

# Concepts of Career Development

If you're starting from scratch in career development, this is a good place to begin.

By PEGGY SIMONSEN

If you were asked by your boss to do something about career development for your firm, or asked by an employee for help with career planning, could you respond without a major research effort?

Instituting a major career development program takes considerable planning and development. And coaching individuals about career issues takes counseling skills and knowledge of organizational realities. In addition, both tasks require a conceptual knowledge of career development to be successful. Do you have a ready understanding—a mental storehouse—of career development concepts?

Many young professionals have recent experience, and perhaps some training, in career planning. Most have conducted a successful job search for themselves. But this experience does not transfer readily into career development knowledge. In fact, trying to make this transfer can be a frustrating and counterproductive experience. One corporate human resource department attempted to use an interest survey designed for young people making initial career choices. An accountant who had requested help with some career development issues was given the survey, which told him he should be a fireman. While these types of instruments can be useful, special knowledge must be applied to interpret them properly.

What should a human resource professional who is not a trained career counselor know and understand about career development concepts? And how can this

knowledge be applied?

Before answering these questions, it is important to clarify the terms used. *Career development* has been defined by Walter Storey as the outcome for the individual of personal or organizational career planning. *Career planning* has often been confused with *career pathing*. The former is an active process whereby an individual, alone or with organizational assistance, determines short- and long-range career goals. These goals may be more or less specifically defined; they may be stated more in terms of outcomes to the individual, rather than by job titles or positions in the organization. *Career pathing* is an organizational process identifying pro-

motional possibilities and sequencing, useful both for succession planning and individual career planning. *Career management* is the term used to identify collaborative efforts between the individual and the organization that result in career development. It is an ongoing process, actively or reactively attended to by employees, ideally with occasional or supporting assistance from their managers or human resource department.

## Career systems

It is also important to identify the common delivery systems of these career functions. Career management practices take the same forms as many other human

Figure 1—Stages for individual career development

	Stage 1 <i>Apprentice</i>	Stage 2 <i>Independent Contributor</i>	Stage 3 <i>Mentor</i>	Stage 4 <i>Sponsor</i>
<i>Psychological State of Individual</i>	Dependent	Independent	Responsible for others	Responsible for organization
<i>Characteristics of Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learns/follows instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capable of doing the job</li> <li>• Makes own decisions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accomplishes tasks through others</li> <li>• Makes decisions for others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directs and plans for organization</li> </ul>
<i>Individual Perceived as</i>	Novice	Expert	Supervisor	Senior manager or executive

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resource systems in an organization. In his April 1985 *Training & Development Journal* article "The System's the Thing," Edward G. Verlander delineated the components of a total career management system. He showed how such a system fits into a total human resource plan. If your directive is to "do something about career development," it is essential to incorporate any new offerings into the existing organizational structure.

A career management system may include workshops, a resource center, an individual workbook, or other materials. It may be provided for certain employees or for everyone. It may be based on manager/employee discussions or coordinated by human resource professionals. It may be activity-based or person-to-person with counseling.

Whatever the procedures or delivery system of career management that will work in your organization, the principles must start with some conceptual bases of career development. You may need to personally counsel employees or train managers to do this. In either case, a good

starting point is with career development models.

### Career stages

It's usually necessary for people to make a basic change in their thinking about growth or development within an organization. Instead of basing developmental thinking on the traditional model of an organization as a pyramid—defining development as moving into scarcer, higher positions—coaches and employees alike should employ a *career stages* model.

Dalton, Thompson, and Price defined the four stages of professional careers from an individual perspective (internal), rather than an organizational perspective (external). Their model, shown in Figure 1, suggests that individuals begin careers at an apprentice level (which they may return to if a major career change occurs). The researchers found that everyone must move out of this stage to attain career satisfaction. It is a state of psychological dependency, and even people new to an organization and required to "pay their dues" chafe after having considerable in-

dependence in school or previous jobs. Mature workers who are considering a move to a new department or function must realize that there will be an apprentice period before they can gain the level of autonomy they may have been used to.

