

10-1980

## Career-Development Planning: An Organizational View

Susan Butler

Rochelle O'Hara

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### Recommended Citation

Butler, Susan and O'Hara, Rochelle (1980) "Career-Development Planning: An Organizational View," *Woman C.P.A.*: Vol. 42 : Iss. 4 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/wcpa/vol42/iss4/6>

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# Career-Development Planning

## An Organizational View

By Susan Butler  
and Rochelle O'Hara

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Career-development planning (CDP) has been viewed traditionally as an individual employee's concern or an effort on behalf of an individual employee. Such planning identifies individual career goals and the means for achieving those goals. As part of a conventional career-development planning interview, the employer and employee discuss the employee's strengths and weaknesses and available career options.

Although individuals are ultimately responsible for their career choices, organizations are making increasing commitments to the career-development process, because more and more they view their employees as valuable resources rather than interchangeable parts.

### Career Progression Network

In fact, before career development can realize its full potential at the individual employee level, the organization must define a clearly-structured career progression network of its own. Without this clearly defined framework, the manager has only a narrow and possibly inaccurate field of information to use in counseling the employee.

Once the organization's career goals are accurately described, the employee can then see the opportunities, direction, and perhaps necessary retraining or new experience needed to reach individual career objectives.

### Organization's Goals

Career-development planning begins by establishing a broad general definition of the organization's career goals. Such work begins with management providing the following kinds of information:

- What are the business plans over the next 1, 3, 5 years?
- What specific goals/objectives are to be achieved?
- What new technologies will be used to meet the plan?
- What new management techniques will be implemented?
- What new skills will be required by the employees?
- What new work procedures will be required?
- Which departments/functions/divisions of the company will be expanding over the next 3-5 years? Which will remain static? Shrink?

The purpose of this definition phase is twofold. First, it gives man-

agement an opportunity to review the organization's plan in terms of human resource requirements. Second, it provides an insight into the future plans of the company, its current profile, and, through selected interviews, an historical perspective.

It is important to identify an organization's particular developmental stage when initiating a CDP project. As a company matures, different career goals evolve; the company may try new management styles, work approaches, or areas of expansion. These changes affect the career choices of individual employees.

A relatively new company, for example, that is trying to become known in its field and develop a customer base is typically controlled by self-motivated, entrepreneurial individuals. The type of employee who would flourish in this company is someone who works well in a loosely-structured environment; also, the individual with strong marketing skills might find this organization a good career match.

That same organization several years later will probably have different business goals and will search for employees with different skills. Assuming the organization has established itself solidly in the marketplace, it may decide to grow through mergers and acquisitions, although always maintaining centralized management. Given these objectives, individuals with good organization skills, team-building skills, and the ability to execute a well-integrated business plan would do well in this phase of the company's development.

In order for an organization to have an effective CDP program — one that benefits both employees and the employer — it must define its goals and objectives as they currently exist.

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Organizations are making increasing commitments to the career-development process

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## The organization must define a clearly-structured career progression network

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### Personnel Policies

Additionally, management provides information about its personnel policies and records:

- What are the retention patterns?
- What hiring policies exist regarding:
  - level of education?
  - minorities?
- Promotion practices:
  - union/ management positions?
  - outsiders brought in vs. moving up through organizational levels?
- Training:
  - formal programs?
  - on-the-job?
- Mobility of transferring to other departments/subsidiaries/divisions?
- Evaluation procedures?

By defining the current personnel practices, one has a good idea of the organization's existing career-development framework and also its systems and policies for hiring, training, and promoting employees.

### Skill Documentation

The next step is to work with management in documenting the skills that are going to be needed to carry out the business plans. These skill requirements are developed through a series of interviews at varying personnel levels throughout the organization. Skill requirements typically include current skills that employees have and are using in their work, additional skills which would be useful, and those new or enhanced skills that will be needed to support the business plan over the next several years.

Once agreement is reached that these skills are the required ones, management identifies the various career movements that can exist and what skills are needed at each position. This network is not based on positions, organization or reporting

structure; the network is developed by using job requirements and skill needs as the hierarchy. This network usually provides a series of valid career movements that are not solely upward within one department or function. Instead, movement is based on related skills, and often job positions in different departments or at different levels require many similar skills. The types of movements that are plausible on a career network include upward, lateral, rotational, into and out of the department or division, and in some cases downward.

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## Management identifies the various career movements that can exist and what skills are needed

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### Skills of Present Employees

Management must then identify the current skill levels of the employees. This initial assessment outlines areas of strengths and weaknesses, areas in which management will have to provide training and experience, areas for which management may have to hire the needed expertise, and what skills although currently required, will not be critical in the future.

This analysis leads to a work force management plan that helps develop the needed people for the needed positions at the required time. Management must continually refine this plan to complement changes that occur in the long-range business plan.

### Employee Interviews

Once management has a clear picture of the organizational needs and the current skills of the employees, it can engage in CDP interviews, with both employees and the employer providing valuable input. The employee can describe his/her career goals, and the manager can counsel the individual by describing what skills and experiences are going to be needed in the future; what training programs, work assignments, and other techniques are going to be available to provide this continued growth; and

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## The employees can evaluate their own goals and preferences

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what career movements exist within the organization. The manager can also describe which skills or positions will be obsolete. This information focuses the employee's attention on those areas that the company considers important.

### Employee Decision

Once management gives employees accurate information of where the organization is moving, the employees can evaluate their own goals and preferences. An employee, after having a career-development interview, may choose to continue his/her career elsewhere. This is not an indication that the CDP program has failed, for, ultimately, it is the employee who has final responsibility for his/her career. But what it does indicate is that the employee made a decision using accurate and complete information supplied by the organization.

### Conclusion

An organization cannot achieve these results in a few days or weeks. But it can make significant progress toward a successful CDP program once its employees understand the organization and its potential for implementing individual careers.Ω

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**ROCHELLE O'HARA** is a manager in the Professional Education Division at Arthur Andersen & Co. Since 1975 she has been working in the area of Career Development Planning and has consulted with Arthur Andersen & Co. clients on defining and establishing their own Career-development programs.

**SUSAN BUTLER** is a partner in the Professional Education Division at Arthur Andersen & Co. since 1978. She has been responsible for the Educational Consulting Services, of which career-development planning is the basis. She has been a national officer of ASWA.