
Succession Planning For The Retirement of Senior Level Executives And Managers

Kelly Olsen

Developing Personal Learning Plans For Federal Government Employees

As human beings, there exists in varying degrees, a life-long need to learn, grow and develop. In terms of the workplace, learning on the job helps us to feel better about ourselves and our work. As an employee, we look for opportunities to improve our skills and our knowledge base. As well, we tend to look for ways to share and transfer the information we acquire throughout our years. What businesses and organizations are trying to do these days is create a "learning organization."

Through Personal Learning Plans (PLP's) federal government departments are able to work towards becoming "learning organizations" by:

- promoting and encouraging continuous learning on the part of its employees
- providing a conducive environment for collective or organizational learning
- being open and responsive to new ideas and creative ways of thinking
- allowing people to share experiences, convey information, and compare best practices (not just allow people to take courses)

Through much research and investigation, the following will provide an in-depth analysis of what PLP's can do for an organization, and summarize their effectiveness.

To begin with, it must be made clear what exactly a PLP is and how it relates to the continuous learning cycle. A continuous learning cycle implies that learning:

1. is not something that you only do in school
2. is not limited to a period of time outside of work
3. means continually acquiring new skills and knowledge
4. means sharing information with others
5. is a life-long commitment.

A PLP can be defined as a tool used within some federal Government of Canada

departments that maps-out a learning strategy that is developed in partnership between a manager and his/her employee. It focuses on learning goals (the 'what') and activities (the 'how'). It also balances individual needs with those that are driven by an organization. Finally, it helps to encourage learning that goes beyond formal training.

There are a number of different examples of types of learning activities. Four main areas of personal development include: Formal, On-the-Job, Self-Directed and Group Learning. The following will discuss each type and give some examples of each.

Formal

These types of activities tend to be what most people think of when they think of learning and usually involve training a person outside the workplace setting. Some examples of this type include: classroom training, symposiums/conferences and formal education.

On-the-Job

This type of instruction focuses more on task and processes related training in the workplace and are used quite often as an effective means of providing 'hands-on' experience to the person being trained. Some examples of this type include: job shadowing, mentoring and assignments.

Self-Directed

This type of learning is sometimes more difficult for some people as it takes a greater degree of motivation and self-discipline. Examples of this type are: audio/visual tapes, web-based training and reading resources.

Group Learning

This type involves more than one person (often a team of individuals) and has the benefit of providing the one being trained



Kelly Olsen

Kelly Olsen is a Finance Officer with the Department of Justice Canada (in the Edmonton, Alberta office). Mr. Olsen provides leadership and guidance to the accounting operations within the Prairie Region. Prior to working for Justice for the past 2 ½ years, Kelly worked in finance for 11 years with Social Development (formerly known as HRDC).

with access to many different styles and personalities. Some types of this training are: action learning circles, discussion groups and team learning.

Motivation

One positive reason for promoting others to offer training to co-workers is that it has been shown that by sharing what you have learned with others, you often deepen your own understanding and transference of learning that occurred. Meaning that when people take the time to show others a certain process or procedure, they often are better able to reflect upon what task is being done and its relevance.

"I find that a great part of the information I have was acquired by looking up something and finding something else on the way."¹ This quote accurately implies the fact that often we learn other things unintentionally when discovering new information/skills. This aspect is often overlooked when trying to sell the aspect of learning to others.

Another way to motivate an employee to complete a Personal Learning Plan is that employees who are willing to learn and develop usually have more skills to offer and more ideas to share. Continued study and growth gives a person more freedom and choice about who they work for and what they will do. Finally, when you create a Personal Learning Plan, you control your own development because as an employee, you yourself know your own potential and

understand where you see yourself in the future.

The Relationship Between Learning and Job Performance

Because organizations are often committed to a strategic and coordinated approach to learning, it's necessary that learning is *linked* to that organization's goals and priorities.

It can be said that employees tend to be more focused on how they are doing in their job, if they have a better idea of what learning they require to either: continue to succeed in their current job, or; identify the training they require to move into a different position (either the one they have now, or a new one).

By creating a culture of learning at work, the employer gains a greater understanding of what future direction their employees hope to take career-wise and what those employee's goals and objectives are (both short-term and long term)

Assessing the Transference of Learning

Because PLP's should be driven by personal learning needs and those of the organization, it is important that the PLP is a reflection of both immediate and longer-term learning goals. As well, the learning goals that are identified should be **clear** and **realistic** and describe what will actually be undertaken as opposed to what an employee would like to do.

It's critical that both a manager and employee monitor the progress of the plan. An employee should discuss his/her ongoing

progress with their supervisor to determine whether the learning goals are being met. If necessary, the PLP can be amended at any time to ensure its relevancy and to accommodate any changes that are required.

Dealing with Employees Who Do Not Want to Do A PLP

At times the question may arise, "How do you promote PLP's to a long-term employee who is a hard worker, always gets his/her job done, but has no motivation to improve themselves at their current stage of their career?" Another words, are PLP's necessary for everyone? It's widely known that some very productive and dedicated people in organizations have no incentive to learn new tasks/processes/ideas etc. And instead they just want to do the job they know and nothing more. Or in some instances employees may be close to retirement and feel "learning" is not for them at this point of their life.

One way to handle those close to retiring is to mention that it may be beneficial then at this stage of their life to learn: new hobbies or even attend a class on how to handle retirement. There are even some seminars available on retirement savings techniques. When one opens their minds to the limitless number of training opportunities available, there are few that can say "There is nothing out there for me to learn."

For managers with staff wishing to exclude themselves from further training, the prevalent question they must ask themselves "Is there not *any* type of new train-

ing-possibly even outside the realm of work-related learning, which this employee could not benefit from?"

Conclusion

Improving employee performance can be achieved by increasing or improving their skills, knowledge and attitudes. The idea that through ongoing learning for staff, organizations can remove or prevent performance deficiencies, make employees more flexible and adaptable, and can even increase their commitment to an organization"²

In conclusion, it must be understood that PLP's are but just one of many tools that can be used as a model to increase staff learning. However it must be noted that it does not matter so much what model is chosen (including PLP's) but instead there needs to be a firm commitment made between managers and employees towards some type of learning plan in order to meet set objectives.

I'd like to close with a quote: "*The best of all things is to learn. Money can be lost or stolen, health and strength may fail, but what you have committed to your mind is yours forever.*"- Louis L'Amour. This statement hold very true and reinforces the fact that learning is never-ending and once obtained cannot be ever taken away.

References

1. Franklin P Adams
2. "Enhancing Organizational Performance-Lusthaus, Charles, Adrien, Marie-Helene, Anderson, Gary and Carden, Fred