

The Career Development Process

Over the past 30 years a fairly large number of people have studied various aspects of career development. One recent review of this literature references well over 500 books and articles.¹ Because many of these writers approached the subject with very different backgrounds and for very different purposes, the literature tends to be split into a number of camps, with little cross-referencing or building. Although there have been several attempts to synthesize these divergent approaches, as yet there is no one generally accepted theory of career development. The different camps may be characterized as having a sociological or a psychological perspective.

Perspectives

The Sociological Approach

The sociological approach tends to look at society as a structure consisting of various occupations. Careers are viewed as movement from one occupational level to another within a structure stratified by status and by the occupational role expectations of a person in a given status. The occupational level achieved in career development is seen as the result of a social process. Membership in a social class (indicated normally by father's occupation status) and socialization (the process by which individuals are

trained, their expectations developed, and their values internalized) are seen as the prime determinants of occupational level. In addition, environmental factors (such as personal contracts, available financial backing, and socioeconomic conditions in society) are also relevant. Any one of these factors may be given major importance as an independent or explanatory variable, depending on the interests of the researcher in question.

The Psychological Approach

The psychological perspective is taken by those who support an individual theory of career development. Some take an intrapsychic approach, seeing unconscious forces as influencing conscious decision making. The shape of these unconscious needs or drives is often postulated to stem from early childhood experiences. Satisfying them then becomes a major determinant in job choice. Others take a rational decision-making approach to career development. Individuals are seen as testing themselves through interaction with their environment, weighing the factors and alternatives, then making conscious career choices. According to some scholars, this all occurs in a developmental process consisting of various stages through which the individual passes.

Scholars in this camp disagree particularly with respect to the relative importance of different variables. Some claim that environmental factors are most important in career development; others make the same claim for intrapsychic factors. Some believe

¹S. H. Osipow, *Theories of Career Development* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973).

that most career job decisions are made consciously by individuals; others feel they are made unconsciously. Some believe that a person's experiences during the first few years of life are central to career development; others do not. And so on.

For our purposes, these disagreements need not distract us. The basic points on which most of the experts agree are strong enough to provide us with a solid base from which to proceed.

What Is a Career?

The first issue is that of career itself. The term originally referred to the speed with which a defined course was traversed by a wagon or contestant. Two interesting features of this older usage that remain today are those of speed and of defined course. We often think of a *career* as a defined course and of the success of an individual in that career as measured by whether or not the person completed the course (reached the top) and how quickly. But this view is unnecessarily limiting. Consider a broader view.

Scope: Individual, Organizational, Occupational

A person's career lies, in scope, somewhere between life style and job. A life style encompasses all aspects of a person's life. A job is a specific set of interrelated tasks in a particular context. A career may affect most or even all aspects of a person's life, but it is not all of it. Rather, a career is that part of a person's life that pertains to the work they do to sustain their lives physically and psychologically. By *work* we mean that which people do in exchange for the tangible or intangible things that sustain them. A career also consists of more than a job; it is a *series* of jobs that are related in some way.

The means we use to relate that series of jobs determines how we use the term career. We might use individual, job content, or organizational boundaries to relate a series of jobs to one another.

If we use the individual, then we may say that *everyone* has a career. We may or may not be paid for the work we do, but we all do things that are intended to sustain our lives. Homemakers bear and raise children and manage households. In return, they receive things that sustain their lives—food and shelter at a minimum, and optimally love, support, companionship, and fulfillment. Volunteer workers receive the satisfaction of contributing to society, although volunteer workers must also have some other

means of support. For some, this is work; for others, it is heritage. In the latter case, where family wealth provides the support, a person's career may be almost totally in volunteer work. The *individual career* is the most comprehensive view of the term in the sense that it can incorporate the other careers we are about to mention.

Sometimes we say that so-and-so had a fine career at XYZ company. In this instance, we are using organizational boundaries to define a career. The jobs one has in an *organizational career* vary in terms of their content rather than their affiliation. A manager may be promoted or given a new assignment. A wife may have another child, or the family (the organization) may move to another location. These examples all represent changes in job content, but not in the career within the organization.

We might have said that so-and-so is pursuing a career in accounting. We then use job content to talk about *occupational careers*. Occupational careers are career courses defined by a particular set of related tasks for which one is compensated. The courses have relatively well-defined career paths. An occupational career in commercial banking, for instance, typically consists of some education in finance and a series of jobs/titles, including financial analyst/credit officer, account responsibilities (assistant vice president), industry responsibilities (vice president), regional responsibilities (senior vice president), and bank-wide responsibilities (president).

