

THE INFLUENCING FACTS OF CAREER SUCCESS

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Abstract: The career success it's a combination between circumstances and the way one answers to the said. In order to have a successful career it is necessary a long term planning of the professional line to be carried out, as well as the anticipation of some certain problems which may emerge. Far from being easy, the strategical planning of the career it's a continuous process which demands involvement, time and effort. The only way to solve the problems and to obtain success is through personal development. There is a powerful correlation between happiness, professional success or quality relationships and the development of a certain abilities and key-attitudes such as: communication, planning and self-trust. Among all the investments that can be made, the investment in the personal development brings out the most satisfying results.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The natural process of growing up to which everyone is subjected to marks our existence even on the professional level. Choosing a career and forming a job identity play a vital role in our development, in the process of becoming mature, fulfilled persons, in finding our personal and social balance. People are often evaluated depending on their professional performance, by means of criteria such as competence, skill, proficiency or, on the contrary, inefficiency. The superior levels of professional skills are often described in close relation to the dimensions of a some works of art and we could say that practically every profession ia an art. We all want to be appreciated for our work, to function in a field of activity that attracts us and makes us fulfilled, to have a jo to which we can fully dedicate ourselves. A successful career represents for some people making as much money as possible, for others getting official recognition, prizes or fame, while a whole category considers itself fulfilled just by having an exciting job. Planning and building a successful career (no matter how individuals perceive success and professional fulfillment) represent a process with multiple stages – some easier, other more difficult. And still, professional development can be managed, planned, monitored, in order to be oriented towards a successful career.

2. THE SUCCESS FACTORS IN A CAREER

The determining factors of a successful career represents a matter of interest for both the employee and the organisation. Wayne (1999) mentions the fact that the success in a professional career can be defined by means of both subjective and objective terms. The objective terms allow the identification of visible accomplishments, such as : salary raise or promotion to a higher level in the hierarchy. The subjective terms express only the personal opinions of the employees, which in fact do not correspond to the objective reality, thus lacking objectiveness. For example, the salary and the personal development are subjective terms.

According to Cagle (2004), the success in a professional career can be defined by conjugating four factors : knowledge, experience, personality and performance. Cagle (2004) combines these factors in the following formula :

$$\text{Success} = (\text{Knowledge} + \text{Experience} + \text{Personality}) \times \text{Performance} \quad (1)$$

Some years before Cagle (2004), Russu and Voicu (1993) proposed a mathematical expression of success⁴¹ based on competence and effort:

$$\text{Success} = \text{Competence} + \text{Effort} \quad (2)$$

By analyzing the extension of this equation of success, we shall notice that Russu and Voicu (1993) define success by means of three factors : competence (meaning theoretical knowledge plus experience in the field of activity) and effort or personality (personality is defined by skills, competence, temper and character). The reporting of Cagle (2004) to performance proved a more accurate approach of success. As far as we are concerned, we shall consider performance as the « engine » of success.

Getting back to Cagle (2004), we shall notice that the four factors are interdependent. Knowledge, experience and personality appear as adding factors, while performance is a multiplying element. Although this last element seems more important than the others, positive performance cannot be achieved in the absence of the first three factors.

Knowledge has a leverage effect because it allows us to obtain information rapidly. Knowledge represents a fluid mix of experiences, values, contextual information and intuition which provide the background for the evaluation and integration of new experiences and information. It is based on summed-up, synthesized, organized information, in order to increase the level of understanding and comprehension. Knowledge represents the premise for the decisions and actions of a person or organisation.

Experience is perceived as an opportunity to put knowledge into practice and personality as a vector used to apply knowledge and accumulate experience. Work experience is essential for building up a successful career. It comes to add up to knowledge acquired throughout the years and helps develop social and cognitive, specialized skills. Every new experience in a field of activity is a stage in the process of shaping a successful career, and experimenting with multiple fields creates the opportunity to identify the specific activity which suits the person the most, which offers him/her the most satisfaction and confidence that he/she will make the best of it.

Personality actually means what is defining for somebody, one's way of behaving. Defining human personality must take into account its four dimensions : skills, competence, temper, character (Constantinescu, ș.a., 2008, p.352). Skills and competence make up the functional side of personality, while temper and character its actional side.

By defining professional success as a performant adaptation to work requirements, the relative character of this phenomenon raises the issue of the criteria used to evaluate performance, of the standard to which performance reports to. The evaluation criteria can be subjective (intra or interpersonal), but also objective (quantitative), on the long or short term. Each of these criteria has a relative validity, depending on the nature of profession, organisation type, society as a whole.

