
STAGES OF CAREER PATH THROUGH USEFUL CRISES

Tamás BOGNÁR

Doctoral School of Regional and Economic Sciences, Kautz Gyula Economics Faculty,
Széchenyi István University in Győr

Abstract

There is a wide range of studies on development in the talent management, knowledge management and assessment in the literature. This study intends to provide an approach, that indicates the dynamics of personal development during the career path. After summarising the related literature of assessment and personality development we introduce an analysis of career development consultancies and interviews of applicants. This analysis points out the importance of crises during their development progress.

Key words: *development, assessment, career*

JEL Classification: M12, M53, M54

Introduction

A significant part of the research focuses on measuring competencies among HR functions. The value of appointing the appropriate person to different positions is increasing as the business competition is intensifying. On the one hand, some studies clarify the adequate methods to assess the candidates along well-defined skills and competencies. On the other hand, one of the basic personality development approaches of Erikson (1956) shows the life pass stages identifying the typical crisis at the given stage. This study intends to add an own research of ours that attempts to identify people's possible development stages during the maturing processes by applying Erikson's logic. We would be able to understand the applicant's suitability better by concentrating on the role that represents a group of competencies. The study has analysed interviews with 51 top-3 candidates applying for different positions and 50 personal development progress consultations on career opportunities at a company. When analysing the professional experiences and applying Erikson's approach it is useful to point out the typical challenges and the winning answers for the crisis or the ones that lead to the person's stagnation or regression. Depending on the sector and the position some specific and common stages are recognised. Describing these stages and their crises there is a qualitative content that can be the key to assessment and development methods and a tool for the management. In addition, the employees could better recognise the hidden psychological part of the challenges that can generate or block their personal development.

Setting up the job descriptions, recruitants usually collect the necessary competences before selection process. Since the most important goal is to better predict

the future performance it is not easy to differentiate the detected potential skills and the manifest competences. That's why we were interested in how these competences open out. A manifested competence better ensures the required later performance as a reference. But what happens if we detect a potential but it didn't appear in practice with success? What kind of crisis can lead to development of a skill? To better understand the maturing process, it could be useful to describe the possible stairs of personal development in work and the characteristics of these stairs.

Theoretical background and Methods

Personality development

Existential opening is a very important part of the personality development (Sanford, 2006). Sanford uses Erikson's logic (1956), and emphasises, that the development process needed some stressful expectation. This challenge produces a crisis that should be solved by the person. Erikson says, that during the life there were 8 stages built on each other. Every stage presumes the solution of the previous one. One of Erikson's stages from this lifelong development dedicatedly belongs to career development. The solution of ego identity vs confusion of role (fifth stage) ensures the vocational choice and an optimally specialised career plan. Following Erikson's model maybe the career development can represent analogous solvable crises.

Assessment

Some researchers emphasises the usage of psychological testing (Carless, 2009), to detect potentials and competencies for a better prediction of the candidates. Some others, like Jones and his colleagues (Jones et al., 1991) revealed that the well-established assessment center can successfully predict the performance of the candidates but they concentrated to static state of competencies.

However, the method is suitable for observing the competence's manifestation in practice (Eurich et al., 2009), which can provide opportunity to understand if some development is blocked. We wanted to examine if the bad solutions of a stage can block the further progress in career. Better understanding of this process can help in prediction in case of assessment goals. To detect the process there are possibilities during structured interviews as well (König et al., 2007), especially because sometimes assessment center follows interview(s). However the validation of the prediction has a crucial problem. There are control groups missing in all patterns of the researches, due to the practical limit of the examinations. We are able to analyse only the candidates who won the application. We can't also give the opportunity of the positions to the underestimated applicants from a control group just in order to be able to compare their performance with the appointed ones.

Personal progress

Meyer (1965) pointed that the superior's coaching role is more effective if the objection setting is based on a common understanding. If the appraisal and the belonging personal targets point the position's challenge, it has the point to realise the blocking effects of the unsolved crisis of the given position. Beer (1981) emphasises the importance of the appraiser's responsibility in intimate awareness of appraisee's main frustrations and difficulties. Recognising the career stairs as crisis stages can provide a focused coaching in case of developmental goals.

Methods

Pattern

In this study we had two groups of pattern. There have been analysed conversations with 50 persons who applied to personal career development consultancy at a multinational business concern in the first group. The one-on-one session's process was at first identifying the possible ambition, at second, analysing the necessary and extant competencies, at third realizing the most important crisis, and finally setting up an action plan within the frame of current position. On the other hand the study has analysed 51 candidates applied for different positions at different companies. The current or latest crises had been also analysed.

