
Impact of Personal Branding on the Development of Professional Careers of Managers

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to present the importance of personal branding in the process of career development of managers, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research method was diagnostic survey, with a research questionnaire. The study was conducted between August 2018 and February 2019 on a group of 1842 respondents (managers). The main hypothesis was “personal branding has a positive impact on managers' professional development”.

Findings: Personal branding, i.e., creating a personal brand, appeared in theory and practice relatively recently. Managers have always been engaged in building a personal image, although they did not do so in a proper, systematic or fully conscious manner. It is the emergence of social media that made online positioning a key factor determining career. The population surveyed most often perceived personal branding as abilities to build reputation and image that are translated into trust and credibility. The respondents indicated that on today's job market professional development is best facilitated by social competencies.

Practical Implications: Managers should pay more attention to personal branding that an increased level of satisfaction can contribute to an increased work efficiency, bringing measurable results.

Originality/Value: Although there are many studies dedicated to employer branding, a relatively limited number of such researches are focused on personal branding for managers of organizations in their work careers. The article is, hence, an attempt to fill the aforementioned gap. Conducting the research is sufficient enough to learn about the personal branding and managers' satisfaction of the work. Furthermore, studies concerning personal branding may be an important source of information which employers and managers can apply to determine areas of further development.

Keywords: Personal branding, career, development of professional career, manager.

JEL Classification: M12, M51, M53, M54.

Paper Type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

With the changes occurring in the 21st century in social, economic and business spheres as well as in an individual's identity, the understanding of career also changed. Globalisation and increased impact of social forces provided stimuli for the emergence of global careers. At the micro level, these changes are seen in the understanding of norms and values as well as attitudes to life and work manifesting in new behaviours of individuals (Baruch, 2006).

Due to the fast pace of technological changes, mergers, acquisitions and restructuring, organisations have to see themselves as a place where an individual can acquire new, labour market desired skills and knowledge; act as a partner in a joint endeavour and actively participate in the development of their employees' careers (Valickas, Pilkauskaite-Valickiene, and Grakauskas, 2015). Activities aimed at the development of employees' careers should be adjusted to the changes occurring in the environment and take into account new career patterns. Employees who exhibit modern professional attitudes can better adapt themselves to the uncertain work environment (Uy, Chan, Ho, and Chernyshenko, 2015).

One of the challenges facing a manager today is using personal branding for the development of his/her career. Personal branding contributes to changes in the perception of career development. Career planning is about aligning an employee's individual career plans with those of the organisation. In order to achieve these aims, it is helpful to provide managers with the guidelines and incentives they need to use their predispositions and to "make a career" that will match their talents and aspirations. The aim of the paper is to present the importance of personal branding in the process of career development of managers, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Professional Career in the Theoretical Perspective

Today's organisations show interest in employee development. Employee development is usually understood as a set of activities aimed at preparing employees to do the job and hold more responsible job positions (Dzieńdziora, Grzesiak, and Wróbel, 2020). Planning of managers' professional careers defines their development within the organisation in accordance with its needs and preferences. Career planning benefits both the organisation and its members, namely: it ties employees to the organisation, reduces costs related to recruitment and selection as well as excessive employee turnover, facilitates personal and professional development without the need to change the employer, and preserves the organisational culture and demand for properly qualified employees (Dzieńdziora, 2009). Today's professional careers span a range of occupations and tasks, and are multi-faceted.

Numerous authors study career and seek to properly define the term. Career is a term most closely connected with the sub-discipline of human resource management. According to A. Poczowski, "career" means "a pattern of the sequence of an individual's attitudes and behaviours related to his/her work experience or, in other words, an individual's professional development over his/her life span" (Poczowski, 2008). According to *Leksykon menedżera* (Manager's lexicon), career refers to progress in held job positions (horizontal career) or professional specialisations (horizontal career). The term is often equated with professional success. The lexicon defines career development as career planning and personal development of an individual as well as training and supervision usually provided by the so-called mentor, which enables the individual to undertake more responsible tasks in the future (Śmid, 2000). According to D.T. Hall, the term "career" can cover a variety of aspects (Table 1).

