Advancing Business through Career Development
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Introduction

Today more than ever, hostile markets, reorganizations and mergers, a maturing workforce, and flattened career and leadership ladders threaten the existence of organizations. Issues of recruitment and retention have moved from backrooms to boardrooms. Human assets drive the locomotive of business success and we are in a full-throttle, knowledge economy. The stronger our people, the stronger our corporations. “It is the dedication, motivation, knowledge and skill sets of individuals that make a tremendous difference in the organization.” Marilu Goodyear et als. “Leaders must address the challenges confronting complex structures and processes if they want to stay in business.” Bryan and Joyce.

Career Development programs help connect personal passion with meaningful and important work that drives organizations. In a study of 1500 companies, Lowell Bryan and Claudia Joyce found that companies with a large percentage of employees who are engaged in problem solving rather than repetitive work are delivering enormous profits. They found that “profit-per-employee” in thinking-intensive organizations was $30,000 more than competitors in the same industry. The authors extrapolate that a hundred thousand of such employees could potentially deliver tens of billions of dollars in increased revenues by effectively mobilizing knowledge and skills. They assert that organizations that fail to fully develop human assets are in jeopardy of losing competitive advantage. Bryan and Joyce.

1. The Purpose and Importance of Career Development Programs

Career Development is a two-way street between organizations and employees. Managers are the communication links and coaches. Companies and employees must be able to bend and not break in the face of economic storms. Successful organizations have flexible employees who are ready to meet the changing needs of the economy. Organizations need to communicate the mission, strategies, pressing problems and engage employees in meaningful work in this changing global environment. Careers are fluid. People may work anywhere at anytime, but to be productive and effective, they need to be grounded in knowledge of the industry, and in the core technologies and local cultures. We have been designing and implementing CD Programs for over twenty years – the precursor of talent management systems. The purpose of these programs today is the same as twenty years ago.

“Career development is an organized, formalized, planned way to achieve alignment between the individual’s career needs and aspirations and the organization’s work-force requirements. It integrates activities of the employees and managers with the policies and procedures of the organization. It is an ongoing process linked with the organization’s human resource structures rather than a one-time event.” Farren et als.
2. Roles and Responsibilities

Successful CD programs assure that each player fulfills their role and responsibilities.

Employees:
Individual employees are responsible for initiating their own career planning by communicating their value and contribution to the organization, and by assessing their current job satisfaction. It is up to employees to identify their skills, values, and interests; discuss their expectations with their managers; and seek out information about career options.

Peter Drucker believes that, “Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves - their strengths, their values and how they best perform.” He asserts that workers need to recognize who they are, identifying their strengths and recognizing their values. Workers must be aware of their vision and the optimum role they play to achieve productivity and success. “Organizations need to understand the abilities and skills of employees and help them play the most effective roles possible.”

Leaders and Managers:
Managers are a critical link in the career development of their employees. While not expected to be career development experts, leaders and managers can provide vital support for employee career planning. They should encourage employees to take responsibilities for their careers, support them in their realistic personal assessments and provide them with clear and honest feedback about current performance and its implications for future development. They should communicate the formal and informal politics of the organization culture, provide exposure for employees, and connect them with appropriate resources.

Leaders, managers and experts play central roles in identifying the natural strengths of their people while directing their teams to work in a zone of passion and zeal. Through Town Meetings, strategy sessions, business round-tables, and task teams, leaders and managers can design work experiences and stretch assignments that assure individuals are challenged and connecting with critical people in the critical knowledge areas.

Organizations:
Organizations are responsible for providing key information on organizational mission, policies, and future directions as well as on current options and possibilities. Organizations provide tools and support for employee self-assessment, training, education, and development. Leaders and rewards systems need to reinforce managers’ roles in career development.

Existing HR systems and policies as well as new systems can be integrated to create a universal talent management architecture that addresses specific target groups and business needs.

Valerie Matthews writes that over a twenty year span, she had witnessed “Career development programs that included performance management, employment development, career planning, management assessment, internal staffing, external recruitment, succession planning, high potential resource management and career transition programs.” She states that “The programs were intended to support the development of all employees and promote retention of key resources. The ultimate objective was to ensure and sustain a supply of qualified resources for positions at all levels.” In the battle to retain high levels of knowledge and skill, she reportedly saw one program after another implode causing disastrous casualties and resulting in costly replacement of many valuable employees. The greatest losses were the skills and knowledge that walked out the door with them. Valerie Matthews.
Career Development Programs that work build a common language and philosophy that guide leaders, managers and employees to achieve the mission and strategy that run the organization. Know-how, know-why, and know-who are about human assets. Career Development is part and parcel of working in the knowledge economy. Mentors, managers and leaders in the industry guide careers into learning areas that grow the business.

3. Benefits of Career Development Programs

The importance of Career Development Programs cannot be underestimated. In the past thirty years, hundreds of organizations have developed programs and tools to enhance careers. The tools continue to change, but the basic principles set out in our book, “Designing Career Development Systems,” remain sound and successful. Farren et als. Businesses have achieved robust success utilizing the ABC’s of Career Development Systems.

