Charting Workplace Transitioning Pathways of Generation -Y Human Resources Practitioners

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present results from a study exploring experiences of Generation-Y Human Resources practitioners as they transition from academia to the workplace. Research findings are from on-line surveys, and individual and focus group interviews with 221 college graduates, 170 supervisors of these workforce entrants, and 42 educators. Emergent from data analysis is a prevailing disconnect between new recruit expectations and organizational realities. Revealed is a need for a more streamlined transition to move new recruits into the workforce in the following areas: assigned workload, strategic accountabilities, establishing internal networks, office politics, mentoring, and conflict management.

Proposed is a template for fostering academic-business partnerships that capitalize on learning for and from the workplace to ensure premier experiences are delivered to steer new recruits into the HR profession. This enables new recruits to excel in their career aspirations; and gives business leaders the edge in creating work environments that appeal to the new wave of HR practitioners, hence improving ability to recruit and retain them in a shrinking labour market. With a high premium placed on transition management new recruits enter the workforce with a full complement of competencies to advance and perpetuate organizational prosperity. Ultimately, due diligence is exercised in preparing the next generation of knowledge workers under whose leadership global communities will thrive.

Introduction

Examining how new recruits adapt to change comes at a critical time when a new wave of HR practitioners, Generation Y (Gen Y), makes its debut on the business stage. Gen Y – those born between 1981 and 2000, bring a distinct set of values, expectations, and behaviours to the workplace. Characterized as entrepreneurial and independent; digitally savvy; rejecting micromanagement; and valuing empowerment, challenge, and excitement (Izzo, 2002), Gen Y has an unorthodox approach to career management that does not parallel traditional paths charted by Baby Boomers and Generation X.

Prevailing trends show more than half of Gen Y recruits resign from their first job within seven months (Saratoga Institute, 2000). Cited in the literature are low levels of trust and loyalty to corporate cultures, attributed to intense media scrutiny of corporations tainted with scandal (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001) and having witnessed several instances of organizational downsizing (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). Consequently, they have become sceptical; mistrustful, and apathetic toward traditional hierarchies and authority (Martin & Tulgan, 2002). With Gen Y declared "the most entrepreneurial generation in history", organizations are confronted with the added weight of convincing young workers that working for a corporation has greater appeal than self-employment (Martin, 2005).

Gen Y brings an impressive, portfolio of academic credentials and requisite skills in technology to the workplace along with lofty expectations for fast-track promotion, raises, perks, independence, flexible work arrangements, and a need for fun (Zemke, 2001). They expect continuous recognition and daily feedback (Hastings, 2008). They also call for managerial support as well as clear and comprehensive instructions, yet seek autonomy to chart the path and pace for achieving goals (Yeaton, 2008; Martin, 2005). Given their pressing sense of immediacy and impatience, Gen Y is unlikely to be enticed by promises of distant pay raises and promotions (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). As stated by senior management interviewed by Weber (2008), "You want to think about how to prepare the next generation to move into leadership and they're already thinking about buying the company." (p.52).

Dissonance between personal expectations and organizational realities coupled with low tolerance of work environments that fail to deliver expectations, frequently result in swift resignation responses (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002; Nyce & Schieber, 2002). Job jumping every two years in search of greater compensation or purposeful work is the norm due to a boundaryless view of career and an awareness of their sought-after technological expertise (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Gen Y's definition of long term commitment is one year (Martin, 2005), and only one in five anticipates tenure with the same company for six years or longer (Hastings, 2008). Security is still valued by younger workers, but is defined as career security whereby they build a solid portfolio of transferable skills permitting them to change jobs (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002; Hira, 2007). Gen Y attitudes, expectations, and behaviours bring a new set of opportunities and challenges to the HR profession that press for unconventional approaches to attract, motivate, and retain their expertise.

Complicating the situation is the grave reality of a shrinking labour force coupled with heightened demand for HR practitioners as organizations comprehend the value-added contribution to bottom line and to competitive edge afforded by premier management of their workforce. The generation of workers currently in the workforce and available to replace Baby Boomers are 20% fewer in numbers (Statistics Canada, 2007). Statistics Canada (2007) reported that

the labour force is precariously balanced with one employee leaving for every one employee entering, yet in ten years a sharp negative replacement ratio is expected with more retirees than workforce entrants. The Conference Board of Canada (2006), forecasts an accelerated rate of retirement beginning in 2012 when 30% of older, "front end" Baby Boomers which represent 6.6 million workers reach age 65. By 2030, a quarter of Canada's population will be 65 and ready to retire (assuming age 65 departure). By 2016, a shortage of one million workers is predicted (Barrett, 2005; McIntyre, 2007), yet more disturbing is the forecast of over ten million more jobs than people capable of filling them by 2010 (Thompson, 2003). Instinctively, Canada looks to the United States as a source of potential labour, yet it faces the same dilemma. Approximately 60 million U.S. Baby Boomers are expected to retire in the next 15 years (Drake Beam Morin, 2003; McClintock, 2003) and 19% of Baby Boomers in management positions are forecast to retire in the next five years (Carey, 2003). International recruitment offers little resolution as census data reports sixty-one countries are experiencing below average birth rates to meet workforce replacement needs (Kaye & Jordan-Evans, 2005).

