TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Charting the Right Moves

The art of career development…

Key Learnings:

- The stages of career development
- Structural approach to career development

No interview is complete without certain clichéd questions on the prospective employee's near-term and long-term career plans. Typically, prospective employers expect potential employees to have clarity in their personal goals. Employees for their part expect employers to have a sound career development plan for the position they are seeking. The expectations are more just in case of employees since the onus of career progression lies largely with them.

From an employee's perspective, the goals and objectives are largely broad-based without any clearly defined milestones. Shaping these goals into concrete action plans is the employer's prerogative. Hence, employees are increasingly asking, "Where can you get me in five years?" .The prerogative was employers till a few years ago.

Tables have surely turned and only for the better. Earlier employers were like dictators who asked employees the contributions they could make to drive corporate success without really dwelling on the career planning issues. Employers believed that good workers would find their own way up the ladder and hence career planning was a superfluous activity. Today, the scenario has changed. Career development is a critical aspect of every employee's wish list and is used as the sole differentiator while bestowing the "most preferred employer status'.

Career development-stages

Before charting a sound and promising career progression path it is important to know the various stages of career planning. These stages are indicative of employees' thought process as they move along their career.

Exploration

In this stage, employees hover on to their preferred area of work. It is a macro-level understanding of a person's professional interests. They explore the various opportunities available to them and identify their areas of interest. This is an ideal stage for assessing employee interests and skills.

Charting out a career plan according to employee interests keeps employees motivated thereby ensuring increased productivity. After sketching the basic framework for a career plan, managers should move on to the next stage of career development where specifics begin to gain relevance.

Formation

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Working in a chosen area of work for a few months gives employees an insight to their preferences in the sub functional segments of the work they are doing. Employees are better able to comprehend the various roles, responsibilities and challenges within a function. At this stage employees identify the specific roles they would want to stabilize in.

Further, employees also seek external supplements in the form of training, educational qualifications and other forms of certifications to help them perform better in their field of interest. This is also a tricky stage for employers in some ways. It is in this stage that employees begin to seek opportunities outside their workplace.

They seek employers who can add to their credentials and offer better growth opportunities. Employers must therefore clearly identify employees in this stage of career development and provide them with adequate training and other supplements to boost their performance and interest levels.

Maintenance

Explored and conquered! Next? Reaching the top is not half as difficult as sustaining it. Maintaining the level of expertise in a particular field by continuously updating knowledge and skills is the next and probably the final stage of career development. Individuals in this stage aspire to reach the top spot in their respective fields.

In addition they seek to gain recognition as experts in their field. They have enough knowledge to double up as coaches or trainers. Hence managers should focus their expertise in order to maximize the gains from their competence.

A clear understanding of the various stages of career development helps leaders and managers chart an effective, purpose-oriented and goal specific career path for their potential employees.

Structural approach to career development

Before getting started with the step-wise approach to career development plans, corporations need to provide employees with a clear account of position-specific SWOT. Every job position has its own inherent threats and opportunities that play on an employee's weaknesses and strengths.

Giving a clear account of options available to an employee is important to sustain interest. The position descriptions the employer provides are important for employees to gain insights into the expectations and objectives from a particular job position. Once the position descriptions are charted out, employers can begin their career development process starting with employee profiling.

Compiling employee data

Employee profiling largely includes data pertaining to an employee's educational qualifications, academic interests, background, specific skills, age specifications, experience details and project specifications. There is no standard format for employee profiles and they are largely company-specific. Both new as well as existing employees

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should complete a profile. Employee profiles form the basis of career planning providing managers with a direction to follow.

Conceive short-term action plans

Employee meetings to discuss near-term objectives and action plans would help realize the beginning of career development initiative. Managers and mentors should frequently meet their subordinates to discuss their short-term objectives and chart out an action plan to meet the same. Reviewing the skills and knowledge base required to successfully deliver the pre-determined objectives is the main focus of these meetings.

Conceive long-term action plans

Unlike the short-term plans that are reviewed every three to six months, the long-term plans hold good for at least two to four years. Another difference is that the latter are not for all employees. These are charted for star performers with an impressive performance record that indicates their potential to lead an organization to success.

The long-term action plan is based on the position gap analysis where the skills required in the current scenario are extrapolated against future requirements. The gap between the two is identified and a plan of action to abridge the gap formulated.

Feedback and review

Conducting performance reviews at regular intervals to determine the progress of individual employees reinforces the formulated action plans. Frequent reviews prevent employees from going astray. Review also allows individuals to rework their objectives by setting new and better goals every time the previous goals are conquered.

Career development initiatives are representations of employee advancement within an organization. Framing effective career graphs that compliment the business growth curve is therefore critical for the success of corporate career development initiatives.

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