

Goal-Setting and Career Strategies: What's the Connection

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine the connection between goal-setting and career strategies. Underpinned by the Goal-Setting Theory, this research posited that goal-setting exerts a significant impact on the career strategies implementation. A total of 256 academic staffs who worked in the Malaysian public universities participated in this research. The regression results indicated that goal-setting is the driving force for academic staffs to engage in career strategies implementation. This research includes a detailed discussion of the research findings as well as the theoretical and practical ramifications of this study.

Keywords: goal-setting; career strategies; academic staff; public universities

1. Introduction

There has been increasing interest in the careers of academic staffs over the last few years. This is due to the recognition of the World Bank that “education” is one of the parameters in the knowledge-based economy index (World Bank, 2008). The knowledge-intensive industry – universities, have been found to have more economic values since universities consist of large groups of educated and talented individuals (i.e. academic staff) who create and share knowledge through new technologies for the purpose of commercialization and wealth creation (Arokiasamy, Maimunah, Aminanh & Jamilah, 2011). Therefore, academic staffs who are engaged in the conception of novel knowledge can be recognized as one of the significant human capital to contribute to the knowledge-based economy (Tan, Johanim & Khulida, 2016). Therefore, the issues of career development of academic staffs need to be highlighted as it can directly impact their passion towards their job responsibilities and indirectly affect universities’ ability to contribute towards nation’s vision 2020. Hence, this research is conducted to enrich the growing body of knowledge in career development domain and to examine the link between goal-setting and career strategies of university academic staffs.

2. Literature Review

Goal-setting is the process of identifying personal aspiration that to be gained in future. This signifies that without having career goals, individuals will lose direction in their life and may not be able to steer their efforts in the right direction. Chang (2002) and Cairo (2006) revealed that career goals should be specific and in a clear form to establish how, when and what the individual wants to accomplish. This would enable the individuals to review how well they are doing now as compared to the past. On the other hand, career strategies are tactics that individuals take to simplify the effort needed to attain their career aspiration (Gould & Penley, 1984). Individuals will implement career strategies to manipulate their difficult situation, so as to assist them to achieve their career goals. Lau and Pang (2000), and Kuo (2006) agreed with this point of view by defining career strategies as intended actions performed by individuals to achieve their career goals in an organisation. Past studies, such as Gould and Penley (1984) have identified the types of strategies (i.e., developing skills and expertise, working outside of office hours, nominating oneself to assume greater responsibility, getting support from experienced person, extending networking within and outside the organization, agreeing immediate superior’s opinion, and expressing favourable evaluation of immediate superior) that individuals use to advance their career progression. As indicated by Goal-Setting Theory, the primary influence on individuals’ career strategies implementation is the identification of personal goals (Locke & Latham, 1990).

Chang (2002) suggested that a career goal needs to be supported by suitable strategies. This is because career goals can provide individuals with a clearer view of what they want to achieve in the forthcoming years, and this had triggered their intention to engage in career strategies implementation to attain the goals (Aryee & Debrah, 1993). As stated by Locke and Latham's (1990), the desire of an individual to attain career goals had act as a motivational mechanism to spur him/her to strategize his/her actions to attain the career goals. Therefore, the implementation of career strategies is initiated by the personal career aspirations.

3. Methodology

This is a cross-sectional quantitative study, where data were collected through questionnaire. The samples (i.e. academic staffs) of this research are drawn from eight public universities that are located in the Peninsular Malaysia. A total of 400 set of questionnaires (i.e.50 set for each of the eight elected public universities) were distributed to the targeted sample via purposive sampling technique. Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 256 questionnaires were usable for further analysis.

In terms of measurement, measures for goal-setting (5-items) were adapted from Gould (1979). Meanwhile, career strategies (8-item) were measured by Gould and Penley's (1984) career strategy inventory. The responses for goal-setting were made on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. However, the responses for career strategies were made on 5-point Likert-scale that ranged from (1) almost never to (5) very often.

4. Results

The respondents included 107 male and 149 female. Most of the respondents' age ranged from 36 – 45 years (42.9%). In terms of academic achievements, 127 respondents (49.6%) have Master's degree while 111 respondents (43.4%) have Doctoral degree. Most of the respondents (41.8%) indicated that they have worked in the respective university for between two to seven years. Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1. Regression analysis was carried out to examine the link between goal-setting and career strategies.

Table 1. Results of the descriptive and correlation analysis

Variables	M	SD	α	1	2
Goal-setting	3,995	0.508	0.802	-	
Career strategies	3.311	0.557	0.755	0.467**	-

Note: **p<0.01; α = reliability; M = mean; SD = standard deviation

Table 2. Results of the regression analysis of goal-setting and career strategies

Predictors	Model 1 Std. β	Model 2 Std. β
Step 1: Control Variables		
Gender	-0.241**	-0.162**
Age	-0.052	-0.026
Education level	-0.017	-0.054
Step 2: Independent variable		
Career planning		0.452**
R ²	0.041	0.241
Adjusted R ²	0.030	0.230
R ² change	0.041	0.200
F-change	3.634*	66.260**

Note: **p<0.01; Dependent variable = career strategies

Table 2 depicted the three control variables (i.e. gender, age, and education level) which accounted for 4.1% ($R^2 = 0.041$) of the variance in career strategies. By adding goal-setting, the R^2 value increased to 0.241. This implied that goal-setting explained an additional 20% (R^2 change = 0.200) of the variance in career strategies. The result indicated that goal-setting ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.01$) is the driving force for academic staffs to engage in career strategies implementation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results confirmed the proposition that goal-setting has a direct influence on the implementation of career strategies. The results signified that academicians who have actively been engaged in goal-setting are more likely to implement career strategies to achieve their career goals. These results are significant because they signify that academic staffs are likely to take charge by planning their own careers. By having clear career aspirations, academicians can strategize their career excellently.

From the aspect of theoretical implication, the findings of this research provide full support for the theoretical proposition of Goal-Setting Theory. Specifically, goal setting influences academicians in developing personal experiences and competencies via the implementation of career strategies. Importantly, this research provides additional knowledge to the literature on career development. From another viewpoint, the findings of this research also provide important ideas to the Registrar's Department of public universities. The Registrar's Department of public universities should realize that successfully facilitating academic staffs to manage their career will enhance academicians' commitment and be more likely to contribute towards university performance. Universities should not only make promotional chances available for academicians, but should also offer a series of formal career management support, such as mentoring, coaching, career counselling, career resources centre, and information systems to assist academicians in managing their careers. The cooperation from both sides (i.e. academicians and university) is needed to promote each other to achieve a win-win situation.

6. Acknowledgement

Authors would like to thank Universiti Utara Malaysia for the financial support in conducting the research by awarding the Leadership Development Scheme (LEADS) Grant.

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