any way, but was instead pushed towards it by others. The engineers see themselves as professionals, but they are not all together sure that they have careers: "I don't have a career in the sense that I don't have an advancement plan."

Several of the engineers think that being happy means being successful. Some think that a successful family life or providing for a family is of utmost importance. Most do not link success with their jobs: "I imagine that success is going to be defined by something other than work." All of the engineers feel financially successful, but they feel there is a lot more to success than making money.

Internal success is differentiated from external success by several of the engineers:

...a lot of these things kind of differ between things that can be externally viewed and things that are internally viewed. You could say because somebody is a vice president,

they're a success --most people can agree with that. But you can't say because they're an MTS, they're successful. ... [unless] you defined it as happiness or self-fulfillment...

One engineer describes how the drive for job success can lead to personal sacrifice:

...sometimes I think that's why a lot of these people really get involved and call themselves quote/unquote successful... They've dedicated so much of their being and energy and emotion to that job, to that role that they wear that they have no room left for anything else. Anybody else that was in their life is now gone. They don't exist. That's all they're focused on. ... it slowly consumes you, especially in today's world. Cause they're just keep throwing stuff at you. And it just does consume you. So I felt that this is really--I can't believe this here, you know. It's like I can't get away from it.

### Self-development

Most of the engineers think that their self-development occurs outside of work and do not see technical skill development as self-development. One of the engineers feels that he has plateaued as far as personal skills that he can learn from his job. However, he does view the mentoring role that a senior engineer naturally assumes as giving a sense of personal satisfaction, even if it is not actually an opportunity for self-development: "So you actually get more reward-- personal satisfaction reward back from helping other people. So that's the aspect that I take away from it, but again, I wouldn't qualify it as a self-improvement or self-development."

Several of the engineers have some type of leadership role outside of work. One engineer plays a leadership role in her extended family and runs family meetings where important decisions are made. Several of the engineers coach children's sports teams, which gives them a great feeling of accomplishment. One engineer ran a non-profit organization at an early age. Another heads a sports league at his place of work.

## Work and Non-work

### Out of balance.

Most of the engineers feel that their lives are out of balance due to work and family conflicts. The engineers without children feel that their personal time is very important, and that it is often impinged upon by their work. One engineer would like to have set hours: "I think I'd like the same kind of life that my father had, which was like working nine to five, five days a week."

One engineer describes his view of the imbalance of organizational demands: "I get this weird feeling these days lately that people feel guilty when they leave work. And that's very unhealthy. It's extremely unhealthy, and it's wrong. And it's totally the wrong value set." He goes on to describe how blurring work and non-work boundaries can cause people to feel guilty and become even more confused about their work obligations:

(...) today I think boundaries are very diffuse. ...you work at home, and it fuzzes the boundary between work and home, yes, as physical--It's not the whole thing. The emotional entanglement and so on. But, maybe the more of that that happens the better because the people feel guilty they didn't work.

He sees causes of this situation in poor leadership and a focus on short-term benefits:

There's something wrong. It's not healthy... and I think it's a remarkable lack of leadership to a certain extent. Even from a management perspective because they're not really feeling responsible for people's wellbeing. It's not out there. ...ultimately it's to the judgment of the individuals as well as to the organization. Maybe the organization will benefit from this culture short time. Will it long term? I don't think so. Because what happens to these people? They become unhappy. If you're unhappy, you're not going to work well. You need that one too. --yeah, there's an imbalance.

The engineers with families feel that work affects their family lives:

"(...) as time has gone on, work has crept into family life just because there is too much to do at work, and so there's stuff to read, there's stuff to do. (...) So you know work does, you know, infuse itself into the home life."

"I don't think what I'm doing now is optimal either. (...) Toward the end of the week everybody gets really, really tired and have lots of fights...."

These engineers feel that they are constantly being pressured to make a choice between their families and their jobs:

"... there are times I'm doing things up until 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. I think that's kind of ridiculous, and it's hard to bring up children in that environment too. (...) so it's choices. And those choices can be like hard at times."

"It's very stressful. (...) The kids get sick, and I get sick. It's very, very stressful. It's very hard. Many times I thought about maybe I should quit my job and stay home."

"Everyday I think I make a compromise coming into work--sending my kids to daycare and coming here. I don't know. It's a tough one."

One engineer describes her view of making a choice between work and family:

...--you're always at odds with yourself if you work all these hours, and you don't see your kids. I think it's harder for women because women have a more--more burden is placed upon them for childcare and stuff. I think for men, you know, it's not--it's tough, but it's not as difficult as for a woman. Yeah, you have to make a decision. Your kids or your job, and I think that's a terrible decision you have to make. Some people make it right up front so that their supervisors know immediately what to set--their expectations are for them. And then other people, well, they're just trying to get somewhere, so they don't see their kids, and they work hard.