Programs start small but are designed to move enterprise-wide and provide the following benefits:

1. Provide a common framework and language for career development and talent management.
2. Build an engaging partnership between employees, managers and the organization.
3. Shift responsibility for career planning and professional development to individual contributors. Drive individual accountability.
4. Highlight existing resources, programs and HR processes.
5. Showcase career mobility and advancement options – not just when jobs are open.
6. Provide a process for individual development.
7. Increase bench strength in key professions and positions.
8. Increase skill development and knowledge in core functional areas.
9. Increase the quality and frequency of individual career development and performance discussions.
10. Increase confidence and skill for managers to host effective career and development discussions.
11. Increase employee engagement, satisfaction and retention.

4. Business Needs and Drivers of Career Development Programs

The specific drivers of Career Development Programs have changed over the past twenty years. In the beginning we were developing career planning frameworks and tools that worked in large organizations and provided training and education to employees and managers. In the early days, our primary purpose was to clarify the roles of the organization, managers and employees and build support structures for the organization that maximized passion and talent. We partnered to assure a common language and framework that would support retention and mobility and that would help managers assure “right people in the right places.” Putting career development in the hand of individuals rather than vocational counselors was a breakthrough. Skilling managers in career discussions rather than performance discussions was a challenge. Making succession planning criteria, career paths and strategic organization information available to all broke the previous parental mindset. And some of these breakthroughs are still needed in many organizations. Linking Career Development Programs to strategic business needs and issues has been a constant in our consulting practice throughout these twenty years.
We have worked with the six organizations cited in the mini-cases below to address different business needs and drivers:

**Retention in a Downsizing Environment**  
A Telecommunications Company understands the business need for retaining talent during times of change and potential downsizings. Toward that end, the company offers a wealth of career development tools and resources to both employees and managers. Using a robust web portal, career assessment tools and career options information is available 24/7. Key business drivers include retention, employee engagement, and the need to continuously build and grow internal talent and bench strength.

**Employer of Choice – Brand Recognition**  
A Financial Services Company knows the importance of brand recognition to customers as well as employees. Being an “employer is a strategic goal of this company. As the battle for talent is waged, this organization provides tools and resources to all employees. Managers have learned to highlight career mobility and redeployment options in their development discussions as the company grows, downsizes, and rightsizes. The company even provides assessments tools on the “careers” section of their internet site so that potential employee candidates can see “where they best fit in” to the talent required to keep the company a leader in their industry.

**Succession Planning**  
A National Association seeks to enhance the depth and consistency for succession planning with the top two levels of the organization. They’ve built a common framework and approach for discussing and evaluating talent. The top hundred leaders are participating in coaching sessions to become more skilled in having career discussions with their colleagues. The organization implements a talent building framework in order to address their issues.

**Retention of Key Talent**  
A Technology Company has been losing key talent in one of their primary professional disciplines. In order to highlight career opportunities and progression, the company built a robust leadership and technical competency model linked to development experiences and training. As a first step, the company introduced this information to potential employees through a career development program with rich assessment tools. Managers of the high potential individuals are also introduced to this information in tandem with skill building components on how to host engaging and effective career and professional development discussions.

**Merger Preparation**  
A Large Energy Company prepares for a merger with a large utility company. Given the anticipated changes and need for proactive integration, the organization built the foundation for career information and professional development opportunities throughout the business, using a web-based career portal. The company engaged individuals to drive their careers during the change and increased managers’ effectiveness to coach and guide their people.

**Downsizing Preparation**  
A Government Agency prepared for downsizing given the reduction in the production of their product. Other government agencies in the area struggle to find qualified talent for growing roles. In order to support employees to redeploy to other government agencies, the organization built a career services center that included career workshops, individual web-based assessments, and career counseling services to support employees with job search and transition.
Each of these examples were driven by differing needs. Solutions were designed to fit the unique culture and existing Human Resource systems and were carefully crafted to maximize the roles of all stakeholders, organizational systems, and leadership.

In each case, the underlying driver was to assure a talent pool ready to take on present and future challenges. Survey after survey reveal that large corporations are not developing vital leadership skills. The Wall Street Journal reported that “Some 60% of companies have no succession planning of any kind, according to a survey of several thousand members of the Society of Human Resources Management.”

Jeff Henderson, finance chief for Cardinal Health, Dublin, Ohio, last year reshuffled more than 20% of his top 230 finance managers within the department to create new learning opportunities for them as part of ongoing succession planning programs he implements every six months. The programs resulted in improved performance and strengthened loyalties. Henderson said that “he looks at the entire talent pool and sees who is the best matched for a job.” The programs germinate and blossom into succession planning discussions “that really align business needs with existing and potential talent and involve employees in these discussions so that their career aspirations fit organization needs.” The Wall Street Journal.

