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The Logic of Career Planning: Concepts, Functions, and Mechanisms for Individual Development

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Abstract: ***Human development has long been a subject of global scholarly inquiry, with particular interest in whether universal rules govern individual growth trajectories. Career planning serves as a methodological framework for navigating this process, offering a structured approach to pre-designing optimal pathways that align with each individual's unique potential and aspirations, thereby facilitating efficient and self-congruent development. Despite its practical significance, career planning remains inadequately understood by many. This paper aims to elucidate the foundational logic of career planning by systematically delineating the conceptual relationships among its definition, functional scope, and operational mechanisms, with the goal of rendering the field more accessible and actionable to a broader audience.***

Keywords: Human development; Career planning; Basic logic.

1. INTRODUCTION

The basic premises for the existence and research of career planning theory and technology are as follows: First, everyone's time from birth to death has an upper limit, and human life and living are subject to this time limit; Second, the normal needs of an individual during their life are guaranteed by exchanging their own resources (intelligence or skills) with the market or society (occupation or work); Third, except for a very small number of individual resources obtained through genetic factors, the vast majority of individuals obtain them through acquired training; Fourth, in the context of increasing competition and decreasing information gap, most individuals' own resources do not have comparative advantages; Fifth, every individual seeks better development for themselves, and seeking maximum value within limited time has become a common concern; Sixth, from the above elaboration, it can be found that how to make an individual's resources have comparative advantages in competition is a key point of crucial importance in individual development. The theory and technology of career planning focus on this issue. Why career planning theory and technology can solve this problem and what its basic logic for solving problems is are the core contents to be discussed in this paper.

2. CORE ISSUES AND MAIN VIEWS

Whether the development of a person's life is subjectively controllable by the individual or a result of passive acceptance, subject to external environmental changes, is a worldwide question and a topic of constant debate among experts, scholars, and the general public. It has even been explored in the philosophical realms of materialism and idealism. Currently, there is no unified understanding of this issue in domestic academic circles, but various views prevail among the public: many elderly people who have experienced life tend to hold fatalistic views such as "man's fate is predetermined by heaven" because "plans can't keep up with changes"; on the other hand, young people are often "fearless like newborn calves" and believe they have the ability to do what they want. Whether one's fate is predetermined by heaven or one is the master of one's own life, the truth of these two propositions is the premise and foundation for the establishment of career planning theory.

A search on CNKI clearly reveals that basic research on career planning is extremely scarce, and existing studies mostly focus on career planning for college students [1]. This has actually greatly narrowed the normal research scope of career planning, and systematic research on career planning theories and techniques is almost non-existent in existing literature, making it impossible to summarize from a literature review perspective. Therefore, this paper can only expand its discussion based on early traditional career planning theories, such as the foundational research of authoritative masters in the field of global career planning and career education, including Donald E. Super (1910-1994, hereinafter referred to as Super), John Lewis Holland (1919-2008, hereinafter referred to as Holland), a psychology professor and career guidance expert at Johns Hopkins University in the United States, and Howard Gardner (1943-, hereinafter referred to as Gardner), a psychological development

scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the United States. From the perspective of analyzing the basic logic of career planning, analyzing based on these literatures is more intuitive.

3. ABSOLUTE LIFE SPAN AND RELATIVE GROWTH EFFICACY

In a broad sense, career refers to a person's entire life, while in a narrow sense, it refers to the stage of a person's career development. The age divisions from the perspective of career planning are based on a main line, which is the course of a person's career development. Most people spend a large part of their lives in a professional state [2]. From the perspective of career planning, the most important stage in a person's life is the career stage, which is the most important, or even the only and most direct platform for individuals to achieve their goals (except for a small number of people who directly inherit assets). The ultimate achievements a person can attain and the quality of their life or existence almost entirely depend on the efforts made during the career stage and the final results achieved. Therefore, how to enable people to maximize their abilities and strengths during this stage is the core content of career planning theory and technical research. Centering on the core of career and the main line of career development changes across various life stages, Super divided a person's life into five stages from a career perspective [3]:

First stage: Growth stage (0-14 years old): A period of individual mental growth and world cognition, during which individuals learn about themselves, the external world, understand the meaning of work, and form a healthy outlook on life through various learning methods and social practice activities.

