MID-CAREER FACULTY NETWORKS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY
EXPLORING HONG KONG MID-CAREER FACULTY CAREER CHOICE AND
THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

A doctoral thesis presented

by

Ching-Wai, Rebecca ONG

to

The School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
September 2014
Abstract

Higher education institutions find difficulty in retaining faculty members because of the tight financial constraints to offer appealing remuneration packages and salary increment annually. In order to seek an economical alternative, higher education administrators intend to develop and retain faculty members through relational development. The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the role of developmental relationships and networks in shaping mid-career faculty’s career decisions through the lens of Developmental Networks Theory. Four frontline mid-career academic faculty members in a higher education institution in Hong Kong participated in the multiple interviews in this study. The researcher selected an Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to enable participants to make sense of their lived experience in relation to career decision making. The results revealed that the participants employed a number of developmental seeking behaviors to obtain information, help, and feedback from developers from both work and non-work relationships across different networks. The participants perceived that supervisors and colleagues were the most influential work relationships while family was identified to be the most significant non-work relationship. Despite taking developers’ guidance and advice into consideration, most of the participants made their own final career decisions. Job security, stability, and long term career planning were discovered to be some of the most important factors determining
mid-career faculty work satisfaction, organizational commitment, and subsequently their career decisions to remain or leave their organization. The findings of the study provide implications for faculty members, administrators, and management of higher education institutions to further understand faculty career considerations and recognize the growing importance of developmental networks, thus implementing alternative mentoring practices and policies. Future research is recommended to delve into examining the role of developmental relationships from developers’, rather than protégés’, perspectives, the effectiveness of peer mentoring, and the role of developmental networks in other countries in the South-East Asian region.

_Keywords:_ developmental relationships; developmental networks; mentoring; career decisions; protégé; developer
Acknowledgements

This doctoral study could not have been done without the people who have helped me along the way and supported me during this daunting journey. First and foremost, I would like to give thanks to God for His glory and giving me the vision to begin and the desire to pursue this doctoral work and the grace and perseverance to complete it.

I wish to extend my appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Kimberly Nolan, Dr. Joseph McNabb, and Dr. Amy Kong, for their assistance and guidance in this process. Special thanks go to Dr. Kimberly Nolan for her willingness to direct this thesis, her encouragement, patience, and direction in guiding me to endure until the end. I am also grateful to Dr. Joseph McNabb who offered his invaluable expertise and constructive advice through sound and robust scholarly dialogues. Next, I would like to thank Dr. Amy Kong for taking the time out of her busy schedule to participate in my committee.

I wish to thank and acknowledge the participants in the study, along with Dr. Margaret Kirchoff who guided me to shape my research topic in the course and Jeffery Cottrell who read and edited my work. I am so appreciative of each of their dedication to give their time to make this study possible.
I am especially fortunate to have my husband Albert for his patience, support, understanding, encouragement, and love throughout this undertaking. I wish to thank my daughter Sophie, who was born during this process, for giving me a clear objective of life and of personal development, cheering me on and motivating me to persist in this endeavor with her toothless smile. I also wish to extend my appreciation to my entire family, especially my parents and my parents-in-law, for their love helping me become the person I am today. I am blessed with them and I am grateful to have them in my life. They each have a special place in my heart and I love them dearly.

To my colleagues in NEU EdD first Hong Kong cohort: Thank you for being such delightful and caring sources of support in our years of coursework together and since. In addition, special thanks to Holly Chung, Wiwik Nurkasanah, for the individual support, inspiration, and motivation you provided during this journey. This has been a very humbling experience. I understand that this is not the end but the beginning and it is now my turn to contribute and serve the education community.
# Table of contents

**Chapter One: The Research Problem**

- Statement of the Problem ........................................... 9
- Significance ................................................................. 11
- Audience that Would Benefit from the Research .................. 14
- Summary of Research Questions .................................... 16
- Summary and Organization of the Study ............................ 17
- Theoretical Framework .................................................. 19
  - Statement of the Problem ........................................... 19
  - Origins and Evolution of Theory .................................. 22
  - Implications for Research Inquiry ................................. 30

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

- Faculty’s Turnover in Higher Education ............................ 37
- Factors Affecting Faculty Career Decisions in Higher Education 38
- Development through Relationships ................................ 41
  - Work and Non-work Relationships ................................. 42
  - Work Relationships .................................................... 43
    - Developmental relationships with superiors .................. 44
    - Developmental relationships with peers ....................... 45
    - Developmental relationships with mentors ................... 46
  - Non-work Relationships .............................................. 46
    - Developmental relationships with family members .......... 50
    - Developmental relationships with friends .................... 50
  - Developmental Networks Theory .................................. 51
  - Developmental Networks ............................................. 53
- Key Characteristics of Developmental Relationships ............ 54
  - Quality of developmental relationships ........................ 54
  - Relationship status of developmental relationships ......... 57
  - Intra and extra organizational affiliation of developmental relationships 58
  - Diversity of developmental relationships ..................... 59
- Developmental Relationships and Networks in Education ....... 61
  - Summary ................................................................. 61

**Chapter Three: Research Design**

- Research Questions ..................................................... 63
- Research Paradigms ..................................................... 63
- Role of the Researcher ................................................ 65
Methodology..........................................................................................67
   Qualitative Research Design.................................................................67
   Research Approach................................................................................68
   Justification of Applying IPA to this Study............................................70
Site and Participants................................................................................73
   Sampling strategy..................................................................................73
   Recruitment of participants.................................................................75
   Access to research site and participants..............................................78
   Research site overview.........................................................................78
   Individual interview participant profiles............................................81
   Pat..........................................................................................................82
   Mimi.......................................................................................................82
   Mary.......................................................................................................82
   Robert....................................................................................................83
Data Collection........................................................................................83
   Data collection overview.................................................................83
   Three-interview series.........................................................................85
   Data recording......................................................................................89
   Data storage and management............................................................90
Data Analysis..........................................................................................91
   Data analysis process overview.........................................................91
Limitations...............................................................................................94
Validity and Credibility...........................................................................95
   Steps to Maintain the Trustworthiness and Validity of the Study..........95
Protection of Human Subjects.................................................................102
   Research Informed Consent...............................................................104
   Obtaining IRB Approval.....................................................................105
Conclusion...............................................................................................106

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis......................................................109
Developmental Seeking Behaviors..........................................................110
   Information Seeking...........................................................................111
   Help Seeking.......................................................................................118
   Feedback Seeking...............................................................................124
Development through Relationships and Networks................................128
   Developers from Work Relationship..................................................129
   Developers from Non-work Relationship..........................................143
Developmental Consequences for Participants......................................153
Chapter One: The Research Problem

Statement of the Problem

Whether an institution sinks or swims depends, to a great extent, on the quality of academic faculty members who are the fundamental building blocks. These faculty members are the most critical, yet unpredictable elements making up an institution. They are able to advance or delay the development of a higher education institution with regard to its teaching quality and research excellence (Lawrence, Celis, Kim, Lipson & Tong, 2013). Handling academic faculty turnover is one of the most important day-to-day considerations of educational leaders all over the world (Rosser & Townsend, 2006; Soltis, Agneessens, Sasovova, & Labianca, 2013).

Voluntary mobility and reasonable turnover is natural, inevitable, and can sometimes be healthy, ushering in an organized, revitalized workforce and can be beneficial to both parties in terms of individual career and professional development (Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). However, frequent departure will result in costly monetary and academic inefficiency and consequences (Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Rosser & Townsend, 2006). Unanticipated faculty turnover will severely obstruct the academic transferability of ideas and knowledge among institutions and interrupt the administrative organizational structure (Xu, 2007). This harmful effect not only
affects students’ learning outcomes and teaching efficacy, but also research development and faculty vitality (Daly & Dee, 2006).

Faculty turnover is indisputably a costly concern in the arena of higher education (Al-Omari, Qablan, & Khasawneh, 2008; Daly & Dee, 2006; Xu, 2007). An understanding of faculty career considerations and decisions is useful for identifying strategies to retain more valuable faculty (Ryan, Healy, & Sullivan, 2012). Although this research does not attempt to remove turnover entirely, an increased knowledge of concerns and needs specific to faculty members can facilitate staff retention, and minimize the cost accordingly.

The practical problem under review is that higher education institutions fail to retain faculty members due to the inadequate funding to offer attractive remuneration packages and salary increments. High turnover rates are therefore a grave consequence that institutions currently suffer (Rosser & Townsend, 2006). Facing financial constraints, administrators of almost all higher education institutions around the world are attempting to explore less expensive alternatives to general monetary or materialistic rewards to promote individual and organizational commitment (Chandler, Hall, & Kram, 2010). Tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are no exception. The developmental relationship and networks among faculty members and the impact they have on each other when making career decisions can be one of those cost effective
solutions. How faculty members develop professionally and personally through relationships is thus worth investigating, exploring and understanding further.

Human resources managers of tertiary institutions in Hong Kong have been challenged for years to successfully reduce faculty turnover (Burnett, Bilen-Green, McGeorge, & Anicha, 2012). Academic midlevel administrators are also expected to seek solutions to effectively develop faculty members at economical costs in a competitive higher education context (Xu, 2007). A qualitative study exploring Hong Kong mid-career faculty career choice and the role of developmental relationships and developmental networks in shaping their career decisions was therefore conducted to address the problem of practice.

Significance

Colleges and universities are faced with various changes and challenges in the current socio-economic and demographic conditions of the 21st century (Clark & d'Ambrosio, 2005). The globalization and proliferation of higher education institutions worldwide has made ongoing competition fiercer than ever. Higher education institutions in Hong Kong are not immune to this universal concern. Faculty turnover is one of the determining factors affecting the institution’s international competitiveness and ability to survive and thrive. The retention of quality academic faculty members undoubtedly benefits the institution in many ways,
ranging from enhancing organizational commitment, reducing the incurred costs through recruitment, and training as a result of a lower turnover (Chandler et al., 2010).

Frequent and unpredictable faculty turnover has a detrimental and disruptive effect on individual, department, and institutional levels, academics and administrative organizational restructuring (Lawrence et al., 2013; Rosser & Townsend, 2006). Students’ learning progress, teacher efficacy, and the development and offerings of courses, programs and research activities are cited as examples of problems (Daly & Dee, 2006; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004). This possible “brain drain” also burdens human resources departments with time consuming, labor intensive and subsequent expensive recruitment cost, and replacement procedures (Al-Omari et al., 2008). The heavy financial, time and socialization investment in training newly hired staff is another manpower issue derived from high turnover rates.

Faculty career decisions are thus significant across academia and have great impact on the entire institution, from individual, departmental, to organizational and social level (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Clark & d'Ambrosio, 2005; Johnsrud et al., 2000). The investigation of faculty’s turnover intent and their career decisions is particularly important to institutional leaders who need to have a better grasp of the variables that lead to faculty retention. The research findings became useful data and had significant
implications for institutional administrators and human resources consultants to anticipate staff vitality and mobility. Apart from serving a preventive function, the present study also facilitates the ability of institutional leaders to design effective formal or informal mentoring programs and recognize the importance of developmental relationships and networks among faculty members.

Deficiency in qualitative research evidence related to the role of developmental relationships and networks in shaping faculty career decisions presented a gap which has not been empirically disclosed or explored enough in the context of faculty turnover and mentoring paradigms. The present qualitative empirical study is thus important and necessary.

Many of the previous empirical studies on the area of faculty turnover, career considerations and faculty’s developmental networks are quantitative studies, which are undoubtedly useful to explain the relationship among variables through tests with scientific data (Creswell, 2012). However, the serious lack of research evidence in qualitative studies and in the context of Hong Kong higher education explains why a thorough understanding of in-depth and subjective individuals’ perceptions of developmental relationships should be specifically explored.

Furthermore, existing research over the past decade has considerably indicated myriad positive variables and sources of faculties’ intent to stay, such as job
satisfaction, autonomy, compensation, communication openness and organizational commitment (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Daly & Dee, 2006; McJunkin, 2005).

Alternatively, other prior research has widely discussed factors weakening faculty’s motivation or job satisfaction, including excessive workload, burnout, conflicting roles and expectations, leading to intention to quit (Callister, 2006; Dee, 2005; Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Johnsrud & Rosser 2002; Rasheed, Aslam & Sarwar, 2010). Despite the valuable contribution of this literature to the field of faculty turnover, comparatively less research has been devoted to concerns about mid-career faculty’s perceptions of developmental networks in relation to their intentions to quit and remain or their career outcomes.

**Audience that Would Benefit from the Research**

Since faculty turnover has long been a practical research concern in higher education, the goals of this study and the audiences that would benefit from the research can be divided into two streams, intellectual and practical. The examination and exploration of two human resources issues, faculties’ career decisions, and faculties’ developmental networks, enables three audiences, namely researchers, scholars, and educators, to have a better grasp of the faculties’ intention to stay and leave.
This intellectual and scholarly attempt advanced new research and intense
discussion on mentoring and faculty’s professional development and personal growth.

Regarding the research development, the findings of the current study deepened the
understanding of the paradigm shift from single or dyadic mentoring relationships to
multiple developmental relationships and from traditional single mentors to a
constellation of developers. Researchers in this discipline certainly had a more
profound comprehension of the change and the review of the mentoring and faculty
development from a traditional perspective to a new concept with increasing variance.

This evolving notion of developmental relationships has also made a major
contribution to build on theoretical significance and experimental developments in
mentoring and social networks theory. The broadened conceptualization of the present
study revealed the role of developmental networks theory and its impact on faculty’s
turnover, which can increasingly lead to interested discussions among scholars and
researchers, particularly those major contributors in human resources management as
well as training and development literature.

In addition to the benefits brought to the paradigms of theory and research, the
broad practical objective of this study was to explore the developmental networks of
faculty in Hong Kong. Specifically, the study sought to gain insight into the career
choice considerations and decisions of mid-career faculty at a higher education
institution in Hong Kong and the role of developmental relationships in shaping their perceptions of career choices.

Institutional administrators, employment policy makers, and Human Resources consultants will therefore benefit from the research results and its implications. Focusing on capturing their experiences about how their career considerations and decisions were influenced by individuals or groups of individuals as their developers, the administration in higher education institutions can develop a deeper understanding of faculty’s commitment. Human Resources departments can also effectively predict staff mobility, which in turn reduce the turnover rate, minimizing the huge monetary cost incurred and the effort of attracting and hiring new staff all over again.

Summary of Research Questions

This study centered around an exploration of the role of developmental networks in shaping mid-career faculty’s career decisions through the lens of “developmental networks theory” (Higgins & Kram, 2001). To investigate this problem, the overarching open-ended research question guiding this study was: (1) How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty describe their career decision making process?

To inquire into faculty’s perception and their detailed account of their lived experience, the primary question was supplemented with the two secondary research questions. (2) How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty members perceive the
developmental relationships and developmental networks? (3) How do developmental relationships and developmental networks shape Hong Kong mid-career faculty career decision making?

**Summary and Organization of the Study**

This study consisted of five chapters, introduction, theoretical framework, literature review, research design, findings and analysis, and discussion and implications for practice and research.

Chapter one introduction begins with the presentation of the problem statement and significance of the study, the audience that would benefit from the research, the summary of research questions, and an introduction of the theoretical framework that is used to conceptualize and define the current study. The selected theoretical framework for this study is Developmental Networks Theory. Higgins and Kram (2001) made a proposition by reconceptualizing mentoring as a concurrent multiple relationship in which individuals take active interests in and action to progress others’ career by means of offering developmental assistance and support. Chapter two contains a substantial literature review including five subsections. The first section is factors affecting faculty’s career decisions and turnover; second, work developmental relationships; third, non-work developmental relationships, and the fourth and fifth
are constellations and an in-depth discussion on the key dimensions of developmental relationships.

Chapter three is the research design of the study. This section includes the explanation and justification of the selection of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the research approach, paradigm, and methodology of the current study. Role of the researcher, sampling strategies, recruitment of participants, selection of the research site, and an overview of data collection ranging from data recording, storage and analysis are documented. This chapter also details the steps to maintain the trustworthiness and validity of the study, including the protection of human subjects and plan for obtaining IRB approval. Chapter four presents the major findings and a detailed data analysis based on the personal interviews with the four participants. In Chapter five, the findings of the study are discussed and analyzed in association with the previous studies and literature on faculty career decisions and developmental networks. This chapter also includes implications for practice and recommendations for future research. The analysis of findings have implications for educational practitioners including faculty members, both developers and protégés, administrators, senior management, and human resources policy makers of higher education institutions to further explore the potentials, impacts, and the insights of developmental networks. Regarding the future research directions, the study findings
are able to give voice to, recommend, and inspire the scholars and researchers to broaden and deepen the avenues for future inquiry in this area.

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this section was to present a theoretical framework for the current qualitative study exploring Hong Kong mid-career faculty career choice and the role of developmental relationships and developmental networks in shaping their career decisions. This section has three subsections: problem statement, origins and evolution of theory, and implications for research inquiry.

**Statement of the Problem**

Academic faculty turnover has a great impact on different organizational levels across individuals, institutions, and society (Johnsrud et al., 2000). While certain occasional cases of faculty turnover are unavoidable and necessary, excessive and unanticipated faculty mobility and replacement, especially the high quality ones, can be frustrating and destructive at multiple levels (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005). At the individual level, student progress will certainly be disrupted. Due to the shortage of labor, the remaining staff members face increased workloads and demands; their research schedules and career advancement will also be interrupted. Financially, the expensive cost incurred in administering the relentless and prolonged recruitment, carrying out selection and training exercises is also a heavy burden to the
administrative level (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Daly & Dee, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Xu, 2007).

The problem of practice under review is the inability of higher education institutions to afford generous remuneration packages and annual salary increments. Faculty turnover has thus become a growing and costly burden to institutions all over the world. Tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are also faced with the same dire situation with severe financial constraints. With limited funding available, the management of higher education institutions keeps seeking various non-monetary strategies to promote individual job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thus influencing individual intention to stay, which in turn, reduced actual faculty turnover (Chandler et al., 2010).

Among a wide range of retention strategies, one of the low-cost options is developmental relationships and networks among faculty members. According to Kram (1985), developmental relationships refer to positive relationships that support and advance an individuals’ professional and psychological development. Developmental networks, alternatively, are defined as a broader subset or group of people, including but not limited to a single mentor or coach, who offer developmental assistance and support to participants for career and personal growth as developers (Higgins & Kram, 2001). By fulfilling faculty relational needs and
desire for professional and personal development, the impact of developmental relationships and networks on faculty when making career decisions can never be underestimated.

To understand better and explore further how higher education institutions develop faculty members professionally and psychologically through relationships, a needed shift of the relational dynamics of developmental relationship theory thus emerges to conceptualize and better frame the understanding of this problem in practice. Developmental networks theory founded by Higgins and Kram (2001) offers a pertinent theoretical framework, serving as a fundamental research inquiry tool to inform the investigation of the current study.

Researchers of prior work in employee turnover recommended future studies to examine new subsets of faculty in terms of industries, types of institutions, disciplines and geographical locations (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Ambrose et al., 2005; Callister, 2006; Xu, 2007). Developmental networks theory (Higgins & Kram, 2001) is thus adopted to offer a theoretical lens through which academic mid-career faculty’s conceptualization and perception of developmental relationships and networks relative to their career decisions can be discovered. The new perspective from the Hong Kong higher education context also provides useful points of reference and advances both theory and research practice.
Origins and Evolution of Theory


Prior to the presence of developmental networks theory, Kram (1985) redefined mentoring relationships as developmental relationships in which individual protégés receive both career and psychological developmental assistance from developers or advisors. Predominant scholars of previous research work on mentoring also acknowledged the growing popularity of developmental networks, which are composed of multiple, simultaneous (rather than sequential) developmental relationships (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram & Hall; 1994). Other seminal researchers who shaped the theoretical framework and conducted studies related to faculty’s career decision and turnover in higher education include a mixture of nascent and mature theorists such as Dee (2005), Daly and Dee (2006), Higgins and Kram (2001), Johnsrud and Rosser (2002), and Kram and Hall (1994).

Mentoring at work has long been perceived as an intraorganizational source of career guidance and psychological support offered by a senior or more experienced individual within a mentee’s organization (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Green et al., 2009; Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Rasheed et al., 2010). Instead of this traditional single
dyadic mentoring relationship, Kram (1985), as one of the founding scholars, emphasized that an individuals’ growth in modern career contexts forces reconsideration of the boundaries of mentoring. As protégés navigate their careers, they rely on the interdependence of multiple individuals and developmental assistance and support from developers in addition to mentors (Kram & Hall, 1994).

There are two broad types of support (professional and psychological) falling under the umbrella term “developmental assistance” (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram, 1985; Thomas, 1993). Firstly, career, or instrumental, support includes mentoring, coaching, collegial communication, guidance from senior administrators, and exposure or access to resources and information. They are the key factors enhancing faculty commitment to the institution and lack of them is deemed as one of the reasons for leaving (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Green et al., 2009; Rasheed et al., 2010). A progressive department climate and welcoming communication environment creates a sense of community, encourages the exchange of constructive, both positive and negative, feedback which directly improves faculty’s performance and job satisfaction, resulting in reduced turnover.

The second type of assistance is psychological or personal support. Reliable networks connect individuals through socio-affective peer support, shared beliefs, values, expectations, friendship, acceptance, and counseling (Al-Omari et al., 2008;
Huston, Norman & Ambrose, 2007). These interpersonal relationships, along with the sense of engagement and connectedness, are especially important among faculty who work independently in colleges and universities (Tolbert, Simons, Andrews, & Rhee, 1995; Callister, 2006). This is due to the fact that there is limited face-to-face interaction and collaboration among faculty members who often have their own independent work schedule and can hardly interact or socialize with other teaching and research fellows regularly and frequently.

As a fundamental frame of reference, Higgins and Kram (2001) introduced a typology of “developmental networks” to illustrate the notion of mentoring as a multiple developmental relationship phenomenon. There are two core dimensions in this construct of developmental network, the diversity of individuals’ developmental networks and the strength of developmental relationships, leading to four categories of developmental networks, namely: entrepreneurial (high diversity and high strength), opportunistic (high diversity and low strength), traditional (low diversity and high strength), and receptive (low diversity and low strength) (Higgins & Kram, 2001) (see Figure 1).
Higgins and Kram (2001) explained that the diversity of developmental networks is defined by the range, the breadth, the senior and non-senior levels, and the number of different social systems (both formal and informal) inside and outside the organization. One’s developmental network is commonly recognized as a subgroup of his or her entire social network. Developers include employers, senior colleagues, peers, family, and any individuals who have access to valuable information and resources, and take active interest in bringing progress to protégés’ career. One example of this is when a protégé actively strengthens one’s multiple extraorganizational ties by seeking a great variety of developmental assistance outside their organization, he or she may have a number of developers such as an employer or
mentor from their working organization, an academic advisor from college, a senior member from a professional association, or an elder from church, etc. In other words, the higher the range of the developmental network a person possesses, the more variety the information provided he or she obtains.

The strength of developmental networks, on the other hand, is determined by the level of reciprocity, mutuality, interdependence, the quality of interaction, and the frequency of communication and engagement (Kram, 1996). The stronger the ties and interpersonal bonds between the developers and protégés, the more motivated and more readily available they would help each other develop.

In order to address the purpose of this study, which was to explore mid-career faculty’s perceptions of developmental relationships in relation to their career decisions, faculty members were invited to recognize the strength and the diversity of the developmental relationships with their developers. By looking into their perceptions and experience through the typology of four developmental network structures, the emergence of four developmental career consequences can clearly be explained.

To facilitate and reinforce the understanding of factors that build the above developmental structures, Higgins and Kram (2001) proposed a framework building on the antecedents and consequences of developmental networks. This framework
begins with factors as antecedents, both work environment influences and individual-level influences, that build and shape developmental networks through mediating processes of cultivating developmental networks and developmental help-seeking behavior (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p.274). As a result, four developmental consequences for protégés belonging to different categories of developmental networks are identified including career change, personal learning, organizational commitment, and work satisfaction (See Figure 2).

Figure 2 Antecedents and Consequences of Developmental Networks, Higgins & Kram (2001, p.274)
Theoretically, the four developmental network structures can be perceived as the abstract constructs while the four protégés’ career outcomes are the concrete variables, which can be observed and measured (Bacharach, 1989). Bacharach (1989) explained that constructs are considered to be general mental configuration whereas variables are identified as observable discrete units. In the present study, the protégés’ network structures, whether a protégé belongs to entrepreneurial or receptive structure, were categorized or distinguished by theorists’ or researchers’ mental or comparatively personal judgment. The protégés’ career outcomes in this study, on the other hand, such as career change or organizational commitment, can be measured or evaluated in terms of the precise data of job change or information about turnover.

Higgins and Kram (2001) claimed that protégés with entrepreneurial development are likely to change careers or seek alternative jobs. Since these protégés have close, strong ties with a wide range of developers, they can get access to reliable information, more resources, knowledge, skills, and contacts which enable them to realize job changes more easily and can lead to increased probability of mobility due to higher exposure and visibility. Frequent, direct, and intimate communication also provides protégés with psychosocial support. This form of personal coaching enhances a protégés’ understanding of their personal developmental needs.
The second example cited here concerns organizational commitment, another career outcome related to faculty turnover. Individuals who are engaged in traditional developmental networks tend to have greater commitment to their organizations. The intimate bonding such as frequent interaction and in-depth communication prompts the developers to offer high level of developmental support. This strong emotional tie and relational support between protégés and developers also generates a sense of trust, loyalty, and devotion, leading to a common faith and belief in organizational goals and values (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). This shared vision and the possession of similar attitudes thus positively reinforces protégés’ intraorganizational commitment and intention to remain. By the same token, protégés with traditional developmental networks implies that he or she attains low level of network diversity. In other words, they are less likely to gain access to extraorganizational resources or information, which in turn reduces the possibility of job change or turnover.

Higgins and Thomas (2001) further pointed out that the quality of primary, single developers, as well as multiple developers in developmental networks and constellations affects both short-term protégé career outcomes “work satisfaction” and “intentions to remain,” as well as long term implications such as “organizational retention” and “promotion to partner.”
Developmental networks theory explains the perceived relations. Hence developmental networks theory presents itself with building blocks and features of a good and useful theory, thus satisfying the criteria evaluating this type of theory stated by Anfara and Mertz (2006). This theoretical framework also effectively demonstrates and clearly defines the boundaries of the present study by providing means for verification and revision in future research.

