

**Remodeling of Intraorganizational Career Development**

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## **Intro**

While the typical landscape of an individual's career has changed quite a bit over the past four decades, the organizational approach and format of workforce development has not kept up. Computers and internet have become an office staple in lieu of a luxury, cell phones are essentially an extension of the human body and the majority of the workforce is now made up of a generation coined as "entitled". With employers leaning on universities and colleges to provide workplace skills, the intraorganizational career development has dwindled to only what is necessary to check the box, but nothing more. Additionally, more expectations and responsibility are being pushed down to employees to be mentors or educators but without additional time or instruction on how to do so in order for it to succeed. The question of who should be providing, when it should be provided as well as what content should be covered in workforce development, and more specifically, career development, has become a very blurry grey line. While organizations gain the most benefit from workforce and career development, efforts to provide a robust L&D model or program within the organization seem to be minimal.

## **Brief History**

The 1980's kicked off a major shift within the workplace which has continually morphed over the past four decades. Since the 80s, individuals have started assuming more responsibility for career development (Lopes, 2020, May 26), less workers are receiving health or pension benefits, and earnings have not increased as much as they used to since the 1970's (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.22). Paired with this, higher education was strongly advocated to youth in order to acquire a "career" in lieu of just a "job" which has resulted in one of the most educated generations entering the workforce. This has conjectured a career development model that continues to be promoted today. This career development model is outlined below:

1. An industry or organization determines that a specific certification or degree is robust and comprehensive enough to be considered a requirement to obtain employment. This becomes a standard to acquire a role within the organization or industry.
2. An individual interested in that organization or industry researches and identifies if this process is obtainable based on their current resources. If not, an alternative organization or industry will have to be considered. If so, they enroll, pay for and complete the certification or degree and then apply for the position or role.
3. Once employment is obtained, intraorganizational training is conducted for any additional specific compliance or regulatory content.
4. Throughout their career they are updated with any new compliance trainings or certifications.
5. Advancement is largely decided by the individual. To do so, the individual is responsible for understanding the dynamic of these roles and expectations of what it takes to assume these roles. Additionally, the individual finds a mentor, learning experiences or necessary training in order to do so.

### **Challenges and Weaknesses of the Current Model**

#### **Higher Education Output Versus Workforce Needs**

##### ***Skills Gap***

Universities and colleges today have a multitude of different degrees, certifications and courses focused on specific career skillsets and experiences to provide an individual with the tools to help in entering specific industries. This is appealing to industry because less instruction and training is needed within the workplace in order to get new hires up to speed. But with this shifting of professional development from the employer to higher education institutions, gaps are

surfacing, and “Soft skills” or “21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills” skills are being identified as major deficits and necessary improvement areas within the workforce. “Employment in jobs requiring average or above-average levels of social skills, such as interpersonal, communications or management skills, increased 83% from 1980 to 2015” (Pew Research Center, 2016, p. 24). Even with the pressing need for these skills, the responsibility of who should be providing these skills seems to be in debate. Employers seem to think this responsibility lives within educational institutions. In fact, fifty-one percent of Society for Human Resource Management’s (SHRM) membership in 2019 stated that “education systems have done little or nothing to help address the skills shortage” and that the top skills needed, but missing, are “problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity; the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity; and communication” (Wilkie, 2019, October 21). But soft skills are hefty and vast, and considering the heavy load of skills that industry has already handed over to universities and colleges to properly equip the workforce, this expectation may be unfairly weighted. Additionally, considering these skills are needed by the entire workforce and not only those who hold degrees, this provides a strong case that employers should be the ones to take ownership of the development of this skillset.

### ***Learning Transfer***

In listing a specific degree as a prerequisite to obtaining a specific job title or role within an organization, it would be reasonable to assume that the knowledge taught to obtain that degree is necessary in order to perform those specific job duties and cannot be obtained through experience alone. This requirement also holds the assumption that an individual who has just spent the last two-to-four years in the classroom learning has retained and can apply the content at the same or higher rate of current employees with that same role or title within the

organization. It is presumptions to assume that a recent graduate has learned the same, or more industry specific information than an individual who does not hold a degree but has learned this content through experience. Experience and classroom instruction are simply two different learning techniques, but for either to be successful, multiple factors have to be considered. This includes, but is not limited to; prior knowledge of the participant, environment, instructional design, patience, enthusiasm and commitment of the instructor, guide or coach, social expectations, content being covered and even time and reflection.

