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Career management: An active process

JOHN MACKOWIAK AND FRED M. ECKEL

Abstract: The self-assessment, goal-setting, and career-planning techniques of career management are discussed, and the organization's role in career management is discussed.

Career management is a planned process, initiated and carried out by an individual with the assistance of others. Because work and nonwork activities are so interrelated, career and life management planning can maximize a pharmacist's personal success.

The career- and life-management process begins with the development of a personal definition of success. A self-assessment must be made of one's values, needs, interests, and activities. The next step of the process involves setting goals and establishing a plan or strategy to achieve them. Establishing a career path requires researching alternate career goals. Career competencies are identified that can

Typical hospital pharmacists probably spend more than half of their awake adult lives engaged in work-related activities—working; going to and from work; talking with friends about work; participating in professional associations or continuing education; and reading, thinking, and maybe even dreaming about work.

Our work experience is an integral part of daily living. For many of us it is impossible to separate our work life from our personal or family life.¹ If we are satisfied at work then positive feeling may spill over into our home life. By the same token, dissatisfaction at work may negatively affect our home life. Research has indicated that this spill-over relationship is often unidirectional and negative; that is, negative experiences at work tend to affect one's personal life negatively. For most men, home life affects work less often than work affects their home life, except in cases of extreme family crisis such as divorce.² This same issue has not been fully studied in women.

Some pharmacists may experience conflict between their work and personal life such that success in one can only come at the expense of sacrifices in the other. This conflictive relationship may apply to men and women who attempt to balance the demands of both career and family. These spill-over and conflictive relationships frequently exist for

increase an employee's chances of success.

The employer shares the responsibility for career development through coaching, job structuring, and keeping the employee aware of constraints. Through the integration of the roles of the individual and the organization in the career-management process, employees can optimize their contribution to an organization.

Pharmacists can successfully manage their careers by applying the techniques of self-assessment, goal setting, and career planning.

Index terms: Administration; Careers; Job satisfaction; Motivation; Personnel; Pharmacists; Professional competence
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career-oriented individuals who are usually younger individuals, between 25 and 40 years of age, working to establish themselves in a career.

Other possible relationships that develop between work and nonwork include instrumentality (which involves using one of the two as a means to obtain something desired in the other), compensation (which involves using one as a way of making up for what is missing in the other), or independence (work and nonwork activities do not affect each other). These three relationships are less common than the spill over and conflictive type.³

The relationship between a person's work and nonwork life is intertwined. Two researchers described the relationship as a "triple helix" composed of three strands—occupation, family, and leisure.⁴ They hypothesized that early in life, the occupation strand is dominant. After midlife, they found that, for many men, occupation moves to a position of secondary or tertiary importance.

Because work and nonwork activities are so interrelated, success in one is usually related to success in the other. Planning for one area cannot be done independently of the other. As a result, the concept of career and life management has been presented by many authors as a method for maximizing an individual's personal success.⁵⁻⁷ But before we de-

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scribe career and life management as a means to achieving success, we need to discuss the meaning of success.

Success

Most people define success as the attainment of wealth or power—a specific achievement-oriented definition.⁸ For many, success means rising to the top of an organization as quickly as possible.

Another part of the definition, according to Webster, is the "favorable termination of a venture."⁹ This introduces the concept that success is personally defined. A favorable endpoint for some people would not necessarily include power or wealth. Each of us may arrive at a different definition of success by going through a self-awareness process to help identify its meaning. Without identifying our own definition of success, we risk being caught up in society's definition, and the attainment of this "success" may not satisfy us.

The shortcomings of Webster's definition is that it is limited to the attainment of a goal or the personal satisfaction derived from an achievement. A broader definition would describe "success as a way of life and not a goal."⁸

When 1548 businessmen were asked to define success, the most common response cited by 33% of the group was "the achievement of goals." The second most common response, cited by 12% of the businessmen, was "self-actualization or progressive self-discovery." For these individuals the rewards in life were principally derived from increased self-awareness. Another almost equally large group (11%) described success as "harmony among their various personal, professional, and social aspirations."⁸

The "self-awareness" and "harmony" definitions describe a state of being instead of the goal-achievement concept that is more commonly ascribed to success. Accordingly, the broadest definition of success would describe it as "a way of life and not a goal." Other definitions given by the businessmen, in order of decreasing frequency, were making a contribution, happiness, job satisfaction, respect, employment security, and integrity. Regardless of the definition, it is clear that success is a personal phenomenon. We must decide for ourselves what success means to us and then pursue our understanding in our own way.