**Implications for Research Inquiry**

The purpose of selecting developmental networks theory as a theoretical lens in this study was not to test the Higgins and Kram (2001) model, but rather to illuminate faculty’s complex experience and perception of developmental relationships and networks in relation to their career decisions. It is essential to gain insight into individual faculty members’ unique and subjective lived experiences concerning their career development through relationships. Nevertheless, traditional social networks theory misses an integrated and comprehensive framework that takes into account the dimension of development within conceptual framework such as developmental networks theory proposed by Higgins and Kram (2001). This theory is thus an appropriate option to closely and thoroughly explore the identified problem of faculty’s perception of developmental networks with respect to their career decisions and their subsequent turnover. This framework is also selected as a theoretical
foundation because the implications of the protégé’s outcomes, career changes and organizational commitment in particular, are closely concerned with employees’ mobility and development.

This study is designed to broaden the scholarly conversation from single mentoring relationships to multiple developmental relationships in order to understand how mid-career faculty members gather the support they need to develop their careers. Facing dynamic financial changes, higher social expectations, increased pressure, and growing competition in higher education, conventional mentoring literature or theories are no longer sufficient to illustrate the projected ongoing demand for mentoring assistance sought and provided in multiple developmental networks.

Unlike mechanical or impersonal manufacturing industries, higher education is a complex, dynamic, and highly people-oriented system. The critical role played by social interaction should never be overlooked. Relational learning, as one of the major undertakings, takes place through talent development and social interaction among individuals, groups, and organizations (Chandler et al., 2010). It is therefore important to conduct a study that examines how social networks develop people and change their lives, thereby advancing the understanding of the effectiveness of these developmental relationships (Westaby, 2012).
This core concept of viewing mentoring as a multiple relationship phenomenon suggests a need for an enlightening paradigm as well as a reconceptualized model to further understand these relationships. The parallel nature of the mentoring relationship between a protégé and a single mentor, and the developmental networks between protégés and multiple developers explains the compatibility of the framework and the present study.

Expanding this conversation is also advantageous to advancing the theory of developmental relationships and attempting to generate a solution to a practical problem: offering a non-monetary alternative to enhance individual job satisfaction and collective organizational commitment. This scholarly attempt provides significant insights into institutions that rely mainly on formal mentoring programs for developing frontline faculty. Despite the economic challenges, with this new option, higher education administrators can still improve individuals, their retention and their intentions to stay while minimizing actual faculty turnover. This study has the potential to identify conditions for retaining capable faculty members that in turn strengthen the productivity of a college’s workforce in its effort to reduce the replacement and recruitment expenditure concerned.

Like all theories, developmental networks theory has positive attributes as well as limitations. The first limitation of this theory is that the emphasis rests solely on the
perspective of teaching protégés, ranging from the antecedents such as perceived needs, their personalities, and characteristics to career outcomes and consequences.

Dobrow, Chandler, Murphy, and Kram (2012) suggested that together with protégés’ views, developers’ individual characteristics and demographic features, as well as their career implications and outcomes such as career advancement, should also be taken into consideration. The mutuality and reciprocation of developmental network theory can then be strengthened by involving dual perspectives.

Secondly, the developmental networks theory has not addressed the issue of gender differences in terms of the benefits or impacts derived from various types of developmental network structures. In fact, male and female faculty members were found to behave and respond differently during social interactions (Tolbert et al., 1995). Gender factors are indeed an important concern that is likely to moderate the effects and outcomes of developmental networks.

In spite of the above mentioned shortcomings of developmental networks theory, the typology and the conceptual framework nevertheless provide a constructive starting point for apprehending various types of developmental networks and the factors which form the developmental network structures as protégés navigate their careers (Higgins & Kram, 2001). This framework explicitly and radically redefines the boundaries of mentoring theory, which effectively shaped the current study.
As Bacharach (1989) claimed, a theory, based on the criterion of falsifiability, stands until disproven by empirical refutation. The developmental networks theory proposed by Higgins and Kram (2001) has been repeatedly adopted by many theoretical and empirical studies to understand the relationship of developmental networks and protean career attitudes during career development. Nevertheless, many of these are quantitative studies examining and testing the implications of developmental relationships and networks with managerial and frontline employees or new hires in service-oriented industries such as healthcare or law firms (Chandler et al., 2010; Chandler & Kram, 2005; Cotton, 2010; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Higgins, Dobrow, & Roloff, 2010; Lofton, 2012). The complex perceptions and subjective experiences of faculty members thus present a fertile field where the literature is far from completion. Due to the broad nature of the phenomenon, this research area of faculty career decision is likely to progress and evolve, and also worth further exploring.

The current qualitative research study was thus conducted to fill the gap in the literature based on an alternative assumption and an original research question, namely, (1) How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty describe their career decision making process?
Specifically, the focus of this study seeks to understand mid-career faculty members whose perceived needs for development and developmental seeking behaviors including individual intentions to remain and actual organizational retention. Developmental networks theory therefore also framed and informed two secondary research questions: (2) How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty members perceive the developmental relationships and developmental networks? (3) How do developmental relationships and developmental networks shape Hong Kong mid-career faculty career decision making?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Academic faculty turnover has long been a major concern for educational leaders around the globe. Although voluntary and natural turnover such as resignations, termination, and retirement are unavoidable, frequent and unanticipated turnover is a real problem for institutions. Not only does this represent a huge waste in recruiting cost, training resources, and management time, it will also slow down student learning progress, lower teaching efficiency, and discourage the growth of scholarly research development. Students and faculty members will then be negatively affected by the lack of continuity. To facilitate staff retention and reduce the cost of faculty turnover, the present study revolves around a deeper understanding of faculty’s career considerations and decisions.
The present study was conducted to explore the developmental networks of faculty. Specifically, the study sought to gain insight into the career considerations of mid-career faculty and the role of developmental relationships in shaping their perceptions of career choices in the context of Hong Kong higher education.

Faculty career decisions are significant for all levels, from individuals and departments, to the entire organization. A stable retention of quality academic faculty members can certainly strengthen the teaching and learning progress and foster organizational commitment. As a result, the time and administrative cost incurred in recruiting and training can be minimized.

The problem statement of the present study was that, given current financial constraints, administrators of higher education institutions are strenuously seeking non monetary or less expensive alternatives to develop faculty members professionally and personally. A qualitative study exploring the role of developmental networks in shaping faculty career decisions was thus carried out to address this problem of practice. The findings and implications of the present research can then shed light on how to predict staff mobility and how to formulate mentoring programs and other retaining strategies.

The literature review question that stages the present research and the following scholarly literature analysis was threefold. What are the factors affecting faculty
turnover and retention in the higher education industry? How do faculty members develop professionally and personally through work and non-work relationships? And what are the key dimensions of developmental relationships and developmental networks?

This chapter offers a review of the literature concerning faculty’s career decisions and relates it to two concepts: developmental relationships and developmental networks. Considering the literature review questions stated above as a blueprint, the organization of this literature review primarily covers three bodies of literature. Firstly, mid-career faculty decisions which involve factors affecting faculty’s intention to leave or remain. The second stream examines the scholarly literature related to faculty development through work and non-work relationships with a variety of developers ranging from superiors, peers, mentors to family members, friends, and community groups. Thirdly, the evolution of development networks theory will be briefly introduced, followed by a discussion on a few key relationships and major developmental network structural characteristics ranging from strength of bonds, density, to network range or diversity, and interaction frequency.

**Faculty’s Turnover in Higher Education**

High faculty turnover rates have long been a costly concern to higher education institutions. The loss of manpower financially inflicts a huge cost on the institution in
terms of recruiting temporary and long-term replacements, faculty training, the overall adaptation, and the redevelopment of courses and programs (Daly & Dee, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Ruhland, 2001). Faculty turnover results in tighter institutional budgets, tarnished organizational reputation, and interference of teaching and learning quality and efficiency (Daly & Dee, 2006).

The unpredictable departure of faculty members can be a frustrating and discouraging workplace experience for the remaining staff members due to the sudden loss of expertise and stability, and increased workloads and demands (Lawrence et al., 2013). The morale among the faculty who remain in the institution is likely to be lowered (Green et al., 2009; Kortegast & Hamrick, 2009). Therefore, retaining employees is often a more cost-effective strategy compared with hiring the new ones (Rasheed et al., 2010; Ruhland, 2001).

**Factors Affecting Faculty Career Decisions in Higher Education**

Since faculty career decisions and intent to leave are always a good proxy indicator and predictor for actual turnover, identifying and investigating factors that affect faculty's career choice is critical to successfully retain high quality faculty members in tertiary institutions (Johnsrud et al., 2000). A series of questions concerning faculty turnover are thus worth examining. What discouraging factors
trigger faculty’s thoughts of leaving and what motivational variables do faculty members need to make them stay? How can the administration in higher education institutions have a deeper understanding of faculty commitment, and effectively predict staff mobility, which in turn can reduce turnover rates, and the high costs incurred through the effort of attracting and hiring brilliant staff all over again?

Frequent and unpredictable faculty turnover will lead to long-term instability and display a significant disruptive effect on academics and administrative organizational restructuring, students’ learning progress, teaching efficacy, and the development of courses, programs, and research activities (Daly & Dee, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2013). The investigation of faculty’s career decisions and choices is particularly important to institutional leaders who need to have a better grasp of the variables that lead to faculty turnover and retention. The research findings have valuable implications for individual faculty members and institutional administrators including presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and human resources employment policy makers and consultants. These crucial stakeholders can then comprehensively understand what demotivates individuals and what incentivizes them, thus anticipating the staff vitality and mobility.

Unlike general physical and financial organizational resources, human resources like faculty are the fundamental building blocks, the most critical yet unstable
elements for the institution (Rasheed et al., 2010). Voluntary turnover is unavoidable and can sometimes be desirable due to the stimulus, fresh perspectives, increased diversity, and inspiration drawn from the constant influx of new blood (Ambrose et al., 2005; Johnsrud et al., 2000). Nevertheless, ceaseless staff mobility will be expensive and exhaust the time and resources of the departmental and institutional administration to recoup financial losses (Lawrence et al., 2013). Whether the institution sinks or swims depends, to a great extent, on the quality and effort of academic faculty members, since they are the lifeblood which is able to build up or obstruct the process of institutional development (Hagedorn, 2000). More importantly, many administrators expressed their concern that the members who intend to depart are often the star performers, those the institution prizes the highest and desires to retain the most (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002).

Due to the increasing financial and demographic pressures exerted by aging faculty, the availability of tenure-track positions has been on a steady decline in colleges and universities worldwide (Ponjuan, Conley, & Trower, 2011). Retaining talented novice faculties is therefore important to build and foster their early and affective commitment during the daunting tenure process.

Research over the past decade has indicated myriad sources of faculties’ career decisions including intent to stay or leave (Al-Omari et al., 2008). Positive variables
involve autonomy, communication openness, job satisfaction and organizational commitment while examples of negative variables include excessive workload, conflicting roles, confusing or ambiguous expectations, and presence of other job opportunities (Daly & Dee, 2006).

Regarding different strategies for retaining the productive faculty, competitive salaries are a must, along with an attractive remuneration package including health insurance and other fringe benefits (Clark & d'Ambrosio, 2005). Nevertheless, colleges and universities are faced with various changes and challenges in the current socio-economic and demographic conditions in the last ten years (Clark & d'Ambrosio, 2005). The globalization and proliferation of higher education institutions worldwide has made ongoing competition fiercer than ever. Higher education institutions in Hong Kong are no exception. Limited resources in terms of funding seem to be an all-time constraint in almost all tertiary institutions. Faculty career decision is thus one of the determining factors affecting the institution’s international competitiveness and ability to survive and thrive. What else can the administrators do to retain faculty and what makes faculty stay?

Development through Relationships

In addition to the materialistic rewards, intangible motivational factors such as recognition and empowerment are also critical elements in faculty’s retention
(Johnsrud et al., 2000; Rasheed et al., 2010). Having more opportunities for career advancement and more participation in organizational decision making boosts faculty’s commitment (Lawrence et al., 2013). Although there is no single certain program or magical formula for retaining faculty since people are motivated differently by various factors, their job commitment and intent to withdrawal are, to some extent, determined by assistance from and their relationship with other individuals. These relationships can improve collegial communication, offer support, and provide opportunities for empowerment, professional development, personal and psychological development including mentoring and guidance (Al-Omari et al., 2008).

**Work and Non-work Relationships**

The contribution made by work relationships and non-work relationships in individuals’ developmental networks varies from developer to developer and leads to career success through a number of different developmental processes (Murphy & Kram, 2010). In general, work relationships develop advice networks offering mainly career assistance and vocational or professional development, whereas non-work relationships include family and friendship networks with personal and psychosocial support (Dobrow et al., 2012).
Dobrow et al. (2012) has complicated the general classification of two support types, arguing instead for the concept of multiplexity. For example, a coworker can also be a friend to a protégé; or a developer at work can concurrently offer a mixture of career and psychosocial assistance. In fact, work and non-work this multiplex relationship cultivates a positive and development connection, thus enhancing individual job satisfaction and leading to organizational commitment and reflection (Murphy & Kram, 2010).

**Work Relationships**

Previous literature pointed out that work developmental relationships can professionally support individuals’ sense of both objective and subjective career success (Lawrence et al., 2013; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Developers in the workplace offer objective career support and outcomes such as opportunities for promotion, salary increment, job status, sponsorship, protection, and network opportunities (Dobrow et al., 2012; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Subjective psychosocial support can also be obtained through work relationships. Self-esteem, intellectual challenges, sense of competence, psychological success, job satisfaction, effectiveness in a professional role, and optimism are cited as typical examples of subjective career markers (Murphy & Kram, 2010). These successful and supportive relationships
provide individuals with satisfaction and commitment, which is also likely to significantly reduce their turnover intent.

**Developmental relationship with superiors.** Job autonomy, challenging tasks, and empowerment granted by superiors strongly or powerfully reinforce faculty’s motivation and meet their higher order needs of achievement in higher education, a context where academic freedom and shared governance are highly valued and vigorously pursued (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Austin & Rice, 1998). Faculty job autonomy and empowerment ranges from planning lessons, formatting syllabi, determining individual work-life balance and pattern, applying for research grants, arranging publication schedules, designing curriculum, developing course materials, managing classes, exercising the authority to conduct evaluations (Daly & Dee, 2006).

Faculty’s participation in decision making should not be limited to the operational level, but should be expanded to include multiple departmental and organizational levels by actively setting organizational goals and by constructing policy (Johnsrud, et al., 2000; Rasheed et al., 2010). When faculty feels appreciated and recognized for their contributions by senior managers, supervisors, and departmental or administrative heads, especially those they admire, they will be more willing and
confident to take part in organizational reforms and maximize their personal devotion to improve their professional advancement (Rasheed et al., 2010).

**Developmental relationships with peers.** Unlike traditional mentoring, developers in developmental relationship and networks are not necessarily individuals in upper management or official mentors from the same organization as the protégé (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Collegial open communication and interaction among peers or coworkers is also a frequently cited psychological factor mediating collegial conflicts and enhancing faculty commitment to the institution (Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Lawrence et al., 2013; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Al-Omari et al. (2008) suggested that open communication is one of the most effective means to promote “faculty’s participation and ownership in organizational decisions, and collegiality”.

An improving department climate and welcoming communication environment creates a sense of community, encouraging the exchange of both positive and negative constructive feedback, which directly improves faculty job satisfaction and performance (Callister, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 2000). Trusting a faculty member’s expertise in job design without extensive supervision, together with the socialization and mentoring experience of the university will enhance individual dedication, promote a strong sense of inclusion and encourage greater teamwork and a more

Reliable networks also connect individuals through socio-emotional peer support, shared beliefs, values, and expectations (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Huston et al., 2007). Social environment and engagement are especially important among female faculty who yearn for the quality of interactions and positive department climate, and are more emotional and sensitive to the interpersonal relationship and connectedness in colleges and universities compared with their male counterparts. Faculty members often have their own independent work schedule and the limited face-to-face interaction and collaboration opportunities they share create valuable relationships (Tolbert et al., 1995; Callister, 2006).

**Developmental relationships with mentors.** Mentors have traditionally been defined as influential individuals who possess advanced experience and hold a senior position or those assigned by established mentoring programs in an organization (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, & Wilbanks, 2011). They are the key players who are officially assigned to provide mentoring initiatives, coaching, and valuable resources for protégés, thereby contributing to their career outcomes, upward mobility, and sense of competence and effectiveness in the profession (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Classic mentoring relationships include traditional
mentor-protégé relationships, supervisor-subordinate relationships, and coworker relationships.

A supportive environment with a well-structured and nurturing mechanism of career development can build and foster young faculty’s motivation and loyalty (Green et al., 2009). Arranging an orientation or an induction program for beginning faculty members provides them with an early, satisfying, and smooth transition, a space for recognizing their voice and advice, and helps them understand their job context, adjust to the culture, and develop their sense of belonging as part of the institution (Austin & Rice, 1998; Boyle & Boice, 1998).

Nevertheless, mentoring, guidance support, and a professional development culture are not the only essential elements for inexperienced faculty given the tenuous and insecure nature of their position; they are also a good approach to retain both talented novice and experienced teachers in higher education (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Green et al., 2009; Rasheed et al., 2010; Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009).

Green et al. (2009) noted that mentoring schemes can also serve as a quality control tool. Experienced faculty members, as a role model, observe, guide, advise, and share their knowledge, viewpoints, and experience with novices who undergo their early career stage. In fact, mentoring is not limited to ensure that the courses delivered by newly recruited faculty fulfill certain requirements. It also presents a retaining and
encouraging factor to both parties. Where junior faculty appreciate the organization’s devotion to professional development and the chance of obtaining feedback and being nurtured, seasoned faculty also gain satisfaction from passing on skills and knowledge to younger generations as trainers (Green et al., 2009).

Mentoring or coaching relationships also serve as an antecedent for personal learning, including relational job learning and interpersonal skill development, of which the impacts and consequences involve job attitudes and overall work satisfaction (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). As a pivotal mediator, personal learning and career assistance were found to be negatively related to turnover intentions and actual turnover (Johnsrud et al., 2000). Through observation, imitation, interaction, collaboration with others, individuals’ knowledge acquisition, self-reflection, and contributions to organizations are greatly enhanced (Kram, 1996). Protégés’ affection and admiration for their mentors’ achievement and behaviors will encourage protégés to closely observe and act like their mentors. As a result, their attachment to their mentors as role models will discourage them from leaving.

**Non-work Relationships**

Despite the indispensable role of work developmental relationships, Murphy and Kram (2010) identified the critical career outcomes and significant contributions made by non-work relationships. Compared with work developers, non-work,
informal, and external mentors, including those from different domains outside of work such as family, friends, and individuals not affiliated with protégés’ organizations, are able to provide stronger, more emotionally intense, more stable and effective career and social-psychological support (Dobrow et al., 2012; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Nevertheless, extant development network studies have paid scant attention to the contributions and the impact of non-work relationships on individuals’ career decisions and outcomes (Murphy & Kram, 2010). This is unfortunate as non-work developers play a significant role in nurturing emotional support.

Situated in the inner core, non-work developers tend to cultivate psychological closeness and frequent intimate communication through the process of evolving into informal relationships, thus benefiting individuals’ overall well-being, morale, satisfaction, commitment, and happiness with an integrated and a holistic view of both career and life (Cummings & Higgins, 2005; Murphy & Kram, 2010).

Apart from positive role-modeling, negative role modeling can also be identified in non work relationships. For example, a protégé detected a sense of devaluing relationships caused by a former supervisor who displayed no recognition and no caring for his subordinates (Murphy & Kram, 2010). Given the suffering that has been incurred by the unsuccessful relationships, the participant would learn from or be
influenced by this misery and try not to make the same mistakes. This experience thus left an indelible impression for the protégé’s future career attitude.

Developmental relationships with family members. The existence of familial networks in non-work domains helps shape individuals’ career and life aspirations, and family satisfaction (Murphy & Kram, 2010). Parental and spousal support is often readily accessible and family members are available to discuss over important personal matters, including issues from organizational commitment to salary, career goals, and turnover. Although older relatives experienced very different career patterns and may not be able to offer up-to-date advice, their values, work ethic, career experience, and attitudes towards job or job change can, despite the generation gap, be instilled into children’s minds at a young age (Murphy & Kram, 2010).

Developmental relationship with friends. Participants in a study conducted by Murphy and Kram (2010) explained how the friendship of best friends, classmates, or neighbors could positively influence protégé’s career thoughts through mutual learning and reciprocation in a non-work setting. Close friends like boyfriends or girlfriends are also expected to be influential figures and a source of encouragement in protégés’ life. Former colleagues, supervisors, or work partners are also frequently named as critical non-work developers who inspire the protégés professionally and psychologically in terms of career behavior that can be emulated.
Relationships established with members of groups such as religious communities, voluntary organizations, or alumni groups are cited as other typical examples of non-work ties (Dobrow et al., 2012). Unpleasant experiences gained from friends can also serve as a good reminder and a valuable lesson for protégés. For example, a friend in the fellowship ended up divorcing after failing to strike a good work-life balance. A protégé may learn much during the observation of this unpleasant experience. The support and connections offered by the fellowship this community thus become a wake-up call for protégés to value this type of non-work relationship (Murphy & Kram, 2010).

**Developmental Networks Theory**

To thoroughly review the conventional concept of mentoring, Kram (1985) emphatically claimed that the phenomenon of mentoring is not limited to a single relationship. Individuals tend to proactively seek not just one, but multiple and alternative individuals as ‘mentors’ for career advancement, psychological, emotional, and social development and support. Baugh and Scandura (1999) also confirmed the critical role of multiple mentors in strengthening mentoring outcomes with regard to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, career expectations, role conflict, role ambiguity, and perceived employment alternatives. Indeed, it is rare for individuals to
maintain merely single dyad mentoring or developmental assistance in today’s age of globalization and organizational restructuring (Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Originally derived from social networks theory, Higgins and Kram (2001) made a fundamental proposition by reconceptualizing the dyadic perspective of traditional one on one mentoring as a multiple concurrent networked relationship phenomenon. Higgins and Kram (2001) adopted a name generator in their study to ask protégés to list names of people who take an active interest in advancing protégés’ careers. The name generating process usually involves four to five people who work or have worked with protégés or protégés’ friends and family members. They indicated the complexities of developmental networks and how this multiple relational approach impacts individual developmental relationships through the theoretical lens and typology of the “developmental networks” framework. Molloy (2005) later reinforced the importance of this emerging transition by highlighting a similar integrative focus on mentoring developmental networks.

Dobrow et al. (2012) expressly distinguished the subtle difference between multiple mentoring networks and developmental networks. Mentoring networks primarily involve a group or a subset of mentors from protégés’ organizations whereas developmental networks extend the scope of developers to family and friends. Furthermore, unlike the limited people-oriented focus of mentoring networks,
developmental networks place the emphasis not only on people, but also the primary and multiple relationships (e.g. range, quality, status, density, intra- or extra-organizational affiliation) between them (Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

In other words, developmental networks include, but are not limited to, mentoring networks. The notion of multiple mentors thus laid a solid foundation for advancing the boundaries and concept of developmental networks further.

Developmental Networks

Developmental networks are also described as multiple developmental relationships, or relationship constellations, which reflects greater variation in terms of the types and statuses of ‘developers’ (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). In other words, a constellation includes more than one single primary and usually up to four or five developers. This composition also implies a wider and concurrent scope of relationships an individual has with peers, subordinates, superiors, friends, family, community members or others who are from different life domains (Dobrow et al., 2012).

Murphy and Kram (2010) believed that concerning networks, “the more the merrier” and indicated that the bigger the developmental network and the more frequently the protégé connects with their developmental network, the greater his or
her job satisfaction and intrinsic career success will be. Spanning several broad social spheres, these developers share a common interest in actively taking concerted actions to develop and progress one’s career (Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Based on the findings of a developmental network study conducted by Higgins and Thomas (2001), there are two temporal career outcomes in general. The quality of an individual’s primary developer displayed relatively subjective, short-term career consequences ranging from one’s work role, self-esteem, psychological success and attitudes, work satisfaction, and intentions to stay at one’s institution (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Nevertheless, the quality of one’s multiple developmental relationships, the comprehensiveness of the network, and the entire constellation of developers led to long-term and greater career outcomes including promotion and overall status, as well as organizational commitment and overall organizational retention (Higgins & Thomas, 2001).

Key Characteristics of Developmental Relationships

Quality of developmental relationships. Firstly, the quality of a developmental relationship is reflected by the amount and type of real and meaningful developmental support and benefits received by the protégé (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram, 1985). Generally speaking, Higgins and Thomas (2001) pointed out that there are two
‘mentoring’ factors or functions, namely career functions and psychosocial functions. Career functions are informational and instrumental in nature and include, for instance, coaching, advice, exposure, protection, time, teaching and research resources, and challenging tasks (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram, 1985). Psychosocial functions, on the other hand, offer emotional intensity and appraisal support including self-worth, concern, caring, sharing, encouragement, feedback, acceptance, confirmation, role modeling, counseling, friendship, social, emotional support, and interpersonal relationships that reduce anxiety and stress beyond the boundaries of work (Lawrence et al., 2013; Murphy & Kram, 2010).

The second characteristic of a quality developmental relationship includes mutuality, reciprocity, and engagement between partners (Chandler & Kram, 2005; Dobrow et al., 2012; Higgins & Thomas, 2001). With an attention to concerns of mutuality, scholars reveal that it is inadequate to take only protégés’ perspectives into account. When protégés draw upon mentors for support, mutual respect and trust provide the career and psychosocial assistance offered by developers to broaden the proteges’ skills, which help protégés boost their confidence and sense of self-efficacy to cope with stress experienced at work and in life.

In addition to protégés’ perspectives, mentors’ views, including their individual characteristics, needs, perceptions, and the benefits they receive through “reverse
mentoring,” also contribute to high quality interpersonal and interactive networking. If protégés are able to identify what important outcomes motivate developers to take up the role of mentors, it can facilitate the recruitment of new developers and follow-up connections. Developers will also find it easier to realize potential opportunities for their own progress. By understanding how two parties engage in shared relationships and how they impact each other, the mutuality of growth, trust, positive regard, and new ideas or skills acquisition can be examined (Allen, Eby, O’Brien, & Lentz, 2008).

Employees’ relational competence is another element of quality developmental relationships. A mutually effective and beneficial developmental relationship hinges on employees proactively seeking out development opportunities and maintaining frequent follow-up interaction (Chandler et al., 2010). For instance, a relationally savvy individual is likely to manage a larger, more diverse and thriving developmental network compared with less savvy ones.