Table 1. Aspects of a career according to D.T. Hall

| Aspects of a career | Characteristics of the aspects of as career |
|---|--|
| Career understood as an occupation | Viewed as an occupation, career refers only to professions with a clearly defined professional development determined by succession of job positions. Career is pursued by accumulation of knowledge and skills that are pre-determined by the requirements of a higher job position (e.g. professional career of lawyers, officials, teachers). |
| Career understood as advancement | Viewed as advancement, career is pursued by "achieving something more", which can be advancement to higher positions within the organisational structure, a job in an organisation perceived as "better", broader decision-making capabilities or a broader range of power. |
| Career as jobs done over the course of working life | It refers to an individual pattern of successive jobs and is an attribute of only working individuals. |
| Career understood as a sequence of experiences | Of significance in this view is experience, which refers to the development of an individual's inner processes such as: aims and aspirations, satisfaction, self-perception, attitudes towards work, which are affected by changing roles fulfilled by the individual. An example would be the role of a housewife who, in addition to this function, also fulfils other roles, such as that of a mother, caretaker, educator. |

Source: Own study based on Hall D.T., *Careers Organizations*, Goodyear, Santa Monica 1976, pp. 1-3.

The concept of career according to D.T. Hall is more holistic in the perspective of an individual life. In this case, the obligation of career planning and development, as well as its management, rests with an individual rather than an organisation (Altman and Baruch, 2012). The perspective of both the entities, the individual and the organisation, becomes reversed - the organisation becomes an instrument of the individual's development (Forstenlchner and Baruch, 2013). A career unfolds in a few stages that depend on the phases of human life, from exploring, searching - years of secondary school education - until to retirement (Zajac, 2017).

A different distinction between the meanings of the term "career" was made by J. Greenhaus and G. Callanan, who indicated that it can be seen as an attribute of an occupation, an attribute of an organisation and as an attribute of an individual. In this perspective, the authors perceive career as a pattern of work-related experiences that impacts the direction of an individual's life (Greenhaus and Callanan, 1994). Summing up the discussion above, it can be stated that a career is a unique sequence of an individual's jobs, job positions, roles, attitudes and values shaped by professional work (Miś, 2016).

According to Kożusznik (2003), the concept "career" is primarily associated with working life. A professional career means employees' development over the course of their working lives through performing various jobs, fulfilling appropriate functions and holding various positions within the structure of an organisation. In the intraorganisational aspect, it refers to successive job positions connected with a specific place in the organisational hierarchy that an employee holds over the course of his/her employment in a given organisation. Individual employees pursue professional careers by horizontal and vertical movement within the organisational structure existing in a given enterprise. Professional careers can be viewed from an objective perspective as changes in the position within the organisational hierarchy of a given enterprise. As far as their subjective aspect is concerned, careers are associated with employees' life cycle, their personal development, pursuit of goals and fulfilment of specific needs (Kopertyńska, 2002).

Professional career can be perceived as a path (more often as a few alternative paths) leading to professional perfection and work satisfaction (Wiernek, 2001). Career is often treated as an outcome of work that involves tactic and relationships (Müller, 2000). Kostera (1998) thinks that the opportunity of pursuing a professional career is the second basic type of rewording. In this case, career is understood as an (individually perceived) path towards professional perfection and achievement of working life satisfaction. Therefore, the opportunity to make a career, which is a very effective type of rewarding, should be, where possible, matched to the individual needs of an employee interested in a career (Kostera, 1998).