Joseph LeDoux, in his book *Synaptic Self* (2002), explains that “new connections formed by activity are not created as entirely new entities but rather are added to intrinsically determined preexisting connections” (p. 78). Changes in the brain occur by “generating the growth of more branches, which increases the density of cellular material and enhances their ability to connect with other neurons to form more synapses” (Zull, 2006, pp. 4-5). This suggests that content learned is strengthened by connecting to something that has been previously learned, either through instruction or through experiences that have been stored in memory. But by default, participants forget a large amount of material in-order to focus on and strengthen connections that are deemed more important by the brain. Forgetting during the learning process is just as important as remembering because “forgetting acts to block the background noise, the static, so that the right signals stand out” (Carey, 2014, p. 23). This is where individuals who attend a university or college right after high-school may not have the advantage, as many full-time students do not have the opportunity to gain any work or career-related experience before jumping right into full time instruction. In 2017, 76% of fulltime students enrolled in degree-granting postsecondary institutions were under the age of 25 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Based on the age of these fulltime students, the majority would have

transitioned straight from high school into these programs denying an opportunity to gain experience that would provide deeper understanding and foundation for instruction on the career path they are about to enter.

Time allows the brain to sort the material for associations to become apparent within the brain. “People learn at least as much, and retain it much longer, when they distribute, or space their study time than when they concentrate it” (Carey, 2014, p. 65). So, if an individual does not have work experience or strong associations from past instruction that the new content can attach itself to, it has a higher likelihood of being forgotten. This is where the experienced individual has the advantage of time and reflection to obtain a larger knowledge base in which these branches can grow.

The current conundrum exists in that college, students need experience to best learn, and individuals within the workplace need instruction or guidance to best learn. Both seem to be lacking unless an individual has the luxury of attending school while working in a related field, which still holds the risk of cognitive overload which may be just as ineffective as the other two scenarios. The best option in this case would be to learn at work, using work experiences, with guidance from experienced individuals or instructors during working hours.

### **Increasing the Equity Gap**

When a large amount of career development is outsourced to higher education, it puts those who decide not to go to college, cannot afford to attend, or even choose a career unrelated that in which they hold a degree at a disadvantage ultimately creating a larger equity gap. This dependence on higher education institutions is increasing and becoming a larger barrier to individuals looking to enter and advance within the workforce:

The number of workers in occupations requiring average to above-average education, training and experience increased from 49 million in 1980 to 83 million in 2015, or by 68%. This was more than double the 31% increase in employment, from 50 to 65 million, in jobs requiring below-average education, training and experience. (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.22)

This leaves a large percentage of the population at a disadvantage. Those who used to receive the career development training within the organization pre-1980's, are now left to their own devices to identify and gain the skills necessary to advance. This hurdle becomes larger overtime considering the time commitment not only for classes, but also study time for any entrance tests to be admitted to the college or university. And even if one has the luxury of time, "45% of these workers say they couldn't afford to take a class or get additional training" (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.67).

This model inherently encourages a competitive verses cohesive workforce in that employees who do not hold a degree have to compete for advancement with employees who do. Where individuals who hold a degree required by the organization were theoretically able to gain these skills in bulk, those who did not or could not attend college would have to acquire them while also holding and maintaining a fulltime job. This means time away from work or family which both have their own setbacks and challenges. "Among those who may have needed training in order to advance in their job but did not get it, some 57% say that the inability to take time off from work or from other responsibilities was a contributing factor" (Pew Research Center, 2016, p.67).

## **Time Constraints/ Productivity**

While pushing the responsibility of career development onto the individual, the challenges of time, cost and stress became apparent. On-the-job training (OJT), has started to gain attention as an attempted way of providing the leanest relief for these workforce stressors. “On-the-job training (OJT) is an approach for developing skills within the normal work environment, most often involving an experienced employee who passes knowledge and skills on to a new or less skilled employee” (Blecke, et al., 2019, May 2). Although OJT has been around a long time, it seems to be resurfacing, but may be confused with mentorship. This is lucrative for organizations in that, in essence, it would solve the problem of OJT while not investing additional resources by adding it to current employees’ job roles and responsibilities. But there are inherent challenges to this model. “Even vague rumors of a mentoring ‘program’ nested somewhere in HR allow too many leaders to check off the employee engagement and development blocks without carefully scrutinizing the quality, utilization rates, and outcomes of such formalized mentoring structures” (Johnson, et al., 2019, December 30).

