

A Model for Career Planning in Healthcare:
Investing in a Career Development Program Will Retain Workers for Growth

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Abstract

Organizations face projected shortages in their workforces due to retirement compounded by the realized forecasted gap of skilled workers available to fill positions. The additional strain of tremendous growth in the healthcare industry adds to the workforce shortage to create vacancies that threaten survival for many hospitals. To prepare for this turbulent future, we suggest that hospitals create career development programs to retain key workers, build their existing workforce to meet future needs, and remain competitive. Healthcare organizations taking these proactive steps to promote career development will prepare their workforce for future growth, increase their ability to achieve organizational goals, and retain valued employees by focusing on their needs for continued development. We provide two models that HRD professionals can use to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of career development programs.

Introduction

Organizations face a looming specter of massive shortages in the skilled workforce pool, in part due to the impending retirement of large numbers of Baby Boomers, and in part due to a projected gap of skilled workers available to fill positions. The healthcare industry is further adversely impacted by additional trends including increases in growth due to demographic shifts, a decrease in the overall health of the population, and a lack of available skilled healthcare workers to fill needed positions.

The healthcare industry is growing at a rapid rate primarily due to a major demographic shift occurring in the United States. Baby Boomers, the largest demographic group in the country with a population of around 76 million, are reaching an age where healthcare services are needed more frequently (Randstad North America, 2000). As they age, the Boomers seek more preventative care tests and medical treatments. Adding to this unprecedented growth are the rising obesity rates that cause chronic illness and increase healthcare usage (Sturm, 2002). These trends force hospitals to strategically plan for growth through expansion of both facilities and workforce.

The decline in the supply of qualified workers, especially nurses, hampers the ability of hospitals to service this growth. Currently, approximately 80% of hospitals report a shortage of nurses, and the national vacancy rate is expected to reach 17% by 2005 (Health Forum Hospital Statistics, 2001). Predictions indicate a shortage of 1.0 million new nurses by the year 2010, increasing to 1.5 million by 2020 (Joseph & Melick, 2001). A new immigration law exacerbates the nursing shortage by requiring foreign-trained nurses to pass proficiency and English-competency exams to earn U.S. licenses (The Advisory Board, 2004).

A parallel phenomenon occurring in healthcare is the aging of the working population of nurses. Registered Nurses (RN) have reached an average age of 43 (Sochalski, 2002); retirement for RNs is expected to peak around 2010. The experience gap combines with supply as an area of great concern; hospitals have the additional challenge of attempting to fill positions requiring experience with well-trained personnel.

In addition, the projected gap in skilled workers to fill vacancies is exacerbated by the lack of educated workers. A study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that although 80% of new jobs since 1992 require post-secondary degrees, only around 30% of high school students will go to college and graduate, which results in more available jobs with less educated workers who lack necessary entry skills (Taylor, 2004).

Healthcare organizations must be able to develop employees and managers to fill vacancies created by all of these events. Career development programs can provide hospitals with one solution to close the experience and supply gap as they prepare for this turbulent future. Career development is a human resource development (HRD) practice of moving employees and an organization forward by assessing the needs of the organization and the employees within, and devising a strategic plan to fill future needs of the organization through retention of key workers and through developing the employees professionally to build the existing workforce for future needs.

Why Career Development

With more job vacancies expected and fewer workers available to fill them, healthcare organizations are pressured to discover new ways to fill critical jobs as well as find ways to retain productive workers. Although internal development of employees for growth provides one solution, many employers avoid investing adequate time or money

for training and development in fear of employees leaving with their new skills. In fact, however, opportunities for career growth, learning, and development are among the top reasons employees stay with their employers and in addition, these opportunities for career growth provide a very important recruiting strategy (Wagner, 2000). A study by the Hay Group (2001) indicated a strong relationship between job satisfaction, career development, and retention of employees. The study indicated the more satisfied employees were those with opportunities to learn new skills, and these workers were more likely to stay with the employer for at least another two years.