Chojnacki and Balasiewicz (2006) define career as a succession of the job positions held by an employee, performed jobs or/and fulfilled functions and roles. According to the authors, career means advancement to higher positions, e.g., professional or academic, or a course of an individual's working life, i.e., a list of successive positions held in a given occupation. One can say that career is vertical, and sometimes, horizontal mobility of an employee, and it involves development of work-related values, skills, abilities, interests, personality traits, knowledge, including institutional and non-institutional education. A person's individual career begins when he/she undertakes a given job position and ends when he/she leaves the organisation. It is affected by the employee's changing duties and functions, periods of holding specific job positions, sporadic or systematic promotions, transfers (transitions, turnovers) and, rarely, demotion (Chojnacki and Bialasiewicz, 2006).

Career as a path of professional development can also mean successive advancement to higher job positions or it involves extension of competencies and other benefits, including intangible ones, at the same or parallel position. Success and career are treated as positive aspects of working and social life.

2.2 Personal Branding and the Development of the Professional Career of Managers

In the contemporary literature on the subject, “*personal branding*” is a concept that appeared relatively recently, but its scale is growing at a remarkable pace. The term itself is not new, but its origins are accepted to date back to the 1940s. Peters (1997) is thought to be the precursor of the modern approach. The author claims that no matter how old we are, what position we hold in our job or which business line we work in, we all have to realise the importance of *branding* (Peters, 1997).

The term personal branding was coined in the United States, from where it came to Europe. It was noticed that, just like with commercial brands, the value of personal brand had a huge impact on the amount of profits earned by specific persons (politicians, scientists, celebrities) and allowed them to build their credibility in the eyes of their audience. Therefore, the term *personal branding* tends to be narrowed down to the issue of personal image and perception of a given person by his/her environment.

However, it is worth pointing out that this is a simplified version of “*personal branding*.” The concept can be defined at two levels (Trzeciak, 2015), the first level refers to the way an individual is perceived by his/her environment, whereas the second - to the way an individual can be distinguished from others. What makes an individual unique are: personality traits, education and, more frequently, also the exterior and appearance. In other words, personal branding is a process by which people seek to sell themselves (Khedher, 2014; Gujarathi and Kulkarni, 2018).

In identifying “*personal branding*”, Oleksyn (2014) points out a common misunderstanding, i.e., viewing an individual as a brand is seen as “commodification” of humans. Another misunderstanding is treatment of “*personal branding*” as “*package*” serving to sell the offered services (Oleksyn, 2014). In fact, it is about something much deeper - about discovering one's own professional identity, building values by which a given person is continuously guided in whatever job he/she has. According to Malinowska-Parzydło (2015), “*personal branding*” means creation of a personal brand by intentional and conscious management of one's image. Thus, the main element of this image is its personalisation, under the assumption that a specific person has a brand, and then becomes a brand in its own right. The strength of this brand is based on that person's reputation, popularity and credibility (Malinowska-Parzydło, 2015).

A personal brand comprises the biography, experience, skills, behaviours, appearance and name of a given person (James, 2009). It should reflect the willingness and ability to meet the needs and desires of a specific individual over a specified period of time (McNally and Speak 2002). Khedher (2014) defined personal branding as a process of conferring a unique personal identity, developing active relations between a brand and its target market, appreciating its impact on an individual's image and authenticity. The author also saw a brand as a tool for achieving personal and professional goals. Everyone can have a stable personal brand, considering one's own goals and employing proper strategies (Shafiee *et al.*, 2020).

Numerous authors emphasise that creation and development of personal branding is necessary for personal and organisational success. They include, inter alia, Lair, Sullivan, and Cheney (2005), Gehl (2011), Harris and Rae (2011), Schwabel (2011), Wetsch (2012), Khedher (2015), Gandini (2016). Khedher (2014) distinguished three phases of this process, shaping of the identity of personal brand, positioning of personal brand and assessment of personal brand.

