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# The Changing Landscape of Careers

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CHINMAYEE ABBEY<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*Gone are the days where our parents and their parents would start working with a company and retire from the same organization. The Gen X & Gen Y or the Millennials want so much more from their Career today. Today's Professionals are not only more invested in their careers but also expect to achieve results in the same proportion. Writer Annie Dillard famously said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." A large portion of our days is spent at work; in fact, on an average- 1/3rd of our life we spend at work over a lifetime. And so our Career can make a huge impact on our quality of life. This paper aims at inquiring the changing landscape of Career, it's meaning and how it may vary from people to people. The definition & the meaning we derive from the word Career- has evolved over the years and despite various career theories it is hard to generalize how the career may be perceived differently by different individuals, fulfilling different needs, at different times in their life-span with varied & unique situations, challenges & circumstances. This paper also substantiates a few challenges faced by the working professionals today, with help of Case Study to elucidate & support the observation made. Some of the important aspects that this paper investigates is the internal & external factors that contribute to the development of one's career and the satisfaction one derives from it. The paper offers new guidelines for creating a comprehensive definition of career and the meaning people derive from it. This work is inspired by the several career theories and career success research done in the past.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As per the definition by Google, *Career means- "a job or profession that somebody has been trained for and does for a long time; the series of jobs that somebody has in a particular area of work" or "the period of your life that you spend working."*

Career could actually mean different things to different people. For instance it may mean Achievement, Growth, Money, Status, Relationships/Belongingness, Expertise or Contribution.

Some people perceive CAREER as a Means to and End whereas some perceive it as the END

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a Student at Galgotias University, India.

itself, if you know what I mean!

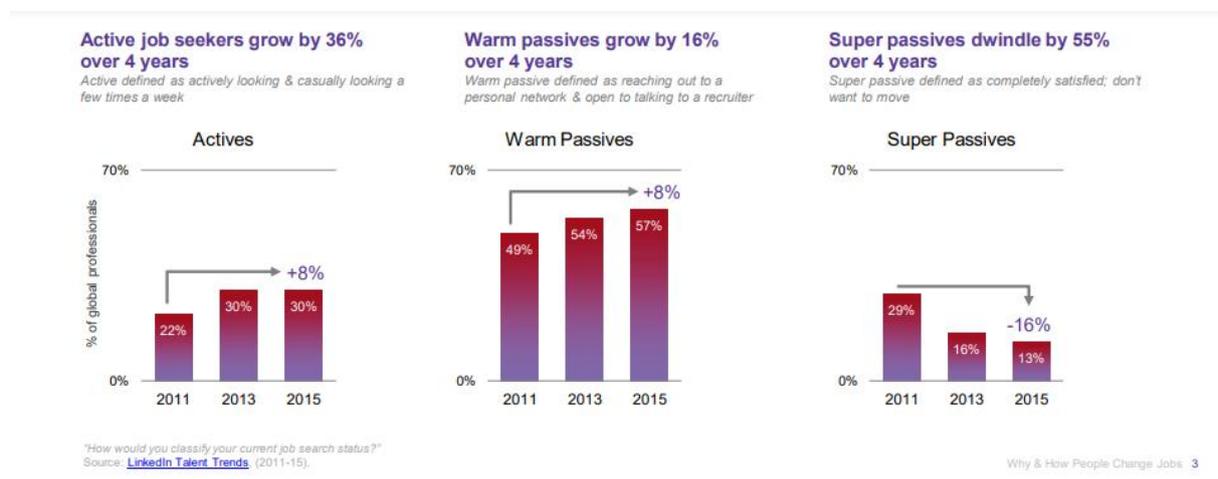
**What does Career mean to you...?**

## II. POSSIBLE REASONS FOR CAREER DISCONTENTMENT

Over the years of experience as an HR Professional & a Career Coach, I have had the opportunity & privilege to coach several people across different levels of experience and across industry. And they reach out to me when they feel stuck due to several reasons like-

- 1.) **Lack of clarity**- Not knowing what they want from their career or have no goals.
- 2.) **Lack of growth**- Not growing in their career, that may include financial growth.
- 3.) **Lack of appreciation**- Not feeling valued at work or not being given the due credit.
- 4.) **Lack of sense of meaning**- Not feeling the satisfaction or inability to see the larger picture.
- 5.) **Lack of identity**- Arising from lack of self-esteem & low confidence.
- 6.) **Lack of healthy environment**- The negative environment caused by people or atmosphere.
- 7.) **Lack of opportunities**- Not able to see the next level challenges supporting growth and learning.

