

DEMISE OF THE PROFESSIONAL CAREER: BIRTH OF THE PORTFOLIO SYSTEM

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Abstract. The presented article tackles the issue of a professional career. The author presents various interpretations of the term and emphasises the organisational and individual point of view in the approach to the professional career. Attention is also paid to the diverse approach to the issue of a professional career in various generation groups. The author initiates a discussion about the question whether speaking about the demise of a career and transition to the portfolio system is acceptable, or only a change in the approach to the career and whether use of such terms as the professional path or professional biography would not be more justified than the term career.

KONIEC KARIERY ZAWODOWEJ – W KIERUNKU SYSTEMU PORTFOLIO

Słowa kluczowe: kariera, kariera zawodowa, nastawienie na karierę, przebieg kariery zawodowej, przemiany pracy, system portfolio

Streszczenie. W prezentowanym artykule omówione zostało zagadnienie kariery zawodowej. Przedstawiono wybrane, różne interpretacje tego terminu oraz zaakcentowano organizacyjny i jednostkowy punkt widzenia w podejściu do kariery zawodowej. Zwrócono także uwagę na zróżnicowane podejście do kariery zawodowej w różnych grupach pokoleniowych. Podjęto dyskusję nad odpowiedzią na pytanie, czy możemy mówić o końcu kariery i pójścia w kierunku systemu portfolio, czy tylko o zmianie podejścia do niej oraz czy zamiast terminu kariera nie będzie bardziej zasadne stosowanie takich pojęć, jak droga zawodowa lub biografia zawodowa.

Introduction

Having a career is the subject of many discussions. A vast number of texts devoted to this issue have been published. It has been tackled by representatives of various scientific disciplines, including psychology, sociology, management sciences and pedagogy. Practitioners are also involved in this discourse. However, the concept of career is interpreted in a variety of ways, and views about the career also tend to change. In this paper, the issue is going to be signalled and the author is going to attempt to provide an answer to the question whether it is possible to speak about the end of the career or only about a change in the approaches to it, and if so, the direction in which they are heading. The author was induced to tackle this issue by the words of Anthony Giddens, who believes that a professional career in its hitherto meaning will become a rarity, whereas the number of employees with portfolios will continue to grow¹.

Diverse Interpretations of the Term Career

Before embarking on a discussion about the career, it must be remembered that the current understanding of the career is equivocal. The term is understood in several or, as Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec claims, several dozen manners². Therefore, quoting and analysing individual definitions does not seem justified or possible in such brief presentation. For the needs of this discussion, it should be noted that in line with a dictionary definition, a career is “a course of occupational, political or social activities during a person’s life; quick social, professional advancement, successes, desired position, good standing in life”³. It is also worth noting that the term career originates from the French word “*carriere*”, which initially meant a road, a race track or a race. Later, use of the term expanded its semantic scope, which is exemplified by the following phrases: “rapid movement as in the case of the sun in the sky or an individual’s progress in life or in a specific profession”⁴.

As mentioned before, the term “career” tends to be understood differently as, for example:

¹ A. Giddens, *Socjologia*, Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2007, s. 436.

² R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, *Zdeprecjonowana wartość nowego pokolenia*, „Problemy Profesjologii” 2016, nr 1, s. 48.

³ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych*, WP, Warszawa 1978, s. 478.

⁴ A. Cybal-Michalska, *Młodzież akademicka a kariera zawodowa*, Impuls, Kraków 2014, s. 34.

- a specific profession, occupation;
- promotion to a higher position;
- a sequence of work, which an individual performs in the course of his/her professional life;
- a sequence of the individual's experiences that refer to the role that an individual plays (its subjective dimension)⁵.

