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| IU International University |
| Personal Career PlanCourse Code: DLBKAENT01 |

# Unit 1 – Career Theories and Approaches

Study Goals

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

… define the term “career” and differentiate between career concepts.

… compare and delineate traditional and modern career models.

… identify career learning cycles and understand which metacompetencies are essential for a successful career learning cycle.

# 1. Career Theories and Approaches

### Introduction

People face career choices at many stages throughout their lives, rather than just once. Careers are a recurring and pivotal theme for all of us: At school, at the beginning of our careers, mid-way through our working lives, and even many years later.

Lisa, who is about to finish high school, is contemplating her future. She has always dreamed of studying journalism. However, her parents work for a bank and would like to steer her toward a cooperative study program with a bank for a more “durable” qualification. Lisa faces a dilemma: Should she pursue her passion for journalism or follow her parents’ advice?

Stephan has been a consultant for five years and gained extensive experience in different companies and industries, which he finds fascinating. Following a steep learning curve, it’s time to plan his next career move. Should he pursue a role that plays to his strengths and allows him to position himself as an expert? Or should he maintain his broader skillset and versatility to keep as many career options open as possible?

Anna-Lena is Head of Finance at a start-up. After giving birth to her daughter, she took a year’s maternity leave. Now she is wondering whether it would be better to reduce her hours or try to balance career and family life. This decision is not solely about her career, but about making it fit with her overall life plan.

Richard has spent the last five years heading up a charitable foundation. The board has indicated it might invite him to remain for a further term, but Richard feels uncertain about committing. Perhaps it is time to take a step back and give someone else a chance?

As these examples illustrate, career path choices do not only concern those starting out but recur repeatedly throughout different life stages. Are you on the career path you initially envisaged? Does it align with your own values and desired direction, and does it provide the right balance between hours worked, recognition received, and financial reward?

Considering your career from a theoretical perspective and exploring your career learning cycle and direction may prove useful.

## 1.1 Definition and Classification of a Career

Career choice issues are not a new concept. Young people in particular may find it difficult to decide on a career direction. Questions such as “Which occupation is right for you?” may arise at any point, even after completing an apprenticeship or degree, mid-way through our working lives, or when we are already well-established in a successful career. At different stages, we may wonder which path to choose, what our next career move should be, or if it’s time for a change. Career orientation is a lifelong process that extends beyond the selection of our first job.

Career choice theories have abounded since the early 20th century when modern labor market structures first emerged. As always, the challenge (Brüggemann & Rahn, 2020, S. 12) lies in finding a career with prospects that accommodate our individual interests and abilities while simultaneously maintaining the strategic flexibility to keep our goals and preferences realistic and aligned with the needs of the labor market. In some situations, the labor market becomes saturated with applicants offering sought-after skills, while a popular career may reflect your personality traits but not suit current market requirements.

### Career Trajectories

In the past, occupations were predetermined and life was simple: If your parents were bakers, doctors, or shoemakers, you would most likely follow in their footsteps, often taking over the family business from them.

Industrialization changed all this. New jobs in factories and manufacturing required little in the way of prior technical knowledge. Employment was readily available and earning money became the main focus.

Today, there is a vast choice of apprenticeships and academic courses available, not to mention a wealth of different occupations. While some view their jobs as merely a means of earning money, others make conscious career choices that often require training. Still, others have a calling to a vocation which fills them with great joy and passion.

The sheer number of choices available makes it difficult to decide on a career. Should you opt for a job that requires extensive skills and strengths? Do you have a sufficient understanding of your individual talents? Or should you consciously choose the career path that promises the greatest possible success? And how do you define success?

### Definition of a Career

**Career versus occupation**

In this text, we have used the terms career and occupation interchangeably. Whereas in the past, the word career tended to be associated with career advancement, more modern career models have revealed the inadequacy of this definition.

The term **career** is derived from the French word “carrière,” meaning path or racetrack (Latzke et al., 2019). Essentially, a career describes the roles and positions held by an individual over the course of their employment history. A career may be linked to a particular profession (such as a predefined civil service career) or a defined sequence of roles within an organization (such as hierarchical levels within a large law firm) (Latzke et al., 2019; Hirschi, 2019); but equally, a career may also extend across multiple organizations.

A distinction is made between objective careers and subjective careers: An objective career covers the sequence of roles held by an individual over the course of their working life and is based around selected indices such as salary, number of employees, or status symbols. By contrast, a subjective career focuses on the career path in its entirety in conjunction with subjective perceptions. It also addresses other aspects such as satisfaction, well-being, personal growth, self-fulfillment, and acknowledgement (Latzke et al., 2019; Heslin, 2005).

It is important to note that “career” is used here non-evaluatively, making the definition much broader than the one used in common parlance (Latzke et al., 2019). The academic definition of the term “career” is the same in both German-speaking and Anglo-American countries.

While in German, the word “career” is often associated with success – especially upward trajectories and promotions within hierarchical organizations – in English, in English it serves as a more neutral, non-judgmental reflection of individual development.

To further differentiate the concept of career within German-speaking countries, recent research has introduced various perspectives to the definition.

For example, Auer (2000) identified three distinct meanings of “career,” depending on individual motivation:

* Career in the sense of advancement means a career path which strives for more senior roles and greater responsibility,
* Career as gainful employment, with an emphasis on financial remuneration, and
* Career in a more universal sense, which holistically incorporates both work-related aspects as well as personal values, interests, and goals.

Auer argues that every individual determines the importance of their own career within the context of their own life plan.

Hall identifies another key distinction between “career” concepts (1996; 2004), namely:

* Career as professional advancement (promotions and speed at which positions are achieved),
* Career as a profession (well-established professions with high qualification requirements, such as doctors, judges, and professors),
* Career as a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences (an individual’s assessment of their career development stages), and
* Career as the sum total of positions held over the course of a person’s working life (any job or role-related success, not necessarily following a vertical trajectory).

The above definitions illustrate that the term “career” has multiple interpretations. A few decades ago, careers were traditionally centered around advancement, and many university graduates aspired to management roles and positions at the highest echelons of the company. The associated responsibilities, rapid rise through the ranks, and – in many cases – high salaries entailed long working hours, limited free time, and self-determination.

In contrast, the modern understanding of work considers this vertical career trajectory equating promotions with hierarchical progression as outdated.

A growing emphasis on the “modern career” now encompasses social factors and transformational processes, whereby individuals define their career status themselves (Drodge, 2002; Hall, 2004). Attention focuses primarily on individual career orientation and career motivation.

More and more companies, especially start-ups, are moving toward flatter hierarchies. They offer alternative incentive systems to promote personal growth and self-fulfillment, rather than simply focusing on promotion. For example, opportunities to work abroad (to broaden horizons), sabbaticals, further education, start-up support, and more are available.

It is important to differentiate here between “career” and “choice of occupation,” since the latter refers solely to the active, autonomous decision-making phase when selecting employment within the context of your own career (Brüggemann & Rahn, 2020, S. 12; Rübner & Höft, 2019).

### Introduction to the Theory

Before proceeding further, let’s consider the “theory.” What exactly are theories, and how can they help to coalesce thoughts and concepts?

A scientific theory is an explanation and exploration of a particular field by combining multiple assumptions, hypotheses, and statements into a system, while allowing for the following requirements (Berger-Grabner, 2022, S. 135):

* **Logical consistency:** The theory should be consistent and follow a logical structure.
* **Internal coherence:** Arguments derived from the theory should be free from contradictions.
* **Objectivity:** The theory may be extended to a wide range of applications, even with minimal assumptions.
* **Verifiability:** The theory should withstand rigorous and varied testing.

Only when all these criteria are met can a theory claim to be valid and scientifically verified.

A theory is an assumption about causal relationships – in other words, observed phenomena are related to one another in a cause-effect relationship (Berger-Grabner, 2022).

Theories may be classified in terms of their complexity and range:

* **High-complexity theories:** Highly complex **metatheories** are very comprehensive and detailed, covering multiple aspects of a particular topic or discipline. They tend to be abstract and general, and their understanding and application requires a high level of intellect.

**Metatheory**

A metatheory focuses on the theories and methods used to explain a phenomenon, rather than the phenomenon itself.

* **High-range theories:** These global theories are comprehensive but less complex than their high-complexity counterparts. They cover multiple aspects of a particular topic or discipline but are more precise and easier to understand and apply. One example of a high-range theory is Leon Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory, which purports to explain inconsistencies in human thinking and behavior.
* **Middle-range theories:** So-called *Ad hoc* theories are more specific and precise than high-range theories, but less comprehensive. They relate to a specific topic or discipline and offer detailed explanations and predictions. One example of a middle-range theory is Fred Fiedler’s contingency theory, which seeks to identify the most effective leadership styles in a range of situations.

**Falsification**

Falsification is an important part of the scientific process. A falsified theory need not necessarily be rejected completely but may need to be modified or developed in order to meet its predictions more accurately. The theory “All swans are white” is unequivocally falsified by the sighting of a black swan.

* **Low-range theories:** These more practical theories are very specific and tangible, relating to specific phenomena or situations. They offer detailed explanations and predictions but are not transferable to other areas or contexts. One example of a low-range theory is the Hawthorne Effect, which examines the impact of working conditions on employee performance.

By their nature, theories tend to be incomplete and provisional, with a temporary claim to validity until **falsified**. They help us to improve our understanding of reality, collate prior knowledge of experiences, and deduce important information with practical relevance.

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please mark the statements that are true.

¨ The word “career” is used in an evaluative way in the sense of career advancement in both scientific and general language use. (F)

¨ Theories must meet a range of criteria (logical consistency, internal coherence, objectivity, and verifiability) in order to be valid and scientifically verifiable. (T)

## 1.2 Traditional Career Theories and Models

Career theories are theoretical attempts to describe and explain career paths and phenomena: “Career theory ... is the body of all generalizable attempts to explain career phenomena” (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 9). Career theories originate from several disciplines, including psychology, sociology, economics, pedagogy, and organizational research.

In the following sections, we will examine some classical career theories, most of which were developed between the 1950s and 1970s. We will then move on to explore some of their more modern counterparts, which refute traditional interpretations of a “career” and instead focus on the individual’s career motivations and subjective perceptions.

