

# Major Factors Affecting Female Executives in Their Career Advancement

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, career commitment, self-efficacy, and career advancement among Thai public organizations. For this research, 800 ordinary, female, civil servants in knowledge worker positions, managerial positions, and executive positions with at least 10 years of working experience were used as the sample. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The fit indices showed that the proposed model had an appropriate fit ( $\chi^2 = 669.75$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.049$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $SRMR = 0.032$ ). The variables in the model explained 77 percent of the variance in career advancement. Career commitment had the highest direct effect on career advancement with effect sizes of 0.51, while job characteristics had the highest indirect effect with effect sizes of 0.43 at the significance level of .05.

**Keywords:** female executives, career advancement, public organization

## บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างทุนมนุษย์ การสนับสนุนขององค์การ ความสมดุลระหว่างงานและครอบครัว คุณลักษณะงาน ทักษะที่เกี่ยวกับบทบาททางเพศ ความผูกพันในอาชีพ การรับรู้ความสามารถของตนเอง และความก้าวหน้าในอาชีพของข้าราชการสตรีในองค์กรภาครัฐของไทย การวิจัยครั้งนี้กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือข้าราชการพลเรือนสามัญสตรีที่ดำรงตำแหน่งนักวิชาการ อำนวยการ และบริหารที่มีระยะเวลาในการทำงานตั้งแต่ 10 ปี เป็นต้นไป จำนวน 800 คน จากการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยแบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง ดัชนีความสอดคล้อง

แบบจำลองสมการโครงสร้าง พบว่า แบบจำลองมีความกลมกลืนกับข้อมูลเชิงประจักษ์ ( $\chi^2 = 669.75$ ,  $df = 227$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.95$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.049$ ,  $CFI = 0.99$ ,  $SRMR = 0.032$ ) โดยตัวแปรแฟรงต่างๆ ในแบบจำลองสามารถอธิบายความแปรปรวนของความก้าวหน้าในอาชีพได้ร้อยละ 77 และพบว่าความก้าวหน้าในอาชีพได้รับอิทธิพลทางตรงจากความผูกพันในอาชีพมากที่สุดอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 โดยมีขนาดอิทธิพลเท่ากับ 0.51 และได้รับอิทธิพลทางอ้อมจากคุณลักษณะงานมากที่สุด อย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติที่ระดับ .05 โดยมีขนาดอิทธิพลเท่ากับ 0.43

**คำสำคัญ:** ผู้บริหารสตรี ความก้าวหน้าในอาชีพ องค์กรภาครัฐ

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## INTRODUCTION

In Southeast Asian countries, female participation in the labor force has risen over the past few decades. This increase is not only in the private and industrial sectors but also in the public sector. In the Thai civil service, there are more women than men. The proportion of female government officials has increased annually and in 2011, the percentage of women in the Thai civil service was 63.30 percent and the percentage of men was 36.70 percent (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2011).

Despite the increasing participation of women in the workforce, the number of women in management positions is limited. Specifically, in public organizations, there are only 25.51% female administrators in the Thai civil service (Office of the Civil Service Commission, 2011). These data illustrate that the proportion of female executives is still very low in comparison to males. Women are likely to be appointed as government officials in equal proportions to men, but on a proportional basis, compared to men, women are still less likely to get promoted to the top positions or to have career advancement.

Everyone wants to achieve success, and work is a part of human life, so career advancement is a goal to be worked on. Career advancement is important for both individuals and organizations. At the individual level, career advancement is a path to the fulfillment of achievement and power. As career success or career advancement is correlated with income, social status, and satisfaction in the lives of the workers, so it improves the quality of life. At the organizational level, career advancement is an incentive for individuals to achieve the goals of the organization. Therefore, organizations which have systems and structures to promote the individual will motivate people to achieve organizational goals.