The effects produced by the four influence factors of success are : personal satisfaction, educational level, ethical behaviour and career mobility.

Personal satisfaction is one of the indicators for a successful career and manifests itself as a powerful stimulus in the work activity. Personal satisfaction can be presented as effort recognition from the part of the organisation, managers, co-workers, family and friends.

Every organisation should be interested in what represents personal satisfaction for its members, so they can get the best results. The connection between satisfaction and manager activity is vital for a successful management. People are the most valuable asset of an organisation and, at the

¹ The two researchers have evaluated the managerial success. In this context, they have stated that, at the beginning of a career (in management, of course), the experience is very low and the knowledge is very high. In a relatively short period of time (5 years), the ratio gets reversed. Based on this idea, they stated that, as the employee (manager or executant) gets older, he/she is forced to become more preoccupied with keeping oneself informed.

same time, the only asset which can work for and against its goals. As a result, the effort to know the mechanisms which motivate employee behaviour is not difficult to understand.

Managers are supposed to identify the effort recognition forms that get most satisfaction to their employees. Effort recognition could mean: financial rewards, bonuses, more spare time, holidays, promotion, involving into new activities, gratitude, expressing appreciation in front of other members of the organisation, diplomas, prizes.

In the category of those for which personal satisfaction means appreciation coming from co-workers are those who want to work in an environment based on cooperation and admiration for the obtained results. Those who seek the appreciation of their superiors will not be too interested in leadership positions, their « anchor » will be technical or security competence.

The appreciation coming from family or friends, which can express their approval or disapproval of the employee's activity is another form of manifesting personal satisfaction. For most individuals, personal life, outside the job, is of utmost importance, in these circumstances, the managers are supposed to create the conditions² to emphasize the role and importance of the employees within an organisation.

For the employees whose personal satisfaction stems from the role they play in the organisation, the degree of influence upon others, the impression made on the others are very important.

The education level is a requirement for success. The employees manifesting a greater availability towards studying will also have the possibility to be more successful in their professional career, as by studying they will accumulate more knowledge.

The ethical behaviour, characterized by honesty in the activity, is a defining effect of success, which emphasizes the most significant personal values guiding every person's existence. Having an ethical behaviour means accepting and respecting the ethical codes promoted by the organisation and the community. The ethical behaviour can be considered a long-term investment it does not produce immediate results, but it has a decisive influence over personal evolution.

The career mobility is a factor by the intermediary of which is ensured the survival on an ever-changing market. Loyalty towards an organisation is important, still it tends to be manifested over a short period of time. Career mobility is in close relation to the way the ability to adapt to environment changes is manifested. In the case where the employee identifies himself/herself to his/her career, there is a danger of self-limitation. Individuality is the expression of character, values, personality and roles played by an employee. Career stands at the basis of opting for one of these roles and the fact that they multiply throughout life provides variety and intellectual stimulation.

3. EFFICIENT MANAGER VERSUS SUCCESSFUL MANAGER

As previously mentioned, mobility stands for one of the influence factors of the career evolution. Vertical mobility, one of its forms, is expressed by means of promotion. In this context, we consider interesting to analyze a study by Luthans (1988) on the success in career. The study was targeted on 450 managers and revealed the different degrees of involvement in four types of activity: traditional management (decision-making, planning and control), communication (exchange of information), human resource management (motivation of employees, conflict management, training) and relation management (politics, socializing, interacting with people outside organisation).

Figure 1 reveals the fact that a manager dedicates, on average:

- 32% of his/her time to traditional management;
- 29% to communication;
- 20% to human resource management;
- 19% to involvement in political relation

² A solution might be organizing reunions (a day when the employees' children can visit the organization, Christmas parties, birthday parties) which include important persons in the employees' lives.

