

Career Growth: A Review of Literature and Implications for the Civil Service in a Developing Country

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Abstract

The need for the Civil Service to deploy Career Growth practices in order to increase workers performance and hone positive behaviour and attitudes has become urgent. Moreover, there are several documented studies across various cultures and countries on the organisational and individual benefits of career growth. Curiously, literature on career growth practices in the civil service of developing countries is under-researched. Considering this gap, this study conducted a literature review on career growth and highlighted its implications on the Civil Service in Nigeria. Based on the review, the study anchored the performance implications of career growth using career goal progress, professional ability development, and organisational rewards growth as foci. The study recommended that: opportunity for employees to attain or achieve their career goals and objectives should be provided; employees should be encouraged to participate in developmental programs and perform developmental tasks; workers should get coaching on how to define and achieve career objectives; more opportunity should be given to workers to learn new skills; salaries should be paid regularly; and government should reintroduce incentive programs, transportation allowances, meal subsidies, utility allowances, leave grants, and entertainment allowances.

Keywords: Career Growth, Public Service

1.0: Introduction

Recent years have seen an increase in scholarly interest in career growth studies (Modem et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Organisations are less able to offer stable careers to their employees nowadays because of the uncertain work environment created by organisational restructuring, mergers, and acquisitions (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990; Aryee et al., 1994; Son & Kim, 2019). Due to the prevalence of such unstable workplaces, people are more prone to make commitments to their career growth than to their employers (Ballout, 2009; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). Additionally, because civil servant salaries are generally lower than those of their counterparts in the private sector, upward mobility and advancement become particularly crucial for public employees (Xie & Yang, 2021). Unblocking employees' paths to career growth is desperately needed to attract and keep more high-quality personnel (Wang et al., 2019).

Career growth is a multifaceted concept that includes achieving professional goals, honing one's professional skills, and getting promotions and pay that match with those skills (Weng, McElroy, Morrow, & Liu, 2010). Career growth also refers to people's perceptions that their present employers provide a work environment where they may fulfil their professional needs and reinforce their successes through promotions, professional development, and remuneration (Weng et al., 2010). Literature indicates that organisations with a high level of career growth encourage employee-organisational interaction, which raises organisational identity (Son & Kim, 2019), organisational commitment, job satisfaction, reduction in turnover (Ohunakin et al., 2018; Nawaz & Pangil, 2016; Wang et al., 2022) and workplace distress (Rubbab et al., 2022).

Also, researchers find that career growth improves the quality of employees' work experiences (Barnett & Bradley, 2007; Chen et al., 2004). Using organisational support theory as a basis, Ng et al. (2022) argue that organization-enabled career growth practises could improve work relationships. Career growth is good for both organisations and employees because it improves people's psychological contracts, sense of fulfilment, and job performance. (Craig et al., 2013; Moon & Choi, 2016; Sturges et al., 2005; Weng et al., 2010). Also, as people grow in their careers, they become better able to take on more leadership roles, which is good for the long-term growth of organisations. (McDonald & Hite, 2005). Academics see career growth as a tool that helps people be more genuinely motivated in their work, which leads to less burnout. (Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015) and greater levels of engagement (Albrecht, 2012; Ugwu & Okojie, 2016; Bai & Liu, 2018).

This study focuses on three aspects of career growth: career goal progress, professional ability development, and organisational rewards growth (promotion speed plus pay growth) (Weng & Hu, 2009; Weng et al., 2010; Weng & McElory, 2012; Weng & Xi, 2013; Wang et al., 2014). These components of career growth make it easier for individuals and companies to reach their goals (Kim et al., 2015; Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019; Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022).

Sadly, civil servants in developing nations like Nigeria frequently lament irregular and delayed promotions, a lack of training, a lack of opportunity to advance their careers, inadequate compensation, and an unappealing reward structure in general. Therefore, it appears that the civil services of developing nations continue to languish in a situation similar to that of the Indian civil service, according to what was observed by Dey (1997) two and a half decade ago that career management is the poor cousin of many other more glamorous civil service processes. It is talked about more than it is done, and there is neither a "career" nor "management" in the civil service in this country. Dey (1997) further argued that careers cannot afford to be left to the whims of time, the merciless hand of chance, or the massive casualness that all too often defines the "relevant bureaucracy." Indeed, careers are fragile and need to be managed carefully; "they are like midnight children who, without parental attention, get spoiled and go astray if a systematised and well-planned agenda of action is not developed and followed" (Dey, 1997; p. 579/580).

