

## Employees' careers and managers policies: a Career Development Program for Managers

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**Resumo:** As carreiras são cada vez menos previsíveis (como no passado recente o eram) e os gestores de recursos humanos procuram um conjunto de ferramentas para ajudar os seus trabalhadores considerando a individualidade, o auto-desenvolvimento, e as necessidades de mudança. São analisados alguns aspectos: gestores e tomadas de decisão; o impacto das práticas de recursos humanos na organização (por exemplo: satisfação na carreira e produtividade); a responsabilidade dos gestores na capitalização dos recursos disponíveis para adquirir vantagem competitiva (desenvolvimento da individualidade, auto-desenvolvimento, necessidades de mudança); e a inexistência de uma prática comum para lidar com problemas de carreira. No sentido de ultrapassar o fosso entre as necessidades de carreira dos trabalhadores e as políticas de gestão apresenta-se o *design* de um programa de desenvolvimento de carreira aplicado em contexto organizacional. O programa de 5 dias, realizado em 30 horas, fundamenta-se teoricamente na Teoria de Construção de Carreira (Savickas, 2004) e comporta três partes, em acordo com as variáveis – chave: Parte I – o contexto; Parte II – a pessoa; Parte III— as tarefas. São analisados os interfaces entre as características da organização e os comportamentos do indivíduo.

**Palavras-chave:** programa de desenvolvimento de carreira; interfaces entre o indivíduo e a organização.

**Abstract:** Careers are becoming less and less predictable (as in the recent past), and human resource managers seek tools to help employees taking into account their individuality, self-development, and changing needs. Some issues are analyzed: managers and decision-makers procedures; the impact of human resources practices on organizational outcomes (eg.: career satisfaction and productivity); the responsibility of managers on the capitalization of the available resources to achieve competitive advantage (development of individuality, self-development, change needs); and the absence of a practice common on career problems. As an attempt to surpass the gap between employees' careers needs and manager's policies the design of a career development program in an organization is presented. The 5-day program (30 hours) is based on the Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2004) divided into three parts, according to the three key-variables: *Part I* – The Context; *Part II* – The Person; –*Part III* – The Tasks. The interface between the organization's characteristics and individual behaviors are discussed.

**Key-words:** career development program; interfaces between individual and organization.

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## Introduction

The classical / traditional career thinking in organizations means upward mobility, sometimes an attempt to resolve a crisis, perhaps a promotion, and a process that increases employees' usefulness within the organization. Since the middle 1980s this view of career development is no more a challenge nor for the employees nor for managers policies. The main issues nowadays turns around strategies to reach the understanding of what employees need and want, and what organizations should do for engage their employees in a more diverse and changing work force.

A help for the implementation of strategies that match individual and organization needs could come from the field of career psychology.

Career theories integrated in the domain of career guidance and vocational psychology has been the poorest member of the organizational psychology family; this may be one of the reasons that justify the apparent lack of contingency between operational aspects of manager's policies and career goals strategies. Some efforts have been done, namely the work of Schuler & Jackson (1999) that integrates both operational aspects of Human Resources Management (recruitment, selection, development, career development, and performance management) and strategic aspects like organizational development, and succession planning.

Human Resource Managers seek tools to help employees taking into account their individuality, self-development and changing needs, but the absence of an integrative general framework that encompasses both research methodology in organizational career issues and decision-making procedures in organizational settings could limit the importance of career issues in the

job of a manager responsible for the personnel. This could be another aspect that justifies the gap between employees' careers and managers policies.

The evolution of organizational career thinking (Inkson & Arthur, 2002) and the new career arrangements leads to a next evolution on the human resources settings: "emerging markets are building educational systems and training programs, which is creating new opportunities to "source" expertise from countries such as Russia, China and India. Complex employer-employee issues will evolve around ethics, employee privacy, and genetic testing" (MacDonald, 2003, p.261).

Researchers on career psychology must take advantage and build a position in the next generation of manager's policies in order to surpass the existing gap between employees' careers and manager's policies.

## Employees' careers and managers policies: How surpass the gap

The development of interdependencies within cultural guidelines and organizational identity, and proactive individual behavior concerning career issues is the key departure point for implementing career policies.