Some of the engineers look for answers in the form of alternative work arrangements such as part-time work, but the organization is not always willing to cooperate:

"I wanted to work part-time, but I wasn't offered that. I asked for it, and...They said no. ... They just needed a full-time person. That was their reason. And that was it, and it's very hard working full time. I don't think you'll find too many moms here--full-time moms and full-time employees."

"...working more at home maybe that would help. ... Yeah. I have to get that situation set up too. I don't have a computer at home. And last year my boss said that it was okay, that we could get new machines and take our existing machine home, right? So but then like at the end of the year he says no. We can't buy anything new because of some--something that he's watching. Some budget he was watching..."

Parental leave is available for new parents, however the engineers consider the absence of onsite childcare to be a burden:

Oh, they don't make it easy on people-- they don't have-- childcare. You know, a company of this stature should have a better childcare situation than they do. I mean, the stuff they give to women is pretty good, but it doesn't help you once you get back to work with childcare as a major problem. (...) They don't make it easy that way. Well, once you're back into work, you need childcare. Why don't they have it on site? Why don't they have better facilities perhaps? Why don't they have better agreements?

#### In balance.

Several of the engineers have found success in balancing their work and personal lives by keeping them entirely separate. One engineer works with computers at home, but only for recreational purposes. Another makes sure to set realistic goals at work and can accomplish this because management plans effectively.

#### Summary: Leading a Balanced Life

Job success is not of primary importance to the engineers. They are more concerned with creating a successful personal life. Their self-development occurs outside of work, and they

also have leadership roles outside of work. Their work and non-work lives are out of balance when they are forced to take personal time and give it to work. A danger is seen is blurring the boundaries between work and non-work life in that the engineers tend to give even more time to work.

They feel that they often have to choose between their families and their jobs, and observe others who are trying to "get somewhere" sacrifice their families. Alternative work arrangements, such as part-time work are hard to find, and the lack of an onsite childcare facility is seen as a problem.

The engineers think that unreasonable time demands might benefit the organization in the short-term, but in the long term people will not produce their best work under these conditions.

#### Future Plans

The engineers do have interests in work other than engineering and in working in engineering under different circumstances. These alternate choices give information about what it is that they enjoy about work. This in turn gives additional clues as to why they have rejected management work.

In summary, this section describes the engineers' hopes and desires for the future.

#### Ideal Work

All of the engineers like to accomplish concrete results: "This is part of the reason why people are programmers too. Because you build things." They like the "feeling of getting things to work." Several engineers would like to move into work where "...you can do something with

your hands." Several mention owning small businesses not related to engineering. Others would like to own their own engineering business. In any case, the engineers like the idea of "... not having a boss." Several of the engineers express a desire to work in more aesthetically pleasing physical surroundings, such as the mountains. One of the engineers would like to work in an area that produces concrete results that are a "legacy." Another engineer would like to become a writer or stage designer and has a keen interest in creating experiences for others. This may lead to work in computer gaming:

I love to go to theaters because they represent things with, even if it's just minimalist with lighting and stuff, and that's one reason I like the computer games, because they basically have created—it's very stagy. It's three-dimensional. You have a lot of lighting effects. What you're looking at is as important as what's happening. It just seems to me ... it's like creating a three-dimensional play in a way. There's sort of a design to a game, to make it interesting but not broken in that it's impossible, to maintain sort of the suspense, like a mystery movie or something. It seems to me there's a lot of creativity there.

### Retirement

After retirement, the engineers would like to travel more and they would be choosier about their work. Several mention engineering in a more creative context, such as gaming or shareware, without necessarily making a living from their work. One engineer would like to donate engineering work to non-profit organizations, and would perhaps like to organize other engineers to do the same.

A few of the engineers would reconsider a management position in the future under different circumstances. They feel they would more comfortable managing if they were

financially secure and had less personal obligations. Several have encountered very successful managers who advanced at a later stage in their lives. Most look forward to a time of early retirement when they "have the financial flexibility to do what we want to do ... " whether that is management, farming, gaming, owning a small business, contract work, or volunteer work.

#### Summary: Future Plans

The engineers are builders at heart, and would like to perhaps do work where they can "use their hands." They would like to own a business and "be their own boss" or move into more creative programming. Several mentioned that they would be willing to try management after retirement. Also mentioned was starting a "programming" Peace Corp, where engineers donate their efforts to needy organizations.

