

# Barriers and constraints to women's career in Silesia Province

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** The paper aims at presenting the issues concerned with barriers and constraints of women's professional career using a theoretical and empirical approach.

**Conclusions/findings:** The paper presents results of a survey on women's professional career conducted on a group of 358 women and men from Silesia province. The survey referred to three areas: barriers and constraints to women's professional career; female management style, work and private life. The results were analyzed both in the context of general results for the entire group of respondents. On the basis of the results, conclusions were drawn regarding the existing barriers and hindrances to women's professional career.

**Key words:** *career, professional career, women, Silesia Province.*  
JEL: E24, J16, J24, O15.

## **1. Introduction**

Present time organizations make considerable efforts to ensure their employees' growth, which is to be seen as a set of measures aimed at preparing employees to perform their jobs and fill positions that have a high level of responsibility. Planning professional career of employees defines their development within an organization in line with its needs and preferences. Career planning brings benefits for both organization and its participants in that it provides the following: it creates ties between employees and organization; lowers the costs related to recruitment, selection and excessive movement of employees; it facilitates personal and professional growth without having to change the employer; and it strengthens organizational culture and demand for

adequately qualified staff. The essential feature of career planning is the combination of the employee's individual career plans with those of the organization. In order to achieve the above objectives it is helpful to provide employees with guidelines and incentives which they need so that they could use their abilities and to "make a career" corresponding to their talents and aspirations. The aim of the paper is to show barriers and constraints to professional career while taking into account particularly the aspects characteristic for women's professional career using a theoretical and empirical approach.

## 2. A theoretical approach to professional career

Numerous authors of publications on this subject are involved in studying career and its accurate definition. Career is a concept most closely related to the sub-discipline of human resources management. According to A. Pocztowski, "career" denotes "an exemplary sequence of attitudes and behaviors evinced by an individual and related to his/her work experience, or, in other words, a professional development of an individual during his/her working life (Pocztowski 2007: 306). According to *Manager's Lexicon*, career denotes the achievement of ever higher positions (vertical career) or professional specializations (horizontal career). This term is associated with a professional success. Career development, according to the *Lexicon* above, is defined as one's own career planning and one's personal growth and training, supervision, usually by a so called mentor, with all these factors allowing one to take on more responsible tasks in the future (Śmid 2000: 151). According to D.T. Hall, the concept of career can encompass a variety of aspects (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Career aspects by D.T. Hall**

Career aspects	Characteristics of career aspects
Career conceived as a profession	In this view, career refers only to professions within which Professional growth is clearly defined and determined by the sequence of work positions. Here career unfolds through the accumulation of knowledge and skills specified in advance by the demands of another position (e.g. professional career of lawyers, public officers, teachers).
Career conceived as advancement	Adopting the advancement approach, career is made through achieving „something more”; this may signify ever higher positions in organizational structure, working in an organization perceived as „better”, wider

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	opportunities in terms of decision-making or broader power
Career as a part of jobs performed during one's professional lifespan	This aspect pertains to the personal model of subsequent jobs and is an attribute of only working individuals.
Career conceived as a sequence of experiences	Of importance in this approach is experience which denotes the development of inner processes of an individual such as: aims and aspirations; satisfaction, self-concepts/vision of oneself, attitudes towards work influenced by changing roles played by the actor; as an example one can indicate the role of a housewife who beside this role fulfills other functions as well, e.g. of a mother, care taker, educator.

Source: self-reported data based on: (Hall 1976: 1-3).

The concept of career according to D.T. Hall is more holistic within the perspective of one's individual life. In this case the responsibility for planning, advancing and managing career lies with the individual and not the organization (Altman, Baruch 2012: 2). The perspective encompassing both entities: the individual and the organization turns around, and then it is the organization that becomes an instrument of the growth of an individual (Forstenlechner, Baruch 2013: 635). Career unfolds over several stages which are dependent on the stages of human life from discovery, search – the years of learning in high school, to retirement (Zajac, 2007).

