

CREATING CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN A STATE AGENCY



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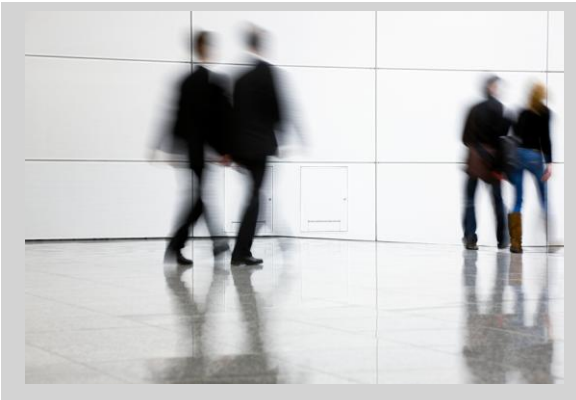
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Team Members

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Summary of Problem and Plan



How does an organization prepare for the possibility of losing twenty-five percent of its workforce by the year 2015 due to retirement, and another twenty percent by the year 2020?¹ How does an organization, in this situation, retain valuable knowledge, build needed skills and retain employees with the ability to move into the positions left vacant by those retiring? These are the questions facing North Carolina state government.

The state's current workforce is aging; many may retire taking with them valuable knowledge, expertise and skills obtained and developed throughout their years of employment, leaving agencies with skill and knowledge deficits. The challenge for agencies will be to retain as much of the knowledge, expertise and skill as possible.

One way to meet the challenge is to proactively manage talent to meet the current and future needs of the agencies. Agencies will need to build processes that allow employees, who are retiring, a way to pass on their knowledge and expertise to others. These processes will prepare employees to function in those vacated positions at a level where there is little or no productivity loss as well as creating opportunities for growth and movement within the agency.

As a way to meet the future workforce challenges, one state agency embarked upon defining a talent management strategy with evaluation of hiring practices, performance review, training, leadership planning, employee engagement and the development of career tracks. The focus was on forty-two core leadership positions, and the development of a process which would give talented employees the opportunity to build the competencies necessary to fill those positions. Creating career tracks was one of the ways the agency thought would help in setting up the process. The career tracks would outline a clear progression path with needed information to help employees work with managers to create the appropriate development plan based on their career goals which will be tied into the agency's strategic goals and objectives.

A team was formed to develop a template that could be used to create career tracks not only for those positions, but others as well. I was a member of the team. I was initially brought in as a consultant to guide the team in the development of career tracks, but soon became a working team member. I was able to help the team see that the agency was going to need a system in order for the career tracks to work effectively. The team quickly expanded the project scope to include the creation of a career development program in which the career tracks would be utilized. The following pages will give an overview of the project's career development program components and process.

¹ Data derived from combining BEACON and PMIS data.

