Your career may well be the primary vehicle for satisfying many of your personal needs, i.e. your need to feel a sense of belonging, to feel appreciated and to achieve your potential. While we all have different interpretations of these needs, your job(s) can play a key role in satisfying them.¹

It’s important, therefore, that you see your career as something you manage. Organisations will support many aspects of your career development, e.g. learning new skills, acquiring relevant knowledge, etc. But, it’s ultimately your responsibility to ensure that your unfilled needs are satisfied to avoid de-motivation, poor performance or unhappiness.

‘Jobs for Life’
Gone are the days when everyone could join a company from school or university and expect to be employed by them until you retire. The new world of work now requires organisations to be adaptable, cost efficient and able to change to meet the demands of society. They are therefore required to constantly look at, and improve, quality and productivity. Human beings are one of the resources at their disposal to achieve their aims. However, human resources have a significant impact on costs, the delivery of service and the speed of change. Employers are therefore constantly evaluating their workforce to ensure that it possesses the necessary competencies (skills, experience, knowledge and behaviours) to achieve organisational objectives.

Mutual Benefits
So, by understanding the needs of your organisation you will be able to identify the roles that will play a part in satisfying your personal needs and longer-term career goals. If you are able to appraise whether or not a role

¹ Further references material can be found here: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/main/newMN_CDV.htm
within an organisation is going to result in mutual benefits then you are able to make sensible career choices. Of course, the overall objective is a win-win situation where you enjoy a role that plays to your strengths and satisfies your needs and your employer is able to utilise and develop your competencies to satisfy their objectives and longer-term goals.

**Steps to Managing your Career**

It’s rare that people plan exactly what they are going to do with their life and how. It’s more likely that a person’s career evolves out of self-exploration and opportunity. With this in mind, there will be times during your career when you feel in a rut or dissatisfied with a certain role. It’s on occasions like this when you need to reappraise matters. The model below is designed to help you review where your career is now and make any necessary changes.

**STEP 1: Identify your personal drivers**
- Identify your primary needs, e.g. to pay the mortgage.
- Identify your personal needs. Ask yourself what do I need from my career? Think about the part your career plays in your life compared to other aspects, e.g. family. Does your job need to suit certain domestic circumstances?
- Identify your true desires. What will make you feel truly fulfilled – what are your measures of success?
- How many of your needs have you or are you fulfilling?
- What do I know about myself that will help me make good career decisions? My preferences regarding: working environment/culture, industry or sector, working with people and management, location, hours of work, holidays, etc.
- What’s important to you, e.g. do you have a set of personal values or beliefs?
- What do you know about your personality and style, e.g. are you gregarious, pragmatic, assertive, shy, etc.

**STEP 2: Audit your talents**

Audit your career and life to date. Include jobs, leisure and social activities:
- What skills, experience and knowledge have you acquired (and would like to acquire)?
- What responsibilities have you had?
- What have you achieved? Consider your outputs and the outcomes from your various endeavours.
- What are your key strengths?
- What has been the highlight(s) of your career/life to date?

**STEP 3: Survey the working landscape**

Understand what opportunities are available and where these might be. Consider:
- Sign up for job alerts for organisations/roles that interest you and read Job Descriptions to get an understanding of what is required for various roles
- Keep abreast of the news; what types of career options are out there?
- Talk to others about their stories and their jobs to get an understanding of what working life is like in other areas

**STEP 4: Check your progress**
- To what extent does your current situation meet your needs, desires and preferences?
- How much of your talent is being used/developed?
- How could you improve things: make adjustments to your working style, negotiate changes to your current job, identify and exploit opportunities to address any gaps or change your role, decide that you need to move on to continue to further satisfy your needs
Progressing Your Career

Careers rarely move forward by themselves. While your employer may take an active interest in developing your skills and knowledge, it’s ultimately your responsibility to achieve your long-term career goals. Everyone has different career ambitions. However, whether you want to become the next chief executive or just fancy a change of scenery, the following tips should help you make progress.