In order to survive growth in an era of a declining eligible workforce, organizations must focus on the career development of existing employees to improve job satisfaction and close the vacancy gap through evaluating and planning for gaps in management and staff positions caused by institutional change and growth as well as projected needs due to turnover of employees. Healthcare organizations taking these proactive steps to promote career development will prepare their workforce for future growth, increase their ability to achieve organizational goals, and retain valued employees by focusing on their needs for continued development. Career development is an essential activity to remain competitive and survive in this turbulent industry.

HRD professionals in the healthcare industry can cite two major benefits of a progressive career development program—retention and growth. Three types of employee development can be examined for implementation: career ladders, career paths, and management development. However, before integrating any of the options for career development, ample consideration and time should be invested in an analysis.

Gap Analysis

Before creating career development programs, hospitals must create strategic plans to successfully survive challenges of growth in times of workforce shortages. As hospitals prepare for the projected shortage, an analysis should be performed to predict the impact expansion and limited worker supply will have on the organization. To help with the process, HRD professionals should be included in strategic planning to ensure hospitals are prepared for the future. Once equipped with the knowledge of operational plans for future growth by service type, HRD professionals can initiate a gap analysis, which is an assessment of current staff to compare existing competencies to projected future needs.

The intent of the gap analysis is to determine the competencies needed in the future and to assist individual employees in development from their current roles toward their desired future roles (Healthcare Financial Management Association, 1998). After the analysis is complete, HRD should work with appropriate departments and employees on career development plans specific to their particular needs. The plan, based on the gap analysis, targets those developmental needs with the greatest potential effect on individuals' ability to fulfill future needed roles successfully (Healthcare Financial Management Association, 1998).

Research and Methodology

Results of a study conducted at a large community-based hospital in the southeastern United States indicated that after salary, the reason most often cited for leaving the organization was the lack of career development opportunities. After conducting regression analysis, the lack of career development opportunities was more

highly correlated with turnover than was pay. Over all, 71% of employees stated they wanted career progress plans—but those in key demographic ages reported much higher desires for career progress plans (92% of those employees ages 18-24 and 83% of those employees ages 25-29). The committee chartered to investigate the findings of the study focused on the negative effect that the lack of career development had not only on retention and productivity, but also on the organization's ability to meet growth and strategic objectives in the coming years. After an investigation of peer facilities found little investment in formalized career development programs, research was conducted primarily through healthcare journals with the focus on career development for the purpose of retention and to meet needs for expansion Numerof, Abrams, & Shank, 2002)..

Career Development for Retention

“Hospital administrators are facing a crisis of escalating proportions: how to retain the most productive members of their staffs during a time of high turnover” (Numerof, Abrams, & Shank, 2002, p. 10). Turnover levels in healthcare are currently at a 20 percent average, higher than most industries (Barney, 2002). However, the high cost of replacing employees makes the impact of turnover even greater. Barney (2002) found estimates to replace one nurse ranging from \$10,000 to \$145,000 depending on the type of job and experience level; estimates were similar for other clinical areas facing shortages of workers in such specialties as radiology, pharmacy, and labs. MidAmerica, a division of The Healthcare Company (HCA), estimates the cost of turnover in the healthcare industry to be 50 percent of the annual salary and benefits for exempt employees, and 35 percent for non-exempt employees. HCA's corporate leadership

increased their estimate to be 100 percent of a healthcare worker's salary and benefits for the purpose of business planning (Gering & Conner, 2002). To manage costs, healthcare companies must retain their workforce.

Throughout the 1990s, wages remained flat in nursing. In 2000, demand for nurses increased and consequently higher wages were being offered to attract workers. New nurses generated wages almost as high as nurses with 10 to 20 years of experience, which led to salary compression. This pattern, found in other healthcare occupations as well, is a signal of low levels of job flexibility and career mobility. In fact, often the only way for nurses to realize greater salary increases is to leave patient care (Sochalski, 2002). In order to retain nurses and other important clinical workers, hospitals must address insufficient career mobility.

In 2000, approximately 81,000 RNs not working in nursing were age 43 or younger with 58% having young children and half working in other fields (Sochalski, 2002). Reasons cited for working in other fields included better hours, more rewarding work, and higher earnings. A study conducted to determine what incentives would likely attract these RNs to reenter nursing found career development to be a strategy that would induce some nurses back into the workforce and was a strategy noted to influence those in nursing to remain there (Sochalski, 2002). In another study, HCA determined through exit interviews that candidates joined their company because they sought career opportunity, but ironically a top reason they left was for "better career opportunity" (Gering & Conner, 2002). With a gap of one million nurses projected by 2010, attraction and retention of nurses is vital for survival.