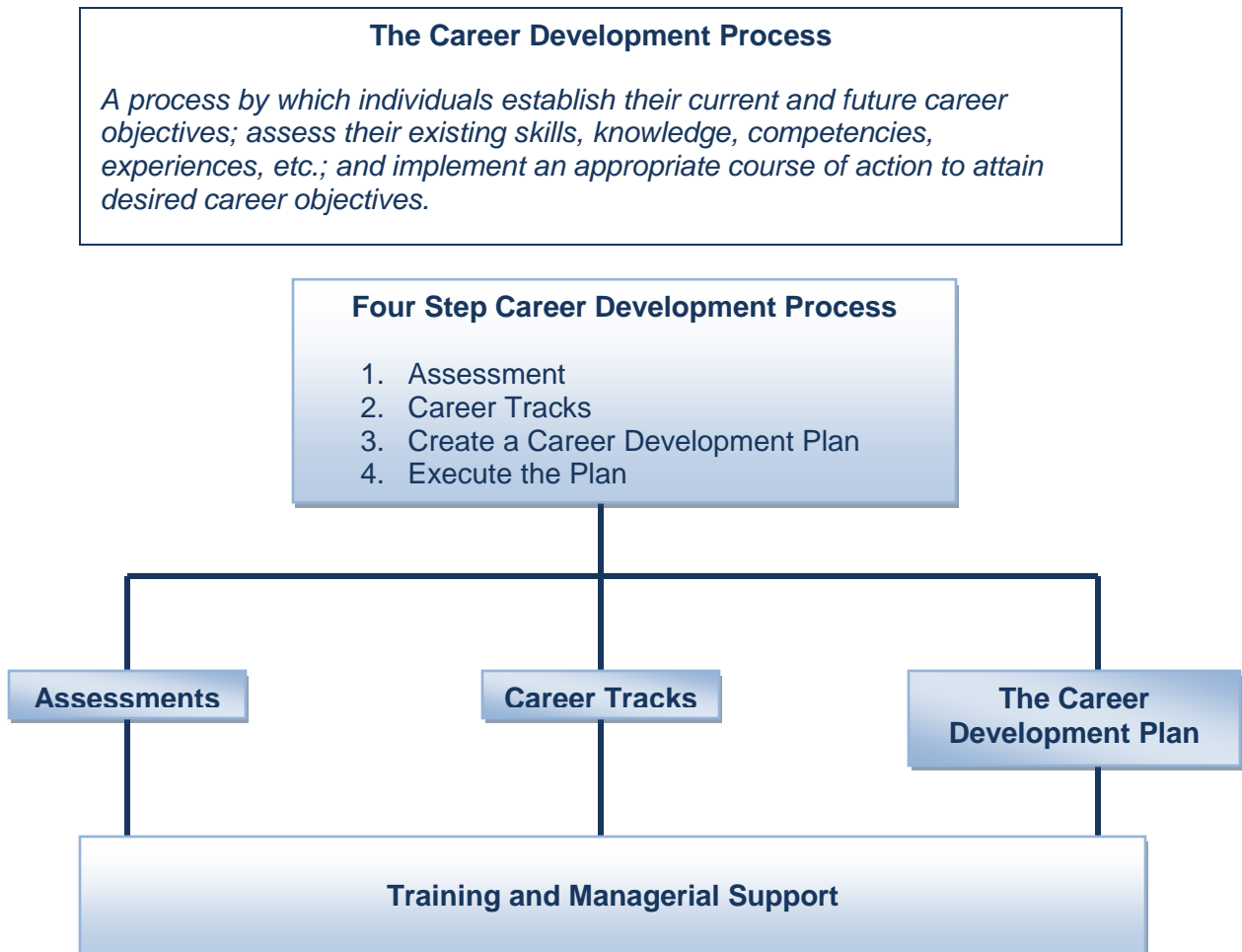
PROJECT OVERVIEW

The team became focused on how to develop a strategic framework for managing talent so that the right people are working in the right jobs at the right time and the agency is strategically filling core positions with employees having skills to obtain critical goals and objectives. The team's goals were to:

- Develop a system to enable employees to build a realistic career path
- Define a process to identify and build career tracks
- Identify necessary tools and resources to enable the career development process.

Defining the Components of Career Development

The System



The team felt that assessing such things as skills, values, etc., exploring career tracks, creating a career development plan, and putting the plan into action were the four crucial steps in any career development program. Each step will be explained in greater detail.

The career development process will be organization focused, incorporating the agency’s strategic goals and objectives for talent management, but driven by employees. Employees will be responsible for taking the initiative to establish a career path, using the four step career development process. Career development is a partnership between employees, managers, and organizational leaders, therefore managers and organizational leaders must commit to supporting and encouraging employee development. The agency must also commit to providing training opportunities to help employees know how to maneuver the process. Training and managerial support play an integral role in building the foundation for a successful career development program.