Our model is based on social cognitive career theory (SCCT). SCCT is derived from Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory to

understand career development processes. SCCT has been applied to additional variables in social cognitive theory such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations on career development. SCCT focuses on learning variables such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations to explain career development. Thus, SCCT has provided a useful framework for researchers that has explored the influence of the individual and social context in career development through cognitive variables. SCCT also focuses on the way these variables interact with environmental factors to explain career development. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) divided SCCT into two components. The first component is learning experiences such as self-efficacy and outcome expectations. This component explains how an individual's background factors interact with the environment in the form of a variety of learning experiences. The second component is external factors such as social factors and organizational factors. Therefore, SCCT provides a framework for career research and SCCT explores the effect on career development in context with social factors such as race, culture, and gender. This study considered the career advancement of female executives in public organizations. SCCT explains the learning experience of each individual that affects the outcome of the occupation or career success.

Career advancement is somewhat synonymous with career success with only a slight difference in focus. Career advancement or career success is defined as the positive psychological or work-related outcomes or achievements which one accumulates as a result of work experiences (Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999). It consists of two categories—objective and subjective career success. Subjective career success is defined by psychological success which come from an individual's own appraisal of career attainment (Aryee, Chay, & Tan, 1994; Gattiker & Larwood, 1989). Therefore, the criteria of subjective career success are intangible outcomes such as career satisfaction, job satisfaction,

and perceptions of career accomplishments, whereas objective career success is defined by society or the organization. Thus, the criteria of objective career success are tangible outcomes which include salary, promotions, or hierarchical status. Further understanding of career success measurement can be illustrated by Table 1. In conclusion, career success has both objective and subjective components.

### Human capital

Human capital refers to the knowledge, experience, and skill of individuals. Human capital is an intangible asset. Therefore, human capital theory proposes that investments in human capital such as education, work experience, and on-the-job training are positively related to productivity, earning, and wealth (Becker, 1993). In fact, human capital variables were found to be an important set of predictors for career success (Johnson & Eby, 2011). Likewise, several studies have found a positive relationship between human capital and

career advancement (Boudreau, Boswell, & Judge, 1999; Guo, Xiao, & Yang, 2012; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Pachulicz, Schmitt, & Kuljanin, 2008; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). Moreover, human capital was also significantly associated with self-efficacy (Cunningham, Bruening, Sartore, Sargas, & Fink, 2005). These findings suggest that investment in human capital can instill confidence in employees to perform their jobs.

The current study focuses on two forms of human capital: 1) work experience refers to the number of years in the current work; and 2) training refers to the number of training courses taken. In conclusion, the importance of this concept and the related assumptions for establishing career advancement is stated in these hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 1:* Human capital positively influences self-efficacy.

*Hypothesis 2:* Human capital positively influences career advancement.

**Table 1** Synthesis of career success measurements

Author (year)	Sample	Career success definition
Gattiker and Larwood (1988)	Employees from major corporations in the USA	Job success, interpersonal success, life success, financial success, hierarchical success
Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990)	Black and white managers	Career satisfaction
Boudreau, Boswell, and Judge (1999)	US and European executives	Remuneration and promotion, employability, work satisfaction, career satisfaction, life satisfaction in general
Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001)	Employees in changing occupations	Promotions and pay, result in the career
Nabi (2001)	Administrative personnel	Intrinsic job success, extrinsic job success
Eby, Butts, and Lockwood (2003)	Borderless workers	Psychological outcomes, internal employability, external employability
Hennequin (2007)	Blue-collar workers	Material career success, psychological career success, social career success
Dries, Pepermans, and Carlier (2008)	Managers	Performance, advancement, self-development, creativity, security, satisfaction, recognition, cooperation, contribution

Source: Adapted from Hennequin (2007)

### Organizational Sponsorship

Organizational Sponsorship focus on the distinction of an organization that may enhance an employee's career advancement. The current study focused on two organizational variables—perceived organizational support and organizational socialization.