### Trait Theories

Some theories (also known as trait theories) are driven by the notion of a “good fit” as a way of measuring congruence between individuals and their environment. They explore the “fit” between individual traits and certain vocational characteristics. The goal of these theories is to ascertain whether an individual meets the expectations of a particular role by examining the congruence between their characteristics, skills, and capabilities and the requirements of a given environment, profession, or organization.

Particularly worth highlighting in this context is John Holland’s Theory of Career Choice (1997), which posits that people and working environments can be categorized into six basic behaviors, skills and personality types (Latzke et al., 2019):

* “Realistic”: Realistic, manual, technical
* “Investigative”: Intellectual, investigating, researching
* “Artistic”: Artistic, creative
* “Social”: Social, educating, nurturing
* “Enterprising”: Entrepreneurial, managing, selling
* “Conventional”: Conventional, organizing, managing.

Holland’s well-known hexagon graphic (“RIASEC model”) matches selected personal characteristics and traits to various sample professions as the basis for making career choices. The idea of a hexagon is based on the precept that adjacent dimensions are a better fit than those further apart, with negative correlations between opposite dimensions. Holland uses these dimensions to describe work environments.

Figure 1: Theory of Career Choice (Hexagon Model)



Source: Nari Kahle, 2023, based on Holland, 1997.

For example, a precision mechanic would be classified as “RCI,” because these three basic orientations (realistic, conventional, investigative) most closely reflect the requirements of that career (Rübner & Höft, 2019).

Table 1: RIASEC Model

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Personality type** | **Profile** | **Description** | **Sample traits and occupations**  |
| R | Realistic  | Practical/technical orientation  | Prefers tasks requiring strength, coordination, and dexterity that produce concrete, visible results | Technical, practical, manual (mechanic, farmer, air traffic controller) |
| I | Investigative | Intellectual/research-focused orientation | Prefers problem-solving tasks and problems that require thinking and systematic observation | Analytical, rational, questioning (biologist, anthropologist, medical-technical assistant) |
| A | Artistic | Artistic/linguistic orientation | Prefers open, unstructured, creative activities that allow linguistic or artistic self-expression | Sensitive, impulsive, open (musician, actor, decorator) |
| S | Social | Social orientation | Prefers activities involving other people | Friendly, helpful, idealistic, educating (teacher, clinical psychologist, speech therapist) |
| E | Enterprising | Entrepreneurial orientation | Prefers power-related activities with an opportunity to influence situations or individuals | Energetic, ambitious, adventurous, dominant (manager, promoter, TV producer) |
| C | Conventional | Conventional orientation | Prefers structured, regular tasks in well-defined situations | Conscientious, restrained, structured, organized (accountant, financial analyst) |

Source: Nari Kahle, 2023, based on Holland, 1997; Eder & Bergmann, 1997.

Holland’s theory of career choice categorizes individuals into different work environments based on their personality traits. The theory suggests that the greatest congruence between personality type and environmental characteristics will yield positive outcomes such as job satisfaction, well-being, stable career development and superior work performance (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 31). Research supports the idea that **congruence** is a strong foundation for career choices, as individuals whose interests align closely with their chosen profession or study program are more likely to remain in that field (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 31; Holland, 1997). For example, artists who transform their passions into careers often cannot envision doing anything else. Conversely, individuals whose talents are underutilized at work face a higher risk of dissatisfaction. Thus, understanding one’s strengths is crucial for achieving maximum satisfaction in one’s career choice.

**Aptitude tests**

Several well-known aptitude tests are based on Holland’s RIASEC model: The Strong Interest Inventory (which assesses a person’s job-related interests and assigns them to one or more of the six Holland types), the Self-Directed Search (a self-assessment tool that helps people identify and match their interests and skills with the most suitable Holland-type occupations), and the Career Key (online test based on the RIASEC model, which helps people identify their interests, values, and skills and compare them with occupations that match their profiles).

**Congruence**

Agreement or harmony between two or more elements.

Holland’s theory is widely popular due to its straightforward, comprehensible personality type model, which has been validated by numerous studies. Many assessment and promotion tools, as well as various well-established **aptitude tests**, utilize Holland’s theory to identify an individual’s strengths and traits, comparing them with the typical characteristics of an occupation to determine the “best fit” (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 32).

However, the model’s simplicity has also drawn criticism. Some argue that job satisfaction is not solely determined by the individual fit but is also influenced by various other contextual factors. Critics claim that Holland’s theory is overly focused on individuals and insufficiently addresses the environmental context (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, pp. 32–34) within an increasingly dynamic and unstable work environment. Additionally, they assert that the nature of typologization inherently reduces complexity and inadequately reflects a diverse range of life realities.

### Development Theories

In addition to trait theories, other theoretical frameworks have recently gained prominence., such as development theories, which view career and development prospects as lifelong processes (Rübner & Höft, 2019). Unlike trait theories, which assign individuals to lifelong occupations, development theories emphasize career development across a person’s working life. This new approach takes into account mid-career developments that can instigate dynamic changes and is more closely aligned with the modern interpretation of a “career” in relation to lifelong learning.

Donald Super’s career development theory (1957; 1980) emphasized career patterns rather than individual career choices. According to Super, career development can be divided into five distinct chronological phases (so-called career stages), which occur at specific ages in a person’s life span (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 34):

Table 2: Five-Phase Model

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Stage 1 | **Growth** | Childhood: up to the age of 14 | First demonstrates an interest in activities |
| Stage 2 | **Exploration** | Youth: age 15–24  | Career preferences become crystallized based on an in-depth examination of interests, skills, values, and the world of work |
| Stage 3 | **Establishment (commitment to a profession)** | Early & middle adulthood: age 25–44 | Acquiring professional experience and promotion, where applicable  |
| Stage 4 | **Maintenance****(consolidation)** | Mature adulthood: Age 45–64 | Maintaining status within the organization, profession, qualification level |
| Stage 5 | **Decline (career withdrawal)** | Late adulthood: from the age of 65 | Retirement, shift in focus |

Source: Nari Kahle, 2023 based on Super (1957); Rübner & Höft (2019, pp. 47–48)

Super (1957) posits that each phase is associated with different social roles, which must be fulfilled or reconciled throughout an individual’s career. He emphasizes the importance of developing one’s self-concept by comparing and adjusting personal interests, abilities, values, attitudes, and goals to fit the specific requirements of one’s occupation (Hartkopf, 2020, S. 45). Your self-concept is developed, considered, decided, tested, and implemented across each development stage.

The growth phase represents the initial formation of the self-concept, stemming from individual career choice preferences influenced by factors such as family suggestions, hobbies, inspiration from school, or aptitude tests. The exploration phase builds on this foundation, gathering information about potential career goals and trajectories to facilitate planning for the next steps – often in collaboration with the family and school environment (Hartkopf, 2020, S. 45). During this stage, individuals experiment with and explore their developed self-concept within the context of their environment. For example, a young person with a strong interest in photography might join the school newspaper as a photographer.

During the establishment phase, individuals attempt to position themselves within their self-created work environment. The maintenance phase primarily focuses on sustaining one’s professional position and status. The decline phase begins with retirement and continues until death.

Super’s career development theory focuses on individual development. Throughout a person’s life span, their career is constructed based on interactions between the individual and their professional or social context. For example, Super contends that career development is always contingent on environmental factors and not solely determined by the individual themselves. This notion supports the societal assumption that individuals from an academic family background have an easier time developing their careers than others. The theory explains a career’s reliance on various contextual factors that characterize specific life stages and the professional context, such as the family environment during a person’s early years, for example, and their work environment during the establishment phase.

Super’s model is based on several assumptions:

* Each person has a unique personality profile and an aptitude for multiple professions, particularly those whose requirement profile most closely aligns with their own self-concept.
* Like Holland, Super believes that the greater the congruence between a person’s self-concept and the requirements of their chosen career in terms of job profile, position, working climate, etc., the greater their subjective satisfaction will be (Hartkopf, 2020, S. 45). However, Super contends that congruence is always temporary, requiring periodic career adjustments.
* The development of a self-concept, based on a person’s perceptions and self-assessment, must always be considered within the context and expectations of each phase of their working life (Hartkopf, 2020, S. 45). This may evolve over time and with experience – for example, as a person becomes more confident in new roles or responsibilities.
* Career choices can also involve compromises between personal preferences and the specific requirements of a role, particularly when there is a mismatch between the skills or educational qualifications required for certain professions (Hartkopf, 2020, S. 45).
* The five-phase process outlined here (growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline) can be viewed as a “maxi cycle.” Each transition between phases may involve a mini cycle, during which all phases of the maxi cycle are repeated. A mini cycle is much shorter and quicker than a maxi cycle and may be triggered by life-changing events (relocation, starting a family, having children, illness, role changes, termination, or socio-economic events) (Rübner & Höft, 2019, S. 48). During times of upheaval, it is particularly important to reflect on and question yourself, your goals, and your chosen path.

Super’s career development theory was more comprehensive than other existing career theories at that time, prompting a raft of new research projects (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 32). Critics of his model argue that these age-dependent phases throughout a person’s life span contradict the modern understanding of human development. And that more emphasis should be placed on environmental and contextual factors as complex, dynamic phenomena (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 34).

**Life roles**

The different functions performed by an individual over the course of their life.

In the 1980s, contemporary thoughts in career development led Super (1980) to expand on his theory by incorporating “life roles” at different life phases that coexist with career roles. Super’s life-career rainbow model situates job-related roles within the context of other common **life roles** that an individual may assume throughout their lifetime:

* The role of a child
* The role of a student in education
* The role of a leisurite
* The role of a citizen
* The role of a worker
* The role of a pensioner
* The role of a spouse
* The role of a homemaker
* The role of a parent.

Super believes that optimal selection, weighting, and organization of these life roles lead to successful career development. He emphasizes the importance of balancing one’s role as a worker with various life roles to achieve a fulfilled and satisfied life. If one role is overly emphasized or becomes too dominant, it can result in stress, overwork, or dissatisfaction. Consequently, individuals should always strive to balance their roles as workers and their other life roles, structuring their lives accordingly.

