

HEY SENIOR! WHO DECIDES WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO YOU?

Gene R. Remoff, Lycoming College

ABSTRACT

We have traditionally instructed business and management students as to what companies could and should be doing about management and professional development. That is not sufficient and may even be misleading for our students, more of whom should be getting an up-to-date prospective on what they will now encounter in regard to their own development when they graduate and enter the present economy and workplace. Described here is an attempt through readings, instruction and a personalized assignment, to actively engage the undergraduate student in understanding (a.) why personal professional development is now largely up to the employee, and (b.) the implications of this self-development on job retention, employment continuity and advancement as the old paternal psychological contracts of employment security and advancement rapidly diminish and vanish.

INTRODUCTION

Let me start my presentation with a chart from "The New American Workplace" by James O'Toole and Edward Lawler - a book we will return to here from time-to-time .

***From the USF Center for Effective Organizations
(CEO) Study of Fortune 1000 Companies
O'Toole & Lawler, pg 67***

<i>Terms of Company Employment Contracts</i>	<i>Percent Saying True to Great or Very Great Extent</i>
Rewards are tied to seniority	5
Loyalty to company is rewarded	16
Outstanding performers have a job for life	27
Continued employment is based on workers' developing their knowledge and skills	29
No one has a secure job	31
<i>Career development is the responsibility of workers</i>	46
<i>Rewards are tied to individual performance</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Rewards are tied to group and/or company performance</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Continued employment is based on workers' performance</i>	<i>77</i>

How things have changed! When I finished undergraduate school in 1954, and for decades afterward, newly-minted graduates talked about the big major employers seeming to provide (in the slang of the day), "cradle to the grave employment, if you keep your nose clean, get your ticket punched and stand in line waiting for your chance to move up (the hierarchy)."

That belief did not seem to fit what our college presidents, deans, and faculty had been telling students nor what commencement speakers were espousing to the about-to-graduate senior class - that they had only passed through the start of a journey in "lifelong learning".

The above U.S.C. chart and many other sources of studious and anecdotal evidence are now letting us know that if the need for 'lifelong learning' was ever true, it is now certainly so for our present business school student body. Among those joining the voices of O'Toole and Lawler is Tom Friedman who, in his book and his many PBS and C-span appearances, explains why "The World is Flat" by offering descriptions of how and why employment security is constantly threatened and vanishing nowadays, as jobs move around the globe and/or are eclipsed by applications of information technology.

So does another renown economist, Tom Sargent of N.Y.U. Sargent's studies of extending durations of unemployment can be partially attributed to employees, at all levels, many with long service, being told they are laid off because their job has been eliminated by IT, shifting demand or competition, or moved offshore ala Friedman. Then they get the unemployment-extending bad news of discovering "...by the way, you will no longer be able to sell your job-specific know-how and skills to a prospective employer (at your expected pay rate, in this country) because they too no longer need what you have to offer.

The message our students need to absorb is found in the practices employed by modern chess-masters, as espoused by Russell Ackoff and his disciples at the Wharton School such as Aron Katsenelinboigen, in their work on corporate

planning in the 1970s and '80s. The chess master attempts to create a good position from which he can act both offensively and defensively, exploiting opportunities as they present themselves, but always prepared to put up a good defense, i.e. to survive.

Not only does the chess-master understand the value of each of his pieces and his opponent's, but what those values are based on where the pieces are on the board and what pieces remain in play. To further the analogy, the once famous IBM chess-playing computer, Big Blue, was fashioned around the same (millions of) calculations of relative positional value. The message for the student, to be gleaned from these and other works on planning and from the readings in this course is not to predict the future, but to develop and maintain versatility and flexibility, armed with a body of general skills and knowledge that always keep one in or striving to be in "a good position".

Described in this paper is a set of lessons within a strategic management course directing students to consider a personalized approach to career development as a company would a S.W.O.T. analysis of its offering.

ATTENTION TO DATE

The author has not conducted an exhaustive search of the curriculums of various business schools. (Perhaps the attendees and readers of this presentation will offer descriptions of their own programs, efforts and experiences regarding what is proposed here.), however my general impression is:

- a.) What company's are now doing and not doing in management development has not made its way into textbooks and journals directed primarily to course preparation and instruction.
- b.) "Career" centers at most colleges, when not preoccupied with getting students into graduate schools, focus primarily on helping students get their first post-graduation jobs, hopefully with "good" companies that have built a relationship with the institution. Alumni placement is typically the same, matching experienced graduates (some of whom suddenly find themselves unemployed or in a dead end) with specific job opportunities.
- c.) The AACSB's stated standards for "Assurance of Learning" struggle to suggest institutions measure the degree of student exposure to and absorption of

the know-how and skills that it is believed by the academic community should be valuable in the workplace, without any qualitative concerns for whether or not or how they "pay off" and can be expanded upon by the graduate in the job setting .