The second stage, independent contributor, can be a satisfactory level for many individuals for many years, as long as growth in expertise or responsibility continues. Some people never need to move beyond this level, thriving on independent work. However, if they don't recognize this, they may seek or accept a third stage—as mentor—only to realize later that they became less satisfied with their career after the move. A typical example of this is the successful salesperson who is promoted to sales manager because it is perceived to be the appropriate growth position. A knowledgeable career coach can help an individual recognize if career development needs really will be met by a move up, or whether growth can be identified in other ways at Stage 2.

Many employees ultimately become dissatisfied with their work if they don't

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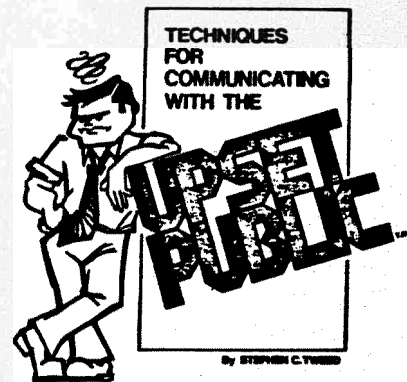
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have the chance to move to Stage 3. This does not necessarily mean they need to have the formal title of supervisor or manager. It does mean that at some point they need to be able to contribute to the growth of others in the course of their work. You may be able to help managers or their employees understand how to fill their mentor-stage needs by leading a project, orienting new employees, or taking temporary assignments while waiting or

preparing for a promotion.

Some, not all, employees ultimately need to attain Stage 4, that of organizational sponsor, for continued career development. As with the mentor stage, this does not necessarily require a permanent or formal move to a titled position, but it means having some influence over the policies or procedures that affect the organization. It means the individual has some control over the outcomes of his or

her work. This is the area where small, newer companies can have an advantage over larger, older organizations. Organizations that cannot offer sponsor positions or functions to individuals who are at this stage of their own growth tend to lose them to start-up companies.

If you recognize sponsor-level needs in people you're counseling, you can employ career management to help mesh their personal career goals with organizational needs. Employees at this stage of their career may become impatient or critical of the organization if they aren't on the fast track. You can suggest to managers that they acknowledge the career development needs of long-term, skilled employees, and that the managers try motivating these employees to stay by involving them in policy and system development. The manager can also motivate these employees by giving them responsibility for how new policies or systems work out. In addition, you can directly assist the employees who feel blocked from advancement, helping them recognize and develop strategies to overcome personal or organizational barriers.

Positions—and individuals—are made up of various combinations of independent contributor, supervisor, and manager functions or interests. One career development approach is to help employees sort out their own long-term goals, recognizing that *up is not the only way*, as Beverly Kaye emphasizes in her book of that title. Whether by career discussions or assessment instruments, career management assistance should help employees recognize the ultimate level of responsibility they want to attain, even if they don't yet know the strategies necessary to reach that level.

## Career anchors

A conceptually simple but very effective means of sorting out values for long- and short-term career management is Edgar Schein's career anchors, discussed in his book *Career Dynamics*. He defines a career anchor as "that set of self-perceptions pertaining to your (1) motives and needs, (2) talents and skills, and (3) personal values that you would not give up if you were forced to make a choice." Most experienced employees can quickly identify their primary anchor or anchors from Schein's list:

■ **Technical/functional competence.** Career development emphasis is on exercising expertise.

■ **Autonomy/independence.** Career development emphasis is on freedom from organizational rules and control of content

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or process of one's work.

■ **Managerial competence.** Career development emphasis is on greater and greater responsibility for accomplishing results through others.

■ **Security/stability.** Career development emphasis is on company loyalty, job tenure, or financial security.

■ **Service/dedication.** Career development emphasis is on making a contribution to an area you value or to a cause.

■ **Creativity and entrepreneurship.** Career development emphasis is on innovation and creating something new.

■ **Pure challenge.** Career development emphasis is on problem solving and winning.

■ **Life-style integration.** Career development emphasis is on balancing all aspects of your life.

Schein is careful to point out that many people have some of each of these anchors in their value system, but that the primary career anchor is the one that gets chosen if a choice is forced. If an individual recognizes his or her career anchors, career decision making and ongoing career

planning are facilitated. As a career counselor, you can help individuals or groups by introducing them to this conceptual way of sorting out career issues.

