Assessing the Need for Career Development

Following this precisely detailed model, you'll find out what managers and employees want in the ideal CD program.

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Hit and-miss career development efforts can amount to little more than time wasted. The successful needs analysis can help avoid this and lead to programs that are relevant, timely, well-received, and enduring. No career development program fits all organizations; each has different cultures and needs. Through the following instrument it's possible to determine a desirable program for your organization, although getting shared commitment to an ideal program requires open communication, dialogue, and trust.

Any needs assessment requires three things: a process for arriving at what should be (the ideal), a way to take inventory of what is (the real), and a way of deciding among alternative programs or approaches to bridge the gap between the two. To get agreement on an ideal program, it's easier if you present specific ideas. For example, it is easier for people to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with the statement, "Ideally, employees should be aware of their own career interests," than to the more general question, "What makes up the ideal CD program?"

Next, analyze the organization through interviews with key managers and employees and by examining organizational data and climate. Look for the common symptoms that show a need for career development. These include frustration over career options or selection, development and promotion; talk of unionizing over "unfair" selection or pay; demographic data and profiles that show possible discrimination or skewed age distribution; coming technological change that may require downsizing; a need for new career paths to accomodate newly hired staff; and unexplained drops in productivity, quality, or quantity.

Perhaps your existing system is fine; it may need only more visibility or a better image among employees. They may not believe in or trust the system. It may be that your staff needs further training in, for example, giving effective feedback through performance appraisals.

The first task is to clarify what an ideal career development system would be. Once defined, the parts that make up an "ideal system" can be developed into a questionnaire and presented to managers and employees for their reactions.

In 1982, Barbara Williamson used this process to develop a needs assessment instrument. This process included review-

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ing pertinent literature and getting reactions from experts to define the ideal career development system. She concluded it can be best defined as communicating information in four categories:

- information for the employees,
- information for the organization,
- methods to get, maintain, and use the information, and
- a particular management climate.

Figure 1 outlines the specific items which explicate each of these broad areas.

The list can be used to develop an instrument to measure attitudes toward an ideal career development program. After content validity was ensured through expert review and revision, Williamson developed the instrument through the procedures of Bohrnstedt and, later, Camp.

The final instrument contains 124 items divided into four sections, which correspond to the four parts of the outline. People responded by indicating agreement or disagreement on a one-to-five scale. Some items were worded negatively to encourage careful reading and to discourage rating all items the same.

The section on information needed by employees about themselves and the organization included such items as, "Employees are aware of their own interest," and, "Employees have information about career paths in the organization."

The section on information needed by the organization about itself and employees included such items as, "Historical information on the employees such as past jobs held within and outside the company is important for the organization to know."

Under getting, maintaining, and using types of information were such items as, "Career discussions by supervisors with employees are not conducted," and "Career counseling from personnel staff may give information to the employee about the organization."

And the management climate that supports the system section included such items as, "The company goals always take precedence over the employee goals."

The instrument itself can be used to promote discussion or a summary of results could be presented to small groups to discuss the results' meaning. Particularly likely to stimulate reactions would be an analysis of gaps between what managers and/or employees considered an ideal career development system and what they perceived their organizations to offer.

The topic list could also serve as a basis for group discussions. An advisory com-

Figure 1—Topics for CD Needs Assessment*

I. **Information for individuals**
   A. **About themselves**
      - Interests, skills, and values.
      - An awareness that the organization expects them to be responsible and active.
      - Strengths and weaknesses of their present job performance.
      - Their roles or responsibilities that the organization allows and wants them to take.
      - Their current career stage, career goals, and career plans.

   B. **About their organization**
      - Job openings, requirements, and salaries.
      - Career paths in the organization.
      - How the informal system works.
      - Role and responsibility of the organization in their career management.
      - Organization's goals, values, plans, and their effect.
      - Developmental resources the company offers.
      - How the organization feels about their potential and its plans for them.

II. **Information for the organization**
   A. **About itself**
      - Present and future jobs.
      - Job requirements
      - Company's past career families.
      - Future economic, political, and social trends that may affect it.
      - Historical information such as job trends, past growth trends, and company's beginning.
      - Future goals.
      - Values.
      - Who is leaving and why.
      - Promotional and pay policies.
      - Methods offered to develop and help employees.
      - Which programs and practices are effective.
      - Role in employee career development.

   B. **About employees**
      - Who it employs, their ages and other personal data.
      - How well they are performing, their strengths, weaknesses, and potential.
      - Employee training, education, interests, goals, plans, skills, and values.
      - Historical information on each person's career, inside and outside the company.
      - Whether the employee understands the "system"; the formal and informal policies and procedures.

