



Staying in career: An Interactive Approach to Career Management and Strategic Organizational Performance

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Abstract

Career management is a challenge to both individuals and organizations. While employees embark on their jobs to satisfy their various needs and attain professional fulfillment, organizations engage in corporate survival strategies designed to ensure that organizational objectives are acted out and delivered to acceptable standards. Ultimately, the cost of voluntary turnover on both employees and organizations and the contemporary career paradigm demand adequate planning and management to ensure sustainable career well-being for the individuals and increased corporate strategic performance. Proper career management process otherwise called staying in career aims at achieving perfect integration of employees into organizational system and the attainment of both professional fulfillment and increased organizational viability. The methodology is qualitative and descriptive approach. This paper studied career management drawing from both person and corporate perspectives. The study focused on the Nelson & Quick's four career stages model through which employment career can be managed successively. It emphasizes the adoption of realistic job preview's (RJP) mentoring and career anchors in career management as both integrative and motivational forces that guide career decisions in a turbulence employment context. It provides constructive knowledge for embracing and maintaining career as well as enhancing strategic organizational performance. The study recommends among others that organizations should adequately ensure the alignment of both employee needs and organizational objectives in career management.

Key words: Career, management, realistic job preview (RJP), mentoring, career anchors, and organizational strategic performance.

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Introduction

After entry into organizations, individuals embark on their careers. This entails embracing and maintaining one's job. It encompasses all efforts towards upholding a particular occupation or vocation. The process is simply referred to as staying in career or proper career management. It is geared towards perfect integration of individuals into organizational system essentially for attainment of both professional fulfilment and increased organizational viability. In the world of works, the challenges arising from globalization, diversity, scientific and technological advancement, organizational ethics as well as the realities of natural disasters provide unique opportunities and threats for career management. For instance, the reconstruction of American Organizations in 1992 resulted in a reduction of 25% of the jobs held in the Fortune 500 companies (O'Reilly, 1992). The flattening of the organizational hierarchy resulted in fewer opportunities for promotions. This caused many employees to move between jobs or even sought for new jobs outside the organization. Again, the wide world ravage of Corona Virus is a big lesson to humanity.

The pandemic outbreak caused many companies to shutdown leaving millions of survived employees jobless. Contemporarily, the world is taking a new shape, the entire economic situation looks like the dawn of a new era. Many employees actually change their jobs because of the preceding economic situation so many others ardently sought salary increase to compensate for the rapid rise in inflation. Furthermore, the workforce of the future is likely to look quite different from what the world is experiencing today. Automatic and artificial intelligence turns the main driver of emerging technologies such as big data robotics and internet of things (IoT) (Thomas, 2022). Artificial intelligence is shaping the future of humanity across every industry. Invariably, it is changing jobs, creating new ones and eliminating old jobs.

Only proper career management would enable both individuals and firms undergo effective planning and harmonization of career decisions for sustainable career well-being and organizational viability. Supporting the above view, Duradoni and Di Fabio (2019) asserted that the contemporary world which is highly sensitive to the effects of information factors such as scientific and technological developments, changing environmental conditions, increasing competition pressure, social and political structures whose expectations differ



requires organizations to be sustainable. Based on the above necessities, it would not seem thoughtful both individuals and organizations embarking on career management.

- The study aims at providing both employees and organizations with constructive knowledge for embracing and maintaining careers as well as enhancing strategic organizational performance.
- It seeks to highlight the concepts of career management; realistic job previews (RJPs) which aims at creating more effective matches between employees and organizations to ensure lower turnover and higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- The study also emphasizes the various stages through which employees' careers can be managed in an organizational system.
- Its focus is interactive career management process as a part of larger human resource system design to achieve perfect integration of individuals into organizational system and the attainment of both professional fulfillment and increased organizational viability.

This study raised the following research questions thus;

- How would employees maintain their jobs in a corporate organization?
- What is interactive approach in career management?
- How would an organizational system achieve person/job match?