The term „career” is perceived slightly differently by J. Greenhaus and G. Callanan in that they indicate it as an attribute of profession, of organization and of individual. In adopting this approach, the authors view career as a pattern of experiences related to work, with career exerting influence on the life of an individual (Greenhaus, Callanan 1994: 5). Summing up the above considerations, one can argue that career denotes an inimitable sequence of professions, positions, roles, attitudes and values evinced by an individual and it is shaped by professional work (Miś 2015: 49-50).

According to B. Kożusznik, the concept of career is predominantly associated with professional activity (Kożusznik 2005: 243-244). Professional career denotes growth of employees over the time of their professional activity, unfolding through performing various jobs, fulfilling relevant functions and occupying different positions in the organization's structure. Considered in an inner-organizational aspect, career means subsequent jobs related to a specific position within organizational hierarchy which an employee performs during his/her employment in a particular organization. The realization of professional careers of individual employees proceeds with

employees shifting horizontally and vertically within the existing organizational structure of a given enterprise. With respect to the subjective side of careers, they are linked to the life cycle of employees, their personal growth, their pursuit of objectives and the satisfaction of their specific needs (Kopertyńska 2002: 47).

Professional career may be perceived as a route (and ever more frequently a few alternative routes) leading to professional excellence and satisfaction derived from one's professional work (Wierenek 2001: 158). Career is often viewed as an outcome of work which takes into account tactics and relationships (Müller 2000: 158). M. Kostera argues that the opportunity of advancing one's professional career is the second basic type of remuneration. Here, career is conceived as a route towards professional excellence (viewed individually) and being satisfied with professional life. As such, the opportunity of career advancement, which is a very effective type of remuneration, should be adjusted, if feasible, to the personal needs of employees interested in making a career (Kostera 1998: 100-101).

W. Chojnacki and A. Balasiewicz define career as a sequence of jobs taken up by employees, including tasks performed, and functions and roles fulfilled by them. The authors' view is that career implies attaining an ever higher position, e.g. a professional or scientific position, or professional work development, that is, a list of posts attained within a particular profession. One might say that career is a vertical or sometimes horizontal mobility of employees which encompasses a development in terms of values, skills, abilities, interests, personality traits, knowledge pertaining to work, including institutional and non-institutional education. An individual career begins at the moment of placing a person at a particular work post and ending at the moment when the person leaves the organization. In this respect, career is influenced by the employee's changing responsibilities and functions, periods spent at different work positions, sporadic or regular promotions, transfers (redeployment, turnover of staff) and seldom demotion<sup>1</sup>.

Career as a route of professional development can also denote subsequent moving into increasingly higher positions, or it can be related to expanding one's competences as well as other benefits, also non-material ones, at the same or a parallel job. Success and career are viewed as positive aspects of professional and social life.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Chojnacki, A. Balasiewicz, *Człowiek w nowoczesnej organizacji. Wybrane problemy doradztwa zawodowego i personalnego*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006, p. 340.

### **3. Characteristics of women's professional career**

Intending to outline the features of career characteristic for women it is worth providing at first the description of the types of women according to their professional work. A. Moir and D. Jessel distinguish three types of women:

- „traditional women”, who place family and husband at the forefront and thus they can abandon their job if there is a smallest chance that the well-being of their family may be at risk,
- “women working at two jobs” who try to reconcile male and female traits, to become ultimately a good wife and a competent specialist,
- “women-innovators in their role” try to be successful in that they reject traditional female roles and adopt strategy that is typical for men (Moir, Jessel 2002: 237):

Among the types of women presented above, we encounter increasingly more frequently women who are innovators in their role in that they seek success and fulfillment in life not as a wife or a mother but as those who “make a career.” Nowadays organizations are more likely to be aware of the fact that women are incredibly valuable contributors to the process of work. Over the recent years women have proved that they choose professional success, showing their determination in undertaking any steps necessary to achieve it (Feldt 2010: 12). Therefore the suggestion is to include in the development of professional career special programs designed to support professionally successful women (Crampton & Mishra 1999), (Butler 2010 and Chen 2011).

