

## *Counseling and Development: International Perspectives*

# **A Description of Career Development Services Within Canadian Organizations**

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*This study explored the scope and nature of career development services within organizations. One human resource/personnel department representative in each of the 30 largest organizations in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, was interviewed. The Career Development Questionnaire provided the framework for the structured interviews. Participants outlined their conceptualizations of organizational career development, described the outcomes organizations hoped to achieve through the use of career development services, listed the services provided by their organizations, and rated the effectiveness of each service. Although the descriptions and the intended outcomes for career development services were consistent, specific services were not aligned with specific goals. This finding highlighted the need for practitioners to ensure they align services with their goals and for researchers to evaluate the effects of career development services on the basis of their specific intentions. Overall, results suggest that career development within organizations is still practiced in a part-time and informal manner.*

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**P**roviding career development services is one way in which organizations may prepare for an increasingly competitive future. Abdelnour and Hall (1980) stated that organizations can no longer afford to squander valuable human resource assets because employee development leads to corporate development. The continuity and success of an organization depends, to a great extent, on its ability to attract, evaluate, develop, use, and retain well-qualified people. Consequently, there is increasing pressure on organizations to provide well-organized and well-administered human resource and career development services.

Most efforts to study the scope of career development services in organizations were conducted in the United States between the years 1979 and 1985 (Abdelnour & Hall, 1980; Cairo, 1983; Griffith, 1980, 1981; Gutteridge & Otte, 1983; Levine, 1985; Walker & Gutteridge, 1979). These studies have suggested that only about 25% of all employees have been offered career development services by their employers. However, the studies cited suggest that there is widespread acceptance of the value of career development activities and that, in the years to come, more and more organizations will be required by various internal and external pressures to develop and expand career development services (Gutteridge & Otte, 1983).

An acknowledgement of career development as a lifelong process has led some organizations to begin to offer services designed to enhance the careers of their employees. By providing career development services, organizations believed they would benefit from a better trained and more productive workforce.

A variety of models have been proposed to conceptualize organizational career development. Leibowitz and Lea (1986) described career development systems as integrated services and procedures that meet the needs of both individuals and organizations. Services meeting individual needs are referred to as *career planning* (e.g., career planning workshops, teaching of advancement strategies), whereas those related to organizational needs are termed *career management*

(e.g., performance appraisals, management succession, and replacement planning).

Griffith (1980, 1981) added a third component called *life planning* to the description of organizational career development provided by Leibowitz and Lea (1986). The incorporation of life planning services (e.g., family and marital counseling, alcohol and drug counseling) as a component of organizational career development represents a holistic view of career development that emphasizes the interrelationships between the work role and other life roles.

Schein (1978) and Hall (1986) provided models to describe the comprehensive linking of individual career planning and organizational career management. Schein's thesis is that optimal matching of individual and organizational needs results in organizational effectiveness and individual career satisfaction. This view is supported by Hall, who stated that it is in the best interests of the organization to support and facilitate individual career planning and development. Although Hall suggested that individuals are in control of their own careers, he believed organizations can help employees to plan their careers by providing appropriate services and resources.

Our current project explored the scope of career development services in organizations by examining the services provided by the 30 largest private and public sector organizations in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Specifically, the study had four purposes: (a) to determine how organizations in Calgary conceptualize career development for employees, (b) to identify the organizational goals of career development services, (c) to determine the range of services offered, and (d) to assess the participants' perceptions of the efficacy of the services.

### **METHOD**

The population for this project consisted of all private and public sector organizations in the city of Calgary, Alberta. Two criteria for

sample selection were set. First, each organization had to possess at least 1,000 employees. The required number of employees was arbitrarily set but was also based on the finding of Morgan, Hall, and Martier (1979) that larger organizations were more likely to offer career development services than were smaller organizations. Second, organizations had to have an identified career development staff member who was willing to be interviewed.

