Chapter 14
CAREER MANAGEMENT: TAKING CONTROL OF THE QUALITY OF WORK EXPERIENCES

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Mountains cannot be surmounted except by winding paths.
Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The job-for-life contract between employer and employee has been replaced by an insecure and uncertain job market. Job security is no longer dependent on length of service; loyalty to an employer and career progression in the conventional sense, that is, along fixed career lines, is not a realistic option anymore. These changes in the nature of jobs and career development are due to flatter and rapidly changing organisations, which will remain to be the dominant characteristic of most companies in the future.

Many authors have emphasised that the way in which these organisational changes will impact upon peoples’ careers force them to take the lead in building their own careers. Otherwise, employees may easily become the plaything of organisations’ short-term operational policies and choices. Hence, employees should engage in career management activities in order to identify and pursue their opportunities for development and self-improvement (Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). From this perspective, career management no longer exclusively refers to the activities of the organisation with respect to the effective selection, assessment, assignment, and development of their employees in order to provide a pool of qualified people to meet future corporate needs (Hall, 1986). Instead, employees themselves need to become the managers of their careers.

From the employees’ perspective, career management should include: (a) engaging in personal development, (b) using career planning skills, (c) optimising career prospects, and (d) balancing work and non-work (Ball, 1997). More specifically, the new employee should: seek for opportunities to further develop his or her (range of) skills in order to stay marketable, review his/her career on a regularly base, promote his/her own career interests, and find a balance between his/her professional and personal life.

This chapter focuses on the first aspect of individual career management, that is, personal development. There are several ways in which individuals may develop themselves. For example, employees may engage in job-related training in order to
broaden and deepen their abilities and skills, or they may obtain higher levels of proficiency by enlarging their experiences within a certain work domain. All these activities help to increase individuals’ human capital, that is, their value on the labour market, which will lead to higher ascendancy rates and salaries (Becker, 1975). Indeed, personal investments in education and work experiences are considered the strongest and most consistent predictors of career success (Tharenou, 1997).

Extant literature on the role of human capital for career development primarily addressed the quantity of employees’ experiences, such as the number of trainings and the length of work experiences (e.g., people’s tenure in a job). In this chapter, however, it is argued that the quality of people’s experiences will be as important if not more important than their quantity. The quality of work experiences refers to the specific content of jobs and the types of tasks and activities people perform in their work. The quality of work experiences is particularly crucial for future career success, in that it contributes to objective as well as subjective career outcomes.

The next paragraph addresses the question of what makes a career successful. Thereafter, the literature on human capital will be discussed and it is concluded that human capital should encompass the breadth of people’s work experiences. The best way to broaden one’s job content is to engage in challenging assignments, since these types of assignments stimulate learning, and development and may lead to career flexibility. Optimally, employees themselves should initiate their challenging work experiences. It is, however, more realistic to assume that employees will often need the support and encouragement of their environment. At the end of this chapter the role that individuals and organisations have in broadening employees’ scope and employability will be discussed.

**Career Success**

Career success has been defined as the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one’s work experiences (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). This definition includes two different perspectives on careers, an individual/subjective and a societal/objective perspective. The individual subjective perspective encompasses different facets of a career as experienced by the person and outcomes of a career are evaluated against the goals that individuals have set for themselves. Typical outcomes of a successful career are psychological in nature, such as people’s job and career satisfaction (Judge, Higgins, Thorensen, & Barrick, 1999). Heslin (2005) rightly noted that subjective career success covers a broader scope than one’s immediate job satisfaction. It may, for example, include a good work-life balance. The societal objective perspective on careers takes the tangible facets of careers into account, such as individuals’ income and occupational status. As recently argued by Hall and Chandler (2005), both perspectives are interdependent since people’s subjective career success often is a function of both subjective and objective career outcomes. That is not to say that objective successful outcomes always lead to subjective career success. Some people may adhere more to subjec-