
The Role of the Counsellor in Human Resources Planning

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Abstract

In response to external and internal factors which have forced post-secondary educational institutions to assess the management of their human resources, one Ontario college is requiring all of its employees to develop Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDP) which meet with individual, departmental, and institutional goals. This article describes how the counsellors of the college meet individually with employees to determine the nature of these plans and to assist them in determining the most effective means of achieving their goals in a proactive, non-punitive approach.

Résumé

En réponse à des facteurs externes et internes qui ont forcé les institutions éducationnelles postsecondaires d'évaluer la gérance de leur ressources humaines, un collège ontarien a exigé de tous ses employés de développer des Plans de Développement Individuel Professionnel (PDIP) qui rencontreraient les buts individuel, départemental et institutionnel.

Cet article décrit comment les conseillers du collège ont rencontré individuellement chacun des employés pour déterminer la nature de ces plans et les ont assistés en déterminant les moyens les plus efficaces pour atteindre leurs buts dans une approche proactive et nonpunitive.

INTRODUCTION

The decline in financial resources to colleges and universities, shifts in the student population away from the traditional student, and changes in expectations by business, industry, and the work force, are some of the factors which are causing changes in the face of the college environment. These changes impact the educational programs that are offered, student services, and faculty. As programs are eliminated or altered, faculty positions may be eliminated or changed. Changing and conflicting demands will be placed upon the faculty: to maintain student enrollments, to teach new courses, to serve nontraditional students at different times and locations, to maintain research and community service under more rigorous standards, and to participate in institutional governance. (Christenson, March 1982). Institutions will be looking toward professional development to provide the guidance and leadership necessary for faculty to retrain in order to teach new and updated courses, to strengthen existing skills, to assess personal goals, and to explore their "fit" with the institutional mission and objectives.

The Counsellor

Many colleges have integrated their counsellors within schools or divisions rather than having a centralized counselling department. This has had an impact on the traditional role of the counsellor as they are now beginning to be seen as consultants to the division or school and to provide direct service to both students and faculty. One aspect of this consulting role is within the area of faculty professional development. Counsellors would become engaged in facilitating the institution's human resources development plan at both the department level and the individual level. The expertise of the counsellor in building rapport, facilitating, and developing career skills, is a logical juxtaposition for human resources development and planning.

At least one Ontario college is requiring that all of its employees develop individual professional development plans which fit within departmental as well as institutional goals. The focus of the human resources department is to develop a comprehensive *Individual Professional Development Plan* (IPDP), to determine the direction that this plan would take, and to assess how it can be implemented within the system over a two to five year period. This approach is a dramatic change from traditional professional development models used by most institutions. Instead of offering a smorgasbord of "things to do" on professional development day, the professional development department would facilitate an institutional climate whereby the faculty member would be motivated and empowered to undertake a more individualized and self-directed career path.

Individual Professional Development Plan

Implicit in the individual professional development plans is the notion that the plan:

1. enables employees to become cognizant of their competencies and skills and thereby promote individual growth;
2. focuses on the future performance of employees rather than past performance;
3. encourages employees to become actively involved in their professional development;
4. enables employees to take ownership of their learning; and
5. lends to the improvement of the overall performance of the institution.

The counsellor would initiate the process by conducting workshops on the general concepts of career plans, how faculty can assess their level of competencies, how the plan is implemented, and how the plan is to be evaluated. Faculty members would then make one-on-one appointments

to discuss their specific goals and plans within the guidelines of the department and institution.

The Individual Professional Development Plan has five steps or stages which are undertaken over a two to five year period.

Step One: Identification and Assessment of Competencies. The employees complete the competencies assessment sheet which lists those competencies associated with their job performance and which enables the employee to self-assess their level of skill attainment within that competency.

Step Two: Priority Setting. The counsellor and the employee together determine which of the assessed competencies the employee feels could be enhanced, improved, or acquired so that the objectives and goals of the individual, department, and institution can be achieved.

