

## Organization Members Directing their Career Development

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### Abstract

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Organization members owe it to themselves to consistently focus on gaining recognition for their contributions to the organization from accomplishments in their present position and the competencies they acquire for career advancement. It is crucial for organization member to have present short-term job specific career recognition goals and long-term career development and advancement goals. These goals should be fueled by the intrinsic motivation that prompts organization members to strive to attain their full potential. It is essential that organization members manage their energy because it can be depleted, cause decreased productivity, and negatively impact their efforts *to be their best*. If organization members want to advance in their careers, they must have a laser-like focus on factors that are most important to such advancement and eliminate distractors that impede it. Four forms of learning desire to learn, learnability, learning agility, and transfer of learning provide the means for organization members to continuously acquire knowledge and skill development for recognition on their present job and career advancement.

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**Keywords:** career development, career goals, reaching full potential

### 1.0 Context

Theoretically, luck is distributed 50/50 half is good luck, and the other half is bad luck. Organization members need not cast their fate to the wind or luck regarding their professional careers. By effectively managing themselves and influencing others, organization members can shift the 50/50 odds of luck much more in their favor by “making things happen” for them. Motivation, taking the initiative for career development, and utilizing various forms of learning integrated with career goals are the vehicles for organization members to impact their career development positively.

### 2.0 Motivation

Motivation is a crucial driver in organization members' efforts to control their career destiny. In his bestselling book, *Drive*, Pink (2009) advocates that intrinsic motivation maximizes organization members' behavioral efforts to *betheir best*. He states that “our innate need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and the world” is a good operational definition of intrinsic motivation (Pink, 2009, p. 101). Pink (2009) also states that “inherent satisfaction of the activity itself” is indicative of a positive attribute of intrinsic motivation (p. 77). This *activity satisfaction* leads to organization members being meaningfully engaged in their work, which is key to on-the-job productivity and career growth. Meaningful engagement is epitomized through “purpose, pride, and passion” by the organization member that feeds high levels of performance (Ray, Dye, Hyland, Kaplan, & Pressman, 2016, p. 79).

Kash and Monte (2002) observe that organization members have control over their thoughts and actions and need to consciously and consistently analyze both their motivation and behaviors to maximize full career potential. They also encourage organization members to reflect on and analyze their values because values drive thoughts and behaviors in the context of career aspirations and the quality of work produced.

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Coincidences which occur in the work setting that are beneficial to organization members, even if they are not at all the cause of them, should be capitalized upon in a sincere and authentic manner for such organization members to gain recognition for their talents and potential.

### 3.0 Taking the Initiative for

#### Career Development<sup>1</sup>

White (2017) identifies three questions for organization members to answer regarding taking the initiative for their career development: (1) How can I become the person [in my profession] I want to be? (2) How can I develop myself? and (3) How can I set myself up for career growth? White (2017) advocates three avenues to obtain insights for career development:

1. **Self-reflection** This enables one to gain an awareness of strengths and weaknesses in comparison to state-of-the-art standards and competencies for one's professional area. It requires honest and open "soul searching" of one's actual performance and competencies.
2. **Input from Others** As the Johari Window Model points out, we all have *blind spots* (insights known to others, but unknown to ourselves) regarding how we actually are viewed and performing (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013). Regarding blind spots, as Mautz (2018) observes, "Leaders [organization members] who can come to grips with their blind spots and tune into unspoken rules are skilled indeed. Both of these things fit into the broader camp of self-awareness" (p. 1). Addressing blind spots and enhancing self-awareness necessitates open and honest feedback from others that is received with a non-defensive open mind. One must ask trusted friends and co-workers: "What am I really good at doing? What are things I do that might impair my future professional growth? What are my weaknesses?"
3. **Self-assessment instruments** Data such as Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), DISC (a behavior assessment), LEAD (Lead Effectiveness and Adaptability Description), and Strengths Finder 2.0 provide reference points for analysis of information for self-development (White, 2017).

Regarding organization members' endeavors in pursuit of career success, Caplan (2013) indicates the following:

1. Prompted by the rapidly changing necessity to innovate, organization members need to continually take the initiative in reappraising their skills, acquiring new ones, and being flexible.
2. Organization members should value what they bring to the organization that translates into short- and long-term successes for the organization.
3. Organization members should always be "looking ahead" to identify skill sets supportive of future organizational needs and those prompted by changes in their professional areas.
4. Organization members need to create opportunities to highlight their skill sets and demonstrate their willingness to develop new ones to meet the future challenges of the organization.
5. Organization members should seek opportunities to work with others in demonstrating their skills for working effectively on team activities and so that others can see firsthand all they have to offer the work unit and organization.

