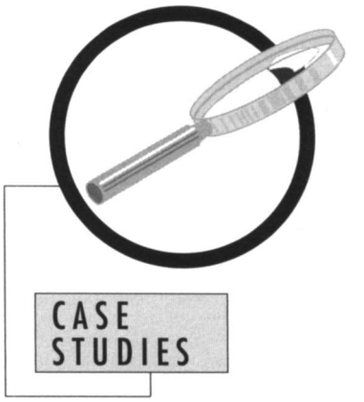
CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM IN QUEENSLAND TRANSPORT:

A CASE STUDY



Sandy Santic

The significant changes in work and workplaces are making organisational career development programs imperative from both an organisational and individual perspective. Queensland Transport has responded to the demand from its employees for career development tools and resources by committing to the development and implementation of a departmental Career Development Program. This paper outlines the Queensland Transport Career Development Program with a particular emphasis on how it came about, what it entails and the challenges faced. Various initiatives have been implemented to date, yet many challenges lie ahead.

Career development in organisations has shown increased interest, both in Australia and overseas. In the recent literature on organisational career development and career development programs, there is an emphasis on career development frameworks and key issues relevant to career development programs in organisations. These are:

- clarifying separate individual, management and organisational responsibilities;
- integration of career development to human resource initiatives;
- the importance of executive management involvement; and
- evaluation of the career development program.

Career development responsibility is frequently described as a partnership between employees and the organisation. Although the shift in the past decade has been toward greater employee responsibility, Armstrong (1992), Griffith (1998) and Monk (1996) clearly outline the separate responsibilities of organisations and employees. Due to these changing career responsibilities and to eliminate unrealistic employee expectations of the organisation, it is imperative that employees and the organisation share the same understanding of career development responsibility.

There is an overwhelming view that career development systems need to be integrated with other human resource processes if employee participation in career development programs is to be meaningful (Armstrong, 1992; Kaye & Leibowitz, 1994; Overman, 1993; Young, 1996). Similarly, executive management support and involvement is seen as a critical element in the success of the program.

Although the value of evaluating career development programs has received some attention in the literature (e.g. Gutteridge, Leibowitz & Shore, 1993a; Kaye & Leibowitz, 1994; Russell, 1991), research evaluating the effectiveness of career systems or interventions has been sparse. The evaluations that are reported draw on informal verbal feedback methodology.

Career development programs can benefit the organisation as well as the individual in different ways (Hutton, 1996; Simonsen, 1997). The suggested benefits range from financial, productivity and performance, to motivated employees and creating a better "fit" between employee and the organisation by ensuring there is goal alignment. With the social, economic, technological and ongoing organisational changes and in light of the benefits that can be obtained through career development programs, there has been increased attention given to organisational career development programs.

Despite the abundance of literature suggesting the issues involved with career development programs in organisations (Armstrong, 1992; Gutteridge, 1993a; Gutteridge *et al.*, 1993b; Kaye & Leibowitz, 1994; Monk, 1996; O'Herron & Simonsen, 1995; Tucker & Moravec, 1992), there is a scarcity of documented comprehensive career development programs in organisations, particularly in Australia. This case study outlines the progress on the Queensland Transport Career Development Program.

Queensland Transport is a state government department in the process of developing a career development program for its employees. When the concept of career development was first introduced, the challenge was to deliver a program that considered the needs of employees and the organisation. Following an extensive consultation process, recommendations were presented to and endorsed by the executive board. Progress to date has included the commencement of the evaluation strategy and the completion of the draft *Career Development Workbook*. The experience, thus far, has presented several issues and challenges for the future.

BACKGROUND

In September 1997, Queensland Transport, through its *Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and Strategic Plan 1998–2002*, committed to providing its employees with a career development program. This was seen as a strategy to achieve a "better Queensland transport organisation" by supporting and encouraging employees to develop and pursue a learning culture.

In order to provide recommendations

on an appropriate career development program for the department, a comprehensive research and consultation strategy was implemented. This involved group and individual interviews with a wide range of internal staff and consultations with external private and public sector organisations. A literature review was also conducted on the current trends in organisations regarding career development.

The findings were compiled in a report, which was distributed to the senior and executive management for the final stage of consultation. Minor changes were made and the report was submitted for endorsement of the recommendations to an executive board.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings were presented to the executive management and the 17 recommendations were endorsed in principle. The key relevant recommendations follow.

First, executive and senior management would actively promote and endorse a career development program.

Second, current and future Queensland Transport activities would be integrated or linked to the career development program (e.g. performance management system, workforce planning, recruitment and selection processes, the induction program, corporate capabilities, equal employment opportunity initiatives and learning organisation framework).