Assessments



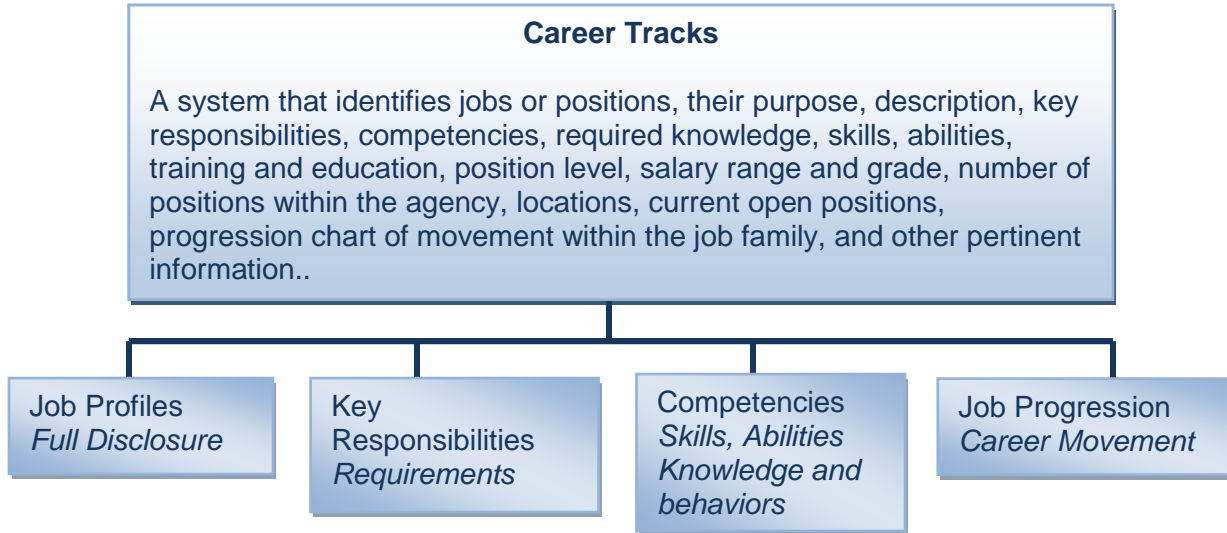
Through the assessment process, characteristics, interests, values, and skills are matched to the desired or suitable work. Individual assessment is necessary to help employees know where they are going and choosing the appropriate career path.

Once employees have addressed what they can or want to do and have performed a workplace environmental scan to gain a better understanding of how their goals align with those of the agency, they can assess opportunities in the agency that match their developmental goals and interests. This is necessary for creating a realistic career plan.

By helping employees match their interest, skill sets and abilities to the appropriate job, the agency becomes strengthened by the strategic use of human capital. Employees should be coached to align their desires with the overall agency’s goals, strategy, mission, vision and policies.

The assessment tools and the assessment process can be formal or informal. Assessment is an important step and should not be overlooked.

Career Tracks



Career tracks have been defined as planned road maps of job progressions and position levels designed to assist employees in attaining a desired career objective. Each position level in the career track will provide all the information necessary to assist employees and managers in setting SMART career objectives, and helping employees visualize different alternatives for their career growth. By using the information contained in the career tracks, employees should be able to personalize a realistic career development plan. (To see an example of what an electronic version of a career track may look like, please refer to the “Illustration of a Career Track” PowerPoint presentation.)

This is an example of how a career track may appear.



Brief Job Description:

A **Division Engineer (DE)** plans, organizes resources, directs, and manages the division units of maintenance, construction, and operations to provide a safe and efficient highway system. This employee manages these units within budgetary constraints to deliver programs within project delivery schedule. The DE organizes and directs the safety and environmental stewardship programs and must be able to interpret and apply maintenance, construction and operations, personnel, and fiscal policies and procedures. He/she provides technical and administrative guidance and policy interpretation for the engineers, supervisors, public officials, the Board of Transportation, and general public.

Required Minimum Training:

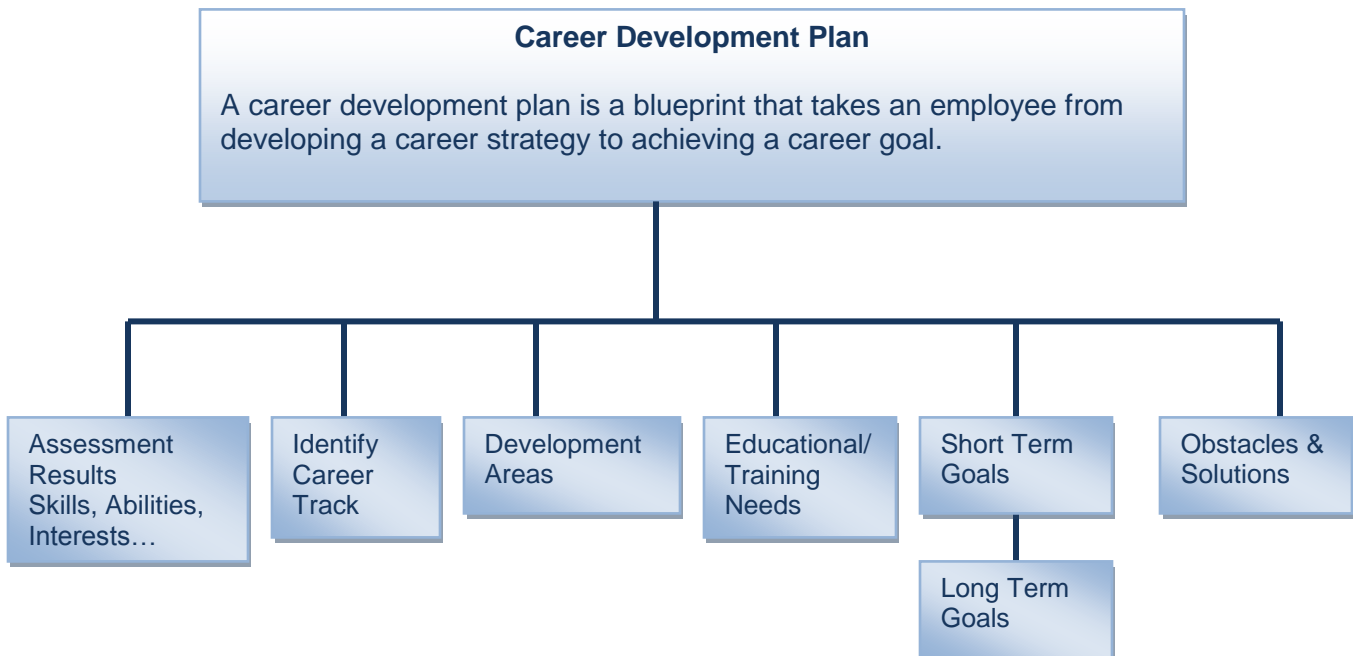
Graduation from a four year college or university with a degree in Civil Engineering and seven years of progressive transportation engineering experience, or an equivalent combination of training and directly related experience.

For more information about this position, click on one of the links below.

Key Responsibilities
Competencies
Knowledge/Skills/Abilities
Helpful Training and Education
Classification Level, Salary Range & Salary Grade
Complete Job Description
Positions Leading to Division Engineer
Number of Positions in DOT and Locations for Positions
Check for Open Positions
DOT Organizational Chart

Division Engineer
(Transportation Engineering Director II)