Literature Review

Career Management

Career management refers to a life-long process of learning about self, job and organization (Nelson & Quick, 2006). Combs, Crook and Shock (2005) describe it as a corporate survival strategy which involves the alignment of both employees and organizational needs in achieving strategic organizational performance. It involves all efforts aimed at helping employees to assess their own career strength and weaknesses, set priorities and specific career goals, provide information on various career paths and their alternatives within the organization and offer employees yearly reviews of their progress towards these goals by managers who have received training in conducting such assessment (Baron & Greenberg, 1990). Career management is a grooming process that is very essential for both individuals and organizations. It enables individuals take anticipatory measures in planning and



harmonizing career decisions as they progress in the world of work. On the part of the organizations, the process aims at ensuring that organizational objectives are acted and delivered to acceptable standards. In organizational career management process, job seekers are provided with realistic job previews (RJPs) as part of the recruitment practices usually before the new hires' entry into the system to ensure more effective matches between individuals and the organizations.

Realistic job preview is a human resource management approach which aims at providing both positive and negative information to potential employees about the job they are seeking, thereby giving them a realistic picture of the job at their entry into the organization (O'Neill et al. 2001). RJPs serve as a recruitment tool designed to eliminate poor screening and selection practices that result in poor job matches and increased organizational cost (Buckley, et al. 2002). The organizational selection and entry process is usually very complex due to certain conflicts that might arise between job candidates and the organizations into which they are being employed. The conflicts usually occur due to a mismatch between the individuals' expectations and organizational expectations based on both the needs and goals of the two parties. For instance, recruits sometimes enter organizations with the expectation that they will receive explicit work directions from their bosses, only to find that they are left with ambiguity on how to do the job. Again, they may expect that promotion will be based on performance, only to find out that promotions are based mainly on political considerations. Some may expect to be given managerial responsibilities right away based on subjective rating of their own abilities, however, this is not often the case. Consequentially, these unmet expectations may give rise to intra/interpersonal conflicts that may not be healthy for both the individuals and the organizations. Therefore, giving potential employees a realistic picture of the jobs, they are applying for becomes a necessity.

Researches on RJPs revealed that it improves retention of new employees by providing potential new hires with accurate picture of the jobs for which they are being interviewed before the organization makes a job offer (Buckley, et al, 2002, Bashir & Bashir, 2016); O'Neill et al, 2001). RJP provides candidates with details of the job including the possible career paths available to the employees in the organizational system (O'Neill et al, 2001). This helps to ensure that recruits who accept the positions will be less likely to leave due to



problem of personal job satisfaction (Bashir & Bashir, 2016). This in turns helps to save organizations from increased recruitment cost and a consequential outcome of early voluntary turnover which leaves high work-load for available workers (Buckley, et al, 2002). By implication, excess work-load as a result of turnover in an organizational system lowers the employees' morale and could bring about reduction in general productivity in the system. Furthermore, Buckley et al. (2002) reported that employees who received RJP have the necessary cognitive ability to perform their job tasks and hence experience increased level of psychological empowerment especially in the form of competence. Morse (2007) in a comparative test of RJP and expectancy lowering procedure reported RJP as a useful, generalized realistic recruitment procedure that was also resistant to adverse self-selection.

Career Management and Model Stages

Individuals' careers can be managed systematically through successive stages. Crities (1989) opined that a common way of understanding careers is viewing them in series of stages which individuals pass during their work life. Nelson and Quick (2006) developed a four-stage career model. The career stage model is a typical representation of the four successive stages individuals pass while staying in careers. These stages include: establishment, advancement; maintenance and withdrawal. Establishment stage is the beginning of an individual's career. It is a period of transition from school/training to work. A period at which an individual separates the self from both emotional and financial dependency on parents and moves into stable period of exploration of adult role and establishing one's self. As well as is a period of entry into a new job in an organization and of great dependency on others as one learns about the new job and the organization. At this early stage, there are three major challenges that individuals face: (a) Negotiating effective psychological contracts, (b) Managing the stress of socialization (c) The transition from organizational outsider to insider. Psychological contract refers to an indirect agreement between a new recruit and the organization that specifies what each is expected to give and receive in the relationship. Usually in real work situation, an employee expects to receive salary, status, advancement opportunities and challenges, whereas organizations on the other hand, expect to receive time, energy, talents and loyalty in order to meet their goals. The psychological contract starts with the candidate's entry into the organization but the contract is modified as the individual proceeds through the career. This helps to establish good organizational climate between the employees and the organization.