The concept of perceived organizational support was proposed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986). Perceived organizational support refers to the degree to which employees perceive their work organization to be concerned with their well-being and to value their contributions (Rasdi, Ismail, & Garavan, 2011). It will increase trust and the quality of the relationship between employees and their organizations. Several studies support a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and career advancement (Arokiasamy, Ismail, Ahmad, & Othman, 2011; Garavan, O'Brien, & O'Hanlon, 2006; Nabi, 2001). Moreover, perceived support by an organization brings about desired employee attitudes and behaviors including self-efficacy. The studies support the relationship between perceived organizational support and self-efficacy (Hashemi, Nadi, Hosseini, & Rezvanfar, 2012; Igbaria & Iivari, 1995).

Organizational socialization is defined as the ways in which the experiences of individuals in transition from one role to another are structured for them by others in the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Organizational socialization focuses on how newcomers learn the behaviors, attitudes, and skills necessary to perform their new jobs and roles. Many studies found that organizational socialization enhances job satisfaction, performance, and opportunities for greater pay and promotion (Chao, O'Leary-Kelley, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2005; Orpen, 1995). Saks and Gruman (2011) examined the relationship between socialization tactics and newcomer engagement and found that socialization tactics were positively related to self-efficacy. In

conclusion, the importance of this concept and related assumptions for establishing career advancement is stated in these hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 3: Organizational sponsorship positively influences career advancement.*

*Hypothesis 4: Organizational sponsorship positively influences career commitment.*

*Hypothesis 5: Organizational sponsorship positively influences self-efficacy.*

### Work-Family Balance

Family is an important part of human life. In addition, social values expect a women's role to be a housekeeper or mother and to perform the duties of cleaning, cooking and raising children. These duties take time that could be spent at work. Not surprisingly, some women in management were found to have few children or to be not married. Family factors have been found relate to women's advancement (Ballout, 2008; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Melamed, 1995; Metz, 2005; Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994). In conclusion, the importance of this construct and related assumption for establishing career advancement is stated in these hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 6: Work-family balance positively influences career advancement.*

*Hypothesis 7: Work-family balance positively influences career commitment.*

*Hypothesis 8: Work-family balance positively influences self-efficacy.*

### Gender-role Attitudes

Gender-role attitudes are the sets of norms through which people define the meaning of gender in their society. Generally, in eastern society, the gender-role of the female has been as housekeeper and mother, while the gender role of the male has been providing income for the family. Gender-role factors have been found to relate to career advancement (Ballout, 2008; Kirchmeyer, 1998; Melamed, 1995). Moreover, gender-role attitudes was also significantly associated with self-efficacy (Ahrens & O'Brien, 1996; Betz & Hackett, 1981;

Eisele & Stake, 2008; Mueller & Dato-on, 2008).

Korabit, Lero and Whitehead (2008) divided gender-role attitudes into traditional and egalitarian attitudes. Traditional gender-role attitudes propose that the women's role should give priority to family responsibilities and the men's role should give priority to work, whereas egalitarian gender-role attitudes propose that women's and men's roles should be equal in carrying out responsibilities for family and work. In conclusion, the importance of this construct and related assumptions for establishing career advancement is stated in these hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 9:* Gender-role attitudes positively influences career advancement.

*Hypothesis 10:* Gender-role attitudes positively influences self-efficacy.

### **Job characteristics**

Job characteristics are the attempts to design jobs with increased motivation. Therefore, job characteristics have been found relate to women's advancement (Aryee, Chay & Tan, 1994; Sonnenfeld & Kotter, 1982). Hackman and Oldham (Newstrom, 2011: citing Hackman & Oldham, 1980), with the definition of job characteristics consisting of five dimensions: task identity, task significance, autonomy, skill variety, and feedback.

*Hypothesis 11:* Job characteristics positively influence career advancement.

*Hypothesis 12:* Job characteristics positively influence career commitment.

*Hypothesis 13:* Job characteristics positively influence self-efficacy.