The characteristic feature of the above-analysed definitions of "*personal branding*" is their highly persuasive character. The authors of these definitions, as put by T. Peters (1997), tend to address the recipient directly, and even direct him/her to take certain actions. This is meant to further emphasise the importance of building a personal brand. A lot of today's managers who are actively building their personal branding reject such a vision of professional career development. The prospect of a career that boils down to scrupulous fulfilment of orders in order to advance to a predefined position after a dozen or so years is less and less appealing. Thus, at a time of *personal branding* it becomes necessary to take a more flexible approach. In presenting the concept of a prospective professional career model, J. Rudnicki emphasises "*an employee's increasing self-awareness - awareness of one's value, possessed knowledge, predispositions and experience, set goals, capabilities and limitations as well as the roles fulfilled in the organisation*" (Rudnicki, 2014). While emphasising the need to move away from the traditional understanding of the shaping of career paths, A. Mayo notes that in the context of career management, representatives of organisations currently have three primary obligations (Mayo, 2002):

1. to analyse the level of competencies (which competencies the organisation will need in the future, and which ones it possesses now),
2. to help employees to achieve their professional aspirations,
3. to provide the connection between the two above elements.

Currently, a shift in the approach can be observed. People are no longer divided into those who need "*personal branding*" and those who do not. Scholars dealing with *personal branding* emphasise that everybody, whatever his/her job, should engage in building his/her brand. As a result of the earlier-mentioned advancements in

technology, an employee's name becomes a brand one way or another. It is important that the brand is strong. According to D. Schawbel, the key features of a strong personal brand are: authenticity, good reputation and visibility (Schawbel, 2012).

Numerous scholars note the growing importance of social media in building a personal brand (Shepherd, 2005; Arruda, 2005; Pace, 2008; Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Nolan, 2015; Gandini, 2016). For instance, Chen (2013) examined how personal branding is expanded through social media (YouTube). Similar studies were conducted by V. Tarnovskaya (2017). In most cases, the context of the studies included professional domain. Therefore, the main emphasis is placed on professionals who intentionally use social media to achieve professional success.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted between August 2018 and February 2019 on a group of 1842 respondents (managers) by the method of diagnostic survey using a self-designed survey questionnaire. The main aim of the study was to identify the impact of personal branding on the development of professional careers of managers. In order to ensure proper achievement of the main aim, sub-objectives were also formulated, determining the familiarity with the category of personal branding among middle and senior management, finding out whether managers engage in personal branding activities; analysing the methods used by managers to build personal branding, determining the impact of personal branding on the development of the professional career of managers.

For the purpose of empirical studies, the main hypothesis was formulated as follows: “personal branding has a positive impact on the professional development of managers”. The research questions are:

- Does, and to what extent, personal branding positively impact the professional development of managers?
- What factors facilitate the professional development of managers?
- Does personal branding impact the achievement of successes in professional work by managers?

The study used a non-probabilistic (non-random) method of sampling, which is purposive sampling. Due to the employed method of sampling, the results of the study cannot be generalised to the whole population. They represent a characteristic of a fragment of reality and show some symptomatic opinions of managers. The research tool was a survey questionnaire. The socio-demographic details section of the questionnaire contained questions referring to the following characteristics of the respondents: sex, year of birth, education, years worked, years worked at a

managerial position, management level and enterprise size. The detailed characteristics of the examined population is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of the examined population (N=1842)

| Characteristics of the respondents | | Structure of the respondents (N) | Structure of the respondents in % |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sex | Female | 1089 | 59.1% |
| | Male | 753 | 40.9% |
| Year of birth | 1949-1963 | 70 | 3.8% |
| | 1964-1979 | 546 | 29.6% |
| | 1980-1995 | 1073 | 58.3% |
| | 1996 and later | 153 | 8.3% |
| Years worked | Less than 5 years | 396 | 21.5% |
| | 5-10 years | 492 | 26.7% |
| | 11-20 years | 609 | 33.1% |
| | Over 20 years | 345 | 18.7% |
| Years worked at managerial positions | Less than 5 years | 659 | 35.8% |
| | 5-10 years | 455 | 24.7% |
| | 11-20 years | 218 | 11.9% |
| | Over 20 years | 33 | 1.8% |
| | Not worked at a managerial position | 462 | 25.1% |
| Education | Primary | 12 | 0.7% |
| | Vocational | 21 | 1.1% |
| | Secondary | 350 | 19% |
| | I-cycle higher education (Bachelor's) | 363 | 19.7% |
| | II-cycle higher education (Master's degree) | 1036 | 56.2% |
| | III-cycle higher education (PhD degree) | 57 | 3.1% |
| | Doktor habilitowany (DSc) / professor | 3 | 0.1% |
| Management level | The lowest management level | 666 | 36.1% |
| | Middle management level | 716 | 38.9% |
| | The highest management level | 460 | 25% |
| Enterprise size | Sole proprietorship | 281 | 15.3% |
| | Micro-enterprises (up to 9 people) | 351 | 19.1% |
| | Small enterprises (10-50 people) | 383 | 20.8% |
| | Middle-sized enterprises (51-250 people) | 328 | 17.8% |
| | Large enterprises (above 250) | 499 | 27.1% |