Psychological contracts also take place among the newcomers and other individuals in the organization. This involves the mutual relationship which the candidates form with other old workers. This is very important as it provides the new candidates with social supports which they need for better adaptation in the work environment. Another stage is managing daily stress of in the organization, which borders on navigating the three phases of stress that a candidate undergoes in adjusting to the new environment. These include: anticipatory socialization, encounter, change and acquisition phases.

- The anticipatory socialization phase: At this phase, the new candidate gathers information from various sources about the job and the new organization. The major stressor in this case is mostly ambiguity. To eliminate this, the recruit needs accurate information that will enable them operate better. It is essential that both parties (the individual and the organization) go into it with good intentions of keeping up their ends of the agreement.
- The Encounter Phase: At this phase, the demands of the job in terms of the role, tasks, interpersonal relationship and physical setting become apparent to the employee. This is simply referred to as the realities of organizational life. In this phase, the expectations formed in anticipatory socialization may clash with the realities of organizational life, and “reality shock” may occur. Reality shock describes surprise reaction or emotional disturbance which follows an unexpected experience. The degree of the reality shock depends on the expectations formed in the anticipatory socialization stage. If these expectations are unrealistic or unmet, reality shock may be a problem. Most organizations usually allow some time for recruits to adapt. This unwritten rule will mean that new comers who cannot quickly catch up to speed on the organizations and workgroup (team) norms and procedures will quickly find themselves experiencing negative feedback from co-workers.
- The change and acquisition phase: At this stage, the new employees begin to master the demands of the job. There is the need to feel that they have some means of control over the job demands. Their personality factors such as locus of control (LE), self-concept and most preferred need will enable them attain perfect adjustment and integration into the system.



Finally, the process of becoming a functional member of an organization (insider) takes time and requires support on the part of the organization. A successful transition from outsider to insider can be ensured if the new employees and the organization work together. The recruits should make efforts to know about the job if they were not given a realistic job preview (RJPs). Older employees are good sources of information. Research shows that new workers who underestimate the stressfulness of their job demands do not adjust well (Nelson & Sutton, 1999). Moreover, new recruits should provide honest and accurate information about their own weaknesses as both actions can promote good matches. At this point, recruits must prepare for reality shock; realizing that slight depression is natural when adjusting to a new job. But proper interpersonal relationship with older employees can serve as social support in this phase of transition. Networking with other new employees who empathize can also be of some help in coping with the stress of a new job. In this case, they can set realistic goals and take credit for the success that occur as they master the job.

The Role of the Organization in Career Development

There are many ways in which organizations can assist employees in their transition from outsider to insider. Realistic job preview should start the relationship with integrity and honesty. Careful recruitment can also help ensure good matches. During the encounter phase, organizations ought to provide early job assignments that present opportunities for the recruits to understand their job better. Studies have shown that recruits who experienced success in training gain increased self-efficacy and adjust to the new job more effectively; and that those who face early job challenges successfully tend to be higher performances later in their career (Nelson & Sutton, 1999). Providing encouragement and feedback to the employees are crucial. The immediate supervisor, peers, other new workers and support staff are important sources of support during this growth. During the change and acquisition phase, rewards are *sine qua non*. Organizations should tie the workers' rewards as clearly as possible to performance. This shows that the organization is concerned about their progress and wants to help them learn their jobs well. Individuals who successfully complete the establishment stage go through many positive changes, including increased self-confidence, interpersonal skills acquisition and self-knowledge (Davey & Arnold, 2000). Once they have fitted into the organization, they move on to the advancement stage of their career.



There comes a period of stability during which the individual tries to find a role model in adult society and wants to succeed in the career. During this stage, several issues are important such as exploring career paths and career ladder, finding a mentor, working out dual career partnerships and managing conflicts between work and personal life. Career path refers to sequences of job experiences along which employee's moves. Individuals examine their career dreams and paths they must follow to attain those goals. These employees' movements are to seek additional challenges, self-fulfillment and freedom. Career ladder on the other hand refers to a structured series of job positions through which an individual progress. In many organizations for example, it is customary to move through series of alternating line and staff supervisory assignments in order to advance toward upper management.