A total of 30 organizations met both selection criteria. The actual participants for the study included 30 representatives employed in human resources or personnel departments of private and public sector organizations in Calgary. The sample included organizations from seven different sectors of the economy, each employing between 1,000 and 18,000 employees. The total number of people employed by the 30 organizations was 99,440. The number and percentage of organizations involved in each sector of the economy are shown in Table 1.

### Procedure

All private and public sector organizations in Calgary employing over 1,000 employees were contacted by telephone. Contact by telephone represented a common method of initial contact in similar studies (e.g., Abdelnour & Hall, 1980; Morgan et al., 1979; Seybolt, 1979). According to the Calgary Economic Development Authority (1993), there were 34 organizations that had over 1,000 employees. An effort was made to speak to the highest ranking member of the human resources/personnel department or equivalent. This procedure increased the chances that we would obtain the most accurate information. Each representative was asked the following two questions over the telephone: (a) Does your organization offer any employee career development services? (b) Do you provide stress management, career planning workshops, employee assistance, and so on? The second question was used to ensure that there were no definition problems that may have led to the inappropriate exclusion of an organization.

If the answer was yes to either Question 1 or Question 2, the representative was asked to participate in a 1-hour interview at a time and place that was convenient to him or her. All 34 organizations gave a positive response to either Question 1 or Question 2.

One of the organizations that was contacted in the above manner did not possess over 1,000 employees and was subsequently removed from the list. Three organizations refused to be interviewed because of other commitments, and the remaining 30 of the eligible 33 or-

ganizations consented to participate in an interview. The result was a response rate of 91%.

*Career Development Questionnaire.* No standardized instruments were suited to this project; therefore, we designed the Career Development Questionnaire. (Interested readers may obtain a copy of this questionnaire by contacting the authors at the University of Calgary, Department of Educational Psychology, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2N 1N4.) Other descriptive studies (Abdelnour & Hall, 1980; Cairo, 1983; Griffith, 1980, 1981; Gutteridge & Otte, 1983; Levine, 1985; Walker & Gutteridge, 1979) provided the basis for the development of potential items. Redundant items were eliminated, and the questionnaire was then tested within actual interviews. The interview format provided frequent opportunities to ensure that participants understood the nature of the questions. Responses of those interviewed indicated that they had no trouble understanding the questions.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part I contained definition of career development services: How do organizations conceptualize career development for employees? Part II discussed the intended outcomes of career development services: What do organizations intend to achieve through the use of career development services? Part III examined the scope and nature of career development services provided: What types of career development services are offered and how successful do participants find them to be?

*Data collection.* Following the format outlined in the Career Development Questionnaire, each interview took between 1 and 2 hours to complete. Structured interviews were chosen over other methods (e.g., surveys) to increase response rates. Although the questionnaire is structured, the interview permitted the clarification of terms and expansion on responses as needed. Answers were reflected back to the participants continuously throughout the interview to ensure the accuracy of the coded data. In addition, 20% of all respondents ( $n = 6$ ) were randomly selected after all interviews were completed for a validity check. The validity check consisted of an additional telephone call and a letter requesting participants to examine the results of their interview and to notify the researchers of any coding errors. Copies of the interview information were faxed to these respondents for proofreading. No data recording errors were found by any of the six validators. On the basis of this level of accuracy with the six validators, or 20% of the sample, further validation was deemed unnecessary. Any errors found within this procedure would have resulted in a comprehensive validation by the rest of the sample.

*Data analysis.* There are three sets of descriptive variables in this study. The first set, career planning, has 17 variables (including *other*); the second set, career management, has 22 variables (including *other*); and the third set, life planning, has 17 variables (including *other*). These three sets of variables provided the basis for a descriptive analysis. Consequently, descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were used to describe the scope of career development services available. The specific career planning, career management, and life planning services that were investigated are presented in the Appendix.

