

Knowledge Based Career Management – Study Sample and Partial Findings on Learning and Development

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Abstract:

Career management appears as a strategically very important and necessary part of the human resource management area, which requires continuous research providing new knowledge in this area, especially in today's era of labor markets and business globalization. The important aspects of career management are learning and development opportunities for employees as well as knowledge sharing environment. The paper describes background of the study on career perceptions, methodological and decisional processes including decisions on sampling, as well as partial findings related to employees' perception of learning and development opportunities and career planning.

Keywords: Career, cross-cultural research, methodology, learning opportunities, career planning.

1 Introduction

Career development, as well as career planning and career succession, are fields that are becoming increasingly important not only for the employee but for the organization as well. Technical development, economic changes, as well as emerging of knowledge economy, have made careers less predictable, and thus career development and planning becomes more strategically important for organizations and employees.

2 Goals and Methodology

Career management appears as a strategically very important and necessary part of the human resource management area, which requires continuous research providing new knowledge in this area, especially in today's era of labor markets and business globalization.

The further discussed study focuses on career and succession management research in internationally successful companies. The study is a part of an international research project led by the Consortium for the Cross-Cultural Study of Contemporary Careers (5C Group), which puts together scholars from more than 38 countries, and data will be collected from the same employee group levels as in other countries engaged in the research. The research studies career and success perceptions, so-called "career aspirations", on a sample of about 38 countries, including Slovakia. The career and success perception research in Slovakia has been conducted among four employee groups – clerical or service workers as the first group, so-called "blue-collar" workers as the second group, professionals as the third group, and managers as the fourth group participating in the study.

3 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to identify the knowledge necessary for optimal career and succession management in international companies. We will try to identify what knowledge is necessary for companies to effectively manage their employees' careers as well as to ensure effective succession within the company. Then we will identify the knowledge that people (employees) need for their career management.

Another objective of this study is a follow-up proposal for processing of the obtained knowledge. We anticipate that the identified knowledge will significantly differ between companies' and employees' points of view. We also

anticipate differences across selected occupations, gender, age, marital status, or sectors which the studied employee groups are a part of. That is why it will be very interesting and important to find the right way of processing the knowledge obtained so that it might be successfully utilized, to the greatest degree, by all of the groups researched in the study.

Since the study will be a part of international research, focusing on obtaining and comparing information obtained by the above-described research, the international comparison of the research results will be a very important part of the study.

4 Sampling

The 5C Group has identified four categories defined for the research as follows:

- Managers

The person's *primary job* is to 'manage', e.g. being an administrative and commercial manager. The person is a manager if he/she is responsible for leading people. The person is also a manager if he/she is responsible for the organization or a unit within the organization.

- Professionals

The person's *primary job* is in a professional field, e.g. a science and engineering professional, a legal professional, an ICT professional, a teacher, a social and cultural professional, a health professional, including nurses. The person needs education to a degree level (tertiary education) or equivalent.

- Clerical and Service Workers

The person's *primary job* is to support others and/or work in administrative or service roles, e.g. being a service or sales worker or a clerical support worker. The person does not need to have a degree-level education for his/her job. Examples would be customer services clerks, material recording clerks, etc.

- Skilled Labor

The person's *primary job* needs a high level of skills but does not normally involve having a degree, e.g. being a technician. For example, the person will work as a skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery worker, a craft and related trades worker, a plant and machine operator, an assembler, a driver. (Career Questionnaire)

5 Sampling Criteria

The 5C group has decided on further details regarding sampling for the 5C survey phase.

The target for each country is 500 responses. These should include at least 100 responses from each of the following four categories:

- Managers
- Professionals
- Clerical and service workers
- Skilled labor

These four categories are defined in full above as well as in the questionnaire. Respondents should be categorized by their current activity. Countries that wish to might also include "unskilled labor" as the fifth category but this should be in addition to the four listed above. There is no requirement to collect responses from unskilled

labor for all the participating countries. The author of this dissertation has decided not to include “unskilled labor” for this phase of the research.

