CHAPTER 19

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER ARE TO:

1 EXPLAIN AND CRITIQUE HOW AND WHY CAREERS ARE CHANGING

2 INTRODUCE SOME DEFINITIONS OF CAREER AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

3 REVIEW SOME OF THE MODELS AND THEORIES WHICH HELP US UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT

4 EXPLORE PRACTICAL WAYS IN WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL CAN MANAGE THEIR CAREER, AND THE TYPES OF SUPPORT THE ORGANISATION CAN PROVIDE FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

WINDOW ON PRACTICE

Mallon (1998) reports on research with 24 ex-managers of one branch of the public sector who now had portfolio careers, and through in-depth biographical interviews set out to understand how they account for their career move. From the data she grouped the participants into three categories: 'refugees', 'missionaries' and 'reluctant missionaries'.

There were only two managers classified as 'refugees' and both were unexpectedly made compulsorily redundant, from senior positions. Since then they had not reconciled themselves to any alternative form of working other than full-time employment. One found a new job, after a year, in which she hopes to remain until retirement, the other still looks for jobs, but having been unsuccessful so far is developing his portfolio of work. Two others Mallon classified as 'ex-refugees'. Both experienced redundancy, both found other work, but both have since chosen the portfolio route. Their explanation for this centred around growing disillusionment with the 'employment' world stimulated by their bitter experiences of redundancy.

Mallon identified five of her respondents as 'missionaries'. All left voluntarily and two of these never felt that they fitted in the 'employed world'. Three made very well-planned decisions to move to a portfolio, reducing hours with their current employer in order to gradually build up work elsewhere, for example. These three felt that there were no further challenges in the organisation for them, they talked about 'new' careers, and about taking control for themselves. They clearly felt pulled by other opportunities.

The final, largest group, 'reluctant missionaries', were somewhere in between. Two were offered the choice between a different job or redundancy, and chose to leave, others felt a growing dissatisfaction with the organisation and being out of step with the organisation, and one felt that dismissal was looming. However, although these individuals were pushed into action they did report factors which pulled them towards a portfolio approach, such as integrity, time for childcare and doing the type of work that they wanted to do. Others fled the organisation because they felt their position was untenable but, at the time, they had no idea what they were going to do next, and their decision to go portfolio was a pragmatic response to the situation that they were in.

Source: Adapted from M. Mallon (1998) 'The portfolio career; pushed or pulled to it?' *Personnel Review*, Vol. 27, No. 5.

There is a considerable body of literature indicating that the foregoing examples are typical of a general and substantial move from long-term organisationally based careers to individually managed portfolio or boundaryless careers.

HOW AND WHY ARE CAREERS CHANGING?

Many writers over the past decade have provided a picture of dramatic change in the nature of careers that are possible in today's society. The traditional career

within a single organisation, characterised by hierarchical progression, managed on a planned basis by the organisation, is gone, it is argued (*see*, for example, Arthur and Rousseau 1996a; Adamson *et al*. 1998). Organisations now have flatter structures and need to be flexible, fluid and cost-effective in the face of an uncertain and unpredictable future. Thus they can no longer offer long-term career progression in return for loyalty, commitment and adequate performance, which was an unwritten deal and part of the traditional psychological contract.

Kanter (1989), for example, suggests that managers can no longer rely on the organisation for their career future and must learn to manage themselves and their work independently as many professionals do. In particular, they must build portfolios of their achievements and skills, develop networks, make a 'name' for themselves and market themselves within the relevant industry sector rather than just within their current organisation. In a different sense Handy (1994) uses the words 'portfolio career' to mean 'exchanging full time employment for independence', which is expressed in the collection of different pieces of work done for different clients. Individuals starting off a portfolio career often continue to do some work for their previous organisation (on a fee-paying basis) and add to this a network of other clients. Arthur (1994) describes the 'boundaryless career' which includes moves between organisations and non-hierarchical moves within organisations where there are no norms of progress or success. This concept continues to capture interest and a whole part of the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* in 2003 was devoted to this and related issues.

However the evidence to support the reality that careers have fundamentally changed is 'shaky at best' (Mallon 1998). Guest and McKenzie-Davey (1996), for example, found the traditional organisation and the traditional career 'alive and well' (pp. 22–3), with the hierarchy still used for motivation and progression. Also, as we indicated in Chapter 8, where we looked at retention, statistics demonstrate that job tenure and the number of job changes has changed very little over the past thirty years. As yet there is insufficient research into the extent to which new career patterns are developing.

