

Career development:

An introduction

Educational Competencies Consortium Ltd is a not-for-profit, member-driven organisation in the higher and further and related sectors. It supplies its members with a unique mix of high quality role design and analysis products and bespoke services to enable them to deliver best practice in people management.

We add value by helping our members develop people and performance in a transparent and objective way.

Developing people, delivering results

Our role design and analysis products (HERA and FEDRA) have been developed by and for the Higher and Further Education sectors and are used successfully in nearly 130 organisations. An independent review found HERA had fulfilled its design objectives and achieved high levels of satisfaction amongst managers, staff and trade unions.

Our unique approach builds links between recruitment, reward management, workforce planning and career mapping thus providing an integrated and flexible approach to best practice in people management.

The ECC team provides expert support, with a deeply held belief that our work has a positive impact on the results our members are able to achieve. These are not just HR results, but contribute to the overall success of each member organisation.

Please contact us to talk about how we can help you achieve your objectives:

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT: BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

"The human experience of work varies from joy to desperation, from the excitement of the new to the boredom of 'been there, done that'. (Bloch, 2005).

What is meant by career development?

The concept of 'career' has traditionally been seen as a course or progress through a broadly linear series of formal changes in role through which an individual gains increasing levels of experience, expertise and responsibility, and often status and reward. This usually occurs within the same organisation and or professional field. However, Arnold (1997) makes explicit the 'personal' nature of career by describing it as "the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person".

Therefore, career development can mean both the ways in which individuals plan their careers within and between organisations (with a focus on their own personal preferences and life contexts) and how organisations structure and support the career progress of staff (with a focus on organisational priorities and often called career management). There can be tensions between these perspectives, but a balance is desirable. As Herriott (1992) notes rather bluntly "Development by the organisation without reference to the individual, and development by the individual without reference to the organisation, are both dead ends"

What do careers in higher education look like?

The world of work and the nature of careers are changing. The expectation of having a 'job for life' with one employer in one occupation is seen by many as being no longer possible (or even desirable). Individuals are increasingly mobile; moving between organisations and roles and looking to develop a range of skills and experiences by moving up, down, across or even off what Gunz (1989) describes as the 'career climbing frame'.

The higher education sector is also witnessed enormous change, as a result of impacts, such as globalisation, 'mass' higher education, changing financial and funding structures and a renewed political interest in higher education.

The management and development of staff in UK universities was the subject of a special enquiry more than a decade ago (CVCP, 1993). The resulting 'Fender Report' noted emerging change in the nature of work and recommended a move towards a more strategic approach to people management and development. The Dearing Report (1997) also acknowledged that "over the next 20 years, the roles of staff are likely to change, as they undertake different combinations of functions at different stages of their careers" and pressed higher education institutions to support staff in preparing for new working patterns and roles. Dearing also recommended (as had Fender) the development of a framework for determining pay and conditions of service. Such exhortations bore some fruit in Autumn 2000, when the Higher Education Funding Council for England announced funds of £330m over three years intended to help English HEIs "... recruit, retain and develop staff and modernise management processes in the sector" as part of its Rewarding and Developing Staff (R&DS) initiative.

An Office of Public Management review of the initiative carried out in 2003 confirmed that HEIs "have been able to increase institutional focus on staff development and training which has raised the profile of training and career development for both academic and professional and support staff. Staff are more conscious of its importance". For HEIs, the OPM review highlighted the progress of many institutions in addressing recruitment and retention issues by focusing on pay and reward frameworks, development of possible career routes and delivery of clear career development that helps all staff "understand where their contribution fits into the larger picture".

In Summer 2003, the Joint National Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) published a Framework Agreement for the Modernisation of Higher Education Pay Structures which included among the agreed principles a statement of the importance of 'regular development reviews for all staff – with a view to facilitating both the improvement of performance to meet institutional objectives and career development for individuals'.

Recent European legislation and sector-wide negotiations have affected the use of fixed-term contracts for staff including those employed as researchers and part time lecturers. Market pressures are encouraging institutional mergers, internal re-structuring exercises, the devolution of functions and increased decision making by line managers mean that much larger and more powerful leadership roles are being created. Succession planning is seen as one of the significant challenges faced by UK vice-chancellors (LFHE Evolving Agenda 2005).