Source: Own work based on research.

4. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the research, respondents were asked about how they perceived *personal branding* and whether they engaged in actions related to it (Table 3). The population surveyed most often perceived *personal branding* as abilities to build reputation and image that are translated into trust and credibility (61.8% of those surveyed). A large group of the respondents (21.7%) perceived *personal branding* as the total image of a person that comprises a set of behaviours, traits and emotions that are meant to improve the individual's attractiveness on the job market; 13.8% of

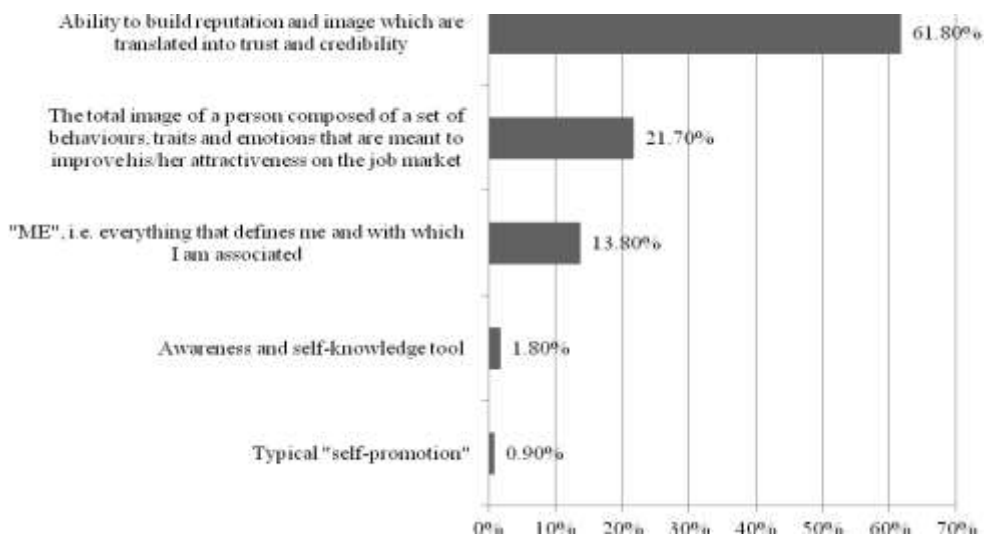
those surveyed viewed *personal branding* as "themselves", i.e., everything that defines an individual and with which he/she is associated (Figure 1).

Table 3. *Meaning of personal branding according to managers*

| What do you associate personal branding with? | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage | Percentage of valid ones | Cumulative percentage |
| Valid | Awareness and self-knowledge tool | 33 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.8 |
| | Typical "self-promotion" | 17 | 0.9 | 0.9 | 2.7 |
| | Ability to build reputation and image which are translated into trust and credibility | 1139 | 61.8 | 61.8 | 64.5 |
| | "ME", i.e. everything that defines me and with which I am associated | 254 | 13.8 | 13.8 | 78.3 |
| | The total image of a person composed of a set of behaviours, traits and emotions that are meant to improve his/her attractiveness on the job market | 399 | 21.7 | 21.7 | 100.0 |
| | In total | 1842 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - |

Source: Own work based on research.