However, while these distinct life phases were applicable up until a few decades ago, they have now become increasingly less predictable, with less delineation between individual phases, often merging fluidly into one another. Nevertheless, the life-career rainbow can be helpful for examining the different roles we perform alongside our role as workers. The importance of these roles may relate to the present and may also acquire greater significance in the future.

Figure 2: Super’s Life-Career Rainbow



Source: Super (1957); (1980)

### Social Cognitive Career Theory

The social cognitive career theory proposed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994; Lent & Brown, 2008) focuses primarily on the construct of self-efficacy in a career context and addresses the socio-cognitive processes that are shaped by our experiences. It stresses the importance of self-efficacy expectations, interests, and environmental factors in career development and postulates that career planning should be based on individual strengths and interests, augmented by experience and feedback.

The concept of self-efficacy describes an individual’s expectation of successfully completing certain tasks. It means being confident in and aware of one’s own ability to perform the tasks needed to achieve specific goals. A high degree of self-efficacy and confidence in one’s own abilities will, in turn, allow one to develop additional specific interests and possibly set sights on more demanding career goals. One’s self-efficacy is then further enhanced by targeted action (endurance, diligence, willingness to learn) and successful task management.

What does this mean in practice? A student who consistently receives good grades and regular praise develops a high degree of self-efficacy in relation to their academic skills. They have the confidence to tackle challenging tasks and may aspire to higher educational goals.

An individual who starts a new hobby but struggles to make progress initially may find their self-efficacy diminishing, and they lose interest. However, if their perseverance and willingness to learn pay off, this may boost their self-efficacy and their own confidence in their abilities.

Based on this theory, Lent, Brown & Hackett (1994; Lent & Brown, 2008) devised an integrative self-efficacy model depicting the development of interests, career choice, and work management (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020). The model begins with the learning experience from which self-efficacy expectations are formulated: Can I solve this task on my own with the skills I have (Rübner & Höft, 2019, S. 55)? These expectations are strongly influenced by previous achievements, learning experiences, social influences (gender, nationality, personality, skills) as well as physical and **affective** **states** (Rübner & Höft, 2019, S. 55). At the same time, these states also influence the outcome and interest expectations for defining your personal goals. The model leads to an evaluation of your career choice, which in turn influences your work performance (Rübner & Höft, 2019, S. 55). The model also focuses on environmental impacts such as social support, as well as any major obstacles to career development, which are increasingly seen as having a significant influence (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020).

**Affective states**

A person’s subjective experiences or feelings during an emotion. Examples include sadness, joy, anger, fear, and disgust. The states may vary from one person to another and from one emotion to another.

Recent updates to the social cognitive career theory have explored career self-management, focusing on specific actions and activities aimed at achieving an individual’s set career goals (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020). For example, a person who devotes significant time to job hunting is more likely to find a new job, influenced by numerous environmental and personal factors (willingness to relocate, alignment between personal values and company values, expected pay and career prospects, and family-friendly working hours).

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please mark the statements that are true.

¨ According to Holland's career choice theory, a financial manager would be most likely to have the traits code “IAS.” (F)

¨ Development theory focuses primarily on individual career choice decisions. (F)

¨ Social cognitive career theory is primarily concerned with having confidence in and being capable of evaluating your own abilities (self-efficacy). (T)

## 1.3 Modern Career Models and Theories

### Traditional Versus Modern Career Models

In recent years, career research has shifted its focus to evolving career trajectories and strategies.

Traditional career models tended to view career development as a clearly defined, linear progression across multiple hierarchical levels within a limited number of organizations, with a corresponding salary, while remaining reliant on the organization as the employer. The working environment was presumed to be stable, predictable, and static, with hierarchical structures through which the employee would progress (Gubler, 2019; Wingender & Wolff, 2019). Mutual loyalty, based on a stable and long-term working relationship between employer and employee, provided substantial job security and regular in-house training and development. Good performance was rewarded with promotions, salary increases, or advancement to the next hierarchical level (Gubler, 2019).

However, experts increasingly question whether this assumption still accurately reflects changing realities and individual experiences. Hall (1996) noted significant changes and growing complexity in work organization, as well as an expanding discrepancy between the assumptions of traditional career concepts and developments in work reality.

Modern perspectives include the “protean career” and the postorganizational career (also known as the “**boundaryless career**”) (Hall, 2004; Arthur, 1994). Both of these models are characterized by their view of careers as dynamic processes with various influencing factors related to the individual: Career responsibility lies not with the organization but with the individual themselves. Simultaneously, long-term loyalty in the working relationship between employer and employee is diminishing. Some organizations are moving away from long-term jobs, and not everyone desires a linear career within the same company.

Therefore, both theories emphasize the individualization, flexibility, and autonomy of individuals in an increasingly unstable work environment. They underscore the fact that humans are complex, adaptable systems that continuously interact with a changing environment (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, S. 40). The new hypothesis suggests that contemporary careers are directed by the individuals themselves, necessitating a certain degree of **physical** and **psychological mobility**, as well as flexibility and adaptability (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020).

**Physical mobility**

Career moves within and outside of organizations and across geographical boundaries – in other words, location flexibility (Gubler, 2019).

**Psychological mobility**

Individual motivation and willingness to change (learning, openness to new networks, cultures, etc.).

Individuals require transferable skills that can be applied across various organizations, and increasingly, this is considered their own responsibility (Gubler, 2019).

Modern career theories no longer rely on conventional measures such as hierarchy, salary, promotion, and status to evaluate career success; instead, they emphasize personal career satisfaction, the meaningfulness of work and life, and subjective definitions of success (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 37).

Table 3: Traditional Versus Modern Career Models

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Traditional career model assumptions** | **Modern career model assumptions** |
| Career environment | Stable, predictable, high level of security | Unstable, unpredictable, low level of security |
| Working conditions | Job security based on loyalty | Employment based on performance and flexibility |
| Career trajectory | Upwards in a vertical direction, generally confined to a few organizations | Multi-directional (upwards, downwards, or sideways), mostly in different organizations |
| Required skills | Role- and company-specific | Applicable to a range of roles and environments |
| Success criteria | Visible, objective career success (visible roles, position, status, etc.) | Subjective career success (subjective satisfaction with your achievements, etc.) |
| Education and training | Focus on the long-term, programs leading to formal qualifications | Focus on the short-term, learning on-the-job |
| The individual is committed to... | … the organization. | … their career. |
| Responsibility for their career lies…  | … with the organization. | … with the individual. |

Source: Nari Kahle, 2023 based on Gubler, 2019, p. 940; Gasteiger, 2007.

### Protean Career Orientation

**Protean**

The term “protean” originates from the sea god Proteus in Greek mythology, who was able to change and adapt his appearance at will according to the situation and perceived threats.

Hall (1996; 2004) initially introduced the concept of the “protean career,” and as an early researcher of changes in modern careers, he defined the term as a form of self-directed career management that has since been extensively studied (Gubler, 2019). A **protean** career orientation involves individuals taking responsibility for their own careers with the goal of achieving a high degree of self-fulfillment, as measured by job satisfaction rather than salary or promotions.

Departing from traditional notions, Hall devised a model that centered on the individual and a career characterized by continuous adaptations to new requirements and situations.

In a protean career, individuals are motivated by the work itself, rather than the organization behind it (Gubler, 2019). They perceive themselves as solely responsible for their own career development and success, rather than relying on the employer to provide it (Gubler, 2019). In essence, the individual becomes the driving force behind their own career, selecting the best possible path from all available options and opportunities:

“Protean career described a career orientation in which the person, not the organization, is in charge, where the person’s values are driving career decisions, and where the main success criteria are subjective” (Hall, 2004, p. 1).

A protean career can be viewed as a mindset that focuses on the pursuit of personal growth and freedom. Individuals seek various ways of achieving work satisfaction and success, rather than subscribing to the traditional view that career success means progressing up the hierarchy and achieving a certain status or income level (Gubler, 2019). In a protean career, the fulfillment of one’s own (professional) desires and needs takes precedence, with individuals taking responsibility for their own success. Protean often have greater satisfaction with their career or work and a stronger connection with the organization, which may help them manage job insecurity (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020). Consequently, people increasingly regard their careers as projects that require effective management (Mayrhofer et al., 2002, p. 408). This perspective has led to the recent development of the term “**careerpreneurialism**” (derived from “entrepreneurship”).

**Careerpreneurial**

You view your career as a project and take full responsibility for as many aspects of your own career as possible.

A key attribute of individuals pursuing protean careers is their openness to new challenges and adaptability while maintaining their personal values and beliefs (Gasteiger, 2007, S. 72). Protean individuals are highly self-reflective and consistently focus on their own goals and values, regardless of varying career paths, work requirements, labor market developments, and organizational changes (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020, p. 36). By focusing on their own personal values, protean individuals can proactively manage their own careers rather than being governed by their employer.

Briscoe and Hall (2006, S. 8) identified two key characteristics of the protean career orientation: a value-led focus and an autonomous approach to career management. The protean orientation is divided into four categories based on the interaction and prominence of these characteristics:

Table 4: Typologization of the Protean Career Orientation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| High | *rigid* | *protean* |
| Autonomous career management | *dependent* | *reactive* |
| Low | Value-led | High |

Source: Briscoe & Hall, 2006, p. 9.

“Dependent” individuals exhibit limited value-led focus and minimal autonomous career management. They do not organize their own careers according to their values or establish their own priorities for career advancement. These individuals often remain in the same role for many years, with little desire for change.

“Reactive” individuals have a high level of self-determination but are less guided by their own values. Their career focus tends to be on status, position, and hierarchy, with minimal emphasis on their personal goals and values. For example, they may not have any significant moral reservations about a career in the defense industry.

“Rigid” individuals are more strongly influenced by their own values but lack the adaptability to align their careers with objective and subjective criteria through performance and learning. For them, volunteering for a small non-profit organization may be highly meaningful, but it offers limited income benefits.

“Protean” individuals strive for success in both dimensions. They are self-driven and can adapt to diverse organizational requirements without losing sight of their own values and goals.

Empirical evidence of a protean career orientation has been found in both the English-speaking world and Germany (Gasteiger, 2007). Studies have confirmed a positive correlation between a self-driven career orientation and subjective professional success and job satisfaction (Gasteiger, 2007). The Gasteiger survey also found that protean individuals change employers far more frequently than their less-protean counterparts.