#### Summary of Findings

The interviews revealed many important findings. They show that the engineers' advancement choices are limited to progression in management. However, they are not interested in management work due to the following concerns: morally opposed to using persuasion and manipulation to externally motivate others, keeping integrity, protecting self and others against unreasonable organizational demands, imbalance in valuing work and creating reward structures, and surrender of investment. They feel they may be judged as unsuccessful, but are not overly concerned about this as they ground their success in personal and family accomplishments.

The engineers do not trust the organization to respect their personal lives, and feel that managers are more vulnerable in this way. The hierarchical nature of the organization encourages behaviors such as self-promotion, unreasonable social and reward disparities between management and nonmanagement, and an overall "level" consciousness. The engineers would prefer an organization based on trust, respect, sharing, and collaboration with leaders who are followed because of the "rightness" of their vision. They would also prefer to work with leaders who know how to balance personal and organizational gain.

The most important findings from the interviews are organized below by *Findings Related to the Nature of Work* and *Findings Related to Organizational Influences*. These findings and their implications are discussed in the next and final chapter.

#### Findings Related to the Nature of Work

1. Technical work was chosen for enjoyment, and enjoyment continues to be a motivating factor.
2. Professional progression is desirable, but the only progression possible is in management.
3. Management work is not enjoyable.
  - Managers do not build things and their skills are not "hard" and measurable.
  - Managers must give too much time and emotional investment to their jobs.
  - Managers must motivate people through extrinsic rewards.
  - Managers must compromise their integrity.
  - Managers cannot protect people from unreasonable organizational demands created by poor planning on the organization's part.
  - Managers must become involved in politics.
  - There are social distinctions between managers and nonmanagers.
  - Line level managers are not rewarded sufficiently.
  - Engineering offers more mobility and it offers more financial security.

- Management requires investment in an entirely different profession and engineers already have a profession in which they have a large investment.
4. Progression to management is expected to happen early in one's career.
  5. Choosing to reject advancement is unusual and those who make this decision sometimes suffer from "being different."
  6. Feelings of accomplishment can be gained outside of work.
  7. Self-development is not necessarily tied to one's job.
  8. It is desirable to do technical work in a smaller company or on a volunteer basis, or to do similar work in a more creative setting.

### Organizational Influences

1. It is better to be judged as unsuccessful than to sacrifice happiness and family life.
2. Personal lives should not be sacrificed for the organization, especially when the organization does not value its people highly enough.
  - The organization is not committed to its employees.
  - The organization's objective is to succeed at all costs.
  - The organization says that it values people, but then pressures them to sacrifice their personal and family lives.
  - Unreasonable demands affect the quality of work and may benefit the organization short-term, but not long-term.
3. The organization says it is moving to a flat structure that encourages respect, trust, and empowerment. This is not the experienced reality.
  - Any of the managers in the organization may have chosen management for financial gain, and the power and control that a hierarchical structure brings. This leads to self-promotion by managers and nonmanagers, which precludes respect, trust, and empowerment.
  - Women are not respected.
  - Managers are on another "level" than other employees where their work is invisible and therefore not appreciated by nonmanagers, and where they cannot appreciate the work of nonmanagers.
  - Management work is valued more highly than technical work even though both are difficult and important.
  - There are external disparities between the treatment of managers and nonmanagers.
  - Managers sometimes abuse employees and have the power to do so.

4. The values of honesty, openness, hard work, collaboration, and balance are important. The organization as a whole does not share these values.
  - Personal values are upheld by finding a manager who shares them and working for her or him. This also illustrates the importance of mobility.
5. A flat organization is preferred. This is given the condition that the transition actually happens and personal interests are not co-opted by a hidden hierarchical organization in the name of "team work" and "empowerment."
  - The organization is increasing its demands on personal lives. The organization is trying to blur the emotional and physical boundaries between work and non-work lives.
  - The ideal organization is centered on teamwork of many kinds and leadership, with management as a support function.
  - In the ideal organization, leaders are selected naturally, by consensus, and the leadership role may be temporary.
  - In the ideal organization, leaders provide vision that balances organizational and personal goals. They foster respect and trust.
  - In the ideal organization, people are internally motivated and rewarded fairly for their work, whether it is technical work or management work.
  - In the ideal organization, high contributors are rewarded in all areas.
  - The ideal organization is highly focused.
  - In the ideal organization, realistic goals are set and met because the people setting them are knowledgeable enough to do so correctly and have the power to influence plans.
6. Management may be more attractive under circumstances where people are not required to sacrifice their personal and family lives.