Career and Life Management

The career- and life-management process includes developing our personal definition of success. The process can be divided into three sequential steps: (1) self-assessment, (2) goal setting, and (3) career-path planning.

Self-Assessment. Of the three steps in career management, self-assessment is probably the most

important. Without an accurate self-assessment, the following two steps cannot be performed. In addition to being the most important step, it probably is the most difficult step for many people.

The purpose of self-assessment is to obtain a better understanding of our values, needs, interests, and abilities. Obtaining an in-depth understanding of oneself is not only important in choosing an occupation but also needs to be done in planning the progression of a career. The process can help in making career decisions, such as which jobs and positions to seek or avoid, which strategy to use in getting a particular job, which assignments or promotions to pursue, and how to select a sequence of jobs to attain a preferred position. A number of useful books have been published on this process.^{5,10,11}

The first step in self-assessment is for a person to generate as much data about himself as possible from multiple sources using various methods. The more data the better. There is no need to worry about redundancy; in fact, repeated documentation of a certain observation will strengthen the validity of that finding.

Values. One of the broadest characteristics to be measured is a person's values, the set of dimensions that are important to that individual. Values affect our goals and the methods used in achieving them. They are established early in life and do not change drastically through day-to-day experience. Values are standards or yardsticks that we use to guide our actions, judgments, comparisons, and evaluations of ourselves and others.

One method of value assessment is to complete a values survey (Table 1). The 16 values listed in Table 1 can be ranked in the order of their importance in a person's life. Friends can evaluate their own values and get together to discuss how they are different from one another. It is important to realize that no one set of values is correct or appropriate. Good friends or close working associates can also complete the ranking for each other to see if their outward behavior exhibits the same values they ascribe to themselves.

Another values instrument is the machine-graded AVL (Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey) study of values, which is available through career-counseling services or Houghton Mifflin.^a Answers to this list of 45 multiple-choice questions are translated into numeric scores to yield theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious values. The test booklet also allows the test taker to analyze subvalue scales of the six basic values.

The least restrictive method of identifying our values would be to write a letter to ourselves describing our values and how they have changed. In this letter, we could explain how we feel about wealth, comfort, stress, discrimination, religion, family, and other topics. Then the letter could be put aside and reread in a few days to add additional

Table 1.
Survey for Ranking Personal Values

Assigned Rank ^a	Value Term	Description
_____	Justice	The quality of being impartial or fair; righteousness, conforming to truth, fact, or reason; to treat others fairly or adequately; without sexual or racial bias.
_____	Power	Possession of control, authority, or influence over others and self.
_____	Love	Affection based on admiration or benevolence; warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion, unselfish devotion that freely accepts others in loyalty and seeks their good.
_____	Knowledge	The seeking of truth, information, or principles for the satisfaction of curiosity, for use, or for the power of knowing.
_____	Morality	The belief in and keeping of ethical standards.
_____	Religious faith	Communion with, obedience to, and activity on behalf of a Supreme Being.
_____	Loyalty	Maintaining allegiance to a person, group, institution, or political entity.
_____	Achievement	Accomplishment; a result brought about by resolve, persistence or endeavor; the word "achieve" is defined as "to bring about to a successful conclusion; accomplishment, to attain a desired end or aim."
_____	Integrity	Fairness or straightforwardness of conduct; honesty, uprightness of character or action.
_____	Obedience	The following of guidance or desires of superiors, such as parents, law-enforcement officers, and supervisors.
_____	Sanctity of life	The concept that all life is sacred and should not be taken.
_____	Self-sacrifice	The subordination of the individual to the group.
_____	Individuality	The innate dignity of the individual.
_____	Responsibility	To be accountable for one's actions.
_____	Trust	Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.
_____	Strength	A capacity for endurance; power to resist force.