However, the protean career model has faced criticism, particularly regarding its use of terminology. Critics argue that the term “protean” is not sufficiently precise or clearly defined (e.g., Gasteiger, 2007). While they may appreciate the focus on values such as autonomy and self-fulfillment, critics contend that a clearly delineated definition and interpretation are lacking. The protean career orientation is also based on the highly normative assumption that the freedom to advance one's own career can only ever be positive. Critics, however, argue that it can also cause a certain amount of pressure and disappointment if individuals are not always clear about their own goals and values (Gasteiger, 2007). Many people may find it overwhelming to constantly plan and rethink their careers, weigh up the different options, and “manage” them.

### Postorganizational Career

The concept of a postorganizational career, or “boundaryless career” (Latzke et al., 2019; Gubler, 2019), as a career without limits (as compared to an organizational career) moves away from traditional organizational structures and hierarchies. Instead of pursuing a career within a single organization (mono-employer), the postorganizational career is characterized by a flexible, cyclical, and dynamic combination of different roles, tasks, and projects across various organizations and industries. Career trajectories may also include sideways moves and breaks from working life, creating a so-called **patchwork or zigzag career** characterized by unusual and unpredictable sequences of jobs and work experiences (Mayrhofer et al., 2002). This leads to greater disconnection and independence from individual organizations and even from skilled professions.

**Patchwork or zigzag careers**

A career trajectory comprising multiple phases of employment which may also include career breaks (such as parental leave, sabbaticals, job changes, illness).

Postorganizational careers are characterized by the following six features: (Gubler, 2019, S. 949):

1. Crossing organizational boundaries
2. Maintaining employability in the external labor market
3. Building and maintaining personal networks that extend beyond individual organizations
4. Breaking with traditional assumptions about career and hierarchical advancement
5. Turning down promotions for personal reasons, and
6. A subjective freedom from objective constraints and existing limits.

In this career model, the boundaries between different organizations and even industries are fluid. Rather than being limited to a specific organization or career direction, the focus is on acquiring skills and experiences that can be applied in various contexts. Employees maintain physical and psychological mobility by constantly realigning their skills and knowledge to reflect changing circumstances. These skills and experiences often result from decisions based on personal interests and circumstances, such as a new career direction, moving to another city or country, family commitments, or even burnout in a previous position.

The postorganizational career requires three skills for success in the current employment market (Gubler, 2019):

1. **“Knowing how”:** Professionally relevant knowledge
2. **“Knowing why”:** Self-reflection on your own career identity
3. **“Knowing whom”:** Informal personal networks.

This approach requires a high level of autonomy and self-directed career planning. Similar to the protean career, employees are responsible for their individual career steps. However, unlike the protean career, the postorganizational career focuses more on learning content and the range of experiences that can be acquired in different industries and positions. As such, this type of career also requires a continuous refinement of skills and competencies to succeed in various roles and organizations. Successful “boundaryless” careers also demand a high level of social and **networking skills** to establish and maintain relationships with different organizations.

**Networking skills**

The skills a person needs to build, cultivate, and utilize relationships and act effectively within a work-related or social network.

Unlike the traditional career based on linear advancement within a single organization or occupation, the postorganizational career requires a broader skillset and the ability to respond quickly to new challenges. Careers are more likely to be shaped by experiences, successes, and network relationships than by formal qualifications. This modern career model deviates significantly from the organizational world of traditional careers, and associated concepts and theories should be updated to reflect more modern career and development types (Mayrhofer et al., 2002).

Another key feature of the postorganizational career is a willingness to take risks and learn from mistakes, as an irregular employment history may involve a higher degree of uncertainty and a lack of continuity.

It is important to note that there is limited empirical evidence to support this theory, given that the term “boundary” in this context lacks a definitive definition (Gubler, 2019). Similar to the protean career theory, critics have questioned the highly individualistic and normative assumptions on which it is based (Gubler, 2019): To be successful, individuals must exhibit a high degree of flexibility, motivation, and self-management, making this type of career more suitable for highly qualified individuals. Many people may struggle to maintain continuity and stability in their career planning if they are constantly transitioning between different organizations and projects. Consequently, the postorganizational career is not unequivocally positive and desirable for everyone, as critics would argue (Gubler, 2019). It is also worth considering how many people genuinely have the freedom to decide how and whether they wish to work – in reality, career choices are often constrained by various external factors and restrictions (Hirschi & Baumeler, 2020).

Experts generally concur that responsibility for personal careers is increasingly a matter for individuals rather than organizations.

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please mark the statements that are true.

¨ In a protean career, the organization is given higher priority than the role / profession. (F)

¨ A postorganizational career requires a broad-based skillset, flexibility, and networking. (T)

2. Please explain the differences between traditional and modern career models.

*Traditional career models are characterized by predefined, linear, hierarchical career trajectories, typically within one organization or a few organizations, in which individuals tend to follow a linear path, and the organization is responsible for their career development.*

*In contrast, modern career models are more flexible, often allowing employees greater freedom and autonomy to shape their careers according to their personal needs and interests. These models frequently provide multiple paths for advancement, and career responsibility lies with the individual rather than the organization. Consequently, this approach demands greater initiative from the individual.*

## 1.4 Career Learning Cycle

A career learning cycle delineates the development of individuals throughout their careers and the challenges they encounter at each step. Protean and postorganizational careers, in particular, rely on repetitive learning cycles (Hall, 1996). A learning cycle is a continuous process of learning, application, and adaptation. Each new role and each change of organization necessitates renewed learning, application, and adjustment.

### Learning Cycles

A single learning cycle consists of four phases (Gubler, 2019, pp. 942–944) which together form a cyclical process of learning and applying new skills and knowledge, contributing to career growth and development:

1. **Exploration:** The exploration phase involves identifying new learning opportunities and needs. The individual recognize that they require new skills or knowledge to achieve their career goals or to prepare for industry changes. This may involve actively seeking knowledge or passively absorbing it from the environment.
2. **Trial:** During the trial phase, individuals apply what they have learned, testing it in practice, gathering experience, and implementing their newfound knowledge in real-life situations. This phase often involves mistakes, poor decisions, and setbacks, which are viewed as opportunities for further learning and adjustment.
3. **Establishment:** During the establishment phase, individuals have internalized new skills and knowledge, and can apply them routinely and successfully. They have attained a certain level of competence and are perceived by others as proficient and capable. This phase may involve growth and stability in one’s career.
4. **Mastery:** During the mastery phase, the individual has gained a high degree of competence and experience in their field of expertise. They can tackle complex problems, develop innovative solutions, and become role models for others.

However, it is quite common for individuals to seek new challenges after some time, initiating a new learning cycle (Gubler, 2019, S. 943).

### Maxi and Mini Cycles

It is important to note that these phases are not necessarily linear, and that each individual career learning cycle is unique (see illustration below). The different phases may also vary in duration, with individual challenges and goals, and may occur sequentially or simultaneously. A distinction is made between maxi and mini cycles. In the maxi cycle (as described by Super [1957], for example), the learning cycle spans a person’s entire life: from the exploration phase at a young age, to the trial phase during the early years of their career, to mid-career establishment, and finally to mastery towards the end of their career. Simultaneously, they may also undergo several mini cycles, especially those following protean and postorganizational career trajectories. The cycles may also be repeated multiple times in each new role, position, or organization. In other words, a person may be at different stages in various aspects of their career and may pass through repeated learning cycles as they progress.

Figure 3: Learning Cycles in the Protean Career



Source: Gubler, 2019, p. 943.

Within the context of the learning cycle, Hall and Briscoe (2004) differentiate between a single learning loop and a double learning loop. In a single learning loop, the individual responds to external changes and adjusts their behavior and decisions accordingly while retaining their previous level of ambition and defining new goals at the same level. The double learning loop goes one step further, encouraging the individual to reflect on their own underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that influence their behavior. This in turn leads to personal development.

In other words, the single learning loop shows what improvements can be made to achieve a set goal, while the double learning loop questions the goal itself and prompts the individual to explore and adjust their own thoughts and actions. The double learning loop therefore facilitates more far-reaching, long-term changes and improvements by fundamentally questioning and transforming an individual’s thoughts and actions (“identity learning,” Gasteiger, 2007, p. 59).

### Metacompetencies

Hall (1996; 2004) identifies two metacompetencies for successfully managing the transitions between learning cycles: Hall postulates that the two metacompetencies “Identity” and “Adaptability” are vital for learning from the experiences of previous learning cycles and achieving advancement (Gubler, 2019):

Identity, or self-awareness, means understanding and being clear about one’s values, interests, strengths, and life goals. A clear identity helps with decision-making and provides career direction through setting and pursuing personal goals. An unclear identity can cause uncertainty and hesitation when making important decisions.

Adaptability concerns an individual’s ability to adjust to new or changing circumstances, learn from them, and overcome challenges. This includes the (intellectual) capacity to flexibly adapt to new technologies, working methods, or cultures. It also includes an inner motivation and willingness to adjust to new situations and learn from experience. Adaptability is a vital skill, given the ever-changing labor market demands and career trajectories in a fast-moving world.

Hall argues that these two metacompetencies interact with and influence each other. A clear identity can encourage adaptability by providing a solid foundation on which to build, while adaptability can help to strengthen identity by providing new experiences and perspectives that shape one’s identity. Together, identity and adaptability are essential metacompetencies for realizing one’s full potential and succeeding in a rapidly changing world.

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please explain the difference between maxi and mini cycles.

*In a maxi cycle, the learning cycle extends throughout the individual’s entire life, while mini cycles refer to briefer learning periods that are repeated several times over a shorter period.*

2. According to Hall, why are the two metacompetencies of identity and adaptability considered important?

*Identity helps guide our decisions and actions and enables individuals to pursue personal goals. Adaptability helps individuals adapt to new situations and challenges. Together, these metacompetencies are essential for realizing one’s full potential and achieving success in a rapidly changing world.*

Summary

The term “career” is shaped by various perspectives, including objective and subjective definitions, definitions that are driven by individual motivations, and Hall’s alternative career definitions.