The external and inter-sector pressures inevitably mean that the nature and structure of work in UK higher education, as in other sectors experiencing similar pressures, are changing. Team and project-based work are on the increase, as are collaborations both within and outwith the sector. Greater movement into and out of the organisation and increasing professionalisation have replaced traditional paths. At one time it was common to see the career administrator or career technician working from entry up through the appropriate grade structure to retirement after 30 or 40 years in the same institution. Even the academic career route from post-doctoral research through lecturer, senior lecturer and professorial roles is followed by fewer staff as "... the opportunities today tend to be less linear, secure and straightforward" (Blaxter et al, 1998). For some groups of staff, the opportunities to pursue a career have been non-existent.

Trends in the labour market at large are encouraging staff in all groups, not just those in professional occupations, to have greater expectations of their employer and see career progression and development opportunities as part of their reward package. They also expect their employer to allow them the right to influence the work on which they are engaged, contribute to decisions and have their aspirations accommodated. This trend has been accelerated in the sector through institutional commitment to initiatives such as Investors in People and employee well-being programmes and the use of staff surveys.

Why is career development important?

Given the extent of change, increased mobility and uncertainty, there may seem little point in individuals or organisations attempting to plan or structure careers. But this is a short term view as there are a number of reasons why career development can play a useful part in broader organisational planning as well as in individuals' development. As Arnold (1997) notes:

"It is exactly because maps of the employment terrain are harder to come by that we need to pay more attention to careers" (Arnold, 1997)

The dynamics of the labour market has increased the demand for employees with transferable skills and the ability to keep up to date and adapt. This means that individuals who treat their careers as the culmination of a portfolio of marketable competencies, experiences and qualifications, rather than progression up a prescribed set of steps, will have greater currency within their employing organisation, as they will be equipped to respond to the effects of internal reorganisation and the demand for new skills and ways of working. However, they are also better able to move between organisations in the sector and possibly in other sectors as the demand for highly skilled experienced workers increases.

Employers have long argued that turnover is a valid reason for not investing in training and developing: why invest in individuals who move to competing organisations? However, as the labour market has tightened, employees, with marketable skills, have added career development opportunities to the sought for characteristics of their employer of choice. Therefore wise employers include training and development opportunities as part of the reward package. They also recognise the importance of retaining staff with sought after competencies and organisational knowledge. Therefore the provision of developmental experiences and training opportunities need that both they and the individuals are able to acquire the skills needed to meet the demands of the future. Thus the concept of career development as climbing frame rather than ladder is perhaps more helpful.

This trend can be seen in the more strategic approach being taken to staff and organisational development by higher education institutions. The introduction of the National Framework Agreement and the single pay spine has prompted many to regard career development schemes as the means of enabling individuals and roles to grow and to help staff move horizontally as well as vertically within the organisation. The career frameworks and pathways being developed will mean that it is possible and desirable to extend progression and advancement opportunities more widely than has previously been the case. They will also recognise staff development opportunities on and off the job. The next section will look at some of the approaches to career development planning and will include examples from within the sector.

IDENTIFICATION, EVALUATION AND PLANNING

Principles of career development planning

A study commissioned by the CIPD (2003) found that the majority of organisations expect employees to take responsibility for their own careers, but nevertheless recognised that they need support and training in order to do this. Career development 'discussions', they suggest, can have the following benefits:

- Better deployment of skills (helping people move into jobs where their skills are best used, including lateral, horizontal career moves)
- Higher organisational performance (based on assumptions of links between individual performance and motivation)
- Attraction and retention of good quality staff
- Making the most of each individual's 'stay' in the organisation (no matter how long or how short)

Echoing much other research, the CIPD suggests the following benefits for individuals:

- A clearer sense of career direction (an idea where they are going in future)
- Increased self-insight - a more realistic view of their abilities and potential
- Better information on, and broader understanding of, career options
- Increased confidence and motivation - an emotional impact
- Job moves - a relatively common, but often not immediate, outcome

(CIPD 2005)

Career development can therefore be defined as a partnership activity which emphasises the importance of relationships between an individual, line manager and HR professionals:

- Line manager and employee: a key relationship which requires open, honest discussions about career options and opportunities
- HR professional and line manager: with the former in a supportive role assisting managers identify long-term development needs and, talent and providing information about internal opportunities
- HR professional and employee – in which the individual is helped to formulate realistic development plans and access to resources, and is provided with objective advice in a neutral environment

Thus a key element requires an individual to have an understanding of his or her current skills and the value of experiences. Equally important is the assessment of how realistic those aspirations might be in the given organisational or professional context. This appraisal should include an evaluation of what opportunities exist or are likely to arise to fulfil them. This can be assisted if the organisation can articulate some of the ways it expects roles to evolve and how it sees individuals may move into or out of them. Whilst this suggests a 'top-down' and potentially mechanistic approach, in practice, as Burgoyne (1988) suggests:

"Collaborative career planning is a managed process of dialogue between every manager and the organisation about career prospects and aspirations, skills and development needs"

Such an approach also fits with the requirements of initiatives such as Investors in People and is practiced by those organisations competent in business planning and with good open internal communication systems.