^a The items in this survey should be ranked in the order of their importance as values to the person completing the survey. The most important item should be assigned a "1," the next important, a "2," and so on. This exercise should be performed quickly.

comments and to see if it still is an accurate description of our values.

Each of these methods can be useful in collecting information on ourselves but none of them should be analyzed alone, without collecting more data about our interests, abilities, and needs.

Needs. Needs can be thought of as the manifestation of our values. While values are more permanent, needs are altered by the environment and our own life-cycle stage and maturation.

Organizational behavior literature is replete with theories of motivation. Even though the validity of these theories has not been proven, their common use in everyday management practice speaks for their usefulness in analyzing and solving personnel problems. Depending on the author of the theory, needs can be classified as physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization, cognitive, aesthetic, existence, relatedness, growth, achievement, affiliation, autonomy, helping, order, power, and understanding.¹²⁻¹⁴ The list of possible terms for needs can continue; however, each of us has a slightly different need structure and must create our own list.

In making our own list, we must start by assessing our needs. Each of us will probably want to expand on the ones given above. Then the needs can be ranked in order of their importance as they relate to our work. After ranking them, we can evaluate how

well our present job satisfies these needs. A need that is very important but is not satisfied adequately would be one factor to consider in changing jobs.

Interests. Interest is defined as a feeling of curiosity, fascination, or absorption.⁶ As children, our career goals were totally based on interest. As we grow older other criteria, such as values or abilities, are also considered, but interest still remains critical for career success and satisfaction. Particular interests may be less enduring than values but they usually reflect a consistent theme through our lives.

An effective way of identifying our interests is to write an interest autobiography. This would list and describe our current and past hobbies and what we enjoyed about them in particular. It could include organizations, projects, accomplishments, committees, or other life events that absorbed us with curiosity.

Another method is by using the Strong Campbell Interest Inventory (SCII).^b Answers to this test's multiple-choice questions are evaluated to rate our career interests on the basis of six scales and their subscales as proposed by Holland in his theory of careers.¹⁵ The six categories of interests are realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Based on the previous use of this instrument, pharmacists primarily have investigative interests, with secondary interests in realistic, social,

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and enterprising careers. Since each pharmacy job is different, the interest structure of a successful individual in that job is unique.

The SCII provides the test taker with his scores on the six scales, 23 subscales, and 124 occupations. This blend of interests is also compared with the interests of people in the 124 occupations to determine the degree of similarity. Interest alone does not guarantee career success. The findings from this instrument must be considered with the findings from other self-assessment techniques.

Abilities. We all have certain abilities, skills, and talents as well as some weaknesses. To maximize our success, we must identify these abilities and weaknesses and find jobs that maximize our strengths while minimizing our weaknesses.

In generating a list of our abilities, the first ones that come to mind are usually those that were obtained through some formal training program. All licensed pharmacists share a basic core of abilities (e.g., in pharmaceuticals and chemistry), but there are other abilities that differentiate us.

To identify these other abilities, we can make the following lists for ourselves⁶:

1. A work-experience list of at least five successful and five unsuccessful aspects of our paid and nonpaid work experiences.
2. A school-experience list of our most successful and unsuccessful academic classes and experiences.
3. A list of voluntary and leisure experiences including our most successful and unsuccessful leisure activities, clubs, sports, and hobbies.
4. A list of experiences with relationships where we were successful and unsuccessful in understanding the feelings of another person or group and in helping to resolve a problem.

After listing these experiences, we can note what personal attributes made each experience a success or a failure. Then we can concentrate on the skills and abilities drawn upon in each experience.

Relying totally on a self-appraisal of our abilities may be misleading if we underrate or overrate ourselves. To resolve this, we can ask a friend or employer to rate our abilities, which we may have already done for our performance appraisal. However, these appraisals can be limited in identifying our abilities if the appraiser does not work with us often or if our job does not provide us with the opportunity to use all of our skills.