## Chapter V: Discussion

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of people who reject advancement offers. To achieve this goal, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with six engineers who had rejected advancement offers. The participants provided me with detailed accounts of their experiences of advancement rejection. They also shared related experiences of their organizational and personal lives, and generated ideas on improving current organizational and leadership models. In the previous chapter, I organized and categorized findings using inductive analysis to describe the engineers' realities. Engineers' quotes were used to enrich this description. Further, a phenomenological theoretical framework guided me throughout the investigation. This allowed me to classify the findings with full awareness that concepts merely point to reality and that often "realities are relegated to being mere exemplifications of concepts (Crotty, 1998, p. 81)." I am acknowledging that cultures (including organizational cultures) impose a particular set of meanings which came "into being to serve particular interests" (p. 81) and harbor their "own forms of oppression, manipulation and other forms of injustice" (p. 81). I believe that revealing and discussing the possible meanings of the categories and themes that are my conceptualizations is important. Somewhere between these meanings and those constructed by the organizational culture is the reality that the engineers in this study experience.

This chapter begins with a summary of the findings discussed in light of the literature. This discussion is followed by an explanation of the limitations of this study, and concludes with implications for organizations and future research.

## Summary of the Findings

This study was designed to investigate the following areas:

The experiences, perceptions, attitudes, and issues that lead to advancement offer rejection.

The experiences surrounding actual advancement offer rejection.

The experience of continuing to work in an organization after advancement offer rejection.

General views regarding advancement, organizations, and leadership.

During semi-structured interviews engineers were asked to describe their experiences of rejecting advancement. They were also asked to explain their views and experiences of organizational life. They shared their understanding of the choices available to them, their experiences of making and living with decisions based on these choices, as well as their understanding of the culture where these choices were made. I have focused on five areas in this summary: (1) engineers' views of available advancement choices, (2) engineers' decision making process in light of these choices, (3) the cultural "reality" in which engineers' make and live these decisions, (4) the ideal "reality" that they envision, and (5) the engineers' personal "reality."

### Advancement Choices

Engineers enjoy technical work. That is why they chose their profession and it is also why they continue to be engaged in it. They entered the corporate world with the awareness that advancement means success, and success should be everyone's goal. There is pressure to advance quickly, a finding that supports Westney's (1985) earlier research. However, there is only one career to pursue: management. And even though management is a possible goal, the

process of being promoted is mysterious and contrary to the engineering nature that appreciates unambiguity and concreteness. In fact, the engineers are not sure that a technical ladder actually exists. If it does, it is a very short one, as there is at most one level above the one at which they entered. The criteria for this promotion are inconsistent and the meaning of the promotion is ambiguous. The engineers would prefer a more open and structured technical promotion process based on experience and professional demonstration. On the whole, these findings support earlier research indicating that R&D career paths are ambiguous and inconsistent (Allen & Katz, 1986; Bailyn, 1982, 1991; Bailyn & Lynch, 1983; Dalton & Thompson, 1986; Ritti, 1971).

#### Decision Making Process

The engineers would like to make a greater technical and strategic contribution to the organization as a whole. However, they are not given that chance due to the limited opportunities for both technical advancement and increased influence. I sensed a great deal a frustration in this area. Several engineers have made a compromise by moving into research organizations where their skills and experience are exploited, but where they have little chance of advancing to management. Whatever their choices, they do not want to be forced to move into management. Schein (1975) observed that someone with a *technical -functional competence* career anchor might rather leave a company than move into management, and my findings definitely support this. Several of the engineers tried management positions, by their own choice, and with motives other than money and power. Their experiences on the whole

were not positive. They did not enjoy the political aspects, the loss of control over their time, and the push and pull of unreasonable demands.

The engineers have also turned down advancement offers. These offers were made because the engineers are seen as having managerial attributes. Often the conditions of the offer were very uncomfortable. Sometimes they were coercive. Other times the offer was made repeatedly over long periods of time to wear down the engineers' resolve. Although the offer flattered the engineers, they soon became concerned about whether or not they really wanted to take it. They feared repercussions if they turned it down. Their fears support Steele's (1975) research regarding a lack of openness in organizations regarding the promotion process. In the end, they decided to reject the advancement offers because:

1. They were not sure that they could do the job.
2. The particular job offered was not suitable for a new manager because it entailed "fixing" a severely broken project.
3. They did not think they could meet the increased emotional and time demands.
4. Preferring internal motivation, they do not wish to manipulate people.
5. They felt that, as a manager, they would not be able to uphold their principles.
6. They do not want to lay people off.
7. They do not feel that they could protect their people from unreasonable demands and unfair practices.
8. They dislike politics and social distinctions.
9. They would lose their investment in engineering and they like engineering.
10. They would lose mobility and flexibility.
11. The job does not pay enough to disregard the above issues.