Questioning method

The method of analysis was different in the groups of pattern. On the one hand there are differences between the intention of candidates and carrier consultancy applicants to unveil their crises. On the other hand the applicants of consultancy are partner in finding their blocks on their career without risk of losing the position or not win the other.

Interviews

Asking to describe the authority and scoop of activities.

The answer can indicate the perspectives and attitudes which can inform about the actual stair of career identity.

Asking to describe successes and failures

Not rarely the successes belong to a maturing process, sometimes the challenge makes the candidate exceed his or her comfort zone. The description informs us about the regression or improvement. Without the opportunity of regression there is no crisis. An authentic reference for a cross functional, higher level of solution indicates the won crises. Sometimes assessors need to check if the self-esteem builds in the success in a right way. The attribution (Covington & Omelich, 1988) of success can show differences according to control attitude (Rotter, 1975). There are some examples for the candidates meet the extra expectation, he or she is successful, but the regression still exists as he or she aims to go back to comfort zone. Recognizing the unknown skill does not widen the comfort zone.

Signs for the meeting with a crisis.

The most informative answers describe a frustration – it is a necessity of crises – that makes one to create the conditions of his job. Employees often need to have a deeper insight and wider perspective for that. We should find the items allude to regression or improvement.

Stress to authority exceeding

Higher responsibility means higher insight. If this deeper understanding is new it causes stress. Assessors should find the signs of regression or stress resistance. The coping strategy can be the most informative.

Asking about the role of duty of the superior can inform us about this insight. Before meeting the crisis applicants cannot describe this with insight. They describe the boss's higher responsibility stereotypically but without practical experience.

Defence mechanisms about a role

Improvement of a crisis changes the applicant's identification with their roles. The defence mechanism mostly belongs to the actual challenge (current or desired position) that can lead to regression or development.

Understanding that all the frustrating factors are parts of the game means accepting the role; and it initiates the improvement of the crisis.

Career consultancy, personal progress discussions

The method is different because the employee and his or her superior have (or should have) an intimate relationship. The leader is mostly aware of the subordinate's weaknesses, potentials and possible ambitions. In practice leader collects evidence during the year about these crises, but in this conversation he needs to identify and nominate them. In this case the employee has no interest to hide his or her limits, but the awareness and the consciousness are never as high as from the leader's point of view. The performance appraisals could focus on the same crises and role regressions. The most informative conversations analyses the interpretation of achieving or failing the personal objectives.