Increasing demand for HR expertise, a dwindling labour force in which to compete for talent, and a new workforce profile raise the stakes for investigating how recruits experience transition and where change is needed in order to become employers of choice and to staff positions with star performers. Ultimately, transition management could become a key ingredient in building organizational prosperity and sealing competitive advantage.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to present results from a study exploring experiences of Gen-Y HR recruits as they transition from academia to the workplace; and to propose a pathway to streamline the transition. Results and change initiatives from this study can be used not only to enhance HR graduates' transition into their respective roles; but used on a macro level by HR practitioners to develop organization-wide policies and procedures to support transitioning of all new recruits.

HR is ideally positioned to advocate for and direct this initiative, given their front line accountability for developing, managing, and sustaining work environments that attract, motivate, and retain workforce talent to achieve high productivity levels. According to Batt (2002), organizations with high involvement HR championing progressive workplace initiatives report lower employee turnover.

Research Findings

This research is framed within a grounded theory approach which focuses on developing defensible theories that are informed by events, as well as the interactions of people and their communications (Halloway & Todres 2003). Strengths related to grounded theory include "strategies that guide the researcher step by step through an analytic process; the self-correcting nature of the data collection process; the methods' inherent bent toward theory and the simultaneous turning away from a contextual description; and the emphasis on comparative methods" (Chamaz 2000: 522).

Research findings from this study are cumulative results from on-line surveys, and individual and focus group interviews with 221 college graduates in their first year of employment, 170 supervisors of these workforce entrants, and 42 college educators. For research purposes, the spotlight is on recent college graduates from Human Resources programs in Ontario, Canada. The majority of HR programs in Ontario colleges have accredited courses toward a professional designation granted by the Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) – the governing body regulating course curriculum. Hence, the high degree of consistency in competency profiles of HR graduates creates a level playing field of knowledge when pursuing careers which, from a research perspective, decreases the probability that there are significant academic variances to rationalize why some graduates are more, or less, effective in transitioning into the workplace.

During data collection, participants shared experiences, insights, and observations of the academic-workplace transition; specifically, addressing challenges faced, changes experienced,

and significant learnings. Emerging from content analysis of data were the following thematic categories: assigned workload, strategic accountability, establishing internal networks, office politics, mentoring, and conflict management.

Assigned Workload

New HR recruits described first year of employment as a radical shift from academic familiarity to labour market urgency. Having come from academic stability – less likely rocked by external influences – the volatility of the work environment was disarming, causing 58% to doubt ability to ride winds of change.

In light of apprehensions, new recruits credited academic training for equipping them with skills to secure employment (73%); comprehending HR roles (71%); and developing general business acumen (54%). Supervisors awarded high satisfaction ratings to new recruits for critical thinking (81%), problem solving (78%), and analytical skills (73%); with lower ratings assigned to verbal communication skills (60%), written communication skills (54%), and taking initiative (37%).

A prevailing workplace stressor noted by new recruits was disproportionate amounts of clerical work requiring administrative competency that, in their opinion, were disconnected from the HR competency profile honed during their studies. New recruits estimated 75% of daily routines devoted to administrative tasks, with 77% perceiving their professional portfolio as undervalued. Especially frustrating was being privy to departmental commotion surrounding HR start-ups, yet asked to contribute administrative support instead of HR expertise.

New recruits and educators concurred that dissatisfaction stemmed from a shaky continuation of project-based initiatives in the workplace that new recruits were familiar with from application-based learning environments where projects replicated real-life scenarios. Having developed HR competencies, they sought work environments to test drive knowledge, skills, and abilities developed in academia.

Educators also argued that the disconnect was rooted in lack of awareness of competencies brought to the workforce, potential of college graduates, and characteristics of Gen Y. Although 53% of supervisors acknowledged the disconnect, they explained that no job is immune from administration and it orients new recruits to departmental operations. Although 51% of new recruits agreed, they remained disgruntled that administration occupied a larger than anticipated portion of workload. According to Kofman and Eckler (2005), the greatest anxiety plaguing Gen Y is lethargy resulting from accountabilities that fail to challenge intellect.