The author of this paper will primarily focus on a professional career, which is determined as 1) “progress of an individual from less valued positions to more valued positions in a given society; 2) course of professional work of man during his life, designated by the “career path” in the profession or transition to another type of work”⁶. On the other hand, according to “Słownik socjologii i nauk społecznych” (“Dictionary of Sociology and Social Sciences”), “a career is a sequence of professional roles, which the individual performs in his/her professional life. In principle, the concept assumes that the subsequent roles are related to higher prestige and other prizes, yet it does not exclude professional and social movement downwards”⁷.

Many definitions of a career refer to the development of a career in an organisation. The authors often have in mind the “process of planning, implementing and monitoring activities of individual employees related to a career in order to accomplish both the goals of the individual and the organisation”⁸.

The term career in the approach of Jeffrey H. Greenhaus and Gerard A. Callanan is an attribute of an organisation or a profession, and an attribute of an individual⁹. In this paper, the author is closer to the understanding of a career in the second meaning. For example, Douglas T. Hall defines a career as “individually perceived sequence of individual stances and behaviour related to the individual's activities and experiences resulting from work and pertaining to his/her entire life. For D. Hall, a career is a process pertaining to the entire life of an individual, not only the time of professional activity, but also the experiences and actions shaping the individual's life which derive from professional

⁵ A. Miś, *Koncepcja rozwoju kariery zawodowej w organizacji*, Uniw. Ekonom., Kraków 2007, s. 19–20.

⁶ T.W. Nowacki, *Leksykon pedagogiki pracy*, ITE, WSP TWP, WSP ZNP, Radom 2004, s. 93.

⁷ *Słownik socjologii i nauk społecznych*, red. G. Marshall, scientific editor of the Polish edition: M. Tabin. Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2008, s. 142.

⁸ Quoted according to A. Miś, *Koncepcja...*, s. 10.

⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 21.

work¹⁰. In this place, it is worth considering whether a reverse situation is also taking place. Do experiences from non-professional life affect the professional career? The reference here is to the career of individuals.

When writing about the career, numerous authors frequently emphasise both the organisational and the individual point of view. Without refuting the former, it seems that nowadays, the emphasis should be primarily put on the individual perspective. One must agree with the stance of Augustyn Bańka that in the modern times, it is necessary to determine a career as the individual properties. Therefore, it may be assumed that a career encompasses “all skills, roles, knowledge and experiences accumulated by an individual and used in work.” Such an approach makes an assumption that every person pursues a unique career¹¹. Without negating the role of the subject in planning and pursuing own professional career development path, it is impossible to overlook other institutions supporting and facilitating this process. Changes that are happening around us and that we not only witness, but also participate in, result in a different course of the professional career paths than to-date. This is partially a result of development of organisations and partially a human choice¹². Workplaces perform a special role in this respect; they can help the employee plan the career path in a knowledge-based economy. Among the activities proposed by Christina Evans, the following ones should be highlighted:

- helping people to look at the issue of career in a different light;
- organising career path planning workshops;
- helping in transition from tasks assigned to a position to tasks assigned to qualifications;
- offering alternative career paths;
- assistance in learning from career turns;
- making it easier for the employees to transition inside an organisation;
- making sure that the applied career planning tools do not collide;
- promoting the managers’ ability to hold matter-of-fact talks with subordinates about professional plans¹³.

¹⁰ Ibidem, s. 21.

¹¹ A. Bańka, *Psychologiczne doradztwo karier*, PRINT-B, Poznań 2007, s. 13.

¹² Ch. Evans, *Zarządzanie wiedzą*, PWE, Warszawa 2005, s. 182.

¹³ Ibidem, s. 182–184.

Acknowledging justifiability of the above standpoint, the author of this paper is however induced to assume that the emphasis in the area of liability for career should be predominantly ascribed to individual persons.

The course of a modern career is affected by multiple factors. Here, following R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, one may list such factors as:

- development of consumer capitalism;
- growth of consumer culture;
- development of the cultural narcissism phenomenon.