Figure 1. *Importance of personal branding according to managers*



Source: Own work based on research.

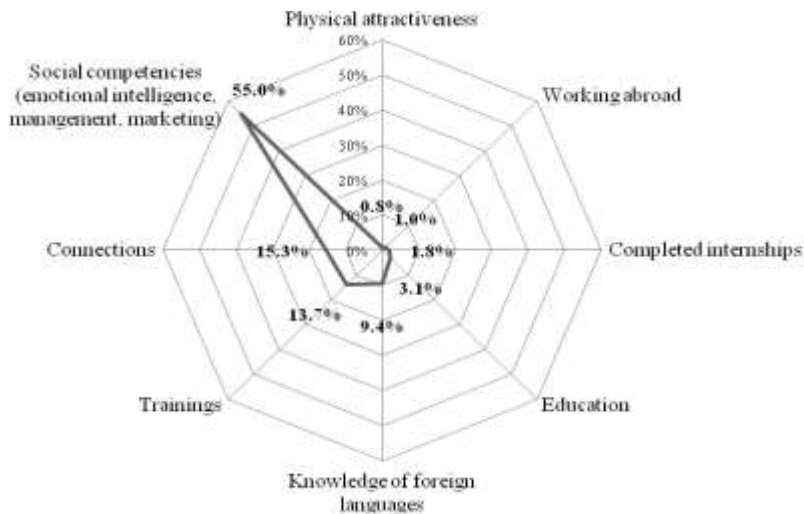
The next research area concerned factors facilitating the career development of managers, which are presented in Table 4. The respondents indicated that on today's job market professional development is best facilitated by social competencies (55.0%). Less important are connections (15.3%) and training (13.7%). Of least importance is physical attractiveness (0.8%) and working abroad (1.0%). Graphical presentation is provided in Figure 2.

Table 4. Factors facilitating the development of professional career of managers

| What facilitates the development of professional career on today's job market most? | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Frequen cy | Percent age | Percentage of valid ones | Cumulative percentage |
| Valid | Trainings | 253 | 13.7 | 13.7 | 13.7 |
| | Connections | 281 | 15.3 | 15.3 | 29.0 |
| | Education | 57 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 32.1 |
| | Physical attractiveness | 14 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 32.8 |
| | Social competencies (emotional intelligence, management, marketing) | 1013 | 55.0 | 55.0 | 87.8 |
| | Completed internships | 33 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 89.6 |
| | Working abroad | 18 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 90.6 |
| | Knowledge of foreign languages | 173 | 9.4 | 9.4 | 100.0 |
| | In total | 1842 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - |

Source: Own work based on research.

Figure 2. Factors facilitating the development of professional careers of managers



Source: Own work based on research.

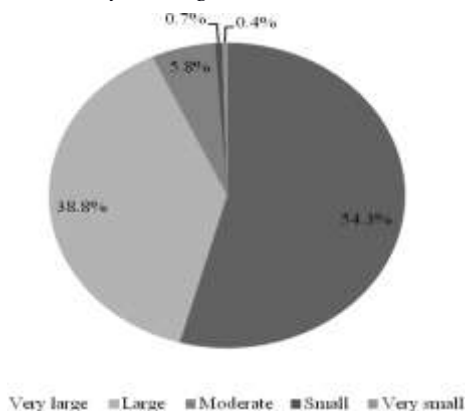
An important research area was finding out how *personal branding* impacts achievement of successes in professional work, which is presented in Table 5. According to the respondents, *personal branding* has a very significant (54.3%) or significant (38.8%) impact on achievement of successes in professional work. 5.8% considered its impact as moderate. Graphical presentation is provided in Figure 3. The impact of personal branding on career success was also demonstrated in research by Labrecque, Markos and Milne (2011), ElMassah *et al.* (2019).