Nevertheless, not all developmental networks researchers believe that “the more the better” is what distinguishes a quality developmental network. Dobrow et al. (2012) pointed out another significant factor determining the quality of developmental relationships is best fit between the developmental assistance offered and the developmental support needed. If developers and protégés perceive a powerful
alignment, the amount and type of support provided and received will be at an optimum level.

**Relationship status of developmental relationships.** The second characteristic of developmental relationships is the relationship status, which demonstrates a quality developmental relationship with a developer at a senior or supervisory position. These relationships are valuable and are more likely to yield enhanced career advancement, better promotion opportunities and salary rates, and higher career satisfaction and compensation than developers in non-senior positions in the hierarchy (Dobrow et al., 2012; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Kram, 1985; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Many developers and protegés are inclined to look for people who possess similar demographic socioeconomic, or educational backgrounds when cultivating developmental networks (Dobrow et al., 2012). They are easily attracted to each other due to the match of their perceived similarities and complementary characteristics. As a result, a relatively less diverse developmental network may be formed since networked members are from similar social spheres concerning their demographics, attitudes, variables, and goals (Dobrow et al., 2012).

Higgins and Thomas (2001) remarked that the possible benefits of relationship with senior members consist of, individually, enriching one’s knowledge, confidence, visibility, and perceived political power by enriching one’s perspective and
empowering one’s upward mobility and capability to learn. Collectively, powerful
and authoritative constellations or compositions of developers such as vice presidents,
senior partners, or colleagues can easily connect the protégé to important elite groups,
professional networks, and informal social circles, bypassing organizational
hierarchical structures while offering various types of credible information and
resources to open up career potential and opportunities.

**Intra and extra organizational affiliation of developmental relationships.**

The third characteristic of developmental relationships is that the intra and extra
organizational affiliation can determine the effectiveness of developmental
relationships (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). In the modern work environment,
extraorganizational developmental relationships have increasingly become a
cosmopolitan source of assistance for protégés’ career development since this outward
orientation generates varied market and industry-related information (Higgins &
Thomas, 2001; Murphy & Kram, 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the growing popularity of extraorganizational affiliation,
intraorganizational, traditional monodyadic mentoring relationships are still the most
common and are usually officially arranged to facilitate protégé’s career. When
compared with extraorganizational affiliation, the intraorganizational primary
developmental relationship is more significant (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). By
enhancing exposure and visibility from various departments within the organization, individuals can enjoy proximity, familiarity, timeliness of support in their institutional relationships (Johnsrud et al., 2000). Upon receiving instrumental and expressive support, protégés can gain easy access to internal promotion and transfer opportunities (Lankau & Scandura, 2002). The success of close and trusting intraorganizational relationships lies in the advice from insiders, which is doubtlessly more appropriate and relevant to the organizational culture of a particular institution and its internal task requirements.

**Diversity of developmental relationships.** In addition to the above three aspects, the diversity of multiple developmental networks also plays an essential role in protégés’ personal growth and career advancement (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The diversity of an individual’s developmental constellation is determined by the extent of variety of their networks, which can be measured through the social contexts, network composition and the demographic background, expertise, seniority, and values of protégés, mentors and developers (Dobrow et al., 2012). This key dimension indicates the extent or breadth of a protégé’s ‘commitment profile’ both inside and beyond the boundaries of their current organization. The level of diversity thus implies the amount of novel resources and information exchanged in these networks. A more diverse network offers a higher amount of new learning opportunities to explore fresh
information for growth while a less diverse one limits access to novel information (Dobrow et al., 2012).

According to Higgins and Kram (2001), there are two dimensions of network diversity: density and range. Density refers to the depth, the breadth, closeness and interconnectedness among developers in a network. For example, if developers are closely connected with one another, there is a possibility that the presence of similar or repeated information should be considered as being relatively high (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Range, on the other hand, describes categories of social fields such as school, work, professional organization, and community (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The wider the range of developers, the greater varieties of information protégés are able to obtain. It is common to find that having greater access to career-related information enhances the capability of protégés’ to overcome difficulties at work (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). However, with regard to career decisions, more information may lead to a higher likelihood of job change since additional information implies more access to employment opportunities and prospective employers.

Dobrow et al. (2012) proposed that perspectives drawn from all members of one’s developmental network can be collectively taken into consideration. Individuals
are thus reminded and encouraged to interact with and enlist the support of a diverse variety of potential developers in crafting their networks (Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

**Developmental Relationships and Network in Education**

Previous research findings revealed the importance of promoting and cultivating multiple and high-quality developmental relationships to bring about positive and long term organizational retention, providing significant insight into and implications for human resources practices in the education industry (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). Building social capital with and across organizational boundaries is recognized as a core competency in a work environment or an occupational community, especially in service-oriented businesses such as health care associations and legal industries. It is therefore not surprising to notice that developmental relationships have an influential role in education, a knowledge-based and people-oriented field.

**Summary**

Many of the prior research studies on mentoring and careers, both qualitative and quantitative, have attempted to explore, interpret, and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of traditional, formal, and dyadic work-based mentoring programs and relationships (Murphy & Kram, 2010). Studies of developmental relationship networks influence on individuals’ personal and professional development are limited
and remain under-researched in terms of its scope and its depth respectively. While the majority of these limited empirical studies concern service industries such as social work, medical healthcare departments, nursing sectors, or legal firms, very few of them focus on the education industry, let alone higher education. In other words, there has been a relative dearth of studies on the impact of developmental relationships on faculty career choice considerations in Hong Kong higher education.

A deeper analysis of the positive effects of developmental relationships and networks influence on career considerations and consequences will not only significantly contribute to the literature intellectually, but also achieve the practical goals through changes in human resources practices. To advance our theoretical understanding and address the practical issues in the higher education industry, there is a need for hermeneutic phenomenological research to fill the gap by exploring how the phenomenon of developmental relationships impacts academic faculty members’ work experience and career decisions. A qualitative research inquiry into faculty’s perception and how they experience and make sense of the phenomenon of developmental networks was thus warranted, appropriate, and necessary, especially in today’s complex and dynamic organizational environment in academia.
Chapter Three: Research Design

Research Questions

The problem of practice for this study was that higher education institutions find difficulty in retaining faculty members due to tight financial constraints and are hence unable to offer appealing remuneration packages and annual salary increases. In order to seek a less costly alternative, higher education administrators intend to develop and retain faculty members economically by exploring the impact of developmental relationships and developmental networks on forming faculty career decisions.

This study therefore presents an exploration of the role of developmental networks in shaping mid-career faculty’s career decisions through the lens of developmental networks theory. To investigate this problem, the overarching open-ended research question guiding and informing this study was: “How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty describe their career decision making process?”

Research Paradigm

The anchoring research paradigm selected for this qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study was constructivism-interpretivism. Given its idiographic and emic nature, constructivism-interpretivism involves working closely with individuals, rather than people in general, and unique constructs, behaviors and
languages which are specific to individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). The individuality of constructivism-interpretivism thus presents a close alignment with the open-ended interpretative research questions. For the practical goal of this study, faculty members’ insights and hidden thoughts gained through their own reflections and interactive dialogue with the researcher concerning developmental relationships was analyzed. Burrell and Morgan (1979) emphasized that interpretative theorists put value on understanding the spiritual nature and essence of the social world as it is seen through subjective experience and individual consciousness. From the perspectives of participants’ frame of references instead of researchers’ observations, the present study enables the participants to share their individual experience and subjective reflection.

Through qualitative research methods like IPA, the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm enables the researcher to understand, explore, dissect, and recover the lived experiences of faculty members’ perceptions of developmental relationships and developmental networks. This recognition can be within or outside the explicit awareness of the participants themselves (Ponterotto, 2005).

During the research process, the interpretative paradigm encouraged faculty members to express their subjective opinions and the patterns and regularities of their worldviews. Interpretation concerning their career considerations then emerged
through careful measures over the course of multiple interviews (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis of the findings produced by multiple interviews reviewed several emerging patterns of faculty members’ career decisions influenced by their experience of developmental relationships.

**Role of the Researcher**

Given the selected research paradigm (constructivism-interpretivism) for this present study, the role of the researcher was defined as a constructivists-interpretivist who values subjectivity, individuals’ lived experience, perceptions, and the multiple interpretations of a phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005).

These characteristics of constructivists-interpretivists are consistent with the interactive and subjective role of the researcher and enhance the interdependent and dynamic researcher-participant interaction in this study (Ponterotto, 2005). In fact, the iterative nature of this IPA study also reinforced and explained the researcher’s inclination to spend a substantial amount of time to facilitate, capture, construct, and describe the lived experience of faculty members during intense and prolonged interaction over multiple interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005).

As the sole data collector, the researcher played an active role in shaping the area of research interest, designing the research methodology, gaining access to the research site, recruiting participants, drafting interview protocols, conducting
interviews, and analyzing the gathered data. The researcher’s prior experience and expectations therefore undoubtedly played an important and active role in the IPA research process (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

To achieve the goals of this study, the researcher was made aware of her own beliefs and was alerted to the impact of her previous experience. Having been in teaching profession for more than a decade, it has always been the researcher’s conviction that teachers, administrative superiors, and coaches are the sole source of mentors, especially in traditional Chinese societies like Hong Kong where people believe that obeying rules and respecting teachers and seniors is one of the most important virtues. This was the horizon of meaning built on the researcher’s own set of values, ideas, and world view (Briscoe, 2005). These assumptions also presented a bias that the researcher avoided when interpreting the experiences of the other in the course of research study (Briscoe, 2005). Due to her socially constructed identity in this traditional community, the researcher presumed that mentors are confined to official mentoring relationships and overlooked the possibility of having non-mentors such as coworkers and family members as developers. In fact, the researcher did not allow this previous experience to generate assumptions or perceptions of bias toward respondents’ answers. Instead, she reminded herself to accept and embrace a myriad variety of individual differences, thus advancing her understanding of various
participants’ experience related to developmental relationships and developmental networks.

Since faculty members in the researcher’s institution comprised the research participants, the researcher had to acknowledge her positionality and these significant “others” in the study (Briscoe, 2005). Being a faculty member from a similar cultural and social background, there was a sense of unity and equal positioning created. During the process of data collection, this commonality enabled the researcher to display sensitivity and understanding of the representation and significance of the other (Briscoe, 2005).

Despite the dual role of being a researcher as well as a frontline faculty member, the researcher attempted to be nonjudgmental when collecting and processing the data. She encouraged the participants to speak for themselves. She also ensured that she would bracket and suspend any possible biases or blinders by setting aside her subjective assumptions. The researcher was also attentive to the significant process of putting the interviews and other collected data in a fresh and non-intrusive perspective when interpreting the participants’ experience in the course of research study.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Design
The purpose and focus of this doctoral research project aimed at having an in-depth understanding and exploration of a human resources issue, namely, mid-career faculty’s experience related to career decisions, turnover, and perception of developmental networks. This rationale therefore directed this study toward a qualitative research approach, putting the focus on uncovering and exploring the inadequately understood, dynamic phenomenon of human interactions. This process of reflection ideographically developed general themes from specific ideas (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

**Research Approach**

There are two main schools of thought to the phenomenological tradition, psychology phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Moustakas’ transcendental or psychological phenomenology centered on description rather than interpretation, whereas Heidegger’s hermeneutic approach valued not only description but also interpretation. Of these two, the latter is certainly a more justifiable approach to data analysis of the present study. The hermeneutic approach facilitates the understanding of faculty members’ lived experiences, cognitive and emotional representation, as well as the features within the context of the phenomenon and the role of developmental networks in shaping mid-career faculty decisions (Creswell,
2013). In this case, the researchers’ and participants’ interpretations and sense-making process effectively answered the interpretative research questions (van Manen, 1997).

Precisely, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a contemporarily revised and comprehensive modification of phenomenology with growing popularity, was the specific research approach adopted for this research qualitative study (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). In addition to inviting faculty members to offer and share the thick description, the IPA researcher would guide individuals to voice, interpret and make meaning of the experiences related to developmental relationships and developmental networks (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The presence of IPA promotes a wider and deeper understanding by objectively exploring, modifying, mediating, interpreting, and explaining the common patterns embedded in the object, the processes of life, or worldly phenomena (Dowling, 2007). Through an integration of three equally important philosophical axes and theoretical underpinnings, namely phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic, IPA researchers enable participants to make sense of their dynamic personal, cultural, and social world. Faculty members in the research process were also encouraged to contribute meaning to their statements and lived experiences, an important process described by Smith and Osborn (2008). In the mean time, the researcher also employed and benefited from the application of the double hermeneutic
phenomenology by making sense of the participants’ perception of the phenomenon under investigation (Smith et al., 2009).

**Justification of Applying IPA to this Study**

According to Smith et al. (2009), the complementary and collective contribution of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography is a critical reason why holistic IPA is a more effective methodology for the current study compared with other qualitative research approaches. IPA engages the essence and elements offered by multiple phenomenological philosophers’ key ideas rather than a particular phenomenological framework or methodology constructed from a limited number of theorists or scholars. This all-inclusiveness enabled the researcher to take a further step to conduct a cognitive, affective, and existential analysis on the complexity and novelty of faculty members’ major lived experiences with respect to their career decisions in a modern, up-to-date, and multidimensional fashion (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Yardley, 2008).

Symbolic interactionism and double hermeneutics are deemed the two most significant features of the IPA tradition (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2008). This two-phase interpretation methodology firstly engages participants’ sense making of their experience when main themes appear or emerge originally as an insider. This first empathic phase is then followed by a second conceptualization, interpretation,
and analysis phase carried out by the researcher on the participants’ own account of their intentions. As an outsider, the researcher is likely to play a questioning role to interpret the meaning of the participants’ experiences and provide critical and further questioning (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). After all, the researcher is a reporter in the interview; her interpretation is deemed as secondary. Attentiveness and both positive and close engagement with participants in these inductive processes were thus required to enhance the openness and truthfulness of the experience shared.

These two steps are consistent with the way Heidegger articulated the case for hermeneutic phenomenological study where the interpretation of the ‘appearance’ of things engages two meanings or qualities (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The first quality is the visible or literal meanings that appear spontaneously, while the second includes the concealed or hidden meanings that may emerge as a result of explicit examination, analysis, or interpretation (Smith et al., 2009, p. 24).

Since IPA involves examining how individuals make important decisions in their life world, ‘career considerations and decisions,’ one of the research focuses of this study, are undoubtedly one of those momentous life changing choices (Smith et al., 2009).

The choice of conducting multiple interviews with mid-career faculty members also confirmed the adoption of an IPA approach. The iterative analysis process of IPA
ensures that the collected data were examined repeatedly and thoroughly from
different perspectives as opposed to a rigidly fixed sequential order.

The idiographic nature of IPA studies also made this research approach a
suitable option to address the research question for the current study. Focusing on
details and particular contexts, IPA studies are concerned with a small sample size or
group who are carefully selected with a specific purpose (Smith et al., 2009). The
present study invited participation from a group of mid-career academic faculty who
have made at least one job change but who are currently employed for more than five
years within the age range 29-52. The details obtained from this particular single
context represented a perspective on a particular phenomenon, which is their
experience about developmental networks in relation to their career considerations.
Their experiences were then used to explain the generalizability and implications of
the phenomenon for a more general and larger population of faculty in higher
education institutions.

In the context of this study, the researcher aimed to understand the general
universal phenomenon of faculty turnover in relation to the role of developmental
networks among academic faculty members in Hong Kong higher education through
distinctive and unique personal viewpoints and subject’s own processes of making
sense of their experiences. The objective of reaching an unexplored terrain, Hong
Kong higher education in this case, was also consistent with one of the features of IPA studies, which is examining an under-researched phenomenon over a period of time (Reid et al., 2005).

Site and Participants

Sampling strategy. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), research questions, conceptual frameworks, and sampling approaches help narrow the foci and set boundaries for sample design. Given the descriptive and interpretive research question concerning exploring and eliciting mid-career academic faculty’s career choice considerations, the sample design for this study drew on a purposeful criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013). Generally, the major rationale for setting the sample size was to ensure that the size was large enough to uncover different voices or perceptions about the phenomenon.

Smith (2009, p.3) recommended that the researchers of IPA studies conduct multiple in-depth interviews with a narrow sampling range of three to six participants who have a deep, common, and concentrated understanding of a phenomenon with a moderately homogeneous background together with the notion that quality triumphs over quantity. Miles and Huberman (1994) also emphasized that small and purposive samples are recurring features of most qualitative studies. Using the established criterion and considering the possible availability of qualified participants at the
research site, Hang Seng Management College (HSMC), a sample population of four frontline mid-career academic faculty members was formed. This sample size was appropriate to capture the lived experiences of participants in detail. Since HSMC is a young higher education institution in Hong Kong, still in its first decade, almost all academic faculty members are non-tenured. The subjects of this study were also non-tenured academic faculty members. All of them ranged in age between 29 – 52 years and included both men and women at mid-career stage, having made at least one job change but who were currently employed for more than five years as an academic faculty member at HSMC.

Criterion sampling is useful to specify that a certain group of individuals is carefully identified and properly invited to participate and articulate the common lived experience of the phenomenon in question or those who are from the single culture-sharing group, thus meeting the research criteria of the study (Creswell, 2013). Since all the participants were invited from the same institution, this sampling strategy reflected the homogeneity of participants in terms of subject demographics. The uniformity of faculty members’ shared experience of developmental networks in relation to their career decisions thus facilitated the data analysis of this IPA study.

In this IPA study, academic faculty members at the researcher’s institution (HSMC) were purposefully selected to inform and explore the research problem and
central phenomenon concerning “mid-career faculty’s perception of developmental network in relation to their career choice”. Participants developed a complex and thick description of the essence of the experience, including both “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced this phenomenon. Participants’ basic demographic information such as job titles, age range, gender, years of teaching experience, number of job changes, etc. were recorded as well.

**Recruitment of participants.** Due to its familiarity and accessibility, the researcher’s institution (HSMC) was identified and selected as the present study’s research site. Here the mid-career academic faculty members from various departments were conveniently located. The researcher’s familiarity with the research site also expedited gaining access to participants, identifying desired participants, and building rapport with them. The researcher then invited those who were likely to be interested and willing to participate in the study.

The researcher first sent an official email invitation to four target participants who fulfilled the above-mentioned criteria. The invitation email detailed the purpose of the study, intended use of the findings, and the length of the expected period of the interview. The researcher offered an informal meeting for further discussion concerning the details of the research proposal. When meeting with the potential participants in person, the researcher shared the specific details concerning the
protection of the participants’ identities, the data collection procedures, and the anticipated benefits gained from the study.

Once the participants had officially accepted the invitation to participate in the study, the researcher sought formal informed consent from the participants. As an essential and required procedure of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), the participants signed an informed consent form, a written document to invite potential participants to take part in the research study as a subject based on a voluntary basis and to acknowledge their understanding of the nature, the risks, and the benefits of the research.

However small the target population of the study might be, upholding the integrity of the research study based on ethical considerations was important in the process of recruiting participants. Documenting and obtaining informed consent was meant to protect the safety, the confidentiality of the participants’ identities, and their personal particulars, especially the vulnerable groups in the study or those without authority or superior status within the institution. Through participating in this study, informants were assured that their identities were professionally safeguarded. They thus had confidence, sense of security and faith not only in the current research, but also the entire research community. Since the present study was concerned with
faculty career choices and considerations, the intention of participants to remain or leave the institution where they were currently serving could prove sensitive.

In order to protect themselves, participants were assured that their identities and their information would be kept confidential. All subjects should be treated equitably and equally, and should never be deceived unless there is sufficient explanation or justifiable research-related reason (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study without consequence. The rationale and purpose of the current study was made known to participants who could decide whether they were willing to participate voluntarily. Through a risk-benefit analysis, the researcher also made every effort to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks to convince participants that the benefits of participation would outweigh the drawbacks. In other words, the participants were presented with the notion that the study was of minimal and reasonable risk and the possible discomfort and risk would not pose other problems beyond those faced by participants under normal circumstances.

In addition to this, the incentives to arouse subjects’ interest and encourage their participation such as gaining valuable learning opportunities, the experience of participating in qualitative research, and meaningfully contributing to the advancement of generalizable knowledge, were also clearly stated (Creswell, 2013). For example, the participants gained a deeper understanding of their own perception
toward developmental relationships and developmental networks, which provided them with insights as well as alternatives to develop through relationships.

**Access to research site and participants.** Acquiring permission from research site’s and consent from participants are essential for research studies: IPA study is no exception. Identifying and earning trust from the gatekeepers, be they the official authorities or informal cultural leaders of the target population, forms a critical bridge between researchers and participants, building trustworthiness and credibility (King & Horrocks, 2010). In the case of the present study, the vice president in charge of coordinating academic research of the institution was identified as the gatekeeper. The researcher selected the campus as the research site where subjects felt safe to participate, share their experience, and clarify agreement terms with participants whenever necessary (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). The interviews were conducted after school when the participants felt relaxed and ready to share their thoughts and experiences in a less stressful time slot.

**Research site overview.** For the past decade, Hang Seng Management College (HSMC) has been undergoing a major transformation, aiming to expand from a post-secondary business school to a self-financing higher education institution offering degree and associated degree programs in Hong Kong. HSMC is now embarking on a long term development plan with the clear goal of becoming a leading
private university capable of offering state-of-the-art learning, teaching, and research facilities to meet the needs of quality tertiary education in the 21st century.

HSMC aspires to follow in the footsteps of its successful predecessor, the Hang Seng School of Commerce (HSSC), which was founded in 1980. Since then HSSC has become a prestigious business school and a pioneering provider of Diplomas in Business Administration, Associate Degrees in Business Administration, and related business programs in the following three decades.

Tertiary education in Hong Kong has long been organized under a two-tier system. The upper tier is composed of the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong (UGC)-funded universities catering to students who performed well on the public examination (Kember, 2010). Those unable to gain a place in one of the eight UGC-funded universities can enroll in degree or sub-degree programs run by self-financing higher education institutions or community colleges. These schools compromise the lower tier (Kember, 2010). As an easy solution promoted and encouraged by the Hong Kong government, the massification of higher education has been achieved through privatization, commercialization, and marketization (Lee, 2006; Mok, 2003; Shin & Harman, 2009).
As a result, since the late 2000s, the self-financing higher education sector in Hong Kong has become an important component of educational services with room for expansion. In response to this growing demand, HSSC formulated a plan to provide opportunities for local students to pursue higher education at the undergraduate level. With this vision and the experience of offering post-secondary education for over 30 years, HSSC set up Hang Seng Management College (HSMC). Since September 2010, HSMC has rapidly expanded and successfully launched five degree programs including Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours) (BBA), Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours) in Supply Chain Management (SCM), Bachelor of Translation with Business (Honours) (BTB), Bachelor of Journalism and Communication (Honours) (BJC), and Bachelor of Arts in English (Honours) (BA, English). All programs have been officially accredited and approved by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ).

Being one of eleven self-financing or private degree-awarding institutions in Hong Kong, HSMC’s vision is to be one of the best education providers comparable to these peer institutions and the eight UGC-funded universities.
Since all the participants of this study have been employed for more than five years as an academic faculty member at HSSC / HSMC, they have all been through the transitional period of the college as it transformed from HSSC into HSMC. To minimize confusion and to enable easier reference, the participants’ institution will hereafter be referred to “HSMC”.

**Individual interview participant profiles.** The interviews conducted helped to formulate each of the participants’ personal developmental relationship and network profiles. This group of participants, frontline mid-career academic faculty members, had some similar experience and common views along with unique stories. All participants worked in the same higher education institution in Hong Kong. For the purpose of this research study, mid-career was defined as those who have worked in this organization for at least five years. Three of them are Lecturers while the other one is an Assistant Professor. Unlike young faculty members with comparatively less experience and limited family obligations, the variety of life experience and level of personal responsibilities of this group of mid-career participants is certainly far greater and deeper. More concerns and obligations will thus be taken into their considerations when making career decisions.
The following section provides a brief overview and the personal background of the participants of the individual interviews.

**Pat.** Pat has been a Lecturer in the Department of Marketing and Management at the School of Business at HSMC for six years. She is between 29-36 years of age and has been teaching for more than 10 years. Before working at HSMC, Pat had her first teaching job at a private secondary school for two years and spent another two years at an aided secondary school. HSMC is her third school.

**Mimi.** Mimi is a Lecturer teaching English at HSMC. She is between 37-44 years of age and has been working for 19 years. Her first teaching job in a secondary school lasted two years. She then worked for the government as a civil servant for 3 months before joining HSMC as a lecturer in the Department of English in 1997. She has been teaching at HSMC since then.

**Mary.** Mary is a Lecturer in the Department of English of the School of Humanities at HSMC. She is between 29-36 years of age and has been teaching for 8 years. After graduating with a Masters of Philosophy (MPhil), she taught at a secondary school as an English teacher for 1 year. She then joined HSMC as a lecturer. After her initial two-year contract, Mary switched to teach at another
direct-subsidized secondary school for 2 months before rejoining HSMC. Excluding this brief period, Mary has been working at HSMC for almost 7 years.

**Robert.** Robert is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics and Finance of the School of Business at HSMC. He is between 45-52 years of age. Before joining HSMC, Robert had experiences working in the banking and finance industry for more than 10 years, Robert has gained considerable experience in the areas of corporate finance, assessment management, and system development. In 2008, he began his career in education as a lecturer at HSMC. He has been with HSMC for six years.

**Data Collection**

**Data collection overview.** The nature of qualitative studies directs the researcher to collect data through an intensive and sustained process of deep exploration concerning participants’ experience, perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, and presuppositions at a field or a situation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Subjects, in a natural setting, can then be reflective of the ordinary issues, as well as the hidden, undeveloped and underlying events, in their daily lives in relation to other individuals, societies, and organizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These kinds of holistic, rich, and thick descriptions generated and gathered through long-term engagement between
the researcher and the participants are therefore able to explore complexity in real life contexts.

To pursue and fulfill interpretative and exploratory research goals, hermeneutic phenomenological study was selected as the current research approach. According to Smith et al. (2013), conducting an IPA study is concerned with identifying a phenomenon to research, bracketing out the researcher’s previous experience, and collecting data from a small number of participants who shared the common lived experience of a phenomenon embedded in a social setting and its subsettings through in-depth and multiple semi-structured interviews.