Although mentor programs have the potential to relieve the challenge of time and support OJT by conducting it during working hours, these programs are not receiving the required attention or resources to be successful. These roles are typically just transferred to or expected to be assumed by current experienced employees who are not given additional time or training when already “71% of white-collar workers feel stressed about the amount of information they must process and act on while doing business, and 60% feel overwhelmed” (Brox, 2011, July 5). The lack of time aside, although managers and experienced workers know their specific skillsets, it should not be assumed that they inherently know how to be an effective mentor or educator. When resources are not recognized and allocated to build, train and manage these programs, as

well as designated time during the workweek for these programs to thrive, they are destined to fail and create frustration among employees. Therefore, these programs still require resources, effort and responsibility from the organization to implement and to be effective.

### **Retention of The Current Labor Force**

As of 2018, “more than one-in-three American labor force participants (35%) are millennials, making them the largest generation in the U.S. labor force” (Fry, 2018). This generation, frequently described as “entitled”, is often criticized for not being as loyal to companies as older generations, while in reality, 55% are simply disengaged at work (Gallup, 2016). What is frequently seen as entitled may be confused for indifference, “and indifferent and entitled are not synonymous. Many millennials likely don’t want to switch jobs, but their companies are not giving them compelling reasons to stay” (Gallup, 2016, p. 19). Even with 31% of millennials holding a degree (Gallup, 2016, p. 59), continual and life-long learning is valued within this generation and not only personally, but professionally within the workplace. “A striking 87% of millennials rate ‘professional or career growth and development opportunities’ as important to them in a job” (Gallup, 2016, p. 46). So, although a large amount of this generation is identified as educated, it does not relieve the desire to continually learn throughout one’s life. Organizations have the opportunity to increase engagement and reduce turnover by providing these opportunities within the workplace. And while millennials may be more vocal, which also may come off as entitled, the intraorganizational career development opportunities would benefit the remainder of the labor force as well. “94% of employees say that they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their career development” (LinkedIn learning workplace 2018 p.26). One obvious fact is that outdated and current learning and development incentive packages are not enough to engage most of the workforce or, at the very least, retain millennials.

### **Suggestions for a New Career Development Model**

Organizations spent \$359 billion globally on training in 2016 and 75% of managers are dissatisfied with their companies learning and development function (Glaveski, 2019). This statement alone highlights a system that is ineffective and needs to be overhauled. With the current approach, investments are being made in these programs but ultimately causing employees to leave because they are dissatisfied. So not only are organizations paying for an ineffective learning and development program, but also paying for high turnover rates. “The cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee’s annual salary” (McFeely et al., 2019). Simply eliminating an intraorganizational learning and development (L&D) department altogether is not a viable solution considering employee engagement and development is a must to reduce turnover. Therefore, a new career development model is proposed as follows:

1. An industry or organization determines specific skills, experiences, certification or degree is robust and comprehensive enough to be considered a requirement to obtain employment. This is customized to individual industries or organizations based on intraorganizational expectations, values and goals.
2. An individual interested in joining that organization based on their expectations, values and goals identifies if their skills or experience meet the job requirements. If certifications or degrees are required, additional considerations are taken to determine if it is obtainable based on their current resources or if this is something that can be acquired during employment. All of which factor into if an individual wants to join that company or not.

3. Once an individual becomes an employee, intraorganizational career development commences. Any additional specific compliance or regulatory content is delivered and continues throughout one's career. Advancement and continual improvement and learning is encouraged, supported and customized by the L&D department of the organization. This is done through mentor programs, on-the-job training, in-person trainings with relevant on-demand training as well as any additional customized financial or time support incentives that align with the expectations, values or goals of the organization.

### **Lifelong Learning in Lieu of Condensed Learning**

Although colleges and universities can be very beneficial in providing the skills necessary to enter the workforce, it is not all encompassing and learning and development should not stop there. Whether an individual holds a degree or not, advancement of individuals and organizations require continual interaction and improvement. The most effective and best opportunities to maximize this learning is within the organization itself, where experiences and application are available and outside resources and opportunities can be properly matched and paired to enhance these experiences. This provides the opportunity to learn over time and utilize any acquired knowledge within the workplace to increase learning transfer in lieu of condensing content into a short amount of time without application opportunities. Humans must use information within a certain amount of time for it to be carried out correctly based on instruction, otherwise, the information risks being lost. "More than 99 percent of experience is fleeting, here and gone. The brain holds on to only what's relevant, useful, or interesting- or may be so in the future" (Carey, 2014, p.35). This is where mentorships and OTJ training have the potential to maximize learning transfer when properly built, carried out and managed within an organization.

