



Are you a mid-level manager who wants to advance your career? If so, this blog will provide you with important insight, advice, and coaching to increase your career success and the success of your organization. You recognize your needs and desires, and that is an important step necessary to define and develop your career. Your vision is where it all starts; it helps you see what you would like to become and accomplish. Next, you set your goals and begin to put your plans in place. These are important initial steps in the process.

As you begin to reflect on this process, consider your management training and experience, in addition to all you have learned throughout your career journey. Take a moment to consider the basic principles you learned about planning. For example, managers in the planning phase examine and evaluate their organizations. First, they analyze their internal and external environments. Then, they select goals to develop strategies, tactics, and plans for success. Finally, they work to allocate resources to achieve organizational goals (Reilly, Minnick, and Baack, 2011).

Here is a question to consider, "Can we apply these principles of planning in our careers?" We think we can, and we suspect you have utilized these steps many times either consciously or unconsciously. These principles of planning are important for success, both in organizations and on a personal level, and they can be applied easily in our career planning. What is even more powerful and provides us with an even greater advantage is when we combine them with the concept of alignment. We have found that greater results are achieved when we develop more effective and efficient plans. We have also discovered that we gain even more job satisfaction and contentment in our careers. It is important to understand the power of alignment and how it applies to us personally and as part of an organization. When proper alignment occurs, the probability for success increases. This blog examines the planning and alignment process and how it can work for you and your organization.

Here is our model:

Career Success = Evaluation + Goals + Strategies + Resources + Alignment

Let's break these ideas down for you so you can create real-world application.

1. Evaluate

This is an important first step. First, let's explore analysis. Just as managers perform analysis in their companies to ensure success, you can do the same for yourself. Think of yourself as a corporation. Consider your goals and the value you deliver. What resources do you have available that can help you gain even greater clarity? How can performing a personal analysis help you?

According to Lisa Quast, "After you've defined your career aspirations and goals, the next step is to understand more about yourself and your external environment. This is where a personal SWOT analysis is helpful. It stands for, Strengths (internal), Weaknesses (internal), Opportunities (external), and Threats (external)" (Quast, 2013, para 2). A personal SWOT analysis is a valuable tool that can help you identify and sharpen your strengths, improve weaknesses, and increase your awareness of the opportunities available to you. In addition, it can help you neutralize and overcome threats.

Next, think of yourself as a corporation and a brand within your organization. When you do this, your focus and objectivity increase. Dr. Marcus Crayton reminds us of the value of branding in his Forbes Mentor Week video, *Branding Yourself*. He states, "When seeking employment or setting yourself apart from the competition, it is imperative to think of yourself as a brand or corporation." Expand on the "few concepts of branding" that Dr. Crayton offers us that you might want to consider. Here is a link to Dr. Marcus Crayton's article and video: <http://forwardthinking.ashford.edu/need-develop-personal-brand/>

2. Goals

As you develop a better understanding of yourself, you will discover how branding and SWOT analysis can help you advance your career with greater clarity. Now that you have evaluated your current position, take a moment to reflect on and further shape your goals. Did you know, the idea that humans can form expectations about the future played a key role in the development of goal-setting theories? According to Locke and Latham (1990), humans can motivate themselves by setting future goals. They remind us that goals help us direct our attention to an objective; they mobilize efforts toward a destination or task. They increase performance because they help us identify the actions required to accomplish our defined mission. To remember this, use this acronym: AMP, where A= Attention, M = Mobilize, and P = Persistence and Performance.

One way to approach goals is to gain an understanding of how they evolve over time. We set short-, mid- and long-term goals, and we continue to evaluate them over time to ensure we are progressing toward completion. New goals may emerge for us as we change roles throughout our careers. When you look forward, "see" your vision (one that is very meaningful, inspiring, and motivational). What goals will you set to achieve that vision? Targeted approaches to goal setting and marketing your brand will benefit you. Planning a course for yourself is very important and managing that plan at intervals is a must. Remember, dreams and goals do come true, they just take time!