A common thread runs through this list which is very significant. A preference for the partnership model as defined by Eisler (1998) is clearly present. The engineers are very

concerned with serving their followership well, leading a balanced life and having the freedom to encourage others to do so. They do not believe in using coercive means to gain cooperation, in the same way that Roberts (1997) believes animals should never be told "you must" (p. 245). They recognize that managing in an organization that works in Eisler's dominator model would be very difficult for someone who is partnership oriented.

After the engineers turned down the offers, they were sometimes passed over for good work, or they were given management work anyway. Their managers were sometimes accepting, sometimes perplexed, and sometimes angry. Peers who have made the same decision give understanding and respect. Other peers are neutral. As Senge (1990) and Stoner, Ference, Warren, and Christensen (1980) have shown before, this study found that respect might be forthcoming from peers, but not from organizations when advancement is rejected.

The engineers continue to struggle with their decision. They find it difficult to watch others who are less competent being rewarded and gaining influence. They would like to have a way to channel their energy and to receive recognition for their talents and achievements. However, they still feel they made the right decision because they continue to enjoy their work and freedom.

### The Cultural "Reality"

The engineers enjoy their work, but they also do it for financial security and the social aspects. They respect work that brings concrete, immediate, and measurable results. They do not tolerate people who try to impress with appearances. Appearances do not impress the engineers, only "real" talent and work make an impression. The engineers seemed to be more

interested in the pursuit of truth than economic values, in the same way that Dalton and Thompson's (1986) conflicted managers are.

The organizational culture the engineers experience can definitely be seen as a cause for their concerns regarding advancement. The engineers continue to work hard, mostly because they enjoy their work, but they question the new contract that they have with the organization. They are not committed to the organization and the organization is not committed to them, and they wonder what that means. There is a great deal of uneasiness as the organization speaks of flat structures and empowerment, while increasing demands and invading private lives. The engineers see these increasing demands as caused by a lack of good leadership and planning. They wonder if they are actually benefiting from the changes that are being made. They are aware that layoffs are always a possibility, but feel that they have some power due to the tight labor market for engineers at this time. The engineers seem to be experiencing a forced transformation to the open-ended moral bond observed by Bailyn (1993). They sense that they should have the right to limit their commitment, but the organization is not giving them to option to do so.

The values of the engineers and the organization clash in one very important area. The organization puts profits first, whereas the engineers feel that people should come first. The reality is that the organization is publicly espousing "value in people," while simultaneously demanding excessive time commitments. Most of the engineers could not name any of the organization's values, except "success at all cost." In general, the engineers feel that the values espoused by the organization are not the same as the ones operationalized at their level. They

are not willing to make the moral compromise that Jackall (1998) sees as necessary to preserve the institutional culture.

The engineers see managers as self-promoting. Other concerns range from a lack of mentoring to ineptitude. They share these concerns with the engineers observed by Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) at another high-tech company. The engineers also observe that women are not promoted as often as men are, even though they possess desirable management attributes. When women are promoted they are sometimes not granted authority or respect by their peers or their subordinates. These findings are not surprising given past research showing that women are not credited for their success, and must prove themselves constantly (Valian, 1998). I was struck by one female engineer's insistence that her success was more attributable to luck than her talent and hard work, which directly supports Valian's research. Further, African American engineers are strikingly absent from the organization. One might guess that black engineers would face conditions at least as severe as those faced by women given historical findings concerning the barriers to success that blacks experience (Graves, 1997). The findings regarding gender and race support the conditions one would expect from an organization working in Eisler's (1998) dominator model. From my observations, the engineers in the organization are predominately male, and the high level managers are almost all male. It seems that the values of honoring diversity and respecting differences are espoused at all levels, but not actually acted upon by management. It seems reasonable to assume women and minority group members consider these conditions when they are weighing an advancement offer. As one of the

women interviewed for the study later commented to me when considering an offer, "... I don't think these guys respect me. I don't think it can work."

The social differences between managers and other employees are pronounced. Managers receive special treatment and have the power to abuse lower level employees, which they sometimes use. Managers are seen more interested in status than results. One engineer noted that this might be necessary, as the managers of other companies, being as status conscious as any managers, need to be impressed. Certainly, social criteria is used to determine promotability (Jackall, 1988) and this probably contributes to the situation described by the engineers.