To address these issues and increase its ability to keep good employees for future growth, hospitals must create high-quality staff development programs. While other areas such as pay and benefits are important for retention efforts, staff development shows employees that the organization is supportive, caring, and future-oriented. Healthcare companies that take staff development a step further into career development increase loyalty or organizational commitment (Bartlett, 2001; Tansky & Cohen, 2001). Surveys conducted at hospitals indicate that the most effective retention strategy was internal promotion (Numerof et al., 2002). Since employee retention is another benefit of a thoroughly implemented career development program, the three types of career development—career ladders, career paths, and management development—can play important roles in retention of employees.

Career ladders provide a method of improving an employee's skill level within a specific occupation. The goal is to produce employees to fill vacancies within their field after they have attained a higher level of expertise. This practice can already be found in the healthcare industry, predominately with nursing, and is usually referred to as a clinical ladder. Career ladders provide a structured reward and recognition system for employees so that they experience both intrinsic as well as financial rewards (Fonville, Killian, & Tranbarger, 1998). Employees feel that organizations that invest in the employee's personal growth are committed to them, and they are likely to respond by increased employee loyalty and reciprocal commitment to the organization that helps the organization retain employees in clinical positions.

In organizations without career ladder opportunities, healthcare employees who seek career progression may be limited to a small number of management positions. With

few options, employees may choose to seek employment elsewhere or take a management position for which they may not be suited nor trained with a similar end result of leaving the organization. Studies have indicated that nurses may get frustrated and leave the profession as a whole, adding to the shortage of available skilled workers (Fonville et al., 1998).

Career paths are used by organizations to provide a means of linking staff to internal opportunities outside of their current skill set, enabling organizations to fill forecasted vacancies through internal development of existing employees, especially important for a hospital's retention efforts. With the numbers of available skilled workers decreasing, internal development of employees is key for survival. If, for example, employees in support positions become frustrated by the lack of career opportunity in their immediate departments or field, their frustrations can be addressed by educating these non-clinical employees on the opportunities for personal growth and the potential for financial progression through career advancement training in a clinical field (See Figure 1). By emphasizing the opportunity for personal growth and advancement as well as available options in a clinical area, as shown on the right-hand side of the example, more of these non-clinical employees may choose to seek direct patient care positions through career development programs.

When introducing the options, the organization will want to stress the greater number of vacancies and opportunities in the clinical path option. The financial progression from a non-clinical to a clinical position is also generally greater due to the high demand for those positions. By informing career path candidates of both of these facts, increased interest in a clinical profession may be generated. For clinical staff,

career paths can be used for those interested in moving to another clinical discipline or in conjunction with management development to develop a progress plan for those seeking a management position. However, the clinician's decision to follow a management path should be based on individual career goals. Those who self-select into a management career path are more likely to succeed than those who see it as their only opportunity (Grindel, 2003). Regardless of the current level of the employee and the chosen career path, as long as the path meets future needs of the organization, the tuition reimbursement programs that most facilities have in place provide these employees with the emotional and financial support to move forward (Olesen, 1999; Weisman, Minnick, Dieneman, & Cassard, 1995). Forward thinking healthcare employers need to recognize the potential of all staff and use career path programs as a retention tool.

Management development plays an important role in retaining staff through leadership development. Leadership development provides growth opportunities for high performing employees seeking management positions, and insures that developing managers are trained to handle employee development and workplace issues which increases retention of staff. Surveys have indicated that many employees harbor negative feelings toward their managers' abilities, underscoring the importance of management development to a retention strategy (Gering & Conner, 2002; Numerof et al., 2002). Through exit interviews, HCA discovered a top reason employees gave for leaving was manager/supervisor issues (Gering & Conner, 2002).

Management positions in hospitals are usually filled within the current work group since a manager's technical qualifications generally need to be identical to those in the department (McConnell, 2002). The difficulty in retaining many managers is the

pressure on the employee to maintain technical or clinical expertise while juggling the responsibilities of management. Management development training should be included in a career ladder or path for select professionals within the department or discipline.