Organizations can offer at least a job and at most a career that is both organizational and occupational in nature (in the case of the person who dies while working in the same company in the same occupational area he or she began in). Usually companies offer an organizational career with a varied occupational content or a segment of an occupational career.

Perspective: Internal or External

We also can take either an external or an internal perspective to each of the careers we have discussed.² By *external* we mean the observable characteristics of a person's career—the salary, the title, the tasks assigned, the power wielded, the speed of promotion, and so on. When we observe a person's career progress and remark, "That person's going nowhere," we are using the ancient imagery to comment on the person's external career. The internal

²See Douglas T. Hall, *Careers in Organizations* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Goodyear, 1976).

perspective refers to a person's subjective experiencing of the traversing of the career course. This internal view is distinct from and not necessarily parallel to the external view. A person may, for example, have a "successful" external career by reaching the top (whatever that may be) in good time, but be very dissatisfied with the result. This evaluation grows from a comparison of career-related results with internally held values, beliefs, and aspirations.

For a long time, many employers and researchers ignored the significance of the internal view of the career. You can no doubt see the importance of taking personal reactions to external careers into account in understanding careers. The external measures of our careers occur against the backdrop of our internal experiencing of those measures, and it is the expectations, the hopes, the desires, and the values of the latter that determine in large part the sense of "integration"³ and satisfaction we experience with the former.

Recently a number of books have been written which recognize this important distinction between the external and the internal career. Their titles are self-explanatory: *Career Success/Personal Failure*, by Abraham Korman (Prentice-Hall, 1980); *Must Success Cost So Much?*, by Paul Evans and Fernando Bartolome (Basic, 1981); *The Failure of Success*, edited by Alfred J. Marrow (AMACOM, 1972); *Tradeoffs*, by Barry Greiff and Preston K. Munter (New American Library, 1980); *Work, Family and the Career*, edited by Brooklyn Derr (Praeger Special Studies, 1980); and *Balancing Jobs and Family Life* by Haleyon Bohem and Anamaria Viveros-Long (Temple University Press, 1981). Taken together, these books are saying that it is not fruitful for individuals or organizations to think about career management from an external view only. Rather, to avoid potentially high personal and organizational costs, we must look at career management and development from both the external and the internal perspectives and understand better the dynamics between the two. Our lives are not as well compartmentalized as we might hope. The activities and events of one sphere will surely affect the other, and we should understand how.

A Conceptual Overview

So far, we have said that:

1. A career is the series of related jobs that a person does to sustain his or her life physically and psychologically.

³See Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), p. 268.

2. Jobs may be related on at least three different dimensions—the individual, the organization, and the job content.
3. Careers have both an external (or objective) and an internal (or subjective) set of characteristics. Both need to be considered carefully.

Exhibit 22-1 summarizes this conceptual view of careers. It also raises the question of time and how a career changes or "develops" over time.

Career Development

The phrase "career development" is one that has been used extensively and with a wide variety of meanings. Most of the usages of "develop" have to do with growth or progress, and yet there are many situations and cases in which the unfolding of a person's individual career can hardly be described as a progression or growth. We prefer instead the photographic connotation of *develop*—"to render visible"—because it reflects the importance of the internal as well as the external perspective on the career, and it carries with it the notion of a picture gradually taking shape. *Career development* consists of the gradual disclosure of the activities that internally and externally sustain an individual through life. This phrasing permits us to talk about the various careers in a variety of terms—not just progressive ones. We can discuss people who failed in their occupational or organizational careers but are happy