III. **Ways of getting, maintaining, and using information**
   A. **Personnel data records for each individual containing**
      - Information on age, education, length of service and past jobs outside the company,
      - Company job history,
      - Training while at the company,
      - Performance appraisal review (skills and weaknesses),
      - Developmental plans,
      - Interests and long-range career plans of employees, and
      - Assessments of potential.

   B. **A career-pathing program that may include**
      - Job analysis,
      - Written job descriptions,
      - Job evaluation showing relevant worth and salary relevance, and
      - Historical movements of employees from past promotion records and transfer interviews and records.

   C. **A manpower planning system for assessing human resources quantitatively and qualitatively that may include**
      - Forecasting that examines quantitative assessment,
         — Current openings identified and compared with current manpower resources, and
         — Future openings and required manpower identified in connection with organizational and strategic planning.
      - Succession planning based on qualitative assessment.
         — Current human resources assessed on skills, development needs and potential using one or more of the following:
            - Assessment centers,
            - Self-assessment,
            - Performance appraisals by supervisors,

Adapted slightly from Williamson, 1983

Figure 1—Topics for CD Needs Assessment (Continued)

■ Individual assessment by supervisor and/or others, and
■ Committee (team) or peer assessment.
— Candidates for the future positions identified and offered developmental activities as preparation.

D. **A supervisor-employee relationship that may include:**
■ Performance appraisal through feedback to employees and feedback to the organization about the individual.
■ Career discussion that includes
— information to the employee about the organization;
— information to the organization about the employee in the form of a career plan, interests, and goals;
— support, encouragement, and realistic feedback on career plans to the individual; and
— coaching by the supervisor, serving as a role model or a mentor.

E. **Career counseling by people in the personnel section that may give information to the employee about the organization and on self-assessment through tests that clarify skills, interests, and values.**

F. **Counseling by outside professionals.**

G. **Career workbooks that are completed by employees independently and allow employees to write out career plans.**

H. **Methods of information exchange that may include media, pamphlets, tapes, booklets, and newsletters.**

I. **Upper management communication of information, philosophy and support, such as luncheon speeches and meetings.**

J. **Career workshops and seminars that**
■ Train supervisors and employees on roles and responsibilities and needed skills,
■ Offer career assessment and planning techniques,
■ Provide information on the company, and
■ Help clarify values.

K. **An internal system for promotion and movement that may include job posting or other self-nominating methods and promotions, lateral transfers, and downward moves.**

L. **Developmental opportunities that may include**
■ Internal company sponsored classes,
■ OJT or apprenticeship,
■ Job rotation,
■ Sabbaticals and seminars,
■ Outside classes,
■ Formal education,
■ Programmed instruction,
■ Self-directed study,
■ Special assignments,
■ Mentors,
■ Immediate supervisors,
■ Other than immediate supervisors,
■ Financial support (tuition refund), and
■ Membership and involvement in professional associations.

M. **A monitoring system that may include evaluation of the career development methods used and opinions and attitudes of the employees.**

N. **A reward system that may include wage and salary based on job worth and achievement; and recognition, benefits, and rewards appropriate to the values of organization and employees.**

V. **A supportive climate and an open communication style that includes**

A. **Ongoing participation of employees and management in the design and revision of the career development system,**

B. **Honesty by employees and management about the career development system,**

C. **Openness and mutual concern, which creates a high level of trust,**

D. **A free flow of information about the career development system and other organizational systems, and**

E. **A mutual willingness by employees, management, and the organization to adjust needs and expectations based on practicality and reality.**

mittee or task force may find it helpful in making recommendations about the content of the career development system. Though it achieves only minimum involvement, time and costs are low. No quantifiable data are produced, but, if the committee is representative of the organization, a workable system can be designed.

Getting input from a variety of organizational sources gives a more realistic assessment of what may be desired and is currently perceived to be offered by the organization. Often when the training or human resource department determines the needs, they may not match those perceived by managers and employees. A task force approach to the needs assessment process can make results more realistic. Composed of managers and employees representing key groups, it could use this model to discuss and agree upon what they think is desired ideally in their organization. The task force similarly can then use the same model to collect incidents that clearly are related to employee career movements. They should be recent, behavioral and not personality based, simple enough to be useful, and reported reliably. The content outline presented in Figure 1 might then be used for grouping these incidents to suggest directions for the planning of career development programs.

Regardless of the approach used, an accurate needs assessment process is essential in designing effective career devlopment systems. This model helps to guarantee a high-quality needs assessment. It provides a basis for conceptualizing an ideal system for a particular organization, for describing what currently exists, and for identifying gaps between the real and the ideal.

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