

Career Related Competencies

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This study will outline the changing nature of careers in the workplace, and trace the development of an instrument for identifying and measuring competencies for goal and value achievement. The relationship between competencies, personal factors, and career success has been studied amongst 1584 employees (51,5 % response) in 16 Dutch companies. The outcome of this analysis will be presented.

Keywords: Career Development, Career Development Competencies, Career Actualization

In research and practice of Human Resource Development there is a growing emphasis on the personal responsibility of the employee for his or her career development. This is related to the idea that careers are becoming more unpredictable and boundary less (Defillippi. & Arthur, 1996). This results into the question which competencies are required to reach goals and values in the career. In this paper results are presented on the following research questions:

- Which competencies for career development can be distinguished?
- What is the relation between career development and the personal factors (gender, career phase and position)?
- What is the correlation between career development and career success?

This study is part of a PhD project about a career development model.

Career Development and its Competencies: Some Theoretical Foundations

It seems that you can not read an article, paper or dissertation on Human Resource Development which doesn't elaborate on the changes of labor and labor market, and its consequences. These changes mark the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial society (Meijers, 1995) and have resulted in the knowledge economy, that can be characterized by increasing market forces, innovation, career mobility and competition for which fast and permanent learning is essential (Thijssen, 1995). Careers have become more unpredictable and boundary less (Defillippi. & Arthur, 1996). Because of this development, in the last decade the career of a person's professional life has been emphasized. Hall & Mirvis (1995) state that in the past mainly the employers felt responsible for the career development of the employee, but that 'career ownership' defines a new meaning in the future, because organizations will not be able to meaningfully plan a person's career due to developmental sequences. This means that the individual is on his own in career development.

Career development can be understood in two ways (dictionary on development):

- as the magnitude of achieved growth; development of the career in time (consecutive jobs and education), a career path;
- as a process to accomplish growth; in the way of exert influence on one's career path.

This study about career related competencies aims at the process of career development by the individual employee. Career development in this way is not a onetime choice for a profession or job, but a continuing process to realize goals and values in work within the possibilities of and in dialogue with the environment. In this study the word career actualization is introduced. Career actualization results in taking initiatives for and acquisition of work experiences, learning experiences and network contacts based on present and developing capacities and motivation within the possibilities of the environment.

Obviously career paths are influenced by many external factors, like labor market opportunities and professional and private circumstances (Onstenk 1995; Kidd, 1996). Furthermore, personal factors like gender, previous education and age are proven to effect the way career paths develop (Nijhof, Mulder & Streumer, 1994; Woodd, 2000). Whether or not one's career path and therefore career success can be influenced by competencies needs to be examined.

Although quite some research has been performed on (factor related to) the development of career paths (see Meijers, 1995), there is little empirical based insight on ability and behavior to exert influence on one's career development.

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In literature three kinds of competencies are mentioned to be related to the development of employees' career paths:

- Working competencies: competencies to perform in a specific work -situation or competencies for different work situations in different time periods (Onstenk, 1998; Thijssen 1997);
- Learning competencies: competencies to develop working competencies (Kessels, 1998; Thijssen, 1997; Min OC&W, 1997);
- Career related competencies: competencies to manage working and learning competencies within the personal career path. Career related competencies would be important for goal-centered career development. (Meijers, 1998; Thijssen, 1997; Carson, 1995; Hall & Mirvis 1995).

Working competencies, learning competencies as well as career related competencies affect the course of the career path. They act upon possibilities and impediments a person meets during his or her career. From the perspective that a certain extent of self control in the career is possible or even recommendable, work exceeding competencies could be of importance to develop and apply effective working competencies. These competencies are called career related competencies

In this paper career related competencies will be interpreted as clusters of ability, behavior and motivation related to a specific subject of career actualization. Career related competencies can be distinguished from working competencies because they exceed the level of specific work, they are meta competencies. A 'boundary less career' requires according to Carson (1995) meta skills instead of job related competencies to select and accept in different settings. Meijers (1998) assumes that the core of the employability is not formed through specialized knowledge, but through the competency of getting insight of personal live values and work that fits these values.

Results of literature survey indicate that there are four career development competencies (process definition) (Kuijpers, 2000a, b):

- Self reflection: the competency to reflect upon personal capacities and motivations regarding the career.
- Work exploration: the competency to explore the labor market and specific work environment for suitable work (activities) and mobility prospect;
- Career control: the competency to plan and act upon one's own learning and working process;
- Self presentation: the competency to show and discuss one's capacities and values regarding work increasing the choices in career development.