The researcher collected data through multiple, in-depth, face-to-face interviews, specifically using the semi-structured three-interview series introduced by Seidman (2006). This institution-specific IPA study focused on identifying, depicting, describing, interpreting, and condensing the meaning mid-career academic faculty members at HSMC placed on their individual, yet shared experience concerning the role of developmental networks in shaping their career decisions. As Miles and Huberman (1994) commented, interviewees in this study are more the co-authors or co-researchers than merely the participants. The responsive interviewing model proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2011) was also adopted during these multiple
interviews sessions, which were conducted as a continuous, flexible, and adaptable extended conversation.

As Smith et al. (2009) suggested, the reasonable number of interviews for an IPA study was between four and ten. The sample population included four frontline mid-career academic faculty members, in which case the three-interview approach of the current study suggested altogether about twelve interviews. Since the sample group was invited at the research site, the researcher’s home institution, choosing the college itself for the interview location was the most appropriate option.

**Three-interview series.** According to Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series, the first interview begins with ice breaker questions and sets the stage for faculty members to put their own life history and experience in context. Informants were invited to share, introduce and reconstruct their early experience as a protégé regarding their interactions with their social settings, including their families, school, friends, neighborhood, and workplace in light of their teaching career path (Seidman, 2006). The interviewers then guided the interviewees to share their experience of developmental relationships and developmental networks, the topic of the study, within the context of their past lives by asking how they had come to be academic faculty members at HSMC. Interviewees started recalling events and incidents
influencing their career decisions or considerations in particular. A trusting rapport and sustainable relationship with participants was built from this stage.

This initial orientation was followed by a second interview in which participants answered seven to nine sub-questions of the study to reconstruct the concrete details of experience on the topic of the role of “developmental relationships” and “developmental networks” in shaping their career decisions and specifically turnover. The second interview was focused and concentrated on asking questions such as “What kind of positive support did you actually receive and how did it advance your professional and psychological development?” and “Can you recount a particular incident of your career experience to date receiving developing assistance and support from any individuals?” Respondents were invited to give names of people, from within or outside their own organization, who actively took interest in offering developmental assistance and support.

The second interview was primarily focused on detailed experience where interviewees’ opinions about their stories were added as supporting materials. Interviewees were also invited to reflect on the meaning, including both intellectual and emotional associations, of their work and life experience (Seidman, 2006). Another interview question was “Given what you mentioned about your life before this current job, how do you perceive the role of developmental relationships and
developmental networks in shaping your career considerations and making
decisions?” A following probe question was, “Given what you have experienced in
the past, how do you describe the role developmental relationships and developmental
networks play in informing your career choice?” Through these questions,
participants were making meaning and producing interpretations through their own
language in three interviews (Seidman, 2006). The selected incidents and stories were
meaningfully, structurally, and thoroughly reviewed with a beginning, a middle, and
an end.

The third interview mainly served the purpose of member checking and
reflection. Instead of conducting another interview with additional questions, the
researcher and the participants collaboratively went through the drafted interpretation
of participants’ responses. The entire process was evaluative and reflective in nature.
Participants were reassured and given an opportunity to foresee the emerged findings
and ensure the data and the descriptions were precise and unbiased.

The three-interview structure served its function well, with each interview
equally as important as the series as a whole. The responsive interviewing model
proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2011) was also adopted during these multiple
interviews, which were conducted as a continuous, flexible, and adaptable extended
conversation. Although the original interview questions were precisely designed
based on the research questions, the researcher, as well as the interviewer, modified
the questions in terms of content and sequence in real time, thus using different
approaches to adhere to and answer the same research questions. Seidman (2006)
reinforced that each interview lays the foundation for the next due to its interactive
and cumulative structure.

The interview duration of this study was about 45 to 90 minutes. Interviewees
were explained how the long suggested interview session took the conversation and
interview appropriately, seriously, and effectively. The interviews were finished in the
allotted time as scheduled. Each interview ended with a polite note of thanks to the
interviewee who was willing to spend the time and effort to contribute to the study.
The space or intermission of each of these three interviews was from four to five days
apart (Seidman, 2006). In this case, participants were given enough (but not too long)
time to think about the previous interview, which inspired them to reconstruct other
relevant experiences in following interviews. This interview duration was in fact
flexibly adjusted according to the participants’ schedules and other unpredictable
conditions. Interviewees were also contacted via email and phone in order to provide
reminders and gain time confirmations.

There was no data analysis carried out during the anticipated time gap between
the first and second or second and third interviews. To capture the participants’
experiences throughout the three interviews as a series, analysis was only conducted upon completion of all three rounds of interviews.

All these face-to-face interviews were held at the college which offered a convenient and familiar setting to the participants and the researcher. King and Horrocks (2010) suggested that the location of the interviews is commonly held on interviewees’ home turf. Rubin and Rubin (2011) also reminded us to identify and target knowledgeable informants who could provide relevant experience and thoughtful ideas in great detail. The occasional emotional outbursts of participants when sharing some intimate details during the interviews were also properly addressed. The researcher thus provided a safe and comfortable environment in which the participants could share their experience truthfully and candidly.

Data recording. Recording data is also a critical stage in data collection. Upon receiving approval from the participants, the researcher recorded the responses by audiotaping with the aid of a recording device and the files were uploaded into Dropbox for reference. The researcher’s handwritten notes acted as a backup in case of technical failure. A reliable voice recorder was used to help guarantee the quality of the voice recording, thus ensuring complete verbatim extracts. All records of the interviews were kept and converted into full transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).
An interview protocol is an essential instrument to assist the researcher in asking questions and recording answers. The interview protocol of the present study was developed for each of the three different interviews and data was correspondingly collected for each participant. Factual background information concerning the interviews such as date, time, place, names of interviewer and interviewee, and the standard procedures and instructions of the interviews are all the necessary components of an interview protocol. In addition to the standard demographic information, interview and follow-up probe and prompt questions to elicit and encourage participants’ elaboration of their ideas and experiences were also stated in detail.

**Data storage and management.** All qualitative data was vigilantly managed and stored on the researcher’s password protected personal computer. This data includes participants’ personal particulars such as years of service and age range, assigned aliases, original transcripts, coded transcripts, and scribbles done during the interviews or recorded digital voice recordings. A responsible researcher should ensure that no one else has ownership or access to the gathered data, which is carefully monitored and held in strict confidence (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). A comprehensive filing system is necessary to organize and store the original
handwritten notes and the backup copies in locked and secured filing cabinets with clear labels and indexes.

The researcher removed the recorded audio files of the interviews from the recording device and saved them in a computer with a password. Backup copies of all data are separately kept from the original, in conditions that safeguarded confidentiality. A record of categories and quantities of gathered data items served as a checklist for the researcher’s future reference. Whenever the files were retrieved for amendments, changes made were recorded accordingly (Creswell, 2013, p.175).

Participants’ confidentiality was maintained by destroying all gathered data at the end of the agreed retention period after the completion of the research project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis process overview. The data analysis of the present IPA study centered on the analytic focus and was composed of six steps (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher first engaged with the collected data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, recalling her initial impressions during the interviews, and analyzing the first hand experience with the interviewees.

The researcher then carried out the process of initial noting by exploring and examining three types of comments, namely descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher first read through each transcript a few
times, identified important text, and put exploratory notes, comments, and remarks in the margin. This detailed textual analysis began with developing rich accounts and descriptive comments of the subject content explicitly made by the participants. The next analytical focus concerned the linguistic coding of the semantic content and specific language used by the participants, for example, participants’ choice of words, phrases, pronouns, pauses, repetitions, tone, and hesitancy. Finally, the researcher accelerated the interpretation to a conceptual level at which point the analysis was carefully constructed by the researcher’s perceptions, understanding, reflection, and interpretation of participants’ teaching experience of their world. The sophisticated interpretation of these conceptual comments lied in generating a broader range of possibilities while adhering closely to the transcribed text.

These three types of initial comments provided the fundamental materials for the third stage – developing emergent themes. The researcher examined the initial notes closely and looked for significant interrelationships and patterns among them. The essence of the concise statements captured in this process emerged and became themes, which reflected both participants’ responses and the analyst’s interpretation.

The fourth step of the data analysis was searching for patterns and connections across emergent themes. The analyst went through the list of established emergent themes, thus incorporating and putting the related themes together as meaningful,
clustered units. To further the organized analysis and enhance the development of super-ordinate themes for clusters of related themes, the researcher employed useful strategies such as abstraction and subsumption when evaluating the listed themes. The analyst also distinguished important and relevant themes from less significant or uninteresting ones by considering the function of the language use and the frequency with which the themes appeared (Smith et al., 2009).

Repeating this process for each participant’s case was the fifth step of the data analysis. The researcher reminded herself to bracket the emerged themes derived from the previous transcripts, thereby keeping these fore-structures from influencing the interpretation. The analysis process also allowed, if not encouraged, fresh ideas and new themes to emerge whenever the occasion presented itself.

Finally, the analyst identified connections and patterns across interviews and cases. She selected and determined the most significant themes for participants both individually and collectively in shared contexts. To facilitate this concluding stage, the analyst formed a master table of themes for the entire group, indicating the emerged themes elicited from individual participants. She then put the related themes together and categorized these clusters into various super-ordinate themes.

In addition to these six steps, two important strategies for qualitative data analysis were employed in the present study. Firstly, phenomenological reduction was used to
explain how a phenomenological study is approached and how the essence of the phenomenon are investigated and brought to the attention of the researcher.

Bracketing is another major strategy of the phenomenological tradition and commonly takes place during this stage of data analysis. At this point, the researcher examined, set aside, suspended, and bracketed out her role and the impact of her bias and prejudice on analyzing various participants’ views by taking a fresh point of view without being influenced by any of her presumptions (Moustakas, 1994).

**Limitations**

To begin, some features of IPA studies present potential threats to the generalizability and validity of the present study. The relatively small sample size and potential for researchers’ bias and preconceptions resulting from the wider role they play in the process of interpretation were cited as examples (Smith et al., 2009).

In addition to the small sample size, subject characteristics and attitudes were another limitation that largely affected the authenticity, validity, and trustworthiness of their responses. These factors presented a challenge to the researcher who is responsible to keep questions simple, short, straightforward, clear, non-offensive, non-intrusive, unbiased, and in plain language that is understandable and accessible to subjects. Even if the interviewer observes if the participants seriously mull the questions over before sharing their experience, earnestly think of the right words to
use, and truthfully pause when responding to the questions and developing their thoughts, the absence of fabricated or biased responses cannot be guaranteed in all self-report data. It is difficult to attain consistency across different studies and inquirers, especially in qualitative studies due to their nature and state of constant flux of the participants’ subjective experience. Unlike scientific experiments, human subjective perception is highly personalized and invariably changing. Qualitative studies thus focus on particularity rather than generalizability.

Given the above analysis concerning the limitations of the study, all the selected strategies employed to maintain validity and trustworthiness and to strengthen the robustness of the findings for the present study were appropriate, significant, and reasonably easy to implement.

**Validity and Credibility**

**Steps to Maintain the Trustworthiness and Validity of the Study**

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings and the study, various strategies were employed in the process of data collection and data analysis. According to Yardley (2008), the trustworthiness or validity of qualitative research inquires can be measured by four criteria, namely sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance.
Yardley (2008) pointed out that sensitivity to existing relevant theories and empirical literature can mark a useful point of departure for researchers to gain fresh insights or create new knowledge by allowing patterns and themes to emerge from the interpretation of the findings. For instance, the present study was built on developmental network theory, which shapes developmental networks through mediating processes of cultivating developmental networks and developmental help-seeking behavior (Higgins & Kram, 2001). This strong theoretical construct enabled the researcher to identify gaps based on the previously known topics and phenomena, thus forming the building blocks of the primary research question.

Two other aspects of this criterion included sensitivity to participants’ perceptions and the conditions in which the study was implemented. The participants of the current study were individually interviewed at their institution by the researcher, who is also their colleague with similar background and experience. The privacy, familiarity, and peer relationships offered by the study encouraged participants to share and express their views freely. Having a personal high sensitivity to context led not only to enhanced credibility, but also reminded the researcher to keep an open mind, appreciate the complexities of human minds and embrace diversities when analyzing the data.
A good qualitative researcher is able to display their commitment and rigor throughout the procedures of data collection and analysis. For example, the rigor of the present study was manifested by the participant recruitment. In order to specifically address the research question as to how mid-career faculty members describe their career decision making process, interviewees were purposefully and carefully targeted. They were all mid-career (aged between 29 and 52) academic faculty members who had made at least one job change and were currently employed for more than five years at the Hang Seng Management College (HSMC).

In terms of commitment, the researcher closely adhered to the six-step analysis in-depth and repeated reading, noting with comments, developing themes, to identifying connections, examining cases, and looking for patterns (Smith et al., 2009). This meticulous and thorough procedure demonstrated the researcher’s devotion and commitment to present research study and ensured coherence and consistency in data interpretation.

The coherence of the current study was clearly demonstrated in the alignment among the constructivism-interpretivism research paradigm, the interpretative research question, and the selected interpretative research method, IPA. Like Yardley (2008), Edmondson and McManus (2007) also pointed out the significance of internal consistency among the key elements of the field research project. The researcher was
obliged to align the chosen topic, theory, conceptual framework, social constructs, research questions and design, and the anticipated contribution in the literature.

These choices concerning the compatibility of the instruments and methodologies led to warranted conclusions enabling the researcher to analyze and examine the subjects’ experience relevant to the purpose of the study. In terms of usability, interviews employed in this study were an accessible and easy to acquire data collection tool, helping the researcher to obtain necessary and productive responses effectively and efficiently.

With the internal consistency between multiple sources of data, a participant’s comments in the present case of three stage interview was carried out by comparing and corroborating his or her responses in one interview against the previous two interviews. This comparison was conducted from a few days to a week apart, thus validating the findings, evaluating a participant’s experience consistency, and drawing connections within his own account in making meaning over a period of time (Smith et al., 2009). This strategy not only provided the researcher with confidence in collecting reliable self-reported data and avoiding biases, but also helped interviewees recognize and clarify their own responses throughout the interviews.

This three-interview structure also facilitated the use of member checking, another reliable validating strategy to strengthen the trustworthiness and transparency
of the data (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In the second and third interviews, the researcher worked with interviewees as if they were coauthors on the draft interpretation of their own narrative accounts of the previous interviews to check for misinformation, to review, judge, and evaluate the accuracy of the data, the impartiality of the descriptions and the concluded themes (Creswell, 2013). Next, the researcher made corrections or modifications accordingly. Trust and rapport were also established between the researcher and participants.

Creswell (2013) also commented that these peer review and debriefing sessions help reinforce the validity of the study and the reliability of the findings. The researcher and participants examined the preliminary coded interviews and reviewed the drafted analyses, thus allowing them to comment, criticize, and honestly point out the problems or areas for improvement in terms of methodology and instrumentation. They also evaluated whether the questions, especially after the first interview session, were sensible, interesting and inviting, and about the right length with understandable purpose and clear instructions.

The researcher’s influence and bias concerning how the participants responded to interview questions when reconstructing and reviewing their experience has necessarily minimized and in some cases, completely removed (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; Seidman, 2006). As an interviewer, the researcher made a great effort to strike a
balance between unobtrusiveness and interaction. On the one hand, the interviewer in the study was inevitably a fundamental part of the interviewing process. She asked questions, clarified unfamiliar or unclear terms, and responded to interviewees when necessary. In this case, the researcher functioned as a qualitative inquirer, the instrument, the human interviewer, handling the whole process from data collection to data analysis. On the other hand, the researcher had to uphold empirical objectivity by tactfully stepping back, keeping quiet, avoiding interruption, not letting her view cloud or color the directions, and allowing the participants to be as much in control of the meaning-making process as they could be.

The heavy reliance on the subjective interpretation of qualitative studies meant that the researcher’s interpretation was a critical determining factor in this study. Yardley (2008) therefore recommended that the researcher, as an interpreter and analyst, should report the data in the form of giving description rather than stating evidence.

Inasmuch as the researcher exerts a huge influence on the research findings, the transparency of the study needed to be assured. During the analysis process, the researcher not only identified similar patterns and tendencies across cases, she also discovered some disconfirming instances that were neither denied nor overlooked. In
fact, the researcher acknowledged and examined these findings for comparison and further understanding.

Reflexivity is another strategy to enhance the transparency of the study (Yardley, 2008). In addition to the above mentioned rigorous six-step data analysis process, it was also necessary to consider and explain the possible impact of the researcher’s role and her own positionality in relation to the research findings. The readers will then have a clear understanding of how the results were generated and what they could possibly be affected by.

Creswell (2012) shared a similar idea and claimed that qualitative researchers tend to address this concern with a view of being self-reflective when analyzing the gathered findings. Since it seems impossible to absolutely separate the researcher’s own values, subjectivity, and personal history from her analytic data interpretation, keeping a research journal as a reflective audit trail can be a useful tool (Creswell, 2013). Given the presence of this unavoidable bias and the subjective interpretation found in qualitative studies, the strategies selected to maintain authenticity and trustworthiness played an exceptionally important role.

The fourth criterion used to measure the validity of the study is based on its impact and importance. A study can demonstrate its validity by its potential implications to offer new insights in both academic and practical streams. To cite the
present study as an example, the findings provided administrators in tertiary institutions with practical alternatives, if not solutions, to predict faculty mobility, and promote faculty development through relationships and networks. Secondly, the study emphasized the significant contribution of developmental network theory. Researchers, educators, and practitioners could also benefit from this study by consolidating and advancing their theoretical understanding for future intellectual and scholarly attempts, and development of new knowledge.

The entire process of data analysis and interpretation, from interview setting, noting, developing categories and themes, to interpreting, making sense of the meaning of the emerged themes of the present study was properly validated to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the collected data.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Creswell (2012) emphasized the importance of striking a balance between uncovering a phenomenon and protecting subjects’ identities, respecting their rights and control over the research process, and ensuring that the resulting research is mutually beneficial. The researcher employed several strategies to ensure protection of human subjects, including ethical considerations such as respecting participants’ autonomy, using language understandable to subjects, and preserving the anonymity
of participants. She removed participants’ names and assigned pseudonyms of the participants’ own choosing in the study. Participants thus had decisional capacity to determine what should and should not be released or shared.

Since the current study aimed at exploring the developmental networks of mid-career faculty in Hong Kong, sensitive professional topics were discussed, in addition to the participants’ individual subjective responses and experiences. Although the researcher was not in a position of authority relative to the participants, some participants could be unwilling or reluctant to reveal the whole truth. For example, faculty members might feel obliged to name their officially assigned mentors when asked to point out or share the experience of receiving developmental assistance and support from the developmental networks during interviews, even when the officially assigned relationship between the mentor and mentee was not actually strong or deep. The researcher therefore ensured that participants’ maintained authority over the facts of their lived experience. Before the commencement of the interviews, the participants were also assured that the researcher acted as a representative of Northeastern University and that the data collected for the duration of the study would only be used for the current research study. The respondents also had the right to withhold data when they believed that the information given would
lead to potential harmful physical or psychological impact or risk to their privacy or employment.

**Research Informed Consent**

Official documentation was procured through IRB approved informed consent forms. These forms and documents were used to invite potential participants to take part in the research study as a subject based on a voluntary basis. The researcher provided the details of the study’s content, including rationale and purpose, involvement of study participants, potential inconvenience and loss of time incurred in the interview procedures and the study process, risks as well as benefits of participating in this study, and measures for the protection of their confidentiality and privacy. The participants clearly comprehended that their participation would not affect their present employment status. After signing the form, their personal information was honored and kept confidential and would not be disclosed.

Participants were entitled to change their minds and withdraw at any time throughout the study in accordance with their own goals and values.

The researcher also provided channels for participants to obtain further information, make enquiries about their rights as research participants, and report if they felt they were being harmed in the course of the study. A mutual agreement was
arranged as both the participants and the researcher signed the necessary consent forms.

**Obtaining IRB Approval**

It was essential to seek permission by following all the policies and procedures stipulated by both campuses’ institutional review boards. The researcher presented and submitted the signed informed consent form, as well as the detailed descriptions and procedures of the study to IRB reviewers. They had a good grasp of the purpose and significance of the research, the recruitment procedures for the participants, the number of participants, the research methodology, the data collection instruments, process, and analysis, as well as the possible risks involved to participants and the research site. The research project was reviewed and was granted approval by the IRBs accordingly. The researcher understood the obligations to protect the confidentiality and rights of subjects in research. She assured the participants that if there was any modification in the existing application, she had the responsibility to report it to the IRB reviews.

Identifying a gatekeeper who could introduce the researcher to the target institution was the next crucial step (Creswell, 2013, p.219). The research site of the present study was the researcher’s home institution where she identified the problem of practice, thus developing problem solutions as she refined the research topic.
Therefore, seeking support and trust, and obtaining approval from the HSMC administration, specifically by presenting this study to the vice president who oversaw the institution’s research policies, was crucial to gain access and locate participants.

Creswell (2012) reminded us of the risk of the “dangerous knowledge” gained from studying in one’s own backyard. The researcher therefore paid extra attention to proper data collection protocol as an “inside investigator.” Reciprocity also needed to be clearly presented (Creswell, 2013). The college authorities, including senior management and human resources administrators, were well informed in advance about the gains from granting permission to conduct this research. For instance, the findings of this study would reveal and demonstrate significant and beneficial implications concerning developmental networks to institutional staff. The study thus enabled institutional leaders to better predict faculty turnover and retention by gaining a deeper understanding of faculty perception concerning their needs for developmental relationships and networks.

Conclusion

Faculty turnover has long been a practical research concern in higher education. With limited financial resources to offer appealing remuneration packages and salary increments, administrators of higher education institutions in Hong Kong have been
challenged and expected to successfully retain and effectively develop faculty members at reasonable costs in a competitive tertiary education industry.

Many previous quantitative studies investigated the relationship among variables related to faculty turnover and their career considerations. Nevertheless, insufficient research evidence in qualitative education studies and in the Hong Kong higher education context specifically demonstrated a need for an in-depth understanding of individuals’ subjective perception of faculties’ career decisions and faculties’ developmental network.

With a less costly strategy to reduce faculty turnover and develop faculty members, institutional administrators and employment policy makers should have a sound grasp of faculty commitment, thus gaining insights into predicting and handling individual instructors’ intentions to stay or leave. Human resources departments could also develop adequate formal and informal mentoring programs to promote faculty’s professional development and personal growth. As a result, faculty organizational commitment would be enhanced, which would in turn lower the overall turnover rate, as well as the potentially large financial costs incurred in the constant processes of staff recruitment.

The primary goal of this qualitative study was to explore mid-career faculty career considerations at a higher education institution in Hong Kong and the role of
developmental relationships and developmental networks in shaping their career decisions. In order to understand further how faculty members can be developed professionally and psychologically through developmental relationships, Higgins and Kram’s (2001) developmental networks theory was selected as a pertinent theoretical framework to inform the investigation of the current study. The guiding research question informing this study was “How do Hong Kong mid-career academic faculty describe their career decision making process?”

To address this open-ended interpretative research question, the researcher adopted Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the qualitative research approach for this study. The participants of the present study were a group of mid-career academic faculty who had made at least one job change but were currently employed for more than five years at a Hong Kong higher education institute. The researcher collected data through multiple face-to-face interviews in which participants shared their subjective descriptions, personal experiences and perception in relation to the role of developmental networks in shaping their career decisions. The researcher then analyzed individual responses in detail before generating an overall pattern of impressions across all participants and cases. As a result, the intellectual and practical objectives of the present study were achieved through a
deeper understanding and exploration of the impact of developmental networks on faculty’s career decisions.

**Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

This chapter presents the findings derived from data obtained from the four participants who are mid-career academic faculty members serving at a higher education institution in Hong Kong. This study was intended to gain insight into the role of developmental relationships and developmental networks in faculty career decision-making processes. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to explore the faculty’s perception of developmental relationships and developmental networks in relation to their career decisions including their employment, retention, job change, position change, and resignation.

In order to draw conclusions from the data gathered, the researcher utilized analytic methods that reduced the data into themes which allowed the ability to display and eventually analyze for emerged findings. The analysis of the interview data generated three super-ordinate themes and nine corresponding sub-themes. The super-ordinate themes and their sub-themes included 1. Developmental Seeking Behavior (1.1 Information Seeking, 1.2 Help Seeking, 1.3 Feedback Seeking); 2. Development through Relationships (2.1 Developers from Work Relationship, 2.2 Developers from Non-work Relationship); and 3. Developmental Consequences for
Participants (3.1 Career Change, 3.2 Professional learning, 3.3 Organizational Commitment, 3.4 Career stability) Super-ordinate themes and sub-themes were defined as those recurring in at least three of the four participants’ interview data.

Table 1 provides a summary of the super-ordinate themes and sub-themes used to organize the data from the research study.

### Developmental Seeking Behaviors

During the process of making career decisions, mid-career faculty members often need guidance, information, support, and advice from others. The first superordinate theme identified in this study is developmental seeking behaviors which refer to the tactics or strategies the participants utilized when considering career

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Super-Ordinate Themes</th>
<th>Pat</th>
<th>Mimi</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Robert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Developmental Seeking Behaviour</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Information Seeking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Help Seeking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Feedback Seeking</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Development through relationships and networks</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Developers from work relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Developers from non-work relationship</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Developmental consequences for participants</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Career Change</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Professional learning</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Organizational Commitment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Career stability</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
related issues. Each of the participants elicited developmental assistance for quite different reasons with varied methods. However, they all expressed that they once sought more than one type of help for professional and personal development through relationships. Three categorizations and sub-themes thus emerged from this seeking behavior: information seeking, help seeking, and feedback seeking.

Based on the participants’ responses in the study, information seeking focuses on the flow of knowledge or instructions of individual’s job tasks, and the exchange of news and information related to employment opportunities. The second type of seeking behavior involves help and support derived mainly from discussions and conversations between participants and their developers. In terms of the content of their interaction, two areas can be identified: career development and psychological support. The third sub-theme feedback seeking details different kinds of feedback the participants received from their developers, ranging from positive encouragement to negative criticism, or from tangible gifts or evaluation figures to intangible facial expressions and reactions in lessons.

**Information Seeking**

Information concerned with job task is one of the most direct and commonly seen types of information seeking in participants’ responses. The impact of the job task information mentioned by the participants varies depending on the scale of the
task. Examples cited by the participants range from information about handling daily teaching matters to establishing a college-wide program.

Pat reported, “The weekly meeting is really helpful. I learnt some strategies to teach bright students, and to handle their emotion or even depression issues.” Pat’s comments illustrated her gratefulness for her informal weekly one-on-one meeting with the Department Head over the teaching and disciplines matters. These regular meetings lasted for about six months since Pat joined the college, which greatly helped her adapt to the teaching environment, inspired her with reflection on her daily teaching progress.