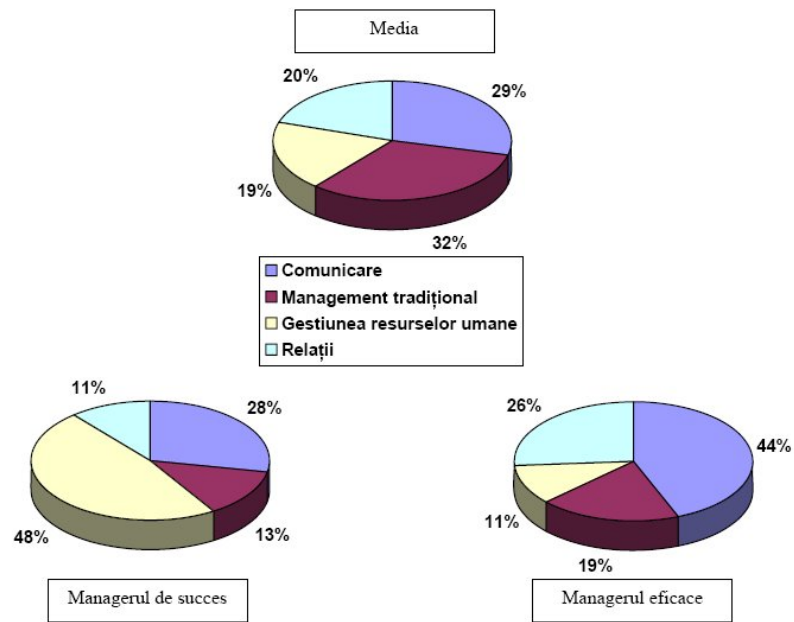


Figure 1.13. The Relation between Efficiency and Rapid Promotion (Cerdin, 2000)

Still, we notice that the successful manager (in terms of promotion) does not dedicate the same importance to activities which the efficient manager (in terms of quantity and quality of performance) considers a priority. Thus, the successful manager, defined by a strong career-oriented force, consider of utmost importance developing relations, as he/she does not try to maximize his/her performance, but instead he/she focuses on maintaining it at a satisfactory level. In order to advance in his/her career, the manager will rely upon relations.

On the other hand, for the efficient manager, communication is the most important activity. The efficient manager blends the vision upon business with orientation towards objectives and results, self-respect with open attitude towards the others. This type of manager does not delegate tasks, but responsibilities and authority. Responsibility delegation involves transferring attributes and competence over the team in order to achieve certain results. Authority delegation is equivalent to the transfer of power, the right to decide without the manager's intervention. In his/her activity, the efficient manager will seek the permanent improvement of performance and a high professional satisfaction among the employees.

The results of Luthans' study (1998) contradicted the historical hypothesis according to which the key to promotion is only performance. It seems that the social and political attributes can play a vital role in getting a promotion. In the perspective of career management, all organisations should carefully analyze their promotion decisions. The promotion decision must be thoroughly pondered upon. The idea that past successes obtained by the employees form a favourable prediction⁴³ as to their success in a higher position can be mistaken. This is why establishing a distinction between performance and potential is crucial.

Igalens (1991) proposes four levels of evaluation for the employees, in order to promote them, such as: cognitive abilities (they correspond to the defining features of the person), attitudes (manifested by the actions of the person), performance (the results obtained), potential (the capacity to evolve, difficult to evaluate). After identifying high-potential individuals, the organisation will involve in their professional improvement, by including them in special training programmes. Thus, the chances of professional progress will be much higher.

⁴³ There is often a tendency to make a confusion between evaluation of the present position and the prediction concerning the chances to be successful in a future position. This error is especially present in the context of international mobility when it is easily considered that a competent person in Paris will be as competent in Beijing. One ignores the fact that strenght can easily transform into weakness and weakness can become critical, in the context of assuming new responsibilities.

4. THE MENTORING SYSTEM

In the process of getting a promotion, an essential role is played by the mentor. From a social and human point of view, the mentor is that person having extended experience and knowledge in a specific field of activity which agrees on providing support and upward mobility to his/her proteges (Kram, 1985).

Another concept developed in close connection to the term « mentor » is « mentoring ». Mentoring must be perceived as a process which aims at transmitting information to newly-employed by people with extended experience in a certain field, in order to help them form a set of skills. For this reason, mentoring must be perceived as an interactive process between two individuals, based on the premise of reciprocal involvement, a process of guidance of the development of learning and assuming responsibilities by both parties. Mentoring is not a continuous process, it unfolds over a limited period of time, having as goal the accomplishments of pre-arranged objectives of both the mentor and the disciple. Any mentoring relationship, once established within an organisation, is developed over a period of time long enough for the mentor to convince himself/herself that the disciple develops and uses extensively the information he/she provides. And because throughout this period, both the needs and the nature of this relationship change, the mentor must become aware of the evolutions and vary the process, depending on the requirements, the degree and type of attention, assistance, counsel, information and encouragement he/she provides.

The mentor's role is vital as a good mentor is an excellent motivator. The person having the capacity of providing professional motivation will always know how to inspire and form people. The relationship between a mentor and his/her disciple is always based on trust. One of the first skills a mentor will try to develop in a disciple is to ability to process information.

