

Professionals Are Career-Minded Too!

They're not managers and they're not administrators, so they often get lost in the middle. They're (misunderstood) professionals, and they need well planned career paths too. Here's a plan for nurturing their careers and keeping your prized professionals longer.

By JEAN M. McENERY and JOHN J. McENERY

The zooming number of professionals in the work place has highlighted an old, but unsolved, challenge: managing the professional career. Organizations hiring more professionals must take a renewed interest in their particular needs. Professionals can no longer be lumped with managers when career development decisions are due.

Consider the differences in the perceptions of the professional career and the managerial career. Employees typically view the successful managerial career as one with upward movement and responsibility increases. The professional career, on the other hand, appears to involve considerably less movement, vertically or laterally.

Organizations often do not value the professional career as much as the more understood and accepted managerial career. Staff (the professionals) are considered peripheral and secondary in importance to profit-generating line groups (the managers). This is especially true in highly formalized, traditional bureaucracies.

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Organizations must tailor career development programs to their growing professional force. Such efforts require sensitivity to the unique qualities of the professional.

What is a professional?

Recognizing the professional is not a simple task. Kerr, Von Glinow and Schriesheim identified the following factors as defining a professional:¹

■ *Structural factors.* A professional commands expertise in a field based on formal and extended education. His profession has selective recruitment processes (e.g., medical and law school boards), entry requirements (e.g., licensing), and a formal statement of ethics.

■ *Attitudinal factors.* A professional has a strong commitment to his field. He tends to make independent decisions regarding his job, but refers to professional peers for standards and review.

Determining how strongly a professional identifies with his organization and with his field reveals significant career goals and motivations.

Identification with the profession is related to education. For example, a scientist with a doctorate has a stronger professional identity than does an engineer with a bachelor's degree. Knowledge turnover also affects profession identity. When education becomes obsolete in a short period of time (as often happens in engineering), the career path steers more toward a management role and further from technical involvement.

The individual with a professional identity focuses on work content. This technical function is less important to the

manager; his main commitment is to management.

The need to understand the professional

Managers use problem-solving, influencing and interpersonal skills to control others and achieve the organization's goals. They are stimulated by emotional, interpersonal and political crises. Professionals find such crises exhausting and debilitating. Because professionals place little emphasis on power—they have little need for power—they are often perceived as less ambitious and uninvolved with organizational workings.

Many problems can result from an organization's ignorance of professional differences. Dissatisfied professionals may leave the organization, taking with them expertise that is not easily replaceable. Or, professionals may assess their interests inappropriately. They may, for the wrong reasons, decide they should move into management.

Frequently, those promoted to higher levels of management in staff areas are professionals with the highest technical expertise. The professional is not always a capable administrator, though, and becomes dissatisfied with his duties. The organization then has lost a good technical performer and gained a mediocre manager.

With acceptance and understanding of the unique qualities of the professional, organizations can nurture his career and benefit fully from his talents. The following factors are particularly instrumental in nurturing professional careers: supervision, career development and compensation policy.

Supervising the professional

The ideal supervisor for the professional is a combination of a good manager and a technical expert. The reality is that technical expertise and managerial capacity is difficult, if not impossible, to find in one person. In making a choice between the two, a good manager is more important. A considerate manager who provides constructive feedback can compensate for lack of job challenge. A capable manager can also redesign the job to provide challenge.

Managers can be truly effective in developing the careers of others. Good managers accurately diagnose subordinates' professional needs. They allow enough time for training and development experiences, and construct opportunities to practice skills on the job. They also devote time to feedback and coaching.

Effective managers, however, are seldom formally recognized or rewarded by the organization. Without organizational emphasis, the majority of managers underemphasize their career supervision responsibility in favor of duties that are measured and rewarded.

Developing the professional's career

Understanding and developing the professional career is problematic for both the professional and the organization. First, although extrinsic rewards, such as salary increases and promotions, are important to the professional, opportunities for such rewards may be limited. Merit pay was constricted in the past because of a recessionary economy. Promotions may be scarce, or simply hard to obtain. In high growth areas like high technology industries, the organization structure is flatter than the traditional bureaucratic structure. This creates fewer opportunities for upward movement. Even when the opportunities exist, however, the professional is often not perceived as promotable because of a lack of management experience.

The result is frustration, and eventually turnover. The Hay group² predicts that as the economy recovers, professional turnover will pose a much larger problem to companies than it did before the recession. This is likely related to pent-up frustration, and to the number of new opportunities that will arise as the economy improves.