Women who are active professionally never stop at trying to reach a compromise between the motivation of success and other motivations linked to their gender roles. They feel anxious about what their family may be deprived of because of their striving for professional achievements. This phenomenon is often termed “the fear of success syndrome” and is viewed as a barrier to women's creative development. Women's involvement in creative work engenders stress which arises from the conflict between their family role and professional role, which often manifests itself in that women feel guilty towards their family, as they believe that their professional roles will distort the fulfillment of their family roles. Moreover, women do not always can count on their husbands' acceptance, as well as that of other family members, for their occupational efforts. Faced with such situations women experience being constantly short on time, in a hurry, and failing to reach their full efficiency while performing various tasks. On top of that, women make attempts aimed at compensating the losses by specific behaviors at home. For instance, they become

overprotective towards their children, which may, however, have an opposite effect. This sense of guilt among women who are involved in creative work can also result in taking care of themselves and devoting much time to themselves by going shopping, to a beautician, going out, doing sport, etc. As the result, professionally active women tend to fail to appreciate their own professional achievements and prospects, they may feel dissatisfied with their professional roles, withdraw from task implementation, and thus weaken their role as a leader in professional situations. What is also noticeable is that women feel anxious about losing their femininity, hence some women who focused on professional career and for whom work was very valuable tried to build good relationships with men, while having considerable expectations in that men would see in them, first and foremost, women (Chomczyńska-Rubacha 2006: 91).

Women too often have a tendency to define success and professional achievements through the lens of male categories. Following this kind of logic they start “imitating the male model based on rivalry,” which requires in no small measure compulsiveness, egocentrism, ruthlessness, and in a sense putting on hold social and personal values, to which woman’s brain is simply not adapted. Success achieved by women adopting male methods and according to the so called men’s rules render motherhood impossible. The modern woman, however, engages too often in professional rivalries which she does not like at all, either in personal or in biological terms. The frequent outcome is women’s feeling of guilt and of failing as a woman, as an employee and as a mother (Moir, Jessel 2002: 235-236).

#### **4. Methodology and research findings**

The study was conducted between January 2016 and May 2016 on a group of 358 citizens of Silesia Province by a diagnostic survey method using a questionnaire devised by this paper’s authors. The questionnaire consisted of 27 questions split into three parts: barriers and limitations on *women’s professional career, female management style, work and private life*. The aim of the survey was to define the role of women in management. In the survey a non-probabilistic (non-random) sampling method was used, which is a purposeful selection. Owing to the sampling method applied, the results thus obtained cannot be generalized to the entire population. The results represent some characteristics, a section of reality and present some symptomatic opinions of the Silesia Province population. The survey tool was a questionnaire comprising 27 questions split into three groups: *Women’s professional career, Female management style, Work and private life*. In a

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certificate of origin of the questionnaire, questions were included pertaining to the following characteristics of the surveyed: gender, age, professional activity, job seniority, work position, the form of relationship, partner's professional activity, the number of children, place of residence (a sub-region of Silesia Province). A specific characteristic of the population surveyed is presented in Table 2.

In the part of the questionnaire *women's professional career* the results allowed for answering the following questions:

- what is professional career?
- does the present work position correspond to the vision of professional career?
- what are barriers and impediments to career?
- whether or not and in what areas do women discern discrimination?
- do women have opportunities in terms of promotion and self-actualization at work?
- which skills are distinctive for women in managerial roles?