Supervisors in customer service might be assigned to the training of staff and then rotate back as line supervisors in network services to gain experience in different departments. Some companies use the traditional concept of career ladder to help employees. Others take a more contemporary approach to career advancement such as innovation and creativity. In this case, individuals have the freedom to move on to interesting and challenging job assignments without notifying their supervisors. If they join a new project team, their current boss is expected to let them move on. This is referred to as self-promotion philosophy. It is seen as a key to high levels of innovation and creativity in organizations. Another approach to the career ladder is called career lattice. This refers to a process of building competencies by moving laterally through different departments in the organization or by moving through different projects. The career lattice approach is an effective way to develop an array of skills to ensure one's employability.

In other to achieve all these objectives, a mentor is a *sine qua non*. A mentor is an individual who provides guidance, coaching, counseling and friendship to a protégé. Mentors are essential to protégé's future career and success because they provide both career leadership and psychosocial guides (Kram, 1985; Allen, et al. 2003). The career functions provided by a mentor include sponsorship, facilitating exposure and visibility, coaching and protection. Sponsorship means actively helping the individual get job experiences and promotions. Facilitating exposure and visibility mean providing opportunities for the protégé to develop relationships with key figures in the organization. Coaching involves providing advice in



both career and job performance. Protection is provided by shielding the protégé from potentially damaging experiences.

The mentor also performs psycho-social functions such as role modeling, counseling, etc. Role modeling occurs when the mentor displays behaviours for the protégé to emulate. This facilitates social learning. Counseling by a mentor helps the protégé explore personal issues that arise and require assistance. Friendship is another psychological function that benefits both mentor and protégé. Acceptance and confirmation are important to both the mentor and protégé. When the protégé feels accepted by the mentor, it fosters a sense of pride. In the same way, positive regards and appreciation from the junior colleagues provide sense of satisfaction for the mentor. Mentoring serves as a perfect means of integrating employees in an organization. For example, studies have demonstrated that individuals with mentors have higher promotion rates and higher income than individuals who do not have mentors (Horgan & Simeon, (1990; Allen, et al, 2004) and that the quality of the relationship not just the present of the mentor is most important (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000).

Maintenance Stages in Career Growth

The maintenance stage is actually a period of dealing with the career crisis. Some individuals who experienced career crisis had burned out. They usually need a period of vacation to rejuvenate. It could be a month's vacation, sabbatical leave or bonuses. Sabbaticals are always better than bonuses. On the other hand, some individuals reach the maintenance stage with a sense of achievement and contentment, feeling no need to strive for further upward mobility. Whether the maintenance stage is a time of crisis or contentment, however, there are two issues to contend with: (a) sustaining performance and (b) becoming a mentor. Sustaining performance becomes challenging when one reaches the career plateau. Career plateau refers to a point in one's career where the probability of moving further the ladder is lowest. Some people handle career plateau fairly well, but others may become frustrated, bored and dissatisfied with their job. This could cause psychological problems like anxiety, depression and both personal and social alienation which result from feeling of being a failure in one's career (Korman, Witting-Berman & Lang, 1981). To keep employees productive, organizations can provide challenges and opportunities for learning, which can be through lateral movements, involvement in project teams that provide new tasks and skill development. The idea is to keep the work stimulating and moreover, it involves individual's



continued affirmation of their value to the organization. They need to know that their contributions are significant and appreciated. During maintenance stage, individuals can make contributions by sharing their wealth of knowledge and experience with others. Opportunities to be mentors to new employees can keep senior workers motivated. Some employees adopt naturally to the mentor role but others may need training on how to coach and counsel younger workers. In all, maintenance is a period of transition. Like all career stages, it can be managed by individuals who know what to expect and plan to remain productive, as well as by organizations that focus on maximizing old workers' involvement in work.