It may also be helpful to make a list of the skills that we would like to improve upon or obtain in the future. These may build upon our existing interests or become target skills because they are in demand.

We have to be honest with ourselves. Often people say they have a knack for something, such as a knack for working with people, but that knack should be true ability to be considered in career planning. To obtain a skill, try to identify the books to read, the courses to take, or the work and non-

work activities that can hone that knack into a refined skill.

After all the data are collected, the task of analysis and interpretation begins. Data must always be analyzed in the context of the instrument or method used in its collection. For example, self-appraisals may be overly negative while appraisals from good friends may be overly positive. An instrument designed to measure interests should not be confused with talents or skills. One approach to interpretation is thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis starts by focusing on specifics (information generated by the various instruments) and then slowly developing generalizations or themes. It involves sifting through large amounts of information looking for clues, drawing tentative conclusions, and then testing those conclusions against still more data.¹⁰

Self-assessment has several benefits: (1) It allows us to identify our strengths and weaknesses that will help us establish realistic career objectives, (2) it provides an information base from which we can present ourselves on a résumé or in a job interview, (3) it provides a framework for generating questions to be answered in the career-exploration process, and (4) it suggests compatible and incompatible work roles.¹⁶

Goal Setting. After completing a thorough self-assessment, the next task is apply those findings to setting goals. Setting career goals is much more involved than saying, "I want to be a hospital pharmacy director," or "I am going to be the best geriatric-care pharmacist in my state." While these are career objectives, they are generally expressed without a solid idea of the responsibilities and activities associated with these positions.

Setting career goals involves more than determining a target job. It includes systematically investigating and collecting information on the jobs in question. Some of the questions to be investigated are the job's responsibilities, the social and political aspects of the position, the salary and benefits, and the demands the position will place on one's personal time and family. The geographical restrictions, authority, task reward, power structure, decision-making methods, reporting relationships, and special skills or talents required by the job should also be evaluated. Comparing the information collected on potential career goals with the results from our self-assessment is an integral part of selecting the most appropriate career goal. The clearer our goals, the stronger our motivation to accomplish them. With clear goals in mind, we can focus our energy toward their accomplishment, and less energy will become dissipated into less desirable goals. We can emphasize our goals to ourselves and others by including them on our résumés. An example of a career goal on a résumé might be "to plan, organize, and direct clinical pharmacy services in a 200-300 bed community hospital."

Even though goals can be typed on our résumés, they are not engraved in stone. Our goal statement should constantly evolve with our changing needs and environment. However, we must be careful that our goals change by design, not by accident.

Often people are tempted to start the career-management process by setting a career goal. This practice is not appropriate because without completing the self-assessment process and researching alternative career goals, an individual is increasing his chances of failure.

Career-Path Planning. Obviously, goals alone without deliberate action add little to the quality of one's work life or chance of work success. The last step in career management is to establish a plan or a strategy for achieving our goals given our values, needs, abilities, and interests. In establishing a career path, it is important to realize there is not one correct way only to reach our goals. Through interviewing individuals who currently hold or have held a career goal position a person can identify alternative career paths. Following the advice gained from these discussions, career-path planning is the "programming of work, education, and related developmental experiences to provide the direction, timing, and sequence of steps to attain a specific career goal."¹⁷

Career-path planning is most successful if each work-related activity is evaluated in its ability to achieve the career goal. Work activities, projects, and continuing-education courses could all be focused on achieving the next step in a career path. Each step is taken with an eye on achieving the long-term career goal.

Other Career Competencies

In addition to using career-management techniques to achieve success, researchers have identified other competencies and skills that can be helpful in obtaining career satisfaction. Based on her research, Adele Sheele described three prerequisites of success.¹⁸ The first prerequisite is self-presentation or the ability of an individual to interpret his past experiences and abilities and present them effectively to perspective employers and colleagues. The best way for a person to present himself depends upon the situation. For example, in applying for a job with responsibilities for writing the hospital pharmacy newsletter, a successful candidate might point out work on a high-school yearbook or a student newspaper in college. The second prerequisite involves positioning or being at the right place at the right time. Sheele believes that successful people achieve this partially by being in more places at many times. Strategic planning and purposeful striving are necessary for maximizing every opportunity. Finally, the third prerequisite Sheele described is called connecting, which emphasizes the importance of who a person knows along with

what he knows. To be successful in any field, we have to know our colleagues and interact with them. Connecting expands an individual's possibilities, encourages sharing of ideas, and reinforces experimenting with new approaches to work and life. Getting involved in state, local, and national pharmacy associations or local social organizations and meeting people who work in other areas of the hospital or the health-care industry can broaden a pharmacist's horizons and increase his potential.