### **Career commitment**

Career commitment is a form of commitment that employees have towards their careers. It is a willingness to attain career goals. Empirical evidence supports the relationship between career commitment and career advancement (Jones & Whitmore 1995; Poon, 2004). In conclusion, the importance of this construct and related assumption

for establishing career advancement is stated in this proposition.

*Hypothesis 14:* Career commitment positively influences career advancement.

### **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy refers to people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1986). In fact, self-efficacy is the self-perception or an individual's beliefs about their capabilities. These beliefs provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. Many studies found that self-efficacy was correlated positively with salary, job satisfaction, and job performance (Higgins, Dobrow, & Chandler, 2008; Kim, Mone, & Kim, 2008; Saks, 1995). Likewise, the studies found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and subjective career success (Day & Allen, 2004; Valcour & Ladge, 2008).

Sherer et al. (1982) identified two dimensional scales to measure self-efficacy—general self-efficacy and social self-efficacy. General self-efficacy is efficacy expectancies in general areas, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of adversity. Social self-efficacy is efficacy expectancies in social situations. In conclusion, the importance of this construct and related assumption for establishing career advancement is stated in this proposition.

*Hypothesis 15:* Self-efficacy positively influences career advancement.

In this study, human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, career commitment, and self-efficacy were considered as antecedents of career advancement. This study also tests a model suggesting the way human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, career commitment, and self-efficacy influence career advancement both directly and indirectly. The proposed model is

presented in Figure 1. Studying these variables within a causal model will shed light on the interrelationships between these variables, in addition to help in explaining the career advancement in great detail.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample and Data Collection

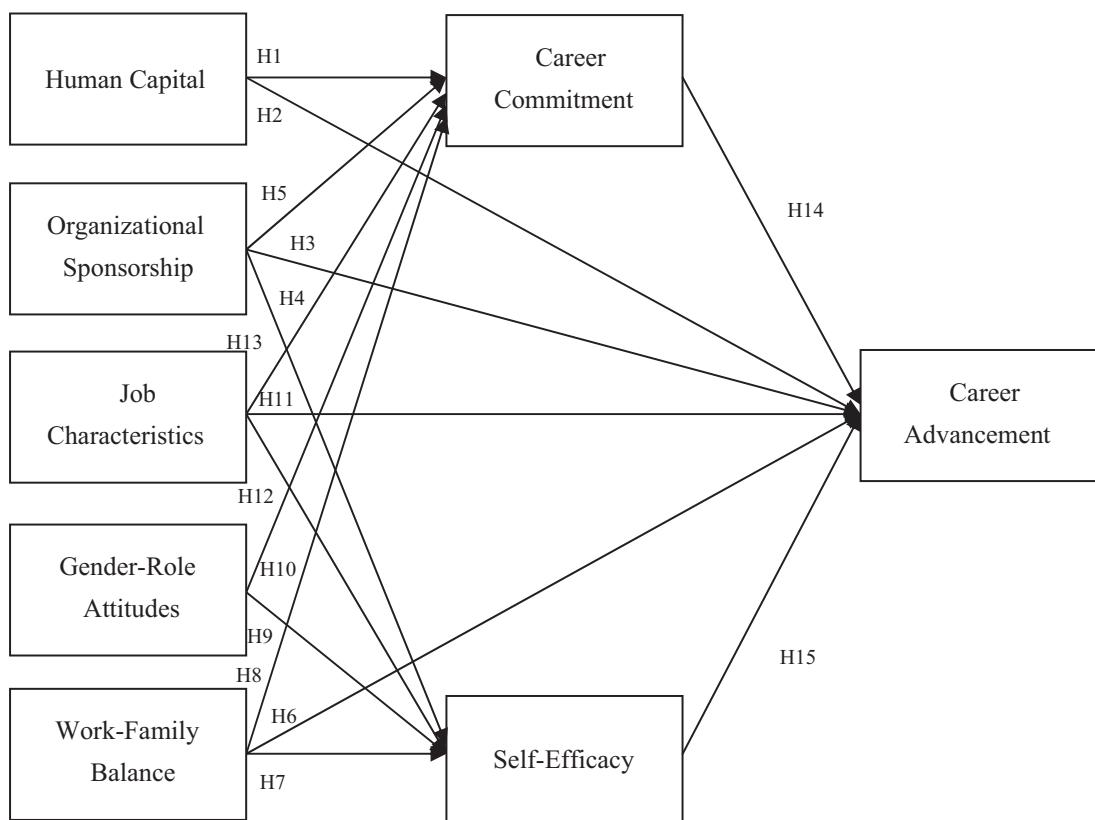
The population consisted of ordinary female civil servants in knowledge worker positions, managerial positions, and executive positions with a minimum of 10 years work experience in Thai public organizations. Approximately 300 organizations were chosen using stratified random sampling and 1,200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed among the sample group, of which 800 (67%) were returned having been completed.