### Work values and interests

Another essential component for anyone involved in career management for themselves or others is an understanding of work values. An easy way to identify an individual's work values is to just ask, "What is important to you in your work?" The list of responses may be long or short, and it will surely differ from one individual to another. The key point for career counselors to recognize and communicate is that their own values may differ considerably from the employee's.

Value conflicts—and job dissatisfaction—occur when top work values are missing from a job or when undesirable characteristics are present. Work values are likely to be unnamed motivators underlying career development needs. Much clarity and assistance can be provided to a needy employee by mirroring his

or her work values and analyzing which are present or missing in the current job. The next step is to identify what developmental action can be taken to obtain the missing work values, either in the present position or another. An aware career counselor will not try to convince the employee to change personal work values.

People often confuse needs with values. Needs do influence career development, but are likely to change with circumstances. A single parent, for example, may make career choices based on a need for higher pay; but once that need is met or circumstances change, such as with remarriage, the need may be obviated. Work values, on the other hand, are likely to be formed young and continue to matter, evolving slowly if at all. Some of the most difficult career counseling is required when needs and values conflict. For example, a person who values authority and power and is offered a transfer that will provide the two may have family needs that prevent relocating.

Interests also have been used extensive-

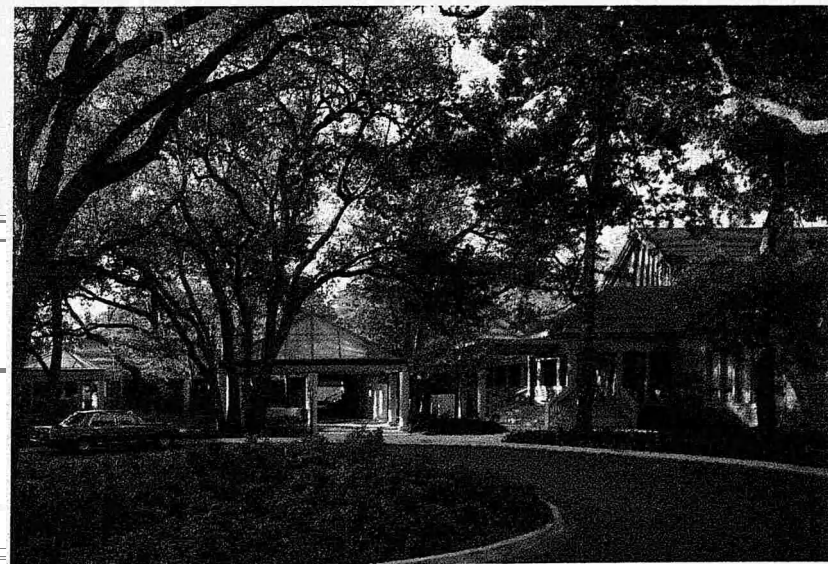
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**Even people new to an organization and required to "pay their dues" chafe after having considerable independence in school or previous jobs**

ly for initial career planning, but they may not influence long-range career management as significantly as work values do. However, discussion of personal interests can relieve a dissatisfied employee, one simply in the wrong occupation, from thinking that there is something wrong with him or her, or the boss, or the company. You may help the employee recognize that the matchup of interests is wrong, then help the employee determine what type of work suits his or her interests.

**Organizational reality**

In addition to understanding the above career development concepts, people contributing to employee career management must also be able to address practical issues of the workplace. One concern about career management is that expectations will be falsely raised. This need not

be so if those providing career counseling help employees mesh their personal goals with organizational needs.

If a company is not growing and there is not much turnover, career development may need to take the form of job enrichment. Employees and employers alike need to recognize that skills are dynamic, not static. A person who is not prepared for a particular position can indeed set a goal to develop the necessary skills if the position meets other career planning concerns. Managers who recognize a future or changing need for expertise can communicate openly to employees that certain skills are more likely to be rewarded in the future.

Organizational information about present and future positions, department needs, and total organizational development is so much more meaningful to

employees if they are also offered the chance to do three things: determine what their internal career development needs are; get information and help in identifying and matching their personal concerns with those of the organization; and develop some sort of action plan for ownership of the process.

Effective career management cannot start with the third process mentioned above: developing an action plan. It must include determining needs and obtaining information first, *in that order*. And behind these employee actions must be human resource professionals equipped with enough knowledge of career development concepts to train others in career counseling, or to perform the counseling themselves.

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