We consider that every organisation could function even more effectively if it had a number of specially prepared people, able to become mentors in certain situations. These persons are experienced people, willing to share their knowledge, they are counsellors providing emotional, professional and moral guidance to the employees. The mentors are people providing periodically a specific feedback on the performances of their disciples. They are genuine information sources and support in obtaining a facility, being practically identity models. There are two types of mentors :

- formal mentors: designated by the organisation within a training programme;
- informal mentors: the organisation does not interfere in any way in the process; it is an evolving relationships between the mentor and his/her disciple.

The mentor supports his/her disciple by providing two types of functions (Kram, 1985): the psychological and social function (contributing to the professional evolution and development of the disciple) and the career development function (stimulating the promotion of the disciple within the organisation).

The psychological and social function presents three features of the mentor, which appears as a role model, advisor and friend. The mentor is the figure with which the disciple can identify to, especially in terms of behaviour, attitudes and values. As an advisor, the mentor provides help in solving professional and personal dilemmas. As a friend, the mentor makes proof of his/her good willing beyond the requirements of the professional activity. The three features of the mentor allow us to appreciate that the psychological and social function depends on the quality of the relations of interdependence and on the emotional connection on which they are based.

According to Kram, the mentor provides the career development functions included in Table 1.

Table no. 1. The Functions of the Mentor in the Development of the Career

| Functions | Actions of the mentor |
|--------------------|--|
| Coaching | He/She accompanies the disciple, providing feedback |
| Protection | He/She protects the disciple from rival forces and ensures disciple's support, acting like a « protection barrier » between him and the others |
| „Godfather figure” | He/She behaves exactly like a godfather which „open doors” for his/her protegee, thus ensuring his/her promotion and horizontal mobility |
| Challenging | Involves his/her disciple in situations which emphasize his/her qualities |
| Vision | He/She contributes to the improvement of his disciple's image on things |

In circumstances where the disciples are satisfied with their choice of a career, thus having a positive attitude towards work, the organisations will benefit from the services of a better trained personnel, having higher performances. The employees will communicate better and, as a result, a stronger feeling of stability will develop within the organisation. Moreover, the privileged information is passed on from one generation to another, which creates an excellent organisational patrimony.

The notion of « coaching » comes from the English word « coach » (a noun with five meanings, among which : negotiator and trainer). Coaching expresses, from the perspective of the career development role played by the mentor, the action of accompaniment aiming at encouraging a person to fully and elegantly express his/her personality, resources and skills.

Alexandre (pp.193-201) considers that, within an organisation, coaching is mainly destined to anticipate the individualization of the process of formation, development and management of skills (including management skills) and professional itineraries. The author identifies four types of coaching :

Performance coaching. It is a concept aimed at describing an action of accompaniment which contributes to the optimal expression of skills in a given situation : project management, crisis or conflict management, etc.

Development coaching. It relates actually to a better self-knowledge as a manager or expert. These efforts find their place in the accompaniment of training or while manifesting a certain attitude in a given situation.

« Mirror » coaching. As opposed from the previous forms, it expresses a more specific approach of a manager willing to confront his/her ideas, priorities or methods to a neutral external interlocutor who can guarantee confidentiality. Therefore the « mirror » coaching stands for a close accompaniment determined by the preoccupation of the moment.

Strategic coaching. It expresses an attitude, a behaviour aiming the management of a change. This form of coaching refers equally to the team cohesion, to the determination of rules, to the ways of cooperating and to the collective efficiency.

Whatever the form it might take, coaching relates to two types of approaches : behavioral and cognitive.

The behavioral approach is closely related to the identification, reintegration or improvement of some behaviours perceived as inefficient, inappropriate and extremely expensive for a person or his/her environment. The advantage of research over behaviours is that behaviours can be noticed and experimented by others. In the case of the behavioral approach, coaching is not related to the investigation of complex and profound personality structures, as there is not enough time or means for that.

The cognitive approach is interested in the manner the human brain treats information and in the impact of treatment upon behaviour. These processes refer to all the main mental functions : perception, memory, reason, language. These functions are, of course, studied from the point of view

of their functional aspect, not related to accumulation or development. In the « core » of the cognitive approach stands the notion of representation. In this respect, the thesis of cognitive approach defends the idea that a disfunction (for example, the difficulty to make a decision) is the result of an erroneous information, conviction, faith or representation treatment.