Engineers do not understand what managers actually do. Managers do not understand what engineers do and often underestimate the effort needed to complete a task or project, to the engineers' detriment. There is very little informal communication between levels of employees. Management work is seen as inherently more valuable by management, but not by the engineers. They do not understand why managers are rewarded so generously, and they do not see management work as more intrinsically valuable. Managers receive many external symbols of status and power such as private offices, better food, and secretaries. These findings illustrate Metcalf and Briody's (1995) study showing that nonmanagerial workers are not seen as successful because they have no visible power. Visible symbols of status, as well as control over subordinates, bring power to managers. Regardless of how the engineers feel about management, they realize that there is not much chance of moving into high level management as

the organization is not flat at all, but is a pyramid. They also realize that it is not in organizations' best interests to publicize this fact.

### Ideal "Reality"

The ideal "reality" proposed by the engineers bears a striking resemblance to the alternative organizational and leadership models found in the literature (Senge, 1990; Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990). They prefer a flat organization consisting of self-leading teams and a small number of leaders. The culture would be open, collaborative, and honest. Realistic goals would be set, and high contributors would be rewarded. The organization would be centered on technical talent, and management would be a support function. The organization would be focused. There would be no politicking for promotions. Good leadership would be key. Leaders would be naturally selected and the leadership role would be transitory. Leaders would provide motivating vision and ideas. Leaders would give trust and respect and followers would reciprocate. Above all, leaders would show that they care by respecting peoples' private lives. The engineers' views on issues of management and leadership are especially striking. They have much experience and have apparently given careful deliberation to the problems that they encounter in their workplace. Their conclusions give strong support to the new thought and research regarding changes organizations must make to survive and advance (Block, 1993; Boyett & Boyett, 1996; Boyett & Conn, 1991; Hollander, 1993; Huber, 1998; Koch & Godden, 1997).

## Personal "Reality"

Success is not really on the engineers' minds, but when prompted they say they do feel successful. However, they tie their success more to family, happiness, and personal accomplishments. They view internal ideas of success as more important than social, or external, measures of success. Their self-development occurs outside of work and they also have outside leadership roles. They feel their lives are sometimes out of balance due to clashes in work and personal life demands. They view the demands of work as excessive and think that their workplace should be more flexible in the area of time. They feel organizations are trying to trade visions of flat organizations and empowerment for more of their time, and this just does not work for them. Their organization does not provide onsite childcare, which they feel would help their situation. They feel torn between their personal and work obligations and this causes a fair amount of stress. They see organizations' increased demands as unhealthy for people and detrimental to organizations' long-term goals. The only way they feel that they can cope is by keeping organizational and personal concerns completely separate. Their experiences parallel Hochschild's (1997) and Rifkin's (1995) work regarding the difficulty of defining work and personal life boundaries.

The engineers would like to continue to "build" things, and they think that they might enjoy doing work that involves "using their hands." They would like to own their own businesses, or work in a more creative environment. They mentioned trying management under different circumstances, when they have less personal obligations to attend to, or perhaps in a

smaller company with a different culture. They look forward to a time of retirement and financial independence, when they might donate their technical work to needy causes.

### Limitations of the Study

As with most studies, there are several limitations to this study. First, the sample size of six participants did not allow for absolute theoretical saturation. Further, the participants formed a convenience sample. They are not a diverse group in terms of organizational affiliation, socioeconomic status, age, race, culture, or occupation.

The findings may not be generalizable and probably only apply to the environment studied in detail. However, as several of the participants also rejected advancement at companies where they previously worked, the findings may be useful for other organizations as well. The findings do have many parallels with those encountered in the literature, particularly studies involving engineers. Therefore, this study presents an alternative view of organizational culture that can be considered by any organization when examining their own environment, but especially those that employ engineers.

And finally, this is the first time that I have engaged in qualitative research. I have received guidance from my academic advisor as needed. Additionally, extensive reading, observations, intuitions, and interactions (some of which seemed to come about in a most synchronous way) guided me throughout this project.

## Implications for Organizations

The message for organizations is clear. Valuable human energy is being wasted because people who do not agree with society's version of success are ignored. They do not align with the current organizational culture, which is closed and based on old ideas of control. People's time and energy is precious and valuable, to individuals, to families, to society at large, as well as to organizations. The assumption that management work is inherently superior to all other work is false. It is leadership that matters, not political aptitude and self-promotion skills.

Collaborative workplaces cannot exist in the same organization that promotes great social and economic disparities between management and nonmanagement work. Teamwork cannot succeed when members are clamoring to be promoted closer to power, control, and money. Too much energy is expended trying to maintain an organizational structure that is no longer needed. Too many managers are in their work for the wrong reasons, making them poor leaders by definition. As Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1996) say, "If the rewards of success in business management were not so inordinate, then choice of this profession could arise from more public-spirited motives" (p.290).