A career theory is a theoretical attempt to describe and explain career patterns. Traditional career theories (trait theory, development theory, social-cognitive theory) postulate that career responsibility rests with the organization. By contrast, more modern career theories (protean and postorganizational) contend that individuals are increasingly responsible for their own careers.

The career learning cycle construct addresses the two main metacompetencies of identity and adaptability, which are the essential prerequisites for a career.

# **Unit 2 – Career Development**

Study Goals

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to ...

… define career motivations and understand the driving factors behind individual careers.

… understand the differences between content and process motivation theories and apply them to your own career.

… identify different career roles and categorize the requirements for career roles and role conflicts.

... describe professional accomplishments throughout different career phases.

# 2. Career Development

### Introduction

Sophie’s father works for a global corporation in Asia and has numerous contacts. Sophie is highly motivated about her career, as she was exposed to the corporate world from an early age through her father and is aware of the career opportunities in this field.

Her career motivation is evident in certain types of behavior, such as deliberately selecting a degree course (business administration with a focus on sales and logistics) with the intention of pursuing a career in a multinational company and attending networking events to expand her contacts and career opportunities.

Sophie’s career motivation underscores the significance of motivation in career development. Motivation can influence people’s behavior and decisions, helping shape and structure their career trajectories.

There are no inherently good or bad motivations; the key is to recognize and address your own motivations and shape your career accordingly.

## 2.1 Career Motivations

Motivation helps to explain people’s behavior and “why” they act in a certain way. Von Rosenstiel defines motivation as a “psychological disposition that is comparatively long-lasting and specific in content” (2011, p. 238). Some motivations are innate and develop over time.

Career motivations clarify why individuals choose a particular career direction or strive for advancement. These motivations are often personal and unique, varying according to individual interests, needs, and values. By understanding our own career motivations, we can make informed career decisions and lead a fulfilled working life.

The concept of career motivations has been studied by several scientific disciplines including psychology, sociology, and organizational research. Researchers have found that individual career motivations are often influenced by an individual’s personality, experience, and values.

In career theory, the term **career motivation** refers to the factors that impact our individual pursuit of professional success and advancement. Career motivations may encompass various needs or desires, such as financial security, prestige, professional development, autonomy, power, or social recognition.

By identifying and analyzing the most common career motivations, we can gain insight into why people aspire to particular careers, the factors that contribute to job satisfaction and success, and how employers can better support and encourage their employees in their career development.

**Career motivations**

Scientists use a range of techniques to research career motivations, including questionnaires, interviews, and psychometric testing.

Analyzing career motivations is crucial for understanding individuals’ behavior at work and helping organizations in developing suitable incentive systems and career development programs. Career motivations can also help individuals make the right career choices and cultivate a meaningful and fulfilling career.

### Motivation Theories

**Motivation theories**

The scientific discourse on motivations dates back to antiquity with Epicurus and his philosophical theories (in around 300 BC). (Haag, 2020, S. 26).

Motivation theories describe the factors and processes that drive people to perform certain actions and achieve their goals. These theories are essential for understanding the influences of needs, desires, goals, incentives, and rewards on an individual’s actions and decisions. Moreover, they also help identify the conditions needed to boost and maintain people’s motivation.

Additionally, **motivation theories** can help explain why some people are successful in the pursuit of their goals. They can offer useful guidance when designing incentive systems in various fields such as education and work.

There are countless motivation theories that focus on different aspects of motivation, some of which are outlined below. Essentially, there are two types of motivation theory: content theories and process theories, each of which focuses on different aspects of motivation. Content-related theories focus on the factors that influence people’s motivation, while process-related theories focus on processes that help motivate people.

### Content Theories

Content-related motivation theories (also known as need theories) explore the factors that influence an individual’s motivation by examining people’s needs and the conditions under which these needs are met. These theories investigate effective motivators and the factors that inspire individuals to act (e.g., work). They consider the wide range of needs, desires, and goals that can influence people’s motivation. Needs can vary greatly (such as the need to earn money, receive recognition, give back to society, use one’s skills, make a mark, or continue the family business).

#### **McClelland’s motivation theory**

Psychologist David McClelland developed his theory of human motivation in the 1950s and 1960s (McClelland, 1961). He postulates that people are driven by three primary motivations: achievement, affiliation, and power. A combination of all three motivations is also possible.

* **Achievement**: Individuals with strong achievement motivation are driven by a desire to improve their skills and knowledge to meet challenging goals and deliver outstanding performance. They strive for personal success and growth, are typically more willing to take risks, and seek feedback to improve their performance.
* **Affiliation:** Individuals with strong affiliation motivation are driven by a desire to build and maintain close interpersonal relationships. They appreciate harmony and collaboration and tend to be friendly, cooperative, and empathetic.
* **Power:** Individuals with strong power motivation are driven by a desire to influence and control other people and situations. They aim to assert their own goals and strive to influence and lead others. These individuals may sometimes be perceived as authoritarian or manipulative.

**Motivation groups**

McClelland found that in nearly 98% of all cases, human behavior can be attributed to one of the three motivation groups (Haag, 2020, S. 31).

McClelland emphasizes that each person has a mix of these **motivations**, but one may be more dominant than the others. These motivations are culturally driven and may change over the course of an individual’s life.

Figure 4: Basic Motivations According to McClelland



Source: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Grundmotive\_nach\_McClelland.png](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei%3AGrundmotive_nach_McClelland.png)

Within the field of organizational psychology, McClelland’s theory serves as an essential foundation for HR development and employee motivation in particular. However, McClelland himself acknowledged that his theory might oversimplify individuals and their motivations (Haag, 2020, S. 123). It is crucial not to categorize individuals and label them based on a single motivational theory. Motivation profiles are helpful in outlining individual characteristics and understanding what drives individuals, but in reality, personal motivations are rarely the sole determinant of personality. Instead, it is the complex interplay of various motivations that influences our behavior.

Recognizing a person’s driving force can therefore aid in making the best decisions for them in critical situations. Depending on an individual’s dominant basic motivation, it may play a significant role in choosing to work for a large corporation or a small start-up. Should one prioritize training opportunities over job titles? Another critical consideration is how much performance pressure one can handle.

#### **Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Barbuto & Scholl)**

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are well-known distinctions in motivation theory, as developed by John Barbuto and Richard Scholl. These concepts served as the foundation for their “Five Sources of Motivation” (Barbuto & Scholl, 1998).

Intrinsic motivation originates from within – our inner drive, or in other words, joy and interest in the activity itself. Intrinsically motivated individuals engage in activities because they find them enjoyable and valuable. Various factors can enhance intrinsic motivation, such as setting challenging but attainable goals, fostering creativity and self-expression, or providing feedback that recognizes performance and commitment.

In contrast, extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factors, such as rewards, punishments, or social pressure. Extrinsically motivated individuals engage in activities to obtain specific rewards or avoid punishment. This form of motivation is also evident in the workplace, for example, when employees complete tasks for financial gain or to maintain their employment.

Barbuto and Scholl categorized intrinsic and extrinsic motivation into five sources of motivation in the workplace.

Intrinsic sources:

1. **Intrinsic process motivation:** This type of motivation stems from joy and interest in performing a task or activity. An individual is intrinsically motivated because they appreciate the activity itself and are not driven by external rewards or punishments. For example, an employee may be motivated to learn a new skill or plan a project because they find the activity enjoyable.
* Other examples: Musicians who make music from the heart or individuals who write articles for Wikipedia because they are passionate about the subject. The focus is on the pleasure derived from the activity itself rather than any specific benefits, rewards, or forms of recognition.
1. **Internal self-concept:** This concept refers to how an individual derives their self-image and identity from internal factors. A person with a strong internal self-image is more likely to identify with their work and find it fulfilling. For example, a factory worker who strongly identifies with their work and considers it part of their identity may be intrinsically motivated to work because they believe they are making an important contribution.
* Examples: Surgeons or journalists who believe they can make things happen (high performance motivation, tends to be long-term and focused on the whole person).

Extrinsic sources:

1. **Instrumental motivation:** This type of motivation is driven by external benefits, rewards, and avoidance of punishment. A person is motivated to perform a specific action to obtain a reward or avoid punishment. For example, an employee may be motivated to complete a certain task to earn a reward. This motivation tends to be short-term.
* Other examples: Authors who dream of writing a bestseller or real estate agents hoping to get rich (high form of power motivation).
1. **External self-concept:** This occurs when a person derives their self-image from external factors. A person may define themselves through feedback and evaluation from others. For example, an employee might base their self-image on having close relationships with managers or colleagues.
* Other examples: Cello players as part of an orchestra, basketball players as part of a team (high form of affiliation motivation).
1. **Goal internalization:** This refers to the process of internalizing goals to maintain long-term motivation. When a person internalizes a goal, it becomes an integral part of their identity rather than just an external reward or objective. One example is an employee who sets themselves a goal to acquire a certain skill in order to advance their long-term career and improve their work.
* Other examples: Entrepreneurs who commit to their company’s values or an assistant whose decisions closely align with those of their manager (combination of affiliation and performance motivation).

Figure 5: The Five Sources of Motivation According to Barbuto & Scholl



Source: [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Quellen\_der\_Motivation.png](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei%3AQuellen_der_Motivation.png)

The theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is often used as a basis for designing working conditions and reward systems that enhance employee engagement and performance. It is important to strike an effective balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to promote long-term engagement and well-being.

### Process Theories

Process-based motivation theories (also known as action theories) investigate the origins of motivation and the processes that lead to people becoming motivated. These theories propose that motivation is influenced not only by individuals’ needs and desires, but also by their evaluations and expectations. They describe the various steps involved in executing a particular action, such as assessing the situation, anticipating the outcome, and choosing the best option.

#### **Expectancy / V-I-E theory (Vroom)**

Victor Vroom’s expectancy theory is an example of a process-based motivation theory (Work & Motivation, 1964). Expectancy theory examines how a person’s expectations about the consequences of their actions affect their motivation. Expectancy theory posits that motivation depends on the expectation that a person’s efforts will result in a certain level of performance, which in turn leads to a specific reward. This theory was developed by psychologist Victor Vroom and is based on three main components: valence, instrumentality, and expectancy (V-I-E).