Now, the interesting thing to notice is that while people identify the need for career coaching, they reach out to seek support with their professional journey or when they want to go to their next level of growth or if they are stuck in their job for any of the above reasons, one common theme that I come across with 80-90% people is the Lack of Clarity. Hence I have listed it as the No. 1 reason. Study shows that 71 percent of employees are looking for new jobs. Take a look at the image below-



We can clearly see that while the Active job seekers grow by 36% over a period of 4 years, the people who are happy & satisfied in their career-who do not want to move jobs shrink by 55%. This leaves us with this most critical question- Why are people always looking for a job change? What are they looking for? What are they seeking in their Career? <sup>2</sup>

### **III. CASE STUDY**

Let me explain why I think that Lack of Clarity is the No. 1 reason, in my experience-

#### **Case Study 1-**

Mr. Anshul Shrivastava (name changed to respect confidentiality) reached out to me to empower him to discover the next best role and so I started coaching him to-‘Discover his next role’. He must be 35 years of age working in a large BFSI company. Gradually as we moved forward in the process of Discovery- he kept talking about how much he dislikes the current role for the simple reason that there is a lot of ambiguity in the role- and hence he is unable to take full responsibility or add much value. When we started going deeper, over a few sessions, what I or in fact we discovered is that the actual reason for his discontentment in his job was something else and not ambiguity in his role. Now, the reason I say ‘we’ discovered- because it was a revelation for him too. Typically, as humans we only focus on what is in front of us and our perceptions about the way our world occurs to us, whereas the reality may be something much deeper than that and embedded in our sub-conscious mind somewhere, that eventually starts running our life and decisions we make.

It turns out that Anshul was feeling very frustrated because of a certain Senior Manager who was part of the leadership team, in his office, who was bullying & gaslighting him on every opportunity. The whole story may not be needed in the context here, however the point that we concluded was that Anshul was letting one person jeopardize his career. Well, after having worked with him for around 2 months- Anshul received 2 job offers for wonderful & massive roles from reputed companies and handsome salary package- but he declined those offers.

#### **Why?**

Because Anshul found clarity- his clarity was that he needs to stand up for himself and learn to draw boundaries in his work area, such that not only because he must learn to respect himself- but also because he would like to contribute to the culture of the organization which should have a zero tolerance for such negative traits demonstrated by anyone in the company,

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<sup>2</sup>LinkedIn Talent Solutions, WHY & HOW PEOPLE CHANGE JOBS, How would you classify your current job search status?’, LinkedIn Talent Trends, (2011-15), [https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/business/talent-solutions/global/en\\_us/job-switchers/PDF/job-switchers-global-report-english.pdf](https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/business/talent-solutions/global/en_us/job-switchers/PDF/job-switchers-global-report-english.pdf)

irrespective of the level of seniority.

**Fast Forward 1 year: Anshul is happy, continuing to work in the same company and expecting a job promotion anytime!**

### **Case Study 2-**

Another Coachee I had- Ms. Vineeta Shankar (name changed to respect confidentiality), a senior professional in the Shipping industry, was really distressed and was desperate for a job change due to monotony. It surprised me a little in the beginning, as she had been with the same company for more than a decade, had grown from the rank & file and now wanted to quit. On further digging deeper, we learnt that Vineeta was actually feeling burnt out due to this particular project that she was engaged in for the last 1.5 years and it was not only taking a toll on her health but was also pinching her as a mother. She was getting stuck and lost in the vicious cycle of guilt of not being able to do enough as a mother to her children, further setting up her day for failure by constantly beating herself and hence it affected her health, productivity and satisfaction, personal relationships & overall quality of life. Now, once we got to the bottom of the real problem, she could come up with the possible solutions like-

- 1.) Vineeta can request her Manager for a project change.
- 2.) She can take a leave for a couple of weeks to take care of herself, feel rejuvenated, create a structure at home, and join back.
- 3.) She could get creative and request the Manager to allow her to work from home twice a week.
- 4.) Given her seniority and tenure with the company, she could also hire more people in her team such that she could delegate better, that will allow her to balance her work & life in a more healthy way.

And do you know what is the best part? All these solutions came from Vineeta herself.. She understood that her dis-satisfaction was less to do with the job alone and more to do with her inability to create balance in her life. She perhaps confused work with her life and gradually realized that she was moving away from her goals & dreams. Her quality of life had deteriorated and she understood that she wanted to be a mother & a successful professional, and not have one at the expense of another.