Without the proper management development training, the burden of being a technical specialist added to the duties of a management generalist causes such intense pressure and stress that the manager may opt to leave and seek a position requiring only one of the responsibilities. Hospitals need to recognize these pressures and ensure the proper management development program trains the candidate to be proficient in management skills and provides skills that enable the candidate to cope with the intricacies of managing technical as well as management responsibilities.

The organization should develop supervisory training programs by first assessing the amount of training an individual has been exposed to prior to entering a management development track. Clinical managers have generally completed two to seven years of formal professional education; however, they may have little training in management orientation. These orientations are often focused on operational procedures, such as scheduling and record keeping, but often little or no training is focused on a supervisor's most difficult task—handling employee problems (McConnell, 2002). Management skills such as emotional and conflict management training should be the first as part of a management development program. Inexperienced or untrained managers tend to focus on the familiar clinical tasks and avoid the unfamiliar and strange management role. Without training, the likely result is frustration and burnout that leads to turnover of healthcare leaders and employees. Effective managers are those who capably manage

processes as well as employee issues and have maximum impact on retention (Numerof et al., 2002).

Career Development for Growth

After balanced levels of supply and demand for hospital workers through the decade of the 90s, the health care industry focused on a 10% growth in demand and with only a 3.7% growth in supply by the year 2000 (Health Care Advisory Board, 2002). With demand for healthcare services growing at such a rapid pace, hospitals have to prepare for future workforce needs in many service areas, filling vacancies and skill deficiencies internally. HRD is poised to insure the establishment of succession and career development plans to accomplish this task.

Traditional workforce and succession plans usually focus on job titles and duties already existing in an organization. The fault in this method is the focus on historical data rather than future or strategic data. To achieve optimal results, workforce planning must be tied to the business strategy (Guinn, 2000). For example, a traditional unit in a hospital may have been composed of a clinical director, unit coordinator, several charge nurses, and several dozen nursing employees. In the future, these units will likely be larger, adding clinical specialists, educators, physical therapists, caseworkers, and a larger staff of nursing personnel. Organizations focused on past history as a planning guide will not have an accurate picture of competencies needed, and are more likely to train or hire for positions no longer in existence. The forward-thinking organization will forecast the skills needed in the future, such as managers and staff better prepared for changes in technology or higher-level job functions.

Some of the factors affecting workforce or succession planning may include human resource needs, regulations, technology, competition, demand for quality, desire for great service, financial performance, and the organization's outlook in the future (Guinn, 2000). Since the available talent pool is scarce in healthcare, hospitals must take these factors into account. Future leaders and employees must have ability to work with diverse groups of people, be able to adapt to change, and have strong critical thinking skills. When the HRD professional prepares a competency model, the right criteria must be determined for managers and professionals in order for the organization to develop employees to achieve organizational goals (Guinn, 2000). Comparing these competencies to the current base of skills within the facility will provide the gap analysis that enables the organization to create a career development plan to fit its strategic needs and focuses the organization's attention on its entire pool of talent, instead of the few "high-performers." The ensuing step will be to place employees within a career development plan to include one or more of the following: a career ladder, career path, or management development.

With the growth and change in healthcare, hospitals are challenged to keep nurses at the bedside. Career or clinical ladders provide a means of training and rewarding nurses who choose to remain at the bedside and give hospitals a method to prepare the nursing workforce for growth (Fonville et al., 1998). A career ladder includes a step where an employee seeking career progression could receive training for a specialty area or higher-level skill set. An example would be a hospital, needing more critical care nurses for anticipated growth that provides training for selected nurses seeking career progression through training for this specialty area. The nurse completing this step would

obtain a Critical Care Registered Nurse (CCRN) certification along with an increase in status and pay, concurrently satisfying the needs of the nurse for professional development, and the needs of the hospital for more critical care nurses.