Step Three: Achievement of the Goals of the IPDP. The counsellor and the employee together develop the framework within which the competencies and skills will be achieved in an effective manner. The framework will consider such elements as time (how long is it going to take to learn the skill — one two-workshop or night classes for two semesters), the most appropriate way to obtain the new knowledge or skill (e.g. in-house workshops, job shadowing, mentoring, out-of-house workshops, university courses, certificate course, etc.), cost to the individual and the institution to support these enhancements, availability of the opportunity, and practicality.

Step Four: Opportunities to Demonstrate Newly Acquired Information. One of the counsellor's roles would be to facilitate opportunities so that the employee is able to demonstrate or practice the skill/knowledge, or able to share the skill/knowledge with peers.

Step Five: Evaluation. Together the counsellor and the employee will evaluate progress through the plan, assess continually the appropriateness of the goals and the effectiveness of the plan, and recommend changes when applicable.

The counsellor is available to guide, help, encourage, and counsel the employee in development and application of the individual professional development plan.

Problems Associated With Implementation

At the present time the trend in the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) system is moving toward an articulated Human Resources Plan. However it is in the embryonic stage and has not as yet been fully developed and implemented. Therefore, it may prove appropriate to state some of the reservations which has been expressed by those in positions of authority and responsibility.

By virtue of the fact that the trend in the community college system is to merge the student development department and the human resources department, counsellors have become sanctioned by the administration to involve themselves in the professional development of institutional employees. However, such actions bring a number of concerns that do need to be addressed, namely: 1) the changing role of the counsellor; 2) areas of responsibilities and authority—“territorial imperative”; and 3) evaluation.

When counsellors are actively involved in the professional development of institutional employees, the question arises as to what is the primary task of counsellors—to assist the student population, which has been traditionally the primary role of counsellors, or to alter their focus and assist the employee. Obviously, the task of assisting employees in developing their individual professional development plan is a time-consuming task and requires additional personnel who would then service a non-traditional population—that of the employees of the institution. This as yet, requires further consideration toward resolution.

“Territorial imperative” is concerned with how much input the immediate supervisor would have and with “ownership” of the plan. In terms of output, the counsellor would be working closely with various managers, supervisors, and administrators to ensure that the individual plans meet departmental and institutional directions and goals. The counsellor would act as a liaison between the individual employee and management. In terms of “ownership,” the plan would remain with the individual employee, with a summary sheet provided to the counsellor upon receiving permission of the employee, would be shared with the supervisor.

The hottest issue related to the implementation of Individual Professional Development Plans relates to evaluation. If an institution is to intensively fund professional development then the question most current in management’s eyes relates to cost effectiveness. One suggestion is to have evaluations spread over successive three-year periods. The first two years of the plan would consist of formative evaluation undertaken in conjunction with the counsellor as well as input from supervisors. The third year would consist of summative evaluation undertaken by management.

Over the past two years the governing body of the Ontario Community College system has been formulating a blueprint proposal for Human Development in the Third Decade.

The system is taking a very serious look at its personnel with a view toward change, growth, and development. Therefore, serious consideration is being given to the counsellors taking on a new role. This discussion briefly outlines some of the major concerns as expressed by management which are being currently addressed.

SUMMARY

External and internal factors have forced many institutions to assess not only the educational programmes and services that they provide but also to assess the effective use of their employees' skills and knowledge.

The human resources department of one college has decided that the development of an individual professional development plan by each employee that would dovetail with the goals and objectives of the department and the institution is one way of meeting the requirements of these changes.

The human resources department would be expanded to include the counsellors of the institution, as they would be the appropriate personnel to aid in the facilitation of these plans. The counsellors would interact with the employees and assist them (on a one-to-one basis) in the development of plans that might facilitate their career pathing, whether for positions within or outside the institution, or in preparation for retirement. A proactive, non-punitive approach to professional development will contribute to the overall continued growth and excellence of the institution.

References

- Christenson, D. D. (1982, March). Changes in higher education: Forces and impacts. In G. M. Hipps (Editor), *Effective planned change strategies. New Directions for Institutional Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 40.

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