

MANAGEMENT NEWS

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Career Development

Linking Career Development to Organizational Change Initiatives

By Marianne Matheis and Jan Cummings

Career Development is a concept and activity which has many facets and definitions. This is especially the case when it is identified as an important program, process or intervention to be implemented within a business organization with its unique values, interpersonal environment, management culture and business imperatives.

“Growing in one’s work life with conscious intention and direction” has always been a favorite definition of career development. For the individual employee, whether they are making a dramatic career/job change, or, (as is more likely within a business organization), attempting 1). to enrich their current job to increase their contribution; or 2). to focus and market their transferable skills across functions; or 3). preparing to compete for greater leadership responsibilities and challenges, “growing” covers a broader variety of options than in the past.

The “technologies and tools” which aid in career decision making and development actions can be chosen, fine-tuned and molded by career development specialists and/or managers to make sense for those employees who are intent on “careering” within their current organization.

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The more individuals, at all levels, who follow sound career development concepts and actions and, who utilize them within the cultural norms and business imperatives of the company the more likely that the company will

have a vibrant, proactive and growing group of employees who take responsibility for “managing their careers”.

However, we would agree with traditional experts of organizational career planning and development (i.e. Douglas Hall, Tom Gutteridge) that, for the process to meet its optimal potential for strategically linking employee goals with business directions (having the right people in the right positions at the right time), other key activities need to be in place. These activities are ones for which the organization and its managers have responsibility.

These efforts can range from the **highly structured**, (i.e. a succession or high potential planning program, or a well managed, open job posting system) to the **semi structured**, (i.e. mentor programs; annual manager-employee career discussions) or the **low structure** of strong, clear messages from all levels of managers about their commitment to support the “continual growth and development” of all employees.

(Continued on Page 2)

Career Development Within Organizations

Organizational career development is the balancing of individual aspirations with the strategic goals and direction of the organization. Effective integration will result in having the right person with the right skills in the right job at the appropriate time. The ultimate business goal is economic success and growth.

All career development structures and processes flow from this dynamic relationship to accommodate changes in the business environment, i.e., demographic, economic, technological or the political climate.

Ideally organizational career development would be focused and linked with other Human Resources and/or Management Systems in a number of ways. Key corporate initiatives such as Valuing and Managing Diversity, Creating a Learning Organization and efforts to maximize productivity can renew and leverage the career development process within the organization.

The increased velocity of change facing most organizations provides the impetus for linking career development with managing change and transition efforts. Companies utilize internal and external professionals to assist organizations to adapt to a variety of changes, including:

- managing rapid growth
- managing in a global economy
- downsizing and reengineering

A creative and proactive approach used by career development practitioners within some organizations has introduced the work of helping to redefine the employment contract to encourage a more adult-adult relationship between employer and employee. This concept has been described in a July/August 1994 Harvard Business Review article, "Toward a Career Resilient Workforce" as well as within a book by David Noer, Healing the Wounds.

Our professional focus is on how to support the individual's growth toward increasing their career resilience. We design processes and implement workshops that maximize the organization's ability to adapt to continuous change by increasing the personal and career resilience of employees and managers so that the organization continues to survive and thrive in the midst of the challenges and opportunities presented as we move into the 21st century.

An integrated approach to career, work, personal and life scenarios can support the individual's growth toward meeting these challenges within business organizations and society at large.



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