3. Strategies

As you study your career and goals, consider your organization's commitment, purpose, and the challenges it faces. What does your organization need? What does your organizational culture reward and recognize? How can you contribute to serve your organization better? Next, work to evaluate your own personal strategies and begin the process of aligning them with the organization's strategies. What goals do you need to set and what do you need to do to accomplish them?

Today, organizations are in continuous-change cycles. This means that they continue to adapt to various forces that cause them to change constantly. As a result, they rely less on past ways of doing things and prior bureaucratic structures; instead, they empower teams and ad hoc committees to solve complex problems and boost creativity, synergy, and innovation. They also design and formulate strategies, and work to create value constantly (Weiss, 2012). With this in mind, contemplate how you can support your organization to the best of your ability and continue to gain incentive and grow personally and professionally.



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Managers and employees learn on-the-job, through-the-job, and off-the-job. What strategies do you have to grow in each area? How can professional development play a role in your success? What internal and external courses and training can you participate in to help you develop further? How can short-term training and certification programs help you succeed? For example, in our careers, external programs such as the Certified Manager certification from ICPM provided us with the opportunity to improve our management skills and earn a professional credential (CM). The program content was truly exceptional and the learning process was efficient and effective.

4. Resources

Dr. Ray Powers, founder of the first Corporate Project Management Group at Bell and current Associate Dean and former Chair of Marketing and Strategic Management at the Forbes School of Business, stated this about managing resources, "Resources are people, time, money, and assets. We know we cannot be 100% efficient all the time, and we all make mistakes, however, if we apply disciplined methodology to whatever we engage in, our chances of success are exponentially better." We agree with Dr. Powers. What resources and assets are available to help you succeed? How do you manage yourself and your time? Are you investing in the right things for your personal and professional development? Are you managing the assets you have properly?

Focusing on your goals is important, and managing your career continuum is crucial. Furthermore, time management and planning are important components of the strategies you should use to advance your career. Did you know that 80% of our results come from 20% of our planned time? It is important to improve our time management and planning skills constantly. The motto, "plan your work and work your plan" works, and as Dr. Powers stated, "If we apply disciplined methodology to whatever we engage in, our chances of success are exponentially better."

As you "work your plan," spend your time wisely; once it's gone, you can never get it back. "Time is an equal opportunity employer. Each human being has exactly the same number of hours and minutes every day. Rich people cannot buy more hours and scientists cannot invent new minutes. You cannot save time to spend it on another day. Even so, time is amazingly fair and forgiving. No matter how much time you have wasted in the past, you still have an entire tomorrow" (Waitley).

5. Alignment

Alignment is a very important component for success. Up to this point, you have been learning actively how to become aware of your interests and those of your organization. We advise you to continue to develop in ways that link your personal effectiveness and satisfaction with the achievement of organizational goals, core values, and strategic objectives. These strategies are very gratifying, and you can achieve greater job satisfaction and career success within your organization.

Mid-level managers seek career opportunities within their organizations. They desire to utilize their skills and strengths to accept new challenges that match their interests, values, and management styles. We recognize that organizations we have worked for in our careers have faced strategic issues and challenges. In addition, they have short-, mid-, and long-range plans to meet their critical needs. In regards to resources, managers work closely to select the employees they need to lead in important roles. They seek employees who have essential skills, talents, knowledge, and experience to remain competitive in today's changing business environment. Completing this model will help you become the employee that management seeks out for important roles. There is no guarantee for complete success, however, this model will increase your chances of success and the success of your organization.

In Conclusion

Today's organizations face many challenges and issues. For organizations to change successfully and grow, front, mid-, and top-level managers and their teams need to align themselves with the organization's leadership, strategies, structure, systems, and culture. While variables are inevitable, we have learned that in the areas of human resources and succession planning, one issue of consideration is always constant: are employees developing themselves in ways that align their personal effectiveness, needs, and satisfaction with the achievement of the organization's strategic objectives?

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