Among the consequences resulting from it, attention should be primarily paid to:

- “lack of employment stability and thus weakened organisational loyalty, i.e. pillars of a traditional career;
- lack of consistent goals of an individual searching for professional prospects and expecting material gratification and organisations looking for employees ready to accept the work position duties;
- necessity of independent creation and constant supplementation of individual capital and career portfolio”¹⁴.

Modes of pursuing a career are nowadays diverse. Simplifying it slightly, two opposing stances may be adopted:

- excessive focus on career;
- absence of such focus, which is particularly characteristic among the Y and the so-called NEET generation.

In particular, in reference to the Y generation, the phenomenon described as “consumerism in the sphere of work” is useful, i.e. “accumulation of professional experiences not justified by actual needs.” It may take place in a two-track mode:

- as hyperactivity in acquiring extensively understood experiences used to accomplish experiences for building own career capital in a broad sense;
- as frequent changes of jobs, the purpose of which is to acquire experiences used to build own career capital¹⁵.

¹⁴ R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, *op. cit.*, s. 52–53.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 54–55.

Work Transformations as a Path to Changes in the Course of Career

A professional career is most often treated in the categories of success and primarily associated with accomplishing a high social position and high wages. According to A. Bańka, three concepts related to career function in reference books. These are: development of a career, planning of a career and career management. These processes take place in a specific economic situation, manifested in the form of a concrete labour market. Therefore, bearing in mind the fact that today's companies are most frequently dynamic organisations, the necessity of planning professional career paths, taking interests of the employed and the company as a whole into account, seems to be fully justified. On the other hand, such factors as, for example: lack of employment stability or clear determination of work positions, less stable work places, take-overs and fusions of companies and changes in their management or market segmentation aggravate the necessity of taking action in this respect. However, one should remember that these are costly enterprises, requiring effort and engagement on the side of the employer. Thus, as shown by the studies, education is the most popular form of acting for the sake of pursuing and developing a professional career.

In the post-modern reality in which we are living, a career has a different meaning than in a traditional approach, where it was, most frequently, described linearly – from birth to old age. It was believed that a model professional career should have the form of an ascending straight line. Nowadays, a sinusoidal course of a career is described. There are various approaches to a career in literature. There is a career without borders. This concept, according to Ewa Solarczyk-Ambrozik, was introduced for the first time by R. De Filipii and M. B. Arthur, showing it as more open, diversified, less structured and less controlled by employers. On the other hand, D. T. Hall introduced the term “protean career, where the emphasis is on the individual, who is responsible for the variability and course of own career.” The concept of a “post-corporate career” also exists. Its authors, M. Peiper and Y. Baruch, draw attention to the “shift of employees’ orientation from employment security to procuring competence for getting employed”¹⁶.

¹⁶ E. Solarczyk-Ambrozik, *Zmiany we wzorach przebiegu karier a całościowe uczenie się*, [w:] E. Solarczyk-Ambrozik (red.), *Doradztwo zawodowe w perspektywie całościowego uczenia się*, UAM, Poznań 2016, s. 32–35.

There is no doubt that changes in the course of a career result from the changes on the labour market. Therefore, one must agree with B. Wojtasik that a professional career may and even should be perceived as a mosaic of episodes of life, rugged and uncertain. It is difficult to plan a professional career in the situation of constant changes. We have to make decisions over and over again, we are constantly forced to choose. There may be leaps through the stages of professional development or reverting to specific stages. The path of professional development no longer leads to a single goal; these goals are mobile. An individual has to learn to function in the world of constant changes which cannot always be anticipated, to use unplanned events, to be curious, willing to learn, optimistic, flexible and ready to take risks¹⁷.

As signalled above, transformations of work exert significant impact both on the private life of individuals as well as the development of a professional career. Sociologists write about the “demise of a professional career”¹⁸. This is related to the diverse approach to the issue of a professional career in various generation groups. The modern generation is characterised by frequent changes of work and changes in the place of employment related to it.

