Mini Review

Science/Education Portraits IV: Experiences from a Decade as Informal Career Counsellor can be Summarized as "Personopreneurship"

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Abstract

A teacher is an informal career counsellor; yet, teachers are often the counselee. This essay summarizes the career guidance received and a decade as informal career counsellor as personopreneurship – each of us is our business and the general manager of this business. This is consistent with the view that our curriculum vitae/resume is likened to a marketing document or product brochure. I consolidated the six key themes of personopreneurship as [a] sufficient skills utilization, [b] work that matches a calling and concordant with beliefs and faith, [c] sufficient workload, [d] good working environment, [e] support by superiors, peers, and subordinates; including availability of mentoring, autonomy and freedom to operate/manoeuvre, and [f] sufficient and stable income. Each of these themes will be reviewed based on current literature.

Keywords: Career Development; Career Planning; Job Satisfaction; Person-as-Business.

Teacher, the Informal Career Counsellor

A teacher; and in broader sense, lecturer and educator; often takes on the role as an informal career counsellor or guides as students value a teacher's advice [1]. This is in spite of substantial conscious biases in career advices given by teachers due to the nature and lack of constant exposure on the part of the teachers. In addition, bias can unconsciously injected as Boone and Van Houtte [2] found that socio-economic backgrounds of students can unconsciously affect the advice given to students, and teachers should be aware of such unconscious biasness. Yet, the lack of career advice coupled with existential concerns [immediate career decisions and long-term career outlook], social pressure, family influence, economic and occupational uncertainties; can be a major source of anxiety for students [3]. Hence, there is an increasing move to train teachers as career counsellors [4] by increasing exposure and awareness to unconscious biasness.

My experience as a lecturer and that of many of my colleagues support the view of Khan., *et al.* [1] that teachers are informal career counsellor regardless of whether teachers are provided such training. A recent conversation with a colleague triggered the impetus to write this essay to summarize my thoughts over a decade as an informal career counsellor, which can be summarized as "personopreneurship" – each of us is our business and the general manager of this business.

The Satisfactory Job/Career

I was once told during my undergraduate days that a career is simply a series of jobs, which may be consecutive or in parallel. Hence, it can be expected that sustained satisfaction across different jobs can eventually lead to career satisfaction. Moreover, career satisfaction is not a personal thing – it has significant impact on the overall performance of an organization, including revenue [5]. Yet, after decades of research, it is still difficult to ascertain the set of factors contributing to a satisfactory career despite its accepted relationship to employee performance [6]. A study by Danica Bakotić [5] found that job satisfaction determines organisational performance more than organisational performance determining job satisfaction. However, it is also likely to exist a set of factors, such as micromanagement, leading to reduced engagement; thus, an unsatisfactory job. Hence, career satisfaction may be a tug-of-war between both fractions and both sides of the story should be examined.

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What are some of these factors? Song and Mustafa [7] interviewed 50 principals and surveyed 385 science teachers from 50 different schools in Texas, USA; found that teachers are most satisfied with their job when strong curriculum support is given compared to teachers in the poor curriculum support group. Kabir., *et al*. [8] surveyed 1141 health workers in Iran and found that income and working environment are significant factors towards job satisfaction. Bott., *et al*. [9] interviewed 17 physicians and found that the fitting a calling into a career can be important in increasing work motivation, especially when the work and calling intersects well with the employee's religion/spirituality. Sinche., *et al*. [10] surveyed 8099 science doctorates and found no significant differences in job satisfaction between research intensive and non-research intensive careers, and skills learnt during doctoral training are largely transferrable. Although the progression to different career tracks may be self-selecting resulting in potentially self-selection of skills acquisition, this study [10] potentially suggests that the utilization of skills may be an important denominator. This is supported by survey of 2550 individuals living in Watari [Miyagi Prefecture, Japan] showed that skill underutilization was associated with an increased prevalence of hypertension in working population regardless of occupations [11]. Similarly, a study [12] on 21 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] countries found that graduate underemployment is associated with lower job satisfaction.

Recently, Feldman., *et al*. [13] studied more than 14 thousand employees and found that the belief in having a free will is significantly correlated to higher job satisfaction in 16 of the 18 sampled countries. This likely suggests that autonomy and freedom to operate/manoeuvre can contribute to higher job satisfaction, which is supported by Aloisio., *et al.* [14]; conversely, lack of autonomy in the form of micromanagement significantly reduces employee engagement [15]. Moreover, Aloisio., *et al*. [14] identified that, at the organizational level, social capital [relationships with superiors, peers, and subordinates; leading to esprit de corp], organizational slacktime [such as, perceived ability to care and share knowledge], and adequate orientation increases job satisfaction. This is supported by Anderson., *et al*. [16] from surveying more than 10 thousand wage workers from Denmark and found that social support from superiors/colleagues and influence at work have the strongest association with job satisfaction. Similarly, DeCastro., *et al*. [17] found strong correlation between the availability of mentoring and career satisfaction, from a survey of 1275 clinician–researchers in the National Institute of Health, USA. At a personal level, Aloisio., *et al*. [14] identified that burnout lowers job satisfaction levels while