Theoretical Framework

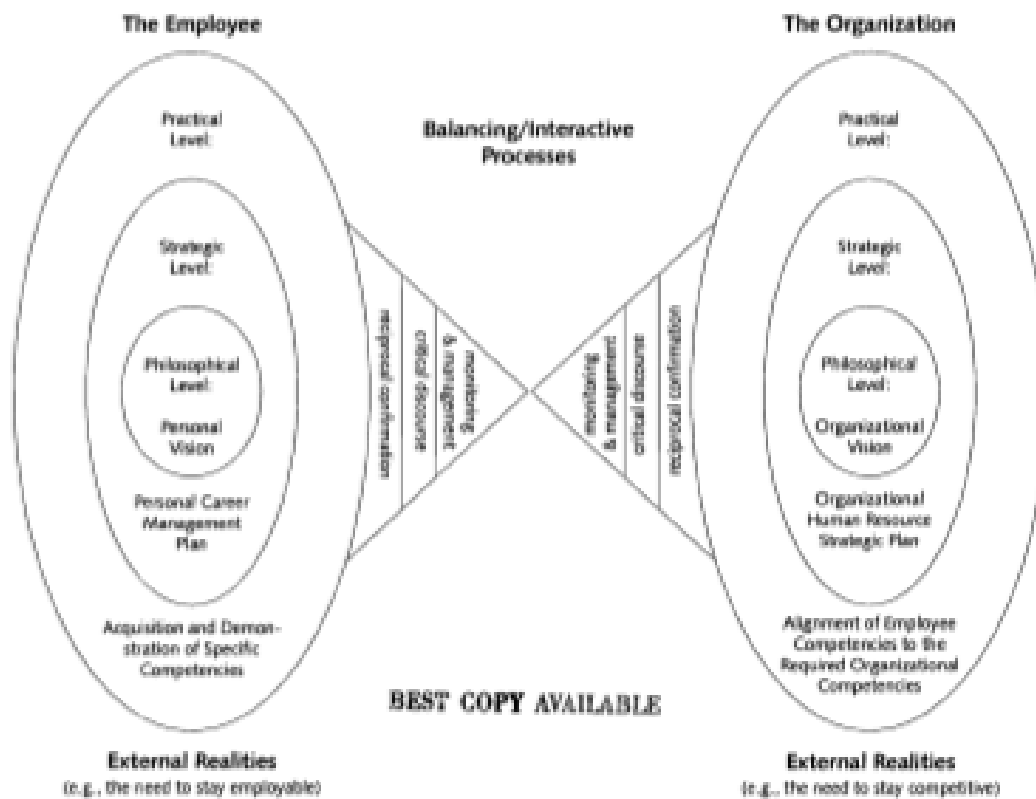
The study is anchored to Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development designed by Bernes and Magnusson (1999). This is a new model of organizational career development that combines the best of career development practice and organizational development into a unified coherent model. It has its roots in synergistic approach to management and organizational development, hence a dynamic management system which seeks to ensure the career growth of the employee, his effective training and achievement of his goals (professional development) and ultimately the attainment of organizational strategic performance (organizational productivity). The model is designed to allow a process for balancing individual and organizational needs and goals (Bernes, 2000). It is also a focus on the transactional nature of the relationship between employee and organization (interactive).

The model is conceived as a response to the changing labour market. The theorists assumed that as the global economy becomes increasingly competitive, organization will be forced to adopt a more future-oriented and integrated approach to managing human resources. Unfortunately, the era of restructuring, downsizing and rightsizing has made this increasingly difficult (Bernes, 2000). Other changes in the world of work such as shift from long-term arrangement to temporary contract work; less frequent use of concepts such as career path, career hierarchies etc. have collectively put pressure on the existing models of organizational career development. The model emphasizes the role of personal and organizational visions, the constructivist literature on career development and management literature on organizational vision and mission statements are synthesized and incorporated into the model.



In the Synergistic Model, the employee takes more responsibility for the career management and the organization has a less tight connection to its employees, causing more fluidity but also more need for a negotiated relationship between the two. Ultimately, the model helps the employee to stay employable and the organization to stay competitive (Bernes & Magnusson, 1999). It is also a response to the available practices at the time, within organizations. The goal of the balancing /interactive process is to bring recruits (employee) and organization (employers) closer together thereby avoiding treating career development and organizational development as separate entities (Bernes 2000).