As healthcare needs grow at a faster pace than the available pool of skilled workers, providing training for future positions to internal staff will help hospitals close the vacancy gap. Developing a career path, such as the one as shown in Figure 1, is a good method of connecting employees with these vacancies. In order for a career path to be successful, the organization must identify people motivated by achievement and willing to move outside of their current occupation into an unrelated field (Llewellyn, 2002). An example would be a ward clerk or an admitting associate who seeks training in nursing. The primary motivators for the employee may include increased prestige, security, and income. The motivator for the hospital is to fill openings with internal employees, consequently narrowing the vacancy rate caused by growth.

A third type of plan, most often associated with succession planning, is management development. Management development is defined as “the system of personnel practices by which an organization tries to guarantee the timely availability of qualified and motivated employees for its key positions” with the right type and number of support and clinical staff prepared for upcoming vacancies in management positions (Jansen, van der Velde, & Mul, 2001).

Excellent nurse leadership is vital to healthcare agencies and hospitals’ survival (Fonville et al., 1998). Approximately 68 percent of all nurses are employed within hospitals with 14 percent holding job with some degree of management responsibility (Weisman et al., 1995). With a growing number of nurses sought out to fill positions such

as quality management and safety coordination, management development skills will be important for growth areas outside of direct patient care.

Most nurses employed in leadership positions do not have traditional graduate-level management training, and only 12% of hospital CEOs reported hiring nurses externally for management positions (Weisman et al., 1995). Therefore, the pathway to management is through internal promotion for the majority of the leadership positions being filled. Nurses who are selected for management development must learn many new skills while staying current with clinical practice. The new responsibilities revolve around unit management and include scheduling, payroll, budgeting, productivity, reporting, interviewing, performance appraisal, and resolving staff conflict (Fonville et al., 1998). Suggested curricula to teach these skills include healthcare law and policy, organizational behavior, organizational strategy, finance, quality assurance, and marketing (Weisman et al., 1995).

Preparation for departure of management staff, also important to consider during strategic planning, fits into the process by providing a method of utilizing human resources as a means to meet future needs of the hospital. An advantage of management development programs for succession planning is the availability of an ongoing supply of well-trained and motivated people ready and able to step into key positions. However, potential problems with management development for succession preparation include lag time between preparation and promotion as well as the selection of the wrong individual for the available position, both of which can lead to turnover and lack of resources when vacancy takes place (Baldwin, 2002). Therefore, succession plans should be flexible,

individual, and amended over time while ensuring quality training and measurements still exist.

After the HRD professional has developed a thorough career development program for an organization, another role to fill is that of advisor to, and advocate for, the career development program at the organizational level to ensure it is able to keep up with growth plans. At the point the HRD professional finds a gap between vacancies and internal staff too wide to be filled through the program, external candidates must be recommended for consideration (Butler & Roche-Tarry, 2002).

Results and Implications

By implementing one or more of the three areas mentioned for career development—career ladders, career paths, and management development—healthcare organizations can strategically position themselves to survive and thrive in a turbulent future. Developing its employees will ready the organization for growth and provide a mechanism for retaining valuable human resources. Career development also results in other benefits such as lowered costs, enhanced job satisfaction, increased efficiency, recruitment of new talent, and improved healthcare as an indirect, but measurable result (Fonville et al., 1998). As pressures increase on healthcare organizations to operate in a fast paced, changing, and growing environment, career development should be included during the strategic planning process. Enlisting HRD professionals in the process will increase likelihood of successful implementation. HRD professionals should develop models for integrating career development programs and processes within organizations undergoing similar changes as the healthcare industry. Optimally, staffing a career counselor in the HRD department to meet with employees and keep the organization

aware of deficiencies would be a more proactive solution to creating and maintaining a career development program.

Next Steps to Integrate Career Development

Organizations experiencing a shortage of workers and simultaneously impacted by growth or high turnover of employees may be benefited by the creation of a position to monitor and counsel employees on career opportunities. The career counselor would assess the future needs of the organization based on evaluation of the current skills held within an organization's human capital, and create and communicate plans to fill gaps through internal development of employees. The person selected for such a position should be grounded in the HRD profession and have a background in assessment and employee development.