## **Employee Driven**

### ***Work-Life Balance***

Where work-life balance is very important to employees “millennials increasingly see life and work as one entity and are drawn to companies that care about their individual well-being and encourage them to focus on their whole selves” (Gallup, 2016). Where carpentry skills learned at work can be beneficial and used at home with home repairs, health and nutrition learned at home can be beneficial to an organization with fewer sick days. This can be beneficial in that millennials are motivated to continue to learn and grow in more ways than one, which ultimately benefits organizations. The challenge with this is that in seeing their development as part of both professional and personal growth, and improving both their work and life, that organizations should be responsible for a large portion of this training. These expectations may blur the line between personal and professional development making it more challenging for organizations to identify what satiates the need of these employees to engage and stay put. Industries understanding and awareness around creating a program that is guided by the organization, but largely self-initiated by the employee stands to benefit.

### ***Timing and Content***

The current system typically has an L&D department that develops and conducts trainings based on what the leadership deems as necessary, what may be required based on certain laws or regulations, and scheduling or conducting trainings for employees to gain industry specific certifications to maintain credentials. Although this is all necessary and important, this is typically where it stops and typically where employee engagement is lost. “Today’s employees often learn uniform topics, on L&D’s schedule, and at a time when it bears little immediate relevance to their role – and their learning suffers as a result (Glaveski, 2019,

October 2). Not only this, they are frequently conducted during a specific time on certain days and considered mandatory. This can be challenging if an individual is in the middle of a crisis, either at home or at work, and they are then asked to stop what they are doing to learn this content unrelated to anything they are experiencing at that time. Their engagement during this training will be very low and learning transfer will likely be minimal. “People learn best when they have to learn. Applying what’s learned to real-world situations strengthens one’s focus and determination to learn” (Glaveski, 2019, October 2). This is where robust mentorships as well as on-demand learning can be beneficial but again, has to be built and carried out with intention, not haphazardly.

## **Mentorships, OTJ and On-Demand Training**

### ***Mentorships***

Although mentorships within companies sound like an easy fix to training and engagement, if the programs are not developed and maintained properly by the right people, it can have the opposite effect than what was intended. “Mentoring programs alone won’t sufficiently engage or develop your junior talent, especially if your culture doesn’t encourage mentoring on a regular basis” (Johnson, et al., 2019, December 30). An encouraging mentoring culture needs to have resources available to educate individuals on what mentorship is and allow time for these relationships to build. A mentor is different from an advisor, boss or instructor in that it takes time, trust and vulnerability to build. Mentorships are a type of relationship, not just a corporate program and it takes quite a bit of skill to be an effective mentor as well as an engaged mentee. These expectations, guidelines, support and resources need to be developed and available to employees. This also requires time to build these relationships and opportunities for growth. If a mentorship is assigned and required on top of what is already required of

experienced employees, it creates more stress and has a higher risk of failure. “Just adding this important duty to the existing workload is a recipe for poor mentoring relationships” (Ramani, et al., 2006, p.406). This does not mean that a set time on a specific day is scheduled for these relationships to flourish, but simply the understanding that these relationships will take a certain amount of time throughout the week in the form of micro-exchanges. Additionally, leadership needs to allow for and encourage these times throughout the week as well as understand that work-in-place may decline slightly to accommodate for the long-term benefits of mentorship. “The mere exposure effect in social psychology supports the value of positive micro-exchanges in the workplace in building informal and increasingly bonded mentoring relationships. Even relatively brief interactions can lead to increasingly transformative developmental relationships” (Johnson, et al., 2019, December 30).

When mentorships are integrated into the workplace, it increases learning transfer by providing guidance and help when and where it is needed most. It increases engagement within the organization and accuracy of knowledge transferred between experienced and newer employees. It checks both the professional and personal development boxes in that life and soft skills are honed. It also increases engagement within the workplace and overall satisfaction of those who want to and choose to participate.

### ***On-The-Job (OJT)***

On-The-Job Training (OJT) is a very important piece of developing specific skills within certain industries. Additionally, a robust OJT program provides opportunities to those who may not be able to attend a university to gain some of these skills. But, just like the mentorship program, OJT programs should be structured to maximize the effectiveness and benefits.

Unstructured OJT describes the situation whereby an inexperienced worker informally 'pick up' job information from one or more experienced workers. Experienced workers pass on what they know, or think they know, about some aspect of the job, often in a manner of their preference (Jacobs et.al., 1992, p.133).

