

CAREER MANAGEMENT IN THE ARMED FORCES

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Abstract

Nowadays, career planning and management are becoming increasingly important. This is partly due to the fact that things do not have a linear evolution and that the current rapid economic changes make careers less clearly defined and less stable than they were before. The dynamics of professions and careers is marked by accelerated changes; staff is put in a position to cope with increased competence and speed of adaptation. If we want to avoid the disturbance of professional development and evolution due to these changes it would be very useful that the components of this system to be synchronized with each other and to achieve an integrated career management.

These days most of us are very preoccupied with our jobs, we all want interesting and successful careers but maybe not all of us understand that we have to take care of that job, of the way it is going to evolve, in other words we should take care of our career management.

According to the dictionaries career management is: “an occupation undertaken for a significant period of a person’s life, usually with opportunities for progress”[1] or “a field for or pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional, or business life”[2].

According to the human resources dictionary the career is the job you prepared for and which you expect to do all your life.[3] A management career path is not a straight line. Nor is it the same for everyone. Yet all management career paths have a starting point and all have milestones along the way.

Career management is the lifelong process of investing resources to achieve your career goals. Career management is not a singular event but a continuing process that is a necessity for adapting to the changing demands.

When we think of “career” we include the idea of evolution or promotion of a person in a certain field having as aim more responsibility, more money, more fame or more power.

We can analyze the concept of career from several points of view:

- We can see career as a promotion, and when we see it like this we understand mobility, advancement in an organization or professional hierarchy.
- Career as a profession; certain professions are a career by themselves (militaries, doctors, teachers etc) while others are just jobs, positions (unskilled workers, seasonal workers etc.)
- Career as a succession of positions. It represents an evolution, series of functions, a succession of positions in an ascending line, from a lower rank to a higher (the highest) rank.
- Career as a series of roles, related to experience; separated working experiences through we all pass along our working life.
- Career as the dynamic framework within which a person perceives and decodes the significance of their own qualities, events and things that happened during his/her life.

When we think of a career we have to take into consideration the factors which influence it; they can be objective or subjective. The objective factors are related to the environment in which each individual lives and works, and the subjective factors, those which relate to the personality of each individual, the interests etc.. From here we can make a distinction between the objective career which means personnel development and the chances to promote in a professional environment and the subjective career which refers to the perception each individual has of themselves and the importance they assign to their work and professional life.

Officers, in many respects, are ultimately their own career managers. While armed forces requirements dictate the final outcome of all career development actions, in every case the officer can participate in such decisions. Participation in the career development process is possible at the basic branching point, volunteering for training and education programs, selection of functional area, preferences for career field, application for entry into special training programs, and long-range planning of career goals. The key is to be involved in career development by making informed and logical decisions and acting on them.

Individual career management is the core of human resources management because it is linked to what we want to obtain, an armed forces system in which each person occupies the position he is prepared for, which will make most value of his work and knowledge and which, of course will help him promote in his career. In the U.S. armed forces there are several documents which contain data about the military personnel: there is an official military personnel file (OMPF), the DA Form 4037 (Officer Record Brief) (ORB), and the career management individual file (CMIF). They all contain the data from which important career

development decisions are made for selection, advancement, assignments and retention. Officers should review, update and maintain these records throughout their careers. Officers should also request periodic advice and counseling to remain in-formed of career opportunities and to assess progress achieving career goals. Apart from the personal work and attention that each military had to allot to his/her career there are persons, raters (sometimes the superiors) who guide their subordinate along their career path. All officers look to their rater, senior rater, and mentors for advice and career counseling. Some counseling is official, such as the preparation and submission of DA Form 67-9 (Officer Evaluation Report) and DA Form 67-9-1 (Officer Evaluation Report Support Form). Other forms of counseling are often unofficial and relate to career patterns, advice about assignments and duty positions. Regardless of the type of counseling, commanders should be factually informed before rendering advice.

Assignment and career managers (who are at PERSCOM- Personnel Command- and OPMD – Officer Personnel Management Directorate) are responsible for fulfilling current and future Army requirements while meeting the career development needs of the various branches and functional areas. Additionally, they balance the best interests of the individual officers against the Army requirements. Career managers can provide candid, realistic advice to officers about their developmental needs. As the executors of Army and proponent programs, they operate within the current policy, budget and legal factors to make decisions concerning assignments, schooling, manner of performance and subjective evaluations of competitiveness for selection and retention. All officers should stay in touch with their assignment managers to receive guidance and advice on career development.

If before 1989, in Romania, the path a military had to take was very clear, the changes that took place after 1990 made things more difficult. A new stage in the armed forces evolution started with the preparations we made to accede to NATO. The individual career management had to be done to achieve interoperability with NATO. On a short term individual career management has as a main objective finding the right person for a certain position and on the long term creating a pool of trained people able to fill in leadership positions.[4]

Individual career management relies on a series of principles:

- Transparency principle – the militaries can access freely the information needed for positions manning, career evolution.
- Equal chances principle – equal chances for all interested people to access and participate in the selection process.
- Integration principle – allows all the participants having the same rank, coming from the same branch or specialty to enter the competition no matter what structure they come from.
- The priority of the armed forces interests principle – the manning is done according to what the armed forces need, then according to the job requirements and last according to the militaries' choices.

- Controlled individual career management principle – the career should develop along a pre-set path.
- Split decision responsibility principle – there should be equilibrium between the armed forces necessities and the personal interest of the military.
- Direct dialogue principle – the militaries should participate into counseling and consultation sessions.
- Necessary steps to be taken during a career principle – filling in certain key positions for one's career, and the minimum stage for a certain rank.

In order for this management to work we need to have the appropriate components:

- The organizational framework – it comprises those structural elements which ensure the functioning of the individual career management system and derives from the career management structure and the manner in which the selection process takes place.
- The career path – the description of the way a military's career should evolve. The career path should tell the positions a military has to fill in at certain stages of his evolution and also the training programs he has to go through etc.
- The military selection process is the basis of the individual career management because it contains the guiding lines according to which are identified individuals who are most likely to accede to a higher position, and it also ensures the transparency and chance equality for every military.
- Military personnel data base which will help to identify the manning level requirement and the data necessary to plan the career evolution of each military.

All these elements are essential for the individual career management but in order to have better results it should be done in an integrated system formed of specialized structures, selection boards, commanders and militaries. Also, in order to have good career managers there should be created and implemented a proper training and development program. Implementing individual career management system should ensure the achievement of the objectives set in "Romanian Armed Forces Human Resources Management Modernizing Concept" [5], meaning to create a career structure which will guarantee the fulfillment of the armed forces needs and at the same time the individual wishes of the personnel.

Bibliography

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