* **Valence:** The subjective value a person places on a reward. In other words, an individual is more motivated to perform a task when the reward holds a high value for them.
* **Instrumentality:** A person’s belief that a successful performance will result in a reward. In other words, it is the perceived likelihood that their action will lead to a particular outcome, such as a reward or promotion. When individuals believe that their performance will result in a reward, they will be more motivated to perform the task.
* **Expectancy:** A person’s belief that their efforts will lead to a successful performance. If people believe that their efforts will result in a successful performance, they will be more motivated to perform the task.

In a corporate context, employees often contemplate whether their work performance significantly influences their opportunities for promotion. If they determine that it has little or no influence, they may not fully utilize their potential to achieve above-average work results, as their motivation is negatively affected by their pessimistic expectation about the consequences.

The consequences of a promotion are even more relevant. For each individual, the additional influence and creative freedom gained may be more or less significant than the loss of leisure time or increased travel required. The weighting of each factor is highly individual but equally important as their expectations.

One interesting aspect of the expectancy theory is that it takes into account the varying values people assign to different consequences. For example, one person may consider a reward particularly valuable, while another may view the same reward as less important. Expectancy theory also acknowledges the possibility of disappointment and frustration resulting from the lack of consequences if the anticipated rewards do not materialize or their probability is perceived as low.

Figure 6: Vroom’s VIE Theory



Source: Tolimir, 2022, p. 91.

Expectancy theory serves as a valuable tool for understanding what motivates people and how motivation is influenced by their perceptions, attitudes, and values. Additionally, it considers both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and the interactions between them.

#### **Locke’s goal-setting theory**

The goal-setting theory was devised by American psychologist Edwin A. Locke, a pioneer of motivation research. In the 1960s and 1970s, Locke conducted extensive research on motivation in the workplace and the importance of goals (Locke & Latham, 1990; 2002).

His goal-setting theory argues that it is possible to boost an individual’s motivation by setting specific, challenging goals. It is based on the premise that people are more motivated when they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and believe they can achieve set goals.

The goal-setting theory consists of three core elements:

1. **Clarity:** Goals must be specific and clearly articulated so that individuals understand what is expected of them.
2. **Challenge:** Goals should be challenging yet realistic and achievable. If a goal is too easy or too difficult, it may cause dissatisfaction or frustration.
3. **Feedback:** Individuals should receive regular feedback on their performance in achieving the set goals. Feedback can also help maintain motivation and improve performance.

The goal-setting theory posits that setting specific and challenging goals motivates people by providing a clear idea of expectations and a goal they can work toward. By monitoring their progress and receiving feedback, individuals can improve their performance and maintain motivation.

**Moderators**

Examples of moderators include an individual’s skills and experiences, and the support of others.

**Moderators** influence the relationship between goals and performance. A moderator can increase or decrease the strength of the relationship between goals and performance. In a career context, factors such as job satisfaction, confidence in your own skills, or support from managers or colleagues can act as moderators.

**Mediators** explain the correlations between goals and performance. In a career context, mediators might include motivation, self-regulation, and work commitment. These factors can help individuals achieve their goals by increasing their effort, endurance, and persistence.

**Mediators**

Examples of mediators includemotivation, effort, and endurance.

The combination of moderators and mediators helps to explain how goals affect people’s behavior and how they can be used to improve their performance.

Figure 7: Model of the Goal-Setting Theory According to Locke and Latham



Source: Burkhardt-Waldherr & Kauffeld, 2020, p. 157.

While Locke's goal-setting theory is widely used in motivation research, it is not without its critics:

* **Overemphasis on goals:** Locke theorizes that setting specific and challenging goals will increase performance and motivation. However, some studies propose that an overemphasis on goals can actually intensify stress and anxiety among employees, which in turn may adversely impact their performance and motivation.
* **Neglecting the long-term impacts:** Locke’s theory focuses mainly on short-term goals and their impact on performance and motivation. However, it is crucial to consider the significance of long-term goals and their impact on employee job satisfaction and well-being.

#### **The Rubicon model**

The **Rubicon**, a motivation theory developed by German psychologist Heinz Heckhausen, delineates the processes individuals undergo to achieve their goals. The model is predicated on the notion that distinct phases in life require varying actions and decisions to achieve an aspired goal (Koch, 2018).

**Rubicon**

The name “Rubicon” refers to the Rubicon River, which Julius Caesar crossed in 49 BC, marking the start of a civil war. The river crossing symbolizes the transition from a state of indecision to a state of determination.

The Rubicon model divides the goal pursuit process into four phases:

1. **Pre-decision phase (preparation):** During this phase, goals are formulated, and possible actions are weighed up. The individual is still undecided and explores possible alternatives.
2. **Post-decision phase (decision):** The individual has decided on an action that best aligns with their goals.
3. **Action phase:** The individual actualizes their decision and actively works toward their goal.
4. **Post-action phase:** The outcome of the action is evaluated and appropriate consequences are determined.

The model also identifies a particular threshold, known as the “Rubicon.” Once the individual has passed this threshold, their motivation transitions from “possibility” to “commitment” (**volition**). In other words, once an individual has decided on and initiated an action, they feel compelled to complete it. The Rubicon model also emphasized the importance of positive expectations and goals for motivation and the need to set realistic and attainable goals to remain motivated.

**Volition**

Unlike motivation, which concerns a person’s willingness to pursue a goal, volition is the ability to actively and purposefully pursue a goal and translate it into action, despite potential difficulties or obstacles. Volition also includes other aspects such as endurance, willpower, and self-management.

One example of the Rubicon process in a work-related context is applying for a new job. During the pre-decision phase, you consider your career goals and the opportunities for achieving them. You search for suitable job advertisements and learn about the requirements and expectations of potential employers.

The decision to apply for a particular job marks the Rubicon. At this point, you transition from considering to actively planning.

During the planning phase, you determine the necessary steps to create a convincing application. You research the company and tailor your cover letter and résumé to the specific role. During the action phase, you execute your plan and submit the application.

During the post-action phase, you evaluate the success of your application and identify potential areas for improvement. If invited to an interview, the process enters a new round, during which you re-engage with the Rubicon process to achieve your goal of a successful job application.

Figure 8: Rubicon Model

 

Source: Mai, 2023.

### Your Own Motivation Profile

Motivation theories examine and explain various aspects of motivation and behavior, helping us understand the importance of comprehending our own career motivations.

For example, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theories can highlight the factors that drive us to perform certain activities and how these factors affect performance and satisfaction. This knowledge may help you identify which activities and tasks you enjoy and which you would rather avoid.

Expectancy and goal-setting theories can elucidate how goal achievement influences our motivation and behavior. This, in turn, helps us in setting realistic and challenging career goals that are incentivizing and motivating.

The Rubicon model can help us comprehend the goal implementation process and how we overcome obstacles. It describes the journey from planning to achieving career goals and how focusing on your own resources and skills can help you overcome challenges.

Motivation theories can help you understand your career motivations and develop a strategy for achieving your goals. Applying different theories gives you a broader perspective of your own motivations, enabling you to embark on a successful and fulfilling career trajectory.

**Motivation profile**

While there are various online tools offering a broad assessment of your individual motivation profile, they are no substitute for a comprehensive, reliable analysis by a qualified professional.

Various online platforms are available to help create your motivation profile.

For example, a free **motivation profile** by Ahead (Haag, 2020, p. 3; 34) is currently being tested, offering quick multiple-choice options. The test is based on a refined version of the McClelland categories and takes approximately 20 minutes. It can be found on the Ahead Academy website (Ahead-Academy, 2023).

Further examples include:

* 16Personalities (16Personalities, 2023),
* Hogan Assessments (Hogan, 2023),
* Talentoday (taltoday, 2023),
* High5Test (High5Test, 2023) and
* Crystal Knows (Crystal, 2023) .

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please provide three examples of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

*Intrinsic motivation:*

* *A person who is passionate about making music and wants to continually improve because they enjoy it and see it as part of their identity.*
* *A person who enjoys exercising for their physical and mental health and because it makes them feel good.*
* *A student who is passionate about a particular subject and wants to learn more without seeking grades or external rewards.*

*Extrinsic motivation:*

* *A person who works solely for financial gain without deriving enjoyment or motivation from their job.*
* *A student who strives to achieve good grades solely to receive praise from teachers or parents.*
* *An employee who works overtime to receive a salary increase or promotion but does not enjoy their work or feel motivated by it.*

2. Please mark the statements which are true.

¨ The theory of self-determination is based on the three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. (T)

¨ In expectancy theory, V-I-E stands for valence, individuality, and experience. (F)

¨ The goal-setting theory is based on the idea that setting specific, challenging, and clear goals increases employee motivation and performance. (T)

¨ The Rubicon model describes the “Rubicon” as the phase of identifying your own motivations. (F)

## 2.2 Career Roles

Career development can be a complex and dynamic journey, encompassing a variety of roles and responsibilities. Recognizing and understanding that individuals take on different career roles throughout their career development can help them prepare more effectively for future challenges. Below, we outline some of the different career roles and perspectives to consider.

### Career Stages Model

Career development involves multiple different roles and responsibilities that can change over time. The “Career Stages Model of Careers” (Dalton et al., 1977) outlines a somewhat traditional career trajectory, progressing from apprentice through to manager, and consists of four stages.

In the first stage, a career entrant typically works under the guidance of a more senior colleague and performs routine tasks as a member of a larger project and team. Upon completing an induction period, they are expected to tackle increasing workloads and complexities while assuming certain responsibilities.

In the second stage, the individual becomes more deeply involved in the projects and takes responsibility for specific aspects. They work independently and achieve significant results, thereby gaining credibility and recognition. They are often responsible for managing a project or part of a project.

In the middle phase of their career, they establish connections between different departments and contribute their own ideas to project implementation. As team leaders, they take responsibility for managing a team and coordinating its performance. The ability to motivate employees and promote their skills is crucial. They serve as mentors or group leaders and contribute to the development of less experienced coworkers. As the head of a section, unit, or department, they hold disciplinary responsibility for a significant number of employees and must be capable of developing and executing a strategy for the entire department.

In the final stage, the individual becomes an important part of the organization. This may mean taking responsibility for a division or the entire organization as a board member. They exercise formal and informal power, represent the organization, and prepare other employees for key roles within the company.