The Career Development Plan

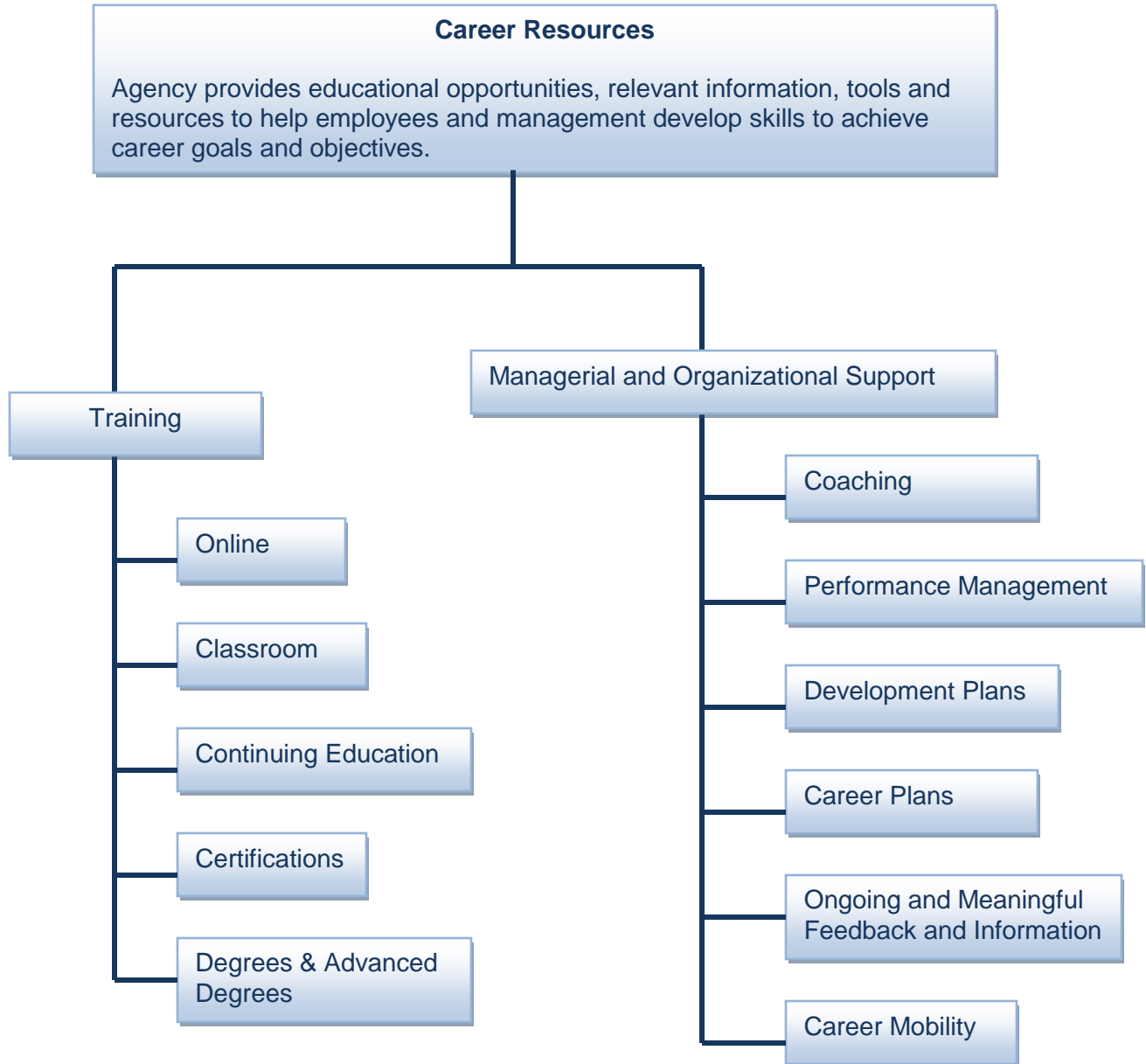


The career development plan is a coordinated written document outlining strategies employees have identified to help them achieve their career goals. Employees use the plan as a guide to help them obtain knowledge and develop the competencies, skills and abilities needed in the attainment of their career objectives. They are collaborations between employees, managers, career coaches or career advisors. Career development plans are a must for any employee engaged in the career development process.

The career development plan should be an action plan that drives the employee's development since it outlines career goals and identifies skill gaps. Through the execution of the career development plan and with the support of the agency, the employee can set a goal planning and achievement process into motion. It has been said that goal planning and achievement is the point at which employees affect a tangible transformation.

Since the career development process is a partnership between the employee and manager to help the agency achieve strategic talent management goals, the agency must commit to providing the necessary career resources to help employees and managers develop needed skills to make sure the plan is executed and goals achieved.

Career Resources



Employees must be active participants in advancing and monitoring their career plans. Organizational leaders have a responsibility to be culturally and fiscally supportive of employee development. They play a key role in the success or failure of employee goal achievement. New and innovative ways to help employees achieve goals will have to be incorporated. Mindsets will have to think differently and creatively about the opportunities made available for employee development and growth. A career development program will not survive if the appropriate resources are not made available to assist in the skill development of employees and managers.

Career Coaches

As an added measure to make sure employees and management have the needed support, it was suggested that the agency invest in career coaches. Career coaches will be highly specialized individuals strategically located in different regions throughout the state, making the coaches accessible to all employees and managers. They will work with employees and managers to help match career goals with the agency's talent management strategy as well as work with the agency to track turn-over-rate, employee satisfaction, succession planning efforts, and productivity rates. This will help senior leaders measure the return on investment in the implementation of a career development program.



The team envisioned that some of the essential functions of career coaches would be:

- Providing appropriate assessment tools based on an individual's need and interpreting the results to help the individual determine interests, abilities, strengths, competencies, values, motivation factors, etc.
- Discovering and disclosing internal and external training opportunities.
- Working with managers to help them develop good coaching skills and giving useful feedback.
- Assisting in the development and set up of career tracks.
- Assisting in succession planning efforts to help steer individuals in the right direction and the best suited direction.

The career coach should also have a full understanding of the agency's strategic plan including mission, vision and goals, and how they apply to job responsibilities. The coach should also have an excellent working relationship with department leaders and have outstanding character traits, such as, approachability, confidentiality, etc.