**Table 2. The population characteristics (N=358)**

Respondents' characteristics		The structure of the surveyed (N)	The structure of the surveyed (%)
Gender	woman	178	49,7%
	man	180	50,3%
Age	less than 25 years of age	45	12,6%
	25-34	120	33,5%
	35-44	91	25,4%
	45-54	72	20,1%
	55-64	25	7,0%
	over 64 years of age	5	1,4%
Professional activity	yes	351	98,0%
	no	7	2,0%
Job seniority	less than 5 years	58	16,2%
	5-10 lat	89	24,9%

	11-15 lat	73	20,4%
	16-20 lat	45	12,6%
	21-25 lat	46	12,8%
	26-30 lat	14	3,9%
	powyżej 30 lat	33	9,2%
Work position	management staff	189	52,8%
	employee with no specific function	162	45,3%
	I don't work	7	2,0%
The form of relationship	legalized relationship	217	60,6%
	not legalized relationship	95	26,5%
	I am not in a relationship	46	12,8%
Partner's professional activity	yes	284	79,3%
	no	28	7,8%
	I am not in a relationship	46	12,8%
The number of children	I have no children	144	40,2%
	One	97	27,1%
	two	89	24,9%
	three	17	4,7%
	four	5	1,4%
	five and more	6	1,7%
Place of residence –a sub-region of Silesia Province	Central	203	56,7%
	North	45	12,6%
	South	60	16,8%
	West	50	14,0%

Source: self-reported data based on the survey.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to answer how they perceived the concept of professional career. Women most likely conceived of the notion of “professional career” as a path of one’s own professional development specified by oneself (48,3%), attainment of one’s professional goals set by oneself (36%), and advancing to ever higher work positions (14,6%), which is all presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. The essence and meaning of professional career according to the population (N=358)**

Item	woman		man	
	N	%	N	%
a path of one's professional development specified by oneself	86	<b>48,3%</b>	90	<b>50,0%</b>
achievement of professional goals set by oneself	64	<b>36,0%</b>	54	<b>30,0%</b>
advancing to increasingly higher work positions	26	<b>14,6%</b>	23	<b>12,8%</b>
receiving increasingly higher salary	2	1,1%	4	2,2%
receiving recognition from fellow workers, friends and family	-	-	6	3,3%
having a job at all	-	-	3	1,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: self-reported data based on the survey.

According to 67% of women surveyed (66,7% of men) their current job position corresponded to their vision of professional career. Moreover, according to respondents, men's were a more advantageous situation on the job market than that of women. Of this opinion is 78% of women and slightly over half of men (57,2%). Another area of focus referred to the discernment of discrimination on the Polish job market and to the indication of the areas where discrimination was present. Among respondents, as many as 73,6% of women suffered discrimination on the labor market, with men making up a much smaller group in this respect (52,2%). The main areas of discrimination observed by respondents included: age discrimination (79,1%), gender discrimination (78,7%) and disability discrimination (48,4%). Respondents were also asked about obstacles to the development of women's professional career in Polish companies (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Impediments to women's professional career in Polish companies (N=358)**

Items	Very frequently		frequently		difficult to say		seldom		never		Total
	N	% of N in the row	N	% of N in the row	N	% of N in the row	N	% of N in the row	N	% of N in the row	
Women at managerial position receive lower salaries than men do	69	19,3%	106	29,6%	137	38,3%	36	10,1%	10	2,8%	358
At the reduction of staffing women are the first to be laid off	27	7,5%	95	26,5%	155	43,3%	51	14,2%	30	8,4%	358
Women become victims of mobbing	78	21,8%	111	31,0%	129	36,0%	23	6,4%	17	4,7%	358
Women are less likely to be promoted than men	54	15,1%	136	38,0%	114	31,8%	37	10,3%	17	4,7%	358
Women are sent to less attractive trainings	29	8,1%	69	19,3%	166	46,4%	69	19,3%	25	7,0%	358

Source: self-reported data based on the survey.