### Measures

The present study employed a questionnaire survey approach to collect data, and all independent and dependent variables required five-point Likert's scales anchored by “strongly agree”, “agree”, “neutral”, “disagree” and “strongly disagree”.

### Analysis

This study analyzed the data using structural equation modeling (SEM) to establish causal relationships between these variables. SEM was conducted to assess the fit of the hypothesized model using the LISREL program. This procedure translates the theoretical model into a mathematical model in order to estimate and evaluate the relationships empirically (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996). Goodness of fit measures such as the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ), comparative fit index (CFI),



**Figure 1** The proposed model

standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to evaluate the model. In general, the recommended level of acceptable fit for a chi-square value over degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df$ ) was between 1 and 3. The CFI should be 0.90 or more. The RMSEA is a measure of approximate fit and values should be lower than 0.08. The SRMR values should also be lower than 0.08.

## RESULTS

The statistics used to assess the validity of the final overall model showed an acceptable fit of the measurement model to the data ( $\chi^2/df = 2.95$ ,

RMSEA = 0.049, CFI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.032). The results of the structural equation model analysis are shown in Figure 2 and the results of the hypotheses testing are shown in Table 2.

The results shown in Table 2 provide the path coefficients, *t*-values and construct relationship. The analysis provided support for the 13 hypotheses of the study. Human capital influences self-efficacy ( $\beta=0.01, p<.05$ ), supporting H1. The study found a significant relationship between organizational sponsorship and career advancement ( $\beta=0.47, p<.05$ ), career commitment ( $\beta=0.20, p<.05$ ), and self-efficacy ( $\beta=0.18, p<.05$ ), supporting H3, H4, and H5. Work-family balance was closely related to and affected career advancement ( $\beta=0.15, p<.05$ ), career