meaning and impact of work increases job satisfaction. Association between meaning of work and job satisfaction is supported by Robinson and Esmail [18] from interviewing forensic scientists. Leutgeb., *et al*. [19] surveyed 320 general medical practitioners in rural Germany and found that excessive workload to reduce job satisfaction. In addition, Arka [20] surveyed of more than 400 current and ex-astronomers and found that job uncertainty and short contracts in academia, which leads to regular relocations, are top factors for leaving academia.

Before summarizing the above findings, I wish to state a disclaimer – I do not say that the following is the entire set of factors to a satisfactory career. However, it is likely to be a partial set to some and an essential set to others. Moreover, it is also likely that everyone has different emphasis at different stages of life. Having said that, I believe that a satisfactory job is one of

1. Sufficient skills utilization
2. Work that matches a calling and concordant with beliefs and faith
3. Sufficient workload
4. Good working environment
5. Support by superiors, peers, and subordinates; including availability of mentoring, autonomy and freedom to operate/manoeuvre
6. Sufficient and stable income.

Personopreneur: You are Your Own Business

Drawing from the analogy that our curriculum vitae/resume can be considered as a marketing document or product/service brochure trying to market ourselves or our services, we can also consider ourselves as a service business. By this, the above six factors that potentially leading to a satisfactory career can then be seen as potential success factors for this business. Our main role is then, how to run this business – the business of us – which I term as personopreneur.

Firstly, optimal skills utilization is important to job satisfaction a survey of 8311 American nurse practitioners found that skills utilization to be most predictive of job satisfaction [21]. However, optimal skills utilization goes beyond job satisfaction. Fujishiro and Heaney [22] examined 2014 Gallup Daily Tracking Survey data [n = 87316], a nationally representative sample of working adults in the United States, and found that one-point increase in skill utilization [on a three-point scale] corresponded to 20% lower odds of reporting poor or fair health, 3% and 8% lower odds of reporting hypertension and high cholesterol.

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Secondly, a satisfactory job tends to be one that matches a calling and concordant with beliefs and faith. Hence, job that matches one's values is likely to improve satisfaction. This can often be seen as person-organization fit, which Kristof [23] defined as "the compatibility between people and organizations that occurs when: [a] at least one entity provides what the other needs, or [b] they share similar fundamental characteristics, or [c] both". This alignment of values is important as Oppenheim-Weller., *et al.* [24] found that the perceived ability to achieve one's values, also known as subjective value fulfilment, is predictive of well-being. Hudson., *et al.* [25] conducted 319 email surveys from both European and Chinese companies and found significant positive correlation [r_s [Spearman's correlation] = 0.519, p-value < 0.01] between person-organization fit and job satisfaction. This is congruent to the findings of Tong., *et al.* [26] whom surveyed 199 manufacturing employees in China and found that person-organization fit negatively correlation [r = -0.38, p-value < 0.01] to role conflict, which is positively correlated to burnout [r = 0.29, p-value < 0.01].

Thirdly, enough workload, without too little or too much workload, is important to job satisfaction. Awan and Tahir [27] surveyed 206 banking and insurance employees in Pakistan and found significant positive correlation [r = 0.755, p-value < 0.01] between adequate workload and productivity. Several recent studies implied that both high workload [28] and boredom [29] leading to lower job satisfaction. This suggests an inverted U-curve between workload and job satisfaction where increasing workload leads to increasing satisfaction until a maximum. Beyond which, additional workload leads to increasingly lower satisfaction. This is consistent to a study by Bruggen [30] observing 27 employees within the same department of a company over three years and eight months and found an inverted U-curve between workload and productive output. This is also consistent with the study by Bos., *et al.* [31] whom found that increasing resources to high job demands improves satisfaction, suggesting that dissatisfaction due to high workload may be readily reversed by addition resources. Taking workload and skills together, these suggest that job satisfaction appears to be hill and there is a Goldilocks region.

Fourthly, it is no surprise that a good working environment is has a positive effect on the happiness of everyone in the environment as it has been known that comfortable work environment is fundamental for optimal performance [32], which is likely to lead to increased job satisfaction and productivity. A survey of 210 employees from Pakistan found significant positive correlation [r^2 = 0.132, p-value < 0.01] between good working environment and job satisfaction [33]. Another survey of banking employees in Ghana further found that the physical environment, especially physical ambience, can improve work environment [34].