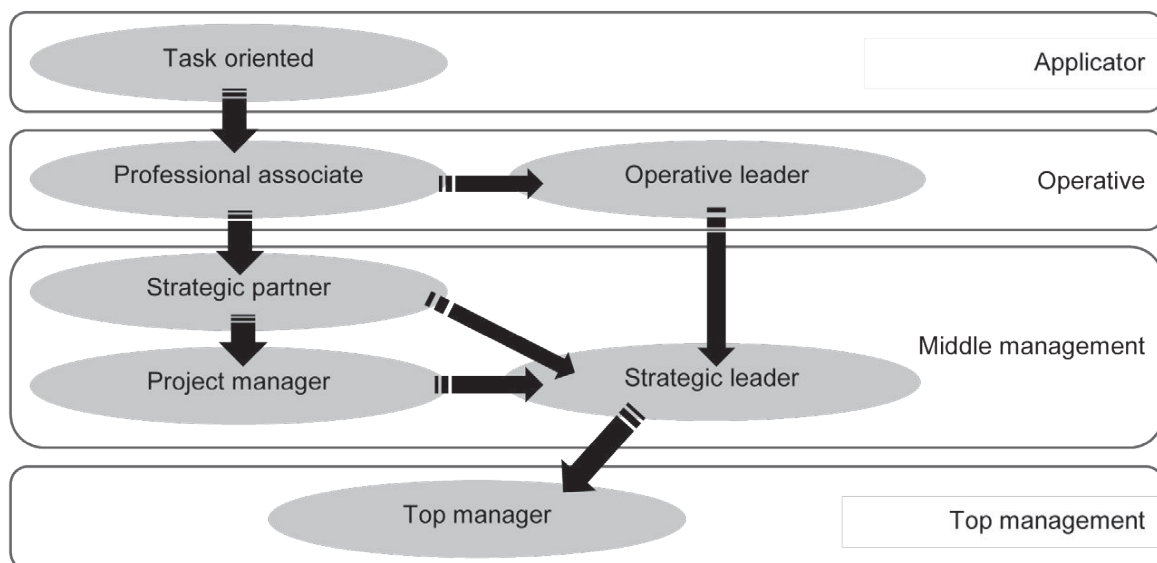
Results and Debate

Description of crisis progress

Identifying career stairs

After analysing the 101-member pattern the following possible stairs can be identified as it is indicated in the figure 1 below. The stairs more or less belong to some positions, but it is not a must. The stair is more dedicated to the typical crisis of the person. The kind and the progress of the crisis determine the stair rather (Chart 1).

Chart 1 Possible progress of career stairs



Source: own edition, 2016

The standard crisis belongs to the development stair can be described on the one hand with the shifting of the next career stairs role.

Table 1 Defence mechanisms of enriching roles – the development stairs of career

Career development stairs	Self-defence attitude	Subject of shifting
Applicator (who is task oriented and completes what he exactly has to even without understanding the reasons)	Let the task be obvious! I don't want to decide between quality and quantity (production example).	Shifting of complexity, contradicted information, decisions
Experienced subordinate	Let the task be obviously a professional question! I don't want to depend on others cooperation.	Shifting of contradicted interests and deeper insight in other processes.
Operative leader	Let the task be obviously a leadership problem! I need a target, and I organise the completion. I don't want to be expected to set up business objectives.	Shifting of strategic role.
Middle manager / strategic partner / key specialist with strategic responsibility	Let the task be obviously a strategic business problem! I don't want to worry about any hidden interests of some top managers.	Shifting of political sensibility and networking.
Top manager	Although in this stair of career can have crises, unsolved challenges, because appointing to this level of positions does not ensures winning all career crises.	

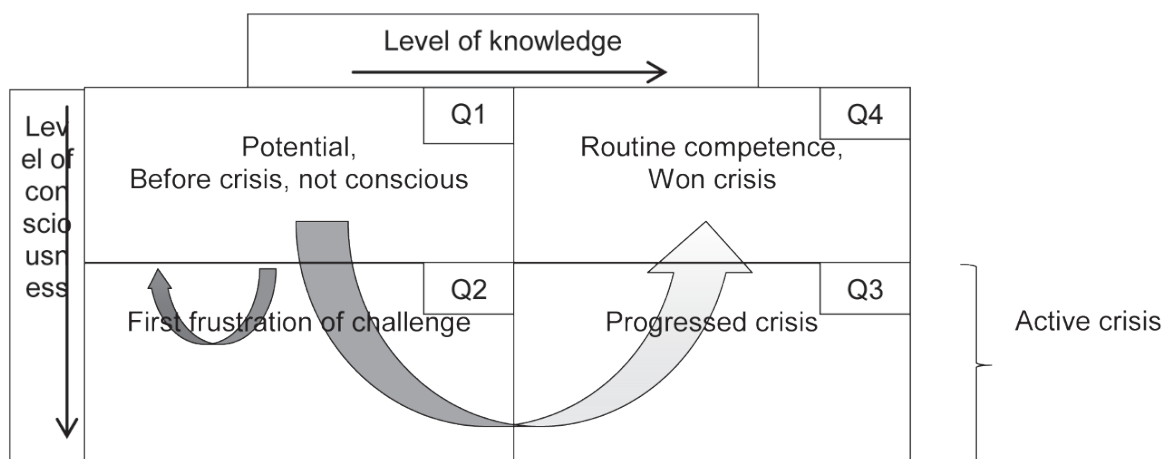
Source: own edition, 2016

On the other hand the stabile position in the current stair can mean all won crises of the current and previous challenges (Table 1).

Consciousness and knowledge factor of crisis process

The crisis more declares the career development stair. Each stair has the typical challenge as it seems above. The progress of crisis happens among two dimensions – the level of consciousness and the level of the improving knowledge. Before the challenge appears the person is not aware of his or her necessary competence as it seems figure 2 below (Q1). It is just a latent ability. As he or she faces with the challenge's frustration factor at first time, the low level of knowledge comes to surface (Q2). This is the first active part of the crisis. Due to the stress and the frustration the progress can develop to regression – that causes block in career development. The optimal way to winning continues to Q3 part as person develops his competences to manifestation. He or she still has to be aware, the stress and the concentration level is the highest in this part (Chart 2).