1. Exploit opportunities

If you feel that your talents are not being fully utilised or developed, look for opportunities where you can apply your skills or gain experience. For example, volunteer to organise an event or be part of a working party, join a project team, offer to help induct new team members or overhaul ineffective systems or processes. Keep your eye on internal bulletins for vacancies or secondment opportunities. Ask colleagues in other departments about any future opportunities and ask them how best to make your interest known. Ask your manager about job rotation or shadowing programmes.

2. Increase your visibility

Not all career development opportunities are easy to spot or create. So, in order to make sure you are considered for any that arise, you will need to increase your visibility within the organisation through self-promotion. Self-promotion is about making others aware of your abilities and ambitions. In order to build this awareness, you will need to market yourself and demonstrate your talents wherever possible. Exploit the opportunities that come your way, as mentioned above, and try to create your own. Think especially about promoting your ambition and potential in order to find opportunities to develop your skills and knowledge, e.g. if you want to manage others, you’ll need to demonstrate that you are responsible and have good interpersonal skills. Some additional suggestions are:

- participate actively and positively in meetings
- get involved in events and team activities, e.g. exhibitions, social events, charity work, staff council meetings, etc
- offer to buddy, coach or mentor other team members
- get to know people at all levels in other departments
- write articles for inhouse newsletters and magazines

3. Discuss your career

… with your manager. A career discussion with your manager can help you work out the best ways of bringing the opportunities you are looking for into your current role. Be clear in your own mind what it is you want to achieve and present some suggestions or options. You should work in partnership with your manager to discover solutions that are mutually beneficial. Be realistic and open to feedback and advice. Remember your manager will have objectives to meet and boundaries to work within.

… with your colleagues/friends. If you’re struggling to find any direction or answers to your career questions, ask your friends. If you feel frustrated and not sure how to take the initiative, ask the people whose opinion you value what they think you are good at or should be pursuing.

… with your family/partner/etc. Your career will impact on the people in your life outside your job. Their opinions will be valid and they often have a very good insight into your true needs.

4. Network

Networking is a method of self-promotion and can be done both internally within an organisation, and externally. It involves building a directory of contacts with whom you can build productive, long-term, mutually beneficial
relationships. Your contacts are people you can call upon for advice, information, help or support. Active networking involves targeting certain individuals or environments to plug gaps. For example, if you want to know more about marketing, you’ll need to find people who work in that field by either asking your existing contacts or attending events where marketing people are likely to be.

Some networking tips:

- Make the most of any networking opportunities in order to find new contacts to add to your network. For example, join a professional association, keep in touch with former colleagues, participate in web forums or networking groups and attend events.
- Talk to your contacts about yourself, your career and your skills in a way that is clear and memorable.
- Find out as much as you can about your contacts so that you can do your best to help them in return.
- Work at maintaining the relationship. Get to know your contacts on a personal basis and keep in touch regularly. Don’t just contact them when you need their help.

5. Develop your knowledge

The more you know about yourself the easier it is to identify the right career opportunity. The more you know about what’s available the greater choice you’ll have. It’s important, therefore, to be knowledgeable about your field of interest and to research other areas to explore any potential opportunities.

When considering your career options and choices, do you know what skills and experience you need? Do you know enough about the industry or sector to gauge whether opportunities are easy to find and the operating environment will suit you? Do this by:

- looking at the job market and noting the requirements for the type of job you would like to do
- tapping into your network for contacts in your field of interest
- attending events, meetings, exhibitions, etc.
- reading relevant journals, magazines and publications

6. Create a toolkit

Being able to seize an opportunity when it presents itself is crucial. Whether the opportunity is a job that’s been advertised or a chance meeting with someone who thinks they can help you, you must be ready to respond in the most impressive and professional way. Consider the following as essential career progression tools:

- **CV and covering letter.** Keep your CV up to date. Submitting a CV is often the first step in the recruitment process and yours must stand out from the crowd. A good, well-presented CV is therefore key to getting an interview and is your first opportunity to make a good impression. Always tailor your CV to the role you’re applying for. Employers are looking for a match between your abilities and their requirements. Always send your CV with a covering letter in which you should introduce yourself, explain why you’re interested in the role and why you think you are a strong candidate.