At the time, this model was useful for describing a typical corporate career trajectory for talented and motivated employees. However, it is debatable whether this career path remains relevant or desirable today. Not every employee aspires to lead others and share the corporate philosophy with them, and not all potential managers want to be on the board. We must consider critically whether this classic career progression model is still valid or desirable for current generations.

More recent developments in protean and postorganizational career development theories describe new career types in an evolving work context. Concepts such as “Empowerment” by Gretchen Spreitzer (1995) focus on the individual sense of self-efficacy, self-determination, meaningfulness, and competency. One feature common to all modern career development models is the need to continually adopt new roles and embrace **different perspectives**. When embarking on a career, we should be prepared to learn from experienced colleagues and gain valuable experience. As team or project managers, we should be able to motivate our own employees and promote their skills to enhance team performance. As departmental or section heads, we should develop and implement a clear strategy for entire departments, incorporating both customer needs and organizational objectives.

**Different perspectives**

It is important to understand that over the course of a career, an employee’s roles are determined by their own skills, experience, and performance.

### Katz and Kahn’s Role Theory

Katz and Kahn’s role model concept (1966) describes how individuals in organizations perform different roles and interact with one another.

**Roles**

Katz and Kahn argue that there are specific forms of behavior associated with certain tasks (standardized behavior patterns required within a functional network).

Katz and Kahn define **roles** as “standardized patterns of behavior required of all persons who participate in a given functional relationship, regardless of any personal wishes or interpersonal obligations irrelevant to the functional relationship” (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 37, quoted by Greif, 1983, p. 128).

Katz and Kahn’s role model identifies the different roles held by individuals within an organization. Developed in the 1960s, the model assumes that each person in an organization performs various roles that mutually influence and interact with one another. It has since been widely applied in organizational and leadership research.

1. **Position:** An individual’s formal position within an organization, such as CEO, team leader, or administrator.
2. **Person:** The individual’s characteristics, such as personality, skills, and experiences.
3. **Role:** The individual’s expectations of their position, such as their tasks, responsibilities, and code of conduct.
4. **Group:** The people with whom the individual works in an organization, such as colleagues, customers or managers.

Katz and Kahn’s role model also influences the behavior of people in organizations. When a person plays a certain role, it can influence their behavior. When a person takes on a team member role, they may become more cooperative and collaborative. When a person assumes a leadership role, they may become more confident and willing to make decisions.

Katz and Kahn’s role model has been applied to leadership research as well. Successful leaders must be skilled at playing different roles within an organization. They must be able to switch between positions and roles, while understanding and meeting the expectations and requirements of each role.

#### **Sending and receiving roles**

There are various ways to send and **receive** roles, either through verbal communication (such as verbal and written instructions), or through non-verbal signals (such as positive or negative consequences). Katz and Kahn elaborate on the different roles in their role model:

**Receiving a role**

The role is received by communicating the role expectations.

1. **Role expectation:** The expectations placed by others on a person who holds a certain position. These may be expectations of tasks, responsibilities, or behavior. Role expectation is important because it affects a person’s perception of their role and how they behave in it.
2. **Sent Role:** The behavior exhibited by an individual in their position and perceived by others. The behavior may differ from or conform to expectations.
3. **Received role:** How the role is perceived and interpreted by others. It may differ from the sent role if other people’s perceptions differ from your intentions or actions.
4. **Role behavior:** The actual behavior exhibited by an individual in their role, regardless of whether it is perceived or expected by others.

These four aspects of roles are closely interrelated and mutually influence one another: Role expectation can affect others’ behavior and perceptions, while other people’s behavior and perceptions can affect role behavior and role expectation.

#### **Role assignment context**

The context in which roles are assigned includes several factors affecting the role sender’s expectations:

* **Organizational environment:** The external framework conditions and influences affecting work and role performance within an organization. This may include the corporate culture, organizational structure, working conditions, and market development.
* **Personality traits:** Individual traits and characteristics that can affect a person's behavior and performance. Examples include performance orientation, conscientiousness, openness to experiences, and emotional stability.
* **Interpersonal factors:** The interpersonal relationships and interactions that take place within an organization including collaboration with colleagues, relationships with managers, or interactions with customers.

Figure 9: Role Model According to Katz & Kahn 1966



Source: Schreyögg & Koch, 2020, p. 491.

Katz and Kahn’s role model is an important concept within organizational and leadership research. It highlights the many different roles an individual may perform within an organization and illustrates how they interact with each other and affect people’s behavior within organizations. Understanding the requirements and expectations of these roles will enable you to respond to them more effectively and improve your performance in different areas.

Understanding the role model may also help people identify and resolve potential conflicts between their different roles. For example, someone who works both as a team leader and as a member of a project team may find it difficult to reconcile their responsibilities in both roles. By understanding the requirements and expectations of these roles, they can develop strategies to minimize conflicts and become more effective in both roles.

Understanding the role model can also help develop career planning by identifying and understanding the different roles that are relevant to a particular career. This may help you to acquire the skills and experience needed to fulfill these roles and achieve your career goals.

### Requirements for the “Manager” Career Role

Katz and Kahn’s role model emphasizes the influence of each role on an individual, as well as the different expectations and requirements that must be met in each role. For example, when a person takes on a leadership role, they are expected to have a vision of their area of responsibility, motivate employees, and achieve goals. Conversely, when adopting a technical role, they are expected to possess expertise and solve technical problems. Fulfilling each of these roles requires different skills and competencies.

Throughout a career, individuals must fulfill a range of different tasks, responsibilities, and expectations. They typically include:

1. **Functional responsibility:** This refers to the role an individual assumes based on their functional knowledge and skills. Both employees and managers can share functional responsibility, which involves being accountable for completing your assigned tasks and responsibilities. This responsibility encompasses attaining goals and delivering results in a specific field or function. In other words, it entails being functionally responsible for work results, checking the quality of work, and ensuring compliance with specifications and processes.

An example of functional responsibility would be when an IT expert is responsible for maintaining a computer system and keeping it functioning correctly. The IT expert is responsible for ensuring that the system is operating smoothly, that it meets user requirements, and that it is secure and well-protected.

1. **Leadership skills:** This is the role played by a manager in leading and controlling teams or departments. Leadership skills include planning, organizing, leading, and communication, and they are crucial for motivating employees to achieve their goals and collaborate effectively.

The ability to create and manage budgets is an example of leadership skills. A manager must be capable of planning and monitoring their team’s or department’s budget to maintain financial stability. Additionally, they must efficiently apply their skills in the demonstrated practices.

1. **Disciplinary leadership skills:** These refer to acting as a role model and decision-maker for other employees. Disciplinary responsibility involves a manager’s responsibility for their employees, which includes adhering to company policies, reviewing employee performance, providing feedback and coaching, and taking action when an employee’s performance falls short of expectations, or when behavioral or trust issues arise.

An example of disciplinary responsibility is when a manager issues a formal warning to an employee for inappropriate behavior. The manager must ensure that the employee comprehends the reasons for the disciplinary action and commits to behaving appropriately in future.

1. **Networking skills:** These involve the development and maintenance of work-related contacts and networks. Networking skills also include the skills needed to establish and sustain effective relationships with others, such as communication, collaboration, negotiation, and networking. A network of contacts can contribute to achieving business goals, attracting customers, and creating new business opportunities.

An example of networking skills is the ability to build and cultivate relationships with other managers. A manager with a good network can leverage the contacts and resources of their business partners to achieve their business goals and explore new business opportunities.

1. **Mentoring skills:** This involves an individual acting as a mentor or coach for other employees or students. Mentoring skills are the ability to guide others (typically employees or younger colleagues) in developing their careers and achieving their goals.

A mentor is usually an experienced manager who shares their experiences and knowledge with others to help them achieve their career goals. Their skills may include coaching, providing feedback, offering alternative perspectives, and demonstrating empathy. A successful mentor helps mentees develop both personally and professionally, enabling them to reach their full potential.

An example of mentoring skills is assisting a young coworker in defining their career goals and creating a plan to achieve them. A mentor can also provide feedback and advice to help employees improve their skills and performance.

1. **Entrepreneurial skills:** These are the roles played by an individual when establishing or running their own business. Entrepreneurial skills are the abilities required to set up, develop and lead a company, including risk-taking, creativity, innovation, and business development. An entrepreneur needs these skills to develop new products and services, enter markets, and attract customers.

The ability to develop and implement new business ideas is one example of entrepreneurial skills. A successful entrepreneur must be capable of developing innovative ideas and converting them into successful business models.

The various roles within a career may differ depending on the industry, company, position, and individual career goals. An individual may play multiple roles simultaneously or transition between different roles throughout their career. It is important to identify and understand your own career roles and development prospects if you want to set clear career goals.

### Role Conflicts

Kahn et al. (1964) and Kahn (1978) argue that discrepancies may arise between the sent and received role for various reasons, such as if the sender is considered untrustworthy, the underlying role expectations are considered unimportant, penalties are thought to be unlikely, the sender and receiver cannot find a common language, or the demands are not clearly and unequivocally formulated.

Role conflicts are prevalent in organizations and companies worldwide. They may take various forms and may impact employees and the organization as a whole. Kahn and Katz identify two specific types of role conflict: inter-role and intra-role conflicts.

Inter-role conflict involves disagreement between the expectations and requirements associated with different roles. For example, an employee who is a father may be responsible for picking up his children from school on time, but as an employee, he may also be required to attend an important meeting on time. Another example of inter-role conflict is when an employee is asked by their manager to perform tasks that conflict with their personal values and beliefs.

Intra-role conflict refers to the discord that arises from differing expectations and requirements associated with a specific role. For example, a teacher may be expected to treat their students fairly while also enforcing discipline and strict rules. Similarly, a manager may need to balance meeting stakeholder expectations with upholding the company's ethical values.

Role conflicts can lead to employee dissatisfaction and stress, which in turn can affect their performance and impacts the working environment. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and address role conflicts. One way to reduce inter-role conflicts is by promoting clear communication and flexibility in work planning. To address intra-role conflicts, employees could be trained to make decisions that align with the company's ethical values, for example.

### Self-Check Questions

Please mark the statements that are true.