Besides the Department Head, Pat’s experienced colleagues are also generous to contribute and share the job-related information with her. Pat reinforced, “They are very willing to share with us the knowledge and experience. The first hand information such as their industrial experience and sharing about everyday lives are also very helpful to my teaching and very useful to students’ learning.”

Upon completion of the class observation, Mimi’s Department Head gave her valuable advice on the time management, the materials preparation and the lesson delivery for improvement. Mimi stated,
I remember the Department Head visited me twice. Most of the feedback she gave me was positive and encouraging. She found that I might have prepared more than enough for each lesson, so my teaching pace was slightly too fast at times, thus putting much pressure on my students to complete the tasks.

Besides her Department Head, Mimi is comfortable seeking help and advice from her colleagues who also provided her with teaching related information. She also found the colleagues in HSMC very helpful and willing to share how they would run the lesson or plan the teaching schedule. Mimi described, “When we came up with new ideas of conducting the class, we would share and prepare collaborative teaching materials like Powerpoint together.” Although Mimi did not take initiative to get help from other colleagues, a few teachers who were more experienced or who taught the same class with her shared how they felt about and how they dealt with students’ problems. This kind of sharing and informal chatting greatly helped Mimi in the right direction in her teaching job as she knew that there were colleagues facing the same situation.

Robert reported that developmental relationships and networks are important in his newfound career in education because they brought him important job task information,
It is all about networking. If you need some first-hand information, it is always much easier if you know somebody, the insiders. Even if you do not get to know that person directly, somebody you know may help you with making an appointment through a contact or making a referral.

During the interview, Robert listed a number of examples related to getting helpful information through networking. He stated,

For instance, we need to invite parties and professionals concerned to be our external examiner for both programs and individual modules, to be our consultant for curriculum development. Therefore, even in education industry, the wider network we have, the easier we can gather a committee of experts. They can give us advice on what needs to be done, modified, and added in building up a module or a program.”

Specifically, Robert cited a very concrete example about the job task information he received in his professional development through relationship-building. There was a personal friend of Robert, who got in touch with the coordinator of the international exchange section at a University in Shanghai, China. During a casual chat, Robert mentioned that HSMC was about to organize a student exchange program. Through his friend, Robert took a trip to Shanghai to meet the
person-in-charge of the department. After an extended process of communication and negotiation, an agreement was signed and the first ever student exchange program was offered at HSMC. The two parties successfully formed a partnership and lined up a student exchange program for students from both higher education institutions in Hong Kong and Shanghai, demonstrating the significance of the networking process.

Robert explained, “It happened only because I unintentionally raised the matter in a conversation with my friend.” Robert’s successful experience of obtaining job related information through informal information sharing reflected that casual work and non-work relationships, despite its informality, can, perhaps surprisingly, be an effective source of information.

Besides job task information, employment opportunities offer another kind of important information for the participants when making informed career decisions. The participants reported that the information obtained from the developers range from job vacancies and promotion opportunities, to information related to the prospective new jobs and employers.

To begin with, Pat was unexpectedly introduced to the news of a job vacancy at HSMC. Upon her completion of the master degree program in Liberal Studies, Pat initially applied for the post of a liberal studies teacher at HSMC. However, Pat’s
former teacher Mr. Choi somehow took notice of her application from the Liberal Studies Department. Instead of getting a job interview for a post of liberal studies teacher, Pat received a phone call and was invited by Mr. Choi to join the Business Studies panel. The opportunity to work for and work with her former teachers became a determining factor for Pat to switch her professional discipline from liberal studies to business studies. The presence of this kind of unanticipated job opportunity information demonstrated how a previously established developmental relationship, former teacher and student relationship in this case, impacts one’s career decision-making process. As a protégé, Pat made her decision based on the faith, confidence, and eagerness to develop by working alongside her former teacher, as well as the subject panel head at an earlier career stage.

While teachers generally articulate a notion that they are the major information providers to students, they may be amazed that teachers can also be information recipients from students. To Mary’s surprise, she received the new job related information from her students at her previous employer after she had accepted a job offer.
She was interested in the teaching post offered by HSMC simply because the
students were more mature. However, she didn’t know much about the college, the
background, or the reputation before she joined the college.

“When I told my former students I had a job interview with HSMC and was
going to leave, my students gave me a lot of information about HSMC, including its
good reputation, the number of academically bright students, etc.” In Mary’s case,
students also functioned as her developers who provided relevant career information
for her change of job.

Based on Mary’s account, her recently made friends in her doctoral study
program became her newfound source of information pertaining to potential job
opportunities. Mary commented,

That kind of job-related information gave me a brief idea about what it is like
in another school or another institution. If they tell me about a great new job, I
would be thinking, “Oh, maybe that place can be my future workplace.” Or, if
they say, “I hate my university. They are treating me bad.” Then I would be
thinking, “Oh, what I am having right now is not that bad. I won’t consider
leaving at least at this very moment.” It’s all about comparison.
Information or news obtained from her course mates made Mary reflect upon her own career more often and encouraged her to compare and analyze the pros and cons from different perspectives.

Information seeking behavior is thus the first subtheme across the participants’ developmental seeking behavior. Two types of information, namely job task information and job opportunity information, were reported to be the most sought after types of information seeking behavior. The result reflected that the participants of the study seek information, for both immediate and long-term use, which mainly facilitates or solves the everyday teaching matters and serves as useful reference for future career advancement.

**Help Seeking**

Three participants in the study sought help and advice for career development through formal discussion and informal conversations with their developers from different social circles including workplace, family, and friends.

Pat’s career development discussion with her former Vice Principal led her to advance in her career. Starting out as a teaching assistant, Pat’s vice principal initiated in their discussion that Pat’s preexisting strength and experience were desirable qualities for her teaching career advancement. “The vice principal told me that my
personality, my background about growing up in a girls school, and my experience working as a teaching assistant enabled me to prepare myself for the teaching post in their girls school.” Through this conversation, Pat was reassured that, given her background and experience, becoming an official teacher at that school was the right first step of her teaching career path.

In her second school, Pat learnt how to be a passionate and loving teacher from her interactions with a colleague. This male colleague is a math teacher as well as Pat’s work partner. They are the class master and mistress of a class of junior secondary students in the second school she taught. Pat learnt a lot about the way to handle serious disciplinary problems from him. Pat recalled, “He showed me lots of methods to deal with the students, especially the naughty ones. Even when he was punishing students, he could teach students something related to Mathematics, so amazing.” As a new teacher, Pat saw this job-related discussion as a valuable mentoring opportunity where she realized it was actually possible to turn the disciplinary moments into teaching moment. The exchange of ideas also reminded her that teaching is definitely not just about teaching the knowledge; it is also about showing love and care to students.
When Pat was struggling with the decision between leaving and staying at HSMC, the former President had a long and thorough discussion about her career development and persuaded her to stay. “He had a talk with me and reminded me about the working environment and the colleagues of our department. He read my mind and elicited the factors that made me stay because I was familiar with the work environment and I enjoy working with my colleagues in the department.” This conversation with the former President reinforced Pat’s thoughts about her priorities and helped her make a critical career decision.

Mary stated that her mother and fiancé would help her analyze her decisions about career development. Recalling the conversations she had with her family and her fiancé over the issue of job change, “They would discuss the pros and cons with me.” Besides family members and her fiancé, Mary would also discuss matters related to her career decisions with her colleague-friend Ruth. “Ruth is more experienced than I am. I go to her for opinions and professional advice on my work, or even about my decision to leave or to stay in a workplace.”

In the working context, Mary’s former president once spent hours discussing and analyzing Mary’s career path for her based on her personality when she was thinking about quitting. Mary explained,
I was looking for a promotion opportunity outside. That’s why I wanted to leave. But the former president did a personalized analysis with me, pointing out that I was still very young and a bit short-tempered, and needed some practice before I have the mentality to be a head or administrator.

Mary’s reflection signified that her former president was able to help promote wise career decisions and help shape the way she thinks about herself through focusing on personality and experience.

The other two participants, Robert and Mimi, also had a discussion with their colleagues over some critical career considerations. When considering the promotion from the position of lecturer to assistant professor, Robert discussed his plans and views with colleagues who were all very positive about this position change. “They told me that it was an opportunity worth trying.” When Mimi was struggling to decide whether to stay or resign, to decline the job offer, she did not discuss this issue with other teaching colleagues. Instead, she talked about this concern with a non-teaching colleague at HSMC, the school social worker.

The above examples of discussions the participants had with their developers were therefore important to give insight and different perspectives on experience and
habits that the teachers themselves would have overlooked or would not have thought of otherwise.

Apart from professional development, participants also sought help from developers for psychological, social, and personal support and assistance. Pat identified colleagues, particularly a few Assistant Professors from her department, have been important to her having psychosocial discussion with her. Since they are in close and friendly contact with one another, the strong association with colleagues and their psychosocial interaction are found even closer after working hours. “They show me the emotional support and encouragement through casual chats, emails, or text messages. We also have some social gatherings such as lunching out or having dinner together.”

Mimi received some advice on emotion handling from her seniors on some informal or social occasions. She shared that during the school Christmas lunch, she had a chance to chat with the former President who asked her not to set too many demands on herself and encouraged her to relax and exercise more so as to ease the pressure on her work.

Mimi also credited two of her former colleagues when describing the psychological assistance and emotional support she received. Of similar age to
Mimi, Katherine often chatted with Mimi and reminded her that it was important for them to keep themselves physically fit and that their lives were not all for work.

Kayley, another colleague at HSMC, also shared her experience with Mimi and gave her very considerate advice on how to balance work and life. Mimi mentioned, “Kayley asked me to spare some personal time for myself, to have some distraction from work.” All these discussions made Mimi reflect on her way of working and made her think how she could balance her time in order not to suffer both physically and mentally.

The psychosocial support gained from colleagues once even changed Mimi’s intention to quit. “There was a time when I felt frustrated and wanted to resign, the colleagues had a chat and gave me comfort and some advice on time management. They asked me not to overwork, not to spend all hours working or grading papers.” This emotional support through conversation assured Mimi there was a way out in the midst of hardship and stress and also allowed her to realize that others capable of empathizing with her sometimes felt the same way she did.

The findings regarding the help seeking behavior of this study indicated that the participants need career or professional assistance as well as psychological or emotional support from different social circles including work and non work context.
Through the detailed account of their experience, the participants gracefully acknowledged the help, guidance, advice, and encouragement they received along their career paths.

**Feedback Seeking**

The participants of this study discussed both positive and negative, and tangible and intangible, feedback they received from their developmental relationships and networks. The most frequently mentioned wordings used for describing positive feedback included “support”, “appreciation”, “encouragement”, “caring”, “acknowledgement”, etc. Invisible and abstract though they may seem, these terms helped the participants make sense out of their development through the positive social and relational feedback.

In terms of positive and intangible feedback, words of appreciation and encouragement are the most commonly reported type of feedback the participants received. Mimi commented, “I’m lucky to have some classes which valued my teaching and found my teaching useful to them.” Similarly, Pat described that the positive feedback she received over the past decade primarily included appreciation from students and support from her mentor and Department Head. “My students appreciate my effort, my passion for teaching and educating them. Besides, I gained huge support from my mentor who is also my Department Head.”
Robert also received positive and encouraging feedback about his teaching performance from students who completed the end-of-semester evaluations. He was pleased that over the past few years all his evaluation reports were satisfactory. All this positive feedback made Robert feel more satisfied, more devoted, and more willing to stay longer in this institution.

Instant feedback in lessons such as students’ facial expressions and responsiveness are cited as intangible examples by Mary. “If students are responsive and positive, it would spice up my day. I would be happy, satisfied, and much more motivated and even want to do more.”

Undoubtedly, students’ end-of-module evaluation plays a big part in teaching and learning, especially in the tertiary education sector. The figures derived from the evaluation offer teachers the most direct and tangible feedback. Moreover, there are some other typical positive, concrete gestures including encouraging messages and small gifts.

Students’ gratefulness and appreciation for their teachers’ effort and teaching are certainly the main drive of motivation for most educators. Mimi shared, “My students gave me some nice feedback in terms of emails messages, text messages, small gifts, and cards with their thankful and appreciative words. There were also
some encouraging messages and little cards from caring and considerate colleagues from time to time.” Similarly, Pat’s students gave her some heart-warming messages and small presents to thank her for her effort. Mary also noted that some students would show their gratitude by giving the teachers gifts or cards. In Robert’s case, some students would send him emails thanking him for his teaching, telling him they had great interest in the subject he taught and were inspired to further their study after taking the module. They would also ask Robert if he would teach them again in other advanced courses in the coming semesters. All these are the participants’ invaluable keepsake to remind them of the supportive feedback from their young developers.

Nevertheless, not all feedback is positive. The participants noted that the intangible negative feedback is mainly from unmotivated students who are inattentive and disobedient.

In fact, Mimi found that the feedback depended on students and varied from year to year. She commented, “Some students can be very harsh and demanding and naturally their feedback may not be very satisfactory.” The lack of constructive criticism offered by these kinds of students failed to help teachers improve or make changes.
Students’ poor learning attitude and low motivation could even result in the participant’s decision to change jobs. Mary suggested that her second job change was partially caused by the students’ less than satisfactory attitude. “They did not follow the instructions this negative factor encouraged and helped make up my mind to resign.”

Interestingly, some participants received negative feedback that was not directed towards them. Instead, the negative feedback changed the way the participant viewed “education” in this profession. Regarding the negative feedback Robert experienced, he explained that he felt frustrated when he witnessed some teachers at the university were not devoted to or not very engaged in teaching. Robert thus understood this type of negative feedback and its related inappropriate practices as a warning. He also reminded himself not to commit the same unacceptable mistakes that he witnessed.

When effectively given, feedback, regardless of whether it is positive or negative, provides important information to help the participants direct their decisions related to future career, improve their professional performance while promoting their personal growth. The participants of the study not only greatly benefit from the positive and encouraging messages, but also gain insights and reminders from the
negative and discouraging remarks. Feedback seeking thus emerged as one of the
developmental seeking behavior reported in the study.

**Development through Relationships and Networks**

When describing their career decision making process, mid-career faculty
members identified a number of, instead of only one, developers from varying
relationships and networks. Hence, the significance of these relationships and
networks on participant development became the second superordinate theme of the
findings.

Each participant of the study reported and listed a few significant developers
with whom they are closely engaged. Those relationships mentioned can be
categorized into two social circles as the sub-themes: work and non-work
relationships, from which the participants received support and assistance across
different social networks in the course of their career development. For the purpose of
the study, the work relationship of participants revolves around and within the context
of higher education or academia where supervisors and senior management, officially
assigned mentors, colleagues, and students are deemed as major developers.

Additionally, the participants also described their non-work relationships with family,
spouses, friends, friends in the education industry, as well as former teachers or
professors in their own education as important.
The study participants shared that their developers from work and non-work relationships exert their influence mainly when considering career prospects, salary level, and promotion opportunities, etc. Different developers, in view of their expertise and unique relationship with the participant, adopt a different perspective to show support, discuss, and analyze the current and future situation for and with the participants. According to the responses of this study, family is the most influential non-work relationship while supervisors and colleagues are the most important work relationships to the participants.

**Developers from Work Relationship**

Work developmental relationships refer to those inter-organizational relationships that are formed in the participants’ workplace. All participants indicated they gained assistance from their immediate supervisors or senior management (current, or former, or both). Three participants expressed they were guided by mentors. Apart from the participants’ superiors, peers such as colleagues and students also served as developers. The nature of each relationship will be detailed in the following paragraphs.

When asked to describe the experience of work relationships, the participants of the study frequently mentioned their superiors and supervisors, or in other words, the people they work closely with and for, or directly report to. There were two
groups of superiors the participants referred to in the interview. The first group included direct supervisors such as the Department Head, the Department Chairperson, etc. Another group included those from senior management, including the School Dean, the President, the Vice-President, the School Principal, and the Vice School Principal. The participants described the relationship with their immediate management as positive as many of them are supportive, influential, and inspirational figures in the participants’ career development.

Pat recalled an experience in which she gained tremendous support and appreciation for her effort from her Department Head. In 2008, there were students complaining that Pat was not suitable for teaching their class. Since Pat was not one of the popularly-known teachers, students tried to make their request a change of teacher by writing a letter to the Vice-President.

In response to the students’ requests and complaints, the Department Head organized visits and observed Pat’s lessons for five days. Pat said, “The Department Head wanted to prove to the students the complainants that I had no problems in conducting the lessons. The matter of changing teachers is then out of the question.” Pat gained support from her Department Head, who was also her mentor, and the Vice-President. “They also commented that the students’ complaints were
unreasonable and they said there was nothing wrong with my teaching.” This type of response from the management (such as class visits and post-visit meetings) restored and built up Pat’s confidence.

Mimi also received positive and constructive support from the principal from his former school and the Department Head at HSMC. Mimi’s former principal once complimented Mimi on her teaching in front of the students. She recalled, “I remember the principal even said to the whole class “It is a treasure for you guys to have Ms. Chan as your English teacher, you people should learn from her.” This kind of compliment demonstrated that Mimi received recognition for her fine performance from the Principal.

Robert expressed that there was a senior support system in place to keep him encouraged. He appreciated the support, acknowledgement, and recognition of his working performance from the college management. He stated, “The positive results of the appraisal carried out by my supervisors did motivate me to put more effort and to do better. The senior management’s support and encouragement is really important.” Starting out as a lecturer at HSMC, Robert was able to showcase his interests in teaching. His ability to deliver his teaching objectives, his contribution to course development, and his achievement in research work were also highly
recognized by his supervisors. He stated, “In the progress of college expansion and development, my supervisors encouraged me to consider applying for promotion to the rank of Assistant Professor.” Besides the promotion opportunities, the School Dean and the Chairperson of the Department also gave Robert a free hand to map out the development of a new course, subsequently leading to college advancement.

Some of the participants’ professional development is attributed to their impressive credentials. Some astute supervisors and senior management value the staff’s potential through giving them employment and promotion opportunities. Mary’s former school principal once offered her a permanent and regular teaching post in spite of her lack of teaching experience. In fact, Mary’s outstanding capability made her the only one who was granted a permanent offer among the twelve new teachers of that year.

Mary also cited the former President of HSMC as an influential figure in her career development when asked to name individuals who gave her developmental assistance and support. When Mary rendered her resignation letter, the President tore the letter off right away. Mary stated, “Honestly, I felt flattered by this gesture because that shows that I was valued.” Indeed, the acknowledgement and confidence
the President instilled in Mary was able to help her reassure herself that she was a valuable asset to the college.

In return, Mary’s admiration for the President’s authoritative leadership style and attention to detail made this former President an important developer, a capable leader, or even a role model for her to look up to and follow. “I can learn from him, his leadership style, or simply his way of communicating with others.” Additionally, Mary also believed that some examples of poor leaders also provided good learning materials and counter examples, reminding her what she should not do, particularly if she filled their position at some point in the future. Those lessons have stayed with her throughout the years.

To Mary, the administrative style and leadership of the senior management to a certain extent determines whether or not she shows commitment to the shared vision and goals of the organization. When describing the reasons for Mary’s job change, she pointed out that it was all about the management being both “push” and “pull” factors. For the push factors, Mary shared her experience in the third school she taught in where the middle management was a total failure. The principal was literally absent from school for most school days while the middle management simply focused on non-teaching and non-learning activities like sports and arts. Apparently
Mary did not see eye to eye with the school’s vision. Mary lost faith in the administration’s plan and leadership for the future, which also motivated her decision to resign from the school.

Mary kept giving examples about the practices and the decisions by the management that she found infuriating and ridiculous. For example, the school placed little emphasis on academic importance and students’ learning. Mary was confused and frustrated because she was told to boost students’ English learning in the job interview. Mary was so irritated when stating examples about the school inconsistent policies. Her impatience clearly displayed that she believed the incapability of the management had caused so many troubles for the school, the teaching staff, and the students.

Equally, the pull factors that brought Mary back to HSMC, her second and fourth school, was also about the management. The Vice President of HSMC dropped Mary an e-mail to say hello after she had left the school. Although Mary did not say she wanted to go back to HSMC in her email reply because she thought it would have been impossible at that time, the Vice President understood her subtext from the tone of her message. Mary then received a phone call from the President and invited her to
Mary indicated, “I did not appreciate the President’s and Vice President’s leadership until I left, until I saw the comparison between HSMC and the third school.” Mary’s reminiscence and reflection demonstrated how a faculty member was inspired by the school leaders through observing how the leader ran the school successfully and how shrewd and observant the President and the Vice President could be.

“They knew what kind of people their school needed and wanted to keep and they could foresee what could happen to me when I left. They had been all correct when I thought about it. They actually had told me everything that I later experienced. They had their vision and they had a great knowledge about their staff members.”

Apart from seniors, mentors of the participants are also named as equally important developers. While not all participants in this study had an official mentor when they began their teaching career, some reported that their mentors offered them substantial developmental assistance and support. The guidance and advice from
mentors are particularly useful when participants were inexperienced in teaching or
new to the school.

Pat’s mentor, Mr. Choi, played three roles for Pat including serving as a
former teacher, a mentor, and an immediate supervisor, in Pat’s study and career. Pat
pointed out that the teacher-student rapport between Mr. Choi and Pat was not close.
They didn’t have frequent interaction or communication when she was still a student.
When Pat joined HSMC and became a new teaching staff member, Mr. Choi acted as
the Department Head as well as a mentor who provided plenty of assistance and
support for Pat to teach her how to deal with difficult classrooms full of capable and
aggressive students. The considerable amount of help offered proved that the most
influential role Mr. Choi played was being her mentor.

Similarly, being assigned to be the mentee of the English Department Head
was a very pleasant experience with very good memories for Mary. Mary’s
experience of her relationship with her mentor implied that the mentor can remarkably
yet unintentionally affect the mentees’ values, attitudes, and their professional
development.

“I had shared very good memories with my first mentor. She inspired me a
lot. She was like a mother to her students and has a great deal of patience with
those who were not motivated academically and had discipline or attitude
problems. She was very enthusiastic and eager to come up with a lot of
teaching methods for those less responsive students and she was very willing
to share with me.”

The passion of her mentor made Mary realize what a good teacher is, and she
continued to encourage Mary whenever she is frustrated with less motivated students.
“Even she did not give up at that time. I should not give up now.”

During the interview, Mary repeatedly shared that her mentor was a great
inspirational teacher and a caring mentor. “She was very attentive. She treated me to
lunch when it was my birthday. I didn’t expect that because it was my first job.”

Mary’s mentor once even offered to swap a class with her for the purpose of class
observation. This observation practice was done by Mary’s course instructor of the
part-time two-year Postgraduate Diploma of Education (PGDE) during her first year
of teaching. Mary was so grateful for the thoughtful offer, though she declined it.

Mary’s sharing showed how great the impact of the support given by the mentors on
the mentees can be.

Some mentors, however, provide mentees with more administrative or
procedural support as opposed to professional or psychological assistance. Robert
pointed out that the mentoring system provided by the college helped him become familiar with the daily operation and administrative routine of the school. His mentor was an experienced teacher who gave him some practical advice such as the adequate amount of materials necessary for a lesson, as well as introducing him to the attendance system, etc. Robert’s mentor also conducted a class visit, after which the mentor gave him some feedback over the teaching skills, and classroom and time management. Although Robert’s experience with his mentor included more administrative and organizational assistance, the presence of a mentor this role helped facilitate Robert’s daily teaching practice.

Colleagues emerged as another group of important developers to the participants of this study. For the purpose of this study, participants were asked if there were any particular people or individuals influencing their career considerations, three participants reported that their former and current co-workers provided various kinds of advice and assistance ranging from classroom management and teaching preparation, to job promotion in their peer discussions. For participants and colleagues of equal standing working under the same roof, colleagues and peers can understand each other easily. Developers can then naturally relate to their own experiences and situations, encouraging and building each other up.
Pat repeatedly mentioned that working environment and colleagues are two main reasons why she has stayed at HSMC and in the teaching industry for so many years. She was familiar with the harmonious work environment and enjoyed working with her colleagues, especially those from the same department. She was particularly impressed by the weekly collaborative teaching preparation of the seven business teachers. These sharing sessions among colleagues are certainly very useful for teachers, especially the less experienced ones like Pat. Many faculty members in her department are experienced teachers who specialize in the field of business education. Besides valuable teaching insights from veteran teachers, some faculty members had substantial hands-on experience in the business field before they joined HSMC. Given their academic and professional expertise, Pat learnt a great deal from her coworkers.

In reflecting on her teaching experience at previous schools, Pat mentioned three former colleagues who offered a great deal of support and guidance in her career development, the English Panel head, the extra-curricular activities (ECA) coordinator, and the discipline master. All of them inspired her in her first year of teaching by giving her various opportunities to try and learn from different tasks e.g. teaching, administrative, and extra-curricular activities. Initially, her then English Panel head looked after her and taught her a lot about teaching efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the coping strategies that teachers usually adopt to deal with discipline problems.
Next, the ECA teacher offered Pat different opportunities to organize school functions for students such as a sports day, the annual drama competition, etc. Finally, the discipline master taught her how to deal with conflicts and problems between the families of students.

On top of these three specific developers, Pat indicated that she also benefited a lot from learning from teachers with a counseling background. This group of caring teachers inspired her to teach with heart.

I can find the common characteristics and strengths shared by these teachers. If a teacher really cares about students and give them love and emotional support, no matter how incapable or naughty the students are, they can feel your passion and they will change because of your influence.

Pat’s sharing suggested that teachers with a counseling background demonstrated how good teachers should act like and how teachers can understand their roles as counselors who can influence students positively. This notion somewhat changed the way Pat viewed students and she is now more patient with those having disciplinary issues.

There is sometimes a thin line between a friend and a close co-worker. Mary revealed that she received encouragement from a colleague, also a friend, from the department.
“Ruth is an experienced colleague of mine. But at the same time, she’s a friend of mine. I treat some colleagues as just colleagues. But this person is more than a colleague to me, a friend plus a colleague. She understands what I’m doing, the situations that I’m in. She also gives me advice that is given by a friend. I value her opinions very much.”

A colleague-friend like Ruth is in a special dual position, taking up the role of developer in Mary’s career since Ruth not only knows Mary well as a friend, but also thoroughly understands what Mary is going through at work, including the challenges, the transition of the schooling system, the pressure, and the importance of acquiring necessary academic credentials for career development at the college.

Apart from teaching colleagues, non-teaching colleagues also functioned as developers for some teachers through their daily social interaction. In addition to her coworkers, Mimi also shared and chatted quite frequently with administrative staff members or social workers at the college.