In the higher education context, we should also acknowledge the contribution that Trades Unions, professional associations and other bodies can and do make separately or as partners with employers in the development and promotion of career frameworks, professional standards and competences, continuing professional development schemes, and other staff and career development activities.

So, the essential, basic ingredients for career development planning include a combination of processes that identify an individual's current 'level' of competency based on an assessment of skills and experience (by self, peer and or management) and the organisation's future expectations for different roles. Research suggests that both self-development and career management have key inter-related components which the CIPD summarises as follows:

- **impartial** career information and advice
(career counselling by trained professionals, access to career information, career workshops, coaching and mentoring)
- **realistic** career planning and support activities
(setting personal objectives, formal appraisal meetings, 360 degree feedback, career support from HR, developmental programmes)
- **lateral** developmental assignments
(external or internal secondments, sabbaticals, managed career breaks, shadowing, projects)
- **internal** job markets and job posting systems
- **targeted** initiatives aimed at specific populations
(high potential development schemes, succession planning, development centres)

As the CIPD (2005) notes, supporting the career development needs of all staff can be a "huge and complex challenge", especially in large and complex organisations, such as HEIs. Finding mechanisms and processes that are appropriate for the wide range of people and potential careers employed within universities is not a trivial task and suggests that a range of approaches is needed to accommodate the diversity of occupational groups and keep pace with the changing nature of work and career in higher education.

Examples of career development approaches

If we take the notion of partnership and relationships and the principles and 'components' identified above, what might (or do) career development approaches look like in HE? Currently a range of mechanisms are being introduced across the sector to support the identification and description of the competencies associated with roles.

Recommendations of the Fender Report (1993) led to the formation of the Educational Competencies Consortium (ECC) Ltd a year later. The Consortium, with now over 120 institutions in membership, developed the Higher Education Role Analysis (HERA) scheme to assess the relative value of roles to support the implementation of the National Framework Agreement and demonstrate equal pay for work of equal value. The definition of roles based on the structure provided by the elements of the HERA scheme enables the similarities and differences to be recognised, valued and articulated. The common language thus provided helps employees appreciate, in greater detail than hitherto, what is required of their role and others in which they have some interest.

Horizontal movement between roles in the same grade (i.e. from one role to another without salary enhancement) may become increasingly important in enabling individuals to gain knowledge, skills and experience that can help prepare them to make their next move 'up'. Increased internal mobility will also provide a means of enhancing cross-organisational understanding and the flexibility of the workforce.

Even so, progression and promotion along recognised career paths are still important. Pay and grading issues have received increased attention as a result of the implementation of new pay and grading structures and the entitlement to career development opportunities is being demanded by all staff groups. Similarly, employers are linking career development and the need to manage progression to 'bigger picture' strategies, succession planning and organisational development.

The terminology varies, but each role in the hierarchy has a profile, outline or description which summarises the expected levels of responsibility and skills, knowledge and experience required to perform the role. The definition of an individual role's requirements can be mapped against other roles to show relationships and create a 'career pathway', horizontal and vertical. This can be within accepted occupational groups, such as HR or IT workers or more flexibly across groups to allow an individual plot a route that fits with their interests and aspirations. Clear and direct links to professional career routes (and associated standards and qualifications) such as librarianship or accountancy can be formed thus allowing them to feature in the internal career framework. This should be a flexible structure for while career development planning is equally important for all staff groups, different approaches, partnerships and supporting tools may be needed for different occupations.

Despite the changes in the nature of careers and the higher education sector more widely, academic roles are still broadly similar to those of several decades ago. The majority of people embarking on an academic career are "likely to view academic work as something they intend to engage in for a significant period of time, perhaps (if not necessarily full-time) for their entire working career" (Baxter et al, 1998) and will expect to develop and progress along a well established route. However, as Ramsden (1998) notes: "it is a cardinal error to believe that academic staff, as professionals, do not need help to define targets, monitor their progress towards them and develop their careers".