Respondents should be either employed or self-employed. Full-time housewives, students, retired and unemployed individuals should not be included in the sample. All respondents should have at least two years of post-education work experience and should have been located in the target country for at least five years.

The 5C group has agreed that it is important that there are not too many respondents from a single organization. Therefore, it has been recommended that no more than 20 respondents from a single organization be included.

The sample should also have a spread of three different age groups: under 30 years old; 31-50; and over 50. The overall distribution of gender should also reflect the national distribution of genders (5C Survey Phase – sampling and data collection instructions).

Many of these considerations are cultural considerations and cultural challenges in cross-cultural research. For example, gaining access to research participants can be very difficult in any country or industry and the same is applicable in cross-cultural research (Liamputtong, 2008). Quite often this can be problematic due to the culture and cultural differences involvement. Thus it is very beneficial to have connections within the community of potential research participants.

6 Research Set

The elementary sampling set for the research was the Slovak Republic population older than 18 years old fulfilling the sampling criteria mentioned earlier. We have sent out 750 review questionnaires either in the paper or the online form and received 504 filled out valid questionnaires. That represents 67.2%, which as Babbie, for example, says: “A review of the published social research literature suggests that a response rate of at least percent is considered adequate for analysis and reporting. A response of 60 percent is good; a response rate of 70 percent is very good” (2007, 262). Another 118 questionnaires were returned but were not completed and since some significant parts were not filled out, they were not included. 128 questionnaires were not returned. Most returned valid responses were from the paper version of the questionnaires. We believe this was due to the fact that the questionnaire was quite extensive and some areas and questions needed further explanation which, was not provided with the online questionnaires. The structure of the research sample can be seen in the frequency Table n.1.

Table n. 1: Gender distribution

		Frequency	Percent
	Male	231	45.8
	Female	273	54.2
	Total	504	100.0

Source: own processing

From the table, it is clear that 45.8% of the respondents were men and 54.2% women, which corresponds with the gender distribution of the Slovak republic population.

The goal was to spread the sample over the three age groups.

Table n. 2: Age distribution

Age	Frequency	%
<30	107	21.23
31-50	305	60.52
>50	92	18.25
Total	504	100.00

Source: own processing

The most respondents were in the age range of 31-50 (60.52%), which is a much higher number than in the other two age groups. This makes the sample look unevenly distributed over the three age groups. We would like to mention that among those 118 returned but not included questionnaires, the majority – about 70 - was from the age group >50.

However, when we looked for the statistical data on the labor age distribution in Slovakia that would allow us to make comparison with our sample age distribution, we found the following data. The data are taken from *Report on the social situation of the population of the Slovak Republic for 2012* of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs & Family of the Slovak Republic.

Table n. 3: Working persons by age in 2012 (annual average)

Indicator	Number of workers in thous. persons	Share in SR (%)	Index 2012/2011
Total	2 329.0	100	100.6
in the age group:			
15 to 19 years	8.3	0.4	110.7
20 to 24 years	138.2	5.9	96.5
25 to 29 years	295.8	12.7	100.2
30 to 34 years	330.6	14.2	98.7
35 to 39 years	346.2	14.9	103.4
40 to 44 years	293.6	12.6	99.9
45 to 49 years	304.5	13.1	99.0
50 to 54 years	294.1	12.6	97.3
55 to 59 years	242.9	10.4	105.4
60 to 64 years	63.3	2.7	117.7
60 or more years	11.7	0.5	95.9

Source: SO SR, LFS

Data are recalculated for the population as on 1/1/2012 according to CIHA 2011; indices are calculated from comparable data.

Interpreting the table above, the age group 30-50 represented 54.8% of the working persons in Slovakia in the year 2012. And although we need to consider also a variation in the age groups division <29, 30-49, 50 and above in the Table n. 3, while <30, 31-50, over 50 in our survey, we can see that our data correspond with the national distribution of working persons by age.