Furthermore, studies establish linkages between organisational career growth and other variables, namely: turnover intentions (Weng & McElory, 2012; Biswakarma, 2016), subsequent voice behaviour (Wang et al., 2014), turnover process (Karavardar, 2014; Chen et al, 2015), affective commitment (Knezović & Greda, 2021), organisational commitment (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Weng et al., 2010); work engagement (Bai & Liu, 2018), career commitment (Son & Kim, 2019), and knowledge-based engagement (Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022). Although there have been many studies on career growth in many various industries,

the public service sector has received relatively little attention (Napitupulu et al., 2017), especially in developing country context.

2.1: Literature Review

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

The Social Cognitive Career Theory was established by Lent and Brown (1996) and Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1996) as an extension of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. The SCCT framework uncovers how people's career-related interests develop, how those interests, in concert with other factors, motivate them to make choices that matter to their careers, and how people of different backgrounds and abilities can succeed at different levels of their career growth (Lent & Brown, 1996). The SCCT states that a person's career trajectory can be affected by their actions, the nature of their workplace, and their perceptions of their own abilities. The common assumption is that people will be motivated to improve their careers if they are placed in an environment that fosters growth and gives them access to the training and experience they need to do so successfully (White et al., 1992).

2.2: Career Growth

Career is “a sequence of positions occupied by a person during the course of a life-time” (Super & Hall, 1978, p. 334). Arthur et al. (1989) define career as “the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time” (p. 8). Similarly, Van der Heijden and de Vos (2015) define career as the sequence of work experiences that evolves over the individual's life course” (p. 2). An employee's career grows as they go through several positions and gain experience and pay raises along the way (Amah & Oyetuunde, 2020). Career growth, as envisioned by Spector (2003), occurs when workers move up the ranks as a direct result of their efforts to learn new skills and perform better. Employees' attempts to achieve their career goals and acquire the skills they seek inside an organisation are also considered career growth, as is the company's effort to reward such actions monetarily and otherwise (Weng et al., 2010; Knezovi, & Greda, 2020).

It has been argued by academics (e.g., Bristol & Tisdell, 2010; Wiley, 1997) that the prospect of career growth is one of the most powerful motivational factors that can have a positive effect on employee behaviour. Career growth possibilities demonstrate to employees that their management is concerned about them as individuals, which may reduce burnout, boost morale and decrease turnover (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Albrecht, 2012; Alias et al., 2014; Van De Voorde & Beijer, 2015).

2.2.1: Dimensions of Career Growth

Career growth was dimensionalized into career goal progress, professional ability development, promotion speed and remuneration growth (Weng & Hu, 2009). It was later reduced to a three-factor model comprising (1) career goal progress, (2) professional ability development and (3) organisation rewards (promotion speed plus remuneration growth) - (Weng & McElroy, 2012). These dimensions have been validated in various settings and contexts (Weng & Xi, 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2015; Bai & Liu, 2018; Jia-jun & Hua-ming, 2022).

Recently, Ni et al. (2022) dimensionalized career growth into: career promotion, career goal progress, professional ability and quality improvement, professional identity development

and increase in personal prestige. However, most studies have adopted Weng et al.'s (2010) facets of career growth, which include: Career goal progress, Professional ability development and Organisational rewards growth (Bai & Liu, 2018).

The extent to which employees think they have had sufficient career opportunities and have not experienced halted careers is known as perceived career goal progress (Lin et al., 2018). Career goal progress is a higher order need satisfaction (Weng et al., 2010) which generates vital, productive work energy that can support more work tasks (Conner, 2014). When workers see daily progress toward their objectives, they are more motivated, more appreciative and become more engaged at work (Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Yang et al., 2018).

Professional ability in the workplace might be viewed as the capacity to manage one's own job and learning prospects in order to achieve certain career ambitions (Kuijpers et al., 2006). Professional abilities include goal setting and career planning, self-knowledge, job-related performance, career-related skills, familiarity with (office) politics, career guidance and networking, and feedback-seeking and self-presentation that foster career-related benefits (Seibert et al., 2001; Wolff & Moser, 2009; Francis Smythe et al., 2013). Such abilities guarantee growth in specific career path and improve communication and relationships with fellow employees. Opportunities for professional development enable sustained competitive advantage (Lee & Bruvold, 2003), foster employee engagement (Sarti, 2014; Shuck et al., 2014; Bailey et al., 2015), employee commitment, and organisational success (Lee & Bruvold, 2003). Conversely, those who believe their current position offers limited opportunity for professional development are more likely to demonstrate low commitment to their current position and will like to quit (Weng, 2010).