The following six career competencies should be practiced as often as possible: (1) experience-doing, (2) risking-linking, (3) showing-belonging, (4) exhibiting-specializing, (5) using-catapulting, and (6) magnifying-accomplishing.

Experience-doing is the testing and stretching of our boundaries over time—constantly discovering new aspects of ourselves through accepting different roles, such as hospital or association committee assignments or special projects. Risking-linking involves the exploration of new experiences by taking risks while connecting with others for future contacts and to establish a reputation. Running for an association office or changing jobs are examples of risking-linking that improve our ability to meet new situations with ease and comfort. Showing-belonging is accomplished through acts of solidarity, cooperation, enthusiasm, and asking support from others. Being a team player is important to our individual success. Openly sharing staff members between satellites, trading hours, staying after a shift when it's busy, or not being sore losers when our proposals or ideas are rejected by management are examples of showing-belonging. Being a good team player does not mean being a "yes-man" with no opinions.

Exhibiting-specializing is developing and making available to others a unique talent or skill needed and appreciated by the organization. Many pharmacies or hospitals would appreciate the services of someone with a skill in computer hardware or programming or with artistic or photographic talents. Someone gifted in writing would be a valuable addition in the production of a pharmacy newsletter. Using-catapulting involves establishing a mentor or protégé relationship with a person who is in a position to advance us to a desired position or to give us the experience we need. Professional associations are valuable in providing access to mentors. The mentor is not necessarily a superior, but someone who has experience in the organization and the profession and knows the unwritten rules. Magnifying-accomplishing is a natural result of successful career management. This competency is achieved when we go beyond our job to the profession as a whole. This means that we use our knowledge and experience to shape the working environment of our profession.

Sheele finds these competencies work best if we practice them and apply them on a daily basis in all

aspects of our lives. Her research was primarily done with professionals.

Robert Jackall, who researched career skills in larger bureaucratic organizations, identified five criteria that control a person's ability to rise in middle and upper management.¹⁹ There is some overlap with the competencies Sheele described. In order of importance, Jackall's five criteria are (1) patron power, (2) style, (3) team player, (4) self-control, and (5) appearance and dress.

Patron power is having a patron, mentor, sponsor, or godfather who provides opportunities for a protégé to increase his visibility, showcase his abilities, and give him connections with those of higher status. This patron can applaud a protégé's presentations or suggestions at meetings and promote him during a reorganization. Style is used to describe the characteristic of a person who is "fast on his feet," well organized, capable of giving polished presentations, able to appear knowledgeable at all times, and sophisticated.

Being perceived as a team player involves two attributes: (1) sacrificing some personal beliefs and goals for the good of the group, and (2) working long hours and participating in the social rituals of work, such as discussing the news, taking coffee breaks, and having informal conversations. Self-control works with the team-player trait in gaining the trust of others. It means not only avoiding the expression of emotion in a public forum but also not betraying valuable secret knowledge or intentions. The last criterion, especially important in the business world, is a person's appearance and dress. Successful managers must look the part with an attractive, well-groomed, conventional appearance. In hospitals, a crisp white coat and neat dress are expected to add to a pharmacist's credibility and respect.

Along with these skills and competencies, we must recognize the importance of luck. "Fate, chance, circumstance—luck often is the determining factor in success or failure. True, fate favors the prepared mind, but far too often fate favors the favored. Often when you fail it is not your fault—the same may be true when you succeed."²⁰ Along similar lines, Thomas Jefferson once said, "I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."