Similarly, having a supportive relationship with helpful colleagues, especially those with similar backgrounds, was evident and important in Mimi’s early teaching career development. Mimi mentioned that in her first teaching job she met a Chinese teacher who was also new to teaching, like Mimi. “We are of similar age and that’s
why I shared more with her.” This collegial support thus made quite a good impression of teaching on Mimi.

Robert also shared that the comments from his colleagues in the banking industry reinforced his determination to become a teacher. Robert’s colleagues commented that he acted like a teacher at work. He said, “Being the supervisor and the mentor of some new trainees, my colleagues at the bank told me that my instruction was clear and I acted like a ‘teacher’. They said teaching may be a suitable career for me.” Robert’s past experience with colleagues’ encouraging comments assured him that his personality could be one of the many reasons influencing his decisions concerning a critical career change.

Undoubtedly, due to the nature of teaching business, students play a major and influential part in faculty’s teaching life. Some study participants regard their current and former students as developers who offered motivation and huge developmental support.

Pat enjoyed interacting with students and it was partially her love for her students that kept her in the teaching industry. Although there were no particular students that solely and directly shaped Pat’s career decisions, students can be perceived as an influential group of people in her career consideration process. She commented, “The feedback, both positive and negative, from my current and former
students concerning their academic performance, discipline, and attitude are the ingredients I would take into consideration when thinking about whether to continue teaching.” Mary echoed this remark, “I tried to be nice in the first place. But then I gave up, I just let it be. I gave up on them and myself.” Mary wanted to teach so she was so determined to leave. She admitted that she once resigned due to her concerns about students unsatisfactory discipline issues.

Mimi also mentioned that the friendly students in her first school brought her a pleasant and satisfactory experience, “Most of my students motivated me to improve my teaching. However, I was also challenged and trained by some classes with academic and disciplinary problems.” Mimi needed to adapt and adjust as a new teacher. Both Mimi’s positive and negative experiences with students demonstrated that students are young developers and important partners who directly influence and develop teachers as they grow in their teaching career.

All the participants of this study received strong developmental assistance and huge support from people at their place of employment. All these relationships appear to assist in developing participants’ professional or personal growth in terms of offering support, encouragement, and guidance in various aspects of their work responsibilities, employment or promotion opportunities.

**Developers from Non-work Relationship**
Family is one of the most essential and influential non-work developmental relationships and offers an important support network among the participants. Their parents, especially mothers, spouses, and even children were the most discussed family members mentioned during the interview.

Family is one of the most significant non-work relationships in Mimi’s career decision making process. Mimi has a very close relationship and frequent communication with her mother, the most influential figure in her career consideration.

Mimi’s mother is heavily involved in almost all aspects in Mimi’s career. When Mimi was considering a career change after completing her 2-year probation with her first secondary school, her mother encouraged her to try different jobs. Her mother persuaded her to start thinking about a more stable and long-term career, to take the government recruitment examination, and to join the civil service.

My mother deemed that teaching is a more physically demanding and mentally tiring job and wondered if one day I was physically fit enough for being a teacher. My mother thought that office work in the government is much more manageable for most people.

Mimi also once gave up another job offer because she knew that her parents would have been concerned about the possible much lower salary. These different
examples and conversations about her job changes from her mother’s perspective cited by Mimi showed a high involvement of her mother in her career consideration process.

Similarly, family is definitely the most significant non-work relationship in Mary’s career considerations. When asked with whom she discussed her career decisions, Mary answered promptly and firmly that she discussed her career concerns with her mother and fiancé. “They give me emotional support and assistance.” In particular, she valued her mother’s opinion. She remembered her mother would always wrap up the conversation with a line, “My mum said, “You can always change again.” The support obtained from Mary’s mum and fiancé is often reassuring. It made her believe that her decisions are not permanent and that she always has a chance to change, to leave, for better or for worse, after a year or so.

Mary’s fiancé gave her similar support, only their conversations were concerned more about the future and practical issues because they were planning to start a family. Mary mentioned, “I would communicate with him everyday details and small incidents leading up to my career decision including my intention of staying at or leaving the institution.”
Robert’s wife has been very supportive of his career transition. He mentioned that he had a conversation with his wife when deciding on a switch from working in the finance industry to devoting himself to education. Robert stated, “My wife was very supportive. She regarded my choice was a sensible decision.”

Additionally, Robert was also grateful for his family support throughout the professional and personal development over the past few years. He indicated that his pursuit of a PhD was a daunting journey in which he had to be very determined and would have to sacrifice some personal, leisure, and rest time for his studies. During the final stage of thesis writing, he was absent from some of the family and social gatherings. Nevertheless, his family and friends were encouraging by offering their understanding and support. Robert’s response demonstrated how his family and friends’ support gives him peace of mind, thus allowing him to be focused on striving for further educational development.

When discussing the influence of non-work relationship in his professional and personal development in the future, Robert had an unexpected and interesting observation that working in the education industry at a higher education institution has a positive influence on his children who are also students currently. Robert first shared, “Knowing that their father works at education sector, they have projected the
image of a professor onto me. When I help them with their study, they would listen to me attentively.” Robert also indicated that his study in a PhD program also inspired his children to adopt an idea of lifelong learning. Robert continued explaining that, “They saw me pursuing further study and spending time revising even at my age. I believe they would see the importance of continuous learning. This kind of positive feedback is something I didn’t expect before taking up a teaching job.” Given this encouraging influence on his children, Robert would see it as a drive to do better and be a role model to them, showing them there is a need for them to be serious about their work. In other words, Robert and his children turned out to provide support systems for each other.

Understanding each other well and seeing each other as friends, Pat described the relationship with her parents as loving and caring. Pat’s parents are her important non-work developers in their relationship. When discussing the role of non-work relationships in Pat’s professional and personal development, she mentioned her family without any hesitation. She said her parents and her fiancé are supportive and they don’t want her to feel stressed at work. Pat is especially close with her mum who tends to initiate all kinds of conversations to share with Pat. Their relationship is so intimate that they can share and discuss any kinds of topics in their lives, including stress and unhappiness at work. These frequent exchanges reflected that parents or
family plays an important part in Pat’s life. She once again emphasized the importance of family,

I think relational support from family is very important. Despite the possible opposite opinion my parents have, they trust me and let me enjoy absolute freedom to make decisions related to my study, life, and career. My parents’ helpful and optimistic attitudes also do much to encourage me to be a positive, happy and helpful person.

Although Pat’s and her fiancé are serving in different industries, Pat’s fiancé exerts positive influence on Pat’s professional attitude towards her teaching. As a lawyer, Pat’s fiancé is very well prepared and his professionalism towards his job is impressive. When asked how her fiancé affects her, Pat firmly said, “He is so serious about his work. His seriousness and professionalism make him want to ensure that everything is perfectly and wholeheartedly done before each court case. So maybe I think I should also have to prepare well before each lesson.”

All the above examples and detailed descriptions shared by the participants suggested that the participants are, to a great extent, influenced by their family members instinctively yet willingly. Family is thus definitely one of the most
significant non work relationships in participants’ experience in relation to their career considerations.

The participants also mentioned the importance of their social circles in which they can achieve a good work life balance by making friends with people who have common interests. Pat shared that she relieved her stress at work through taking dance classes. The regular dance classes provide her with gatherings through which she could share her teaching life with friends in the dance class. “It helps me a lot to reduce stress. When attending the dance class or having gatherings with my friends, I completely forget all the upset. I talk to them and describe what kinds of incidents I’ve met at work.” Pat effectively alleviates her stress at work through sharing with friends who have similar interests.

The participants’ friends who work in education industry are also reported to be important developers. Since they are the insiders in the industry, they are in a privileged position receiving first hand information about the latest developments in the education field. The participants in the study thus also benefit from communication and contact with this particular social circle.

Pat decided to stay at HSMC partially because of the information obtained from friends working in other secondary schools. They learned that the number of new students in Pat’s prospective school was declining. The shortage of students may
therefore lead to insecurity in Pat’s new job. Pat commented, “They understood my situation and gave me advice through sharing. They are the people that I can trust.”

Mary also obtained news and information about what is going on in the industry from her friends in education. Mary shared, “I would also seek advice from friends, I mean friends in this business, not just general friends.”

Moreover, Mary expanded her education social circles in the industry and built up her contacts beyond the schools she taught through her part-time doctoral study. Since Mary started her doctoral degree in education two years ago, she met and made friends with a new group of people working in the education industry but outside of her organization. Mary mentioned, “My fellow course mates are mostly working in the education sector ranging from early childhood education, primary education, to higher education in both public and private sectors.” Mary thus had an informal channel to get to know more about other work situations, career advancement, and experience and progress in their industry.

Former teachers and professors are in fact another type of “friends” in education industry the participants all have. In our study, three participants have kept a close contact with their alma mater, their own teachers in secondary schools or professors at university. This teacher-student relationship provided a firm foundation on which the teachers could keep infusing their former students, now grown up, who
also became teachers with their guidance and advice on teaching profession. For example, Mimi still keeps in touch with her own secondary school teachers.

“Although we do not meet with each other very often, they would sometimes give me some help or suggestions on dealing with my teaching job.”

In reflecting on his transformational career change from banking to teaching industry, Robert firstly pointed out that the decision was caused partially by the influence of one of his former professors at university. Since Robert’s graduation, he has been keeping close contact with this enthusiastic scholar who shows a great passion for teaching and cares a lot about students’ learning and development. Robert explained, “This professor gives me advice and reminders about teaching, values, attitudes, interpersonal skills, ways of counseling and communicating with teenagers, etc.” Despite working in the business field for years, Robert revealed that he has had interest in teaching for a long time under the influence of this professor.

Moreover, as an alumnus of HSMC, Robert remarked that his fondness for and devotion to her alma mater partially explained his decision to join HSMC when he was planning to devote himself to education. “I graduated from HSMC with a Diploma in Business Studies years ago. I wondered what it would be like if I became a teacher here at HSMC.”
Coincidentally, Pat is also an alumnus of HSMC. She is thus familiar with the work environment and the colleagues, many of whom were her former secondary school teachers. For example, Mr. Choi, Pat’s former business teacher, later became her business studies Department Head as well as mentor when she began teaching at HSMC.

In addition to being guided in the academic and professional arena, Pat was also greatly inspired by the teacher of her dance class for the past decade. Pat specifically stated,

Her passion, her attitude to her students… she is my role model. She loves her students a lot. I’ve learnt from her about her attitude towards the career. Even though there may be frustration at times, she would not give up easily. Instead, she keeps on teaching and having passion for dancing. She inspires me and shows me how to acknowledge the ups and downs.

Among the non-work relationships discussed above, family members including parents, spouses, and children were reported to be the most influential non-work relationships for the participants. In addition to those living with the participants under the same roof, other non-work relationships such as friends, friends in education industry, and former teachers or professors in their own education,
though having relatively less interaction, also play a part in the participants’ professional and personal development.

**Developmental Consequences for Participants**

For the purpose of the study, mid-career faculty’s perceptions of developmental relationships and networks in relation to their career decisions were explored. Using the participants’ responses made during interviews, a few common career-related consequences were identified. The third superordinate theme thus captures the impact of developmental relationships and networks on participants’ career consideration.

The different impacts for participants vary across four major areas, namely career change, professional learning, organizational commitment, and career stability. First, the impact of developers may result in the participants’ position change or job change. In this study, the position change within the same institution or the job change from one organization to another were reported. The second impact involves professional learning through joining the mentoring system, furthering academic study, and looking up to their developers as role models. Third, concerns the impact of organizational commitment. The participants realize that they turned out to be the final decision makers when it comes to concerns about their career. Despite being
influenced, slightly or heavily, by the developers and taking their developers’ advice into consideration, the participants emphasized that they made their own final decisions in most cases.

The fourth developmental consequence for participants is concerned with their career stability. To mid-career faculty members, it is not difficult to notice that their sense of career stability comes from job security and long term career planning and development. Instead of thriving promotion opportunities or adventurous career prospects which seem to be more important to young faculty, participants of our study preferred predictability, assurance, and peace of mind. Their desire for certainty can also be easily understood with the fact that the participants’ institution is currently expanding and undergoing a significant transformation.

The four sub-themes under this third superordinate theme therefore include career change, professional learning, organizational commitment, and career stability.

**Career Change**

Among the four participants, Robert can be regarded as the one who experienced the most radical career change. After working in the banking and finance industry for more than ten years, Robert came to the turning point in his career life and began his teaching profession as a lecturer at HSMC. Due to his interest in teaching and research work, influence from his former university professor, and the
economic depression in the business world, Robert chose to pursue PhD qualification and a secure teaching job at tertiary institutions.

Robert reached another milestone in his career after working as a lecturer at HSMC for two years. He was promoted to Assistant Professor. Robert described this position change in detail, “Due to the expansion and transformation, the college attempted to implement both external recruitment and internal promotion. My satisfactory results in both staff appraisals and students’ evaluation boosted my confidence in this promotion.” Robert’s positive feedback from developers demonstrated that the senior management recognized his contribution and the students appreciated his effort, thus facilitating his promotion.

Mimi also experienced a brief yet dramatic career change during her early career development. Mimi had worked for the government for three months between two teaching jobs. Mimi admitted that she wouldn’t have understood herself so much if she had not had these career changing experiences.

Since becoming a teacher, Mary has never left the education industry, though she resigned three times and at times changed her jobs abruptly over these few years. She made up her mind to quit and change school right after her first year of teaching. After her first year of teaching Mary had decided to quit because she couldn’t stand the disciplinary problems concerning the worst students in the class. Furthermore, she
couldn’t achieve her main goal in teaching, namely developing students’ intellectual growth by helping them to learn academically. When asked why she quitted HSMC (her second job change), Mary could not come up with a strong reason. But later she revealed that she was still very young and idealistic about job change. However, Mary changed her mind impulsively, yet firmly, again right after joining the next school. She resigned in the first week of the new school year. After these few job changes, Mary was welcomed to rejoin HSMC. She also appeared to have identified her career path and thus have settled in HSMC, her present organization.

Pat also shared her experience about a position change, from a teaching assistant to an official teacher, when she was in her first school. Pat started out as a teaching assistant when she first joined the teaching industry. She was then given a chance by the then vice-principal who gave Pat an opportunity to try to become a teacher. In Pat’s case, the developmental relationship with her vice-principal led her to a critical position change in her early career.

All participants in the study have experienced two to three job changes since their first job. Most of them changed positions within their school or college, while others changed jobs from one educational organization to another. One even changed their career path from business to teaching. This developmental consequence thus constituted a significant part of each participant’s career life.
Professional Learning

The second developmental consequence for the participants involves professional learning regarding their career and personal development. In our study, the most discussed areas of professional learning included mentoring systems and further study.

Robert, Mimi, and Mary reflected that the arrangement of assigning a mentor to the new teachers is useful and worth keeping. They all agreed that the mentor-mentee system is helpful to new teachers who are inexperienced in the teaching or education industry. Both formal information exchange and informal experience shared between colleagues allow the protégés to gain important guidance and advice from experienced colleagues.

Nevertheless, Mimi found that it is sometimes hard for the mentor to comment on or to have control of mentees’ personal decisions such as dress code or appropriate manner. Mimi said, “It was quite sensitive and embarrassing for a mentor to give them advice on office attire.” Mary also echoed that the mentee’s personality also affects the usefulness of a mentoring system. “Some people do not welcome the idea of having another person on their back all the time, teaching them to do this or do that, even if the advice is valid.” Mary felt that the mentoring system was instrumental for first-year teachers. However, assigning a mentor to a teacher with two or three years
of experience might discourage the mentee from taking risks, and exploring or
meeting challenges. Mary also commented that a good mentor is not necessarily one
who is senior or very experienced, but one who is willing to pass on knowledge, to
nurture newcomers, and to share. Mary expressed that it was unfortunate that not
everyone was willing to do so.

Apart from learning through the mentoring system, three participants also
discussed the issue of further studies in relation to their professional development.

Since HSMC has been undergoing a long-term development plan with an
objective to become a private university for the past decade, the college has raised
their standards regarding the academic qualifications of the faculty. Within the last
five years, there has been an exponential growth of academic teaching staff to meet
the needs and demands of the growing student body at HSMC. In addition to
recruiting experienced academics from other local acclaimed universities and fresh
PhD graduates to faculty positions, the administration has strongly advised the
existing staff, including all master’s degree holders, to pursue further Doctoral and
PhD studies.

Of four participants of the study, Robert is the only PhD. The other three have
master’s degree while Mary is enrolled in a part-time Doctorate of Education (EdD)
program. When asked how they perceive their professional and personal development in the future, some of them talked about the issue of further study.

The deputy program director and an assistant professor from Pat’s department actively encouraged her to take up further study as they both can foresee the future needs of the college, which is striving to be a private university. Accordingly, the college seeks to achieve 100% Doctoral faculty. This group of developers therefore advised Pat to pursue a doctoral degree and is willing to offer her some academic advice on program selection and scholarly research. Nevertheless, this kind of developmental assistance or persuasion is found to have minimal influence on Pat’s career consideration. She still has no plan to pursue a higher degree at the moment.

Similarly, Mimi mentioned the low possibility of further study in her foreseeable future despite the opposite view expressed by her colleagues and family.

Many colleagues from my department are having their own professional development by studying for a doctoral degree. But I myself did not have those plans. In fact, my parents also did mention the possibility of me doing a PhD, but I do not think that I will have that energy and time.

Conversely, striving to be a part of the doctoral faculty in a soon to be private university, Mary decided to pursue a doctorate degree a few years ago. Apart from the
academic growth, Mary’s further study also helped her develop through relationships in another social circle, her fellow course mates in the doctoral program. Mary shared,

Now I am studying a doctoral program, I get to know more people from different sectors even from different countries. Then I get to hear more things about their situations and their career progress. Actually that kind of information is interesting me, making me reflect upon my career more often.

Although not all participants had experience in being a mentor or mentee, all of them affirmed that the existence of mentoring system to a certain extent is beneficial to teachers, especially those new and inexperienced teaching fellows. However, their reservations about the practice included that they believe the effectiveness of a mentoring system largely depends on the personal characters and styles of the mentor and mentee. Similarly, although not all participants are pursuing doctoral studies, they all recognized the significance of higher academic qualification in their present employment condition as the institution is expanding and transforming into a private university.

**Organizational Commitment**

When asked to describe their experience of making career decisions, all participants reported that most of the time they made their own decisions. They explained that some career changes were impulsively made due to their immaturity
and inexperience when they were young. They also admitted that some other career
decisions were made without strong reasons or thorough consideration. In other words,
y they changed for the sake of change.

When asked who influenced Pat to change her job, she indicated that there was
no particular person influencing her. The main reason she changed her job was due to
a desire to work in different types and different scales of the school, from a small
private secondary school to a subsidized secondary school, and then a higher
education institution at HSMC.

Mimi took the initiative, without being influenced by anyone, to enroll for a
one-year Diploma in Education right after university graduation. Her enthusiasm for
equipping herself with further education studies implies her immense interest in
teaching. After teaching at the KCC secondary school, her first school, Mimi felt
that she was still young and wanted to shop around, to try some other and different
kinds of jobs before she decided to settle. She asked herself “Would I be teaching for
my whole life?” It turned out that Mimi had worked for the government for a few
months prior to joining HSMC. During the interview, Mimi restated that her initial
decision to change from being a teacher to being a civil servant did not come from
others. Rather, it was a decision made by herself after being encouraged by her
family.
Having worked for the government for a few months, Mimi reasserted herself that she had a good deal of passion for teaching and decided to switch back to teaching. Mimi recalled, “I prefer teaching. So I decided to get back to teaching.” The pronoun “I” was repeatedly emphasized by Mimi to show that despite the critical role her mother played in Mimi’s career consideration, her decision to leave civil service was not due to her mother’s influence.

Mimi pointed out again that all career decisions over the years were mainly through her own choices and decisions. She said, “In the end, it’s me who’ll make the decision.” In this case, Mimi reinforced that her own situation has not and would not be affected by other people.

In spite of having a great mentor and possible promotion opportunities, Mary’s headstrong personality was reflected in her decision making processes. She shared, “If I decided on something, no one could really change my decision.” For example, she described her first year teaching experience as miserable and frustrating. At this point, she firmly decided to leave right after one year. She said, “I hated the students to death. I hated being there… Even after work I was really upset, not upset even angry.” Mary reflected that she should not have blamed the students but she did at that time because she was young. Mary’s frustrating experience gained from the first job helped
her identify different career goals and position herself in a certain type of school
where she could display her ability and potential.

Mary claimed that she was a very self-centered person since all the career
related decisions were made by and for herself based on her own feelings. She
described herself as “emotionally driven,” “I used to be very self-centered and just
valued my own emotions and made my decision. My decision was not likely to be
affected by others whose opinions didn’t matter.” In Mary’s case, her
self-centeredness could explain why she was so determined to make almost all
decisions on her own will. She admitted that this character trait has also struck a chord
with and reinforced her strong-mindedness. Nevertheless, at a later time, Mary had a
realization about her own personality that made her reflect differently upon her first
experiences. She admitted that she used to be stubborn and she is now making career
decisions more objectively and more open-mindedly with a new perspective.

Robert’s view echoed the other three participants in the study. His career
decisions were mainly his personal decisions. He explained, “I would not be
influenced by certain individuals to decide whether or not I stay at an institution.”
Nonetheless, he later mentioned that recognition from his supervisor would motivate
him to do more and work better, and so he would be more willing to stay in an
organization.
Despite having stayed at HSMC for more than 5 years, there were moments when the participants felt frustrated or even had an idea of quitting. Pat and Mimi shared their experiences about their “attempted” resignation from their present employment.

In 2008, Mimi could not bear the workload and frustration anymore. She took action, applying for other jobs. She interviewed for two jobs and received offers from both. However, she ended up declining both offers and has stayed at HSMC. For the first offer, Mimi did not accept it because of miscommunication over the commencement date of employment. In the end the new employer could not wait until Mimi was available. Mimi then gave up the offer. For the second offer, Mimi decided to stay since the salary of the new job was much lower compared to what she was making at her existing job.

In 2009, Pat got a job offer to be the panel head of business studies in a secondary school. She accepted the appointment and even signed the contract with that secondary school. However, she regretted resigning because she felt insecure about the possible decline in student enrollment in the new school. She therefore gave up on the idea of quitting.
All the participants in the study are mid-career faculty members who have worked at HSMC for at least five years. In the interview they described their experience and issues related to organizational commitment such as intentions or decisions to stay or quit. Despite the influence of their developers in the consideration process, all of the participants coincidentally stressed that they were the ones who made the final decisions about their careers. The interviewees’ descriptions reflected that the role of developers was significant in offering information, feedback, advice, professional guidance, and psychological support in relation to the participants’ career change and professional learning. Nevertheless, when it comes to considering whether to stay or quit, the participants insisted that their decisions were final verdicts.

Some of them admitted that they had intentions to resign during their years of service. Although all of their attempts to quit were not translated into actual turnover for some reason, their intention to quit carried some pragmatic meaning. Evidently there were some “internal factors” pushing people away or/and some “external factors” pulling people out of the institution. This motive therefore sent a signal to the college administrators as well as the Human Resources Department for future study.

The findings of this research study led the senior management to a deeper understanding of the faculty’s career consideration process in which “who” and “what” play important roles or exert influence in their decision making processes, as
well as what are on offer from other institutions, the competitors in the higher education industry.

Although the developers did not make critical career decisions on behalf of the participants, they may have provided the participants with various promotion opportunities or other employment opportunities for participants’ career advancement. The college administrators thus have to recognize the importance of these developers in their employees’ professional development and personal life, thus introducing corresponding and effective policies to enhance faculty’s individual work satisfaction as well as overall organizational commitment. Given the huge impact of developmental relationships and developmental networks on faculty members, all current and prospective work and non work developers including supervisors, mentors, peers, family members, and friends should never underestimate the power of their support and influence on their protégés.

**Career Stability**

For the purpose of this study, “career stability” of participants refers to job security and their long term career plan and development. Three out of four participants explained that the sense of job security and the level of stability was one of the major reasons bringing them to and keeping them in the teaching industry.
Pat admitted that the stable income, sense of job security, and long vacations during summer, Easter and Christmas drew her to teaching industry. Having a secure and stable job has become Pat’s priority when making critical career decisions. In reflecting on how she struggled over the decision of her job change at the present organization, Pat explained,

“I applied for the teaching post at that secondary school because I didn’t know whether I could adapt to the transition HSMC was going to go through. What’s more, the secondary school offered me the post of a panel head. However, some of my friends in the teaching field told me that a shortage of students could be one of the many challenges that lie ahead for that secondary school. Job stability is then an issue.”

Mimi stated that she has great interest in teaching and she believes that teaching is a very stable profession. Moreover, being the breadwinner of her family, Mimi’s parents are mostly concerned about stable income brought in monthly by Mimi. Having a secure job with a stable income is always Mimi’s mother’s top priority whenever Mimi discusses her career options with her mother. Given these concerns, Mimi admitted in her comments that she prefers stability without drastic changes. She also mentioned that she is not a person who looks for something very
adventurous. Nevertheless, the sense of unpredictability about her career is reinforced by the continuous institutional development and plenty of changes ahead. Mimi expressed, “There may be some other source of hidden pressure after this huge college transition. It’s very hard to tell.” Mimi’s uncertainty in her expressions implied her anxiety about the future.

In fact, Mimi chose to stay at the existing position at HSMC since it was more stable and the salary was acceptable to her and her parents. She admitted, “I decided to stay since the current salary brings me stable income while the other potential new jobs can’t offer the same.”

A desire for job security is not exclusive to teaching professionals. Due to the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008, Robert chose to switch from the volatile world of banking and finance to a relatively more stable education industry. For the sake of gaining a sense of security, Robert made a decision to radically change his career.

Similarly, in reflecting on her perception of the role of developmental relationships and networks in her current job, Mary shared that she saw the importance of job stability. She said she would consider her marketability and believed that changing jobs too often might reflect poorly on herself in the teaching
industry. She said, “People may think there must be something wrong about you.”

Being her family’s breadwinner and starting a new family with her fiancé are also the reasons why job stability matters most to Mary. “The mortgage and household expenses caused me to put options such as stable income, job security, and financial consideration as the first priority when planning for professional and personal growth.”

Alongside job security and stability, a clear long term career development in the education sector is another feature raised by all participants when describing their career considerations.

Pat’s concern over her long term career can be traced back to the reason why she chose to be a teacher in the first place. She mentioned that given the structured nature of an education environment, she could foresee that, compared with other industries, teaching discipline can give her a steady and smooth career path.