Almost all of the reasons the engineers gave for rejecting advancement would disappear if organizations were more aligned with this one value: "people first." This means that the values of organizations need to be clear, applied, and subject to change. If the organizations espouse "people first," then they must make sure that peoples' personal lives are not devastated by organizational demands. They must make sure that organizational members share equitably in success. If organizations mean "profits first" but say "people first" then they have lost all

credibility and trust. This is far worse than just admitting that people do not matter as much as money and power.

Obviously, organizations are misaligned with their members on a very basic level. No amount of talk about trust, respect, or empowerment can speak as loudly as real change and action in the realm of giving back to people: giving back their time, giving back their lives, giving back their choices, giving back their freedom, giving back their selves.

In a recent Hays Group survey (Gannett News Service, 1999) two thirds of non-management IT professionals said they left their positions primarily because they could not get ahead without becoming managers. The companies who lost the talents and services of these people are not addressing the issues found in this thesis. I believe that many of the people who reject advancement are exactly those who have the most to contribute to an organization free of artificial structures, political concerns, and *teleopathy*. There are leaders all around us; who have little chance to contribute and little chance to change organizations for the better.

#### Implications for Further Research

Most of the findings support the literature and also reflect my own experiences. However, more work is needed to find ways to encourage those who do not share the values of current leadership to move into leadership roles. Ways must be found to infuse their ideas and behaviors. Class, race, culture, and gender will certainly all play a part in this work. The mass movement of women and people of varying cultures into the workplace will bring with it an increased questioning of the "correctness" of current value systems that may run counter to the

"ways of being" of these new corporate members. Organizational designs must be found which promote diverse leadership.

Also, this research concerned a population that has the marketability and economic status to ease their decision to reject advancement. Similar studies are needed involving those who may not have this privilege.

More active research is needed in the area of personal rewards and team efforts. Methods to reward group outcomes while fairly compensating for differences in individual contribution and knowledge need to be tested. The popularity of self-managed and self-leading team ideas makes this issue most pressing.

Organizations are changing very rapidly. Short, longitudinal (spiked) studies might help to bring the experiences of corporate members back to organizations in a much tighter feedback loop than most current research seems to provide.

Research that simultaneously deals with the various levels of an organization would be a great benefit. If the organization espouses flatness, self-managed teams, and empowerment, managers could be asked if they are actually willing to loosen the reins of power and control, and share corporate profits more fairly. At the same time, nonmanagement employees could be encouraged to expose issues of trust and boundaries.

Finally, action research could be undertaken that looks at the personal and spiritual growth of managers. This is the type of change, transformation of intentions and motivations, which might have the quickest and largest impact on organizations.

## Personal Post-Script

One day some years ago, I walked into my place of work and realized that something was different. I have always seen the world in a different way than most people around me. I am very intuitive, have experienced many non-linear events, and relate with others in the most honorable way that I can. This way of being was not allowed at work. I was an engineer in a great business, a technician, a scientist, and expected to be solely analytical and not always truthful. The truth was somehow changed whenever I walked through the door and entered the world of work. On that day long ago, I knew that I could never leave myself at the door again. At the same time I felt that it was impossible to integrate truth at this place where an entirely different code of honor was followed. After that, every day became a learning adventure and my place of work transformed into a hotbed of ideas, issues, opinions, and talk. Talk about collective action started surfacing around me and I knew that things were changing even more quickly than I had thought. We are telling the truth, knowing the power of no compromise. Even though I cannot help but notice the nuances of control, half-truths, and fear that surround our best intentions, I also know that something is occurring that cannot be stopped. I experience it everyday.

In the midst of all this change, I noticed a pattern that occurred throughout my more than twenty years at work. The people who I would have most gladly followed were usually the ones who would never accept a management position. I then experienced this pattern directly after I turned down a promotion and was told that I was the type of person who was needed at this time. It was then that I realized it would be beneficial to expose the reality behind the

decision to reject advancement. The engineers who shared their stories through this study are kind, intelligent, and most of all, honorable. I see the information that they shared as some part of a truth that can be lived by all of us, wherever we are. As Edgar Cayce (n.d./1999) said, "Begin where you are! Be what you should be where you are! And when you have proven yourself, He will give you better ways!"