Third, a workbook would be developed that includes:

- self-assessment tools for employees;
- tools that guide employees through a goal-setting process;
- explanations of the different options for learning;
- job searching approaches;
- information on the systems available to support employees (eg. a study and research assistance scheme) and how to build particular skills (e.g. marketing, application writing, interview skills);
- clarification of the different roles of all the players in career development; and
- information on what activities can contribute towards career development.

Fourth, a mentoring program be developed and implemented across the department.

Finally, feedback processes be introduced enabling employees to receive and provide feedback on any issues (e.g. development, performance).

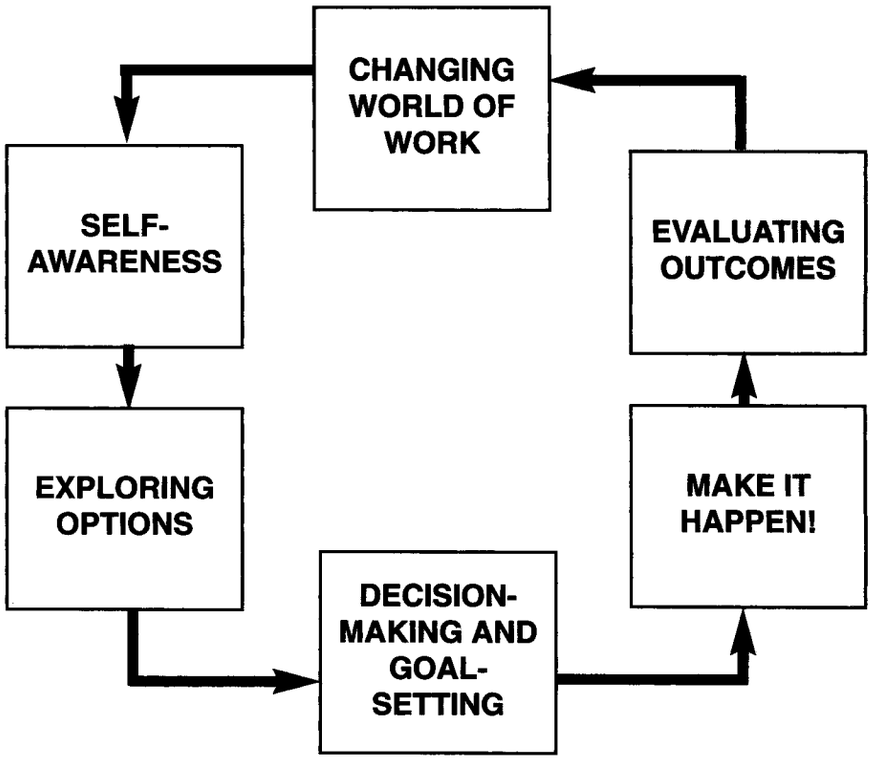


Figure 1. The Queensland Transport career development process.

INITIATIVES TO DATE

The initiatives to date include a career development awareness brochure, a *Career Development Workbook*, career development workshops and an evaluation survey. The following timeline illustrates the sequence of events and provides an overview of the range of activities undertaken:

- September 1997: Written into enterprise bargaining agreement;
- March 1998: Research and consultation;
- October 1998: Recommendations endorsed by executive and senior management;
- December 1998: Career development brochure distributed;
- March 1998: *Career Development Survey (Time 1)* distributed;
- April 1999: "World of Work" workshop;
- September 1999: Draft *Career Development Workbook* completed;
- December 1999: Integrate into People First initiatives;
- February 2000: Proposed launch of *Career Development Workbook*;
- Ongoing: Proposed career development workshops; and
- End-2000: Proposed distribution of *Career Development Survey (Time 2)*.

BROCHURE

The *Queensland Transport Career Development Brochure* was distributed in December 1998. It was designed as a marketing tool to communicate to employees that the organisation is committed to career development by undertaking the development of the program. The second aim of the brochure was to provide some introductory information regarding the changing world of work and career development responsibility, and to encourage employees to participate in their own career development.

WORKBOOK

One of the major findings in the internal consultation phase was that employees felt that they received little information on various issues, which was seen as a barrier to their career development. The *Queensland Transport Career Development Workbook* is being developed to address this issue. The workbook is based on the career development process outlined in Figure 1.

The workbook contains six modules based on each step of the process. It is designed to provide employees with a career development process as well as tools and resources to enable individuals to actively participate in their career development. It is also designed to be a flexible workbook in regard to when and where it can be used, the timeframes

within which to complete the career development process and where to begin the process. For example, if an employee is facing a redundancy and is keen to find alternative employment as quickly as possible then the best place to start the process may be the *Make It Happen*! module. Overall, this is done through the provision of reading material, reference to resources and many exercises and activities to assist employees on their career development journey.

CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

The *Changing World of Work* module focuses on the individual exploring changes at the global, industrial/labour market, organisational and individual levels, and introduces the issues of career development responsibility and what is career and career development. It is designed with the view that individuals whose career development is aware of the changes occurring in the world of work, such as changes in technology, are more likely to reap greater benefits for their efforts.