Second stage: Exploration stage (15-24 years old): This is the stage of career identity, during which individuals make initial choices regarding their career scope, prepare and practice relevant learning and skills, convert the results of learning and practice into concrete career support, and implement them initially.

Third stage: Establishment stage (25-44 years old): Individuals begin to subjectively determine their position in the entire career, take on new family roles, and balance the relationship between family and career.

Fourth stage: Maintenance stage (45-65 years old): Individuals seek development in the established and suitable career field. The changes in this stage are mainly those of career growth rather than career changes. Individuals strive for promotion while consolidating their existing position.

Fifth stage: Decline stage: The focus gradually shifts from work to family and leisure. Individuals begin to arrange for retirement, start retirement life, and seek new spiritual satisfaction.

Throughout the cycle, Super emphasized the individual's multiple role identities and the transformation of roles in different periods, such as being a child, husband or wife, father or mother, while also being a learner, worker, leisure participant, and other identities. All these changes are interrelated and have strong causal relationships with each other. Among these, completing the corresponding tasks in different stages is very important. If a task is not completed in the current period, it is difficult to smoothly enter the next period to start a new task; only after this task is completed can a new task in the next period be initiated. Here, particular emphasis is placed on the importance of the exploration period, that is, the importance of the initial establishment period of an individual's career planning. Because without the first, there can be no second and third.

Regarding how to explore an individual's career planning, Holland, Gardner, and others have provided very practical technical methods, namely the career aptitude test proposed by Holland based on the person-job fit theory and the theory of multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner. These two scholars have provided strong technical support for the establishment of career planning from the perspectives of individual interests and abilities. Each individual has a career field they are interested in, and each individual has unique intelligence. By exploring an individual's career interest field and matching their unique intellectual strengths, the most suitable career for the individual can be positioned. On this basis, after completing career exploration, one can smoothly enter the establishment period, maintenance period... proposed by Super, thereby enabling the development of life to reach a state of relatively high cost-effectiveness.

4. BASIC LOGIC OF CAREER PLANNING THEORIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

According to career planning theory, an individual's career can be planned in advance, and compared with individuals without planning, those who grow and develop based on career planning have a higher degree of

achievement, which is the significance of studying career planning theories and techniques. The length of life is not equal to the height of life. The "height of life" mentioned here refers to the degree of goals that can be achieved in a certain field based on an individual's own conditions (physical + intellectual). For example, if a high jumper has athletic talent for high jump (such as height, jumping ability, explosive power, etc.), after acquired professional training, the height he can jump is predictable, which is also the optimal competitive state relative to his own conditions (not necessarily in horizontal comparison). The time when he reaches the optimal competitive state is not positively correlated with the growth of his age; on the contrary, as he grows older and exceeds the best age stage for competition, his competitive state will decline with age. There are two key factors contributing to the achievement of his best competitive state: first, the timing of identifying high jump as his advantageous event; second, starting planned, professional, and scientific training in a timely manner. These are the keys to determining the level of his competitive performance. Conversely, if he fails to identify his advantageous event in a timely manner and misses the best training period, or identifies the advantageous competitive event but does not receive professional training, it will be difficult to achieve the optimal competitive performance.