Organization's Role in Career Management

So far we have only described the individual's role in his own development, mainly because we believe the primary responsibility for career management should exist with the employee. The organization, however, shares in the benefits from, and thus has some responsibility for, career management. As an example, an athletic team is concerned with the performance of its members. The coach works hard to recruit the best players and to improve his team's

abilities. Often pharmacy managers act as if their role in achieving good performance stops with recruiting the best pharmacists possible. They seem to think that after they hire the best pharmacists they can find, the pharmacists should strive to improve their own skills. But organizations need to work constantly at improving the abilities and advancement potential of their members.

The organization's role in career management begins with a sound performance-appraisal system. By having this, the organization can clearly communicate the performance requirements for each of the jobs and the extent to which those requirements are being satisfied. For performance appraisal to work in career management, there must be frequent or continuing informal discussions that are not directly linked to salary adjustments. Annual performance review is not congruent with career-development goals. The employee should have an open atmosphere for acknowledging weaknesses without the risk of a loss in rewards.

In addition to a performance appraisal of current job functions, a career-management interview should discuss the skills that should be developed for future job functions and possible promotions. The role of the supervisor is to determine if the employee has exhibited these additional skills.

The Catch-22 of career development is that to develop and exhibit the skills necessary for future jobs, the opportunities must be present in the pharmacist's current job. Thus, the supervisor must provide challenging job experiences for his employees that are designed to improve their abilities. This development can be planned to occur slowly and progressively toward a predetermined goal. The career-management discussion should include a discussion of these goals especially as they relate to the goals of the organization. A modified management-by-objectives approach can be used. The other half of the Catch-22 is for the employees to avoid becoming so preoccupied in developing new skills that their success in their current jobs is impaired. Advancement comes when an individual does a good job in performing his current responsibilities.

All the organization's responsibilities mentioned so far should be carried out by the immediate supervisor through his role in performance appraisals, employee counseling and coaching, mutual goal setting, and job redesign. It is appropriate to focus on the immediate supervisor as the career-development agent. The desired abilities are not unique to career management, but are basic supervisory skills that lead to better job performance while developing employees to their fullest potentials.

Supervisors may resist becoming involved in an employee's career development because they lack the skills or there are few rewards for helping employees develop their careers.²¹ The necessary skills can be obtained through workshops given at su-

supervisor meetings or from interactions with appropriate individuals in the hospital's personnel department. Rewards for personnel development will be perceived if it is a priority of the director. Some organizations will not promote a supervisor until an individual under him is capable of accepting greater responsibilities.

The director's responsibility includes establishing career paths that recognize and reward professional growth. These career ladders should not only include managerial growth, but also professional skills growth. Clear criteria and abilities should be communicated regarding movement from one level to the next.

One negative effect of career-development programs is that the employees can lose touch with reality regarding their abilities and opportunities. In the process of helping people dream about the future, career-planning agents often overlook the realities and constraints present in organizations. The department should provide information on the actual prospects for promotion or transfer, the chances of reaching a certain target level, and the pay ranges for various jobs. It is important that employees assess these opportunities in light of their abilities. Overinflated expectations can lead to frustration and problems in morale, performance, and turnover.

For this reason, career counseling should not focus solely on advancement. The key should be to help employees make a better fit between their own desires and the realistic opportunities available in pharmacy. Individuals should not be encouraged into an upward-mobility trap but challenged to identify their own interests, abilities, needs, values, and goals and how these can be realized in their current job.

Conclusion

A successful career and lifestyle is in the control of the individual; it is not just a matter of fate. By understanding what we want in our careers and how this will affect our nonwork activities, we can be in a better position to plan our future. The techniques of self-assessment, goal setting, career-path planning, and other career skills can also be helpful, especially if supervisors and managers are supportive of employee development. Most important, we must all realize that achieving our definition of success, whether it be inner harmony, autonomy, or wealth, is within our own control and is a result of our actions. Success and life satisfaction do not come by accident.

^a The AVL examination list is available by sending \$1.35 to Houghton Mifflin, Pennington-Hopewell Road, Hopewell, NJ 08525.

^b The SCII method is available from guidance counselors, either private or those affiliated with high schools or colleges.

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