SELF-AWARENESS

Self-Awareness is a stage in the career development process that focuses on the individual and his/her past. It provides a series of exercises, checklists and questionnaires to guide individuals to increase their awareness about themselves. *Self-Awareness* is about individuals exploring and identifying their values, interests, abilities and skills, personal style, experience, accomplishments, knowledge, and strengths and weaknesses. The module is based on the assumption that an individual will be prepared to examine options for the future and make informed and appropriate career choices following an understanding of self.

EXPLORING OPTIONS

Exploring Options refers to the use of various research strategies to explore the opportunities and options available in the future. The majority of this module explains the research strategies available and how to access them. The employees are encouraged to use these strategies and document the findings of their research. The intent of this module is to provide employees with ideas and contacts for conducting their research rather than doing the research for them.

DECISION-MAKING AND GOAL-SETTING

The fourth module is *Decision-Making and Goal-Setting*. It is believed that the more attention an individual gives to determining priorities and learning the decision making process, the more likely he or she is to recognise opportunities when they occur and have the confidence to take them. Similarly, the goal-setting process will increase an individual's skill in nominating for these opportunities. Following a summarising exercise that highlights the key findings from the self-awareness activities and from the research previously undertaken, individuals are provided with a step-by-step process enabling decision-making and goal-setting. Prior to making decisions, the process includes identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each of the most favourable options.

MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Make It Happen! concerns the actions that are most commonly associated with career development. In addition to the well researched areas of résumé and application writing, networking or marketing and interview skills, areas such as time management, mentoring and professional portfolio are also covered. Due to the enormous amount of literature available on these topics, this module provides an overview of factors to consider and directs employees to more comprehensive resources that would be more suitable to their circumstances.

EVALUATING OUTCOMES

The final step in the career development process is *Evaluating Outcomes*. Evaluation or reflection is the critical step that enables the career development process to be ongoing. Determining what worked, what did not work, how things could be done differently or more effectively, what the individual has learned and the value of the learning provides a stimulus for continuing on the career development journey. This step in the process includes reality checks and evaluation of outcomes achieved at each of the previous steps in the career development process.

WORKSHOPS

To supplement the workbook, which is designed for individuals to work through independently, short workshops will be designed for each step of the Queensland Transport career development process. This would be particularly beneficial in business areas that are undergoing organisational change or are affected by changing business priorities. The expectation is that through interaction and a trusting environment, individuals will openly share their experiences and learn from the experiences of others. One of Queensland Transport's branches recently requested a career awareness workshop due to the impact on employees of an organisational change process. Two small workshops were held on the "World of Work" and the responses on the evaluation forms suggest that the workshops were timely and useful for employees to be able to objectively and proactively deal with the organisational change process.

EVALUATION SURVEY

For the purpose of continuous improvement of the proposed career development program and to ensure its future existence, a survey was designed to collect baseline data prior to the implementation of the program. The survey was distributed with a return self-addressed envelope to a random sample of 450 Queensland Transport employees. A 73% response rate was obtained. Key findings suggest:

- 82% of the sample have applied for a job in the past two years;
- 51% of the sample are dissatisfied with their career prospects;
- 43% of the sample are either unsure or do not know where to find information on the departmental recruitment and selection process and relieving policies;
- 55% of the sample rate the clarity of their career planning over the next two to four years as vague; and
- women in Queensland Transport are significantly more satisfied with their career development than men.

CHALLENGES FACED

Since the commencement of the career development project in March 1998, several issues have arisen and numerous challenges have been faced. Many of these challenges are ongoing and remain part of the program development and implementation agenda.

Timeframes

While it was tempting to offer a product quickly, it was realised that a development phase was necessary. The predetermined

timeframes were acknowledged as unrealistic. The range of consultation and preparatory research has enhanced the eventual product.

Executive Management Support

Executive management support was initially received through the endorsement of the recommendation outlined in the career development report. This achievement was communicated to all staff as the commitment of the department's executive management to the career development of its employees. Ongoing demands of the Human Resources Branch to deliver additional training programs have meant that programs competed for staff time. With employees' expectations raised through initial communication of the development of the career development program, it was important to follow through with the program. As successful distribution of the initial brochure throughout the business units of the department was variable, another strategy that will more effectively market the program and have reading material reach all employees at minimal cost was devised.

Staffing

Heavy workloads extended timeframes by several weeks. Seeking feedback from a broad range of stakeholders led to a number of revisions to the career development program. In addition, staff movement reduced the time available to work on the program, again extending completion dates.