Chart 2 Way of crisis



Source: own edition, 2016

The person solves the challenge and after a few successes he become self-confident and steps to the Q4 as the challenge comes inside the comfort zone and the task becomes routine – that's why the lower level of consciousness again. The employee won his or her crisis.

Facts in the study

The study categorised the candidates and the career development consultancy's applicants to 7 different levels (Table 2, Table 3). The groups of the pattern have a different partition as the rows show. The left column indicates the level of identified crisis.

Table 2 Participants of career consultation

Progress level	Applicators' level (17)	Professional associate (13)	Strategic partner (10)	Field leader (2)	Strategic leader (4)	Project manager (4)	Top manager (0)
Not conscious 8% ¹	2 12% ²	1 8%	0	1 50%	0	0	0
First frustration 34%	7 41%	7 54%	2 20%	0	1 25%	0	0
Active progressed crisis 34%	6 35%	3 23%	4 40%	1 50%	2 50%	1 25%	0
Won crisis 24%	2 12%	2 15%	4 40%	0	1 25%	3 75%	0

Remarks: ¹ Rate of the 50 – member carrier consultancy-group, ² Rate of the 17 – member task oriented person Source: own edition, 2016

For example there was no top manager among career consultancy's participants and there was no task oriented person (applicator stair) among candidates. The possible reason for this later fact is, that the companies do not have resource head hunters to recruit an applicator candidate.

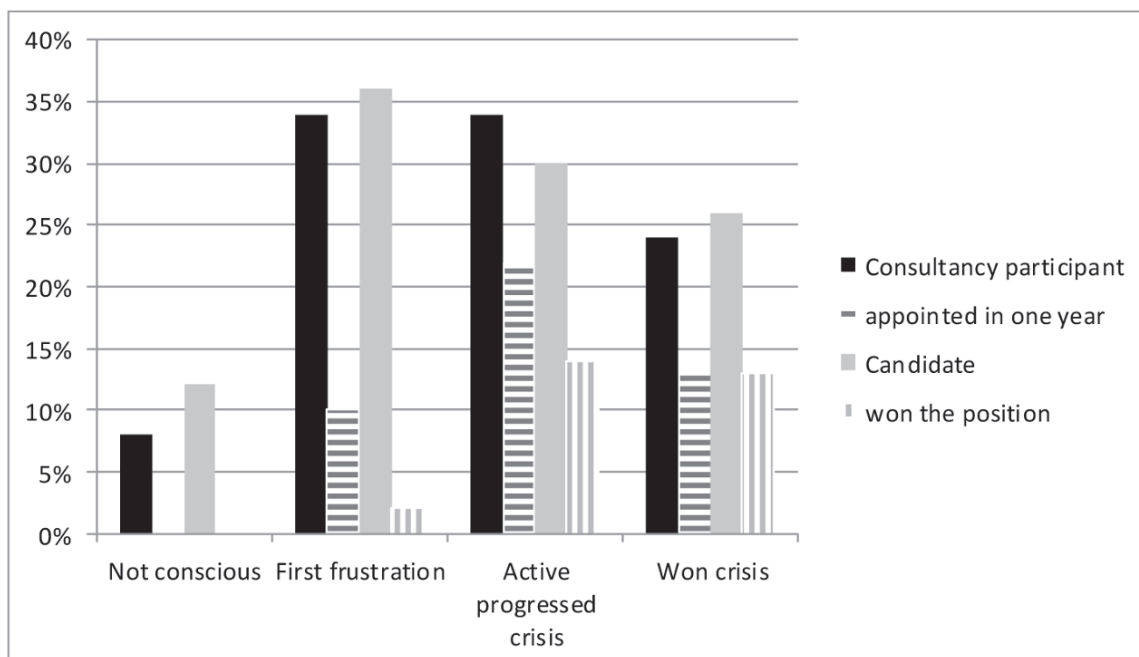
Table 3 Top 3 candidates

Progress level	Applicators' level (2)	Experienced associate (20)	Strategic partner (13)	Field leader (7)	Strategic leader (4)	Project manager (5)	Top manager (1)
Not conscious 12% ¹	2 100% ²	3 15%	0	1 14%	0	0	0
First frustration 36%	0	5 25%	7 54%	2 29%	2 50%		0
Active progressed crisis 30%	0	5 25%	2 15%	4 57%	2 50%	2 40%	0
Won crisis 26%	0	7 35%	4 31%	0	0	1 20%	1 100%

Remarks: 1 Rate of the 51 – member candidate-group, ² Rate of the 2 – member task oriented person Source: own edition, 2016

The most interesting relationship between the persons' success and the progress of their career development stair's crisis can be seen in Chart 3.