The most common organizational approach to dealing with job satisfaction is to devise extrinsic rewards. These

rewards include flexible benefits, flextime and profit sharing.

These efforts may be necessary, but they are not enough. The intrinsic rewards—job challenge, growth and development—must still be addressed to motivate and satisfy professionals. This implies a need for a strong, continuous human resource planning and development process. Career planning gives professionals a formal mechanism for defining personal needs, and for understanding how their needs mesh with organizational needs.

Career planning can be accomplished through a variety of techniques, such as workshops, books and programmed instruction packages. In addition, the organization must provide data regarding its human resource needs. This data should include the number and nature of job openings, career paths, job families and new technological requirements. As a result:³

- Individual needs are assessed, based on analysis of interests, skills, motives and values.

- Skills and opportunities are verified. This is accomplished through various programs—performance appraisal, formal testing and assessment centers—and through help from the professional's supervisor.

- Professionals set realistic career goals that meet organizational needs.

Kleinknecht and Hefferin⁴ discuss a career planning program developed for a group of nurses. The nurses were experiencing career dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction was related to confusion over the roles their careers played in their lives. It also stemmed from inadequate knowledge of developmental activities that could enrich their jobs. Career planning clarified both areas and increased career satisfaction. For example, one nurse attended team building and assertiveness training classes in an effort to enhance her job performance. She subsequently became happier with her job, and recognized the important role it played in her life. She decided against leaving her job—something she had considered doing.

The organization also benefits from career development. In one study⁵ medical professionals who believed their skills were being developed showed less tendency to leave the organization.

After goals are set through career planning, skills, abilities and job knowledge must be developed to achieve the goals. This involves providing the professional

with updated knowledge in his specialization and broader responsibilities. As a result, the professional becomes more expert in his discipline, plus moves up the organizational ladder. If the professional is more interested in a managerial career path, however, technical cross training and management training are involved.

There are several implications here for the supervisor of the professional. Hall⁶ suggests that supervisors be trained in concepts of job enrichment. It enables them to build challenge into jobs. The supervisor can also implement job rotation to involve the professional in new and different duties. Collegial relationships can be encouraged by team projects, task forces and other group activities.⁷

Professional activities should be viewed as an important part of job responsibilities, not as extracurricular activity. Memberships in professional groups and opportunities—such as conventions—to increase knowledge and meet peers should be encouraged and funded. Through these activities, the professional better his job performance, and feels rewarded for high quality work.

Properly compensating the professional

Professionals should be properly compensated as they take on additional (not necessarily managerial) responsibility. Allowing clear career paths for professionals, and rewarding and promoting them for increased knowledge, should result in the following:

- Professionals perceive increased opportunities and increased career satisfaction.

- Professionals are placed in jobs for which they are better qualified and likely to perform well.

- Top-quality professionals are retained.⁸

When a professional performs at an increasingly advanced level, he should be compensated to reflect the benefit to the organization. The job evaluation system must be capable of measuring the worth of the professional's job.

Typically, in pricing jobs, organizations assess the worth of the job in relation to other jobs in the organization, and to the going rate in the job market. The point-factor job evaluation system is a common tool in evaluating internal compensation equity. This system is recommended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.⁹ Since all job classifications are evaluated on the same factors, the

possibility of discrimination in compensation is lessened. A major impediment to this type of assessment is that, many times, it is biased toward criteria reflective of managerial responsibility. These criteria include the number of subordinates, amount of budget, number of subordinate managerial levels, consequence of financial error and hierarchical ranking in the organization.

While it is possible to devise a separate job evaluation system to measure the worth of the professional job, having one system is more advantageous. An evaluation system that can be used for both management and professional job classifications measures the following:

- *Knowledge and skill*—the amount of specialized expertise that must be acquired, either through formal education or job experience;
- *Impact on goals*—the extent to which the job classification impacts the organization on a long-term basis. The amount of time it takes to achieve job goals, and their impact on the respective supervisor's goals, should be considered here;
- *Decision making and problem solving*—the extent to which there is protocol or policy to follow for decisions. Also to be considered is the extent to which someone else can really evaluate the decisions;
- *Contacts*—the amount of technical, sensitive or negative information that must come from contacts in order to make decisions or plan actions;
- *Working conditions*—the extent to which physical working conditions are pleasant.

By properly compensating the professional, an organization displays its sincere interest in the individual's career, and its acknowledgement of the individual's work. It is this type of organizational attention that keeps professionals on the job longer.

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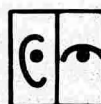
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