Self Reflection

Self reflection, self research (Mensink, 1994) and self concept clarification (Taborsky & de Grauw, 1974) are central terms in research on career development and career services. Skills to reflect systematically on experiences are fundamental from the perspective of a changing labor market according to Kidd (1996). Career related research and practice, that focuses on matching persons with work requirements, puts emphasis on reflection of capacities. Meijers (1995) finds this cognitive method of approach too limited and pleads for emphasis on reflection on life values. Insight in one's motives and values in work are related to the meaning and identity of a person (Defilippi & Arthur, 1996) and is needed to be able to reach high performances.

Work Exploration

Acquire information on work related issues has been valued as being essential in career development. Gathering of *information about work* should be based on one's capacities and motivation. Information acquisition can take place on the different levels; information about work on the labor market, in a specific organization or on work activities. It handles content and development of work (Reynaert & Spijkerman, 1995; Meijers & Wijers, 1997). Another aspect of work exploration is *orientation on mobility*: the opportunities, procedures and relevant sources for transition on the labor market and in specific organizations, relevant for the capacities and motivation of a person. Crites (1984) describes the importance of using the right sources to gain information for career development.

Career Control

Based on self reflection and work exploration one can have to some extent control on his own career. Career planning is often valued as being essential; setting long and short term goals, determine activities to achieve one's goals and evaluate the results (Hall, 1987; Reynaert and Spijkerman, 1995; Kidd 1996). Besides career planning, *control of the learning process* is of importance for career control (Onstenk, 1998). Activities of learning process control are for example: define and analyze learning questions, evaluate and obtain appropriate training and development activities. Thirdly *control of one's work process* seems to influence career development. This indicates activities that affect the content of work in a way that work makes a better fit with one's capacities and motivation. Part of control of the work process is the balance of work and private life (Meijers, 1995; Defilippi & Arthur, 1996).

Self Presentation.

Career actualization will not be achieved by evaluation of self and work only. One should make clear to relevant others what one wants and is able to fulfil: *verbal career promotion*. Based on outcome of empirical studies Kidd (1996) emphasizes that negotiation regarding one's career is important in career development. Important factors are assertion of capacities, motivation and future career planning, together with the ability to obtain appropriate training facilities and gain support necessary for future career development. Next to the ability to express verbally the capacities and motivation is the actual *performance on the job*. One should perform well on those specific tasks that signify future career wishes. Another important factor of career development in a dynamic job-market and a dynamic organization is one's networking skills, the so called 'knowing whom' competencies (Defilippi en Arthur, 1996) for extending ones career relevant network. A *career relevant network* is the source of career related information and increases one's position on the job-market.

These four competencies are used to study career actualization and its relation to the personal factors: gender, career phase and working position, and career success. In the next paragraph, the instrument development to measure career related competencies, the instrument and subjects involved in the main study, and the analyses will be outlined.

Methods

Instrument Development

The process of the development of an instrument for the measurement of career related competencies started with a study to clarify the important components. A literature survey combined with nine in-depth-interviews with experts on career development in The Netherlands was carried out. Experts are defined as either scientific workers who study on this subject or people who worked for a long time in de field of career development.

The interviews were analyzed with Atlas ti, a program for qualitative analysis of textual data. The text was coded, dimensions and indicators were formulated. This resulted in the division of four competencies. Based on the indicators derived from the interview texts with experts items were formulated. The questionnaire was presented to employees, researchers, methodologists and linguistic experts for advise on improvement.

For content validation five experts on career development, who were interviewed before and four experts who were not involved in the study before, were asked to evaluate the questionnaire. All nine confirmed that in general the questions measured the construct career related competencies. Furthermore four in-depth-interviews were held with experts by experience about the applicability of the distinguished competencies to their career paths. The initial developed questionnaire included 131 items to measure career related competencies. To be able to diminish the number of items and to get an indication of the reliability and homogeneity of the questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out under 197 employees (response of 42 %) from the IT and Educational sector. Based on homogeneity and reliability analyses the number of items were reduced from 131 to 69. Twelve clusters of items were formed. The four competencies were each divided in three aspects: ability, behavior and motivation.