Chart 3 The correlation of the workout level of the current stair and the career development



Source: own edition, 2016

Some of 44% of career consultancy-group appointed to a further position in the company within one year; while only 17% of other employees of the company were appointed in the same interval. Some of 2% of the counselee's group has finished the career initiated by the company from the Q2 part of the crisis. Some of 2-2% left the organisation. All the appointments of the group belonged to the active and the won part (Q2-Q3) of the current or the following (!) career development stair as it is indicated in black columns in Chart 3.

The appointments of top-3-candidate's group come from the higher knowledge parts of the stair's crisis since the consultants don't have to take risk with the further progress of the crisis (grey columns in Chart 3). The point is that sometimes the assessment tests indicate the competence in the first crisis part too but with a very low predictive value.

Conclusions

To evaluate the predictive factor of analysing the crisis and declaration of career development stair would need a further follow up. All the candidates who won the position worked in charge after one year. A further study can compare the relationship between the performance and the crisis in the stair. The present one year experience is not enough to say the won crisis ensures the performance of the position but in lower positions we can think it. In the group of career development consultancy the next appointment means to step to the next stair of career development or rotating on the same level helps to progress their own current crisis. As it has been experienced, preparing for the next positions challenge pays.

After analysing the conversation and the interviews with the two groups of pattern, a tendency has been set up, which shows the progress of crisis. In the pattern no candidates won the position from the first two groups. In the consultancy group, the career changing can be understood. The interpretation of result can be influenced by some possibilities. These could mean the limitations of this research. For example we cannot exclude that the candidates was already planned to appoint at the time they attended the consultancy sessions. It is not easy to organise the follow up the winner candidates, because they did not start their new job at the same time. It makes sense to think over, that there are different time-period can be relevant for different positions to decide about fitting the expectation of the position. There are plenty of areas to utilize the results. Understanding the progress of the crisis can give tools and inputs to superior to develop the person. The prediction factor of assessment methods can increase with the new information comes from the crisis' process, its prognosis related to career development stairs.

The further possibilities of the usage may be specific developmental or leadership tools dedicated to each part of the progressing crisis and also linked to career development stairs, we could work out. A further study can find which tools are pays in development.

Bibliography

1. BEER, M. (1981): Performance appraisal: Dilemmas and possibilities. *Organizational Dynamics*. Volume 9. Issue 3. p. 24–36.
2. CARLESS, S. A. (2009): Psychological testing for selection purposes: a guide to evidence-based practice for human resource professionals. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*. Volume 20. Issue 12. pp. 2517-2532.
3. COVINGTON, M. V., & OMELICH, C. L. (1988): Achievement dynamics: The interaction of motives, cognitions, and emotions over time. *Anxiety Research*. Volume 1. Issue 3. pp. 165-183.
4. ERIKSON, E., H. (1956): The Problem of Ego Identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. Volume 4. Issue 1. pp. 56–121.
5. EURICH, T. L. et al. (2009): Assessment Centers: Current Practices in the United States. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. Volume 24. Issue 4. pp. 387–407.
6. JONES, A. et al. (1991): Attempting to improve the validity of a well-established assessment centre*. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*. Volume 64. Issue 1. pp. 1–21.
7. KÖNIG, C. J. et al. (2007): Candidates' Ability to Identify Criteria in Nontransparent Selection Procedures: Evidence from an assessment center and a structured interview. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*. Volume 15. Issue 3. pp. 283–292.
8. MEYER, H. H. (1965): Split Roles in Performance Appraisal. *Harvard Business Review*. Volume 43. Issue 1. pp. 123-129.
9. ROTTER, J. B. (1975): Some problems and misconceptions related to the construct of internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*. Volume 43. Issue 1. pp. 56-67.
10. SANFORD, N. (2006): *Self & society: social change and individual development*. New Brunswick, N.J: Aldine Transaction.

Correspondence address:

Tamás, BOGNÁR, PhD student, Doctoral School of Regional and Economic Sciences, Kautz Gyula Economics Faculty, Széchenyi István University, H-9026 Győr, Egyetem tér 1, e-mail: bognar.tamas@barticonsulting.hu