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Informed Consent Form<sup>3</sup>

1. *What is the aim of the study?* The aim of the study is to learn about the different reasons that people reject offers of advancement in organizations. I hope to learn how different people decide whether or not to take a promotion and the issues and concerns that drive this decision. Ultimately, I am hoping the findings will increase awareness and appreciation of the diverse viewpoints and contributions essential to personal and organizational success.
2. *How was I chosen?* I will interview about 6 persons who were identified as people who had rejected advancement offers by their work associates.
3. *What will be involved in participating?* I will schedule one or more interviews with you, depending on what seems most useful. Ordinarily, the interviews will last between one and two hours. I will tape the interviews and make transcriptions from the tapes.
4. *Who will know what I say?* Only I will have access to your tapes and transcripts.
5. *What risks and benefits are associated with participation?* I do not foresee any risks to you other than a possible breach of confidentiality. To protect against that risk I will ensure that your tapes and transcripts are held in my home and that access to them is limited to myself. Your name will not appear in the transcripts. In any publication or public statement based on the study, all names, occupations, or other potentially identifying information will be omitted or changed. Two years after the end of the study the tapes will be destroyed.  
  
Sometimes people find participating in an interview to be beneficial insofar as it gives them a chance to talk about things that matter to them.
6. *What are my rights as a respondent?* You may ask any questions regarding the research, and they will be answered fully. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation is voluntary.

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<sup>3</sup> Format and some content borrowed from Weiss (1994), pp. 217-218.

7. *What will be published?* I will include the findings in an academic thesis. It is most likely that this thesis will not be published, although such theses are sometimes published in professional journals.

8. *If I want more information, whom can I contact about the study?* The researcher, Elena Papavero, may be contacted at (732) 949-5416. This research is being conducted under the direction of Shoshana Simons, Ph.D., who is a faculty member at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont.

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Elena M. Papavero, Researcher

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Respondent, date

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

### A. The Experience

#### 1. General

##### Prompts:

- (a) What lead you to your current line of work? (summary)
- (b) How long have you been working? In the same company? In your current position?

#### 2. Before the Advancement Offer

##### Prompts:

- (a) How long ago was the advancement offer? Was it in your current organization?
- (b) How did you feel about your work before the advancement offer?

#### 3. The Advancement Offer

##### Prompts:

- (a) Describe the experience of receiving the advancement offer. Did you expect the offer?
- (b) What caused you to reject the offer?
- (c) Describe the experience of rejecting the offer. How did your manager react to the offer rejection?

#### 4. After the Advancement Offer

##### Prompts:

- (a) How did you feel about your job after the advancement offer?
- (b) Was your standing at work affected by the offer rejection?

## B. Views on Work

### 1. Work and Nonwork life

#### Prompts:

- (a) How do you see the relationship between your work life and nonwork life?
- (b) How does your work life affect your family life? How does your family life affect your work life?
- (c) In your view what is the ideal relationship between someone's work and nonwork life?

### 2. Identity and Work

#### Prompts:

- (a) Why do you work?
- (b) How important is self-development to you? Does your work offer opportunities for self-development?
- (c) What is your definition of success? Do you feel successful?<sup>4</sup>
- (d) If you could do any type of work at all, what would it be?

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<sup>4</sup> Added "Do you feel successful?" after third interview. (1/30/99)

## C. Views on Leadership

### 1. Leadership Qualities

Prompts:

- (a) Are leading and managing the same? If not, how are they different?<sup>5</sup>
- (b) Describe your concept of a good leader.
- (c) Do you think you have any of these attributes?
- (d) Do you know of anyone with these attributes?

### 2. Gender and Race

Prompts:

- (a) Do you think that gender, race or other factors can affect one's success as a leader?

### 3. Leadership in Other Organizations

Prompts:

- (a) Do you have a leadership role outside of work?

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<sup>5</sup> Added after second interview. (1/25/99)

## D. Views on Organization

### 1. General Perceptions of Current Organization

#### Prompts:

- (a) Describe your current organization.
- (b) Describe the values of your current organization. Describe your values. Contrasts?<sup>6</sup>
- (c) What is the nature of your commitment to the organization that you work for? What is the nature of the organization's commitment to you? Contrasts?<sup>7</sup>
- (d) Describe the leadership structure of your organization.

### 2. Relationship of Management to Non-management Work

#### Prompts:

- (a) How is power distributed in your organization?
- (b) Are managers and non-managers treated differently? If so, can you describe how they are treated differently?
- (c) What value does your organization give to non-management work in relation to management work?

### 3. Ideal Organization<sup>8</sup>

#### Prompts:

- (a) Describe your idea of an ideal organization.
- (b) Would you consider leading in your ideal organization?

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<sup>6</sup> Added after first interview. (1/23/99)

<sup>7</sup> Moved from Identity and Work here after third interview and added organization's commitment to individual. (1/30/99)

<sup>8</sup> Title changed from Entrepreneurship after third interview. (1/30/99)

#### E. Personal Data

1. What is your age?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. Do you have children? If so, how many and what are their ages?

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