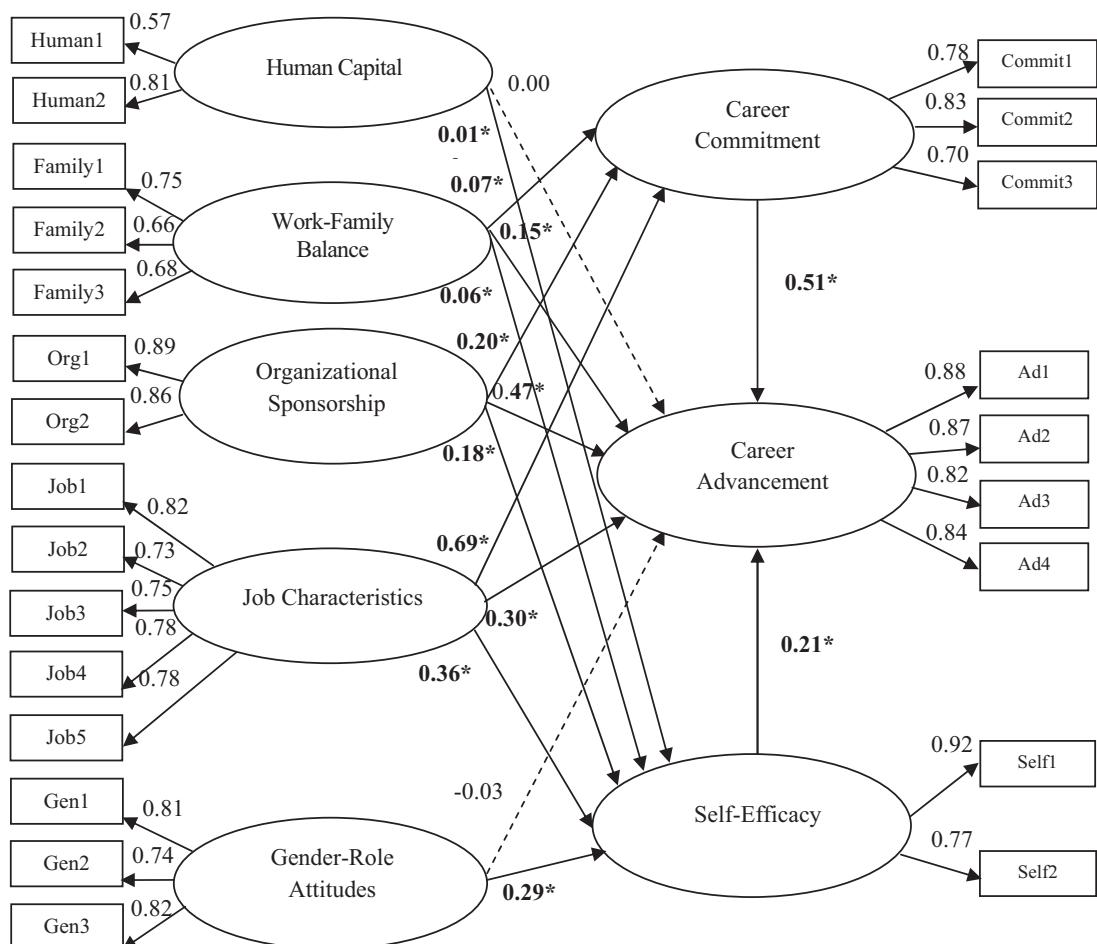


Figure 2 Results of structural equation model

commitment ( $\beta=0.07, p<.05$ ), and self-efficacy ( $\beta=0.06, p<.05$ ), as predicted in H6, H7, and H8, respectively. Gender-role attitudes were significantly and positively predicted by self-efficacy ( $\beta=0.29, p<.05$ ), supporting H10. As hypothesized, job characteristics exerted a direct effect on career advancement ( $\beta=0.69, p<.05$ ), career commitment ( $\beta=0.30, p<.05$ ), and self-efficacy ( $\beta=0.36, p<.05$ ), supporting H11, H12, and H13. Career commitment also affected career advancement ( $\beta=0.51, p<.05$ ), supporting H14. In addition, self-efficacy affected career advancement ( $\beta=0.21, p<.05$ ), supporting H15. Human capital was not found to be directly affected by career advancement, rejecting H2. Similarly, H9 was not supported by the study's finding which indicated that gender-role attitudes did not directly affect career advancement. The relevant hypotheses tests that were conducted to assess the significance of statistics tested the null hypothesis at the 95 percent confidence level.

The results reported in Table 3 provided path analysis showing the direct, indirect, and total effect of each construct. Job characteristics had the highest total effect on career advancement with effect sizes of 0.73. Career commitment (CC) had the highest direct effect on career advancement with effect sizes of 0.51, while job characteristics (JC) had the highest indirect effect with effect sizes of 0.43 at a significance level of .05.