Some argue that the contradictions between the above views are a result of being in transition (*see*, for example, Burke 1998a), whereas King (2003) suggests that the 'new career' may be reflected in people's expectations rather than their labour market experiences. Another explanation may be that temporary and contract work are spread more evenly across different sectors (*see*, for example, Burke 1998b), and have therefore become more visible. Let us not forget that the traditional psychological contract was never available to everyone. Smithson and Lewis (2000) argue that public perceptions of increasing insecurity may have more to do with the characteristics of those whom the insecurity now affects, such as graduates and professional staff, rather than an increase in the phenomenon. Similarly, different groups have different sets of expectations and subjective feelings of job insecurity. Younger workers accept insecurity, almost as the norm (*see*, for example, Smithson and Lewis 2000), but older workers feel the psychological contract has been violated. Older workers may have the same expectations as before but realise that the employer is no longer going to fulfil their part of the bargain (*see*, for example, Herriot *et al*. 1997; Thomas and Dunkerley 1999).

A different explanation for these contradictory findings is that organisations project the image of a stable and predictable internal career structure, because it is in their interests to do so, whatever the reality. Adamson *et al*. (1998) suggest that it is

Table 19.1 The old psychological contract

Employee offers	Employer offers
Loyalty	Security
Commitment	Future career
Adequate performance	To look after the employee

Table 19.2 The new psychological contract

Employee offers	Employer offers
Continuous learning	Employability
Keep pace with change	Tools and environment to achieve this
Commitment to organisational success	Opportunities for assessment
Manage their own career	Opportunities for development
High productivity	Care

Source: Based on R.H. Waterman, J.A. Waterman and B.A. Collard (1994) 'Toward a career-resilient workforce', *Harvard Business Review*, July–August.

in the organisation's interests to maintain the illusion of such career structures so as to retain high-performance employees. It could also be argued that such structures are useful for the organisation in recruiting highly skilled employees, for whom career structures are likely to continue. Purcell *et al.* (2003) also showed that positive perceptions of career advancement opportunities are one of the most powerful determinants of employee commitment. However, if this is an illusion such a strategy may well backfire on the organisation.

If the psychological contract between employer and employee now needs to be renegotiated (*see*, for example, Herriot and Pemberton 1996), this does not mean abandoning the concept of career, rather, the idea of a new psychological contract is developing. Many articles identify a 'new psychological contract' in which the deal between the employer and their staff is different but still mutually beneficial. Employees offer high productivity and total commitment while with their employer, and the employer offers enhanced *employability* rather than long-term employment. The offer of employability centres on enabling employees to develop skills that are in demand, and allows them opportunities to practise these and keep up to date. This equips the employee with the skills and experiences needed to obtain another appropriate job when he or she is no longer needed by their present employer (*see*, for example, Waterman *et al.* 1994). The difference between the old psychological contract and the new psychological contract, as they relate to careers, are shown in Tables 19.1 and 19.2. King (2003) found that graduates rated the offer of employability as of most importance in career terms, and they still expected the organisation to provide a career for them; she argues that the picture presented is one of lip service and a less than whole-hearted commitment to the concept of the 'new career'.

However, a further contradiction is apparent in the literature: the assumption that the 'new psychological contract' supplants the old when the original contract is violated, but the degree to which this happens is debatable (*see*, for example, Doherty *et al.* 1997). Herriot (1998) argues that the new psychological contract is just more rhetoric, and that in reality there are many different new deals, and Sparrow (1996)

suggests that the solution to the fragmentation of the old psychological contract is a series of layered individualised career contracts. King also suggests that the organisation should not adopt an either/or career approach, but aim to offer both internal careers and employability support.

DEFINITIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

A career can be defined as the pattern or sequence of work roles of an individual. Traditionally, the word applied only to those occupying managerial and professional roles, but increasingly it is seen as appropriate for everyone in relation to their work roles. Also, the word career has been used to imply upward movement and advancement in work roles. As we have noted, many organisations no longer offer a traditional career, or only offer it to a selected few. Enforced redundancies, flatter structures, short-term contracts, availability of part-time rather than full-time work, all break the idealised image of career. We now recognise other moves as legitimate expressions of career development, including development and extension within the job itself, lateral moves and the development of portfolio work. Career can also be conceptualised more broadly in terms of 'the individual's development in learning and work throughout life' (Collin and Watts 1996), and thus includes voluntary work and other life experiences. Indeed Adamson *et al.* (1998) go so far as to say that a good curriculum vitae may:

> no longer be one with an impressive list of job titles of increasing seniority, but rather a rich cv (e.g. one which includes a variety of work and non-work activities). (p. 256)

Male careers are becoming increasingly similar to the traditional fragmented pattern of women's careers (Goffee and Nicholson 1994), and many men are generally keener to develop careers which take account of personal and family needs, including children's education, partner's career and quality of life. Career development is no longer a stand-alone issue and needs to be viewed in the context of the life and development of the whole person and not just the person as employee.

We view career development as something experienced by the individual (sometimes referred to as the *internal* career), and therefore not necessarily bounded by one organisation. This also means that the responsibility for managing a career is with the individual, although the organisation may play a key facilitating and supporting role.