The implementation of the National Framework Agreement has been accompanied by the development of academic profiles. The indicative profiles agreed by JNCHES identified three major routes (i.e. Teaching and Scholarship, Teaching and Research and Research) and up to five distinct levels of responsibility. While academic staff have been assigned to the relevant

profile in one of these routes, it is accepted that progression can be sideways as well as upwards.

This categorisation of academic work also supports the recognition given to the importance of establishing career pathways for research staff by the Concordat and subsequent Research Careers Initiative (RCI, 1996-7) and, most recently, the Roberts Review (2003). "The [contract] research staff in our universities are a very precious asset. We must do all we can to support their personal and career development" (Roberts, 2003, quoted in Kent (2005)).

Legislation and agreements on the use of fixed term contracts has resulted in the introduction of redeployment policies and new redundancy arrangements rather than simply allowing contracts to terminate at the end of the research contract. These new arrangements have brought the need for career planning for research staff into even clearer focus. Whilst 'traditional' academic roles that combine lecturing and research will continue to be fairly hierarchically based on a career ladder and grading structure, those, particularly in the early stages of a research-oriented career, are now encouraged to develop a wider range of transferable skills to allow them to branch out onto other areas of the career climbing frame either within or outside academia.

Modernisation of pay and performance systems that reward personal development has been "slow to develop in universities and, notably among technical and support staff, there is much work to do" (Murlis and Hartle, 1996). HEFCE agrees and is encouraging the increased professionalisation of those staff groups often pejoratively labelled as support staff. Now the work needed to implement the National Framework Agreement, has largely been completed universities can now turn their attention to the career development of these occupations. However, this presents new challenges as the number of senior posts available within a single institution can be limited by structural and hierarchical constraints that do not exist for academic roles. Additionally, broader skills and experiences, including people and resource management, are likely to come into play and potentially 'map across' the climbing frame.

Regional and national collaborations such as the Higher Education and Technicians Educational Development (HEATED) project are exploring ways of supporting professional and career development for specialist technical staff. The aim is to develop a professional organisation for HE technicians, with continuing professional development developed in partnership with the Institute of Science Technology. The Higher Education Academy has now established its accreditation process for those engaged in teaching and learning support services which recognises increased mastery rather than progression up the hierarchy.

There is a range of tools and approaches available to line managers, HR and careers professionals (as well as individuals) to support career development planning, evaluating individuals' capabilities, matching them to their career aspirations (and organisational need) and identifying development actions to achieve them. Beesley et al (2004) highlight the use of 360 degree feedback particularly for senior managers. Huxley and Thackwray (2004) found "varying support for and indeed perceived value in competency frameworks in the sector, with respondents". Competency-based approaches are increasingly being explored as a means of linking role requirements (and organisational need) to the assessment of individual achievement and aspirations. Development plans that can be formed to enable an individual develop within their current role, along an occupational pathway or horizontally using a mixture of approaches

that include off-the-job training with work related activities as well as the development of personal competency.

Beesley et al (ibid) also found a growth in appraisal and development schemes for manual staff that place less emphasis on formal paperwork than is sometimes the case in 'traditional' appraisal schemes in higher education. The annual appraisal or performance review process may be the best known forum for a career discussion, although much has been written elsewhere about the "historical barriers" to the successful use of such schemes in higher education (ECC, 2007) which may suggest they should not be the only forum.

Higher education institutions have traditionally offered careers advice and guidance to their student body. There is some evidence of this type of service being extended to staff. Investments in careers services made with Roberts funding to support research staff workers have, in some institutions, been consolidated to allow appointment of specialist careers advisers dedicated to the provision of career development services for staff across all groups.

The HERO web site also provides information to attract people to careers in higher education and inform those already employed within it. Whilst careers in higher education and elsewhere may no longer offer 'cradle to grave' prospects, the growing interest in lifelong learning and a mobile workforce are likely to require more, not less, tools for supporting personal and career development planning. Continuing professional development and personal development planning tools – many of which can be found online – have been in use by professional associations and students for many years. In future, higher education institutions may encourage staff to supplement formal training and development found in induction, probation and appraisal schemes. Approaches available for use include a form of personal development that encourages career development planning and provides a record of learning and increased competency that supports reflection and is available to take should they leave their employing organisation.

The challenge with any approach, given the pace of change, is to be flexible enough to accommodate diverse career patterns and 'a range of inputs and outputs'. As suggested by the principles of career development planning set out above, the individual's and line manager's needs and aspirations also need to be placed in the context of wider organisational goals and developments.

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