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How Corporations Are Helping Employees Take Control of Their Careers

Helen Scully and Shoya Zichy

The challenges of unstable economic times, inter-generational clashes, and impending boomer retirements can translate into an array of career development offerings within organizations. Increasingly, companies are stepping up to the plate and creating programs that would not have existed several years ago. Offerings are employee-driven and highly customized to meet the unique needs of each organization's culture. Some companies are more progressive than others – many companies provide some of the requisite website resources, but lack the commitment from senior management.

However, the following descriptions of career development programs represent a sampling of innovative approaches.

Deloitte LLP

Stan Smith of Deloitte LLP estimates that the company's "career customization" program has saved the company more than \$150 million over the last five years by keeping valued employees who otherwise would have left the firm. Over 1,000 people have gone on record saying they would have moved elsewhere without the resources available through the career connections website and coaching program which enable people to change jobs within the company without negative repercussions. The program started after 9/11 with the support of then CEO, Bill Parrett. Smith, whose title reads "National Director, Talent Innovation & Eminence," put his motto into action: "If we fearlessly prepare employees to leave, then they will stay." Typically, some 400 people will switch jobs within the company every year, he notes. This represents 1% of Deloitte's 40,000 employees in 100 locations. Many more, however, are coached for career development – in his

estimation, over 10% of the workforce.

The resources include a comprehensive website which lists, among other things, job openings within the firm in the U.S. It also provides career-building tools, such as a series of instruments familiar to APTi members which assess personality, values, and working styles, as well as a resume writing facility and a number of consultants available for confidential coaching. Properly used, these tools enable employees at all levels to create an actionable career plan. Meanwhile, he adds, others are also expected to coach – managers, HR professionals, and assigned mentors. The goal is career customization which Smith also refers to as a "career lattice." You can move up, down, and sideways, reflecting the fact that careers follow a "wave-like pattern." In addition to keeping valued employees and strengthening the work culture, he notes that career customization has proven to be an excellent recruiting tool for attracting new talent. "Career development," he concludes, "is on its way to becoming the value proposition between employer and employees."

Oracle

Jackie Alcalde Marr, Director of Organization and Talent Development (OTD), is responsible for leadership, professional, and organizational development at Oracle in North America. Oracle is the largest business software company in the world with more than 320,000 customers – including 98 of the Fortune 100 – and supports these customers in more than 145 countries. Roughly 80,000 employees utilize both face-to-face and online offerings to develop their careers via highly flexible, regionally customized platforms.

"Oracle has a strong self-service culture," Alcalde Marr notes, as she explains

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the extensive online toolkit that includes nine interactive platforms for employee self-development. Over the past five years, these toolkits have been developed through the collaboration of OTD design teams from all over the globe. Each kit incorporates the very best of each regional solution, including web-based information, processes, and tools that managers and/or employees use to improve their performance.

"The OTD website was designed to accommodate three kinds of users: those who were not sure what they needed, those who had a good idea, and those who were returning to find a specific tool or solution," says Alcalde Marr. Solution roadmaps, a signature feature of the website, lead employees down one of five question paths to the global or regional solutions that best meet their needs.

The toolkits are as follows:

New Hire Toolkit: Helps recently hired employees navigate their new careers at Oracle.

My Career Toolkit: Helps employees take initiative to plan their own career path.

Development Options Matrix: Links development solutions to specific core competencies.

Job Competency Profile Toolkit: Shows employees the capabilities needed for various jobs.

Job Readiness Toolkit: Helps managers determine if employees are ready for promotion.

Candidate Interview Toolkit: Assists and interviews the team to create an effective selection process.

Performance Management Toolkit: Guides employees and managers with performance assessment and development planning.

Talent Model Toolkit: Guides managers to assess their team's capability and to plan development, retention, and succession strategies.

Executive Resource Portal: Shares executive resources and success stories.

Beyond the toolkits, each regional OTD team responds to requests for customized solutions regarding career development, leadership development, mentoring, and executive coaching. These services are delivered onsite through face-to-face consultation, offering a human touch to accent the online resources.

New York Life Investments

Christine Birnbaum, Director of Human Resources and Diversity Director at New York Life Investments, focuses more on group activities for the staff of 1,600. "In asset management," she explains, "people do not have a lot of time, so activities must be done fast and in sound bites. We have noted that VP women, for example, need to work on their skills for networking and managing up to get them to the next level. So with the support of senior women sponsors, projects are identified to develop those skills and are gained by activities such as organizing panels of senior managers who will talk about their own career development during lunch sessions held four times a year." The VPs develop needed skills while interviewing and interacting with these managers.

New York Life Investments also has a popular mentoring program and runs book discussions on relevant management issues. Monthly networking events for different interest groups, such as Asians, Hispanics, gays, and lesbians, provide the opportunity for these groups to come up with their own ideas.

Birnbaum also maintains a comprehensive lending library and an internal website where she posts her interviews with senior managers, featuring their career stories, special interests, hobbies, and strategies for work/life balance. Another successful program involves sending high



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potential individuals in their mid 30s in groups of 24 to a program at Babson College in Boston. There, led by professors from the Harvard Business School, they explore the implications of leadership in professional services organizations and create short, medium, and long-term career plans to guide their advancement. The success of these initiatives is measured through engagement surveys, zoomerang surveys, and 360 feedback reports.

The main challenges, she states, are convincing middle managers of the value of these initiatives (upper and lower levels seem to buy in more readily) and getting employees to recognize it is *their* responsibility to take charge of their careers. They need "to have skin in the game," she notes, "and to recognize that the world is changing around them, and if they don't do something it will come back to bite them!" Birnbaum's best strategy is finding senior level champions and providing them with lots of data that builds the business case for these initiatives.

Hartford Financial Products

For **Patti Mittelman**, Director of Human Resources at Hartford Financial Products, the motto is "The Hartford is the place where you grow your career rather than just take a job." For this underwriting unit of the Hartford Financial Services Group, "it's a win/win strategy." She adds, "It benefits the individual, while providing the business with a more knowledgeable and motivated employee.

"Career development is embedded in our culture," Mittelman emphasizes. The initiatives include transferring people to other departments to provide exposure to a variety of clients, lines of business, and products, which gives them breadth of experience. They are also encouraged to collaborate on meaningful projects with peers and senior leaders. "Those on the management track are tapped as mentors and spearhead key initiatives such as our underwriter trainee program. We also have career paths for those who excel in their field, but have no desire to move into management. Professionals in underwriting or IT, for example, who may prefer to focus on their technical expertise find this an attractive route for advancement," notes Mittelman.

On a company wide level, The Hartford's Corporate University provides formal development. Through webinars and onsite courses, entry-level employees up through managers can experience tailored programs designed to advance their skills, competencies, and business knowledge. For example, the Leadership Acceleration series provides a robust curriculum designed for those who want to move up the management track.

Success is measured through engagement surveys, or shorter versions known as "pulse surveys." The company also keeps an eye on the progress of attracting and retaining key talent. Additionally, managers are rewarded for strong leadership skills and there is accountability. The challenge is to come up with realistic career plans that balance employee interests with business strategies. The overall effect, says Mittelman, is very much facilitated by the Hartford culture, with its long standing tradition of encouraging employees to "grow their own careers." ■

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