The primary purpose of career development is to meet the current and future needs of the organisation and the individual at work, and this increasingly means developing employability. On this basis Walton (1999) argues that it is increasingly difficult to disentangle career development from general training and development. We could make a strong case for the value of self-development here. Career success is seen through the eyes of the individual, and can be defined as individual satisfaction with career through meeting personal career goals, while making a contribution to the organisation. Although in this chapter we prioritise the needs of the individual, in Chapter 3 we prioritise the needs of the organisation when we review replacement and succession planning.

We have given priority to the individual in career development, but it is worth noting the general benefits career development provides for the organisation:

- It makes the organisation attractive to potential recruits.
- It enhances the image of the organisation, by demonstrating a recognition of employee needs.
- It is likely to encourage employee commitment and reduce staff turnover.
- It is likely to encourage motivation and job performance as employees can see some possible movement and progress in their work.
- Perhaps most importantly it exploits the full potential of the workforce.

Before looking at how individuals can manage their career development with organisational support, we need to review some of the concepts underlying the notion of career.

UNDERSTANDING CAREERS

Career development stages

Many authors have attempted to map out the ideal stages of a successful career, matched against an age range for each stage. Schein (1978) offers nine stages of the career life cycle, while other authors, such as Super (1980) and Hall and Nougaim (1968), have suggested five. In this section we review the five stages outlined by Greenhaus and Callanan (1994). Few careers follow such an idealised pattern, and even historically such a pattern did not apply for all employees. However, the stage approach offers a useful framework for understanding career experiences, if we use it flexibly as a tool for understanding careers rather than as a normative model.

Stage 1: occupational choice: preparation for work

The first stage may last until around age 25, or may reappear for those who wish to change career later in life. It involves developing an occupational self-image. The key theme is a matching process between the strengths/weaknesses, values and desired lifestyle of the individual and the requirements and benefits of a range of occupations. One of the difficulties that can arise at this stage is a lack of individual self-awareness. There are countless tests available to help identify individual interests, but these can only complete part of the picture, and need to be complemented by structured exercises, which help people look at themselves from a range of perspectives. Other problems involve individuals limiting their choice due to social, cultural, gender or racial characteristics. Although we use role models to identify potential occupations, and these extend the range of options we consider, this process may also close them down. Another difficulty at this stage is gaining authentic information about careers which are different from the ones pursued by family and friends.

Stage 2: organisational entry

There is some overlap between Stage 1 and Stage 2 which occurs, typically, between the ages of 18 and 25, but is revisited by most of us a number of times. It involves the individual in both finding a job which corresponds with their occupational

self-image, and starting to do that job. Problems here centre on the accuracy of information that the organisation provides, so that when the individual begins work expectations and reality may be very different. Recruiters understandably 'sell' their organisations and the job to potential recruits, emphasising the best parts and neglecting the downside. Applicants often fail to test their assumptions by asking for the specific information they really need. In addition, schools, colleges and universities have, until recently, only prepared students for the technical demands of work, ignoring other skills that they will need, such as communication skills, influencing skills and dealing with organisational politics. To aid organisational entry, Wanous (1992) has suggested the idea of realistic recruitment which we refer to in Chapter 8.

ACTIVITY 19.1

Think of three different jobs in your organisation (or any organisation with which you are familiar) which have been/may be recruited externally. If a 'realistic recruitment' approach were adopted:

- What information would you give to the candidates about each job and the organisation so that a balanced picture was presented?
- What methods would you use to communicate this information?

Stage 3: early career – establishment and achievement

The age band for early career is between 25 and 40 years.

The establishment stage involves fitting into the organisation and understanding 'how things are done around here'. Thorough induction programmes are important, but more especially it is important to provide the new recruit with a 'real' job and early challenges rather than a roving commission from department to department with no real purpose, as often found on trainee schemes. Feedback and support from the immediate manager are also key.

The achievement part of this stage is demonstrating competence and gaining greater responsibility and authority. It is at this stage that access to opportunities for career development becomes key. Development within the job and opportunities for promotion and broadening moves are all aided if the organisation has a structured approach to career development, involving career ladders, pathways or matrices, but not necessarily hierarchical progression. Feedback remains important, as do opportunities and support for further career exploration and planning. Organisations are likely to provide the most support for 'high fliers' who are seen as the senior management of the future and who may be on 'fast track' programmes.

Stage 4: mid-career

Greenhaus and Callanan (1994) suggest that the mid-career stage usually falls between the ages of 40 to 55, and may involve further growth and advancement or the maintenance of a steady state. In either case it is generally accompanied by some form of re-evaluation of career and life direction. A few will experience decline

at this stage. For those who continue to advance, organisational support remains important. Some people whose career has reached a plateau will experience feelings of failure. Organisational support in these cases needs to involve the use of lateral career paths, job expansion, development as mentors of others, further training to keep up to date and the use of a flexible reward system.

