Agency and communion as factors influencing men’s ECEC career trajectories. 
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Abstract

Achieving gender balance in ECEC requires both effective recruitment and retention of men. This study examines characteristics of agency and communion as explanatory factors in men’s trajectories from entry and throughout their careers. The research extends previous studies on men’s entering the profession (author, year; Pirard, 2015) by closely looking at continued decision making along career paths, using agency as the theoretical framework.

Bandura (2006) delineated core agentic properties: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness, while Buchanan & Bardi (2014) distinguished between agency ("getting ahead") and communion ("getting along") as meta-constructs related to wellbeing. Based on a multi-case study paradigm, we used semi-structured interviews and storylines, focused on five veteran male ECEC workers at the end of a five year longitudinal study. Participants agreed to all research procedures. Identification was avoided through pseudonyms and changing identification of work contexts.

Findings showed that men who chose to remain in the classroom exhibited high levels of communion. Their agentic behaviors included passionate intentionality towards work with children, short-term career forethought, and delayed self-reactiveness. In contrast, those who entered administrative positions in their schools and day care centers exhibited high levels of intentionality towards institutional frameworks, long-term career forethought, immediate self-reactiveness, deep self-reflectiveness, and low levels of communion.

These findings shed light on men’s retention in the ECEC workforce, suggesting a nuanced re-examination of the glass escalator paradigm which posits that men in women’s professions uniformly tend to rise in their organizations.

Keywords

gender balance, retention, agency, communion, intentionality

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Aims of the study

► How do men’s career trajectories in ECEC unfold?
► What factors affect their career decisions?
► Can agency theory contribute to understanding men’s career trajectories?
Agency, characterized as “getting ahead,” involves a self-focused orientation that manifests itself in self-advancement and self-reliance and entails pursuing self-orientated goals, striving for achievement and independence.

Communion, characterized as “getting along,” involves an other-focused orientation that manifests itself in benevolence and interpersonal connections, and it entails consideration of others, helping, and social connectedness.

(Buchanan & Bardi, 2015)
Dimensions of Non-agentic Behavior

Iterational
- Low self esteem
- Unrealized plans
- Stasis - inertia

Evaluative
- Blames external factors
- Inaction
- Accepts outside decisions
- Indecisiveness

Projective
- Lacks future orientation

Dimensions of Communion

Iterational
- Relational orientation

Evaluative
- Ethical orientation

Projective
- Ethical orientation
Longitudinal study of men’s career trajectories in ECEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Study (2012-2013)</th>
<th>Follow-up Study (2016-2017)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ Six veteran ECEC educators</td>
<td>▶ Same participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ All working directly with children in the classroom/nursery</td>
<td>▶ All but one had changed jobs:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Two in kindergarten/nursery</td>
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<tr>
<td>▶ Years of service at time of study (2013): 7 - 25 years</td>
<td>▶ Two teaching older children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Two managerial ECEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Years of service at time of study: 12 to 30 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

▶ Narrative interviews about career trajectory
▶ Participants draw a storyline of their career trajectory and explain it.

Analysis

▶ Open coding of narrative interview protocol and explanation of storyline
▶ Identification and analysis of critical moments in the storyline.
▶ Quantitative and qualitative comparison of the seven cases based on data analysis.


**Storyline methodology**
*(Gergen and Gergen, 2000)*

![Diagram](image)

**Critical Moments**

![Diagram](image)

Coding of interview protocols

**Agentic behavior:** (Initiates purposeful action.)

“I started to push. In other words, I had a vision, a dream [about establishing a science center for ECEC in the area]. There was active participation on the part of the local community council, and together it came into being. There was a process that pushed itself forward. When everyone is involved, then anything can happen. There is a song: ... *For one small dream, you need a million dreamers who close their eyes.* Here that’s not what happened. In order to realize one small dream, you need one crazy person to activate the million others. In my dream, in that vision, I succeeded in exciting those around me.”  (Eitan, Israel)

Coding of interview protocols

**Non-agentic behavior:** (Indecisiveness)

“Like I said, I want to have a good balance between work life and personal life, and I think just teaching the children, because that is the part that finds the most joy, ok, you are happy for it, because working with children is nice, I get energy out of it, that is what I want. Perhaps in the future, I don’t want the same group because then you get stuck in the routine and everything. Yeah, for now, my main goal is ok, keep it like it is now, and we’ll see, and perhaps some changes - like changing to another school, two years from now. I will see it year by year.”  (Lucas, the Netherlands)

