

Ongoing Career Management in the Millennium

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ONGOING CAREER MANAGEMENT IN THE MILLENNIUM

The world of work continues to change around us. Industries and workplaces are restructuring, and all of us are continually faced with having to upgrade our professional and technical skills. We also are having to consider a wider range of work contexts beyond traditional employment and entrepreneurship. Industrial restructuring has increased the frequency of out-sourced or contract work. In addition, the new telecommunications and information technologies are supporting a wider range of teleworkers (working at a distance electronically) and e-business options.

The concept of ongoing career management

In order to cope with these rapid changes, all of us are having to develop skills in managing our own career path. These skills include:

- Keeping skills current (lifelong learning)
- Developing and maintaining a network
- Moving successfully between positions and jobs
- Planning ahead for changes
- Finding new ways to use skills

The growing awareness that we need to manage our own careers is linked to a significant paradigm shift that is taking place. Traditionally, persons in transition have been encouraged to focus on “Here’s what I have to offer—who wants to hire me?” This is an other-directed focus that places the individual in a position of adapting as best as possible to what is being offered. The new paradigm is one of “Here’s what I want to be doing—what are my options?” This orientation is a much more empowered, self-managed approach.

The employment readiness scale

As part of an initiative to measure employment readiness, the authors have developed an Employment Readiness Scale (ERS) that measures (among other dimensions) the skills related to ongoing career management. Field testing of the scale has shown that ongoing career management is significantly related to self-sufficiency in career decision-making, skills enhancement, and employment maintenance.

The ERS itself is structured around three factors: employability, challenges, and facilitators. The employability dimensions

include career decision-making, skills enhancements, job search skills, and employment maintenance, as well as ongoing career management. Simply becoming self-sufficient on these employability dimensions, however, is not enough to ensure successful employment. Many persons face challenges in their personal life or environment, such as arranging childcare, or being responsible for aging parents. Some face more severe challenges such as dealing with a substance-abuse problem or an abusive spouse. Any of a number of challenges can interfere with a people's ability to find and keep a job, or launch their own business. The third factor of the ERS, the facilitators, is intended to measure the skills and supports that people have to help deal with the challenges they face. Four types of facilitators are included: self-efficacy (a component of self-esteem); outcome expectancy, or whether one expects to succeed; social supports; and work history. In combination, the three components of the ERS provide a dynamic model for career management, in addition to specific career decisions.

Using the ERS for ongoing career management

Individuals, service providers, and government agencies are all concerned about how to make career transitions as efficient as possible. In order to do so, each group needs different kinds of information. The ERS is designed to provide the following types of information to support decision making for individuals, program development for service providers, and program planning and accountability for government agencies:

Action planning for the client

- Self-sufficiency status on employability dimensions
- Status on facilitators and areas at risk
- Status on challenges, with suggestions
- Suggested next steps, with a timeline (based on client input)

Reporting for service providers

- Description of client base by:
 - Self-sufficiency distribution on employability dimensions
 - Percent low/medium/high on facilitators
 - Percent low/medium/high on challenges
 - Most common challenges to be managed
- Summary of client-rated changes due to interventions
- Summary of staff-rated changes before and after interventions, compared with client ratings
- Predicted versus actual employment outcomes

Reporting for government agencies

- Roll-up* of agency client-base reports for allocating program dollars
- Roll-up* of change ratings to monitor effectiveness of intervention
- Setting and monitoring of likely outcomes
- Identifying areas where staff professional development may be needed

* Refers to the combination of information from various sources.

CONCLUSION

The ERS offers valuable insights into the importance of career management as an increasingly critical skill set in the current work environment. Interested readers are invited to contact the authors to explore ways the ERS may be utilized in their own context.