Stage 5: late career

The organisation's task in the late career stage is to encourage people to continue performing well. This is particularly important as some sectors are experiencing skills shortages and there are moves by some companies to allow individuals to stay at work after the state retirement age. Despite the stereotypes that abound defining older workers as slower and less able to learn, Mayo (1991) argues that if organisations believe these employees will do well and treat them accordingly they will perform well. Greenhaus and Callanan point out that the availability of flexible work patterns, clear performance standards, continued training and the avoidance of discrimination are helpful at this stage, combined with preparation for retirement.

ACTIVITY 19.2

If you had a high degree of choice in terms of your career stages would you prefer to:

1. Remain with one organisation for life, or move around?
2. Stay with one occupation/profession for life or change your occupation/profession once or twice?
3. Prefer hierarchical job moves with more responsibility in the same area, or the opportunity to move into new areas without increasing your responsibility level?
4. Prefer to retire as soon as you can, or work for as long as you can?

Identify the reasons for your choice, and consider its advantages and disadvantages. How likely do you think it is that you will be able to fulfil your choice?

Career anchors

Based on a longitudinal study of 44 male graduates of Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management completed in 1973, 10–12 years after graduation, Schein (1978) identified a set of five 'career anchors' and proposed that these explained the pattern of career decisions that each individual had taken. Schein described career anchors as much broader than motivation, and including the following:

- self-perceived talents and abilities;
- self-perceived motives and needs;
- self-perceived attitudes and values.

Our perception of ourselves in these areas comes from direct experiences of work, from successes, from self-diagnosis and feedback. The conclusions that we draw both drive and constrain future career development. Schein sees career anchors as a holistic representation of the person, which takes into account the interaction between the factors identified above. Career anchors can identify a source of personal stability in the person which has determined past choices and will probably determine future choices.

The problematic aspect of career anchors is the accuracy of the individual's self-perceptions, and the question of what happens in mid-career to those who feel their attitudes and values are changing. Schein acknowledges that career anchors are learned rather than reflecting latent abilities and are the sorts of things that people are reluctant to abandon. Not only do we all need to identify and understand what our anchors are in order to make sure we are doing the right thing, we also need to appreciate that there are things that we shall continue to need even if we make a career change.

Schein originally identified five career anchors and later supplemented them with another four. The original five are:

Technical/functional competence

Those who have this as their career anchor are interested in the technical content of their work and their feelings of competence in doing this. They tend not to be interested in management itself, as they prefer to exercise their technical skills. They would, however, be prepared to accept managerial responsibilities in their own functional area.

Managerial competence

For those with this career anchor, the exercising of managerial responsibility is an end in itself, and technical/functional jobs just a way of getting there. These people are most likely to end up in general managerial jobs and possess three key competences: analytical competence to solve problems characterised by incomplete information in areas of uncertainty; interpersonal competence to influence and control; and emotional resilience, with the ability to be stimulated rather than paralysed by crises.

Security and stability

It is characteristic of those with this career anchor to be prepared to do what the organisation wants of them in order to maintain job security and the present and future benefits which go with this. Given the choice, most will therefore remain with one organisation for life, although there are alternative patterns such as remaining in the same geographical area but moving between different employers, and making separate financial provision for the future. Because they have not sought career success in terms of hierarchical promotion those with this career anchor often feel a sense of failure, and find it hard to accept their own criteria for career success. This group are more likely to integrate career with home life.

Creativity

Individuals with creativity as a career anchor feel the need to build something new. They are driven by wanting to extend themselves, get involved in new ventures and projects and could be described as entrepreneurial. Should their new venture turn into a thriving business they may become bored by the need to manage it and are more likely to hand this aspect over to others.

Autonomy and independence

The desire to be free of organisational constraints in the exercise of their technical/functional competence is what drives those with this career anchor. They tend to find organisational life restrictive and intrusive into their personal lives and prefer to set their own pace and work style. They will usually work alone or in a small firm. Consultants, writers and lecturers are typical of the roles that this group occupy.

The four additional anchors which Schein added later are:

Basic identity

Those with this career anchor are driven by the need to achieve and sustain an occupational identity. Typically they are in lower-level jobs where their role is represented visually perhaps with badges or uniforms. In this way their role is defined externally, and some may seek, for example, to be associated with a prestigious employer.

Service to others

The driving force here is the need to help others, often through the exercise of interpersonal competence or other skills. The need is not to exercise such competence as an end in itself, but for the purpose of helping others; typical examples here would be teachers and doctors.

Power, influence and control

This career anchor can be separate from the managerial anchor or may be a pronounced part of it. Those driven by this career anchor may pursue political careers, teaching, medicine or the church as these areas may give them the opportunity to exercise influence and control over others.

Variety

Those who seek variety may do so for different reasons. This career anchor may be relevant for those who have a wide range of talents, who value flexibility or who get bored very easily.

Career balance

Much of the original work done on describing career stages and career anchors was carried out by analysing the experiences of those who were both male and white, so

the analyses are clearly inadequate for our contemporary world of work. Schein's development of his original set of career anchors shows understanding is being reshaped, but we still lack satisfactory explanations of career development that can embrace the full variety of ethnic backgrounds, gender and occupational variety.