Having a structured versus an unstructured program is important for increased engagement as well as cost. "Structured OJT was forecasted to provide nearly twice the financial benefits of unstructured OJT... however, given its comparative unreliability, used of unstructured OJT for any training situation would be of questionable value" (Jacobs et.al., 1992, p.138).

### ***In-House***

An in-house OJT program can transfer, hone, tweak and reinforce skills based on individual preferences of an industry or organization. This provides the opportunity for subject matter experts (SMEs), also known as experienced employees, to be the direct source of information and increase engagement with younger employees. This provides straight-from-the-source information in lieu of it being transferred to someone within the HR or L&D department, and then be presented in a classroom where the information may be distorted or lack the hands-on component that could maximize transfer. This is separate from mentorship in that it is more of a teacher/learner relationship where employees who are masters at their craft, or experts in specific areas, can help guide and teach younger employees either one-on-one or in groups. But one should not assume that because an experienced employee is great at a specific task is also good at teaching or instructing. This is where the L&D department can help educate and guide these employees and provide resources and materials to bolster and complement these interactions.

### ***Outsourced***

If experienced employees are not interested in participating in mentor or OJT programs, or certain challenges are present such as lack of resources, time, equipment or know-how, then OJT can be outsourced. This can be through a community college, consultants, industry experts, workforce development centers or even industry partners that can help with this process. It is still recommended that the L&D department research, evaluate and set up these trainings to ensure the content is relevant, accurate and helpful to the organization. This can be a time consuming and exhausting process for an employee who does not have experience or knowledge in what is needed or required for effective learning transfer so having designated individuals who have the knowledge to do so is important.

### **On-Demand Training**

With the capabilities of recording and posting information, videos and voice recordings online, information now has the potential to be available anywhere and anytime. This can be very beneficial in providing the information to individuals when they need it, in the moment, when learning transfer potential is at its maximum. Also known as “Just in Time” training, it “refers to only using effort when it’s needed, instead of ahead of time. This means gaining new knowledge or skills only when you need them, rather than in case you’ll need them” (Andriotis, 2018, Feb 21). The disadvantage to this is that there is a massive amount of information available. This can not only be overwhelming to find information that is applicable or helpful in a specific situation, but also understanding what information is valid and true versus misleading and inaccurate. Content also risks being offensive or misaligned with a company’s culture and intent. Therefore, diligent and proactive measures should be taken from the L&D department in finding the best opportunities and suggestions and providing easy access to this information to

ensure alignment with the organizational needs and requirements. This also helps identify which opportunities have the most learning potential and are not haphazard training programs or videos that are frequently considered a waste of time and contribute to a poor impression of training.

On-demand training is also a wonderful opportunity to provide or create content that can reinforce material from a prior training which increases retrieval strength within the brain.

Retrieval strength is a “measure of how easily a nugget of information comes to mind. Without reinforcement, however, retrieval strength drops off quickly, and its capacity is relatively small [compared to storage]” (Carey, 2014, p.37).

### **Learning and Development Department Role Adjustment**

Each of the suggestions outlined above require an adjustment to the roles and responsibilities of an L&D department or position within an organization. This role would take on more of a professional development coach in lieu of a trainer. One that approaches L&D as a train-the-trainer approach. This would include building and managing the mentorship program and OJT program as well as consistently researching and updating the database for on-demand and relevant outsourced learning opportunities. This would also require review and implementation of programs, technology or learning platforms that best fit the organizational L&D needs. This department would have to work closely with employees, leadership and the human resources department to establish expectations, employee retention, and communication procedures to ensure the correct information is being taught in the correct format. This reformatting should not exclude in-person trainings. But in-person trainings should also not simply be the default learning format for an organization. The L&D department should have the knowledge to identify components such as content, audience, location, timing, instructor

knowledge and presentation style as well as current workloads to determine the best approach to maximize intraorganizational learning and development.

### **Conclusion**

While interorganizational workforce and career development has waned, the demand for life-long learning and development within the workplace remains and may have even increased for both workers who hold a degree and those that don't. And while this may seem like a one-sided benefit for individuals, organizations would benefit greatly by consistently educating and improving their workforce by reducing turnover and increasing engagement within their organization. To do this, considerations are needed in the role, approach and customization of an organizations learning opportunities, L&D department as well as the perception and expectations of the role of higher education institutions in career development models.

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