In addition, human capital exerted an indirect effect on the career advancement through self-efficacy. Organizational sponsorship exerted a direct effect on career advancement and organizational sponsorship had an indirect effect on career advancement through self-efficacy and career commitment. Similarly, work-family balance affected career advancement directly and work-family balance also affected career advancement indirectly through the mediation of self-efficacy and career commitment. Gender-role

**Table 2** Tests of hypotheses

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	t-value	Result
H1	Human capital → Self-efficacy	0.01*	2.42	Support
H2	Human capital → Career advancement	0.00	0.29	Reject
H3	Organizational sponsorship → Career advancement	0.47*	11.48	Support
H4	Organizational sponsorship → Career commitment	0.20*	5.78	Support
H5	Organizational sponsorship → Self-efficacy	0.18*	4.86	Support
H6	Work-family balance → Career advancement	0.15*	4.75	Support
H7	Work-family balance → Career commitment	0.07*	2.51	Support
H8	Work-family balance → Self-efficacy	0.06*	2.20	Support
H9	Gender-role attitudes → Career advancement	-0.03	-0.57	Reject
H10	Gender-role attitudes → Self-efficacy	0.29*	5.20	Support
H11	Job characteristics → Career advancement.	0.69*	13.52	Support
H12	Job characteristics → Career commitment	0.30*	3.62	Support
H13	Job characteristics → Self-efficacy	0.36*	4.66	Support
H14	Career commitment → Career advancement.	0.51*	3.26	Support
H15	Self-efficacy → Career advancement	0.21*	2.98	Support

\* $p<.05$

attitudes had an indirect effect on career advancement through self-efficacy. Job characteristics exerted a direct effect on career advancement, and job characteristics had an indirect effect on career advancement through self-efficacy and career commitment. Finally, career commitment and self-efficacy directly influenced career advancement and played a bridging role to connect career advancement. Thus, career commitment was not only an independent variable, but also a mediator.

Overall, 77 percent of the variance in career advancement was explained by the set of predictors; human capital (HC), work-family balance (WFC), organizational sponsorship (OS), job characteristics (JC), gender-role attitudes (GRA), career commitment (CC), and self-efficacy (SE).

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the relationship between human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, career commitment, self-efficacy, and career advancement among Thai public organizations. The results showed that organizational sponsorship had a positive relationship with career advancement. This finding was in accordance with researchers

such as Nabi (2001), Tharenou, Latime and Conroy (1994). It should be taken into consideration that organizational sponsorship is an important antecedent of career advancement. Moreover, the results of this study showed that work-family balance positively influenced career advancement. Consistent with the view of a work-family balance (McGinnis & Morrow, 1990), the family factor was significantly related to career advancement. On the other hand, the results showed support for the importance of attempts to design a job with increased career advancement. Conducted studies have supported a positive relationship between job characteristics and career advancement (Aryee, Chay & Tan, 1994; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996).

## CONCLUSION

Based on a theoretical background and the conceptual model, this study examined the relationship between human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, career commitment, self-efficacy, and career advancement among women in Thai public organizations. This study indicated that organizational sponsorship both

**Table 3** Structural model results (direct, indirect, and total effect)

Variables	Effect	HC	WFB	OS	JC	GRA	CC	SE	R <sup>2</sup>
CA	DE	0.01	0.15*	0.47*	0.30*	-0.03	0.51*	0.21*	0.77
	IE	-	0.05*	0.14*	0.43*	0.06*	-	-	
	TE	0.01	0.20*	0.61*	0.73*	0.03	0.51*	0.21*	
CC	DE	-	0.07*	0.20*	0.69*	-	-	-	0.66
	IE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	TE	-	0.07*	0.20*	0.69*	-	-	-	
SE	DE	0.01*	0.06*	0.18*	0.36*	0.29*	-	-	0.53
	IE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	TE	0.01*	0.06*	0.18*	0.36*	0.29*	-	-	

\*p<.05

directly and indirectly affected career advancement through self-efficacy and career commitment. Moreover, the results of this study showed that the work-family balance directly and indirectly influenced career advancement through self-efficacy and career commitment. Finally, job characteristics both directly and indirectly impacted on career advancement through self-efficacy and career commitment. Therefore, career commitment and self-efficacy played a mediating role between human capital, organizational sponsorship, work-family balance, job characteristics, gender-role attitudes, and career advancement.

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