

Career Planning in the Organization

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An increasing emphasis is being placed upon career planning systems within organizations. This growing concern for career planning has three root causes. First, employees at all levels within organizations are demanding to have more of a say in the direction which their career takes. Secondly, career planning is the only sensible approach to rapidly moving women and minorities into higher level managerial positions to fulfill the organization's Affirmative Action Plan. Thirdly, a rapidly changing environment necessitates careful grooming of men and women to fill executive positions ten and fifteen years in the future. This grooming can only occur efficiently through careful planning and programming of the individual's job related experiences and training. These three forces appear to be propelling career planning into the forefront of concerns for human resources practitioners.

Career planning comes in many shapes and sizes. Frequently, career planning will incorporate various training programs, designation of career paths and methods for identifying and tracking employees with high potential. A shortcoming of many career planning programs is that they have not been viewed from a systems perspective. As a result, they have not been integrated into the personnel system. Career planning approaches have suffered from three reoccurring problems. The first deals with participation. Who should participate in a career planning program? If all employees are forced to participate the program is bound to be plagued with individuals who have little interest in developing their own careers. The result of this lack of interest will be reflected in the overall quality of the program. Hence, participation should be selective.

A second problem is the lack of participation of employees in the career planning process. The author is reminded of a young middle manager who was assured by his superiors that his career was being planned and closely monitored. The only

problem was that the manager had no input into the process. As a result the manager resigned in frustration. This approach to career planning is not atypical.

Third, career planning is often done independently of organizational requirements. If the organization does not know what positions will be open and when, career planning cannot be realistically maintained. The employee must not only participate in the career planning process, but must also have some time frame of reference. Too often employee expectations are raised through some element of the career planning process—only to be dashed when the desired opening does not occur. A similar sequence of events may result if the employee is not fully and accurately informed of his or her performance and state of development in relation to achieving career goals. The result may be feelings of disappointment, frustration and betrayal when the career system does not consider these factors.

The Career Planning System

The career planning system has three key components: (1) Personnel Assessment, (2) Personal Assessment and Goal Setting and (3) Organization Assessment. Personnel assessment involves selecting participants to participate in the program as well as assessing their current and potential performance.

The most likely persons to successfully participate in a career planning system are those who are highly involved in their careers, have a high need for achievement and an internal locus of control. The extent a person is involved in a career varies among individuals. High involvement generally signifies that work is a central life interest from which the individual derives a great deal of satisfaction and which may define a large part of the person's identity. A high achievement need indicates that the person has a tendency to set moderately difficult goals which he or she strives to achieve.

Such a person requires feedback from superiors and peers to maintain that drive for goal achievement. An internal locus of control signifies that the individual believes that success or failure is to a large extent due to his or her own actions rather than to some outside force.

PERSONNEL ASSESSMENT

Assessing current performance and the employee's potential is a second function of the Personnel Assessment component of a Career Planning System. Performance feedback is essential for the development of achievement oriented individuals—the type most likely to benefit from a career planning system. Yet superiors are often unable to give meaningful feedback either because they lack the proper interviewing skills to effectively communicate performance data or because the performance appraisal system does not provide meaningful standards upon which performance can be evaluated. Often performance appraisal stresses evaluation of personality characteristics rather than productive behavioral characteristics.

Management by Objectives (MBO) is one method by which performance appraisal is made more objective. Another promising approach is the Behavioral Anchored Rating System (BARS). The BARS differs from either MBO or traditional performance appraisal in that specific behaviors are identified for a particular class of jobs. Several statements are then constructed which are indicative of a range from ineffective to very effective for each identified behavior. Using BARS, the manager chooses for each relevant behavior the statement which most closely resembles the subordinate's behavior on the job. By dealing with specific job related behaviors, defensiveness on the part of the subordinate is minimized and specific developmental recommendations can be made.

Most good appraisal techniques including MBO and BARS are subject to the criticism that while they may measure performance adequately in one job, they do not necessarily predict how good a person will perform at the next higher level. The assessment center is a technique which appears to have high validity in predicting employee potential. The assessment uses multiple assessors or judges to assess the performance of several individuals engaged in a simulated managerial task. The center normally consists of a series of structured and unstructured exercises which the candidates perform

under the watchful eye of the assessors. The assessors themselves may be managers from the organization who are trained to perform the assessment task. This technique may be used to supplement performance appraisal. The center may last two or three days. Specific recommendations are made to participants regarding their developmental needs. Assessment centers are currently used by several large and medium size organizations for identifying the potential and development needs of selected employees.

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

A second key component of a career system is personal assessment and goal setting. Commitment to reaching career goals is strengthened by direct employee participation in the determination of career goals. In order to set meaningful career goals, an individual must have a clear self-concept, the type of person he or she would like to become. This requires the individual to clearly define values, interests and skills. Several sources exist for aiding employees in investigating these personal factors and some are listed among the references for this paper. Several organizations have put together personal assessment exercises for their employees.