- d.) There is a plenitude of self-help books and coaching consultants for those already out in the swim who now decide they must redirect their career development along new paths or accelerate their career success, however defined. Proof is provided when one goes to Amazon and keywords an appropriate title such as "career", or to Google to look for a "coach". There are even books on such advanced subjects on how to get rich quickly, so you can leave the workplace behind!
- e.) Not enough attention is paid in coursework, including strategic management and other capstone courses, to executing plans and programs – sad because executives, in speeches and books that I refer to in this course (see Bossidy, Dell & others) place the greatest value on people who show they can effectively lead and help get things done. [None of my students at any school where I taught have heard the workplace term "completed staff work" which is the act of not only bringing your boss a description of a problem or an opportunity, but a choice of at least two alternatives to fix it or leap on it, and even a draft of a memo or plan to get the word out about the choice to be executed – the kind of thing that many effective Chiefs of Staff do as a matter of course.]
- f.) The New American Workplace offers a very different proposition than the kinds of "behavioral sciences" constructs we have used through the years. Also out-of-date is the assumption that any sophisticated (read "big") company will have a management development program that responds in part to the development and retention of talented people.

In the 1960s and into the 1980s the combination of a scarcity of professional and management talent within the borders of the U.S.A. and a still rapid

rate of corporate growth (again within the U.S.A.) made the subject of how to develop needed management an active topic in the magazines and conferences that drew management attention.

The scene has changed. This book sets up and looks within three types of major-sized employers in the “new” economic scene in terms of their view of employment security and employee development. These are “LC” – Low Cost companies that pay minimum to a large number of low skill workers in a high labor content, low profit margin world; “GC” – Global Competitors who see employees as they see other asset investments and costs, all moveable; and “HI” High Involvement firms who tend to see employee know-how and skills as their primary and very valuable asset that deserves nurturing and investment. Students deserve to be introduced to these constructs and other new revealing approaches to this matter.

THE CHALLENGE: A DESIGN TO ATTRACT AND HOLD STUDENT INTEREST

We instruct our students on why and how “management development” should be undertaken by top management. But we can make the message in this instruction more compelling by having them limb, right then, into the role of the prospective employee who will or will not undergo such development.

The challenge was to make more vivid and hopefully prolong the half-life of what seniors learn about “management development” by directing them to consider where and how they may each best realize job satisfaction and professional growth after they graduate.

In a strategic management course, when the subject of a S.W.O.T. analysis is introduced, and the question of strategic advantage is explored, the discussion often turns to whether or not the deployment, capabilities and development of human resources of the firm give it a competitive edge. This was an opportunity to turn this subject (of company interest) on its head and pose this question as a matter of interest to the students:

If a realistic, candid S.W.O.T. analysis that compares a firm to its competition surfaces its human resources as an important “strength” or “weakness” why not consider if the same S.W.O.T. approach has any merit, when applied to one’s own choice of where to invest yourself as an employee?”

So, the S.W.O.T. lesson was “turned on its head” in this instant capstone strategy course, by asking the students, “ Now you know the elements of what good management development can look like. When you decide to invest yourself in working in a particular organization, will the development opportunity there be good enough for you, and what might you do about it?”

This question hopefully shoves the student into taking on the role of the managed employee who has some concern about influencing or controlling his or her own developmental experiences and prospects. Of course, some of these about-to-graduate students (often those anticipating that they will continue to be taken care of in life by the locus of control construct of either “luck” or some “significant others”) do not enthusiastically respond, at this time, to this challenge. But after the course was over it was surprising to hear from a significant portion of the class, that this was a provocative exercise.

We started the discussion by looking at The New American Workplace’s argument that in the present day and into the time after graduation, one’s professional or management development is largely up to the self and the choices one makes, not just the employer. This self-determination is not restricted to just moving to another employer environment, although that may sometimes be advisable. There are questions to raise and signs to read that reveal where developmental opportunities arise – in one’s present setting or in a particular other environment.

The two sources used in the searching and assessment of the subject were (a.) the management literature and the testimonies of many executives, and (b.) the experiences of the instructor during a 35 year career in “big company” positions as a staff management development professional. In the process of our inquiry we also noted in our instruction that a strong and deep management that creates a “learning organization” enjoys a sustainable competitive advantage in its business sector.

[The bibliography of reading sources given to the students and partially discussed in class is shown in an attachment to this paper. However, those sources identified with an asterisk were not part of the instructional material to which the students were exposed, but form part of the research reviewed by the author of this paper.]

