



Question: Much has been said of the 'boundaryless career'. Critically evaluate the extent to which this will be relevant for you when you join the workforce. Reflect on how an understanding of some of the challenges in the current work environment, as derived from this course may better prepare you for working in the new economy."

Living in a new economy powered by technology, fueled by information and driven by knowledge, the traditional organizational career pattern is gradually shaped to one which is increasingly becoming boundaryless. A career can be defined as an evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time. It does not require that a person's work roles be professional in nature, be stable within a single occupation or be characterized by upward mobility. A career defined to be stable will be deemed unrealistic in today's world of downsizing, contingent workers and constantly changing jobs. In this sense, the definition will be consistent with the notion of a 'boundaryless' career which can be taken to be firstly, when a career moves across the boundaries of separate employers or simply, organizational boundary transitions. Although there is no guarantee that I will not switch jobs when I join the workforce in the near future, my personality or self-concept tends to make me being committed and responsible in the things I do as opposed to another person with a cosmopolitan personality. Other than the personality variable, the choice of whether to remain in the company will also depend on motivator factors such as achievement, responsibility, recognition and future prospects. Factors such as the pay, working conditions, company policies and welfare will also play a part as well. In addition, the level of self-monitoring or the awareness of social cues and role expectations will also have an effect on inter-firm transitions. High self-monitors will be



more likely to change employers and receive promotions. The decision to change jobs may also be in response to attractive alternatives or to enact action plans which I have previously developed.

Secondly, a boundaryless career can be seen as one in which its identity is independent of the employer. It makes occupational boundary transitions possible due to the accumulation of employment-flexible know-how (such as how to work in an innovative, efficient and quality-enhancing way). Having gone through an engineering course does not mean that I will end up only being an engineer. There are also other viable career options which entail management, planning as well as verbal communication skills. In my opinion, professional commitment and personal aspirations will be a major influencing factor in my future decision in whether to change my profession. Another point to note that occupational transitions need not take place across organizations, it can take place even within the organization itself. The latter will be more relevant to me as I will choose to take on different responsibilities in the company and eventually selecting one which has a working environment that is congruent to my personality and interests.

Another interpretation of the word 'boundaryless' will be to consider the changes in employment relationships between that of the company and employee. Hierarchical reporting and advancement principles are broken. With increased empowerment, decisions can be made and changes implemented quickly. If I am to take up managerial positions in the future, an important way for me to lead my subordinates is by delegating duties and to let them make certain job-related decisions. By doing so, the company will



be able to stay competitive in the global dynamic economy. The psychological contract between that of the employer and employee is also changed from one that is characterized by the exchange of loyalty for job security to one that is characterized by the exchange of performance for continuous learning and marketability. Knowing this, my subordinates' self-actualization needs can be satisfied by designing jobs with high motivating and advancement potential.

The meaning of 'boundaryless' career can also be derived from the individual who can pursue his interests which he perceive as his career. This group of people are known as the free agents who do not want a lifetime career with a single employer. Money alone does not ensure that they will remain loyal to a certain employer. These people will go around looking for a career that will provide them with the greatest satisfaction, which will normally be pertaining to an area which they have an interest in. Due to my personal dislike for organizational politics, this seem extremely relevant in a sense that being a free agent can provide me with opportunities to acquire skills and a greater control of time. A free agent can also be characterized by his mobility. Due to advancements in technology, it is becoming increasingly viable to work from home. Teleconferencing, electronic mails and the Internet are some of the tools which facilitates work to be done in this virtual way.

The work environment can exert a powerful influence on career development because different working environments give rise to different levels of opportunities for interaction, the development of competence and the extent to which the concept of the



'boundaryless' career can be materialized. Thus, only by understanding our working environment and the challenges it brings can we respond effectively to them.

Gone are the times where loyalty to an organization or corporation paid off in a lifetime guarantee of employment. This can be seen by many recent efforts by companies to downsize and reshape. The relational contract between that of the employer and employee has been transformed to a psychological contract in which there is an implicit understanding that specifies the contribution the employee is expected to make to the organization and the rewards that he will get in return in exchange for his or her contributions. The working environment which we are in now is one which adopts a "survival of the fittest" approach. Workers whose skills are deemed obsolete will be retrenched or sent for upgrading. It encourages career to become 'boundaryless' in nature, as there is now a need for us to take charge of our own career and acquire useful and relevant skills on our own before the need arises, as in the case of a free agent. Continuous learning and networking are two indispensable strategies which we should engage ourselves in so as to prepare ourselves adequately to meet the demands of the new economy and to maintain our competitive edge. In this case, learning is self-directed, voluntary and career specific so that competencies that promote our employability and future success can be developed. We have to learn how to be creative and flexible as well as to possess the ability to have foresight as it will be crucial in determining if the company will be a market leader, or just a follower of market trends. However, the learning process will be impeded if there is a lack in the development of networks which is the collaboration of resource providers outside one's boundaries. A person with a large