Mentoring is beneficial to all the parties involved : mentor, disciple, organisation. Wickman and Sjodin (1997) highlight the fact that every person has an implicit responsibility towards the future generations to transmit accumulated knowledge. Transmitting information gives the mentor a feeling of personal satisfaction. He/she is always supposed to be vigilant, to reflect deeper on important matters, either personal or organisational. By encouraging creativity, he/she himself/herself will have to be creative. But the most important reward of the mentor is the deep gratitude of the disciple. For the disciple, the benefits are numerous : sensible advice, support and backing up, getting to know the organisation and establish professional relations, assistance in developing new skills. On the whole, the disciple is satisfied by manifesting more involvement in his/her own career.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In order to have a successful career, a careful long-term planning of your professional itinerary is necessary, as well as anticipating problems that might occur along the way. Far from being easy, the strategic planning of a career is a continuous process, involving dedication, time and effort.

Forming your own image on your career is extremely important : one of the requirements for a successful career is accurately establishing your final goal, the objective to be accomplished.

The category of strategies to reach a successful career might include : self-knowledge, mastering the professional environment, improving one's professional reputation, evolution and mobility, continuous development, well-documented successes and keeping oneself in a good mental and financial shape.

Self-knowledge can be achieved by means of a careful analysis of the career orientation, of weaknesses and strenghts, of one's place within an organisation.

Mastering the professional environment. Knowing the enviroment, the economic problems and the rival organisations creates the possibility to anticipate both opportunities and unwanted events. Monitoring the signals from one's field of activity generates a permanent feedback, thus eliminating the possibility to be taken by surprise.

Seeking permanently to improve one's professional reputation aims at highlighting those attributes which prove special skills related to one's capacity to invest and carry out a project.

Evolution and mobility. One must always monitor the correspondence between personal skills and those skills required on the labor market.

Continuous development stands for a strategy which focuses on the necessity of individual development in a field of expertise, but also of keeping a certain flexibility as the main way to prevent limitation. It is well-known the fact that mastering only a very narrow field makes an inflexible and vulnerable person out of any employee.

Well-documented successes. Easily-identifiable results and accomplishments are much more valued on the labor market.

Keeping oneself in a good mental and financial shape refers to the fact that one must provide enough to maintain a living standard, a mental and material confort and balance.

Having a successful career represents the goal of every individual involved in a professional activity. In fact, obtaining the success depends of the degree of internalisation of the authetic work values, which will form the basis of the way in which people and work are perceived.

In order to have a successful career, one must follow a set of « golden rules » : being honest, being permanently informed, having a personal brand, having communication skills amd working hard.

Being honest. Even since the beginning of his career, the employee must be perceived as honest. Being honest means, on the one hand, being true to oneself, being aware of one's weaknesses and strenghts. Honesty opens the possibility of identifying what must really be changed in order to get a promotion. On the other hand, honesty means being true to the others, open to any responsibility within the organisation. Honesty also imposes that the one's task should be carried out

with integrity. Once a mistake is made, it must be admitted and assumed. This kind of attitude will create the adequate circumstances for an appropriate recognition among the co-workers. Hiding an error, in the hope that no one will ever discover it, can lead to unpleasant consequences which might affect the career in the long run.

Being permanently informed. Information means power, therefore a permanent improvement of one's knowledge and skills is needed. The specialists emphasize the fact that the employees aiming at a successful career must be informed on everything that is new in their field of activity, still receptive to new trends and events outside their area of expertise.

Having a « personal brand ». The way a person looks, dresses, speaks, gesticulates makes up his/her personal image. And image sells. The reputation can be reached by behaving like a trustworthy, professional, cooperative person. A good reputation involves manifesting a positive attitude even when the situation gets difficult.

Having communication skills. The communication skills are extremely important in the process of achieving a successful career. An employee must be able to communicate efficiently with his/her co-workers and management staff. Communication opens most doors which are normally shut throughout one's career. Perfecting one's communication skills will make the difference between successful people and mediocre or unsuccessful ones. Improving one's communicating skills contributes to the improvement of personal efficiency.

Working hard. Dedicated work is one of the capital conditions for a successful career. It involves a considerable amount of hard work, at higher or equal levels compared to the norms established by the organisation. Even in the situation when one works intelligently, maximal efforts are needed. Working intelligently at a constant pace and not giving up the idea of consecventei means working responsibly.

We conclude by saying the fact that the a successful career represents a mix of circumstances and responses to those circumstances. Circumstances are, for the most part, outside the direct control of any person, still this is not the case with the behaviour. People having successful careers understand, even if intuitively, this principle. They are constantly looking for better means of action and do identify much more easily the obstacles represented by the lack of knowledge, skills or attitude. Even more, they make the best investment, in their own person, by becoming aware of the fact that the safest path to solving all problems and reaching success id personal development. Of all the investments one can make, investing in the personal development generates the best results. There is a strong connection between happiness, professional success or quality relationships and the development of key skills and attitudes, such as communication, planning and self-confidence.

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