Anshul Shrivastava & Vineeta Shankar, were not just 2 such cases- but I have met a myriad of professionals from different industries and levels of experience and while we start the coaching journey with a pursuit of finding the right job/role, job search, professional branding and so on,

more often than not, it boils down to NOT having a vision for self – or not being aware of what one wants from his/her life and career- and therefore Lack of Clarity!

#### IV. CAREER VS LIFE- PROBLEM & SOLUTION

After having coached hundreds of people, I can safely conclude that one of the major reasons for overall career discontentment is that a lot of people have actually confused between Career and Life! Career is part of one's life- just as Self, Health, Relationships, Family, Hobbies, Spirituality. Mathematically speaking, we typically spend 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our lives at work. So work comprises of one part of this whole called Life. Since people at times confuse Career with Life, they tend to be completely invested into it- focusing with all their resources & time in this area. What happens thereafter is typically the lop-sided imbalance. Since all one creates and invests in is work life or Career, one tends to have all expectations to be fulfilled by that area of life only. A few consequences of the same may be- lack of health, well-being, meaning, purpose, satisfaction, meaningful relationships and so on.

Now, I am not advocating the need for one to retire or go to Himalayas- away from work. Do not get me wrong. This goes much deeper than that as the results too manifest in varied degrees for different people. However, what I am proposing is- investing in a meaningful professional pursuit built on the **foundation of inner well-being, growth, and balance!**

A great starting point is to invest in building awareness of what is important to one-self and building a life (not just work) around fulfilling those things that help you get closer to your priorities, goals & dreams. What is that one loves to do? Love is undeniably the strongest positive emotion known to man. We spend 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our lives at work. That is indeed a lot of time. Since I started working with professionals I realized that the concept of loving their jobs/career is alien to people. Now, I am not referring to a utopian world here and that love is only for the time you have on vacations. We can craft a career path that could evoke emotions like love & passion. Well, I believe that- you can earn, while doing what you love and enjoy doing! What you love to do doesn't only have to be for a vacation, it can also be your vocation.

#### V. WHAT DO WE UNDERSTAND BY CAREER?

A lot of in-depth work has happened in the area of Career Development and there are various interpretations around 'Career'. As per Career Choice & Development book, by Mark L Savickas, Career means-

*"Life Course is the meaning Sociologists inscribe on career when they define it as a sequence of occupations in the life of an individual."*

*“Studies show Davidson & Anderson in 1937 worked on occupational mobility, where the sequence of occupations can be objectively analyzed for patterns.”*

*“Form & Miller in 1949, coined the term occupational career pattern to denote the sequence & duration of work positions occupied by an individual.”*

*“Shartle-1959, indicated that one's career involves stages, including preparation, participation & withdrawal from one's occupation.”*

*“Research by University of Chicago Sociology Dept. led by Clifford Shaw, 1931, used the term Career focused explicitly on the subject's point of view, particularly how individuals conceptualize their social roles & interpret their experiences.”*

*“The above research was similar to Hughes, 1958 definition of 'subjective career' as an evolving notion, from which people see their lives as a whole and interpret the meaning of their attributes, actions & experiences.”*

*“It is this subjective meaning -the one individuals use to orient themselves to their society's occupational structure- that Super (1954) assessed a technique that identified the preoccupations (For e.g. themes) that shape a career and the concept that Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman (1985) denoted. They suggested that career should be defined as the meaning one places on behaviors related to their careers.”*

*“Career Construction Theory is based on the Premise that career denotes a reflection on the course of one's vocational behavior, not vocational behavior itself. This reflection can focus on actual events such as one's occupations (objective career) or on their meaning (subjective career). From this, a subjective career is a reflexive project that transforms individuals from actors of their career to subjects of their 'own story'. It tells one's own story usually by emphasizing a sense of purpose that coherently explains the continuity and change in oneself across time, similar to Mc Adam's conception of Identity (McAdams 1993).”*

*“As per Super's Career Development Theory-'Maxicycle of Career Stages-Periods of Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Management & Disengagement, in his attempts to shape a comprehensive career theory in the 1950s through the mid-1990s, Super complemented the traditional individual-difference approach to vocational guidance with three additional perspectives:*

*1) Developmental perspective focusing on the life course of vocational behavior and stressing continuity in career development.*

*2) Phenomenological perspective emphasizing the role of self-concept in the development of*

*an individual's career and*

*3) Contextual perspective bringing forward the importance of multiple social roles and their interaction across the life span.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Taking cue from **Super's Career Development Theory**, I completely believe that Career Development is a continuous process and has a phenomenological as well as a contextual perspective to develop one's career to reach one's potential fully!