Integrating Human Resource Initiatives

Within the Human Resources Branch there are performance management, career development and corporate core capabilities project teams. The integration of each of these is critical to the marketability of these programs and their benefits to the organisation. The project leaders met regularly to discuss the language used between projects and how to integrate them most effectively. Beyond ensuring the use of consistent language, the integration of these human resource systems is difficult. The *Career Development Workbook* refers to the use of the performance management system and corporate capabilities as a tool to assist in the career development process. The team members anticipate that the implementation of these programs would enable more effective integration, both from an online perspective where appropriate links are made and from using these programs together in the workplace to achieve effective employee development.

Fee for Service Arrangement

The proposed introduction of fee for service in the department raised a challenge to increase organisational awareness of the importance of the program. Suggestions that our internal clients may have budget challenges for the next financial year highlight potential difficulties in selling the career development program to some internal clients.

Implementation

The Human Resources Branch has previously experienced difficulty in effectively implementing its programs to a workforce greater than 2000 employees geographically dispersed throughout the state. Adopting more innovative implementation strategies for the *Career Development Workbook* will be essential in ensuring that employees have access to the program and that both the employee and organisation ultimately benefit from the program.

Our current challenge is to determine an implementation strategy that will be most effective in ensuring that the *Career Development Workbook* not only reaches each employee but is also used by employees within the department. Issues under consideration include:

- the value of either piloting the program, having a staged implementation or simply launching the program across the organisation at once;
- regional and divisional implementation needs;
- accessibility of the program and the benefits of electronic or paper versions of the workbook;
- the type of communication and marketing necessary and the associated costs; and
- the level of support required to ensure that the program is ongoing and reaps maximum benefits.

These issues have had significant impacts on the development of Queensland Transport's career development program. Other events have also had varying impact on the progress of the career development program, such as the review and restructure of the Human Resources Branch and the appointment of a new Director of the Human Resources Branch. Despite all these issues, the career development program remains on the agenda.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Several of the issues faced will continue to exist to some degree. However, there are additional challenges for the future.

The first challenge is ensuring that the career development program is not a one-off training program but an ongoing, continually improving program. Competing issues raise the need to emphasise that career development is ongoing. Different strategies are being used to ensure the program continues to exist. These strategies include integration of the career development program with

many other organisational systems, particularly those that are bound by existing legislation, collecting baseline data early in the process to enable effective evaluation following the implementation of the program, and communicating widely and frequently to all employees what the department has promised to deliver on the program.

Gaining greater executive management support will continue to be a challenge in the future. With competing employee development priorities and changing business needs, individual career development may be considered optional. Therefore, the importance of evaluations of the program is reinforced. Mayo (1992) argues it takes several years before the success of career development systems can be assessed. If this argument is true, the challenges appear even greater. Executive management commitment through resourcing the program may prove to be a critical element to the success of Queensland Transport's career development program.

Another challenge will be the impact of the introduction of new reporting and financial systems. Under review is the process of how to deliver initiatives and determining who pays for the service. The review will have the greatest impact on the recommendations designed to support the career development workbook and workshops, which have not yet commenced.

In conclusion, despite the many challenges, Queensland Transports' career development program has made significant progress with the career development brochure, the *Career Development Workbook* and workshops, and the *Career Development Survey*. The existence of very few career development programs in organisations makes the achievements of Queensland Transport's career development program, thus far, even more extraordinary. Clearly many challenges lie ahead.

Sandy Santic
Queensland Transport

REFERENCES

Armstrong, L. (1992). Organisational career development programs and practices: Emerging issues for career practitioners, managers and employees. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 1*, 29–33.

Griffith, C. (1998). Building a resilient workforce. *Training, 35*, 54–60.

Gutteridge, T., Leibowitz, Z. & Shore, J. (1993a). A new look at organizational career development. *Human Resource Planning, 16*, 71–84.

Gutteridge, T., Leibowitz, Z. & Shore, J. (1993b). When careers flower, organizations flourish. *Training and Development, 47*, 25–29.

Hutton, D. (1996). A framework for understanding career development in changing organisations. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 5(3)*, 41–46.

Kaye, B., & Leibowitz, Z. (1994). Career development: Don't let it fizzle. *HR Magazine, 39*, 78–83.

Mayo, A. (1992). A framework for career management. *Personnel Management, 24*, 36–39.

Monk, R. (1996). Through career development to the development of careers. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 5(3)*, 33–36.

O'Herron, P. & Simonsen, P. (1995). Career development gets a charge at Sears Credit. *Personnel, 74*, 103–106.

Overman, S. (1993). Under HR umbrella, career development pays dividends. *HR Magazine, 38*, 67–68.

Russell, J. (1991). Career development interventions in organizations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 38*, 237–287.

Simonsen, P. (1997). *Promoting a development culture in your organization: Using career development as a change agent*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.

Tucker, R. & Moravec, M. (1992). Do-it-yourself career development. *Training, 29*, 48–52.

Young, C. (1996). How CDP can further organisational aims. *People Management, 2*, 67.