A. Giddens writes that “the concept of work is often associated with troubling oneself, or with an activity that we would willingly limit to the minimum and, if possible, would not undertake at all”¹⁹.

The author emphasises it that “an individual remained bound to a single employer for several dozen years; this was a “lifelong” employment; nowadays, more people independently arrange their professional careers, setting own goals and arbitrarily selecting means that lead to them”; full-time employment has been substituted by flexible forms of employment, frequent changes of work, procurement of new qualifications and mastering of the already held ones, frequent changes of jobs²⁰. These are common phenomena on the modern labour market.

On the other hand, Sennett “tries to prove that focusing on flexibility in the organisation of work has to offer beneficial results, but it also gives rise to uncertainty and causes damages. This happens because expectations towards employees – for them to be flexible, mobile, ready for novelties and ready to take risks – are clearly contrasting with numerous fundamental features of a strong

¹⁷ B. Wojtasik, *Podstawy poradnictwa zawodowego*, KOWEZiU, Warszawa 2011, s. 21–23.

¹⁸ Cf. A. Giddens, *op. cit.*, p. 395.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 396.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 85.

character: loyalty, perseverance in striving for the goal that was set, devotion, trust and vocation” (quoted according to A. Giddens, p. 436).

The above-quoted author also believes that “perseverance in pursuing a professional career is no longer expected from employees, but rather work in liquid teams, joining them and leaving them, ability to constantly accept new tasks. Loyalty ceases to be a virtue and becomes an unnecessary burden. When professional life is no longer a consistently developed career, but consists in performance of a series of separate tasks, long-term goals disappear, no social ties are established, and trust becomes elusive. People find it hard to assess what risk is worth taking and former “rules” of promotion, dismissals and remuneration cease to apply. In Sennett’s opinion, the main challenge encountered today by the grown-up part of the society is pursuing the long-term goals in a world where everything is “short-lived.” He believes that the features of “new capitalism” corrode such elements of man’s character that are “responsible for inter-human ties”²¹.

According to Giddens, “sociologists and economists believe that the effect of economy globalisation and the demand for “flexible” employees will be a growing number of employees with portfolios, i.e. people who possess a number of professional skills and recommendations from prior work places, which they use in their professional life, performing several professions and working at different positions. “A professional career” in the modern meaning will become a rarity. Indeed, the proponents of this approach believe that something like a “permanent position” is a thing of the past”²².

Are they right? There are a number of indications that they are, at least in reference to the persons who have higher education, hold managerial or independent positions, knowledge workers. However, the above-listed changes may be evaluated:

- positively: employees with portfolios will no longer be forced to work for many years in the same profession;
- negatively: employers will be able to hire and to dismiss employees arbitrarily²³.

When writing about the portfolio system, it must be emphasised that it is related to the aforementioned views, appearing more and more often, about

²¹ Quoted according to *ibidem*, s. 436.

²² *Ibidem*, s. 436.

²³ *Ibidem*, s. 437.

the “demise of the professional career” or at least a career in the hitherto meaning. Employees with portfolios are people with a file full of qualifications, easily swapping one job for another. There are such employees, but it must be remembered that many people who are professionally active associate “flexibility with badly paid positions and meagre prospects of professional growth”²⁴.

To supplement the above, it is worth adding that changes in the living conditions of individuals are important. From the point of view of this discussion, it is worth mentioning the reduction in the number of fixed work places and decreasing attachment to a single profession, as well as the requirement of becoming accustomed to new conditions of a work position and a work place. Traditional forms of employment are applied less and less frequently. This allows for formulating the following regularities: (1) the term “work” becomes more and more separated from the term “employment”; in other words, less work is performed in the form of permanent employment. (2) employment is also different. It requires more individualised work, and its character, organisation and conditions are adjusted to it. (3) growth of competition caused by globalisation processes leads to increased flexibility of work, conducive to more efficient operation of an organisation. Solutions allowing for quicker replacement of employees are applied, and task-based and periodical employment contracts are used on a greater scale. (4) models of work in people’s biographies are also changed. The model of permanent employment in the period from graduation until the moment of retirement becomes anachronistic. Breaks in employment are used not so much to bring-up children, but to gain additional skills or to change qualifications. The period of professional activity is longer. Retirement has shifted to a later age²⁵.