The primary role of the career counselor is to meet with managers at all levels to discuss current and projected vacancies as well as existing employee needs and qualifications. At this initial stage, assessments of existing staff occur, beginning with the most vital areas as identified by managers. This information would then be shared with local colleges to assess available programs, which in turn gives the career counselor the necessary information to create various types of developmental pathways. As this process is completed, the responsibility of the counselor is to share the information with the organization and to meet with interested employees to provide them with information about the available developmental options. The counselor then works with the organization to create flexible work schedules for those in developmental programs to facilitate completion of their studies. The career counselor manages tuition and scholarship programs, advising the organization of the best use of funds according to

greatest needs and corresponding programs. Hours for such an employee would vary from part-time to full-time, based on the size and needs of the organization.

Model for Integrating Career Counseling

Once the decision to move forward with career counseling has been made, an organization must determine how and when the process would take place. Before integrating such a process, the organizational culture must be considered. In other words, does the program have a strong backing from senior level managers and will the support structures be kept in place to make sure developmental efforts are sustained? Since career development can be expensive for organizations, careful planning and communication must occur before the program is announced. Once this is done, each organization should determine a model that fits within its current processes and culture.

Figure 2 shows an example of how the career planning process could work within an organization with a fairly standardized orientation and evaluation process. In this model, like most organizations, the employee is formally introduced to the job and environment, followed by an evaluation time-period. The unique part of this model is the integration of career planning opportunities throughout the year, beginning with awareness during the orientation processes.

Ideally employees should be given a formal opportunity to speak with a career counselor after a probationary period, such as a six-month evaluation as shown in Figure 2. This important juncture in an employee's relationship with the organization provides an optimal time for futuristic planning. The manager simply offers to engage in a conversation about career planning and the employee chooses the direction. If the employee shows interest in career planning, an opportunity to meet with the in-house

career counselor is extended. If interest is not expressed, then the conversation is moved toward the current job responsibilities and setting goals. Regardless of which path employees choose, the chance to increase productivity and engagement is provided early in the employment cycle, giving the individual responsibility to perform. If the employee chooses to take a career planning path, an opportunity is available to set specific goals based on the individual's and organization's objectives.

Whether pursuing career or departmental goals, the level of accomplishment is first measured at the annual evaluation. This becomes a time to truly gauge how successful the individual has been, a chance to boost performance, and an opportunity to revisit the career planning process regardless of the initial decision on a pathway. This part of the process recycles annually in formal conversations, with more informal meetings taking place more often. Managers can be provided with a standardized format to determine each employee's interests. (See Figure 2.)

Discovering Employee Career Objectives

After awareness of the organization's workforce needs and options for professional development plans have been determined, a method of assessing individuals on their desires for career development must be implemented. Employees can be questioned about their career interests to help them build careers within their current roles, to determine out if they are interested in pursuing other positions, and help them to determine what satisfactions they seek in order to derive their personal objectives (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

A perfect time to begin using these questions is during a probationary or six-month evaluation. During this discussion, both manager and employee may form

conclusions about current performance, any obstacles present, and employee potential for meeting the objectives discussed so both can make better decisions for the future. The employee may also choose to meet with the career counselor at this stage for assistance in setting objectives since the counselor will be knowledgeable about various options for career plans and the associated requirements of each. After setting the objectives, an organized and open process for follow up meetings to discuss performance will keep the employee on track and the manager informed. This could be in the form of a mentoring program or by planning structured performance management meetings with the employee.

Incorporating a Mentoring Program

In order to retain employees in career development programs, a good mentoring program provides vital support to employees and keeps them from getting lost and frustrated in the process. Mentoring can be defined as the process of experts facilitating learning through workplace interactions that allow the learner to construct his/her own knowledge and understanding with a goal of promoting the protégés' career development (Grindel, 2003; Kerka, 1998). Such a program can be used for career ladders, career paths, and management development as a means of teaching employees within their career development plan.

The benefits of a mentoring program include a reduction of organizational problems such as premature departure, stagnation, boredom, and lack of qualified personnel in the organization (Grindel, 2003). Even though the benefits may be residual, when mentoring is done correctly, the result should match the main goals of the career development program. For example, a mentoring program at New Hanover Regional

Medical Center in Wilmington, N.C., reduced nursing turnover rates from 34 percent to 8 percent in one year, with protégés attributing their decision to remain with the hospital and in nursing to their relationships with their mentors. The program defined “mentorship” as “a self-limiting relationship between an expert and novice nurse that involved role modeling, counseling, and coaching” (Verdejo, 2002).