#### 3.1 Learning

Acquiring new knowledge, skills, and competencies as well as supplementing current ones is achieved through ongoing learning. Organization members must aggressively seek new learning experiences to control their career destinies by realizing their full potential and viewing themselves as *life-long learners*. This new learning should encompass on-the-job experiences that stretch the organization member's capabilities and challenge their acumen (Bartz, 2018c).

Four aspects of learning for successful career development of new skill sets and competencies by organization members are: (1) desire to learn, (2) learnability, (3) learning agility, and (4) transfer of learning. The *desire to learn* is representative of organization members who have "innate curiosity about the world around them" (Henriksen, 2018, p. 132). The *desire to learn* means having an open mind that is inquisitive to finding cause-effect connections to solve problems.

Interestingly, organization members indicative of the desire to learn understand the importance of the *ability to unlearn* (Caplan, 2013). This means “letting go” of what traditionally has been done, and how to do it, in favor of identifying new job targets that improve the work process and implementing unique ways to solve problems.

The effective application of *learnability* is a key to organization members’ acquisition of new skills and competencies over time for their career development (Bartz, 2018b). Henriksen (2018) describes *learnability* as “the desire and ability to quickly grow and adapt skill sets to remain relevant for the long term” (p. 139). Henriksen (2018) goes on to explain learnability by referencing the Learnability Quotient™ that assesses the following about each organization member:

- “Intellectual: How motivated or willing is the individual to learn or understand things better?
- Adventurous: Does an individual have an intrinsic desire to explore and try new ways of doing things?
- Unconventional: Is the individual willing to question the status quo?”(pp. 144-145).

*Learning agility* is defined by Gay and Sims (2006) as: “Encompassing the ability to learn very quickly and think creatively. Individuals with high learning agility also seek out the ideas and feedback of others, and work towards continuous improvement both for personal effectiveness and team effectiveness. Demonstrating high learning agility includes the ability to be flexible, handle stress well, and adapt to change. Individuals with high agility perform effectively in ambiguous situations” (pp. xvi-xvii). Dalziel (2018) adds innovation and self-reflection to the learning agility concept (p. 132). Dalziel (2018) also notes that the inability of organization members to effectively apply learning agility can result in *derailment*. A derailment is indicative of the “know-it-all” organization member who is extremely inflexible and ineffective in reacting to change. The self-managed organization member in pursuit of career development must embrace learning agility and counteract derailment.

*Transfer of learning* refers to an organization member’s ability to take knowledge and skills acquired in one context (e.g., off-site seminars or previous on-the-job tasks) and effectively transfer and apply the learning to new tasks or unfamiliar situations. New learning is of minimal utility in the context of career development if it cannot be put to correct use in performing new and difficult tasks.

### 3.2 Goals

“The fundamentals of becoming more productive are *setting goals* and maintaining *energy* and *focus*. No goals, no focus, no energy and you are dead in the water” (Burchard, 2017, p. 177). Goals represent *priorities* for organization members to use as guiding lights for channeling their time and effort and which, if properly identified, point them in the direction of success, recognition, productivity, and career development. Hunt (2014) observes that organization members with “specific, difficult, yet achievable goals” outperform others who have no goals or nonspecific goals and simply pursue “doing their best” in a general sense (p. 101). Organization members need to maintain two sets of goals: (1) focus on driving their performance in the short-term for their present job for recognition, image, and reputation; and (2) focus on long-term career development and advancement (Bartz, 2018d). Distractions of an organization member’s efforts from giving her/his full effort to goal attainment impede success. As Drucker notes, “Nothing is less productive than to make efficient what should not be done at all (cited in Burchard, 2017, p. 187). Goals represent what Stulberg and Magness (2017) label as “the power of purpose as a performance enhancement” (p. 22).

An organization member needs to manage his/her attention with a *single-tasking* focus whenever possible to maximize time usage, productivity, and goal attainment. “For 99 percent of us, effective multitasking is nothing more than effective delusional thinking” (Stulberg & Magness, 2017, p. 58). As Stulberg and Magness (2017) also note: “It’s not just our short-term performance that suffers at the hands of multitasking. Additional research shows that people who are *chronic* multitaskers are worse at filtering out irrelevant information, slower at identifying patterns, and have worse long-term memories. In other words, multitasking not only makes the work we do today suffer, but it also makes the work we’ll do tomorrow suffer” (p. 59).