There is considerable evidence that racial minorities and women limit their career choices, both consciously and unconsciously, for reasons not to do with their basic abilities and career motives. Social class identity may have the same impact. Employers need at least to be aware of such forces and ideally would explore such constraints with their employees to encourage individual potential to be exploited to the full.

The acceptance of such idealised career development stages as described above, particularly in an era of work intensification, leaves little room for family and other interference in career development, and until recently there has been no place in career development and even in the thinking about careers for those who do not conform to the stages outlined. There are hopeful signs of increasing recognition that career and life choices need to be explored in unison. There has also been little recognition of the commercial environment and the impact that this has on career development stages for many individuals. Considerable attention is being paid, currently, to the concept of work-life balance (*see* IDS 2000) where aspects of work are combined with other life choices and we devote Chapter 32 to this issue.

INDIVIDUAL CAREER MANAGEMENT

If we identify a career as the property of the individual, then clearly the responsibility for managing this rests on the individual, who should identify career goals, adopt strategies to support them and devise plans to achieve the goal.

In reality, however, many people fail to plan. Pringle and Gold (1989), for example, found a lack of career planning in their sample of 50 'achieving' men and women managers. Only around a quarter of people had plans for the future and many identified luck, opportunity or being in the right place at the right time as the reason they had achieved promotions. Harlan and Weiss (1982) found both men and women drifting into positions created through coincidences.

Of course, we do not know how well these people would have done had they planned – they might have done even better. We argue that planning is an essential ingredient of individual career management even if only to provide a framework for decisions about the opportunities that arise through identifying priorities. We also argue that the more an individual attempts to manage their career, the more likely it is that opportunities will arise and the more likely that they are to be able to do something constructive with them.

Mayo suggests that in defining a career goal it is too difficult for a person to try to specify the ultimate goal of their career. Career aiming points are more appropriate if based on a 10–15-year timespan, or maybe a shorter period.

A career goal will be specific to the individual, such as to become an internal senior organisational consultant by the age of 35. The range of strategies that a person may adopt in pursuit of their goal can be described in terms of more general groups. The list below describes the type of strategies, identified from a review of the literature by Gould and Penley (1984).

- **Creating opportunities.** This involves building the appropriate skills and experiences that are needed for a career in the organisation. Developing those skills that are seen as critical to the individual's supervisor and department are most useful, as is exercising leadership in an area where none exists at present.
- **Extended work involvement.** This necessitates working long hours, both at the workplace and at home, and may also involve a preoccupation with work issues at all times.
- **Self-nomination/self-presentation.** The individual who pursues this strategy will communicate the desire for increased responsibility to their managers. They will also make known their successes, and build an image of themselves as someone who achieves things.
- **Seeking career guidance.** This involves seeking out a more experienced person, either within the organisation or without, and looking for guidance or sponsorship. The use of mentor relationships would come into this category.
- **Networking.** Networking involves developing contacts both inside and outside the organisation to gain information and support.
- **Interpersonal attraction.** This strategy builds the relationship with one's immediate manager on the basis that they will have an impact on career progression. One form of this is 'opinion conformity'; that is, sharing the key opinions of the individual's manager, perhaps with minor deviations. Another is expressed as 'other enhancement', which may involve sharing personal information with one's manager and becoming interested in similar pursuits.

More recently Siebert and colleagues (2001) suggest that career success hinges on who you know as well as what you know, and often on the relationship between the two. In their research they found that it was better to have a large network of contacts and weaker ties, rather than a smaller network with stronger ties.

These strategies provide some difficulties for women:

> women in management often find it difficult to break into the male-dominated 'old boy network' and therefore are denied the contacts, opportunities and policy information it provides. (Davidson and Cooper 1992, p. 129)

The career strategies explored above are clearly most appropriate in the early and mid-career stages, and other strategies will best fit other stages.

There is evidence however, that individuals are generally not good at career self-management, as demonstrated by Sturges *et al.* (2002). Nevertheless, they did find that informal career support, perhaps in terms of mentoring, did reinforce self-management activities. This supports the partnership approach to career development. From a slightly different angle, Yarnall (1998) found that career education for employees helps them extract support from the business. In the 2003 career management survey by CIPD (2003) 95 per cent of respondents felt that individuals will be expected to take responsibility for their own careers in the future and 90 per cent felt that they must be offered organisational support to do this. Arguing that the public sector seems to depend more on the individual to drive their own career Hirsh (2003) suggests that this may be related to the lower effectiveness of the public sector.

ACTIVITY 19.3

What general types of career strategy would be appropriate for:

- organisational entry?
- late career?

Compare your views with those of people you know who are in each of these career stages.