Instrument

The questionnaire that was used in the survey consisted of 104 items of which 69 items measure career related competencies. Four competencies were divided in ability, behavior and motivation items. With regards to the ability items, the respondents were asked to judge their own ability on a Likert scales ranging from 1 (very low ability) to 5 (very high ability). On behavior items the respondents were asked to indicate to which extend he or she agreed with the given statement or how often he or she performs activities with regard to career development. On motivation items the respondent were asked to indicate the importance of a statement. Other aspects of the questionnaire are amongst others: personal factors like gender, age and working position and career success which is subdivided in career success from own perspective (5 items) and career success from others' perspective (5 items).

Subjects

The questionnaire was send to 3092 employees in 16 Dutch companies from March tot July this year. These companies were selected from a national database from the Association of Chambers of Commerce. 1598 Employees (52 %) returned the questionnaire. The response rate by the companies varied from 35% to 75%. The questionnaire was send to employees working on high professional and academic level, with minimal one year of working experience and a minimal 20 working hours per week. The choice for the educational level was made because of the ability for reflection on ability, activities and motivation. In The Netherlands reflection on ones own performance is one of the aspect taught in college and academic education.

The group that returned the questionnaire consist of 69 percent male and 31 percent female employees. The average age of the respondents is 39,5. 23 Percent fits in the career phase before 30 years of age, 44 percent in the phase from 30 to 45 years and 33 percent in the phase above 45 years. As for positions 49 percent works in operational positions, 22 percent in a management position and 18 percent in staff positions of which 3 percent HRD/HRM positions.

Analyses

Firstly homogeneity analysis by Homals were performed. Reliability, 'independent samples T test' and 'one way anova test' are performed of which the results are described in the next paragraphs.

Results

Reliability of Scales

Career actualization was operationalized into four competencies. These competencies were divided in ability, behavior and motivation. Cronbach's alphas of the used scales and the number of items per scale are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Reliability Coefficients of Scale and subscales or Career Actualization and Number of Items

Career actualization	Ability (A)	Behavior (B)	Motivation (M)
.94 (69)	.89 (29)	.88 (32)	.79 (8)
Self reflection (C1)	AC1	BC1	MC1
.83 (17)	.69 (7)	.80 (8)	.63 (2)
Work exploration (C2)	AC2	BC2	MC2
.80 (16)	.71 (6)	.71 (8)	.48 (2)
Career control (C3)	AC3	BC3	MC3
.83 (20)	.72 (9)	.73 (9)	.56 (2)
Self presentation (C4)	AC4	BC4	MC4
.84 (16)	.71 (7)	.71 (7)	.57 (2)

Scales of career actualization, competencies and modalities are reliable. Subscales of the combination of competencies and modalities regarding ability and behavior are satisfactory. The subscales regarding motivation are low, because the number of items are few.

The scale 'career success' consist of 10 items, Cronbachs alpha .75. Career success is subdivided in career success from own perspective (α : .73) and career success from others' perspective (α : .44).

Competencies for Career Actualization

To understand which competencies are relevant for career development one needs to know to what extend employees value their career actualization, or: ability, behavior and motivation on self reflection, work exploration, career control and self presentation. Table 2 shows means and standard deviations of the four competencies, the three modalities and the total: career actualization.

Table 2. Competencies for Career Actualisation (n=1580)

	M	Sd
Self reflection	1.61	.55
Work exploration	1.54	.54
Career control	1.45	.49
Self presentation	1.53	.55
Ability	1.55	.49
Behaviour	1.46	.50
Motivation	1.70	.72
Career actualization	1.53	.45

Employees, participants of this research, seem to be very motivated regarding career actualization. They evaluate their ability for career actualization higher than their behavior. It seems that employees mainly aim at self reflection and less on career control. Reflection on capacities (mean 1.64) mainly contributes to the high mean for self reflection. The lower score for career control is due to low means on career planning (1.41) and control on the learning process (1.43) and can not be attributed to the mean on control of the working process (1.51). T- test results indicate a distinction between all competencies and their modalities on a significance level of .000, except the distinction between the competencies 'work exploration' and 'self presentation'.

To get more insight on the question of relevance of career related competencies, the question on the extend of relationships with personal factors and career success is studied. Gender, career phase and working position are the personal factors of which the results are presented here.

Career Actualization and Gender

The question is: To what extend differ male and female from aspects of career actualization? A T-test was performed on the grouping variable gender. The test variables were career actualization, the four competencies, the three modalities and combination scales of the last two (see table 1). The significant differences between the groups are shown in table 3.