The 5C group has decided on further details regarding sampling for the 5C survey phase. The target for each country was 500 responses. These had to include at least 100 responses from each of the following four categories:

- Managers
- Professionals
- Clerical and Service workers
- Skilled labour

The following frequency table shows the sample distribution over the occupation groups.

Table n. 4: Occupation distribution

	Frequency	Percent
Managers	134	26.6
Professionals	145	28.8
Clerical and Service Workers	123	24.4
Skilled Labor	102	20.2
Total	504	100.0

Source: own processing

Table n. 4 shows that the goal was reached and the sample has even occupational distribution. We would like to stress that this was an especially challenging task as it was very difficult to find and persuade a sufficient number of persons in the category of the Skilled Labor who would be willing to take time and fill out the questionnaire. This was mainly due to the length of the questionnaire as well as some question formulations. A similar challenge occurred when we wanted to approach a single company and have the questionnaire distributed there at various levels so we could cover various occupational categories. The author of this dissertation has managed to do so via networking and snowball sampling.

7 Survey – Partial Findings and Their Interpretation

The career success scale was designed to assess how important various aspects of work are for an individual. It also measures to what extent an individual thinks he/she has achieved “success” in these different aspects of work. One of the content areas focused on *Learning and Development* – having the opportunity to learn as well as experiencing challenges at work.

Following are examples of some findings focusing on learning and development opportunities and the employees’ perception of companies’ approach to learning and career management.

Table n .5: Doing work that gives one the opportunity to learn. - Thinking about my career success, I consider this career aspect.

Importance

Doing work that gives one the opportunity to learn. - Thinking about my career success, I consider this career aspect	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Somewhat important	129	160	289
Very important	102	113	215
Total	231	273	504

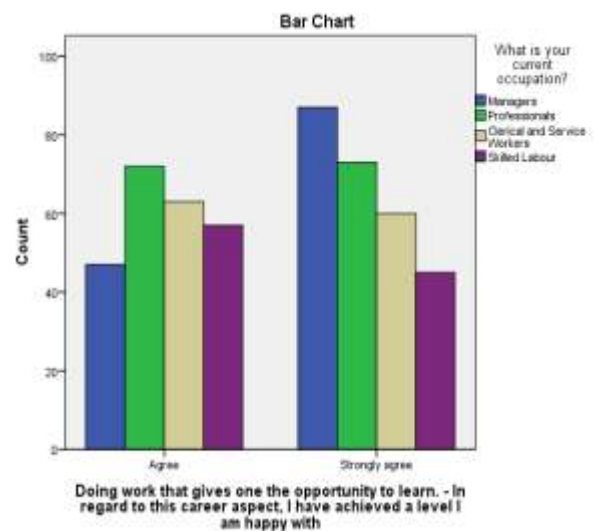
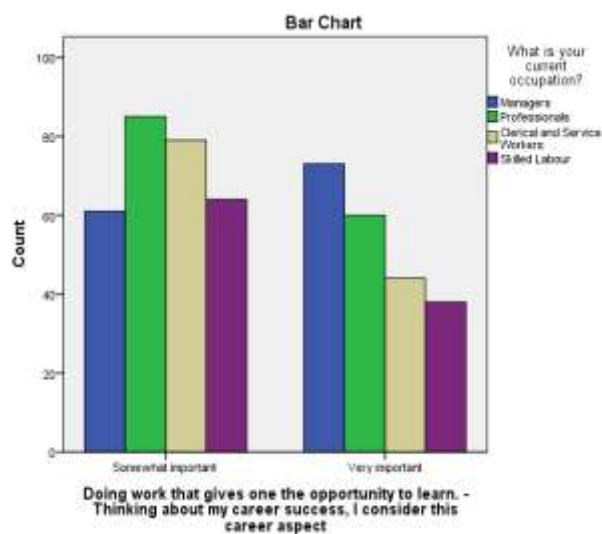
Table n. 6: Doing work that gives one the opportunity to learn. - In regard to this career aspect, I've achieved a level I am happy with

