

FORUM

Human Resources Outsourcing Article

Employee Development Plans That Actually Work

Employee development plans (EDPs) have the potential to offer tremendous benefit to organizations—if they actually work. Well-designed EDPs are a cost-effective way to improve employee performance. The process involves creating goals and objectives based on an employee's current performance, identifying appropriate developmental resources, setting a time line for completing activities, and meeting regularly with a manager to assess progress and discuss ways to fulfill the plan. Yet, most developmental planning processes are not effective. Read on to discover why EDPs fail and, more importantly, to learn how to implement development plans that deliver real ROI.



EDPs fail to live up to their potential primarily for two reasons:

- ◆ An employee's individual and organizational goals are not aligned.
- ◆ The process lacks the infrastructure and support required for employees, managers, and HR practitioners.

All too often individual performance goals and objectives fall short of their desired effects and fail to impact strategic organizational goals. This occurs because:

- ◆ Managers wearing the hat of a “coach” are left in a position to recommend strategies and resources for fulfilling development needs—a role they are unprepared or too overburdened to handle.
- ◆ Internal resources often dictate the goals and objectives that are set. In other words, if a training course is offered on “Communicating with Impact,” suddenly the employee's objective is to improve communication skills by taking the class—even if communication is not a true developmental need for the individual employee.
- ◆ Internal training and development departments lack the resources to address every possible development need within the employee population. As a result, managers that are unaware of appropriate external resources could find themselves in the difficult position of identifying a need without being able to recommend appropriate resources to address the need.
- ◆ Finally, most EDPs are not aligned with talent management and succession planning processes. They fail to address gaps between the employee's current skills or abilities and what they will need for successful transition into a different role. The end result can range from completed

development plans that get filed and are never seen again, to unmotivated employees, wasted resources, unmet objectives, and no discernable performance improvements.

There is hope. Many organizations have discovered how to implement effective EDPs that drive organizational results. The key lies in a systemic approach to organizational development while at the same time leveraging cutting-edge research and technology. Consider the following best practices:

- ◆ *Frequent discussions and follow-up.* Effective development planning requires ongoing feedback, assessment of progress, and overcoming obstacles to achievement. Eliminate the “forgotten file drawer” problem by revisiting development plans throughout the year.
- ◆ *Individualized approach.* Resist adopting a “one-size-fits-all” EDP approach and address employee needs individually. Employees may need to immediately attend to a performance issue, improve their current job performance, or gain experience for career progression, and development goals should be tailored to reflect these different needs.
- ◆ *Integrate with a performance management process.* Create EDPs that support continuous performance improvements by ensuring developmental planning goals and objectives are consistent with employees’ current performance needs.
- ◆ *Link competencies and performance achievements to development resources.* Create and update a wide variety of approved resources that will address performance improvements such as classroom training, books and articles, on-the-job experiences, and stretch assignments.
- ◆ *Align individual and organizational goals.* Ensure EDP goals and objectives address employees’ current responsibilities, future career aspirations, and anticipated talent needs within the organization. Seamlessly integrate EDPs with strategic talent management to ensure your organization effectively leverages its internal talent and is positioned to succeed in tomorrow’s competitive environment.
- ◆ *Provide easy access to EDPs.* Harness the flexibility of the Internet to store, retrieve, review, and update EDPs. Managers and employees can review the plan throughout the year, document progress toward goals, and revise as needed.

Aon Consulting has developed a performance and talent management system called *Performance Pathfinder*.™ This fully integrated system provides complete alignment and integration between EDPs, performance and talent management, and a development resource library called *Development Resource Advisor*. *Performance Pathfinder*.™ provides a Web-enabled portal to support employee development, performance management, development resources, multi-rater/360 processes, and interview resources.

Effective development planning requires more than completing a document. Best practice processes and tools, user-friendly document storage and retrieval, and dynamic information management are essential for implementing an EDP process that actually works.

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