Fifthly, a supportive environment comprising of support by superiors, peers, and subordinates; including availability of mentoring, autonomy and freedom to operate/manoeuvre; is adjunctive to a good working environment. Awan and Tahir [27] surveyed 206 banking and insurance employees in Pakistan and found significant positive correlation between productivity and good relationship with co-workers [r = 0.530, p-value < 0.01] or superiors [r = 0.533, p-value < 0.01] and training opportunities [r = 0.643, p-value < 0.01]. This is supported by a survey of 549 medical secretaries in various Istanbul hospitals [35] where perceived supervisor support positively correlates with job satisfaction after controlling for age and tenure [adjusted r^2 = 0.524, p-value < 0.01], which is also supported by similar studies done in Turkey's hospitality industry [36] and education industry [37]. More importantly, Yang., *et al.* [38] found significantly positive relationship [β = 0.67, p-value = 0.001] between supervisor support and co-worker support, suggesting that a supportive working environment with supportive supervisor is likely to have supportive peers as well. While substantial work had been done on effects of supervisor and peer support to job satisfaction, little has been done on the effects of subordinate support to job satisfaction. However, it is also not clear from most studies on peer support to job satisfaction whether peer includes subordinates or solely on same-level co-workers.

Inherent in a supportive working environment is perceived trust, which is often viewed as perceived autonomy and freedom to operate. Van Hoorn [39] implied the direct relationship between the degree of trust and the degree of job autonomy – "employers need to differentiate between those employees that they can trust more and offer higher degrees of job autonomy to and those employees that they can trust less and need to monitor and control more closely". Inversely, micromanagement creates distrust and is among the top three reasons employees resign [40]. A survey on 279 academic librarians across 8 universities in West Malaysia [41] found significant correlation between job autonomy and job satisfaction [r = 0.23, p-value < 0.01]. Bligh suggested that trust may buffer negative workplace experience [42]. Moreover, countries with higher levels of social trust have a comparative advantage in high-autonomy industries and vice versa [43], further suggesting the association between trust and autonomy. Ding., *et al.* [44] surveyed 129 employees in China and found that knowledge sharing positively correlates with interpersonal trust [r^2 = 0.344, p-value <

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0.001], and knowledge sharing may constitute availability of informal mentoring.

Collectively, Factors 4 [good working environment] and 5 [supportive working environment], suggest the importance of friendship and camaraderie in the workplace. It has been shown that supervisor's organizational support and commitment to work can trickle down and manifest as subordinates' dedication and extra-role performance. Similarly, such effect is likely to flow upstream from subordinates to supervisors or flood sideways across peers as suggested by Yang., *et al.* [38].

Lastly, sufficient and stable income is instrumental to job satisfaction. In this essay, paid job is assumed; hence, there is no job satisfaction without a job. Job security, actual or perceived, is fundamental to job satisfaction. Bollin [45] surveyed 317 family day care providers in Delaware, USA, and found that job satisfaction is significantly higher [p-value = 0.04] in providers with job stability compared to providers without job stability. Origo and Pagani [46] analyzed 6445 surveys from 2001 Special Eurobarometer 56.1 and found that job insecurity is a primary source of job dissatisfaction [p-value < 0.01]. Moreover, "temporary but secure job" appears to enhance worker well-being compared to "permanent but insecure job", suggesting that short but consistent contracts is preferred to the risk of being jobless. Moreover, persistent perceived job insecurity is a stronger predictor [p-value < 0.001] compared to perceived recent insecurity [p-value < 0.01]. This is consistent with a study of 23245 working adults aged 45-70 years from 16 European countries by Laszlo., *et al.* [47] and found that job insecurity significantly associated [p-value < 0.05] with an increased risk of poor health in 9 of the 16 studied countries.

Although intrinsic factors had been cited to be more important than extrinsic factors, such as salary, during career choices or entry into a profession; low salary appears to be a contributing factor towards resignation as 73.7% of 440 interviewed medical doctors from Chongqing, China, cited low salary as the reason for resignation [48]. This suggests the fundamental importance of adequate salary to job satisfaction as Masum., *et al.* [49] surveyed from 346 respondents ten private universities in Bangladesh and found significant influence [p-value < 0.001] of compensation package to job satisfaction. However, it can be expected that a sufficient salary can be a hurdle requirement for one to stay within a job or career. This concept is consistent with a study by Hu and Hirsh [50] suggesting that people may be more likely to accept lower salaries for meaningful work when they had already achieved a certain income level.

In conclusion, it is safe to say that all of us wants a satisfactory career. At the end of a few decades in the workforce, I believe that we will all like to give ourselves a pat on the back and say, "it had been a satisfactory career".

Acknowledgement

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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