To effectively plan a career the individual must understand the nature of those jobs to which he or she aspires. Therefore, skills, training and job experiences required for each job must be known. In addition, the skills and training required at each step along the path to the ultimate goal should be defined so that proficiency can be evaluated at each step in time. This leads to the third key component in a career planning system—organization assessment.

ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Organization assessment involves the analysis of the sequence of jobs or the path by which a particular career goal may be reached and a forecast of positions which may become vacant. Assessment of career paths should be done for all key positions in an organization. This involves defining the particular jobs, training and skills which are required to perform this job and those which will be required of future job incumbents. Career path assessment begins with the key position and works backwards through a sequence of jobs which will ultimately prepare an individual for that key position. There may be multiple paths for any one job.

An important variable to most employees planning a career is the time it will take to reach certain of their goals. This time is a function of (1) the speed with which an employee can develop the required skills, (2) the frequency with which the desired positions become available and (3) the number of employees who will be competing for the position. Adequate personal assessment will provide the employee with an estimate of how fast he or she can develop the requisite skills. However, the speed with which positions become vacant and the competition for each job can only be accurately assessed through a manpower forecasting system. Manpower planning within the organization should not only provide insight into the frequency with which positions open, but also provide the lead time necessary to adequately develop candidates to fill these positions. Thus, manpower forecasting is essential to the maintenance of a smoothly operating career planning system.

Administering the Career Planning System

Administration of the career planning system involves two activities: (1) developing a plan and (2) joint goal setting. The components of a career planning system provide a basis upon which a career plan can be established. The career plan will be unique to each individual. This uniqueness is a reflection of the uniqueness of each individual's values, skills, interests and aspirations. The career plan must contain a statement of the individual's ultimate career objective. This is the top position which the person would like to achieve at some point in the future. This is often a difficult objective to establish. It requires a firm knowledge of self as well as a knowledge of the higher level positions in the organization. An adequate personal assessment is mandatory for success at this stage. Choosing this end goal is a tentative decision which requires frequent reanalysis. A change in the end goal will require a change in the path by which the new end goal will be achieved. Sometimes the change may require only a slight mid course correction while other more drastic changes may require a return to some beginning point from which a new direction can be plotted.

Once an end objective is determined, intermediate positions and developmental skills can be outlined.

It is at this point that career paths established by an organization become helpful. These provide a guide for plotting one's course to the end objective. The career paths also help the individual identify an immediate promotional objective. This objective is the next step up the organizational hierarchy. Specific developmental steps now need to be outlined for achieving this immediate promotional objective. This leads to the second primary activity in administering a career planning system—joint goal setting.

Goal setting in the career planning system involves identifying developmental steps required for achieving the immediate promotional objective and then attaching a time frame to these goals. This goal setting process must be a joint venture with both the individual and his superior participating. Identifying the developmental steps will involve a projection of the job related experiences, skills, training and education which the person must receive and master prior to becoming a candidate for the position. These steps may involve lateral transfers to other jobs at the same level to broaden the person's job related experiences and knowledge. It may require further training or experience in the person's current position. Or it may require that the person complete formal educational requirements.

A key factor in setting developmental goals is an understanding of the person's current performance and stage of development. This is where the personnel assessment component of the career planning system becomes essential. Accurate appraisal in this area will strengthen the goal setting activity. Also important is the setting of a time frame for accomplishing these goals. This is a difficult but necessary part of the goal setting process. Timing must be viewed as a forecast not as an absolute. It will depend on several factors as discussed earlier and will therefore always be a variable. Manpower forecasting will be the only guide available for this part of the goal setting process and hence it is a very important basis for introducing realism into the career planning process.

Administration of a career planning system requires that frank discussion and joint goal setting occur between the supervisor and subordinate on a periodic basis. Career goals must be established

realistically with consideration for (1) the individual's self assessment of needs, interests, values and aspirations, (2) the likely openings and position vacancies which are likely to occur and (3) an objective assessment of the person's capabilities and stage of development. These factors may require supervisors to cultivate counseling and coaching skills to a greater extent than now exists.

A final issue that needs to be dealt with is motivation. Not the motivation of the employee but rather motivation of the manager to invest time and energy in developing subordinates—i.e. in taking his or her role as a career coach seriously. Typically, developmental efforts of managers are penalized. Time spent in developmental efforts takes away from more pressing issues. Further, once the employee is developed he or she is often transferred out of the manager's department and the coaching process begins over with a new employee. Effective administration of the career development system requires that managers be rewarded for their development of subordinates. This may require that performance evaluation of managers and supervisors be partially based upon how effectively they develop their subordinates to assume positions of greater responsibility.

Summary and Conclusions

Organizations must have two goals to maintain their position. That is to make a profit (or operate within budget) and develop people. Developing people is the process whereby the organization can continue to operate efficiently in the future. Effective career planning requires that human resources practitioners take a systems perspective when they design career planning programs. Too frequently career planning is approached in a disjointed fashion. New training programs are established or career ladders are defined and included in the personnel manual without proper consideration for other system components which are required for the system to work effectively.

FIGURE 1
Elements of the Career System



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