We used a constant comparison method (Stainback & Stainback, 1988) to analyze the data from the open-ended questions. The responses were coded into categories, and these categories formed the basis for the development of themes. Finally, we compared the results of a correlational matrix of career planning, career management, and life planning (both number of years offered and effectiveness ratings) with the percentage of the total workforce that directly received career planning and life planning services; the overall effectiveness ratings

TABLE 1

### Number and Percentage of Organizations Involved in Each Sector

Sector	<i>n</i>	% <sup>a</sup>
Oil and gas	10	33.3
Education	5	16.7
Sales	4	13.3
Service	4	13.3
Government	3	10.0
Health	3	10.0
Transportation	1	3.3
Total	30	99.9

<sup>a</sup>Because of rounding, percentages do not add up to 100.

of all services: the number of career development practitioners in each company; the training levels of the career development practitioners; and the proportion of career development practitioners that were employees versus outside consultants.

**RESULTS**

The results obtained from each part of the Career Development Questionnaire are presented separately.

**Part I: Definition of Career Development Services (How Do Organizations Conceptualize Career Development for Employees?)**

Participants described career development as a process to achieve specific goals, including providing career information to employees ( $n = 15$  or 44%), helping employees to identify advancement opportunities ( $n = 5$  or 15%), promoting job satisfaction ( $n = 4$  or 12%), and improving employee productivity ( $n = 4$  or 12%).

**Part II: Intended Outcomes of Career Development Services (What Do Organizations Intend to Achieve Through the Use of Career Development Services?)**

Participants suggested that the organizational and employee goals for career development services were very similar. The respondents indicated that the most common goals were to provide career information ( $n = 6$  or 17%), promote job satisfaction ( $n = 5$  or 14%), enhance employee productivity ( $n = 5$  or 14%), and diversify employee skills ( $n = 5$  or 14%). This finding reflected the possibility that both the organization and the employee benefit, in different ways, from the same service. This finding is consistent with the theoretical positions advocated by both Schein (1978) and Hall (1986).

**Part III: Scope and Nature of Career Development Services Provided (What types of career development services are offered and how successful do participants find them to be?)**

The less formal career planning services (e.g., informal counseling by personnel staff, career counseling by supervisors, and informal mentorship) have been around the longest and were rated as the least effective. Meanwhile, formal and newer career planning services such as career planning workshops, assessment centers, career counseling by specialized staff counselors, career support groups, and formal mentorship programs received higher effectiveness ratings. In fact, the existence of two formal career planning services (teaching advancement strategies and formal mentorship programs) were correlated ( $r_s = .50$  and  $.66$ , respectively) with higher overall career planning effectiveness ratings. Similarly, higher training levels of career development staff were correlated with the existence of more formal services ( $r = .44$ ). Other formal career planning services (e.g., career planning workshops and individual self-analysis and planning workbooks) were correlated ( $r_s = .59$  and  $.51$ ) with the number of outside career development consultants that were employed by the organizations sampled. Therefore, organizations that employed more outside consultants were more likely to offer formal career planning services. These results seem to suggest that formal programs, although resulting in higher ratings, are also associated with career development staff with higher levels of training, the use of outside consultants, or both.

Career management services were frequently used by the 30 largest organizations in Calgary. In particular, the larger organizations were more likely to possess formal career management services. These included manpower forecasting ( $n = 21$  or 70%), recruitment

procedures ( $n = 29$  or 97%), personnel information systems ( $n = 28$  or 93%), skill inventories ( $n = 14$  or 47%), communication on training and development options ( $n = 26$  or 87%), communication on job requirements ( $n = 28$  or 93%), and communication on career paths ( $n = 13$  or 43%). The sheer complexity of having to manage so many employees may have necessitated the use of formal career management services.

Although providing career path information to help employees sort out their options within the company was the most common intention of career development services ( $n = 15$  or 44%), it was the least available career management service ( $n = 13$  or 43%). This finding may suggest that the goals for career development services are not always aligned with the availability of services.

The perceived effectiveness of career development services was rated by the respondents on a scale from 1 (*not effective*) to 4 (*very effective*). The career management services that focused on training were rated as the most effective career management services (see Table 2).