While the strategies discussed above were derived from careers within an organisational context, similar strategies could be appropriate for employees forced to look more widely in developing their careers. Arthur and Rousseau (1996b) suggest that individuals need to develop career resilience, which they defined as bouncing back from disruptions to one's career, and Waterman *et al.* (1994), in an article on the career-resilient workforce, suggest that individuals need to:

- Make themselves knowledgeable about relevant market trends.
- Understand the skills and knowledge needed in their area and anticipate future needs.
- Be aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Have a plan for increasing their performance and employability.
- Respond quickly to changing business needs.
- Move on from their current employer when a win/win relationship is no longer possible.

Ball (1997) identifies four career management competencies. Three of these are planning, engaging in personal development and balancing work and non-work. The fourth is optimising, which includes intelligence gathering, seeking a mentor, having a positive self-image and gaining the attention of others. However Hirsh (2003) argues that:

> If employees want to get on they should seek qualifications and training, greater responsibility and varied work experiences. They should not work reduced hours, take career breaks, work from home or get ill. (p. 7)

So far we have tended to focus on career moves within the organisation, but many people desire the next career move to be to another organisation or into a new type of career. The concept of a personal career agent has emerged for top-flight executives and for further details on this see case 19.1 on the website. However, most us of need to rely on our own skills and effort to make a career move. In particular, moving into a different type of career is very difficult for many of us and so we conclude this section by discussing why this is so difficult and what steps might be taken to improve one's chances of success. Drummond and Chell (2001) use two case studies

to illustrate some of the issues which embed us in our career. They explain, using Becker's theory of side bets, how other interests influence our choice of career in addition to the work itself, for example the likelihood of high earnings, status, travel and so on. If these desires are fulfilled but we are dissatisfied with our career we may find ourselves trapped. They also show how we use self-justification to defend the careers choices we have made and to stick with them, failure or problems being attributed to external causes. They suggest that decisions made early in life are hard to reverse and that the more we stick with what we have done and the more we rationalise this, the more likely we are to stick with it in the future. Ibarra (2002) also uses case studies to illustrate how individuals try to make the change but fail due to the way they go about it, in addition to the natural fear we have of change. There are cases where dramatic changes were attempted and failed, either because they turned out to be the same as before (moving to a new job in a new organisation, but finding the nature of the work just the same) or because they just did not work (as in a new start-up business that could not make sufficient profit). Not only is self-knowledge important, Ibarra argues, but much of this needs to be gained from real experiences. Planning to change and using advisers is insufficient. She suggests that:

> working identity, as a practice, is necessarily a process of experimenting, testing, and learning about our possible selves. (p. 43)

Her advice is to try out new activities on a small scale before making a major commitment to a new career path, for example, trying out additional work at the evenings or weekends, or on the basis of temporarily reduced hours, sabbatical or extended holidays, and maybe working on a voluntary basis. She also suggests developing new networks and reference groups in areas where we may be interested to work, as these people will not only provide information and possible opportunities but also a support network when different types of work are begun. Third, she suggests that we to seek out or create triggers and catalysts for change. For example, one may use redundancy as an opportunity to be free to try something different.

ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Although career management is primarily the individual's responsibility, organisations can and should support this. This will be relevant whether careers are offered internally or whether employability is promoted, although the support may be different. Most organisations still see career management as optional rather than essential, its future orientation makes it slip down the business agenda, and there is always a tension between individual and organisational needs (Hirsh 2003). Successful career management is dependent on resolving these differences. CIPD (2003) argues that the factors contributing to effective career management are using career management activities valued by employees; training of line managers and HR staff in career management; line managers taking career management seriously; commitment of senior managers; a formal written career management strategy; integration with overall HR and business strategy. Based on the 2003 CIPD study Hirsh notes that the main barriers to career management are practical rather than philosophical

and involve lack of time and resources, career management being seen as peripheral and lack of senior management commitment. Organisations can help individuals with:

- **Career exploration** – providing tools and help for self-diagnosis and supplying organisational information.
- **Career goal setting** – providing a clear view of the career opportunities available in the business, making a wider range of opportunities available to meet different career priorities.
- **Career strategies and action planning** – providing information and support; what works in this organisation; what's realistic; when considering working for other organisations may be appropriate.
- **Career feedback** – providing an honest appraisal of current performance and career potential.

Organisations can make this contribution through the following activities.

Career strategy

Although a career strategy is critical, less than a half of the organisations responding to the 2003 CIPD careers survey reported that a written career strategy existed, and only one-quarter of respondents had a career strategy that covered *all* employees. Most organisations concentrate on senior managers and key staff that the organisation wishes to retain. There appeared to be little support for traditionally disadvantaged groups such as part-time workers, those returning after long-term sick absence or a career break, women returning to work after bearing children and workers over age 50.

Career pathways and grids

A career path is a sequence of job roles or positions, related via work content or abilities required, through which an individual can move. Publicised pathways can help people to identify a realistic career goal within the organisation. Traditional pathways were normally presented as a vertical career ladder, emphasising upward promotion within a function, often formally or informally using age limits and formal qualifications for entry to certain points of the ladder. Joining the pathway other than at the normal entry point was very difficult. These pathways tended to limit career opportunities as much as they provided helpful information. The emphasis on upward movement meant that career progress for the majority was halted early on in their careers. The specifications of age and qualification meant that the pathways were restricted to those who had an 'ideal' career development profile but excluded those who had taken career breaks, or who had lots of relevant experience but no formal qualifications. This inflexibility tended to stifle cross-functional moves and emphasised progression via management rather than equally through development of technical expertise.

