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Career Development in Organizations: Placing the Organization and the Employee on the Same Pedestal to Enhance Maximum Productivity

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Introduction

Globalization, rapid changes in information and communication technologies, and the emergence of competition in almost all aspects of life have impacted on the work life of people. The concept of a job for life is now a thing of the past. There is constant movement of people from one job place to another taking the form of casual, contract, part-time and full time work options and this bound to impact on their productivity. The uncertainties and constant flux in this aspect of life call for deliberate and conscious actions in order to be successful in one's work life. These deliberate and conscious actions should gear toward equipping one with the requisite attitudes, competencies, and knowledge to be able to fit into an organization and be relevant for the purposes of the organization and in all these the role of the organization serves as the heartbeat of career development.

What is a career?

A career involves the various functions and roles one engages in throughout life, and these include education, training, paid and unpaid work, family, volunteer work, leisure activities and more. Traditionally, career has been linked with paid employment and had been connected to a single occupation. The tide has changed in current situations. Today, career is seen as a continuous process of learning and development which is anticipated to enhance acquisition of values that foster employee development. The understanding of career stands out clearly when contrasted with a job. A job is something done simply to earn money, a career is series of connected employment opportunities; while a job is short-lived and has little influence on one's future work life, a career equips one with experience and learning for an entire life. A scrutiny of few definitions by some scholars will shed more light on what a career is. Herr et al (2004) and Beukes (2009) define 'career' as the sequence of interaction of individuals with a society, education and organizations throughout their lifespan. Arthur et al (1989) indicate that career is an evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time. A huge aspect of life which revolves around work and work provides challenge, self-fulfillment, income, and a sense of purpose. Weinert (2001) reveals that a career is a pattern of work experiences comprising a greater portion of one's life and relates to a number of phases or stages reflecting the transition from one stage of life to the next. Shertzer and Stone (2004) considered career as chosen pursuit, life work, success in one's profession; a sequence of major positions occupied by a person throughout his life time. It can be deduced from all the above definitions and more that a career relates the activities and positions involved in vocations, jobs, and occupations and cover one's life. Careers are an important part of talent management, but must be pointed out that individuals and organizations view careers in distinctly different ways. Much of the responsibility for career growth or development is on the shoulders of individual employees. So, the individual should conscientiously build and progress his career.

What is Career Development?

Career development entails the management of a person's growth and progress in his or her career. Braer, Flexer, Luft, and Simmons (2008) contend that an individual's career development is a lifetime process that encompasses the growth and change process of childhood, the formal career education at school, and the maturational processes that continue throughout a person's working adulthood and into retirement. The Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners describe career development as "the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future". Schreuder and Coetzee (2006) are of the view that a career consists of different stages and the individual is faced with different issues during each of these stages. It will therefore be accurate to assume that different individuals have different issues that confront them as they move on in their work lives and it may be possible for this to generate different views about career development and progression in different individuals.

Career Development Perspectives, Career Planning, and Career Management

It is obvious that different views of careers exist to explain this lifelong process. First, there is the protean view which assumes individuals will drive their careers and define goals to fit their life, the second view held is termed career without barriers. This views a person as having many possible routes for a career and many are across organizational boundaries. Portfolio career is the view that careers are built around a collection of skills and interests and are self-managed. The next view of career is described as authentic career and this view posits that people achieve a high level of personal insight and use this to follow a “true-to-self” career (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). These different perspectives emphasize the individual’s role in career development planning and management. This is not to say that organizations play no role in career development.

Organizations have a critical role to play in career development. The organization that pays attention to career development planning stands a high chance to reap high productivity from a properly trained, skilled, and talented workforce, therefore, the HR manager who is aware of this possibly will steer his organization to places and enhance competitive advantage. Organization-centred career planning focuses on a well-planned career development program which entails talent management, performance appraisal, development activities, opportunities for transfer and promotion, and planning and succession. The following are adopted by organizations to communicate to employees about opportunities and to assist with planning: career workshops, a career newsletter, and career counseling. Some organizations have career sections on their websites. Such sections have places of lists of available jobs for current employees wishing to change jobs. An organization’s website is a link to the external world and also a link to existing employees’ development. Such sites can be used for career assessment, information, and instruction. Organizations are advised to consider the importance of career sections for development as well as recruitment, when designing their websites. A key system that is employed by organizations to guide HR managers to develop employee careers is career paths or “map”. A career path represents employee movements through opportunities over a period of time. Although career paths are thought of as leading upward, good opportunities are also available in horizontal directions. This is normally created and shared with individual employees. Working with employees to develop career paths has aided organizations to retain key employees (Mathis & Jackson, 2011).