Finding the right solutions to business challenges and entrenched cultures generally requires a consultative approach. The best engagement strategy is a carefully woven fabric blending employee’s aspirations with the future needs of the organization. There are many ways to assure the passion and productivity that come from a good career fit between the individual and the organization.

5. Design Principles

Needs might vary but several Career Development design principles remain the same.

- **Provide Critical Organization Information** – people can’t plan in a vacuum. What are some of the products, services, breakthroughs that will be critical for the future? What trends in the industry and organization will most impact talent requirements in the near future? What professions, trades or functional areas are key to achieving mission and strategies? What innovations/changes would make the organization more successful? What positions/business units are growing? Shrinking? What have been typical career paths? What are the functional competencies required for success? When all people are seeing and discussing similar information, there will be a coalescence of opportunities, learning and breakthroughs of knowledge.

- **Involve Key Stakeholders** – people are responsible for their own destinies. Developing and implementing a career development program involves change. The people most closely affected are the experts. Leaders need to be involved and engaged along the way. Awareness and education takes time. Create advisory groups, implementation teams, pilot groups, manager champions to consult to design and development. Start small but work with the most influential people to guarantee a lasting change.

- **Use Multiple Delivery Methods** – people learn in different ways. The most successful programs have combined career web portals for information and self-assessment, workshops, virtual seminars, career resource centers and/or career coaches. Integrate with existing HR systems and websites. Leverage existing programs and add career development modules to performance management, on-boarding, career pathing, leadership development, succession planning, etc..
• **Customize to Your Unique Culture** – assure that the look and feel “fits” your organization.
  Develop a name or brand that inspires and sets a vision. Determine some uncharacteristic strategies that will get attention and produce real change.

• **Provide Individual Career Assessment Tools** – People are shaky about the current financial and career landscape. Although some customer service jobs are returning to the United States, others are at risk because of the housing and lending industries. As we know, talented people frequently leverage shaky times to improve their careers. Leaders and managers are in a unique position to offer their employees career tools to help them prepare for a recession. Go to http://www.MasteryWorks.com and build confidence and strengthen your business by making any of our career tools readily available to your employees through a secure website. Here are three popular tools:

  **Take Charge Now - Career Initiative® Assessment**
  Do your employees know the fifteen (15) key initiatives for career success? This assessment gives employees a benchmark and practical recommendations for increasing their performance and value to the organization. The online version includes a Personal Report with the results and score-based recommendations for taking action. This career assessment program acts as a benchmarking tool that measures employees’ awareness and progress in fifteen career initiatives. (For example: Interests, Reputation, Network, Industry trends, etc.)

  **Assess Your Goals - OPTIONSSMART™**
  Show employees how to align their aspirations with organization needs. Moving up may not always be the best nor possible career option. Do your employees know there are six development options? This forty-eight question assessment will give your employees multiple options for aligning their aspirations with the needs of your organization. The Online version includes a Personal Report with the results and recommendations for taking action.

  **Build Your Knowledge Base - MENTORSMART™**
  Mentors accelerate learning, open up access to resources (networks) and provide encouragement and direction. This tool helps individuals determine which of eight types of mentors is most important NOW for professional development. Show individuals that mentoring is a recognized and supported management practice. Use the slowdown to fine tune expertise in the areas that count for your organization.

**Summary**

We are full-throttle in a knowledge economy. The stronger our people, the stronger our corporations. Workers need to recognize their strengths and values and be aware of their vision and the optimum role they play to achieve productivity and success. Organizations are successful when they understand the abilities and skills of their employees and help them play the most effective roles possible. At MasteryWorks, Inc., we have created successful tools and proven models that strive to build a common language for leadership development, succession planning, individual career planning, and career development coaching by managers and mentors.

Whether it’s “green,” “wiki,” innovation, security or service – certain professions and trades, generally identified as “core competencies,” are critical to the health of different organizations. A Career Development Program that works advances business and the lives and careers of individuals.
References


3. See above, Lowell Bryan and Claudia Joyce, “Mobilizing Minds, Creating Wealth from Talent In The 21st Century”


About the Author — Caela Farren, Ph.D., is President of MasteryWorks, Inc. in Falls Church, VA. She has been a consultant, entrepreneur, and educator for over 30 years, Caela has worked with hundreds of thousands of people worldwide to get them on their mastery path. Caela’s practice and company builds strong links between changing trends in industries, changing strategies of organizations and the talents and aspirations of individuals. People who work with her company discover their passion, their mastery path, and bring renewed contribution and high performance to their organizations.

Caela is known internationally for her expertise in developing talent management products and services. Her solutions are user-friendly systems that serve the needs of both organizations and individuals. She is frequently quoted in the media regarding her thoughts and advice on changing careers and work patterns in the nation. Hundreds of organizations have implemented talent management solutions from MasteryWorks, Inc. — consulting, workshops, assessment instruments and web-based talent management portals.

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