Table 3. T-test (independent samples) on Career Actualization Between Gender

Career actualization aspect	Groups Gender	N	M	Sd	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
C1 (self reflection)	Male	1077	1.56	.55	-4.44	.000
	Female	490	1.70	.54		
M (motivation)	Male	1076	1.67	.72	-2.86	.004
	Female	490	1.78	.72		
BC1 (behavior on self reflection)	Male	1079	1.40	.72	-4.27	.000
	Female	489	1.57			
MC1 (motivation for self reflection)	Male	1073	1.64	1.03	-3.77	.000
	Female	488	1.85	1.00		
MC2 (motivation for work exploration)	Male	1067	1.60	.87	-3.43	.001
	Female	485	1.76	.86		

The above indicates that women are more motivated in career actualization together with self reflection. Besides that they more motivated in work exploration but they do not regard their ability and behavior more enhanced in comparison with the male population.

Career Actualization and Career Phase

In this section is analyzed to what extent the career phase determines the motivation, ability and behavior regarding the career related competencies. The first phase includes the period from the beginning of the career till 30 years of age, the second from 30 to 45 years of age, the third from 45 years and above.

The results of the test show that young employees estimate their self reflection to a higher degree compared to other competencies and compared to employees in the second or third career phase. Young employees have high scores specifically on ability and behavior on self reflection, not so much on motivation for self reflection. On the other hand do they value motivation for work exploration and career control significantly higher than employees above 30 years of age. Also their behavior on work exploration is more extended than behavior of employees in other career phases. This is not the case for behavior on career control.

In general employees below 30 years indicate that they are more motivated and do more on career actualization. Employees above 45 years value their ability for career actualization more than employees below 45, in particular ability for career control. Although not in every case significantly, the means of the middle career phase is in general lower than means of the other phases.

Career Actualization and Position

The third personal variables that is included in the study of career actualization is the position of the employee on the workplace. Three types of positions are distinguished: management position, operational position and staff

position. Specifically was asked for HRM and HRD officers as part of staff positions, because career development can be part of their job.

Table 4. *T-test (independent samples) on Career Actualization Regarding Management Position*

Career actualization aspect	Groups	N	M	Sd	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
C4 (self presentation)	no manager	1223	1.50	.56	-3.835	.000
	manager	345	1.62	.50		
A (Ability)	no manager	1224	1.54	.49	-2.783	.005
	manager	343	1.62	.46		
AC4 (ability for self presentation)	no manager	1222	1.48	.62	-4.366	.000
	manager	343	1.64	.56		

Table 5. *T-test (independent samples) on Career Actualization Regarding Operating Position*

Career actualization aspect	Groups	N	M	Sd	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
C4 (self presentation)	no operating staff	807	1.57	.53	3.12	.002
	operating staff	761	1.48	.56		
AC4 (ability for self presentation)	no operating staff	804	1.56	.60	3.05	.002
	operating staff	761	1.46	.63		
MC4 (motivation for self presentation)	no operating staff	800	1.83	.93	3.04	.002
	operating staff	758	1.69	.96		

The results above indicate that managers find themselves more competent and operational workers are less competent in self presentation. Managers value their ability for career actualization in general more than employees in other positions, specifically for self presentation. Operational workers estimate their ability for self presentation less, but they also seem to be less motivated for self presentation. Staff workers, including HRM and HRD officers, don't indicate that they are more motivated, able or active regarding career actualization than other workers.

Career Actualization and Career Success

An essential question regarding career actualization is whether or not career actualization correlates with career success, and more specifically to which extend competencies and modalities of career actualization covariate with career success. Career success can be valued by others or by one self. Career success is valued by others through (un)employment, level of work position in comparison with education, salary, application success, promotions and social appreciation for the work. Career success can be valued by one self in the extend one can use his/her talents in his/her work, the evaluation of the importance of the work and the success of the career path up to now, and the satisfaction about development in salary, in career and about balance between work and private life.