A meaningful context in which a group of people at human resources department have power to solve problems regarding individual differences motivate people to direct their actions and strategies for coping with day-to-day problems. The recognition of the existence of so many career problems as so many employees is a sort of an evolutionary and healthy pressure for the establishment of how reward strategies are administered and career development is processed.

The design, development and implementation of this point of view require that

Human Resources Managers focus and help individuals on the following issues:

1. Work with the organization rather than for the organization (Callinan, Bartram & Robertson, 2002). Finding common definitions of the problems through the understanding of the existing reality facilitates the recognition that the preparation of future without knowing what it will be could serve both parts. The control of those definitions can lead to sustainable gain and a career territory - the interdependencies between individuals and organizationally relevant outcomes.
2. A problem solution approach is another aspect. A sustainable strategic success encompasses the definition of goals, the conceptualization of career problems and the contextualization of the research project for developing career development. The promotion of flexible careers is intrinsically related with the understanding of the employee's characteristics, and with the type of rewards that each one tries to achieve.

Since the Chicago School of Sociology (Hughes, 1937) the interest in promoting individual careers is seen as a process of added value for the organizations and for the individual goals. For example, Schein's model (1978) incited managers to understand that people are different, with different career goals and career anchors, and managers could take advantage if they were capable to integrate the contributions of diverse and specialized resources and enlarge the concept of organizational development. At present, Schein's model, with its concept of career anchor, which involves a mixture of values, needs, motives and abilities (Schein, 1993) seems to be somehow in danger (Inkson & Arthur, 2002), and its compatibility with the

characteristics of certain types of professional activity is only applicable to a certain, very limited group of professionals.

An article by Rynes, Bartunek & Daft (2001) suggests a discussion about more fundamental issues regarding the relationship between academics and practitioners: the gap between organizational research findings and management practices is part of a more global gap between research and practice. The main conclusion is that a more balanced approach between the real world problems and academic research on career psychology is needed, that is, conceptualizes, develops and implements solutions for career issues and understands the degree to which the interventions are effective – the evaluation impact.

3. Emphasize career development rather than advancement. The framework that promotes the fit between individual's career concerns and culture and organizational identity must be seen as an added value for both individual satisfaction and organization productivity, and it is that whole we can call the collective success. Instead of the traditional career upward promotion, the notion of career development should encompass improving performance, update skills, career movements, and rewards for excellent work. But this approach does not come as already-made package, but has to be developed by managers according to the needs of individuals and a business plan. Arnold, Cooper & Robertson (1998) list 15 different approaches to career development interventions in organizations, but the question still remains: what a manager can do to help individuals to understand what career development is?

First, they have to understand what career development is, and demonstrate to employees that is a part of the manager's job.

For this reason, they should be trained on career issues, and one the possible way consists of the development of a Career Development Program for Managers. The program must be seen as training to promote career development issues, and the distinction between what a qualified career psychologist can offer as compared to a manager offer that had just understood the issues involved must be done. In short, from theoretical will arises the use of intervention methods and techniques: the development of self-knowledge and ecological variables, facilitating or inhibiting, in decision making processes; help in the application of career strategies; the existence of feed-back information in a bidirectional system which permits the individual to achieve plans that are realistic and adapted to situations of change, and to the organization, the establishment of career plans according to a previously defined strategy.

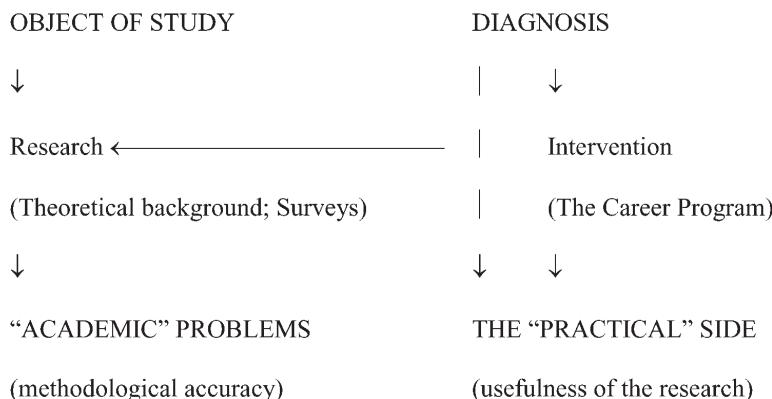
### **The design and the implementation of a Career Development Program for Managers**

The goals and objectives underlying the program were two: put career problems in the top of priorities of Human Resources Managers; and build up actions to improve the links between theory and practical issues. The key points discussed with managers turned around issues like: the absence of a practice common on career problems; the variations on human resource systems; managers and decision-makers procedures; the responsibility of managers on the capitalization of the available resources to achieve competitive advantage; and the impact of human resource practices on organizational outcomes.