The mentor can be in the form of an executive, a manager, a co-worker in the desired position or level, or a person outside of the department where the employee is currently assigned. The mentor takes on the role of guide, advisor, coach, sponsor, motivator, and role model during these processes (Grindel, 2003; Kerka, 1998). The relationship between the mentor and protégé during the learning process provides both instrumental and psychological components for success. The instrumental component supplies necessary knowledge and the psychological component provides feedback, which gives the protégé support in a non-threatening manner (Kerka, 1998). This personalized and systematic way of introducing an employee into the work environment or position socializes the person into an organization’s culture and provides a mechanism to immediately address the protégé’s problems or aggravations, giving the organization a greater chance of retaining employees as they are trained.

The key to a mentoring program is having mentors who are subject matter experts and who have additional training in the mentoring process. When choosing a mentor, careful consideration must be made to make sure the mentor is appropriate, in the right position to be able to assist and have the resources—time, emotional and intellectual capabilities—to dedicate to the relationship (Doody, 2003).

The HRD professional must then work with the organization to have appropriate mentoring training established, depending on the position the learner is training to fill, along with a timeline for completion. Once the selection criteria and the processes are completed, a workshop to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and protégé will prepare the mentor for his/her role. This workshop should include training for setting up communication guidelines because during the process it is imperative the mentor provides timely feedback and keeps the learner on course. While the communication process may vary depending on the individuals in the mentoring relationship, it should be stressed that successful communication is goal-focused (Grindel, 2003). An example of goal-focused communication is scheduled performance management meetings, which is also a method managers can use for developing staff outside of a formal mentoring program.

Performance Management

An alternative to a formal mentoring program is performance management, a method by which managers set objectives and monitor performance. Performance management is used to track performance more frequently than annual reviews, to communicate expectations, motivate, and develop employees. Performance management meetings have also been shown by organizations to have a positive effect on retention (Gering & Conner, 2002). When organizations implement such meetings, a regular timeline (such as quarterly for example) should be established for continued discussions and tracking. However, consideration should be given to individual communication and management styles.

A starting point for implementing such a system may include an overview of the roles of managers. With the heavy workloads and rapid change in the workplace, many approaches to managerial behavior and systems are often too complex for implementation, may not be necessary or may not fit the individual's managerial style (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Therefore, when reviewing the roles and suggesting new practices, flexibility needs to be built into the plans.

Mintzberg's research of the roles and responsibilities of the manager is a simple yet comprehensive overview being used successfully in organizations (Guo, 2002). Guo (2002) provided an overview of Mintzberg's research, where he identified ten distinctive work roles: the interpersonal roles including figurehead, leader, and liaison roles; the informational roles including monitor, disseminator, and spokesman roles; and decisional roles including entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator roles. Mintzberg provided a good framework for the HRD professional to link employee development and management responsibility as part of the hospital's strategy. The benefits of such training include a better understanding of leadership competencies, ability to handle new challenges, leverage to meet outcomes and to meet financial viability (Krejci & Malin, 1997).

Once managers understand their roles in retaining and developing people, the managers may move forward with a performance management arrangement. This process should begin by HRD suggesting all departments create a format for employees to meet with their managers. Establishing a routine for performance planning meetings may include asking the employee to assess his/her performance to review with the manager, followed by an opportunity for discussion for the manager to help the employee set goals

for the time period between meetings with specific actions to be measured at the next meeting (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). This cycle of performance management meetings continues as the employee develops and the relationship grows.

The characteristics of these meetings are simplicity, frequent interaction, future orientation, and self-tracking (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). The meetings should begin soon after career discovery meetings take place or after someone is hired to determine individual strengths and preferences, to establish a communication pattern, and to develop an agenda and routine for meeting. The purpose of these meetings is to continuously set objectives for a prescribed amount of time, such as the next quarter, to follow up on success in meeting those objectives, and then to reestablish another set of goals. This allows the managers to help employees manage and progress in their careers, and stay informed about the performance of each person. This cycle will also bolster the capability of organizations to stay on track with its strategic initiatives involving development of its human resources. While this format is designed for the manager-employee relationship, it could also be used in a mentoring relationship. Not only does this meeting format give managers and mentors the agenda to develop employees, but it also gives them opportunity to spot dissatisfaction and solve problems. Having these types of discussions have been shown to increase staff retention through improved employee satisfaction (Fabre, 2003). Whether mentoring or using performance management meetings, management should evaluate the employees to ensure adequate competency standards have been met as management plans for the employees to move into new roles and/or take on more responsibilities.