Table 6. *Correlations between Career Actualization and Career Success (n=1580)*

	Career success others perspective	Career success own perspective	Career success
Self-reflection	.038	.081*	.071*
Work exploration	.051	.129*	.114*
Career control	.091*	.222*	.194*
Self presentation	.210*	.297*	.299*
Ability	.161*	.295*	.276*
Behavior	.068*	.133*	.122*
Motivation	.020	.069*	.057
Career actualization	.112*	.214*	.197*

* correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Career actualization in general is more related to career success from one's own perspective than to career success from others perspective. The evaluated ability for career actualization is most correlated to career success. The competency 'self presentation' is related to career success from the perspectives from self and others, 'career

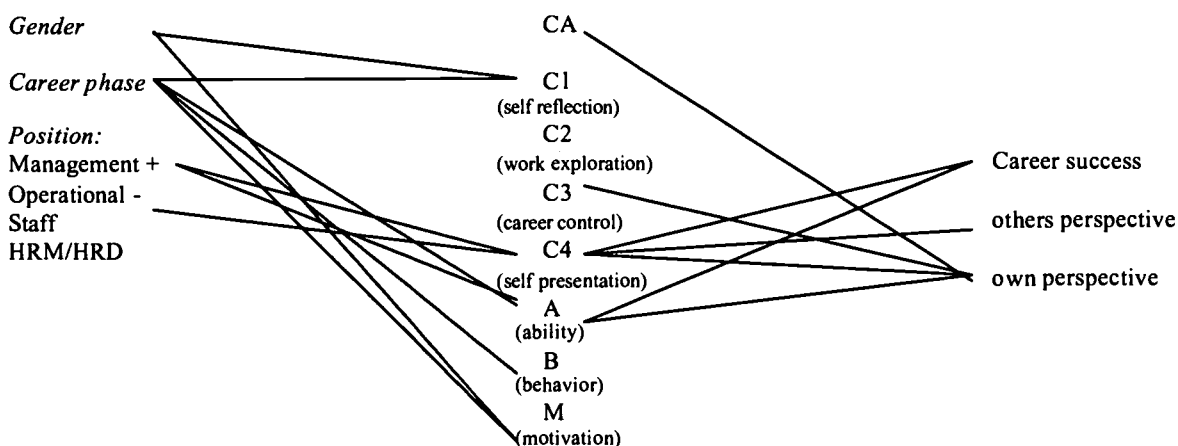
control' more to career success by own perspective. The competencies 'self reflection' and 'work exploration' are less related to career success.

Conclusion

The competencies that can be distinguished at this stage of the study are: self reflection, work exploration, career control and self presentation. These competencies, formulated based on interviews with experts and employees, were recognized in the results of the survey. Modalities of competencies that were distinguished are: ability, behavior and motivation. The (sub)scales which were developed to measure career actualization are in general reliable. The competencies and modalities distinguish themselves from each other statistically significant except for the competencies 'work exploration' and 'self presentation'.

Employees involved in this study are well motivated for career actualization. They evaluate their motivation higher than their ability, and their ability higher than their behavior. Focussing on the content aspect of competencies of career actualization the results show that self reflection is more and career control is less used for career actualization.

Personal factors which were described in this paper are: gender, career phase and work position. Female employees evaluate self reflection and motivation for career actualization higher than male employees. Younger employees (below 30 years of age) estimate their selfreflection, behavior and motivation to a higher degree than the employees in a later career phase. They also indicate that they act more upon work exploration. Employees in the career phase above 45 year estimate themselves in a higher degree regarding the ability for career actualization. Regarding the working position of employees it appears that managers value their self presentation higher than their other competencies and than employees on other positions. Employees on operational positions value self presentation lower. They are also less motivated for self presentation. Managers estimate their ability for career actualization in general higher than employees on other positions. The personal factors that differ between groups on content and modalities of career related competencies are shown in the figure below.



In this figure is shown which competencies and its modalities are related (correlation more than .20 at .001 significance level) to career success. Career success in general is related to the competency 'self presentation' and the modality 'ability'. Career success from others perspective is only relevant related to 'self presentation'. Career success from own perspective is related to career actualization in general and to 'career control', 'self presentation' and 'ability'. The competencies 'self reflection' and 'work exploration', and the modalities 'behavior' and 'motivation' are less related to career success.

The figure shows that the competencies and modalities, which are regarded to be relevant for career actualization, relate differently to personal factors and career success. This indicates a distinction between competencies and modalities. More advanced analyses are needed to expand on the concept of career actualization.

Contribution of the Study to the HRD Field

Little empirical studies are performed regarding career development as a process. The PhD. study, of which some results are presented in this paper, intend to give more insight on the relation between personal and situational factors and career related competencies, and between career related competencies and career success and HRD interventions.

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