

Career Development & Employee Commitment

By Andrew Simon

Practices which help or hinder employee commitment

To employees, loyalty means the desire to stay and contribute because they think what the organisation does-and how it does it, is worth their time, experience and creativity. These employees are vital to any organisation dealing with 'retention and commitment issues'.

The checklist of conditions and practices that help or hinder an employee's desire to stay with an organisation can be very long. Recent work which the prestigious Saratoga Institute carried out, has narrowed the potential list to a few, important factors that are linked to job satisfaction and to a person's intention to stay with their current employer.

Over a period of 2 years, the Saratoga Institute surveyed nearly 9000 people in 18 organisations to identify issues that are linked with job satisfaction and the intention to stay, which is a powerful predictor of turnover.

Issues related to career development are among the top 10 items most closely related with intention to stay and job satisfaction. Specifically, the 'opportunity for career growth and development' and 'resources for career development' emerged as the main issues in the career development category.

Through focus groups and content analysis of written comments, the Saratoga Institute discovered that more specific desires and expectations underscored these results. These included:

- Employees want assignments that stretch them, make them work hard and apply what they've learned
- Employees want to work with skilled, experienced people who can teach by example
- Employees find working on ad hoc or special task teams stimulating and largely beneficial to them and their organisations
- Employees expect career development budget to be sufficient and available for everyone

These findings go a long way in highlighting the idea that career development is still very much a joint activity - between the organisation and the employee. This has powerful financial and business implications.

Since career development is strongly related to employee's intention to stay, attention to career development can help attract and retain talent and contribute in part to reducing internal pressures on voluntary separation and costly turnover of good employees.

Career development and employee commitment

The notion forwarded in some quarters that career development is solely the employee's responsibility under the so called 'new employment contract' does not square with the finding that employees still do expect their organizations to provide opportunities and resources for career development. Indeed it certainly does not account for the reality that organizational support and investment in career development will bring financial returns through employee commitment and the retention of talent.

One clear implication from the Saratoga findings for leaders concerned with creating supportive career development strategies is that organisations can build employee self-directedness, independence and proactivity by providing appropriate opportunities and resources for staff to use in ensuring that they become and remain employable and deployable.

A role for e-HR?

Electronic technologies can provide attractive cost - beneficial opportunities for organisations to provide career development related resources. The use of career portals and stand alone career development specific web based platforms delivered by ASPs, which bundle resources such as:

- work styles inventories;
- personality assessments;
- personal skill inventories;
- career planning;
- networking, marketing and decision making tips;
- career related articles, tools and industry or profession related information;
- one-on-one career coaching; and
- work/life balance ideas;
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accessible from the office or home, are realistic steps organisations can take in providing their employees with accessible, up to date resources .

The bottom line is that organisational attention and innovation in the area of career development can impact the organisation's ability to attract and retain talent.

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