As per Career Drivers Test developed by Richmond in 1999 called the RSI-Richmond Survey Instrument, there are 9 motivators that motivates a person for working that is used in Career Development. The top 9 movitators include-

- 1.) Money
- 2.) Power
- 3.) Meaning
- 4.) Expertise
- 5.) Innovation
- 6.) Social Affiliation
- 7.) Autonomy
- 8.) Security
- 9.) Status

## **VI. HOW TO BUILD THE CAREER FOUNDATION (OF INNER WELL-BEING, GROWTH, AND BALANCE)-**

It all starts with the awareness and one may begin by answering the following questions-

- 1.) What do I want my career to look like?
- 2.) How do I want to grow in my Career?
- 3.) What is my key motivator (refer above- RSI is a great tool to do that)
- 4.) How can I build a balanced career that gives me space & time to engage with my top-most motivator.

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<sup>3</sup> DUANE BROWN & ASSOIATES, Career Choice & Development, 4th Edition, JOSSEY-BASS 151-154 (JOSSEY-BASS ed., 2002)

<sup>4</sup> CAREER RESEARCH, Super's Career Development Theory, <http://career.iresearchnet.com/career-development/supers-career-development-theory/>

5.) Is it possible to fulfill my biggest need for motivation from my work?

Once, we can understand how we want to craft our career, we can evolve & grow meaningfully and cope up with the external challenges thrown by our environment or industry.

The concepts that exist in the current landscape of career and work are something that were completely unforeseen and one that could not have imagined. With the outburst of Covid-19, we live in a different world today. Now, if I as a career professional am aware of the answers to the questions above, I can adapt myself to the new situation one is confronted with. We may not be able to control what happens on the outside, but if we know what really matters on the inside- it becomes relatively easier for us to adjust to the changes on the outside. Makes sense?

The competencies that were needed in 2018 have become obsolete today and new competencies have emerged that form the basis of success & happiness at work.. The future trends include concepts like- Internal migration, Gig-work, Job sharing, People sharing and even office sharing and these trends are here to stay. While we may be working in our silos- we are more in it together like never before. The critical skills like- adaptability, learnability, organization, team-work and managing stress have stood the test of time and are imperative to succeed in today's and the future career landscape.

**As per Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) State of Flow; Theory of Differentiation & Integration',**

The ability to derive moment-by-moment enjoyment from everything we do, can overcome the obstacles to fulfillment, and that state is the State of Flow. It is by becoming increasingly complex that the self might be said to grow. Complexity is the result of two broad psychological processes: differentiation and integration. Differentiation implies a movement towards uniqueness, toward separating oneself from others. Integration refers to its opposite: a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self. A complex self is one that succeeds in combining these opposite tendencies.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

**The New definition of Career-**

**CAREER- Contribution, Attitude, Results, Entity, Exchange, Reality!**

**C- Contribute** with

**A-The right Attitude**

**R- to Create Results** for

**E- An Entity****E- In Exchange** of value to**R- Make Dreams a Reality**

Basically, people do not know what they want from their career and so they are constantly just running to somewhere, out there thinking they will find something someday! If we relate with this definition of Career- we can approach this 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of our life with a different & simplistic perspective. This new definition can act as a cornerstone for someone to build a great Career.

**How about defining the Career as**

**Means to CONTRIBUTE with the right ATTITUDE to create RESULTS for an ENTITY in EXCHANGE of value to make dreams a REALITY!**

Going forward, what is going to be more critical is the need for Meaning, Fulfillment, Happiness and Balance from one's Career. The landscape of career- the way I see it is further blurring lines between Work & Life and so the need for balance is even more imperative. The more authentic we can be with who we are- the more congruent we are with our thoughts, beliefs, actions- the more we can be in the **Flow**- and that is the place that our souls yearn to experience. We as spiritual beings should not want to work such that we can experience life after work but we really want to experience life while we are at work such that we can build a Career of Meaning & Balance, a career that is well differentiated- yet integrated, a career that I am attached to- but yet detached to derive a higher meaning & fulfill my purpose, such that I know where I am going and remember the big picture always. I want to close with my final thoughts that either you do what you love or learn to love what you do and create the Career that is nothing but the best- the best that you deserve!

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