The least effective career management services were the services that help prepare organizations for the future (see Table 3). Among this organizational sample, the newer career management services show more sophistication and more breadth. For example, flexible working arrangements and job rotations move beyond the basic aspects of meeting job requirements and provide employees with increased flexibility and variety. Both career planning and career management services were deemed to be more effective when supervisors received training in career counseling.

Most organizations ( $n = 28$  or 93%) in Calgary had employee assistance programs. Employee assistance programs are delivered by outside professional counseling firms. These counseling firms maintain ongoing contracts with organizations, and their mission is to provide generic counseling services to the people employed within the organization. The most frequently available life planning services were the ones most commonly associated with employee assistance programs. These included family and marital counseling, alcohol and drug counseling, and stress management. There was no significant relationship between the effectiveness of life planning services offered within employee assistance programs and the length of time each service had been offered. However, the effectiveness of life planning services offered by in-house staff was correlated with the length of time the service was offered ( $r = .60$ ). Thus, one may conclude that when trained professionals design and deliver life planning services, they are effective almost immediately. However, when in-house staff design and deliver life planning services, it takes time for the services to become effective. Overall, effectiveness ratings do not

**TABLE 2**

**Career Management Services Focusing on Training**

Career Management Service	Effectiveness Rating <i>M</i>
Educational assistance	3.3
External training	3.1
Designed training	3.0
New employee orientation programs	3.0

*Note.* 1 = not effective; 2 = partially effective; 3 = moderately effective; and 4 = very effective.

**TABLE 3**  
**Least Effective Career Management Services**

Career Management Service	Effectiveness Rating <i>M</i>
Job redesign	2.6
Management replacement planning	2.6
Manpower forecasting	2.6
Job rotation	2.6
Communication of career paths	2.6
Communication of training and development options	2.5

Note. 1 = not effective; 2 = partially effective; 3 = moderately effective; and 4 = very effective.

seem to be related to the length of time a service had been offered. Instead, some services (usually the newer ones) were perceived to be more effective than others (usually the older ones). This was especially true for the career planning and career management services.

Sixty percent of the participants stated that less than 25% of their workforce directly received career planning services, and over 73% estimated that less than 25% of their workforce directly received life planning services. These findings are consistent with Griffith's (1980, 1981) findings and seem to show that career development services have not expanded as expected, at least not in Calgary. On a positive note, although 75% of the participants believed that budget cuts were affecting the career planning of their employees and the career management of their company, very few services were discontinued.

Most participants cited fairly informal methods of evaluation. The foci of their evaluations were often quite distant from the intentions they held for their career development services. Overall, participants indicated a need for career development services to become more formal, more specific, and more valued.

Another important finding was that more than 93% of the staff involved in career development did it on a part-time basis. Therefore, one may suggest that the high incidence of part-time career development staff reflects the informal and still-fragmented nature of organizational career development in Calgary in 1994. This finding is consistent with what Walker and Gutteridge found in 1979.

### IMPLICATIONS

Although career development was described by participants as a process to achieve specific goals, there seems to be a shortfall when it comes to applying formal and specific services to meet these goals. For example, the key goals for career development services were to promote job satisfaction, enhance employee productivity, reduce employee turnover, and increase employee motivation. However, it is unclear what specific services were used to meet these goals. This gap seems to result in methods of evaluation that are informal and often distant from the intentions that organizations hold for career development services. Therefore, the current acceptance of career development services may be based on their good intentions rather than on their demonstrated impact on organizations and employees. This may explain why authors such as Hall (1986) have found that career development services are often cut during recessionary times. Similarly, it may explain why over 93% of Calgary's career development service providers are involved in career development on a part-time

basis. The discrepancy between goals and service availability seems to suggest that Schein's (1978) theory of organizational career development has not been adequately applied to organizations within Calgary. In fact, current organizational career development practices seem to resemble the structural or static theories of career development whereas contributions from process theories seem to be absent. Unfortunately, without a developmental emphasis, organizational career development will very likely not reach its potential.