As a result of the above-listed transformations in man’s work, traditional models of organisation of time in the course of life, hitherto dominant in the culture of multiple European societies, are slowly disappearing. At the present moment, a new model of organisation of time appears, conditioned by greater individualisation of professional activity and a flexible world of labour that prefers “atypical work.” This model consists of five stages: (1) education/training, (2) work undertaken before the start of a career (primarily various sporadic jobs and/or part-time jobs undertaken already during education and before the start

²⁴ Ibidem, s. 440.

²⁵ *W trosce o pracę. Raport o Rozwoju Społecznym Polska 2004*, red. S. Golinowska, M. Boni, UNDP, Warszawa 2004, s. 33–34.

of a “real professional career”), (3) professional career, (4) period of transition (employment to supplement the period necessary to acquire the right to retirement, education, part-time work), (5) retirement. Earlier, the structure of time use in the course of a person’s life was strictly phase-based (youth – education, middle age – work, old age – rest); in contrast, in the emerging new model, in spite of the fact that it is still made up of phases, this structure has become more parallel. It is characterised by the fact that the employees easily change work places and their professional functions. The price of such freedom is the fact that they do not have, in principle, any legal guarantees for retaining or returning to the previous work place. It is expected that in the future the trend is going to become even more clear than it is nowadays²⁶.

Whilst continuing the presented reflection, two remarks should be made: 1. employment was divided into traditional and flexible. 2. changes in the modes and forms of employment result in the demand for new, flexible, multi-tasking employees, the so-called portfolio employees. The course of professional career of such persons is different than it was in the past. Changes in the course of a professional career result from, as the author of this paper tried to justify, changes on the labour market. Thus, the author is ready to agree with the statement of E. Solarczyk-Ambrozik, who writes: “In an approach broader than individual, we can thus speak of post-corporate careers, whereas in reference to individuals, following D. T. Hall, about protean careers, in the case of which responsibility for career planning and management is borne by the individual. In this approach, the individual has a contract with oneself and not with an organisation”²⁷.

Conclusions

Eventually, one has to revert to the question asked in the introduction to this paper: is it possible to speak about the demise of a career? It seems that the phenomena that were signalled and presented allow for deeming that we are drawing close to the portfolio system, at least in reference to the employees from the Y generation, i.e. persons born after 1980. These are the so-called Millennials, i.e. persons who grew up in the era of globalisation and common access to the Internet and personal computers. They grew accustomed to constant uncertainty of employment and the necessity of continuous changes. They are rather focused

²⁶ Ibidem, s. 32–32.

²⁷ E. Solarczyk-Ambrozik, op. cit., s. 35.

on searching for private happiness and self-fulfilment than pursuance of a professional career. They do not accept aggressive competition and the “rat race, whereas when choosing the employer, they are mostly intent on enriching their CV. At work, they expect independence and possibility of a rapid career”²⁸.

One more final remark: the terms “careerist”, “careerism” and “to make a career” emphasise their negative undertones. This also should be remembered when discussing the issue of a career. Therefore, it is worth wondering whether instead of the word “career”, the term “professional path” should not be used, or, following B. Wojtasik, “professional biography.”

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²⁸ A. Smolbik-Jęczmień, *Rozwój kariery zawodowej przedstawicieli pokolenia X i Y w warunkach gospodarki opartej na wiedzy*, [w:] *Nierówności społeczne a wzrost gospodarczy. Społeczeństwo informacyjne – rozwój e-gospodarki i gospodarki opartej na wiedzy*, nr 36, UR, Rzeszów 2013, s. 229.