

CAREER PATHS

*a planned program
to help solve the
growing people problem*

Any organization will sustain itself and increase its effectiveness only if its programs are related to its objectives and if its programs meet and satisfy the needs of its employees. In the past, great emphasis has been placed on the first area, but emphasis is sadly lacking in the second. Organizations are having people problems, yet people are the variables that can make the difference between the success and failure of an organization.¹

PEOPLE PROBLEMS

Dr. Michael H. Mescon has conducted a research project entitled, "The Problem of Businessmen."² This project was designed to ascertain what businessmen consider to be the major problems facing them as administrators. One major problem identified was the people problem.

Here is how some businessmen responded to the people problem: "With each passing day initiative and "get-up-and-go" seem harder to come by, and it is reaching the point of being almost unattainable . . . Because of this lack of "go" in people, we find screening is expensive and time-consuming with little reward . . . The man himself still remains the biggest problem in today's business."³ The central problem facing our company today is not the availability of investment alternatives, the availability of markets for our products, or the availability of adequate financing, but the availability of effective administrators."⁴

John W. Gardner is also concerned with the people problem. Here is how he responds to it: "People are the ultimate source of organizational renewal. The shortage of able, highly-trained, highly-motivated men will be a permanent feature of our kind of society . . . If organizations get these types of people . . . it cannot afford to let those men go to seed, or get side-tracked or boxed in. There must be positive constructive programs."⁵

MANPOWER PLANNING

Some organizations see manpower planning as the answer to the people problem. Manpower planning has the following objectives:

1. To identify on a continuous basis those individuals who have promise to occupy positions substantially above their present organizational assignments;
2. To identify candidates for jobs even before the jobs become vacant;
3. To identify individuals who have potential in terms of specific jobs or functional areas?
4. To identify individuals with the potential to occupy a broad range of jobs which may or may not be related with regard to functional areas or organizational level.⁶

The total emphasis of manpower planning is the future. Executives are looking at manpower patterns that develop in their organization. One example of a pattern is to determine if the replacements within the organization are filled by upgrading, by lateral assignments, or from outside selections. Another pattern is the effects of retirements, deaths, and quitings — voluntary or non-voluntary.

The hope is that the patterns, together with accomplishing the objectives, will have a positive effect in the future for the organization and will help solve the people problem.

In one research study, employers were asked questions concerning the extent of their manpower planning and the relationship to their training programs. Unfortunately, the study results were very negative on the extent of quality manpower planning. While most organizations reported they engage in manpower planning to some degree, they do not tend to plan seriously even though they claim that poor planning would harm their operations.⁷

Leading business firms are not fulfilling their responsibility to choose their future leaders in a systematic way. There

JOSEPH J. WNUK, JR.
Chief, Administration Division
Internal Revenue Service
U. S. Treasury Department
Jacksonville, Florida

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are two principal reasons for failure in manpower planning. First, the highest levels of executives generally cling to a survival-of-the-fittest theory for getting to the top. Second, the professional training or personnel manager who favors more systematic manpower planning usually hasn't enough influence in the highest councils.⁸

Manpower planning is as good as the effort, the involvement and the commitment of top management. To some organizations, manpower planning is a fad or the in-thing to do with no real thought.

EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Even with the organizations where manpower planning is successful, it is still very much a management-oriented program. This is as it should be, but there ought to be a way of getting the employees involved—involved to the extent that they begin thinking about their careers, their goals and their expectations in relationship to the organization.

Manpower planning is one attempt. It should be continued—continued at the highest plane and very actively because if we don't, organizations will be seriously hurting in the future.

A strategy of some organizations to solve the people problem has been to build fences around their employees. This is done by rapid promotions, large salaries, frequent and fat raises, lush stock options and job enrichments. These are all management oriented and do not get the employee involved. Even with these fences, employees are able to high jump them, leaving management facing the people problem.

But, what else can be done to get employees involved?

CAREER PATHS

What is a career path? A career path is a program by which *all* jobs within an organization are described by level, by function, and by the needed development for each job. For each job a career

OPPORTUNITY is the keynote word members of an association recently reached in response to the question, "Why do you value your membership in your association?"

The members said their association gave them OPPORTUNITY:

TO MEET—by providing a common place and ground for general assembly.

TO GREET—to know their competitors better.

TO KNOW—to learn better methods and procedures in their own business.

TO GROW—personally, through contact with others having problems even larger than their own.

TO GIVE—members benefit in proportion, they said, to what they put in—ideas, cooperation, participation.

TO RECEIVE—all of the values of cooperative study.

TO PLAN—through discussion of industry conditions.

TO IMPROVE—association activities help to promote better services, and to eliminate poor ones.

TO PROTECT—through understanding of government regulations and proposed as well as existing legislation.

TO COUNTERACT—harmful and unfavorable propaganda through public relations programs.

TO ACT—in unison in behalf of deserving projects—giving strength and effectiveness which would be missed if tried individually.

Join others in the association of your industry or profession by taking advantage of the tremendous OPPORTUNITY it affords you.

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path and its alternatives should be established. This is a big task and, for many organizations, this would be the first time this type of project would be undertaken. However, this would provide management a real fix on paths within the organization and the paths that lead to the top.

Once the material on career paths is assembled, a copy should be distributed to all employees. When the employee receives it, he should find where he is in the organization and determine his personal career path — short, intermediate and long-range within his functional area and within the total organization.

Before the employee starts development toward his goal, he should assess his own strength and weaknesses for his current job and for the jobs on his path. A guide could be prepared for each level to assist the employee in this self-assessment.

The career path program gets the employee involved in his own growth and development. It also provides each employee with a positive goal and a feeling of togetherness because others will be doing the same thing. The program will also provide each employee with a need to do something in meeting his goal and a sense of advancement by reaching his goal on the path.⁹

Periodic counseling sessions will be necessary to assist the employee in the implementation of his program to achieve his path and a critique on how he is progressing.

How does this program differ from manpower planning? While they are compatible and do complement each other, there is also a difference. Employee involvement is the major difference between the two programs. Career paths

get all employees involved in relationship to their careers within the organization.

A LIVING PROGRAM

Could the career path program become a fad? Yes, unless you have the involvement and commitment of top management and the employees. It must become a living program and it should become a part of each employee's job regardless of level. If it is not a living program, the same negative reactions will occur as with the manpower planning program.

Some might say that they have such a program, but it is informal. The response to such a statement is: Do you really? Do the employees know which paths are available to them? Have you checked with them? What are their goals? If you seriously ask yourself these questions you will find an answer and a need.

There are going to be some employees who are not going to get involved; others who will be disappointed because the program is not working to their satisfaction. However, with involvement and active participation these problems will be kept to a minimum.

There are other employees who have no place to go in the organization. One solution could be to develop a path within their current jobs. A short-range possibility could be that the employee becomes better equipped to do his present job. An intermediate-range possibility could be that the employee develops toward a lateral assignment or an advancement. The overall career path program can be flexible enough to handle all situations.

As McGregor stated in Theory Y: "Peo-

ple are responsible and creative when given the opportunity." By getting involved in their own career paths, they will become more involved in their current jobs because employees will know that if they perform in their current jobs they will move on their career paths. Employees need this opportunity.

CONCLUSION

The people problem is becoming critical and positive action must be taken. The career path program is but one possibility.

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