Mimi positively viewed her long term career development as she saw the college’s development as an opportunity for her to grow with the college. When she discussed the current college expansion with some old HSMC colleagues, “They asked me not to think of leaving the school if I am comfortable with the current situation.” Mimi’s comment reflected that the college transformation, development,
and expansion directly influence staff members’ long term career planning and decision making.

After working in the banking and finance industry for more than a decade, Robert reconsidered his career path and mapped out his long term career development by looking for a job alternative during the global economic downturn in 2008. In fact, Robert had begun working on his PhD at that time, well before he became a member here at HSMC. He said, “I clearly understood that the college has been evolving from a post secondary institution to a self-financing degree-awarding institution towards a private university in Hong Kong.” Robert’s enthusiasm and determination to develop professionally in higher education is manifested in his vision for the future, his preparation for his scholarly career, and his career planning at HSMC. Robert’s desire for long term career development can also explain why he subscribes to the belief that changing jobs every two or three years may not be an ideal practice for one’s career development.

Mary also shared in the interview that she had seriously considered her long term career path. She mentioned that after years of working in this profession, she knew that there would be no such thing as a perfect workplace. Instead, she started thinking about settling in an institution where she is familiar with and can develop her teaching career. Her desire for long term job stability is also illustrated with her
apprehension about the future, “I want to be kept in a place that I am wanted, not a place that I always have to consider whether I am wanted.” Her concern was due to the fact that the college would eventually experience a big change, gradually transforming into a private university. Based on Mary’s account, her long term career at HSMC matters to her and thus her goal is fitting in and surviving all the possible changes in the coming years.

Conclusively speaking, the participants, mid-career faculty members, often mentioned that they desired a sense of security, stability, and long term career options in their employment. Their responses thus implied that, given their present stage of life, long term stability and assurance is deemed as the most important factor determining their work satisfaction and sense of stability. Moreover, the ongoing changes, including both uncertainties and opportunities brought about by the continuous expansion of their institution can also explain why the participants expressed that long term career plan is a major consideration when making career decisions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore mid-career faculty’s perceptions of developmental relationships in relation to their career decisions. Four frontline academic faculty members working within the same higher education institution in
Hong Kong participated in interviews in this research. This interview helped to formulate each of the participants' individual developmental relationships and network profiles. Overall, all of the participants shared experiences about their developmental relationships and networks, and stories of their career decision processes. Three superordinate themes and nine subthemes emerged from interview data as the key findings of this study after the analytical process.

Developmental seeking behavior emerged as the first superordinate theme as all the participants had employed strategies of some kind, individually or in combination, during their career decisional processes. The key findings of this theme supported the Higgins & Kram (2001) developmental network model which indicated that study participants leverage mainly three approaches including information seeking, help seeking, and feedback seeking as a core part of their developmental seeking behavior from different developmental networks. The result supported the presence of developmental relationships and networks as a common and useful means for participants to actively seek or be receptively given the information ranging from day-to-day job-related information to potential employment opportunities to facilitate their career development. In some cases, the role or status of developers determined the type and importance of information received by the participants. Help seeking behavior took place in terms of seeking guidance, advice, and opinion through career
development discussion with their developers while they obtained psychological

support, comfort, and care in other encounters. Regarding feedback seeking behavior,

feedback received was in a range of forms in terms of tangible and non tangible,

positive and negative. The participants received feedback from individuals with

whom they were familiar, people who understood the participants’ ability and

assessed their performance such as administrative heads, school dean, colleagues, and

students. Among all these developers mentioned, students were discovered to be the

most influential group affecting the participants’ job satisfaction and career decisions.

It is probably due to the fact that the participants and students had a close and frequent

interaction in the heart of their everyday teaching work. Moreover, since the faculty

performance appraisal system has been increasingly reliant on students’ evaluation on

their academic modules and faculty teaching, this finding reinforced the central role

of students in the professional life of faculty.

Previous literature explained that people tended to have a greater inclination to

seek assistance and interact with non-work developers (Lofton, 2012; Murphy &

Kram, 2010). However, the participants in this study did not display the same

situation. The participants demonstrated that they utilized relationships evenly with

people from both work and non-work, intra-organizational and extra-organizational

domains as an important mode to receive professional support and psychological
assistance. This finding demonstrated that the willingness and preference of participants to engage in multiple relationships with individuals inside and outside of their workplace. Their developmental networks ranged from traditional relationships with assigned mentors, formal relationships with supervisors, senior management, official mentors, or colleagues, to informal relationships with family, friends, and individuals from different social circles. The diversity of developers implied that the participants are in need of varied assistance to address their unique concerns. In this study, supervisors such as departmental administrative heads, school deans, school management and colleagues were found to be the most powerful work-relationships, while among the many non-work relationships, family were reported to be the most influential group of people. The dominance of family confirmed the previous research on the non-work relationship in higher education industry (Murphy & Karm, 2010; Phillips, et al., 2001; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Another important finding was related to the specific aspects on which the developers exert influence when participants were making career decisions. The participants expressed that they discussed the career matters mainly related to promotion, salary, and career prospects with their developers, regardless of the type of developmental relationships.

The impact of developmental relationships and developmental networks on the participants can be perceived and understood by examining the developmental
consequences for participants. The four aspects of consequences identified in the
study were namely career change, professional learning, organizational commitment,
and career stability. All four participants reflected on their experience of position
change, job change, or industry change whereas three out of four participants shared
their experience about mentoring system as well as professional, mainly academic or
scholarly, learning. The participants acknowledged the importance of mentor-mentee
system, particularly to the inexperienced or new faculty. In addition, they also
mentioned a long list of developers beyond the traditional mentoring relationships.
This finding implied and strengthened the ever growing importance of multiple
developmental relationships and networks. Regarding the organizational commitment,
while all participants took their developers’ advice seriously into considerations, they
all coincidentally emphasized that they made their final career decisions on their own.
This finding displayed that higher education faculty accepted and involved other
individuals in their career consideration process but at the same time they upheld their
autonomy and independent thinking. Despite the possible attempted resignations, all
participants apparently chose to remain in the institution, at least during the time of
interview. However, all participants honestly expressed their concerns over job
security and long term career development. The observed apprehension was perhaps
due to the ongoing institutional development of the participants’ organization. This
finding also explained and reinforced the significance of job security to mid-career faculty members in particular.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to understand the relationship between mid-career faculty’s perceptions of developmental relationships and their career decisions. The researcher selected the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to conduct an analysis on the complexity of faculty members’ lived experiences in connection with their career decisions over the years. This approach enables participants to make sense of their distinctive experiences and unique personal points of view.

The researcher particularly explored the role of developmental networks in shaping mid-career faculty’s career decision through the lens of the developmental networks theory as proposed by Higgins and Kram. By understanding faculty individuals’ relational needs and desire for professional and personal development, the impact of developmental relationships and networks on faculty when making career decisions can never be underestimated.

This study consisted of four participants serving in a higher education institution in Hong Kong. This chapter explains the major findings by linking the empirical results with the principal theories, discusses the meaning of the findings
with literature support, interpretation of data, and implications that emerged from the qualitative inquiry. The three emerged superordinate themes were 1) developmental seeking behavior, 2) development through relationships and networks, and 3) developmental consequences for participant.

This chapter is structured into three sections. First, the discussion of key findings regarding each emerged superordinate theme is presented and subsequently linked to the research question along with current scholarly literature that supports, or contradicts, these questions. The discussion of findings is followed by the implications for practices, especially for the management of higher education institutions and human resources departments to understand faculty’s career considerations and anticipate their vitality and mobility. The discussion will then suggest effective and improved mentoring practice and encourages the institutional administrators to acknowledge the growing importance of developmental relationships and networks among faculty members. In the third section, the researcher provides suggestions and implications for future research concerning new perspectives on the current and future roles of developmental relationships and networks in faculty’s personal and professional development, particularly those in Southeast Asian higher education context.

**Developmental Seeking Behavior**
The analysis begins with the discussion on the first emerged superordinate theme “developmental seeking behavior”. The empirical evidence of this research study was used to understand the nature of the role of the participants’ developers in their career decision making process. The participants in this study employed three main developmental seeking behaviors including obtaining career related information, seeking professional help and psychological support, and gaining feedback from other individuals in their family, workplace, and different social settings.

The notion of gaining assistance through relationships with other individuals was espoused by Al-Omari et al. (2008). That study pointed out that when the protégés are in need of development, their “developmental initiation” will be activated (Higgins, Chandler & Kram, 2007). They will intentionally utilize tactics and strategies to elicit professional and psychological support for development, information for task completion, and opportunities for empowerment or career change through mentors or other developers who provide guidance and support promoting the protégés job satisfaction and commitment. The amount of new information and opportunities for growth depends on the diversity of the employees’ network (Dobrow et al., 2012). The more diverse the network, the larger the amount of fresh information (and hence the smaller the amount of redundant information) the employees will receive. This wide yet relevant range of information will help in the protégés’ ability
to develop professionally and make informed career decisions accordingly. This conception concerning the range and amount of information was also manifested in the present study.

The participants in the study received day-to-day job task knowledge and information such as regular collaborative lesson planning meetings, teaching materials, and experience sharing. In addition to the information for daily duties, they also received information from extra organizational affiliations such as external examiners and education consultants in different professional bodies to facilitate long term program development. These findings of the present study echoed the information seeking behaviors and activities identified in previous studies. Higgins et al. (2007) defined information seeking behavior as the flow of knowledge, data, and news that facilitate the carrying out of individual duties as well as the completion of organizational goals.

The study participants found that connections and referrals from scholarly circles can be surprisingly useful and effective for them to gain assistance for professional development. The participants shared that they had initially believed that networking with other individuals, unlike other businesses, was not particularly essential in the education sector. However, the participants changed their mind as the connection with educational or institutional specialists intentionally and
unintentionally gave the participants and their institutions insights into college-wide program planning. Developers with different backgrounds, experience, and points of reference are indeed the source of an array of career support including advice on lesson planning, curriculum designing, research grant application, and unanticipated opportunities for new employment or promotion, sponsorship, and network (Daly & Dee, 2006; Dobrow et al., 2012; Murphy & Kram, 2010).

Apart from receiving information regarding job tasks and job opportunities, all participants explained how they sought two types of assistance, namely professional assistance and psychological assistance. As Higgins and Kram (2001) explained, the protégés’ received these two kinds of assistance for career development, career transition, and personal growth by asking for and taking the opinions of their developers into consideration. The first type of professional support mainly involves informational and instrumental assistance. Coaching, advice on time management, teaching, and research resources are instances of career support (Kram, 1985; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Professionally, the participants emphasized that senior management such as principals or vice-presidents provided insight into their career options by discussing and analyzing in detail their future career paths and development based upon the participants’ personality, ability, academic and career background, strengths,
and weaknesses. These in-depth discussions illustrated the participants’ help seeking behaviors.

On the other hand, the second type of help can be illustrated by psychological acts of support including caring, sharing, encouragement, acceptance, confirmation, counseling, friendship, and social and emotional support (Higgins & Thomas, 2001; Kram, 1985; Lawrence et al., 2013; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Through conversations and discussions, the protégés receive psychological support by asking questions and accepting guidance and advice from the developers. At the same time, the developers facilitate the protégés’ personal learning by offering care, counseling and support based on their own personal expertise and experience (Higgins et al., 2007). The study participants’ desire to seek help to reinforce these two career and psychosocial functions is thus consistent with the existing research in this area. Some participants felt grateful that their developers constantly offered support, caring, appreciation, and would encourage them to maintain a work-life balance. Other participants pointed out the frequent and supportive conversations with coworkers, family, spouses, and friends. The power of these informal occasions and regular social gatherings such as the happy hour after work or Christmas gatherings before the term break is thus exceptionally strong and influential.
In addition to seeking information and help from their developers, receiving various kinds of feedback from developers is another common developmental seeking behavior adopted by the study participants. Interestingly, instead of the traditional developers such as mentors and senior colleagues, students were identified as a major group of developers in the present study. In fact, among a broad range of performance indicators, student feedback surveys are a useful and robust tool to enable the universities to understand the latest trends in student learning experiences and identify the strengths of the programs as well as areas that need improvement (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013). Administrators and faculty members can then set out their priorities tied to students’ opinions. The participants of this study also reflected that feedback from students are important channels to allow them to realize students’ responses and evaluation, both positive and negative, verbal and written, concerning the course programs and teachers’ performances. When the faculty members received positive, encouraging, or critically constructive feedback from appreciative students, they would feel satisfied and more motivated to improve. In contrast, some students’ poor learning attitudes and low motivation would discourage faculty members from striving for betterment. Students’ first-hand feedback, facial expressions, instant responses and comments thus directly affect and determine faculty job satisfaction to
a great extent. As a result, this feedback would partially guide faculty’s career
decisions since their consideration hinges on the level of their overall job satisfaction.

Undoubtedly, feedback from peer faculty members also improves faculty job
performance (Callister, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 2000). Valuable feedback and helpful
advice from peers allow the participants to be nurtured, to relate to their daily
teaching, and to make changes for enhancement accordingly (Green et al., 2009).
Some participants found that they felt comfortable seeking feedback from
professional peers while others claimed that some verbal or behavioral feedback from
coworkers serves as a valuable reflective tool for them when making decisions
whether or not to take certain actions. These good reminders help the faculty reflect
on the purpose of teaching and stay engaged with it.

The participants in their stories described various communications in their
supportive developmental relationships that inspired and encouraged them by means
of receiving information, help, and feedback during their pursuit of career progress.
This demonstrates the capability and willingness of the participant to seek out support
in both work and non-work settings. They utilized multiple developmental seeking
behaviors to interact with the people in their professional and personal developmental
networks to ask questions, ask for information and opinions, and discuss their career
development. As Chandler et al. (2010) indicated, the quality of developmental
relationship and employees’ relational competence can be enhanced by frequent interaction with developers, especially if employees tend to be proactive in engaging in different development opportunities. Given the power of assistance and support sourced from developmental relationships or networking, the contribution made by these developmental seeking behaviors should not be underestimated.

**Development through Relationships and Networks**

Development through relationships or within relational context was emerged to be the second superordinate theme. Study participants reported that they used multiple and various sources, both work and non-work relationships, across different networks to obtain assistance and support in the course of career development and career decision making process. Almost equally the same was the importance of both work and non-work relationships or networks, neither of these relationships dominantly affected the participants’ career considerations. Nevertheless, the findings specifically provide insight to the role of specific work and non-work relationships. Dobrow et al. (2012) stated that work relationships primarily provide career support, advice, and professional development while non-work relationships or networks such as family and friendship offer personal and psychological developmental assistance.

The present study results indicated that the most instrumental work relationships were supervisors and colleagues while family was identified to be the
most influential non work relationship. The presence of these multiple developmental relationships is a means for participants to seek and receive the support needed to promote their career development. The study participants’ developers influenced the participants’ career decisions through interaction and communication revolving around topics related to salary, promotion, and career prospects.

All four participants engaged in developmental relationships with more than one developer from two or more different networks. The roles of the developers varied from being immediate supervisors, mentors, senior management, colleagues, students, spouses, children, fiancés, friends, friends in academe, former teachers or professors, etc. This wide array of developers the participants interacted with emphasizes the needs for the study participants to have diversity in their developmental network for their career development (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, and Gravino (2001) conducted a qualitative inquiry which suggested that there had to be some people participating in individuals’ decision making situations in some way, whether they are mentors, family members, or peers, one way or another. A recent study carried out by Tareef (2013) also revealed that higher education faculty members’ professional careers had been largely shaped by one or more individuals.
All participants recognized the contribution and support given by their developers by listing a number of relationships. They coincidently shared that their superiors and colleagues acknowledged their job performance; their students appreciated their effort and enthusiasm about teaching; their family and friends offered their career advice and words of encouragement in relation to their professional development. This combination from different relationships and diverse social networks facilitate the unique learning and specific developmental process of participants; thereby fulfilling their individual complex needs and requirements (Lombardozzi, 2004).

Apart from diversity, mutuality and reciprocity are other qualities of a developmental relationship in which the developers both offer and receive support from their protégés (Allen et al., 2008; Higgins & Kram, 2001). In the current study, this characteristic, however, could not be easily identified. Study participants mostly put on the focus on describing their experience of being developed in the relationship with their developers.

The findings of the present study revealed that the contribution of both work relationships and non-work relationships to faculty’s professional and personal development is equally significant. Research over the last few years has indicated the growing significance of non-work relationships and its remarkable contribution and
its impact on career outcomes and individual career success (Lofton, 2012; Murphy & Kram, 2010). Developers in non-work relationships such as parents, spouses, fiancés, children, and friends from different social circles effectively provide more powerful career and psychological support in terms of the diversity and emotional intensity when compared with developers from work relationships (Dobrow et al., 2012; Johnsrud et al., 2000). Nevertheless, the findings of this study did not reflect the same phenomenon. The present study’s results indicated that the status of work and non-work developmental relationships and networks are on much the same level of importance in the participants’ career considerations. This equal standing can be explained by the career-related research focus of this study, which is the participants’ career decision making process. The role of work relationships in the participants’ professional context is therefore regarded as highly important.

Instead of evaluating whether work or non-work relationships play a more important in participants’ career considerations, development and success, the present study pointed out that the most powerful work relationships and the most influential non-work relationships. Developmental relationships with superiors and colleagues are revealed as the most discussed work relationships. The participants expressed that examples of admirable superiors and counterexamples of poor leaders helped the participants distinguish genuine good leaders from those with disappointing
leadership style, resulting in a factor affecting the participants’ commitment to the institution and intention to stay or quit. Rasheed et al. (2010) also described that faculty members would feel appreciated and be more devoted to the organization when their contributions are acknowledged by their supervisors or administrative heads they admire.

Overall, the participants appreciated that their senior management put faith in them, value their performance, and stand on their side when handling unfair judgments or unconstructive criticism. Some participants even looked up to their leaders as role models. This kind of collegial and institutional trust across hierarchical boundaries thus builds up teachers’ sense of security and confidence in receiving assistance in academic settings (Bowman, 2012).

From the direct supervisors on the departmental level to the senior school management or administrators on the institutional level, the developers provided the participants with huge support, recognition, and appreciation. They also mentioned that formal class visits and informal chats were typical communication tools used by the participants’ supervisors. As Atkinson and Bolt (2012) suggested, faculty heads or supervisors constructively support teacher development and improve teaching practice in higher education by identifying areas for improvement based on lesson observation and students’ feedback. Much evidence in the existing literature also indicated that
developers who are senior or supervisory position are more likely to effectively facilitate protégés’ overall career advancement (Dobrow et al., 2012; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Kram, 1985; Lankau & Scandura, 2002).

Collegiality is another work relationships or networks identified to be critical in this study. The participants repeatedly stated the many different types of guidance and support they received from existing or former coworkers were important opportunities for professional learning and emotional encouragement ranging from lesson preparation sharing to advice on giving counseling to individual students. Indeed, collegial trust and respect are able to bring about useful exchange of views, guidelines, and resources. The positive impact of camaraderie and collegiality is huge, particularly on those faculty members’ individual or somewhat isolating teaching journeys (Atkinson & Bolt, 2012). Collegial open communication and frequent peer interaction promotes faculty organizational commitment (Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Lawrence et al., 2013; Murphy & Kram, 2010).

A harmonious collegial work environment has been emphasized to be a critical factor in faculty career experience in previous research studies (Daly & Dee, 2006; Hagedorn, 2000; Lindholm, 2004; Rosser, 2004). Their engagement in positive social connection and interaction with departmental teaching members or institutional non-teaching staff enable them to gain constructive comments, enjoyment, and
satisfaction in work domain. This finding is consistent with previous studies of academic faculty showing that faculty turnover intention is partially based on their collegiality experience from their department.

While supervisors and colleagues were significant players in work relationships in this study, family were found to be dominant members in non-work relationships. Family members including parents, spouses, and children were their important support networks, which was the most talked about relationship in this study. Generally the influence of family was significant for these participants who described their family members as “close”, “honest”, “supportive” and “reliable” people they were most familiar with and on whom they totally relied. The participants basically and frequently shared every aspect, both positive and negative, of their lives with family and based their career decisions on the opinions of family. Their family’s love and support act as the participants’ best refuge. Their respect for individuals’ own decisions also brought the participants stress free and peace of mind.

The significant effect of family involvement in the participants’ career decisions of the present study reinforced the findings of the previous literature on career decision making (Phillips, et al., 2001). Existing research in this area has indicated that family has strong influence on career development (Murphy & Karm, 2010). Phillips, et al. (2001) identified that extended family and significant others
were dominant groups who participated in respondents’ decisional processes. The role of family members has been influential in terms of involving in individuals’ occupational exploration and career selection (Whiston & Keller, 2004). O’Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008) identified that family-related situations were found to be one of the six factors affecting faculty’s work satisfaction.

Some participants placed much emphasis on parents’ opinion and advice; they would even, consciously or subconsciously, see their parents’ concerns such as stable income and career preferences as their priorities when making career decisions. As Whiston and Keller (2004) described, individuals at times are not able to distinguish their own career expectations from their parents’. The others on the other hand directed their attention to their future family planning with their spouses or finances. Spouses, second to parents, were characterized by individuals who were asked to name those taking an active role and giving unconditional support and understanding in their daunting journey of career and decision making situations (Phillips, et al., 2001).

A few recent studies have also specifically examined the relational influence of family on adult career decisions and planning (Gibbons, Woodside, Hannon, Sweeney, and Davison, 2011; Thoene, 2011). Gibbons et al. (2011) identified that some family members serve as mentors in other family members’ lives influencing
their choice and considerations of careers and strengthening the career decisions and goal attainment. Despite their non-education expertise, family members provide individuals with advice and guidance according to their own life experience. The participants of this study also echoed that they valued their family’s reassuring opinions despite their different professional background.

Some participants of this study shared how they made career decisions in relation to their family’s values, wishes, expectations, and worries. Interestingly, some participants discovered that they and their developers influence each other mutually. Assuming a family dual role by being a “spouse” and “parent” figure, they took their significant others’ advice into consideration and at the same time, they surprised themselves by setting a role model and unintentionally changing their next generation’s way of thinking.

Inasmuch as the family plays a large role in supporting individuals’ career decision making and career achievement, the quality and connection of family relationships needs careful attention (Gibbons et al., 2011). It is vital to understand how family members provide assistance, positively shape, or facilitate individuals’ career advancement. Family process variables such as warmth, support, caring, attachment, autonomy were reported to influence individuals’ career constructs (Whiston & Keller, 2004).
Different structural aspects of reward systems such as remuneration package, promotion opportunities, and career planning are reported to be the common career matters discussed between the developers and the participants of the study. Some participants received opportunities to engage in an in-depth and serious discussion in which they were encouraged by their developers to attempt to apply for promotion. As Higgins et al. (2007) indicated, developers, especially those at a higher position in an organization, are more able to facilitate his or her protégés to progress to the next career stage.

**Developmental Consequences for Participants**

The current study revealed four major impacts of developmental relationships and networks on the participants’ professional development and career decisions. The four consequences identified in the study are career change, professional learning, organizational commitment, and career stability. Among these four developmental impacts, the influences on the participants’ organizational commitment and career stability were reported to be the most remarkable. Organizational commitment involves mainly two types of decisions, intention to stay and intention to quit. What these career decisions are and how these career decisions are made can be understood as faculty’s conscious, personal, and professional investments in certain academic institutions (O’Meara et al., 2008). Johnsrud et al. (2000) also stated that
understanding factors that influence faculty’s career consideration enabled tertiary institutions to effectively retain faculty of high quality. Career stability, on the other hand, refers to job security, the faculty’s rising concerns. This mixed feeling of insecurity, frustration, and anxiety is likely to render faculty members vulnerable with respect to development and plan for their long term career (Gottschalk & McEachern, 2010).

The present study revealed that there is minimal evidence to imply a strong relationship between the developmental relationships or networks of the study participants and their organizational commitment and subsequently the career decisional outcomes. The process and the outcomes of the participants’ career decisions to a certain extent reflect their organizational commitment. All the study participants expressed that they themselves are typically and always the ones who made their own final career decisions despite taking their developers’ advice into consideration during the decision making process. There were no particular one or two persons who determined or settled their decisions on behalf of them. Faculty members employed their own powers to shape and map out the plan for their work and development. Academic freedom and independent thinking have always been the key features of faculty career (Callister, 2006; O’Meara et al., 2008; Tolbert et al.,
It is therefore not surprising to find that faculty members, especially those in higher education, advocate relying on their own decisional competence.

Phillips et al. (2001) reported the results of a study showing that a certain group of respondents thought the matter through on their own before seeking suggestions and guidance from their parents. Despite playing a less active role at times, they unconditionally supported their children to make their own career decisions individually. Although the decision makers in that study spoke to their developers and asked for direction about their pending decisions, many faculty asserted the autonomy of making the career-related decision on their own (O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2010; Phillips et al., 2001).

Similarly, the participants in our study also expressed that they appreciated their family support to allow them to weigh their options available and pursue their decisions. Instead of subscribing to others’ opinions without a doubt, the participants regarded their developers as a sounding board for them to verbalize their ideas and gain some insights.

Given some of the contradictory views in the existing literature, the study findings implied that faculty career decisions were not largely determined by their developmental relationships and networks. Higgins and Kram (2001) stated that receiving high level of developmental assistance would enhance protégés’
commitment to an organization and their intention to stay. Nevertheless, it may not be
the case with higher education. The present study showed that the developmental
relationships and networks positively promote one’s professional and psychological
development with the aid of various information, support, and feedback. While they
have close and supportive developmental relationships with developers from work
and non work context, their connection does not necessarily lead to increased
organizational commitment. The commitment to and attachment with the developers
may only apply to or may be evident on individual or departmental levels. The impact
of the developmental relationships and networks on individuals’ ultimate career
decisions is thus insignificant.

The current study reflected that faculty’s navigation of growth and the weighty
career decisions are made according to a few key aspects namely personal desire,
aspiration, and career goal. Many participants have a great passion for the teaching
industry. They paved their own distinct paths by choosing and deciding to devote
themselves responsibly and enthusiastically to education. As O’Meara et al. (2008)
suggested, faculty members pursue teaching as their ideal career and self-defined
profession by drawing on their personal motivation, self confidence, and expertise,
thus selecting a profession following the compass of their passions. In addition to
individual career ambition, faculty members tend to examine if their personal values fit in the institution’s before they decide to stay or leave (Lindholm, 2004).