According to the results of this study, the least effective career management services were job redesign, management replacement planning, manpower forecasting, communication of career paths, job rotation programs, and communication on training and development options. Unfortunately, these are the career management services that help organizations to prepare for the future. With participants viewing these services as the least effective career management services, one is left wondering how effective organizations are in preparing for the future.

Although several authors (Abdelnour & Hall, 1980; Dawson, 1983; Rhodes, Schuster, & Doering, 1981; Russell, 1991) have emphasized the need for organizations to provide career development services for plateaued workers (employees with limited potential for advancement), this study did not identify any specific programs designed to meet this need. Unfortunately, organizational inefficiencies may become more pronounced without programs to address the need for continued efficiency and variety that these stagnant conditions often produce.

Another implication identified by this research has to do with the fact that both career planning and career management services were perceived to be more effective when supervisors received training in career counseling, yet only 43% ( $n = 13$ ) of the organizations provided this training.

Career planning services received the lowest overall effectiveness rating (as compared with career management and life planning services). Although organizations seem to have acknowledged that career planning services help both the organization and the employee, they seem to be slower in providing the necessary resources (e.g., outside consultants or service providers with higher levels of training) to make them more effective. In contrast, life planning services have been designed and delivered predominantly by outside consultants (e.g., employee assistance programs). In such cases, the results have proved to be more effective and more immediate.

In addition, formal career planning services such as career planning workshops, assessment centers, career counseling by specialized staff counselors, career support groups, and formal mentorship programs received the highest effectiveness ratings in this study. However, these career planning services were the least available. The likelihood of organizations offering these services was correlated with the number of outside consultants and career development service providers with higher levels of training (i.e., master's degrees).

Overall, career management services were frequently used by the largest organizations in Calgary. This finding, along with the lower effectiveness ratings for career planning services, seems to indicate that organizational needs are still dominating career development services within organizations. If Herr and Cramer's (1992) view that employees are human capital that require preventative maintenance is to be adopted, organizations will need to focus on the career needs of their employees by placing greater emphasis on career planning activities.

To make career development more formal, more specific, and more valued, organizations need to tie specific services to specific goals. This seems to require help from better trained career devel-

opment service providers. Evaluations then need to become specific and relevant to the goals and methods used to obtain the goals.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELING PRACTICE

This research demonstrates that the field of organizational career development is growing slowly. Professional counselors are the most appropriate mental health professionals to help expedite growth in this field because of their emphasis on working with healthy personalities and because of their emphasis on psychoeducational interventions. The previous section of this article ("Implications") identified the need for counselors to ensure that services are aligned with specific needs and that evaluation efforts clearly document service effectiveness. Only by documenting the effectiveness of such services will organizations begin to see them as essential, rather than as goodwill gestures. Although this research has examined the availability of a number of potential services (see Appendix) and outlined some common problems, Herr and Cramer (1992) have identified several other ways in which counselors can become involved in organizations. Other potential services may include developing programs for plateaued workers; providing training in supervisory, management, and communication skills; training in performance appraisals; leadership training; employee selection; assisting in organizational development; program evaluation; helping employees and managers identify hazards in work; training people to identify their work styles; working to educate employees and managers on the effects of repetitive work, the effects of transfers to new locations, the special stresses and strains on the two-career couple, and the special stresses in people with high interpersonal demands in their jobs; dealing effectively with the process of job evaluation; and dealing with the problems of job loss. In addition, Herr and Cramer suggested that counselors may be involved in team building; consultation with managers; psychological crisis consultations; training in negotiating skills; needs assessments; training trainers; evaluating outside programs; designing, presenting, and evaluating training programs; and interviewer training.