Coding of interview protocols

Communion: (Relational orientation)

“When I first came here they didn’t have a union rep, there was just a person who was receiving the union information and kind of distributing it to people, but they weren’t really involved…. And then it came out that we could have a rep, and nobody wanted to do it. I do feel like I should be protecting peoples’ rights …. I didn’t necessarily want to do it, but I thought of myself as (pause). Its mainly involved with just the staff here. A lot of it is very routine…. You kind of just make sure that the procedure gets done properly.” (Liam, UK)

**Storyline analysis: critical moments**

**Internal**
- Dissatisfied with job
- Frustration
- Seeks meaning
- Seeks self-advancement
- Crisis in self-confidence

**External**
- Job ended/defined
- Experiences rejection
- Invited to take new job
I was working as a fill-in teacher. It did it "on the surface" because from a professional perspective, I wasn't getting anywhere there. I got a lot of positive feedback, but I felt like I'm treading water. At the end of the second year they called me from V----, where I established the kindergarten, and asked me to run the after school program.

At the end of the year they opened a kindergarten in K----- and asked me if I want to teach there. And during all those years I worked in the kgn there, opened an experimental kgn. I developed this entire vision, in the last few years I felt an "up down" like that, a dip, an incline. In the last few years I was not at my best, as they say.
I first heard about the idea of a science center in the town education committee. I learned that there 30 in the country, and I realized that the thing I dream about already exists. I thought of a certain concept that is much broader, and I thought - here is an opportunity to establish something like this in my area.

So at the same time I am working, 50% job, 50% school. And after about 2 years, I had some practicum. My first practicum I went to a really great kindergarten and learned a lot there, and about the same time I started to get confidence that my grades were getting better. The teachers had a lot of nice things to tell me about my professional career and me as a teacher, so my confidence exploded.
When the one that had the job before me quit, I thought that I have so much experience in this kindergarten, and I wanted to help the kindergarten go forward. But it’s been a lot of new experience for me, both good and bad. Parts of me really miss interacting with the kids, and also the parents. But in the same way I have learned a lot about myself as a person and as a leader, and I’m really interested and hope to be the best possible leader for the rest of the staff.

It is an important school in Norway. I never thought that I would go to a school like that, but it’s been great…. And so I will get 30 points or something, I think that’s only for Norway, for each class you get more points, and when you get to a reasonable amount it will have some effect on your salary. But that’s not the main reason for me to go to this school. I think it was the main reason, O---- (director) wanted me to do to this school, and I’m really glad I’m going.
Since then it was kindergarten which I really enjoyed. Till 4 years ago when they got rid of the all day kindergarten program so I had to teach third grade and the reason I think it was such a drop for me was that I felt disgruntled, I felt a little disrespected just because of the way they handled that.... There was a chance that I probably would have gotten the kindergarten job at another school, but I felt uncomfortable doing that because I didn't want to bump anybody out of their position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agentic typology</th>
<th>Type of Critical Moment</th>
<th>Source of CM</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Work trajectory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eitan</td>
<td>Hi agentic, non-agentic and communion are absent</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction, seeking challenge</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Creates new opportunities, initiates purposeful action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolf</td>
<td>Balance: low levels of agentic and non-agentic, with some communion</td>
<td>Invited into new positions, crisis of self-confidence</td>
<td>External - internal</td>
<td>Mentorship and positive outlook, relational orientation, low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>Low agentic, high non-agentic, high communion</td>
<td>Job redefinition, salary and job reduction</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Ethical orientation, stasis</td>
</tr>
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Conclusions and Some Questions

► Understanding men’s career decisions in ECEC requires a long term perspective.
► Agency, non-agency, and communion may be powerful analytic tools for understanding men’s career trajectories.
► If agency and communion are correlated with gender, does this mean that men who stay in the ECEC classroom share an agency/communion profile with female ECEC workers?
► What kind of retention is desirable for men in ECEC? Is remaining in the classroom an ideal, or should we also value advancement into managerial roles?

Thanks for your attention!

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