The building of the program was sustained on a conceptual and contextual framework (see Figure 1). The conceptual is based on cross-national issues: the object of study or the theoretical background – in this case the career construction theory (Savickas, 2004); the methodological accuracy and the links between the diagnosis for intervention; and the usefulness of the program.

FIGURE 1

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Regarding the context or ecological issues special attention was done to: the organization; to the people involved; and to the correspondence of the needs of the individual and the demands of the organization.

The program is a five-day program, a total of 30 hours, and the target populations are managers and supervisors, working in organizational context. At the end, they should have answers, new “learning”, new approaches, and new visions of career problems.

In figure 2, the scheme of the program is presented.

gies were used, such as: exercises (teamwork; individual); case studies; and personal development plans.

The format of the program consisted on cope and deal with the following concepts and ideas:

Part [A]: The employment environment.

The context: social ecology (opportunities and constraints). Occupational choice and organizational commitment. Social context and life roles.

Part [B]: The chessboard: implementation of organizational career changes.

FIGURE 2

The Program

|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| The context | Life structure                                       | <i>Employment environment</i>           |
|             | Occupations and social position                      |   |
|             | Individual's career pattern                          |   |
| The person  | Vocational characteristics and occupation            | <i>Search self</i>                      |
|             | Occupational success and satisfaction                |   |
|             | Process of career construction                       |   |
| The tasks   | Career stages and vocational development and changes | <i>Comprehensive career development</i> |
|             | Career adaptability                                  |   |
|             | Career construction and organizational development   |   |

The development and implementation of the program was made in workshops. The titles of the “worked” issues were several, and it is impossible to transmit the entire program, all the interactions and connections established. For that, some guidelines are presented, according with the main parts of the program. Active methodolo-

Short- and long-term goals in career development. Career counseling? What for? Changes in the individual and in the organizational career context.

Part [C]: Idiographic framework and career construction. Self-perceptions and social comparisons.

The organization and social practices. Self-concept dimensions and the content of choice alternatives. Self-concepts metadimensions and the process of choosing.

Part [D]: Career aspirations and social practices in the organization. The fit work / worker. Career satisfaction: what is it? Process(es) of a career construction.

Part [E]: Career conception: changes in goals across life. Managing careers: coping with changes and transitions.

Evaluation of the program.

As an example, some issues raised by the participants: "Finally, I understood what the Psychologist wants when he told me we have to implement a career system". "A planned career program may be of vital importance to maintain some of my best employees". "Career is all that? Adaptation? Values? Competencies? Myself and the environment? Well, it was a new field for me".

## Final remarks

At the end of the program, managers recognize the legitimacy of career world "inside" the organizations, although career problems were hard to define. A "sightseeing" on career world leaded managers to recognize that they have the responsibility to provide employees with the opportunities to career development beyond traditional organizational career management.

Better than try to find someone guilty or try to find someone not guilty because of the gap between employee's careers and managers policies is to assume a positive

attitude and the attempt to look ahead. The representations of how members perceive and evaluate their organization encompass important elements such as participation, skills-training, or job flexibility. But more important than that is the need of change of mentalities: the understanding that organizations must be able to develop individuals in a well-established and a well-defined employee career development linked with business strategies, rather than an attempt to resolve a career crisis. Further research is needed for the establishments of interfaces between theory and its practical side, namely, methodology for research: practice-based research networks (e.g., different groups, of practitioners who have agreed to implement research statements (or programs), collected data and examine common (or not) career problems in organizations (Duarte, 2008). The key objectives consisted in translating concepts into practical exercises; and the key tasks demanded to verify the effect of employee involvement on organization productivity.

At last, the evidence: career psychologists do not have, yet, the interdependencies within personnel and organizational psychology models and methods, concerning career issues in organizations. But they need.

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