Achievement

Doing work that gives one the opportunity to learn. - In regard to this career aspect, I have achieved a level I am happy with	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Agree	86	153	239
Strongly agree	145	120	265
Total	231	273	504

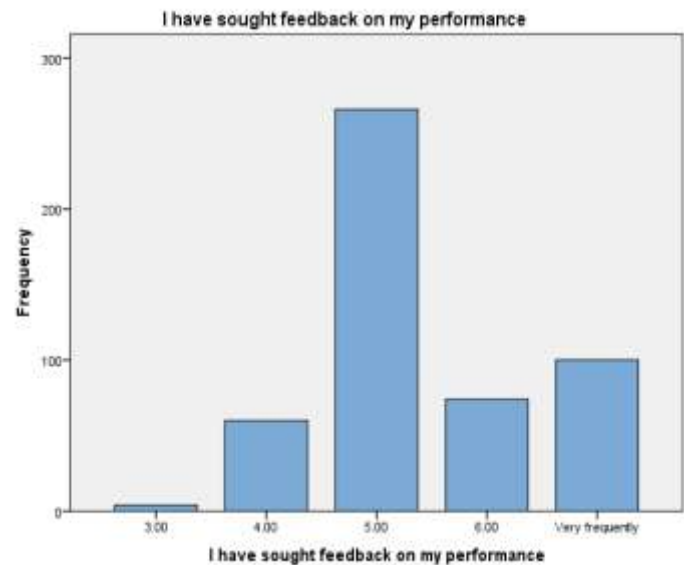
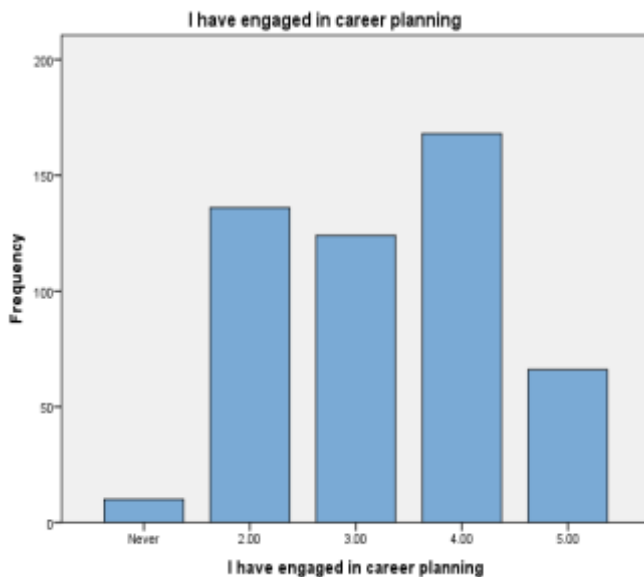
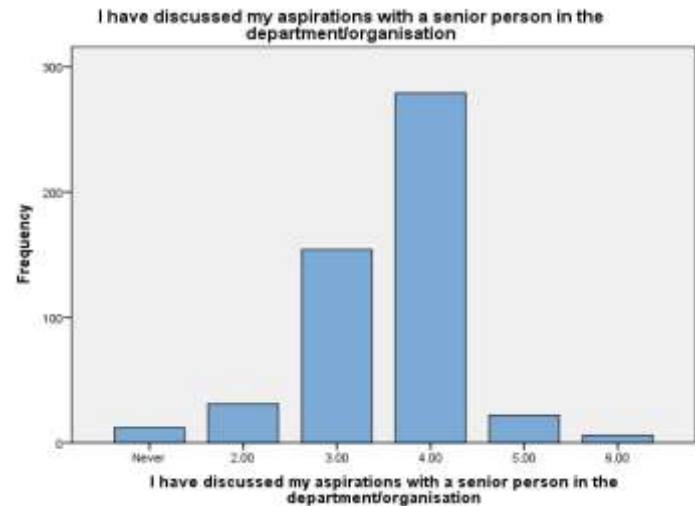
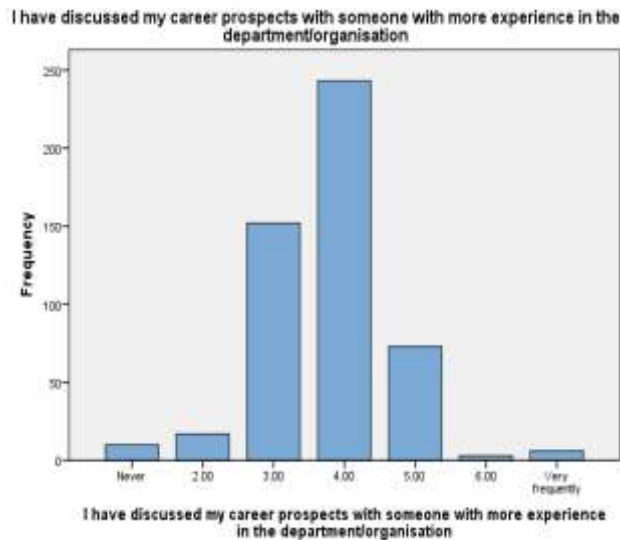
The results correspond with the notion that female employees rate the opportunity to learn as more important than male employees. Based on that, the female employees are less satisfied with the achieved state than male employees.