As can be seen from the aforementioned items and this research study, counseling professionals have a number of skills to offer. Documenting and evaluating their efforts will eventually help counselors to solidify their roles within organizational settings.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Leibowitz and Lea (1986) and Brown and Brooks (1991) suggested that more research in the area of career development may result in more organizational support. Specifically, researchers and practitioners need to make a more concerted effort to demonstrate the results of their services. Consequently, future research efforts need to be directed toward evaluating existing services in more rigorous ways to determine their actual effectiveness. This will lead to the development of better techniques for assisting employees and organizations.

Relative to the number of career development services available, there is very little research published on their effectiveness (Cairo, 1983). Without these studies, practitioners may have trouble justifying the existence of their services. Specifically, researchers can take an active role in the professionalization of career development by posing research questions that address the following: Is the service effective? Does it do what it is set up to do? Does it help the organization meet its needs? Does it help employees meet their needs? Does it do so at a manageable cost? Is it worthwhile? Are all the services equally effective? Are some redundant or ineffective? Does

the overall career development program contain built-in steps for evaluation, modification, and change? In addition, conducting studies that compare different services with no services, including random control and treatment groups, may also shed light on the nature of effective and less effective services.

Although support for organizational career development by means of evaluation studies is limited, other reasons explaining why career development services have not expanded as expected need to be explored. This research needs to focus on the perceptions employees hold vis-à-vis career development services. For example, employees need to be asked questions such as the following: Is there a problem with use (i.e., Is access to services limited? To what extent do employees use the services? Do employees feel a need for them?)? Are employees satisfied with the current services (i.e., Are some services better than others? If so, which ones?)? To what extent do employees know about the available services (i.e., How effective do employees perceive organizational communications on these services to be?)? Overall, future research efforts need to focus on evaluation and the perceptions employees hold regarding career development services.

### CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the scope and nature of career development services within Calgary's largest organizations. Specifically, the study sought information on how organizations conceptualize career development for employees, what organizations intended to achieve through the use of career development services, what services were available, and how effective participants found the services to be.

A number of interesting findings emerged. Overall, career management services were the most widely available, followed by life planning and then career planning services. Career planning services were deemed to be the least effective. Consequently, more career development service providers with higher levels of training and/or outside consultants are required to design and deliver effective career planning services.

Across all services, there is an immense need for more rigorous evaluation. It is unclear how current services are combined to achieve specific outcomes. Without the necessary documentation, career development services will only be provided on the basis of their good intentions and not on their demonstrated impact on organizations and employees.

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## APPENDIX

### Career Planning, Career Management, and Life Planning Services Investigated

#### Career Planning

- Informal counseling by personnel staff
- Career counseling by supervisors
- Job performance and development planning
- Career exploration programs
- Psychological testing and assessment
- Career support groups
- Testing and feedback regarding aptitudes, interests, etc.
- Referrals to external counselors and resources
- Training of supervisors in career counseling
- Career counseling by specialized staff counselors
- Individual self-analysis and planning workbooks
- Assessment centers for career development purposes
- Career planning workshops
- Informal mentorship programs
- Formal mentorship programs
- Teaching of advancement strategies

#### Career Management

- Employee career development policies

- Performance appraisal: Planning and review
- Promotion and transfer procedures
- Educational assistance programs
- External training and development programs
- Designed training programs
- Management succession and replacement planning
- Communication of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action plans and policies
- Recruitment procedures
- Personnel information system
- Job description and job evaluation
- Manpower forecasting
- Skill inventories
- Job rotational programs
- Flexible working arrangements (work at home, 4-day work week, etc.)
- Communication on training and development options
- Communication on job requirements
- Communication on career paths or ladders
- Job posting and communication on job vacancies
- New employee orientation programs
- Job redesign
- Life Planning
  - Personal financial planning
  - Family/marital counseling
  - Alcohol/drug counseling
  - Job separation counseling
  - Workshops and communications on retirement preparation
  - Interpersonal skills training
  - Time management
  - Stress management
  - Weight control
  - Nutrition
  - Fitness
  - First aid
  - Preventative health care
  - Safety
  - Smoking cessation
  - Formal employee assistance programs

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