

Up the Career Path

Career development takes on an activist tone in this variation on traditional techniques.

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It's no secret that organizations which provide for career advancement stand a better chance of attracting top-notch personnel than those that do not. Many of the former employ career counseling or assessment centers to satisfy such employees' needs for professional growth. "Career pathing" is another alternative.

Organizations typically use one of two approaches to pathing: traditional/political or job/behavior.

The traditional/political approach uses past movement patterns of employees to chart future career development avenues. Traditional movement patterns among jobs often evolve within large job families (such as clerical positions) or clearly defined industry groups (such as EDP professionals). The way these jobs historically have been structured and evaluated has resulted in widely accepted traditional interrelationships. Political processes also contribute to these patterns since managers often dictate the avenues employees should take from one job to the next.

Of this approach it can be said:

- Tradition, logical analysis or managerial discretion are usually its main drivers.
- Movement among jobs is typically limited to single functions or organizational units.
- Actual movement through the system of jobs is often based on who knows whom.
- Rate of movement through the system is often based on tenure.
- It is very easy to develop the paths.
- The paths are easy to maintain over time.

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Figure 1 is an example of traditional/political career paths in a fictitious EDP department.

Organization cultures that support the traditional/political approach to career pathing are often more mechanistic than fluid. That is, employees are informed that career development is their responsibility and they they should meet the people who make promotional decisions within the job classes to which they aspire. The organization claims little responsibility for career development beyond encouraging employees to pursue career ambitions. Hence, employees who have both the ability and interest to interact with managerial personnel throughout the organization stand a better chance of making career moves than those with limited access to management.

Problems with this approach occur because the paths are based on an organization's past human resource needs and methods and may not address current human resource issues. Further problems

surface because the traditional/political approach does not maximize all of an organization's human resource strengths. Employees do not gravitate toward the jobs they can perform and in which they are interested when a full disclosure of jobs and paths throughout the organization is not made. Even though the traditional/political approach is a relatively informationless career pathing procedure, its practicality attracts many organizations.

The job/behavior approach, on the other hand, is based on analysis of the similarities and differences among jobs within the organization. In this approach:

- The focus is on job attributes to determine similarities and differences among jobs.
- Job families or clusters of jobs are developed from the similarities and differences.
- Multiple job functions and levels, i.e., job heterogeneity, produce the best pathing.
- Movement through the system is based

Figure 1—Typical Traditional/Political Career Path in EDP Department

Level	Position
7	EDP Director
6	Operations Manager
5	First-Line Supervisor
4	Project Leader Sr. Systems Analyst
3	Systems Analyst Sr. Programmer/Analyst
2	Programmer Analyst
1	Programmer

largely on matching individual employees to the jobs they can do best.

■ Rate of movement through the system is based on interest and performance because career paths are identified clearly.

An added benefit of the job/behavior approach is that it permits jobs throughout the entire organization to be drawn into a web of logical analysis. This opens up new avenues of movement for employees while providing them with maximum information regarding their options.

Developing career paths using the job/behavior approach requires a number of distinctive steps:

■ identification of the target jobs for study;

■ analyzing the jobs using various job descriptors (employee behaviors required on the job, or job attribute requirements such as employee knowledges, skills and abilities required for success on the job);

■ developing job families or clusters of jobs using the information provided by the job descriptors. Jobs within a cluster or family are similar, whereas job clusters have major differences;

■ developing career path charts that indicate both vertical and horizontal mobility among the jobs based on similarity.

Figure 2—Employee Relations Functions Analyzed

- General Employee Relations
- Compensation
- Benefits
- Equal Employment Opportunity
- Labor Relations
- Staffing
- Human Resources*
- Community Relations
- Safety
- Communications

* Includes Training, Organization Development, Planning Employee Records and Research

Employee relations jobs (see Figure 2) in a large Midwestern electronics firm were analyzed using the steps identified above. Seven distinct clusters of supervisory/managerial jobs were developed (see Figure 3). Each cluster contained jobs with specific characteristics that differed from the jobs in other clusters. Each cluster, therefore, was given a descriptive

name. Career movement within a given cluster is relatively easy due to the similarities among jobs in the cluster. Movement between clusters would require the performance of new duties and, in most cases, the acquisition of new knowledge or skill.

Another major advantage of this approach is that career-planning time frames can be considered as a part of the overall career development process. By analyzing jobs using employee behaviors and specific descriptions of jobs, jobs with similar duties can be clustered. This allows employees to chart career development movement in small steps. Employees are able to identify jobs that are highly similar to their current positions.

Furthermore, by analyzing the jobs using job attribute descriptors (i.e., knowledge, skill and ability requirements) paths can be identified between jobs that appear to be highly dissimilar but that require similar competencies. Employees are more likely to identify jobs toward which they would like to work and to prepare for them by obtaining necessary competencies.

The major problems with this approach include development and maintenance of

Figure 3—Supervisory/Managerial Job Clusters

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Managers	Employee Services	HR Research	Labor Relations	Employee Information Services	Staffing	Division Communications	Division Training
	Safety	Corp. Training		EEO General ER			Education Programs
		HR Planning		Compensation			Health/Benefits Analysis
				Benefits Corp. Comm.			
Supervision	Medical Disability			Compensation	Staffing	Communication	
Cluster Name:	Employee Service	Program Planning	Hourly Relations	Information and Policies	Selection Placement	Communications	Program Implementation

Traditional movement patterns among jobs often evolve within large job families or clearly defined industry groups

Figure 4—Traditional/Political Versus Job/Behavior Approaches

	Traditional/ Political	Job/Behavior
When to Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single function; few jobs • Strong political overtones or traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple functions, levels or jobs • Analytical map seen as useful
Method of Data Gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content experts chart paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations and interview • Questionnaire • Statistical analysis
Development Time Frames	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-three months
Maintenance Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy; new content experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More difficult; re-issue questionnaire and reanalyze data

the results. The analysis process is time-consuming and expensive in the developmental phase. All targeted jobs must be analyzed and the output of the analysis reviewed by content experts. The resulting information is difficult to maintain due to its analytical nature. As jobs change, new information must be gathered, more of a challenge in this process than in the traditional/political approach.

Both approaches contain elements necessary for success in any organizational culture (see Figure 4 for a comparison of the two). The traditional/political approach thoroughly uses organization decision

makers and obtains their acceptance of the program. The job/behavior approach thrives on information regarding jobs throughout the organization. A combination of these elements is necessary in any successful program. Managerial decision makers must accept the paths developed for organizational movement, and those paths should be based on detailed information regarding the organization and its jobs. Therefore, when determining a strategy for career pathing, the positive features of both approaches might be synthesized into a hybrid career pathing model.