The students were earlier given an assignment, to determine their outlook on career development and as a personal exercise in setting objectives, to "...Identify and describe the mid-term goal you will strive toward in regards to employment as an employee or an owner [None selected ownership] You decide how to state that goal, but it should be clear enough to make a judgment or take a measurement when it was time to consider how close you came to achieving that goal.

"Identify what strategies you will have to execute to move you toward and to that goal (assessment, research, self-development, experience, contacts, education, etc...) Do not describe how you will execute your plan, but do describe what actions you will need to consider and resources you will need to employ to make your plan realistic. Also identify what you will use to determine your progress (your milestones) toward your goal and what you may have to be prepared to do if it becomes apparent you are going to fall short of attainment."

THE EXERCISE

What follows is a replication of the talking points that were addressed in the classroom in concert with and in reference to the readings and the instructor's experiential anecdotes and observations. These talking points were subsequently made the basis for a student paper requiring the following:

My Management Development" Paper Assigned Strategic Mgt. Class Spring, 2006

These [below] are the questions to ask yourself. Respond to at least ten of the most important (as you see it). When you address any of the following, be sure to explain or justify your reasoning, including citing any of the "expert" sources in articles and books you had been assigned to read for this subject (including" the quotes from Michael Dell, the Bossidy and Senge texts, Pearson's "Muscle Build...", the CCL article, "How H-P identifies potential executive" and others.

Strategic Mgt Spring, '06 - Class discussion outline "Making My Mgt. Development Happen"

A. Experiences I should/should not seek

- Which "me" do I want to project to a prospective employer – the one who seeks to make a visible contribution in areas important to the company or "fit in" as a team member?
- How tough should my work assignments be? i.e. what ingredients should they contain (or character they should have) for me to "learn something" from them. What will I learn by failing to totally succeed in a very tough and unusual assignment?
- Should I seek out special project and task force assignments? Is it important I learn to deal with:
-ambiguity - risk-taking - people not under my control - difficult people
- Being judged by something more abstract and elusive than a set of numbers or financial targets.
- Should I experience involvement in and the management of "turnarounds"? Business "startups"? When & how?
- Should I build a record of specific accomplishments rather than just a resume of where I worked and my job duties? Should I avoid or dive in to risky assignments in which I may fail to achieve what the firm wants done?
- Which functional discipline do I want to move up through/to. – Accounting, Finance, Human Resources, general management, Marketing, and what kind of company will offer me the best experience to move on that path?
- If I want to be a general manager, am I considering the likelihood that may be easier to have happen in the services sector, or retailing, where the most common discipline is "General Management" (of a store or unit, then district, then region, etc...)?
- Should I try to gain experience in other specific disciplines to prepare myself fully for where I am heading? (For example, do I need marketing experience to be an HR exec in a kind of company with heavy emphasis in that area such as retailing, or consumer packaged goods?)
- Should I look for an employer in a highly competitive, fast-changing business

environment? Are there certain industries I am attracted to (or wish to avoid)?

- Should I work for a smaller company at some point (and when) because I believe I will get to do more ‘stuff’ than in a well staffed bigger department of a larger company? But, then where will I learn how to do it the best way?
- Should I try to experience working in a variety of environments? How about outside the USA ?
- How will I determine it is time to initiate an effort to “move on’ to another job?

B. My (prospective) employer’s demonstrated interest in management development

- How high should my employer’s standards for good performance be?
- Do I notice there are too many mediocre performers in managerial jobs above me (some of whom are residing in a job I would like to have/move through to enhance my development?). Do I want to be with high-performing peers, or stand out among lower-rated performers?
- Does my employer use performance appraisals to facilitate employee development or more as an administrative tool to determine the size of raises, etc...? Do they do 360 degree appraisals for developmental purposes?
- How would I feel about my development as a manager in Dell, which practices what Michael Dell calls “segmentation”?
- What are the criteria for getting promoted in my company – does seniority (how long you have been here) rule? Is there any indication of improper/illegal bias, such as a “glass ceiling”? For example if I am a female, are there any women in the higher ranks of management?
- What kind(s) of boss do I want in terms of facilitating my development as/to be a manager?
- How can I find out if a particular prospective employer values the internal development of promotable managerial talent? How much and what kind of formal training and/or education should I look to my employer to provide?
- How often do transfers of people occur across organizational units (cross-fertilization)? Can the company point to others (like me) who have had

various assignments and jobs in their formative years?