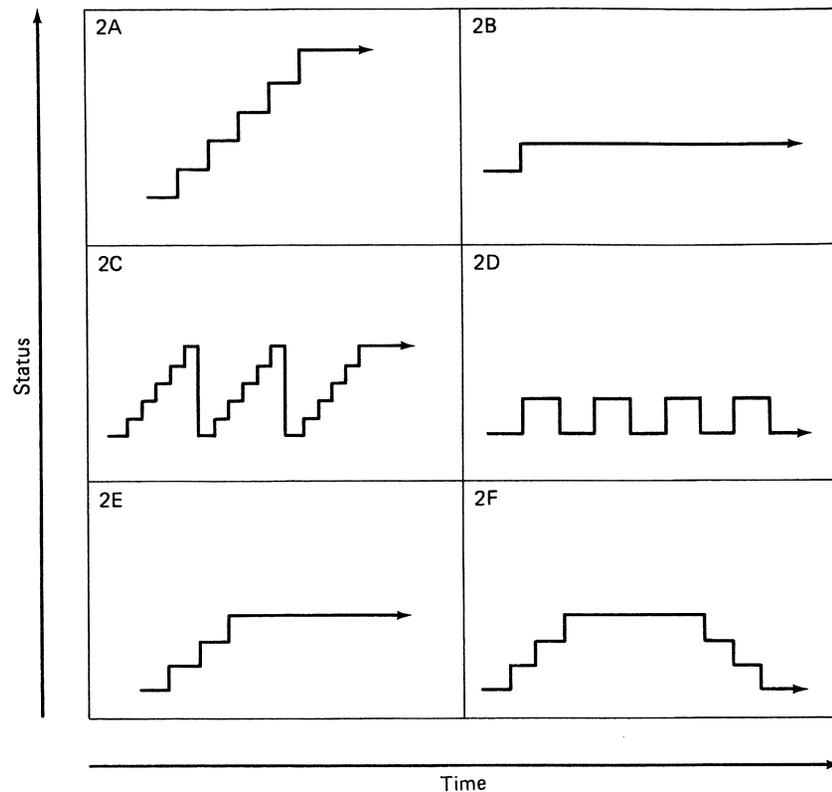
Exhibit 22-1

The Career

<i>Individual Career</i>	
The set and sequence of jobs that sustain life both physically and psychologically. May consist of occupational (related by job content) and/or organizational (related by organization) career segments.	
<i>External Characteristics</i>	<i>Internal Characteristics</i>
Title	Self-concept
Salary	Goals
Perquisites	Hopes
Prestige, status	Aspirations
Power	Values
Frequency of changes	Feelings
Location	Satisfaction
Travel	Patience
Influence	Anger
Number of subordinates	Disappointment
Career path traversed	

Exhibit 22-2

External Career Shapes



in their individual careers, as well as people who succeeded in occupational careers but “failed” in individual careers.

Time is central to the idea of career development. And when one thinks of the passage of time, one wonders about marking its passage and the changes that occur within it in some way. Several researchers have tried to characterize stages through which most people’s careers pass. Super⁴ and Dalton, Thompson, and Price⁵ outlined the two most commonly accepted ones—about which we shall say more later. For the time being, suffice it to say that time is a key dimension in the consideration of the career development process.

We can add to time a number of other dimensions and begin to sketch out the *shape* of careers over time. Status, income, and learning rate are the most common dimensions used to develop these

shapes. Consider the career shapes shown in Exhibit 22-2, which can be generated by using time and status as the defining dimensions. The first four represent common career patterns identified by Professor Michael Driver at USC. These patterns are linear, steady-state, spiral, and transitory, respectively.

The linear pattern reflects the drive of an individual to reach the top of an organization or occupation. The steady-state shape reflects careers that show little change over long periods of time. Many professional occupations fit this pattern. The spiral pattern characterizes the careers of people who for a number of reasons leave an occupational or organizational career every five to ten years to pursue something new. A desire for variety or new learning is often the motivation. Exhibit 18-2D shows the transitory pattern, in which people move from job to job relatively quickly and with no apparent long-term objective in mind.

To these four patterns, we have added two. First, in 2E, is a “plateaued” career; second, in 2F, is a declining career. Both are common in occupational and organizational careers.

⁴Super, D., J. Crites, R. Hummd, H. Moser, P. Overstreet, and C. Warnath, *Vocational Development: A Framework for Research* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1957).

⁵Dalton, J., P. Thompson, and R. Price, “The Four Stages of Professional Careers,” *Organization Dynamics*, Summer 1977.

The notion of a person's career gradually taking shape over time makes us wonder about the factors that affect shape.

Factors That Shape Career Development

The shape a person's career takes over time is a function of several things. Let us consider these factors within the context of the job and career opportunities provided by organizations. Although we will not treat careers that are created by individuals outside organizations, there are many parallels to the organizational context.

When an individual accepts a position in an organization, there are costs and benefits to both parties. Simply put, the individual gives up time and talent and receives compensation and a job focus. The organization gives up financial resources and gains talent and time. In this arrangement, there is an explicit or implicit attempt to match costs and benefits. In reality, these costs and benefits change in various ways over time, and both parties attempt to manage the fit continuously. When changes occur, decisions are made. Both parties assess the alternatives and choose one. Thus, the career-related

decisions for both sides have a direct impact on the shape of the career development of the individual. The factors that affect the career-related decisions on both sides have an indirect influence on the shape of career development.