¨ Functional responsibility primarily means being responsible for managing employees. (F)

¨ Disciplinary responsibility mainly concerns accepting responsibility for work results and performance in a particular field or role. (F)

¨ The best managers are usually adept at balancing their different skills. (T)

¨ Role conflicts can significantly impact organizations, employees, and their performance. (T)

## 2.3 Professional Accomplishment

Accomplishment plays a vital role in your career, both for your success in your current role and for your future career opportunities. Accomplishment can be defined as the degree to which a person achieves their career goals and meets the performance expectations of their employer. It may also encompass a person's ability to consistently deliver high-quality work and improve their skills and abilities to advance their career.

### Performance Behavior (von Rosenstiel)

The concept of performance behavior is closely linked to the concept of professional accomplishment. In many cases, performance facilitates rapid attainment of career goals. Conversely, successful accomplishment can bolster a person's self-confidence and motivation, which can positively affect their performance.

Von Rosenstiel (1997) developed this approach to describe employee performance behavior, which has since become very well-established in occupational psychology. Performance behavior encompasses an employee’s efforts to achieve a specific performance level, the quality of the performance, and its duration. In other words, it examines the effort an employee invests in a task, how well they execute it, and how long they can maintain that performance level.

Von Rosenstiel posited that performance behavior is a complex function determined by personal factors, situational factors, and task requirements. Personal factors (volition and ability) encompass personality traits, cognitive abilities, skills, experience, and motivation. Situational factors (situational enabling, empowerment and social obligations) pertain to the environment in which the task is performed and include physical and psychological aspects such as time pressures, workplace design, and social interactions. Task requirements involve the complexity of the task, the accuracy and speed necessary, and the available resources.

Figure 10: Performance Behavior According to von Rosenstiel 1997



Source: Sigg et al. 2020, p. 41

* **Volition (motivation, values):** Volition is a person’s desire to exhibit a particular behavior and the recognition that the associated goals are important.
* **Ability** **(knowledge, skills, abilities):** This category includes the acquisition and improvement of abilities and skills.
* **Situational enabling (impeding or favorable external factors):** Performance behavior cannot be exhibited unless necessary framework conditions (such as timing and spatial resources) are in place.
* **Empowerment and obligation** **(norms, regulations):** This encompasses the individual’s social environment and system, including social and societal norms, regulations, and environmental expectations, both explicit and implicit.

Performance behavior can be measured in various ways, such as observing behavior during task completion, self-assessment, or assessment by others. Identifying the cause of underlying issues and taking targeted action to improve performance can be facilitated by measuring performance behavior.

Von Rosenstiel emphasized that performance behavior depends not only on personal factors, but also on the fit between personal factors, task requirements, and situational factors. For example, an individual with high cognitive abilities and skills may still fail to complete a very time-consuming, high-precision task if faced with time constraints or distractions.

The concept of performance behavior is crucial for HR and organizational development, as it can help to improve employee performance and optimize the alignment between individual skills and task requirements. Additionally, it can help improve working conditions and workplace design with a view to maximize performance.

Overall, the concept of performance behavior has significantly impacted occupational psychology as well as HR and organizational development since its introduction by von Rosenstiel in 1997. It provides a valuable foundation for measuring and optimizing employee performance and improving working conditions and workplace design.

### Performance Behavior at Different Career Stages

Von Rosenstiel’s research also examined how performance behavior changes throughout the various career phases identified by Greenhaus et al. (2010): the early, mid, and late career stages.

#### **Early career**

The early career stage generally focuses on establishing oneself in the industry, gaining experience and acquiring expertise. Greenhaus et al. (2010, p. 196) further divided this stage into the establishment phase and the achievement phase. During the early career stage, individuals focus primarily on acquiring and developing skills, professional competencies, and knowledge.

Performance behavior at this stage is determined by the individual’s skills and experience, as well as the task requirements. Early career achievement may be characterized by high motivation, a steep learning curve, and rapid adaptation to new challenges. As the individual is still relatively inexperienced, their performance may fluctuate during this stage, especially when faced with demanding tasks. Consequently, it is important to provide support and feedback to individuals at this stage to improve their performance.

#### **Mid-career**

In the mid-career phase, most people have already acquired considerable work experience, a broader skillset and knowledge, and are established in their profession.

During this stage, personal factors such as personality, motivation, and experience, as well as situational factors such as working conditions and task requirements influence individuals. Career performance at this stage may be characterized by high productivity, leadership, innovation, and the development of expertise and skills. The emphasis is on consolidating previous experience and developing leadership skills. Career planning ais also crucial at this stage, as the person often focuses on advancing their career. They may also review, confirm, or modify previous career moves and career goals (Schmeisser et al., 2013, p. 221).

#### **Late career**

Individuals in the late career stage typically have extensive experience and may hold leadership roles based on their skills and experience. At this stage, performance behavior is often influenced by management task requirements and by situational factors, such as organizational framework conditions and the corporate culture. Professional accomplishment during this phase may be characterized by prioritizing knowledge transfer and experience sharing with younger employees, helping the company achieve strategic goals, and achieving a good work-life balance. It may also involve succession planning and successfully concluding one’s career.

In summary, von Rosenstiel's model posits that performance behavior at various career stages is influenced by both personal factors (e.g., skills and experience) and situational factors (e.g., working conditions and requirements). Work experience and career planning are also of particular importance. We should consider performance behavior at different career stages to ensure optimal performance.

### Performance Behavior at Particular Career Phases

Performance behavior also plays an important role during particular phases of a career, such as during a career plateau, a career break or a consolidation / career realignment phase.

#### **Career plateau**

A career plateau is a (temporary) phase when no further advancement opportunities exist within the current organization. This may occur, for example, if a person has already achieved a senior position with no further room for growth, if they have held their position for an extended period, or if no further opportunities for promotion or advancement are available (Möller & Volkmer, 2005).

In this situation, professional accomplishment may stagnate or even decline if there are no new challenges or growth opportunities. Motivation may diminish and job satisfaction may fall, leading to a decrease in productivity and work quality.

**Career plateau**

Regnet’s studies found that the average manager reaches their career plateau at around the age of 45 **Invalid source specified.**.

During a **career plateau** phase, performance behavior may help employees maintain their current position, change direction, or embark on new career steps, for example, in a different industry. It is crucial at this stage to continually improve one’s skills and competences and embrace new challenges, for example, by taking on additional responsibilities, participating in training, or accepting new projects and tasks.

**Career break**

Career breaks (sometimes known as career setbacks) may occur for a variety of reasons: termination, time off due to illness or caregiving, part-time work, family time, etc.

A lack of motivation may cause people to remain on a career plateau and miss development opportunities.

#### **Career break**

A **career break** is a sudden, unexpected, or unwanted interruption to a person’s career development. During this period, professional accomplishment and success may stagnate or even decline.

A career break may result from various causes, including personal factors, organizational changes, or external influences. Personal factors such as poor work performance, lack of commitment or insufficient skills may also cause a career setback. Other causes may include organizational changes such as mergers, acquisitions, reorganization or restructuring. External influences such as economic turbulence, technological changes or political unrest can also lead to a career break. Furthermore, a combination of factors may also cause a career break; for example, a person may lose their job due to a merger, leading to a loss of job security and self-confidence.

During a career break, performance behavior is critical for getting back on track. It is important to analyze one’s strengths and weaknesses and reflect on your performance behavior when considering the next steps. A high level of willingness and motivation are crucial during this phase to overcome the setback.

One option is to identify the causes of the career break and develop strategies to overcome the obstacles, such as further training, changing direction, or switching employers or industries.

#### **Consolidation/reorientation phase**

A consolidation/reorientation phase is a period for reflecting on one’s career, reconsidering past performance behavior, and setting new goals where necessary. This phase may be triggered by various factors, such as personal considerations, job changes, or external influences.

During this phase, individuals might critically assess their career development and seek ways to improve or broaden their skills and competencies, such as further training, a new direction, or taking on new tasks in the current working environment.

During this phase, individuals might also rethink and adjust their career goals and priorities. A consolidation/reorientation phase might also be an opportunity to pursue personal or professional interests and passions that have become sidelined.

In a career consolidation/reorientation phase, performance behavior may help individuals to secure and develop a new role. It is important to adapt to the new requirements and acquire necessary skills and competencies. A high level of motivation and willingness to perform is also crucial.

This phase may also coincide with changes in the work environment or organization triggered, for example, by restructuring, mergers, or acquisitions, which may force individuals to reassess their career development.

A consolidation/realignment phase often requires a high degree of self-reflection and self-management to develop a clear vision of one’s career goals and priorities and take concrete steps to achieve those goals.

### Self-Check Questions

1. Please define professional accomplishment:

*Professional accomplishment can be defined as the degree to which an individual achieves their career goals and delivers the performance expected by their employer and the industry. It also describes an individual's ability to consistently deliver high-quality work and improve their skills and abilities to advance their career. Maintaining performance depends on the personal aspects of volition and ability combined with the environmental aspects of empowerment and social obligations.*

2. Please mark the statements that are true.

¨ A career plateau is a phase when there are no further advancement opportunities within the current company. (T)

¨ A career break is an expected, planned interruption to a person's career development. (F)

¨ A consolidation/reorientation phase is a period for reflecting on your career, re-evaluating past performance behavior, and setting new goals where necessary. (T)

Summary

Career motivations describe why people exhibit certain types of behavior, why they pursue certain career directions, and why they strive for career advancement. Motivation theories may be categorized into two main types: content theories that focus on people’s needs, desires, and goals; and process theories, which delve into the origins of motivation and behavior. Both types of theories are important for a comprehensive understanding of people’s motivations. Content theories include McClelland's theory of motivation, the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and the theory of self-determination, while process theories include the expectancy theory, the goal-setting theory, and the Rubicon model.

Throughout their careers, most individuals will assume various career roles (as described in the career stages model), beginning with minimal responsibility, then progressing to project and team responsibilities, and subsequently acquiring increased responsibility through management positions in an organization. This classic model has existed for decades but is now being increasingly scrutinized.

Professional accomplishment plays an important role in every career phase. To successfully shape one’s career trajectory, it is crucial to consistently improve one’s skills and competencies, embrace new challenges, and remain highly motivated and enthusiastic.