Recommendations

Faced with burgeoning needs and limited resources, the healthcare industry would benefit from implementation of a comprehensive career development program, made up of career ladders, career paths, and management development, as part of a hospital's recruitment and retention strategic plan.

HRD must explore career development as a practice to bolster an organization's ability to meet strategic goals through its human resources. Lawler and Mohrman (2003) found that 97 percent of organizations use tuition reimbursement to some extent and 53 percent to a great extent for developing employees. While this speaks volumes for an organization's commitment to assist in employees' development, they also found investments made in career support programs were not related to any particular organizational strategy (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003). The healthcare industry, faced with burgeoning needs and limited resources, would benefit from implementation of a comprehensive career development program, made up of career ladders, career paths, and management development as part of a hospital's recruitment and retention strategic plan.

At the beginning of this undertaking, organizations should examine deficiencies in its evaluation and communication processes, integrating necessary improvements within employee development programs. Furthermore, consideration should be made to incorporate career counseling within the program, optimally through an additional full-time HRD position or as added responsibility within a HRD professional's duties. With the pressures of maintaining and cultivating human capital within many industries, career development programs could emerge as one of the most important elements of HRD that could contribute greatly to the success of businesses in today's economy. The

measurement for such programs would be an organization's ability to develop staff for growth and the resulting effect on retention versus current costs of recruiting and turnover. In the long term, measurement of the impact career development has on the organization's ability to reach strategic goals should be included.

Through more focused career development initiatives, HRD can provide the vital link between employers and employees as they search for ways to enhance human capital and create opportunities. Further research on the topic and testing of the proposed model will open new methods of applying career development programs to varying sizes and types of organizations. Additionally, a job analysis and competency model should be performed for a career counselor to further define the functions the job would perform as well as its strategic fit within HRD.

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Figure 1

Example of a career path for an entry level position

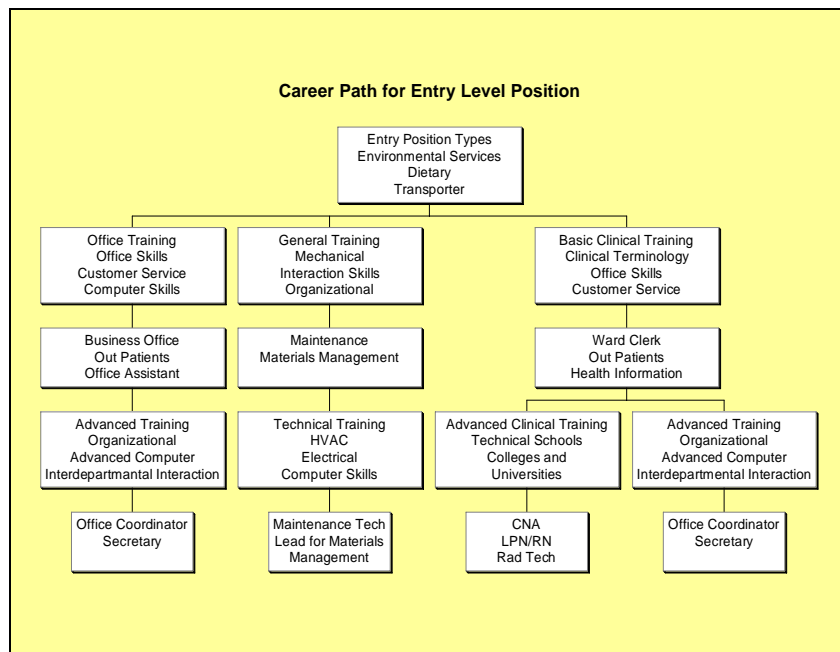


Figure 2

Example of a Career Planning Process