and diverse network will have an easier access to information compared to another whose network consists of contacts that are redundant. In order to establish a wider network of contacts, establishing good personal relationships will be important as it will help an individual solve many complex problems in his life. It will be incorrect to assume that an individual will automatically turn to databases or manuals for assistance to resolve a problem as organizational memory is built not only from databases, work processes and products, but also in their employees' memory. Getting information from colleagues and friends is more efficient than mastering and obtaining huge chunks of information. Tacit information in the employees' minds will be exchanged during interaction and this can establish a sense of reciprocity and trust among colleagues.

An adequate understanding of the work environment, to learn and establish networks are not sufficient in preparing us to meet the challenges brought upon by the new economy. In my opinion, another crucial factor will be self-management; in the way one does things as well as his perceptions. The possible transitions between companies or the change in jobs will tax even the most adaptable worker. There will also be home boundaries to manage and given that technology has made it possible for a career to become 'boundaryless' by allowing individuals to work from home, time management will be an important factor so as to maintain a balance between work and family life. There will no doubt be a role conflict but the problem can be ironed out if efforts are put in to plan out the proportion of time to be allocated.



In order to manage oneself, evidently a person must have a certain level of self-awareness and control. We must attempt to re-orientate the way we think so as to meet up the challenges brought forth by the dynamics of the new economy. Managing diversity by learning to be respectful, patient and appreciative to differences will be an important concern especially in the context of the 'boundaryless' career as the transitions and uncertainties that arise will create a constantly changing work environment. The inability to do so will most probably result in a limited network development that stems from interpersonal ineffectiveness. In order to lessen the impact the uncertainty will bring on us, there is a need for us to cultivate a skill of adaptability and to develop a positive attitude towards change which enables us to accommodate to new tasks and relationships and to incorporate new roles and responsibilities into our personal identities.

As it is important to have personal identification with one's career, in looking for a job, we must ensure that we are able to identify with the job and find meaning in it. The organizational culture should also match our values and lifestyles. If we derive pleasure from what we are doing, creative ideas can arise and we are then able to work on our weaknesses and build on the strengths to better perform the job.

Managing oneself also means to have realistic expectations. Too high an expectation will only lead to anger, disappointment and frustration if work experiences do not live up to values and expectations. Although we should set goals for ourselves, we should be realistic in doing so and consciously re-negotiating our aims in the attempt to secure a match between expectations and experiences. An individual should always keep in mind



what they want from the job, and have self-evaluation and assessment programs to ensure that they are finding meaning in their own work.

Another point to note is that the increasing levels of non-standard employment non-standard employment signal the end of an age of big corporations and governments acting as employers who provide health and pension benefits. Hence, there is an impertinent need for us to cultivate self-reliance skill that involves coming up with a strategy for reducing dependence on the job system and for achieving a fulfilling and meaningful life despite the decline in traditional jobs and job security. Self-providing denotes direct involvement in providing for individual and family needs: food, clothing, shelter, home furnishings, appliances, transportation, recreation, education, health care, etc. It can be achieved as long as we start to plan and prepare ourselves early by making use of how-to publications, computerized information networks and community resources.

The line between regular employment and self-employment is gradually blurring in the era of changing paradigms with more and more workers assuming the characteristics associated with free agents, that is, frequent job changes, self direction of career etc. However, in order to do so, there is a necessity for one to understand the challenges associated with it and come up different career development strategies to meet these needs accordingly.



Bibliography

1. Arthur, M B & Rousseau, D M (1996), 'Introduction: The Boundaryless Career as A New Employment Principle', Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era, Oxford University Press. pp. 3-20.
2. Sullivan, S E (1999), 'The Changing Nature of Careers: A Review and Research Agenda', Journal of Management, Greenwich, Vol. 25, Iss. 3. pp. 457-484.
3. 'The Boundaryless Career Experiences of Mobile Spouses in Dual-career Marriages', Group Organization Management, Sep 2001, Vol. 26, Iss. 3. pp. 343-368.
4. Arthur, M B (1994), 'The Boundaryless Career: A New Perspective of Organizational Inquiry', Journal of Organizational Behaviour, pp. 295-309.
5. Mirvis, P H & Hall, D T (1994), 'Psychological success and the Boundaryless Career', Journal of Organizational Behaviour, pp. 365-380.