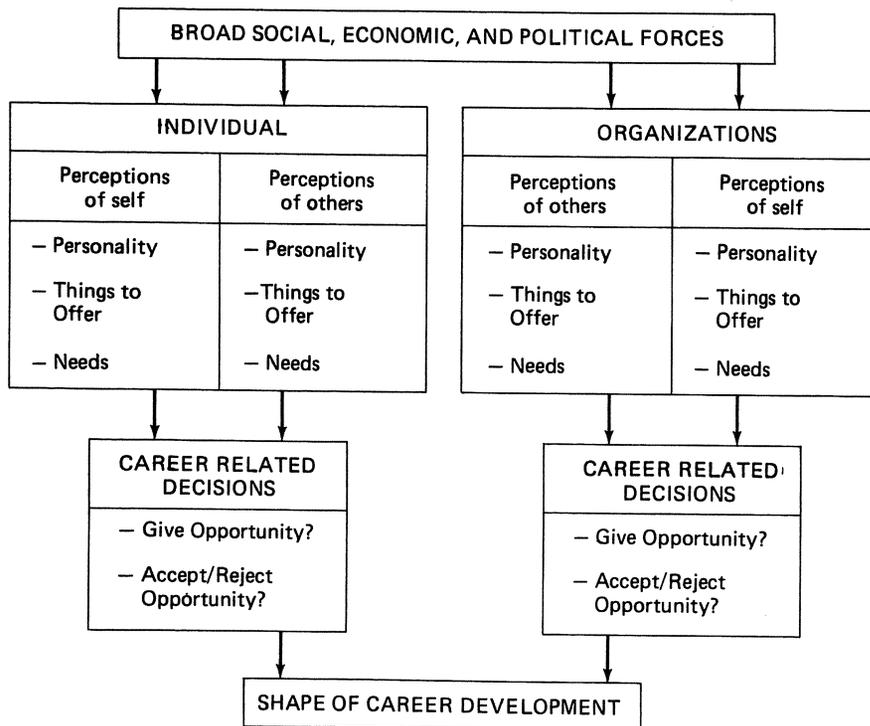
A simplified view of this is presented in Exhibit 22-3. The self-assessment process was intended to give you a more accurate picture of your perceptions of yourself. The career development process we are about to consider is intended to help you learn a process so that you can get a more useful picture of the organization, can give the organization a more accurate picture of you, can understand more clearly how the organization sees itself, and can help both the organization and you make more productive decisions.

The Career Development Process

The first step in the individual's side of the career development process is to develop a focus. There are simply too many alternatives in society to examine them all. Next, you must begin to generate options (step 2). This will require that you make contact with organizations in your target focus, and then generate information that both you and the organi-

Exhibit 22-3

Factors That Shape Career Development



zation can use to assess the fit between you and organization. This assessment will generate career-related decisions based on the criteria both you and the organization deem important. Your experience with those decisions then becomes additional data for your ongoing self-assessment. This process (step 3) continues throughout life, and is summarized in Exhibit 22-4. It is important to note that you have as much responsibility for the accuracy of the decisions as the firm does. Every organization is not right for you. Although many people think of the job search as an exercise in selling, in fact it is also an exercise in buying.

The remainder of this book is organized roughly as follows in Exhibit 22-4. First, we will consider the job search process. The examples we use will relate specifically to people searching for jobs directly out of school, but the process is equally applicable to people about to make job or career transitions. We will help you consider the importance of developing a job search focus using your implications (step

4). Then we will consider ways of getting information about the vast array of opportunities in society (step 5). Having established a focus to your job search, you will then consider how to seek out and generate options that fit your focus. Once you have some options, you will need to assess them and choose one (step 6). We will provide some ways of thinking about and doing that. When you have accepted an offer, your transition to your new job or career will be much more effective and efficient if you manage the joining up process (step 7). Then, being up to speed in your new job, you will be starting the cycle again, reassessing continuously your fit with the job and career and adding to your knowledge of yourself (step 8). The choices that you and the organization make will then determine the shape of your career development and your satisfaction with it over time. Near the end of the book, we will help you to anticipate some career-related issues that will face you in one form or another in the future.

Exhibit 22-4

The Self-Assessment and Career Development Process