There is now increasing use of alternative approaches, often designed in the form of a grid, with options at each point, so that upwards, lateral, diagonal and even downwards moves can be made. These grids may also be linked into grids for other

parts of the business, thereby facilitating cross-functional moves. Ideally, positions are described in behavioural terms, identifying the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for a position rather than the qualifications needed or age range anticipated. However, as organisations continue to change more and more rapidly even such a matrix may prove to be too rigid and career opportunities may need to be expressed in terms of groups of roles, and be fluid enough to integrate newly developed and unexpected types of roles.

Not only do career pathways and grids need to be carefully communicated to employees, they also need to reflect reality, and not just present an ideal picture of desirable career development. Managers who will be appointing staff need to be fully apprised of the philosophy of career development and the types of move that the organisation wishes to encourage. It is important that the organisation reinforces lateral moves by developing a payment system that rewards the development of skills and not just the organisation level.

Fast-track programmes

Fast-track programmes have been considered as a way of developing and retaining high performers. However, problems have been found with such accelerated progress. Hall (1999) reports that although individuals on such programmes perform well early on, they tend to experience derailment later in their career. He proposed four reasons for this. First, that moving through the organisation so quickly means that they have never been in one place long enough to develop a network of learning support. Second, that in their rapid progress they will have alienated a lot of people on the way. Third, that they have never been in one position long enough to experience failure and setbacks and learn how to deal with these, and, finally, this means that they have not received sufficient developmental feedback, which is critical to career success. Iles (1997) suggests that to make such careers more sustainable there needs to be greater emphasis on developing empowerment skills and more developmental feedback.

Career conversations

The lack of opportunity to discuss career options is frustrating for employees, and to discover the nature of helpful career conversations Hirsh and her colleagues (2001) asked individuals to explain positive career conversations in terms of where they took place, who was involved, how they were conducted and the impact that they had. They found that only around one-fifth of the discussions took place with the individual's line manager and many more had conversations with other managers in the organisation, and some with specialist advisers or HR. Around half the discussions took place informally, outside the remit of, say, an appraisal, development centre, mentoring, coaching, or any other formal system, and of these 40 per cent were unplanned. It was key that discussions were held with people who were trusted and open, prepared to be frank about the individual's skills and potential and who were genuinely interested in the individual. Around three-quarters of these conversations appeared to result in some form of career action. Hirsh and her colleagues note that these findings differ from current ideas of best practice which are to discuss career with one's line manager in an appraisal context.

Managerial support

In spite of the above findings managerial support remains critical, not only in terms of appointing staff, but also in terms of supporting the career development of their current staff. Direct feedback on current performance and potential is vital, especially in identifying strengths and weaknesses, and what improvement is required. The immediate manager is in a good position to refer the individual to other managers and introduce them into a network which will support their career moves. In addition the manager is in the ideal position to provide job challenges and experiences within the current job which will equip the incumbent with the skills needed for the desired career move.

Unfortunately, managers often do not see these responsibilites as part of their job and see them as belonging to the HR department, and Hirsh notes that managers often need to be cajoled by HR to play their part. Yarnall (1998) found low levels of support from managers, but also found that employees participating in self-development career initiatives did encourage management support. Managers often feel constrained by their lack of knowledge about other parts of the organisation, and often withdraw from giving accurate feedback about career potential, particularly when they know that what they have to say is not what the individual wishes to hear. CIPD (2003) notes that there appears to be a lack of training for line managers to support them in their career development role. It also found that the most common career goals explored by line managers were around short-term promotions and projects within the organisation at the expense of more complex issues such as lateral moves, secondments, work-life balance and career flexibility Managers are also sometimes tempted, in their own interests, to hold on to good employees rather than encouraging them to develop elsewhere.

ACTIVITY 19.4

As a member of the HR function pursuing an organisational philosophy of flexible career moves and continuous career development, how would you:

- encourage managers to adopt this philosophy?
- prepare them for the skills they will need to use?

What other career development support could immediate managers give in addition to the suggestions made above?

Career counselling

Occasionally immediate managers will be involved in career counselling, drawing out the strengths, weaknesses, values and interests of their staff. In many cases, however, those who seek such counselling would prefer to speak in confidence to someone independent of their work situation. In these circumstances a member of the HR department may act as counsellor. In more complex cases, or those involving senior members of staff, professionals external to the organisation may be sought. This is

also more likely to be the case if the career counselling is offered as part of an outplacement programme resulting from a redundancy.