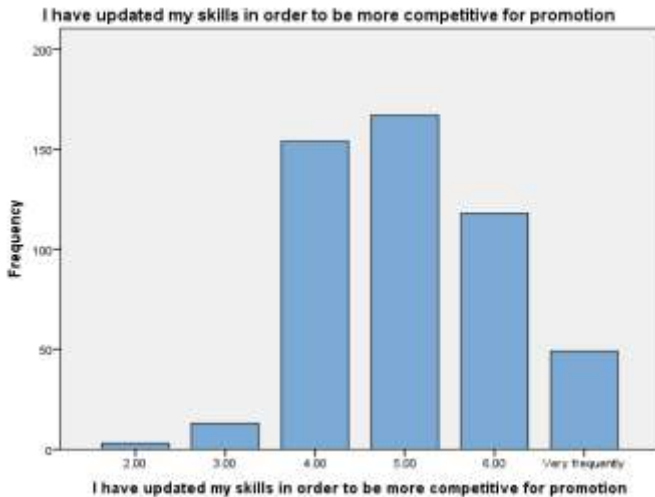
Following graphs show the perception of importance and achievement of learning opportunities across occupation groups.



Very positive knowledge for the companies resulting from the graphs above is that all the employees, regardless of occupation, find the learning opportunity at their work important and all of them agree or strongly agree that they have achieved a level they are happy with in regard to this career aspect.

