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What is the Expected Engagement and Impact of Human Resource Development (HRDP) Participants During their Tenure with the Company?

Abstract

[Excerpt] Human Resource Development Programs (HRDP) consist of rotations designed to develop human resources talent. These programs highly emphasize development, yet participants' engagement and impact should not be overlooked. Getting the right balance of engagement and development is essential for both the participant and the business. Although there is extensive research and publication surrounding training and development, HRDP-specific work is less common. Given this, broader research on rotational programs and career development may be adopted for HRDP considerations.

Keywords

Human Resources, HR, HR development program, talent, engagement, HRDP, rotational program, train, expose, inculcate, rotation, high performance expectations, leadership development, Millennials, mentors, coaching, bottom line, corporate social responsibility, CSR, cross-functional moves, survey, 360 feedback, assessments, ROI, return on investment, career maps, career ladders, talent management, employee engagement

Comments

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Question

What is the expected engagement and impact of Human Resource Development Program (HRDP) participants during their tenure with the company?

Introduction

Human Resource Development Programs (HRDP) consist of rotations designed to develop human resources talent. These programs highly emphasize development, yet participants' engagement and impact should not be overlooked. Getting the right balance of engagement and development is essential for both the participant and the business. Although there is extensive research and publication surrounding training and development, HRDP-specific work is less common. Given this, broader research on rotational programs and career development may be adopted for HRDP considerations.

Program Structure

For entry-level and emerging talent, the purpose of a rotational program is to train, expose and inculcate certain values or knowledge.¹ The program's structure is a key part in meeting the purpose, and common structural themes have emerged amongst companies.

- **Program Duration:** 74% of rotational programs are 1 to 2 years, with 67.6% consisting of rotation durations lasting 3 to 6 months.¹
- **Rotating Locations:** 50.5% of companies have rotations across different office locations.¹
- **International Rotation:** Only 13% of companies offering rotational programs provide rotation opportunities in alternative locations outside the US.¹

Appropriate Expectations

Understanding participants' desires and expectations and aligning these with organizational expectations is key for companies to adequately structure the HRDP.

Companies' Expectations of Participants: **Personal commitment to growth;** leadership development is not a one-way street where the employer initiates all of the development. Millennials sometimes expect mentors to tell them what to do, but the experience will be more valuable for both sides if millennials have specific goals in mind. At an individual level, expectations for each participant varies by company. For example, in one study a company had to ask participants to exit the HRDP due to being unable to cope with **high performance expectations**. Conversely, another company felt performance ratings may be unrealistic and it may be okay for the participant to **just "meet expectations"** at times, particularly when in a stretch assignment.²

Participants' Expectations: Overall participants expect a program where their **skills will grow** and they will develop an **understanding of that particular line of work**.³ Additionally, it's important to have very good descriptions of exactly what constitutes poor, fair, good and excellent levels of performance against a particular competency. This is so employees have a firm understanding of exactly what performance at a particular level "looks like."⁴

Participants' Desires: Robust stretch experiences, mentoring and coaching, and alignment with the bottom line are some of the key trends in developing HR talent.³ These HR best practices can be adopted for the HRDP. Isolating findings of Millennials and Gen-Zs, these employee groups desire opportunities to work on **corporate social responsibility projects** and desire **cross-functional moves** within a company. When it comes to mentors and coaches these groups want immediate input that is delivered in a caring, direct, and informal manner. All levels of talent expect a clear correlation between their work and the bottom line.

Student Survey: HRDP Perspectives

We administered an informal survey to 26 Masters of Industrial and Labor Relations students at Cornell University that had partaken in summer internships that were direct pipelines to HRDPs; 19 companies and HRDP programs were represented. The results indicated:

- **Ideal Program Length:** 18/26 respondents (69%) preferred 2 years while 1/26 (4%) preferred 1 year and 7/26 (27%) preferred 3 years.
- **Ideal Rotation Length:** 20/26 respondents (76%) preferred 7 to 12 months while 3/26 (12%) preferred 6 months or less and 3/26 (12%) preferred 12 months or more.
- **Most Desired Rotations:** The top 5 rotations were in Business Partner (92% were interested), Compensation (69%), Training (69%), Talent Acquisition (58%), and Compliance (27%).
- **Areas of Opportunity:** Respondents believed their HRDP could be improved through increased peer mentorship (“a buddy”) with another more senior HRDP member, a non-HR business rotation, analytical-heavy rotations, and guidance around selecting the right rotation.
- **Engaging HRDP Alums:** Only half of the 19 HRDP programs formally engaged their alums in any way. Those who did utilized them in only two capacities: recruiting future HRDP members and mentoring current HRDP members.

Measuring Organizational Impact

- **Behavioral Change:** A 360 degree–feedback exercise can assess behavioral change, through administering at the beginning of a program and after 6 to 12 months. Participants can use this tool to demonstrate commitment to improving themselves and the organization.⁴
- **Retention:** Retention strengthens the business case for development programs. In 2016, retention rates for 5-years (70.9%) were elevated for employers that had rotational programs, compared to (59.8%) for employers with no rotational program.¹
- **Business Results:** With measuring ROI there should be awareness that the impact of learning application on final business results often interacts with factors at organizational and environmental levels, such as culture and market conditions.⁶

Additional Considerations

Some risks associated with HRDPs can be mitigated through program structure. One HR leader suggested, “HR rotational programs risk causing frustration if there is nowhere for the HR leaders to go once they have “graduated.”³ Employees desire customized career maps through gaining a series of experiences that are fulfilling and meaningful to each individual. In essence, companies should shift away from career ladders and instead offer ongoing informal conversations on development.

An additional consideration is a ‘make’ versus ‘buy’ strategy. No organization can survive with either a solely ‘make’ or ‘buy’ strategy. Talent management is a delicate balance between the two. Most organizations do both talent acquisition and development in varying ratios, and within an organization this ratio will fluctuate with market conditions, organizational strategy, state of the economy, and other factors. “An optimal approach would be to use a combination of the two. The challenge is to figure out how much of each to use.”⁶

Conclusion

It is evident that many companies are investing in HRDPs, but research on these programs and their effectiveness is limited. With limited information on the ROI, the positive impact on retention rates is the best supporting evidence for continually investing in HRDPs. Moving forward, companies should regularly assess and reasonably align their expectations and program offerings with that of participant expectations and desires to optimize engagement.

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