The participants of the study reinforced this notion by identifying and settling at their organizations after comparing their career goals to the vision and mission of their institution. They believed in their professional competence, judgment, and right to set their own academic priorities regarding their research and teaching. Particularly in higher education, when the participants advocate academic freedom and independent thinking as faculty, they have to put their words into action. Nevertheless, being open minded and accepting advice are also equally significant in learning process. Taking their developers’ assistance and advice, both professional and sentimental, into consideration is then another way to practice what the faculty preaches. Managing a balance between these two is thus what faculty members primarily need to address.

Job stability has been one of the universal distresses and has topped the “top ten workplace issues for faculty members and higher education professionals” (Petry, 2011). Unless faculty are on tenure or permanent appointment terms, the continuation of their employments are constantly exposed to unpredictable conditions such as change of management or budget constraints. Likewise, the growing concern of job security was also widespread among the study participants.
The presence of job insecurity was partially due to the dwindling number of tenure appointments in higher education sector. Cummings (2009) asserted that academic profession has become no longer stable as the majority of academic faculty members were recruited to work for renewable contracts. Undoubtedly, this group of faculty would prefer stable contracts to shaky ones.

Long term personal and professional commitments can only be made if faculty members feel secure and appreciated by the institution. Faculty members’ terms of appointment is deemed as an important factor fostering or obstructing their capacity to grow in areas of teaching or research in higher education (O’Meara et al., 2008).

The strong desire for job security of the study participants can also be explained by a myriad of challenges facing academic faculty in Hong Kong. Apart from the global financial crisis, the declining birth rate in the region, the education budgeting cut, major reforms in curriculum and education structure in both secondary and tertiary sector are all the factors weakening faculty’s sense of job security (Draper, 2012).

Economic changes and financial crisis can be deemed as a threat as well as an opportunity to the study participants. While the world is fighting against the unstable economy and finding ways to survive the volatile market, higher education industry is temporarily a rather safe alternative for one to develop his or her career. In fact, some
of our participants had an inclination to join the teaching industry due to the relatively
reliable nature. Nonetheless, given the above the existing social and economic
problems, job security remains a main concern in one’s long term career planning
(Draper, 2012).

In addition to the unpredictable external social factors, the internal
institutional ongoing development also intensifies the participants’ sense of job
insecurity. The continuous college expansion means a number of changes,
restructurings, and new policies. Circumstances such as these can lead to faculty’s
apprehension about career stability and steady long term development. Be it an
unannounced excitement or an unhappy surprise, faculty members’ peace of mind will
be disturbed. Petry (2011) explained that higher education faculty cannot focus on
intellectual and creative scholarly work if they are distressed about concerns of job
security. Professional and mental preparation is thus a productive way to minimize the
panic and best protect oneself and one’s career.

Implications for Practice

This study aims to provide educational practitioners, administrators, school
deans, and human resources (HR) managers with insights regarding faculty career
decisions and faculty developmental networks. The findings of this work can help
these stakeholders understand faculty organizational commitment, their intention to stay or leave their institution, and, ultimately, their overall career decisions.

Implications and recommendations in this section include recognizing the importance of students’ feedback on the faculty members’ academic teaching and focusing on faculty job stability. Job security is not only a significant factor in making career decisions, but also particularly important to mid-career faculty members who are relatively more mature than their younger colleagues and are more bent toward seriously considering a long-term career. In addition, the ongoing expansion of an institution intensifies the issue of job security. Given these considerations, the management and senior administration are encouraged to perform their roles responsibly and meaningfully to capitalize on developmental relationships and networks. These relationships can help promote individual job satisfaction and overall organizational commitment. Administrators should thus pay special attention to dual or multiple developmental roles from different contexts by understanding the re-conceptualization of the mentoring system as well as the rising need for family-friendly policies.

This study relates to the sizable impact of feedback from students who emerge as a group of young, potential developers in developmental relationships. The present study suggests that feedback from students is a prime factor that determines the
participants’ job satisfaction and career considerations. This finding confirms that of a previous study, which reveals that students’ quality and achievement constitute a major part of faculty job satisfaction (O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2010). Faculty members acknowledge students’ influence and admit that they are the sources of energy and the main reasons driving them to perform well (Romano, Hoesing, O’Donovan, & Weinsheimer, 2004).

A recently conducted study reported that thriving universities are expected to emphasize students’ opinions by listening to their words and prioritizing their feedback, because identifying with the students’ experience can serve as an effective tool for teaching and learning improvement (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013). In terms of end-of-module evaluation, formal discussion, and informal chats, students’ comments can be gathered through both written and verbal formats.

Another key area identified is the issue of job security. The extent of job security could determine a faculty member’s willingness and capacity to contribute to their work and the institution where they belong (O’Meara et al., 2008). This is based on the principle that the higher the sense of security, the more likely the employees would put much effort and time into their work.

Job security is undoubtedly regarded as an important consideration by faculty members who keep looking for employment stability. However, this sense of security,
which is even more critical in small institutions, is being shaped by continuous
transformational changes (Draper, 2012). In the present study, when faced with the
dynamic nature of a huge expansion, faculty members in the institution, including our
four participants, mentioned issues about job stability while describing their career
decision process. Being a higher education faculty member in this era is tougher than
ever. Existing difficulties, challenges, and increasing expectations for faculty
members include rising workload, limited funding, demanding research output,
insufficient time and resources available for research and publication, reduced
promotion opportunities, and stagnant salary increment (Clark & d'Ambrusio, 2005;
O’Meara et al., 2008).

This desire for job security may be due to unique characteristics and particular
needs of mid-career faculty members. All participants of the present study are
mid-career faculty members aged between 29 and 52 years and have been working for
their present employer for more than five years. In other words, they are not new to
the institution and are comparatively more mature than others in terms of age and
teaching experience. Romano et al. (2004) described the mid-career faculty as those
who are no longer at the early career stage but are not expecting to plan for retirement
yet. Thus, they are not only experienced academicians, but are also very familiar with the
practices, the culture, and the norm of the institution. Facing years of professional
challenges and scholarly activities ahead, such faculty members certainly have their own expectations and needs at this point in their respective careers.

Many mid-career academic professionals claimed that they are burdened with unmanageable teaching and research load, poor work-life balance, unreasonable amount of administrative work, stress, and other challenges (Bexley, Arkoudis, & James, 2013). Despite the identity of mid-career faculty members, none of the participants in the present study are tenured. In fact, almost all faculty members in the institution they belong to are not tenured. Based on prevailing employment conditions wherein the institution cannot provide tenure, faculty members are expected to capitalize on experience and expertise to achieve individual and organizational improvement (Pennington et al., 2012).

Due to universal demographic changes and growing financial pressure, tenure employment in the academic labor market has been rapidly dwindling (Ponjuan et al., 2011). The prevalence of non-tenure track appointments in academic institutions across the world carries as much risk as the opportunities it provides. The issue of job security has turned into a perpetual concern given that faculty members’ contracts need to be renewed regularly (O’Meara et al., 2008). At the same time, the seemingly unstable situation in their position would be an automatic mechanism to screen out the faculty with substandard performance. Administrators find this arrangement efficient
for it allows institutions to take advantage of the consequential higher flexibility and lower costs (Jacobe, 2006). Faculty turnover in higher educational institutions is undoubtedly a costly expenditure involving recruitment, replacement, and training (Daly & Dee, 2006; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Ruhland, 2001). In order to stay financially competitive in the rapidly growing higher education sector, recruiting and retaining talented faculty is one of the recommended steps to be taken by HSMC in the future.

The study participants have been going through an ongoing college development and expansion. This transformation from a post-secondary institution into a self-financing, degree-awarding institution has had a direct impact on faculty career development and decisional outcomes. Compared with other locally established government-funded universities, HSMC is a more fragile and younger self-financing higher education institution. To achieve better local ranking within the academic hierarchy, administrators and faculty have to differentiate HSMC from other competitors as well as pursue external prestige by recruiting new faces, raising aspirations, increasing scholarly productivity, and any other means possible (O’Meara & Bloomgarden, 2010). This uncertainty and forthcoming change have led to anxiety or enthusiasm, or both. Therefore, HSMC faculty members are under pressure to prepare themselves academically and professionally for long-term development.
Another implication is concerned with faculty non-work developmental relationships. In view of the significance of the family and its core values in non-work relationships, various family-friendly policies are likely to benefit the academic faculty in a number of ways. Although not a focus of this study, research has pointed out that several universities over the last decade introduced new family-friendly measures to help parents achieve work-family balance (O’Meara & Campbell, 2011). When family-related circumstances such as pregnancy or adoption arise, these much needed accommodations can influence one’s career and personal decisions. If the institution advocates for and implements family-friendly policies, faculty members will be assured of their family’s situation and that their needs will be well addressed (O’Mera et al., 2008). Once family members are well-attended to, and the relationship in the family is positively supported by the institution, the faculty will be more contented with day-to-day decisions and, ultimately, with the career path they are mapping within the organization. This work-family balance is one of the best tools in balancing personal and professional lives, resulting in enhanced organizational commitment and career stability.

Aside from establishing work-family measures, their usage should also be encouraged (O’Meara & Campbell, 2011). Underutilizing work-family policies will ultimately make such policies ineffective. Many faculty members endure hardships to
arrive at satisfactory decisions to help them balance work and family and/or integrate caretaker roles in their work-intensive context (O’Mera et al., 2008). They feel stressed out because of the sacrifices they make for a balanced work-family life. In fact, regardless of the industry, no family-friendly policies in the workplace have yet to be smoothly executed. Many faculty members, especially women, are struggling to meet both their professional and family duties. O’Meara and Campbell (2011) indicated that the attitudes and actions of management or senior colleagues are critical in establishing a norm that is agreed upon, shared, and practiced by faculty members in an institution. Effective work-family balance can bring about a sense of work and family success, thus facilitating long-term faculty retention.

Higher education institutions are recommended to evaluate and advance their family-friendly policies on a regular basis. In Hong Kong, family-friendly policies have been receiving more attention in recent years. The HKSAR Government’s Family Council and its relevant policies have been established and introduced to the public since its inception in 2007. As the largest employer in the city, the Government has launched initiatives, such as the “Five-Day Week,” “Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme” and full-pay paternity leave, to promote a family-friendly working environment. Given the rapidly growing economy and the highly competitive business environment, organizations (including the academe) face overwhelming
challenges when practicing family-friendly policies. Nonetheless, initial support and commitment from the government have convinced employers that family-friendly employment practices foster harmonious family relationships and productive employment, which in turn, benefit both parties. The local higher education administrators, particularly the HR managers, are therefore expected and encouraged to pay close attention to this increasingly widespread employment practice.

Apart from revising HR practices, the significance of both work and non-work relationships is supported by the present study. Especially in young institutions, relationships and networks play more critical roles in professional and personal development. For instance, professional partnerships built within the higher education industry would imply privileged status for faculty in their own campuses, because they bring in scholarly relationships and even the opportunity to obtain significant funding or collaborative research projects.

The relational context affects how an individual’s career decisions are made (Phillips et al., 2001). Due to the limited information, people tend to make shared decisions. The involvement of others can be sources of important information to help the faculty develop informed choices and avoid mistakes. Faculty work is centrally concerned with collaboration, wherein most scholarly works have been written with
certain collegial relationships in their institutions (Atkinson & Bolt, 2012; O’Meara et al., 2008).

In addition to work and non-work relationships, the present study reveals another important group of relationships, which involves these two relationships. This dual role of developers has been found in the participants’ experience. For one participant, her developer is the administrative head and her former school teacher, while another mentioned that a coworker is a close personal friend. Yet another participant stated that one of his acquaintances turned out to be his informant at work. It is not necessary for the participants to distinguish these overlapping roles themselves. In fact, the dual roles are likely to enrich one another in the work-life interface (Murphy & Kram, 2010). Phillips et al. (2001) also claimed a strong possibility of overlapping vocational and personal assistance in decision making.

Another key implication here is the relevance of having a mentoring system. While traditional mentoring system has its values, the impact of others on one’s career and personal development should be better reflected on one’s developmental relationships and networks. Multiple mentoring networks, or a constellation of mentors, have been discussed and endorsed in the literature (Baugh & Scandura, 1999; Dobrow et al., 2012, Higgins & Thomas, 2001). From their networks, individuals are expected to benefit from mentors, but not restricted solely to mentors.
Phillips et al. (2001) described that faculty members welcomed advice from trustworthy individuals or role models who, as outsiders, share their opinions concerning faculty members’ strengths, weaknesses, and capabilities for self-improvement. The present study extends what the previous study found and suggests that the mentoring system in higher education is worth retaining because of the great deal of support offered by mentors to the faculty, especially those new to teaching or to the institution. The participants acknowledged the contribution and benefits of having a mentor in their profession.

The mentoring experience advanced the organization and individuals in a number of ways, such as enabling new faculty members to immerse into the job context and organizational culture, strengthening the individual’s dedication, and promoting a culture of inclusion, teamwork, and cohesiveness (Austin & Rice, 1998; Boyle & Boice, 1998; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Given the abovementioned advantages, as mentors, senior colleagues or departmental leaders should help promote professional growth and development plans that are readily available to and easily accessed by all faculty members (Cummings, 2009). The developmental relationships should also include mentoring (Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram, 1985). Tareef (2013) recently argued that one or more individuals have significantly influenced study respondents’ professional careers. All these influential individuals
belong to a broad range of professions, cultures, and backgrounds. They are called “mentors” in the present study, although they actually serve as “developers” who assist and offer support to the respondents.

The administrators of higher education institutions are obliged to perform their duties responsibly and meaningfully as their daily practices influence all academic and administrative staff members. Positive consequences on academic faculty, which are brought about by capable higher education management, lead to higher level of commitment, work satisfaction, and contribution (Cummings, 2009). Therefore, to adapt to the new models of academic management, the senior management has to abandon obsolete leadership and management styles and adopt new ones.

With financial constraints, almost all units in higher education institutions have turned into profit-making sources. However, O’Meara and Bloomgarden (2010) reminded administrators that leaders may be prone to give mixed or conflicting messages to the faculty in the course of aggressively motivating the rest of the institution to achieve its goals. In this case, relentless activities could push all teaching and administrative staff members to work without a clear objective or goal in sight. This coercion may threaten the actual teaching vitality and service mission, faculty reward systems and performance assessment, which may ultimately jeopardize the faculty’s well-being and the teaching environment in the entire institution. The
management has to ensure that they are committed to academic freedom and shared governance (Al-Omari et al., 2008; Austin & Rice, 1998). The administration’s attempts must not achieve upward mobility of the institution at the expense of the faculty and staff.

**Implications for Future Research**

Along with the implications for practice, this study also provides several implications for future research. Understanding how certain factors, such as the target sample group being studied (i.e., frontline academic faculty member) or their stage of career (i.e., mid-career group), affects the results of the research study is essential. These criteria constitute advantages and limitations from different research points of view.

Future research opportunities should include exploring developmental relationships from developers’ perspectives, because the present study is limited to investigating the role of developmental relationships and networks from the protégés’ perspective. A productive step would be to examine the role of developmental relationships and networks from developers’, rather than protégés’, perspectives. Researchers can then examine the different impacts of relational context on developers and protégés in the aspects of professional development and career decision making. The effective assessment of the power of developmental relationship
and networks of protégés and developers remains a question for future research (Dobrow et al., 2012). In addition, some qualities of a developmental relationship, such as mutuality and reciprocity, are not addressed and analyzed. Incorporating the developers’ standpoints can enable the researcher to understand and examine the holistic impact of developmental relationships or networks.

Additional research is needed to examine the feasibility and popularity of some new or alternative mentoring systems, such as peer mentoring or buddy programs (Allen & Finkelstein, 2003). Such research can assist in gaining more insights into various mentoring systems offered to the faculty. This research endeavor may include participant reflections concerning the impact of the developmental networks, thus enabling the researchers to explore the cost and benefit of relational development to the faculty so as to decide whether such program is worth the financial and HR investment.

While students may have been discovered to be the newly identified developers, other alternative developers also deserve further assessment beyond the limits of this study. Researchers are reminded to consider the distant, unmet, or imaginary individuals as potential developers (Cotton, Shen, & Livne-Tarandach, 2011). Hamilton and Schandura (2003) also suggested that technological advancement can facilitate the establishment of virtual relationship. Researchers
should therefore consider all the possibilities that would have been unthinkable in the past when people heavily relied on face-to-face relationship.

The transferability of this research can also contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of developmental relationships and networks in different industries. The present study only included participants coming from a higher education institution. This unique context resulted in the exploration of developmental networks from a faculty perspective. Therefore, a longitudinal comparative study across industries (i.e., higher education versus legal) or disciplines (i.e., academic versus administrative) would be beneficial. Such research is warranted because any industry-related issues, such as the roles of developers and protégés, work and non-work relationships, and developmental seeking behavior, may have varied results.

This study broadens the discussion of research interests in developmental relationships and developmental networks; it requires further studies of the longitudinally, experientially, and contextually social and economic views of the local dynamics. Nevertheless, the present study opens the door to further studies in this field and is likely to add valuable insights to developmental network literature in the South-East Asian region.
References


Chandler, D. & Kram, K. E. (2005). Applying an adult development perspective to


Daly, C. J., & Dee, J. R. (2006). Greener pastures: faculty turnover intent in urban

Faculty Retention. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 28*(7), 593-607.

583.

Developmental Networks Incorporating a Mutuality Perspective. *Journal of
Management, 38*(1), 210-242.

phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(1),
131.

Draper, J. (2012). Choosing teaching in Hong Kong: a strategy to survive the financial
crisis?. *Educational Research, 54*(2), 199-211.


Green, T., Alejandro, J., & Brown, A. H. (2009). The Retention of Experienced Faculty in Online Distance Education Programs: Understanding Factors that Impact Their Involvement. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 10(3).


Incorporated.


Appendix A – IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: March 25, 2014  IRB #: CPS14-03-07
Principal Investigator(s):  Kimberly Nolan
                          Rebecca Ong Ching Wai
Department:  Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address:  20 Belvidere
          Northeastern University
Title of Project:  Mid-career Faculty Networks: A Qualitative Study
                   Exploring Hong Kong Mid-career Faculty Career Choice
                   and the Role of Developmental Relationship
Participating Sites:  Hang Seng Management College approval in file
DHHS Review Category:  Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents:  One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval:  12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: MARCH 24, 2015

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when
   recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
   information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must
   be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month
   prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
   other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B – Recruitment email

Dear….,

I am a doctoral student in the College of Professional Studies of the Northeastern University. Your organization (HSMC) has agreed to serve as the site of this doctoral thesis study. The purpose of this study is to explore how mid-career academic faculty members develop professionally and personally through relationships and networks. Specifically, the study seeks to gain insights into the role of these relationships and networks in shaping faculty’s career considerations and decisions at a higher education institution in Hong Kong.

I would like to invite you to participate as a subject in a research study. You are being invited and receiving this email because you have made at least one job change and you are currently employed for more than five years at the Hang Seng Management College (HSMC).

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in a three-interview series. All interviews will be face to face and will be conducted on site at your organization, HSMC. Each interview of the series takes about 45 to 90 minutes.

Before you decide to participate in the study, please carefully read the attached consent form which reviews the risks and benefits. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your decision to take part or not to participate will not affect the services, benefits or your employment status in any way at any time. If you decide to take part and then change your mind you can quit at any time. If you agree to participate you will be asked to sign the attached consent form. Any information you provide will be kept confidential by the researcher and other reviewers. The reviewers will not include anyone affiliated with your current institution (HSMC). You may choose not to participate or decide to withdraw from the study at any time.

I hope you will give favorable consideration to this proposed research study and agree to participate.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ong
Student Researcher
Appendix C – Informed consent form

Signed Informed Consent
Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Principal Investigator: Dr. Kimberly Nolan
Student Researcher: Ms. Ong Ching Wai, Rebecca
Title of Project: Mid-career Faculty Networks: A Qualitative Study Exploring Hong Kong Mid-career Faculty Career Choice and the Role of Developmental Relationship

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
We are asking you to be in this study because you have made at least one job change and you are currently employed for more than five years at the Hang Seng Management College (HSMC).

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to explore how mid-career academic faculty members develop professionally and personally through relationships and networks. Specifically, the study seeks to gain insights into the role of these relationships and networks in shaping faculty’s career considerations and decisions at a higher education institution in Hong Kong.

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in a three-interview series.

1) The first interview begins with the ice breaker questions and sets the scene for you to share your subjective description and personal experience and perception in relation to the experience of development through relationships and networks.

2) In the second interview, you will answer nine to eleven sub-questions of the study to reconstruct the concrete details of experience in the topic of the role
of “developmental relationship” and “developmental networks” in forming and influencing your career considerations and decisions.

3) The purpose of the third interview is mainly member checking and reflection. The researcher and you will evaluate and reflect on the drafted interpretation of your responses. You can also foresee the emerged findings and ensure the data and the descriptions are precise and unbiased.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

All interviews will be face to face and will be conducted at a location that you choose. The intermission of each of the three-interview series will be from four to five days apart. Each interview of the series takes about 45 to 90 minutes.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

The topic of the present study is possibly sensitive since it is concerned with your career considerations and choice, as well as your intention to remain or leave the institution or the employer you are currently serving.

Psychologically or socially, you may probably feel obliged to name the officially assigned mentors when asked to point out or share the experience of receiving developmental assistance and support from the developmental networks during interviews, even when the officially assigned relationship was not actually strong or deep.

To protect you as a human subject and minimize the risks, your identity and you would remain confidential and the data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. If need be, you can withdraw from the study without any harmful consequences. The rationale and purpose of the current study will be made known to you, thus you can decide whether you are willing to be the participants voluntarily. You will also be assured that the researcher will only act as a representative of Northeastern University and that the data collected for the duration of the study are for the current research purpose only. You also have the right to withhold data that you believe the information given would lead to potential physical or psychological harmful impact or risk to your privacy or employment.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There are no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study. However, you may have a better and more thorough understanding of your own perceptions towards
developmental relationships and developmental networks, thereby exploring more alternatives to develop through various relationships and networks.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researcher of this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. All collected data will be managed vigilantly and stored at the researcher’s password protected personal computer, including your personal particulars and assigned aliases, original transcripts, coded transcripts, scribbles done during the interviews or recorded digital voice recordings. Apart from the researcher, no one else has ownership or access to the gathered data. The original handwritten notes and the backup copies will be organized and stored in secured filing cabinets with clear labels and indexes at two different sites. The researcher will remove the recorded audio files of the interviews from the recording device and save them in a computer with a password. Backup copies of all sorts of data will be kept separately from the original, in conditions which safeguard its confidentiality.

Your confidentiality will be highly maintained by destroying all gathered data at the end of the agreed retention period, three years following the end of the study, after the completion of the research project.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. The researcher will only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**

You have the option of not participating in the study.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. You are entitled to change your mind and withdraw at any time throughout the study in accordance with your own goals and values. Please send a written request for withdrawal to the Principal Investigator responsible for the study. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee.
**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Ms. Rebecca Ong, ong.c@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kimberly Nolan, K.Nolan@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There will not be any financial or materialistic rewards as remuneration for the study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**
There will not be any financial costs incurred by the participant for the study.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**
You must be a mid-career academic faculty (aged between 29-52) who has made at least one job change and is currently employed for more than five years at the Hang Seng Management College (HSMC).

**I agree to take part in this research.**

_____________________________________________ ________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

_____________________________________________ ________________
Signature of person who explained the study to the Date
participant above and obtained consent

Ong Ching Wai Rebecca
Appendix D – Interview protocol

Topic: Mid-career faculty networks: A qualitative study exploring Hong Kong mid-career faculty career choice and the role of developmental relationship

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Pseudo Name of Interviewee:

Age range: a) 29-36, b) 37-44, c) 45-52

Position of Interviewee:

Position / Faculty / Department / School of Interviewee:

Subjects / Modules taught by Interviewee:

Number of years in teaching industry:

Number of years teaching at HSMC:

Number of job change:

Introduction/Description of Project

(a) Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how mid-career academic faculty members develop professionally and personally through relationships and networks. Specifically, the study seeks to gain insights into the role of these relationships and networks in shaping faculty’s career considerations and decisions at a higher education institution in Hong Kong.

(b) The sources of data being collected
(c) Explanation of what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the participant

(d) Provide an approximation of how long the interview will take

(e) Provide an opportunity for questions

(Turn on recorder)

**Interview Questions**

**First Interview**

1. Can you tell me what brought you to teaching at the beginning?
   
   (Possible prompts: How did you experience as a protégé or a mentee? How do you interact with your social setting (e.g. school, friends, neighborhood, workplace, etc.) in light of your teaching career path up to the present?)

2. Can you describe how you came to be an academic faculty member at Hang Seng Management College (HSMC)?
   
   (Possible prompts: What made you take up this employment opportunity?)

3. Can you share with me any particular people or individuals influencing or shaping your career decisions, choice, or considerations?
   
   (Possible prompts: examples of career decisions: job change, position change, resignation, retirement, etc.)

**Second Interview**

4. Can you share with me any particular events or incidents influencing or shaping your career decisions, choice, or considerations?
   
   (Possible prompts: examples of career decisions: job change, position change, resignation, retirement, etc.)

5. What kind of feedback did you actually receive and shaped your development and decision making?
6. Can you recount a particular incident of your career experience to date receiving developing assistance and support from any individuals?

(Possible prompts: Can you give names of people and relationship with them, from within or outside your organization, who actively took interest in offering developmental assistance and support?)

Third Interview

7. Given what you mentioned about your life before this current job, how do you perceive and describe the role of developmental relationships (*Relationships that positively support and advance individuals' professional and psychological development*) and developmental networks (*A group of people, rather than a single mentor or coach, offers developmental assistance and support to participants for career and personal growth as developers*) in shaping your career considerations and making decisions?

(Possible prompts: very important, important, not important, etc. What happened? How did you feel at that time?)

8. Given what you have experienced in this current job, how do you perceive and describe the role of developmental relationships and developmental networks in making your current and future career considerations and decisions?

(Possible prompts: very important, important, not important, etc. What happened? How did you feel at that time? Do you feel differently now than before? In what ways? How do you feel about these changes?)

9. In what ways do you find that the work relationship can influence you in your professional and personal development in the future?

(Possible prompts: work relationship: senior management, school dean, administration head of department, Human Resources department, peers, mentors, supervisors, etc.)

10. In what ways do you find that the non work relationship can influence you in your professional and personal development in the future?
(Possible prompts: non work relationship: family members, friends, religious committee members, voluntary organization members, alumni group members etc.)

**General Prompts to be used during interview**

- Can you tell me more about that?

- Can you provide an example?