**3.2.1. Energy.**<sup>2</sup>Organization members need to allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use energy for achieving goals and maximizing productivity. As Kogon, Merrill, and Rinne (2015) note, “Extraordinary productive people consistently recharge [their energy]” (p. 15). The capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) the body, (2) emotions, (3) mind, and (4) spirit. For each of these factors, energy can be expanded and renewed with *intentional practice* (Goleman, 1995).

Organization members need to identify situations that place considerable demands on their energy with a limited payoff to their overall productivity and minimize or eliminate them. A resurgence in energy can be enhanced physically by organization members having proper diets, exercise, and sleep. Meditation, which creates relaxation, can also play an important role in regenerating energy of organization members. Energy regeneration can also be addressed by taking periodic breaks throughout the workday to rest the mind. Organization members must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015).

Reducing interruptions by others and interruptions organization members create on their own (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) is crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Herrera (2018) advises organization members to “hide your [smart] phone when you’re working” to use energy more efficiently (p. B5). Expressing appreciation to others, as well as receiving positive feedback from individuals, team members, and other group members with whom an organization member works; are excellent sources for regenerating energy.

**3.2.2 Focus.**<sup>3</sup>Focus means organization members can maintain their concentration to the point of eliminating distractions by creating a single-mindedness and devotion to the task at hand and their career goals. As Warren (2017) explains, “Many managers [organization members] lose focus for bringing work to completion or get distracted and mispend energy on nonessential activity” (p. 150). He describes this phenomenon as “unproductive busyness” or “active inaction” (Warren, p. 150).

Focus creates *attention to factors that are important* to organization members in achieving the results for which they are accountable and for their career development goals. As Goleman (2013) notes, “Leadership itself hinges on effectively capturing and directing collective attention which first requires managers [organization members] focusing their own attention” (p. 210). Goleman (2013) also indicates the crucial role that organization members’ inner focus plays in attuning them to effectively engage intuition and guiding their values to make better decisions. This *inner focus* of organization members works best when they tune out emotional distractions and sharpen attention to the task or issue at hand (Goleman, 2013). As Zahariades (2017) observes, “Few people are born with the ability to focus. That’s great news because it means we can train ourselves to have single-minded focus when we need it” (p. 2). Examples offered by Zahariades (2017) for organization members to enhance focus are:

1. Understand the purpose and reasoning for undertaking a task and clearly identify the desired results.
2. Know your *distraction triggers* those things that interfere with the single-minded focus needed to be productive. Structure your approach to work to minimize or eliminate such distraction triggers.
3. Work in *time chunks*. The Pomodoro Technique is based on concentrated focus for 25 minutes followed by a 5-minute break. The 52 + 17 Strategy advocates 52 minutes of engaged focus followed by a 17-minute break.
4. Identify your most productive time of day for concentrated focus and protect this time from interruptions. For most people, this is early to mid-morning (Pink, 2018).

A key to effective focus is organization members creating a *flow state* by tuning out and ignoring distractions so the task at hand completely absorbs attention (Zahariades, 2017). This means that organization members identify personal distractors such as food cravings, procrastination, restlessness, frustration, and moodiness and structure their work environment and habits to counteract the distractors (Zahariades, 2017). Hanson (2018) indicates the importance of an organization member having a refuge, a place of solitude to work that is perceived as nurturing, secure, and uplifting, to aid concentrated focus through mindfulness.

#### 4.0 Concluding Thoughts

Relying on luck and good fortune are not sound concepts for organization members to depend on for their career advancement. Organization members must take the initiative for self-development in the context of career enhancement (Bartz, 2018a). Organization members must be proactive, vigorous, and have calculated goals that result in recognition for their competencies and talents which contribute to success in their present jobs and make them attractive for career advancement in the organization and profession. Learning is key to *getting better* through the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and competencies. Such acquisitions will help organization members to *reach their full career potential*.

## 5.0 Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Based in part on Bartz, D.E. (2018a). Components for talent development of staff members. *International Journal of Organizational Theory and Development*, 6(1), 1-9.
- <sup>2</sup> Based in part on Bartz, D., Thompson, K., & Rice, P. (2017). Managers helping themselves “be their best.” *International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration*, 20(1), 1-8.
- <sup>3</sup> Based in part on Bartz, D.E. & Bartz, D.T. (2018). Focus, resilience, and realistic optimism: A triangulation of skills key to managers’ effective performance. *International Journal of Management, Business, and Administration*, 21(1), 1-8.

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