How Career Coaches Work with and Help Employees

- Choosing appropriate assessment tools based on individual needs
- Working with employees individually and interpreting assessments and answering questions
- Comparing results of the assessment process to key positions to determine the strongest fit
- Comparing experiences, skills, competencies and education to what is needed in the next career move (creating a clear focused vision)
- Guiding the employee in a career path that best matches the employee's abilities, competencies, interests, values and personalities
- Encouraging employees to team with mentors if necessary
- Assisting employees on developing a realistic career development plan in line with agency strategy

Guiding Principles for the Career Development Program

- ✚ Managers must create a trusting environment in which employees trust management.
- ✚ Employees, their immediate supervisors, and senior leaders must support career planning efforts.
- ✚ The career development program must have built in accountability for employees and management.
- ✚ Managers must be receptive to recommendations from career coaches.
- ✚ Employees must be receptive to recommendations from career coaches.
- ✚ Feedback to employees must be appropriate, worthwhile, consistent and of value.
- ✚ Assessment tools should be developed to measure ROI.
- ✚ An evaluation of the program should be done to measure effectiveness and to make improvements where needed.
- ✚ Career coaches must maintain discretionary confidentiality.
- ✚ Career coach positions should be filled with highly skilled professional individuals to ensure success of the career development process.
- ✚ Career tracks should be established for all core positions and then for all others.
- ✚ Human Resources Dept. must play an integral role in the career development process.
- ✚ The agency should learn to think outside of the box, looking for creative solutions and alternative resources.
- ✚ The career development process must be an ongoing continuous process between the employee and the supervisor that establishes the employee's current and future career objectives allows for assessment of existing skills, knowledge, experiences, and implements an appropriate course of action to attain desired career objectives.

Additional Recommendations for a Successful Program

- ✚ Based on the number of employees, the agency should consider establishing regional career development centers staffed with an appropriate number of career coaches.
 - Reasons:
 - Career coaches would be close geographically to the managers and employees.
 - All employees will have a better opportunity to utilize the program. Localized centers will allow for greater accessibility (they will be closer to employees' work stations) and should encourage a higher percentage of usage.
 - Through regionalization and use of kiosks, tools and resources are more readily available to all employees.
 - Career coaches can travel from regionalized centers to outlying offices to reach all employees and be available in person.
 - Resources will be wasted if all career coaches are based in one central location and travel to remote areas all over the state.
 - This model will mirror the organizational framework in the Employee Relations Group in HR. Currently, employee relations representatives and personnel techs are dispersed through the state to better serve the employees and managers.
- ✚ Create interactive web-based career tracks.
- ✚ Have a policy to establish accountability and program process.
- ✚ Hire highly skilled professionals into the critical career coach positions.
- ✚ Consider manpower needs in the HR Department to ensure career tracks are completed for all positions.
- ✚ To ensure that the information contained in each career track is accurate and up-to-date, a commitment will be needed from management to provide information on all positions.
- ✚ Keep all organization charts updated and accessible.
- ✚ Make the system easy for employees to access and know what positions are open.
- ✚ Continually assess tools and resources to make sure they are up-to-date, useful, and appropriate.
- ✚ Develop a library of career development tools that can be electronically accessed with explanations on use and how to use.

Conclusion

The team completed its work and submitted a plan for the creation of a career development program. In July of 2009 (estimated time frame), to my understanding an individual was hired to help the agency achieve its talent management goals. Work was started to develop career tracks before the team disbanded, and other talent management initiatives were under way. At the time of this paper, I do not think a career development program has yet been formally instituted; however, the agency has a viable plan when it is ready to embark upon that journey.

Most often career development is often overlooked by the State in the management of talent. Perhaps because the term “*career development*” is often associated with the past traditional organizational model depicting upward (vertical) movement, or movement outside of a department or agency to attain a higher position. However, that is not the general way progressive minded employers think of and set up career development programs today. Movement within the career development process can be lateral, downward or upward depending on the employee’s career goals and the needs of the organization.

Career development plays an integral role in succession planning, workforce planning, knowledge management, and talent management in regard to development, retention, recruitment, and engagement. In a recent Corporate Leadership Council report, (*Rebuilding the Employment Value Proposition and Tactics for implementing an EVP*, 9 November 2009), future career opportunity ranked number 12 and development opportunity ranked number 17, out of 38 identified attributes that drive employee commitment.

Designing and implementing a system that build the necessary competencies help agencies be able to strategically fill key positions with the right employees. With the right employees in the right jobs, agencies are better able to achieve critical goals and objectives. Creating a system such as this is not impossible for state government and is doable with the appropriate resources and well thought out program structure.

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