- How strong is the company’s people management function (human resources) in insuring that management development programs and exposures will occur for promotable people? Do they make a systematic effort to identify such promotable people?
- Is this a company that asks you to leave if you are not promotable and are therefore clogging a developmental slot for someone on the way up (an “up or out” culture)?
- Do managers in my company get rewarded for developing and readying promotable people?
- Do I need a mentor or “rabbi” to help me along by counseling me on my career/job choices? Who might that be? Will that person be replaced along the way?

GRADING THE EXERCISE

Shown in an attachment is the grading form used by the instructor to grade each student’s paper and provide remarks (on the form and on the paper). [Incidentally, the author uses such a form for all assignments because they are typically argumentative papers. The form helps provide me with consistent criteria as I move from one paper to the next, and also gives the student some idea of how I arrived at the grade.]

As will be shown in an overhead during the presentation, the students’ papers yielded these kinds of comments and criticisms from the instructor:

- a.) Some students had difficulty getting into the assigned role. They preferred (and often do) to address an assignment as if in the third person. It is easier for them to then just mouth or digest the readings or their class notes. Doing this produces a vague, dull result and brings a penalty in the grade.
- b.) Too many were timid about taking on a responsible job or task, perhaps fearing failure rather than seeing such an assignment as a learning experience.
- c.) Students did not grasp the common likelihood that almost every organization has relatively well-trod paths to the top of each function and to senior general management.

- d.) The subject of when and why one should or should not work in a smaller company is not clear, given the pros and cons of big versus smaller company work environments, such as relative sophistication of processes, demanding performance standards, intensity of competition for promotions and the breadth of assignments.
- e.) Many did not yet understand (or respond positively) to the notion and value of joining a team and experiencing the work and enjoying the success of high stakes teams and projects.
- f.) Too many seemed more interesting in standing out as performers (the best of the lot) rather than subjecting themselves to high standards, tough coaching, intense results-oriented environments.
- g.) I did not do a good selling job on the importance (to the student) of gauging the organization's commitment to or investment in management development efforts.
- h.) Too many emphasized making important contacts, too which I replied in critiquing their papers "Getting and staying ahead is no longer a matter, even partially, of who you know. What matters with contacts is who knows you – the you being your demonstrable talent and proven capabilities. Empty Suits who get too high up in management mostly crash and burn."

CONCLUSION

Was it too soon for students to explore this subject? I do not know, but I do not think so. After all, if not now, when will be the best time and who will offer the graduate, at that later time, the questions to consider when beginning to feel concerned about how it going. They will largely be on their own. Anecdotal evidence of the impression this exercise had on students came from only a few. I did not seek out reactions, nor do I believe in the time honored use of "happy sheets" to support a program or seminar's existence.

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Gene Remoff is an adjunct management instructor at Lycoming College and has taught there and at other Central Pennsylvania universities for the past twelve years. previously for 35 years he was a human resources practitioner and senior HR executive with Fortune 500 global corporations, the last being ARAMARK, a 150,000 employee services provider where he was Corporate VPHR for ten years.

GRADING “My Management Development”

	<u>Silent or does not requirements</u>	<u>Meets most require</u>	<u>Fully meets require</u>	<u>Exceeds require</u>
Aspect of Paper				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes her/his arguments with support, proper paragraphs , sentence structure and grammar 				
Supports claims with named citations/references such as				
Dell excerpt, Bossidy chapter, text pieces, c’pack readings CCL article, Muscle-Build article, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Uses first person to address actions to enhance/further own mgt. dev. & explains why each so identified is important</i> 				
Experiences to seek early On:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How tough should my assignments be? • Special project & task force assignments? • Take on risky assignments I may fail to achieve? • What (kind of) company will offer me the best experience to move up in a chosen functional path? • If I want to be a general mgr. • Certain industries I attracted to (or wish to avoid)? • Exposure to other disciplines important to my industry • Seek employer in a highly competitive, fast-changing business environment? • Should I work in smaller company at some point (when?) • Gain experience in a variety of environments? Int’l? • Need to decide it’s time to “move on” from a job? 				
Experiences to get once become a mid-level manager:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should I learn to experience managing “turnarounds”? • How about business “startups”? • Build a record of specific accomplishments rather than just a resume of where I worked? 				
Will my (Prospective) employer attend to mgt dev:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My employer’s standards for good performance? • Is this an organization with many mediocre mgt. performers? • Employer uses performance appraisals to facilitate employee development? • Company practices what Dell calls “segmentation”? • Criteria for promotion based on best qualified? • Kind of Boss I want (to facilitate my development) • Does employer value internal development of mgt. talent? • How often people transfer (cross-fertilization)? • Role in Mgt. Dev. of company’s human resources dept. • Are managers here rewarded for developing & readying promotable people? • Do I need a mentor or “rabbi” to help me along ? 				

GRADE: _____