The results of the study show that women in managerial positions were more likely to receive lower salaries than men (48,9%). In the situation of staff reduction women were the first to be laid off, which was confirmed by 34% of respondents. Women were very likely to become victims of mobbing at work (52,8%), with over half of respondents (53%) believing that women were less likely to be promoted than men.

An irrefutable argument is the fact that women encounter impediments and barriers while pursuing their careers, which has the effect that they are hold back in their growth. The barriers which are referred to can vary in their nature; however, their determinants tend to be deeply rooted in culture. Respondents were asked to indicate no more than three barriers to women's professional career. The most frequently cited barriers to women's professional career are as follows: maternity, which reduces the chance of women being promoted (56,4%), a stereotype stating that men are more suitable to management than women (39,1%), and having to have considerably higher qualifications in order to be given managerial functions (33,8%). The barriers to women's professional career are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Barriers to women's professional career**

Items	N	%	% of observations
a woman must have significantly higher qualifications to be given managerial functions	121	14,6%	<b>33,8%</b>
maternity reduces women's chances of promotion	202	24,4%	<b>56,4%</b>
a lack of flexible work time and the possibility of tele-working	85	10,3%	23,7%
women's access to the highest positions is hindered (glass ceiling, sticky floor, glass escalator, velvet ghetto)	108	13,1%	30,2%
a lack of structural help from companies and the state (company crèches, state or company based kindergartens, etc).	105	12,7%	29,3%
a stereotype is present that there is always time to promote a woman or raise her pay	28	3,4%	7,8%
a stereotype is present that man is more suitable to management than woman	140	16,9%	<b>39,1%</b>
I see no barriers	38	4,6%	10,6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>100,0%</b>	<b>231,0%</b>

Source: self-reported data based on the survey.

An important factor in women's professional career is also their family life, in particular, having children and a life partner. Professionally active women are likely to encounter challenges in that they have to reconcile a few roles such as that of an employee (or a superior), a housewife, a mother, a wife or a partner. Over half of respondents (56%) voiced the view that contemporary women preferred devoting themselves to professional career rather than family life. Undeniably interesting is the fact that almost half of the surveyed (45%) said that family life exerted a positive influence on the development of women's professional career, while having a child had a negative impact on this development. The reasons for this situation is that motherhood involves taking a break from work on account of maternity or parental leave, which in turn engenders difficulties in returning to the labor market. When asked whether legislation provided women with sufficient safeguards so as to enable them to devote themselves to family life without having to fear that they might lose their job, respondents answered that the legislation rather guaranteed this security but employers largely failed to comply with it (47%). A life partner can be of considerable support for women in the development of their career, and in particular the relationship between partners within which family duties are shared so that both women and men could take up a job (of this opinion is almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents).

## 5. Conclusions

In today's world professional work and active growth, as well as improvement of skills and qualifications represent a great challenge and an essential element of one's life. Through their determination and exceptional ability to organize time, women are able to reconcile harmoniously family life with a professional activity.

A significant problem in women's professional career is having to reconcile work with the obligations arising from the role of a wife and a mother. In this respect, a good solution is making working time more flexible. In the majority of the EU countries a part-time employment provides a solution to this problem. At times it may affect negatively the level of salary and women's career in the future; however, part-time employment is widely spread and is addressed, in particular, to women.

In line with the objective set in the paper, an analysis of the definition of professional career was conducted, while indicating the characteristic features of women's professional career. A significant portion of the paper is comprised of the analysis of the results of a survey designed to identify barriers and constraints to women's professional career with the survey being conducted on some members of the Silesia Province population.

The situation could be changed through the application of beneficial legal tools that would induce women to continue their professional career, such as security, job protection, comparable wages with a reduced working time, maintaining full pension rights (Dzięndzióra, Smolarek, 2012). What becomes then undisputable is the introduction of suitable legal instruments aiming at protecting women workers and accommodating women's specific needs which would be met according to the needs of the present labor market.

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