Change of career plans is no new thing to many employees. This change is normally prompted by organizational changes- downsizing, merging, technological innovations, retrenchment etc. so transiting from one workplace to another is normal and has brought to the fore the importance of individual-centred career planning. This focuses on an individual’s responsibility for a career rather than on organizational needs. The successful execution of certain key activities enables individual employees to properly manage their own careers. Three of such key activities are self-assessment, feedback on reality and setting career goals. In relation to self-assessment, employees should know their strengths and weaknesses, what interests them, what they do well, and what they do not like. Tools are available for this self-assessment and an example is the Strong Interest Inventory which career advisors use to help employees understand themselves (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). Regarding feedback on reality, individual employees need feedback on their performance and where they fit in organizational plans for the future. This information is had through performance appraisal feedback and career development discussions. In connection with setting a goal, the individual employee will have to decide on a desired path, set timelines and these prepare the individual employee to embark on a career of choice. The career goals are supported by plans for the employee to arm himself with the required training and experience to match toward the set goal.

It is evident from the discussion so far that career development is a joint responsibility between the organization and the individual employee. In this joint action, the planning and management aspects are made clear. When the individual employee self-assesses himself and consciously look out for opportunities, constraints, choices, consequences, and programs himself through training and education to equip himself with needed attitudes, skills, and knowledge, that is career planning, Storey (as cited in Hall, 1986). Career management connotes the ongoing process of preparing, implementing, and monitoring career plans undertaken by the individual employee alone or in concert with the organization’s career system, Storey (as cited in Hall, 1986). In the management process, the organization provides the mechanism/structure to match the individual employee’s career goals and demands the appropriate skills from the employees. In brief, career management is the organization’s response to meet the individual employee’s as well as to prepare the entire workforce to reach states career and organizational goals. The organization provides the structure, opportunities, tools, and support to help employees develop their skills and maintain their employability and the employees have the responsibility of managing their own career taking advantage of the opportunities available (Brown, 1998).

The Stages in Career Development -General Career Periods

Characteristics	Early Career	Mid Career	Late Career	Career End
Age group	20years(+/-)	30-40years	50years(+/-)	60-70years
Needs	Identifying interests, Exploring several jobs	Advancing in career; lifestyle may limit options, growth, opportunities.	Updating skills;individual is settled in; individual is a leader whose opinions are valued.	Planning for retirement, examining non work interest.
Concerns	External rewards, acquiring more capabilities	Values, contribution, intergrity, well-being	Mentoring, disengaging, organizational continuance	Retirement, part-time employment

Source- Mathis & Jackson, 2011

The concept of career development stages is an area that is seen differently by different authors. The above figure from Mathis and Jackson, 2011 indicates that there are four stages, the early career, mid-career, late career, and career end stages. They indicate the needs and concerns associated with stage. Super (as cited in Santrock, 2000) reveals that individuals go through five stages in career development. These are, according to him, the growth stage, the exploration stage, establishment stage, maintenance stage, and the declination stage. A critical analysis of these two forms of stages reveal that Mathis & Jackson (2011) have ignored the formative, early stages of an individual, that is the growth stage in Super's Case. The growth stage is the period where children affirm themselves and are affected very much by the relationship with family, school, and society. It is during this period that physical and cognitive development takes place, from birth to adolescence. In this stage, children move from no interest in vocations (0-3years of age) to extensive fantasies about careers (4-10years), to career interests based on likes and dislikes (10-12years), to beginning to consider ability in their career choices (13-14years). Considering the definition and description of career development, this paper consider Super's groupings very worthy to consider, for as revealed by the definition, career development is a lifelong phenomenon.

Career Development Theories

Career development theories are many and vary in perspectives. Each theory is a set of assumptions, typically based on research that explains human behaviour. Career development theories are critical to career development planning because they indicate what is important to clients and what to consider when embarking on career decision. Also, theories provide guidelines, tools and techniques for practice. However, these theories have some limitations. Few are: each theory tackles career choice and development from a different perspective, no one theorist presents a complete, comprehensive picture on career development. It must also be noted that much of these theories are context and culture specific and may not necessarily be applicable to all societies. This piece will concentrate on three of the career development theories and these are trait-and-factor theory, career development theory by Donald E. Super, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Trait-and-Factor Theory

This theory seeks to describe individual differences in personality types. The fundamental assumptions of this theory include are:

- ✚ individuals have peculiar, unique characteristics related to interests, abilities, needs, values, and personality trait
- ✚ occupations and jobs have unique characteristics to work tasks, skills required, demands and rewards
- ✚ the unique characteristics of both individuals and occupations can be measured
- ✚ workers and employers are most satisfied when there is a good fit between the characteristics of the worker and the characteristics of the occupation/job (Klein & Weiner, 1977).

Career Development Theory by Donald E. Super

This theory focuses on how career unfold over the life span of an individual. The theory's propositions are:

- ✚ People differ in their abilities, personalities, needs, values, interests, traits and self-concepts
- ✚ People are qualified by virtue of these characteristics, for a number of occupations
- ✚ Each occupation requires a characteristics pattern of abilities and personality traits
- ✚ Vocational preferences and competencies, the situation in which people live and work and hence, their self-concepts change with time and experience
- ✚ This process of change may be summed up in a series of life stages characterized as a sequence of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline
- ✚ The nature of the career pattern is determined by the individual's parental socio-economic level, mental ability, education, skills, personality characteristics (needs, values, interests, traits, and self-concept), career maturity, and by the opportunities to which an individual is exposed.

• Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Developed in the 1940, it specifies that

- ✚ Each of us is motivated by needs
- ✚ We must satisfy each need in turn starting with survival itself
- ✚ When the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied we can then be concerned with the higher order needs that are related to personal development.

Maslow hierarchy needs theory posits that needs related to our work roles begin at the 3rd Level-Love and Belonging. This level refers to becoming part of the work environment. The theory warns that one has to be certain that there are no deficits in physiological and safety needs before working with an individual on their work-related needs. At level 4-Esteem needs, we are achieving status at work and have a reputation in our field.

As already hinted, in-depth knowledge of the theories is adequate armour to tackle the knotty issues related to career development, really of immense value to career counselors or advisors.

It must be emphasized that there are various activities that are organized by the organizations for employees that go a long way to contribute to the career development processes of employees. It must, however, be stated that there are occasions that individual employees themselves also take steps to ensure they benefit from other programs organized outside the organizations they belong and these help in their career path. The following are some activities that are organized to train and equip employees with needed attitudes, skills, and knowledge:

- ✚ Workshops
- ✚ Seminars
- ✚ Short Courses
- ✚ Mentoring /Career Coaching
- ✚ Career Guidance Programmes
- ✚ Job Rotation
- ✚ Job Enrichment
- ✚ Promotions/Transfers

Importance of Career Development

Participating in the career development process is of value for several important reasons. Notable among them are those highlighted on below.

✚ Developing your career management skills

Engaging in the career development process will assist you in developing your career management skills. These career management skills include understanding your own strengths and weaknesses, needs, wants, interests, capabilities and aspirations, and linking these together with current educational and potential career opportunities which a particular degree will prepare you for.

✚ Identification of jobs and career paths

Undertaking career development would help the individual to identify jobs and career paths which would utilize his potential and allow him/her to meet his personal goals. As a result, one is likely to be more motivated and therefore more productive in his/her chosen career field, which will lead to greater personal and career success.

✚ Opportunity to access good-quality career information

When one engages in the career development process it will provide him/her the opportunity to access good-quality career information on education and training opportunities, occupations and their characteristics and labour market supply and demand. It will also allow you to gather information on the occupational implications of educational decisions, and the learning pathways that lead to particular occupational destinations. Engaging in the career development process will provide the opportunity to confirm and decide upon an educational and career goal in a well-informed and well thought through manner.

✚ Personal Support

Engaging in the career development process will provide you with personal support in the form of advice and

guidance from a competent Career Development Advisor. This individual can assist you in finding the information you need, understanding this information and relating it to your personal needs and circumstances and convert this information into personal career action plan.

Challenges in Career Development

Employees are faced with various problems in career development. A few of these challenges are as enumerated below.

✚ Mobility

Employees who prefer faster career advancement do not stay in one position and not even in a single organization. They move from position to position and from organization to organization most of the time upward but sometimes laterally. When these lateral moves are made, they may be internal or external. When the individual is loyal to the organization, the lateral moves are internal; the individual may shift from one department to another. In that case this department may give him a different career altogether and different life style may accompany. This can affect his career path.

✚ Career and Family

Men and women who pursue their own careers have specific problems. Professional men, when they become so engrossed with work, tend to reduce their attention at home. They expect their wives to take care of all the family matters and not to disturb them. Professional men tend to focus more on their career than on non-work issues such as family, socialization, and leisure activities. Since professional men spend most of their time and energy on the work, they like to relax at home and not face problems at home. If they tackle problems at home, it is likely to affect their efficiency and their behaviour at work. As their children grow up, then professional men ought to solve problems at home by discussing with their spouses. Professional women face real conflict between work and home responsibilities. Work demands may limit the amount of time women can devote to home responsibilities.

✚ Dual-Career Family

These days both partners in the families have professional careers, husband-wife pairs often experience conflicts between their work and family responsibilities. The family members develop commitment to both careers. They build flexibility in home and on the job. Each person must be willing to adjust his or her plans as required in order to reduce the impact of their careers on their family lives. Members of two-career families must be skilled at time management. This puts a lot of strain on these couples. The situation is even worse if they are newly married.

✚ Inadequate Financial Resources

Limited financial Resources tend to be a major hinderance to career development. This usually prevents the youth from pursuing their dream careers. This is because it hinders them from attending additional schooling or training. It is even more pervasive in Sub-Saharan Africa where a lot of families live below the poverty line.

✚ Inadequacy of Employment Opportunities

The issue of limited employment opportunities is a key barrier to career development. Though people may be willing to develop their career along a certain identified path, the inadequacy or in some cases absence of employment opportunities impedes their desire for such noble courses. This is normally very common among university graduates.

Conclusion

Career development is a vital exercise that cannot be ignored. Current technological innovation and globalization, with prevailing competitions among corporate organizations have made the world of work excessively active, requiring up-to-date attitudes, knowledge, and skills. To survive in the world of work, the organization and the employee must not leave career development to chance. Career development is a joint activity between the individual employee and the organization, as already noted. Both parties should do what is expected to ensure successful work climate that will bring about maximum productivity.

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