The example above is analogous to human development. Human life is limited, and everyone has expectations for themselves. Constrained by the length of life, one must achieve higher goals within a limited time frame. At this point, the "cost-effectiveness" of time and efficiency becomes particularly important, meaning the higher the efficiency achieved per unit of time, the higher the efficiency of life. For instance, John Arnold, an American hedge fund manager and genius trader, announced his retirement at the age of 38 with $3 billion in hand 4. Another example is Chinese snooker player Ding Junhui, who became a national champion, world champion, and professional player at the age of 15. The commonality among these successful cases is that these individuals maximized their own advantages early on (by identifying their advantageous competitive events early and actively engaging in training and competition). Conversely, the time to achieve goals will be significantly prolonged, and many people never accomplish their goals in their lifetime [5]. What's more tragic is that many people have no (or no clear) goals throughout their lives. Take Liu Hanqing, a mathematical prodigy from Xinghua, Taizhou, Jiangsu Province. He was admitted to Harbin Institute of Technology at the age of 16 but failed to obtain a graduation certificate because he was obsessed with mathematics and neglected other studies. After dropping out and returning home, he continued to be immersed in "mathematics" for more than 20 years, and now he only relies on a monthly subsistence allowance of 400 yuan from the government to maintain his life [6]. Although these people have obvious advantageous competitive events, they did not enter the corresponding training path. As time goes by, their competitive advantages gradually diminish, making it impossible to achieve their goals by leveraging their own advantages. As for those who neither have clear goals (individual advantages) nor invest in corresponding training, they spend their lives competing in non-advantageous events, and naturally, it is difficult for them to achieve good results. This is the purpose of promoting career planning theories and techniques.

Gardner, the founder of the theory of multiple intelligences, believes that everyone is a genius in their area of greatest expertise. Finding one's strengths and then putting in the effort—with just 10,000 hours, one will become a true expert in that field. This is a fact and truth told to the world by the "10,000-hour rule" proposed by Canadian author and speaker Malcolm Gladwell [7]. How to maximize goals within a relatively limited time, a question that seems to belong to economics, perfectly aligns with the theory of career planning. The answer is simple: individuals should focus more of their time on the fields they love and excel at [8], which will achieve the best cost-effectiveness for individual development. Based on the above discussion, the basic logic of career planning theories and techniques can be summarized into the following three points:

Every individual expects to have an efficient life, but the length of life has an upper limit, and achieving the best goals within the limited period is the ultimate life issue that individuals pursue;

Second, every individual has their own area of expertise, and in the process of pursuing an efficient life, wholeheartedly devoting oneself to achieving value exchange in one's area of expertise is the optimal choice for achieving high cost-effectiveness;

Third, proactively exploring and early identifying one's area of advantage and fully investing in it is the most important path and means to achieve maximum utility.

This is the basic logic behind the existence and function of career planning theories and technologies.

5. CONCLUSION

The development of individuals is not only a fundamental issue for a country's development but also a key aspect that every organization, family, and even individuals themselves must face directly. The subtext of Liang Qichao's statement "If the youth are strong, China is strong" is that the youth are not only strong in the present but also in the future, which can ensure China's strength. The key to ensuring that the youth are strong now and will remain strong in the future is that each youth can continuously develop their strong projects, so as to ensure that if the youth are always strong, the country will definitely be strong. Currently, whether it is teenagers or young adults, and regardless of whether they are strong or not, it is unknown how many people can clearly understand their own advantages and develop them. Judging from available data, very few middle schools in the country include career planning education in their curriculum. As Wen Yu (2009) pointed out, the majority of young people receive almost zero career planning education before entering university [9]. During the author's practice of promoting career planning education in high schools across multiple provinces from 2017 to 2019, it was also clearly felt that teachers and students in various schools were unfamiliar with the field of career planning. From the perspective of relevant literature retrieved on CNKI, nationwide research and basic theoretical research on career planning are extremely rare. This article aims to analyze from the perspective of the basic logic of career planning, hoping that more people can start from the beginning, then move to the second step, then the third, and then generate everything. Doing a good job in career planning can help a person move from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. As Marx pointed out, "The true realm of freedom only begins when human beings take the development of their own abilities as an end in itself." Only when a person pursues their own development in the field they like most, are most good at, and consider most meaningful can they ultimately move towards their own realm of freedom

Project Name

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