- **Interview technique.** Interviews can be nerve-racking but are the most common way of assessing candidates. Remember, an interview is an exchange of information and is your opportunity to evaluate the role against your career criteria so ask questions when invited to do so. Ask a colleague to interview you so you can practise talking about yourself and articulating your talents.

- **Journaling.** Maintain a record of the achievements, skills and other competencies you develop throughout your career. Note all relevant development activities and events, responsibilities and achievements so you can update your CV accordingly.
Even More Questions to Ask Yourself…

1. Values & Skills

Establish your work life priorities by answering the following questions:

- What is meaningful in your work life? Where do you derive your sense of purpose from? How do you contribute?
- Define the rewards and incentives, financial and otherwise, that are truly important to you? How important is money?
- In which environment are you happiest (an office, working outdoors, from home)? How do you like to work (teams, autonomously)? What would be the ideal culture and environment for you to work in?
- If you had multiple offers to consider, which would be the deciding factors?
- How would you ideally like to balance your work, family and free time? How might this be achieved? What value do you place on your leisure time?
- How important to you is where you live?
- What are your skills, professional and personal? What jobs are best suited to these?
- In what country, industry and company do you want to work? Can you identify 20 companies for whom you would like to work and who could use your skill and experience?
- What makes you different from everyone else? What is your personal competitive advantage? Do you need to ask others (colleagues and family) to identify the latter?
- In what areas could you use more training or knowledge?
- If you are unhappy or dissatisfied in your current role, why is this? Is it something you can change, or do you need to move job?

2. Personal Branding

Use the following questions to establish your personal brand and decide how best to market yourself:

- Do you have a quality CV that highlights all your achievements? Does it differ in style and tone from the standard business résumé? Is it tailored to match each job for which you apply?
- Do you make covering letters individual? Are they specific to each job for which you apply?
- Is your résumé up to date?
- Is your dress and appearance fitting for the company for which you are hoping to work or for whom you are already working?
- Have you pre-prepared answers to standard résumé questions, including accomplishments and your own questions? Have you practised interviews? Have you identified your interview style? Do you need help?
- Are you prepared to chase every lead? If you do not hear from a prospective employer, do you follow up?
- What is your reputation in the workplace? How do others see you? What are your perceived strengths and weaknesses?

3. Networking

The most effective way to advance your career is through personal networks. Answer the following questions:

- Have you compiled a list of family, friends and business contacts who might be able to help you? Have you carefully planned what you are going to say to them?
- Are you networking enough? Do you keep in touch with contacts? Do you do your best to be visible and help others?
- Are you using all available resources (career fairs, online recruiters, head-hunters)?
- Do you have a database to keep track of your applications, contacts and progress? Are you in danger of losing telephone numbers or contact names?
• Have you considered joining professional associations or business forums? If you are a member already, do you network with your peers?
• Have you identified your job targets? How much do you know about each of them, their history, culture and financial performance? How can you develop contacts in these organisations?

4. Performance

Consider the following when managing your career from the workplace:
• Do you effectively deal with office politics? Could you improve on your people management skills?
• Do you have a trusting relationship with your colleagues? Do you have an internal personal network? Do you have a mentor or sponsor within your organisation?
• Are people aware of the good work you do?
• Do you understand the culture and mission of your organisation? Do you understand your own role within that?
• Are you responsive to change and up-to-date with the latest technologies and improvements?
• Are you exploiting opportunities at work to expand your skills and knowledge?

5. Long-term Planning

Use the following to consider your whole career, and where you wish to go:
• Do you have a professional development plan? Have you considered relevant professional qualifications? Have you contacted universities and professional bodies with a view to obtaining these?
• Do you have an idea of where you would like to be in one, five and ten years’ time? How do you plan to achieve this?
• Do you have a financial planning programme? Do you effectively manage pensions, savings and debts?
• Do you have a fall-back option if you lose your job today? Are you continually updating your network in the event that you have to use it?
• Have you identified short-term goals? Are they in line with your medium and long-term strategies?