Organisational rewards growth includes the following: (i) likelihood and frequency of promotion; (ii) likelihood of being rewarded; speed and frequency of reward; adequacy of reward; and likely of reward increase. Rewards include any type of monetary compensation, physical perks, and services that workers receive in exchange for the job they accomplish for the company, with a focus on the employment relationship (Malhotra et al., 2007). Rewards can be generally divided into three categories: extrinsic, intrinsic and social rewards (Malhotra et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2017; Kokubun, 2019).

Extrinsic rewards are the more material benefits that the employer provides to employees during their employment, such as bonuses, staff suggestion programs, pay increases, and fringe benefits (Malhotra et al., 2007). Intrinsic rewards are the unquantifiable benefits resulting from the fulfillment of the work itself. When an individual receives intrinsic rewards such as praise from supervisors and coworkers, receives recognition in the public, and has control over their job (e.g. allocation of discretionary funds or application of budgets), they are likely to experience psychological growth. Other forms of intrinsic reward are removal of constraints, role clarity, skill variety, feedback, interesting/challenging assignments or projects, training, delegation of authority and responsibility, and participation in decision making (Malhotra et al., 2007). Social rewards pertain to the availability of favorable interpersonal interactions at work such as pleasant or supportive relationships with supervisors and coworkers (Malhotra et al., 2007; Kokubun, 2019).

Effective reward strategies are used by organizations to raise work engagement, customer satisfaction, employee performance, and job satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2004; Breevaart et

al., 2014). Employee engagement is greatly impacted by incentives and recognition, according to a recent study by (Rose) Liu et al. (2022).

It has also been demonstrated that employees who have access to adequate socio-emotional resources, such as reward and recognition, are more invested in their job and more willing to go above and beyond for their employers (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). If workers see a negative gap between the rate at which their compensation is increasing and what they were promised, they may get disengaged from their work (Creed et al., 2015). If there is not a good mechanism in place to reward employees for their hard work, they could avoid coming to work, which would limit productivity (Breevaart et al., 2014).

3: Implications for the Civil Service

Scholars (Jacobson, 2011; Costantini et al., 2017; Berman et al., 2019) argue that there is a human resource problem in the public sector as a result of the public sector's declining performance. About four decades ago, Etuk (1981) stated that “a sense of complacency settles on many a public servant and their attitude to work is negative” (p. 993). However, directors, permanent secretaries, and decision-makers in government have been working nonstop to find methods to boost civil servant performance. Numerous administrations have implemented changes and made attempts, including regular salary payments, goal-setting, work-life balance, mentorship, and communication from directors and permanent secretaries. The civil service employee work engagement has not increased despite these initiatives.

Based on extant literature (Albrecht, 2012; Ugwu & Okojie, 2016; Huang et al., 2017; Bai & Liu, 2018), this study identified the career growth as both a job resource (Naruse et al., 2015) and personal resource (Ouweneel et al., 2013) that could serve as a mechanism in offsetting the low level of performance in the civil service. The implication of the findings from various works suggests that the three dimensions of career growth (career goal progress, professional ability development and organisational rewards growth) may foster work performance among civil servants. This study practically implies that it is imperative for directors, permanent secretaries and policy makers in government to understand how they can stimulate work performance through career growth practices. Therefore, the critical challenge before policy makers in the civil service who want to ensure that employees perform their tasks adequately is to be aware of the mechanisms that provide the civil servants with opportunities to grow in career paths, while improving their professional abilities and adequately rewarding them.

4: Recommendations

- i. To encourage greater levels of performance, Permanent Secretaries and Directors in the Civil Service should make sure that employees experience progress in the attainment of career goals. The opportunity for employees to attain or achieve their career goals and objectives should be provided. The employees may be required to participate in developmental programs and perform developmental tasks as part of these opportunities. Workers should get coaching on how to define and achieve career objectives.
- ii. The government should provide employees greater opportunity to learn new skills so they may become more competent at their jobs and more adept at problem-solving, strategic thinking, engaging with the public, crowdsourcing ideas, and co-creating better services.

- iii. The government has to examine and enhance its reward system to guarantee that civil servants get timely, adequate recognition and rewards. Regular salary payments are necessary. Depending on funding, the government should reintroduce incentive programs, transportation allowances, meal subsidies, utility allowances, leave grants, and entertainment allowances.

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