Fig: 1



The theoretical overview of the Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development.

The model has three levels of organization: (a) the philosophical level, (b) the strategic level, (c) and the practical level. Expanding circles are used to illustrate movement from the broad



philosophical vision to strategic plans and then to the practical need for the acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies. Specifically, the model encourages employees and organizations to dream (philosophical level), plan (strategic level), and then perform (practical level). The personal and organizational vision circles are represented by the center rings to denote their role in regulating the other sub-systems. The focus on competencies is represented by the outer rings to denote their role in providing feedback to the rest of the system regarding the requirements of the world of work specifically, the competencies required to remain employable (in the case of the employee) and competitive (in the case of the organization). This feedback helps employees and organizations to adjust to changes in the world of work and monitor their plans and strategies to ensure the most optimal fulfillment of their respective visions. In practice, the model can be applied in a corporate context. It has some useful sections within which specific experience can be considered were particular employees struggle with their career management in specified jobs or employment circumstances.

Methodology

The study used qualitative and descriptive research approach. Qualitative method is a non-numerical analysis of data gathered from library, semi-structured questioner, videos, etc. It utilized already existing material from other research works, as well as researchers' own experiences. The descriptive method helped us to interpret the data collected analyze the characteristic features and facts about things that are. This method is also necessary in measuring attitudes, behaviours, opinions and motivations of people.

Findings

From the above discuss, the study reveals that:

- Career management enables employees take a proactive approach in planning and harmonizing carrier decisions as they progress in work life which results in increased career-wellbeing and professional fulfillment (Nelson & Quick, 2006).
- Career management as a corporate survival strategy enables organizational objectives to be acted-out and delivered to acceptable standards (Combs, Crook & Shock, 2005).



- The alignment of employee needs (aspirations) and organizational objectives is crucial in achieving strategic organizational performance (Combs, Crook & Shock, 2005).
- RJP was found to be a useful tool for integration of new workers into organizational system as well as for improving person job matches (Buckley, et al. 2002; O' Nell, et al. 2001; Morse, 2007).
- Employees that received RJP have the necessary cognitive ability to perform their job tasks and therefore experience increased levels of psychological empowerment, especially in the form of competence, self-determination as well as meaning (Buckley, et al. 2002).
- Having a clear sense of one's career anchor (abilities, talents, needs, interests, motivations and value) is essential to help individual make effective career decision and thus enjoy career success (Valcour & Ledge, 2008).
- Mentoring is an essential component of career management as employees who have mentors enjoy high promotion rates and higher as well as more psychological benefits than those who do not (Allen, et al. 2004).

Conclusion

The paper concludes that interactive career management process as part of a larger human resources system is a process which plans and shapes the profession of individuals within an organization in accordance with the organizational needs and objectives and a joint responsibility of both the individuals and the organization. RJP as a component of hiring process eliminates poor screening and selection practices that result in poor job matches and increased cost. It ensures more effective matches between individuals and organizations which enhances adequate employees' integration and achievement of strategic performance in the organizations.

The important stages in a person's career include: establishment, advancement, maintenance and; each stage has unique characteristics and challenges as discussed in this paper. Mentoring is very important for career success of young employees as well as for self-fulfillment needs among the older workers. Career anchor enables an individual establish a career identity and be able to find direction in career.



Recommendations

Given the above findings, the study recommends that:

- Organizations should adequately ensure the alignment of both employees' needs and organizational objectives when designing career management plan.
- Organizations should integrate RJP in job selection procedures to give new workers the necessary cognitive disposition in performance of their tasks which expresses increased level of psychological empowerment especially in the form of competence, self-determination and meaning.
- Organizations should adopt a knowledge sharing through mentorship programme. This involves creating a structure that encourage and support mentorship relationship between employees of different departments and experience level.
- Individuals should construct a psychological career profile that will help them make effective career decisions and thus experience increased career well-being and success.

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