Table 5. Impact of personal branding on the achievement of successes in professional work

| Which areas of life are impacted by personal branding? - achievement of successes in professional work | | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | Frequency | Percentage | Percentage of valid ones | Cumulative percentage |
| Valid | Very small | 8 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| | Small | 13 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| | Moderate | 106 | 5.8 | 5.8 | 6.9 |
| | Large | 715 | 38.8 | 38.8 | 45.7 |
| | Very large | 1000 | 54.3 | 54.3 | 100.0 |
| | In total | 1842 | 100.0 | 100.0 | - |

Source: Own work based on research.

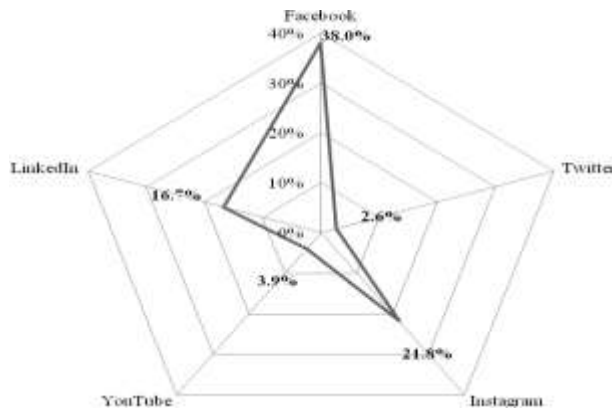
Figure 3. Assessment of the impact of personal branding on the achievement of successes in professional work by managers



Source: Own work based on research.

Another research area involved indication of social media that were helpful in the development of the respondents' professional careers (Figure 4). The managers surveyed most often used the following social media for career development: Twitter (81.8%), YouTube (72.3%), Instagram (50.2%) and LinkedIn (45.3%). The weakest link in the development of professional career was, according to the managers, Facebook (28.6%).

Figure 4. Social media that are helpful in the development of professional career of managers



Source: Own work based on research.

Research conducted in 2010 by Shaker Consulting Group demonstrates that using social media for building personal brand through presentation of professional development opportunities (51% of those surveyed) and career paths (47% of those surveyed) is becoming increasingly important to employees. Polish research (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka *et al.*, 2013) also found that the Internet was used to gather information on professional career development (89% of those surveyed). Social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, Google, Twitter, Blogi, MysTempo and other online applications, made it significantly easier to create personal brand (Karaduman, 2013; Khedher, 2014). Even fashion blogs are used to build it (Crewe, 2013; Bruzzi and Gibsn, 2013; Hermanaviciute and Marques 2016; Safitri, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The paper, following its stated aim, analysed the impact of *personal branding* on the development of professional careers of managers. An important part of the paper was analysis of survey results which identified the phenomenon of *personal branding* and the process of professional career of managers. An important finding is the fact that *personal branding* has a significant impact on traditional approaches to the development of professional careers of managers. Climbing successive levels of organisational hierarchy has now given way to building personal branding.

As aptly put by Schawbel (2012), as recently as a dozen or so years ago, working life "involved hiding behind the corporate brand and using the company's logo as a protective shield against the rest of the world. Employees were submissive to the corporate policy and did not have many *personal branding* tools at their disposal. Today's professional careers have moved away from long-term employment in a single company. It becomes necessary to expand activities aimed at building

personal branding, with a particular focus on the instruments used by managers, and consequently change the attitude to the shaping of professional career paths, modify talent management programmes and take many more actions (Sidor-Rządowska, 2016). The growing popularity of *personal branding* is a challenge for which those responsible for human capital management have to be really well prepared.

6. Limitations and Future Research

In the study, there were some limitations, including the data was collected using a completed questionnaire. Thus, the researcher was dependent on the voluntary cooperation of respondents. The study was limited to selected personal branding factors. The study was conducted using a self-designed questionnaire.

As *personal branding* is gaining importance, future research could address its impact on the satisfaction and commitment of employees in an organisation. Thus, farther research could focus on better exploration of the relationships between personal branding and the value added of an organisation.

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