

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT**

Once you have hired new employees, and they have gone through the orientation programme, it's time to start thinking about their careers.

But they only just started! Can't that wait?

You could wait, but it's probably a mistake to do so. If you don't talk about it with them, then you can be sure that somebody else will. And when that happens, how long will they stay as your employee?

### **Changing career expectations**

In the past, an employee joined an organisation and stayed for many years, working his or her way up the hierarchy.

Very few organisations claim to offer careers for life any more. Organisations are flatter and need more flexibility, which means they cannot offer long-term career advancement in return for loyalty, organisational commitment, and good performance, which used to be part of the psychological contract.

A new psychological contract has emerged. Employees today offer high productivity and commitment while with their employer. By contrast, employers offer an improved employability: employees can develop and practise skills in demand while employed, which gives them a better chance to find a new job when the current employer no longer requires them.

Today's workers will probably change jobs several times during their careers, working for a number of organisations in a variety of positions, so each person will need a range of skills, learning new ones as required. This is sometimes called the "portfolio career".

Responsibility for career management has moved from the company to the individual: modern employees do their own career management. Success is now seen as achieving personal goals, rather than attaining the lofty heights of an organisation's hierarchical structure.

### **Step by step**

In general, careers in western culture develop in a number of clear stages. First there is the occupational choice and preparation. All jobs need at least basic education, and some need more specialised training.

Stage 2 is organisational entry. This happens several times during the career as people change jobs and employers.

Up to about age 40, the third stage follows. An informative induction, challenging work, and a supportive organisation will keep people happy. Here is where career opportunities are most important. What is the pathway to advancement?

Next is Stage 4, or mid-career, from about age 40-55. Most re-evaluate their career and life decisions. Some may continue to advance, while others will stagnate.

Stage 5, or late career, takes us up to retirement. Many organisations do not place a lot of value on these employees believing them to be almost ready to leave. But their experience is invaluable to organisations.

### **Career anchors**

Throughout the stages of an individual's career, we can identify what have been labelled "career anchors". These explain the way people make their career decisions, and tend to describe what they will do in the future as well. Researchers have identified nine of these.

Those with the anchor *technical/functional competence* want to use their technical skills, whereas those with *managerial competence* want to continue in a managerial role, and may use their technical abilities to eventually get a managerial job. Some people require *security and stability*, and tend to remain with the same organisation, although they tend not to pursue hierarchical promotion. The *creativity* anchor means people who feel the need to develop new ventures and projects. Those with *autonomy and independence* desire freedom and will probably work alone or in a small firm. Some people need their *basic identity* from their jobs, and tend to wear badges or uniforms. Others need to give *service to others*, such as teachers and doctors. People in management, politics, and other leadership positions may have the anchor *power, influence, and control*. Finally, *variety* is the spice of life for those who have many talents, want flexibility, or get bored easily.

### **Individual Career Management**

Although the modern employment environment suggests that people manage their own individual careers, the reality is that many people do not. Research shows that most people rely on "luck" or random opportunity for their career development and choices. As few as 25% actually do any planning at all.

Those who practise career development need a strong awareness of the stage they are in and the anchors important to them to help aid career decisions. They need to create their own opportunities to suit their own personal preferences, and this may include working very long hours, seeking career guidance from more experienced people, and building solid relationships with their work colleagues.

However, studies show that most individuals are not very good at career self-management. It takes a lot of time and effort. Possibly the common lack of personal drive in this area is why organisations that offer career support to their employees are popular with potential recruits.

## **Organisational Support for Career Development**

And that's not the only reason. A company that supports its employees' careers will garnish more respect, because it is seen to attend to employee needs, and show that such benefits are for everybody, not just top management. As a result, company-driven career management encourages commitment, motivation, performance, and reduces turnover. All good for any organisation.

Let's return to our gourmet ice cream manager from the earlier recruitment example. Most of his time is taken up with courting potential customers, so he's probably not very active in thinking about his own career. But his own manager can help him to explore his options by thinking about where he is now: perhaps he is approaching 40, and trying to figure out where he wants to go next. If his anchors are variety, creativity, managerial competence, and power, he would be good developing a number of new business opportunities for the company, and bringing new people in to run them once they are established.

This self-knowledge can lead to constructive goals, strategies, and action plans that work towards making the most of the career stage and anchors. The boss can also provide feedback on progress.

Many managers believe that this kind of work belongs with the human resources department. But HR can only provide guidance on how to do it. The immediate superior has a much closer relationship, and as such has worked with him directly, knows him better, and can offer the insight of greater experience in the same work: ice cream sales.

Career discussions can be part of the usual development discussions, in terms of more long-term goals over several years.

## **Summary**

Before people can make career decisions, they need to know about themselves. When they know at which stage of their careers they are, and what drives them, then they can make more accurate choices about their professional future.

Today, more than ever, individuals drive their own careers, yet the majority of employees do not do any career management at all. An organisation providing career support is going to be very attractive to recruits who want to develop their careers but cannot find the time or resources.

The organisation today does not run an individual's career, but it does provide some input and momentum.

Some related links (copy-paste into your browser):

*Career development at the Free Management Library*  
<http://www.managementhelp.org/career/career.htm>

*Australian Association of Career Counsellors*  
<http://www.aacc.org.au/>

*National Career Development Association (US)*  
<http://www.ncda.org/>

Next month, we will be discussing some of the reward systems you can use with your people: in other words, pay.

*References:*

Bratton, J., & Gold, J. (2007). *Human resource management: Theory and practice*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Torrington, D., Hall, L., & Taylor, S. (2005). *Human resource management* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Harlow, Essex, U.K.: Prentice-Hall.

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