Career workshops

Career workshops are usually, but not always, conducted off-site, and offered as a confidential programme to help individuals assess their strengths and weaknesses, values and interests, identify career opportunities, set personal career goals and begin to develop a strategy and action plan. Career goals will not necessarily be restricted to the current employing organisation – and one objective of the workshop is often to broaden career perspectives. Workshops may last 2–3 days, and normally involve individual paper-and-pencil exercises, group discussions, one-to-one discussions and private conferences with tutors. For some people these can be quite traumatic events as they involve whole-life exploration, and often buried issues are confronted which have been avoided in the hurly-burly of day-to-day life. The most difficult part for many individuals is keeping the momentum going after the event by continuing the action planning and self-assessment of progress.

Self-help workbooks

As an alternative to a workshop there are various self-help guides and workbooks which can assist people to work through career issues by presenting a structure and framework. Organisations such as 'Lifeskills' provide a range of workbooks appropriate for different stages of career development.

Career centres

Career centres within organisations can be used as a focal point for the provision of organisational and external career information. The centre may include a library on career choices and exploration, information on organisational career ladders and grids, current opportunities to apply for, self-help workbooks and computer packages. Such centres appear to be relatively common in large organisations, yet CIPD (2003) reports that participants do not consider them to be very useful.

Assessment and development centres

Assessment centres for internal staff have traditionally taken the form of pass/fail assessment for a selected group of high-potential managers at a specific level. They were focused on organisational rather than individual needs. Recently changes to some of these centres have moved the focus to the individual, with less limitation on who is allowed to attend. These 'development centres' assess the individual's strengths and weaknesses and provide feedback and development plans so that each can make the most of his or her own potential. The outcome is not pass/fail but action plans for personal and career development.

Whatever career activities are in place in the organisation it is important to ensure that:

- There is a clear and agreed careers philosophy communicated to all in the organisation.
- Managers are supported in their career development responsibilities.

- Career opportunities are communicated to staff.
- There is an appropriate balance between open and closed internal recruitment.
- The reasons for the balance are explained.
- Knowledge, skills and attitude development are rewarded as well as achievement of a higher organisational level.
- Attention is given to career development within the current job.

Although all of these activities focus on careers within an organisation, most are still appropriate for employers providing development leading to employability rather than long-term employment. Waterman *et al*. (1994) stress that employers need to move to an adult/adult relationship with their employees from that of parent/child, be prepared to share critical organisational information and let go of the old notion of loyalty, thus accepting that good employees will leave. Hiltrop (1996) provides a good range of suggestions for managing the changing psychological contract.

ACTIVITY 19.5

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of open and closed internal recruitment?
- In which circumstances might it be appropriate to give a greater emphasis to closed recruitment?

- In which circumstances might it be appropriate to give a greater emphasis to open recruitment?

Perhaps the most outstanding challenge is to come to terms with the fact that careers have changed due to a changing organisation structure and competitive demands; individuals in our current labour market have a greater say in their career and how it relates to their whole life; and that alternative career profiles are equally legitimate. It is a sad reflection that in most research career development activities are not found to have a high profile (*see*, for example, Atkinson 2000).

SUMMARY PROPOSITIONS

19.1 The context of careers is changing from long-term careers in one organisation with upward movement to careers that are characterised by disruption, movement between employers and the development of portfolios of work. There is a school of thought that suggests this trend is overstated.

19.2 Careers are owned by individuals and the primary responsibility for managing them falls to the individual; organisations have a role in supporting and encouraging this.

19.3 Theories of career development include career stage theories and career anchors. Although these were developed in an era of more stable career structures they still have interpretive value if used in a flexible manner.

19.4 Individuals need to manage their careers and aim to become career resilient, so that they have developed the skills and knowledge to overcome career setbacks.

19.5 Organisations can support and encourage individual career management by providing flexible and realistic career grids, honest feedback, opportunities for individual career exploration and planning.

GENERAL DISCUSSION TOPICS

1 What is the career management challenge for the early twenty-first century? What appropriate strategies and actions might there be for employers and employees?

2 'No matter how much we encourage individuals to plan their careers, at the end of the day it comes down to opportunity and chance.'

Do you think that this comment is a fair reflection of the way that individuals manage their careers?

FURTHER READING

Daniels, I., Schramm, J. and Ryder, B. (2002) 'Evolution at work', *People Management*, Vol. 8, No. 11, 30 May, pp. 28–30
A thought-provoking article based on the views of six experts of what work and careers will look like in the future.

Hirsh, W. and Rolph, J. (2003) 'Snakes and Ladders', *People Management*, Vol. 9, No. 9, 1 May, pp. 36–7
An extremely useful summary of the CIPD 2003 survey report *Managing Employee Careers*, together with some brief material from CIPD's *Reflections: Trends and Issues in Career Management*. If you do not have time to read the full reports this is an accessible and informative alternative.

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An extensive range of additional materials, including multiple choice questions, answers to questions and links to useful websites can be found on the Human Resource Management Companion Website at **www.pearsoned.co.uk/torrington.**