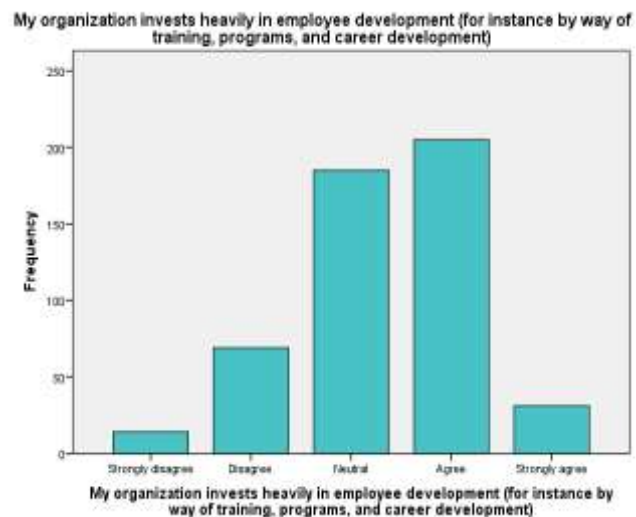
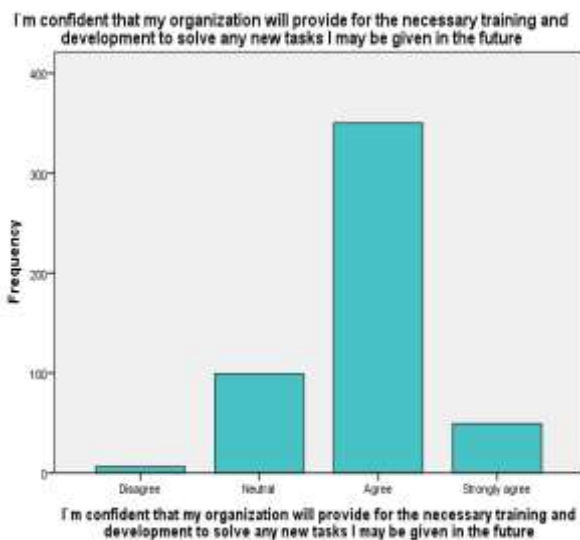
Another area in which we studied the employees' perception was *Career Prospects and Planning* and the employees' involvement in these areas. The respondents were asked to rate the questions on the 7 grade scale where 1 = never and 7 = very frequently

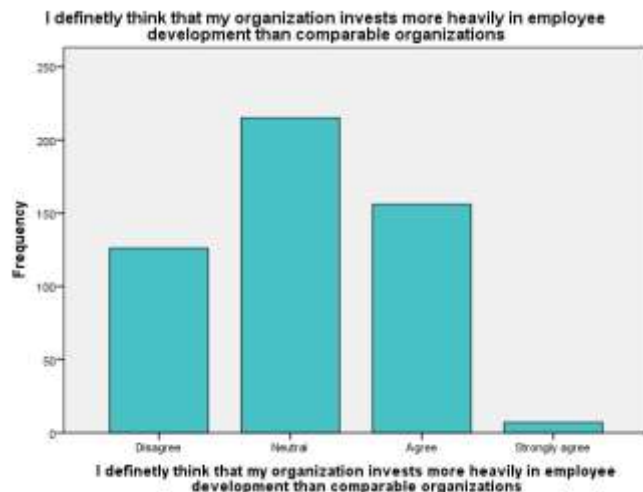




It can be read from the figures above that the employees are not very active in discussing their career prospect with senior or more experienced employees, neither are they actively engaged in their career planning. However, we can conclude that they are more active in looking for feedback on their performance as well as in updating their skills to be more competitive for promotion. The companies can build on this knowledge and encourage their employees to be more involved in their career planning through providing and establishing better knowledge sharing environment.

The last area we were interested in was the employees' perception of how their company is doing in regards to providing the necessary training and learning opportunities as well as how they feel about the company's investment in employee development opportunities.





Interestingly enough, although the respondents were confident their company would provide the needed training and development for their future performance, at the same time, they didn't think the company's investment in employee development was sufficient. This leaves space for the companies to reconsider the learning and development opportunities for their employees and, at the same time, utilize the confidence they have among their employees.

8 Conclusion

Career management appears as a strategically very important and necessary part of the human resource management area, which requires continuous research providing new knowledge in this area, especially in today's era of labor markets and business globalization.

The above mentioned partial findings from the career perception research among various occupation groups provide insight into employees' perception of their career as well as perception of their company's approach towards providing the right environment for learning and development. The knowledge deriving from the study can be critical for future activities of companies as it is very important to be aware of the employees' perception and as it directly influences their sense of belonging and loyalty towards their employer.

The follow-up objective of this study will be to study the results based on various aspects across different age, gender and occupation groups and provide a proposal for utilizing the obtained knowledge to fit Slovak specifications. The objective of this part of the study will be to propose specific use of identified knowledge needed for effective career and succession management in companies with respect to specifics and conditions within our country.

Literature

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5. 5C Survey Phase – sampling and data collection instructions

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