The remaining 25% of workload devoted to project-based initiatives posed their own set of challenges. Eighty-one percent expressed difficulty prioritizing work given the constant flux of change and were unnerved by the revolving door whereby assignments – originally stamped as "top priority" - were shelved and replaced with assignments deemed of greater importance. Frustration mounted when midway through research they were asked to embark in different directions – with no assurances they would return to finalize previous projects. Often spinning in attempts to re-focus their efforts, they questioned their value-added contributions not having seen projects through to fruition.

Strategic Accountability

Although there was clarity regarding HR functionality in the broader organizational context, new recruits questioned how their specific roles and responsibilities contributed to strategic mandate. Survey results revealed 18% were fully aware of job-organization linkage, and 56% required clarification. Of the 56%, the majority pointed to heavy administrative workloads and compartmentalization of projects as blocks to construing strategic relevance. In sharp contrast, 72% of supervisors affirmed that they communicated strategic relevance as part of orientation, and 65% communicated how projects fulfilled strategic mandate.

Under the umbrella of role ambiguity, new recruits noted they were hesitant volunteers. With a fragile grasp of role, new recruits were reluctant to risk embarrassment by offering input that may be skewed from organizational reality. Risks potentially jeopardizing stellar professional reputations being honed were not worth taking, especially at this sensitive time in their careers when management was vigilant as to what professional impact they would make.

New recruits were not under illusions of grandeur that they would contribute to revolutionary organizational change, but needed to grasp a thread of connectivity between entry level and organizational mandate. Noted in the survey, 76% declared that this information fed motivation and established credibility. Instead of undertaking assignments in a vacuum – with analysis and recommendations void of linkages to organizational values, vision, and direction – they could frame their work within the organizational context. Subsequently, their work would stand as legitimate strategic contributions from which their professional reputation would be honed. According to 68%, making clear and focused connections are fundamental in preparation for management positions.

Establishing Internal Networks

New recruits expressed elevated levels of social anxiety during their inaugural year. Finding their place on "the team" – with its dynamic and complex web of interactions – was a complicated strategic manoeuvre requiring laser-precision. There was no prescribed methodology for executing this mission, but art and science leveraging of observation and executive decision making as to the precise moment to ask questions and offer input.

Results indicated 48% preferred to be observers during initial involvement with teams; scrutinizing communication patterns, norms, power brokers, personalities, work habits to achieve success, and behaviours to gain team acceptance. Having come from academic settings, new recruits were cognizant of their Gen Y jargon used in conversations with college colleagues, with admission by 58% of being self-conscious about verbal presentation skills and 65% apprehensive about business writing skills. Sixty-seven percent were carefully examining speech patterns, vocabulary use, and written correspondence used by seasoned practitioners to discern business etiquette.

Of the 52% choosing participatory roles in initial involvement with teams, 29% were satisfied with their actions, and 48% assessed their actions as premature. In haste to carve out professional identity and overzealous need to impress management, their contributions often missed the mark hence, creating a less than favourable impression. In hindsight, they would have engaged in team shadowing and reflection on process before leaping forward with input.

Office Politics: Negative Side of Organizational Interactions

One of the most illusive and complex dynamics faced was office politics. Survey results revealed 87% struggled to respond, with 69% choosing flight responses to avoid politically-loaded scenarios. Of the 31% who became involved, they assumed involvement would solidify acceptance by the team. In hindsight, 71% regretted getting trapped in political webs for they became locked in grapevine cliques that detracted time and energy from work. Through trial and error they learned avoidance was a safer route.

According to supervisors, circumventing office politics was not an option. No organization is anesthetised from political clutches, and 89% concurred that proficiency in managing hurdles created by office politicking was a measure of professional success. Side-stepping office politics was perceived as indifference to the inner machine fuelling interpersonal dynamics, or incompetence in rising to the challenge of crafting responses that shut office politics down when on the brink of sabotaging work.

Educators explained that the study of organizational political behaviour was compulsory in college curriculum, but complexities of office politics coupled with power dynamics, personality differences, demographic mix, and organizational norms made formulating definitive courses of action in response to politics improbable. However, new recruits were not unfamiliar with politics as many experienced "academic politics" when collaborating with colleagues on projects. According to new recruits, as team interactions became hot beds of political activity, their typical response was to ignore disruptive

behaviours and sprint toward the task finish line vowing never to work with perpetrators of team discord. It was easier to evade disruptive behaviours, since flagging process issues often escalated into unbridled conflict which further derailed relations and resulted in substandard final products.

On average, new recruits grasped the political landscape of the workplace within six months of employment, with their greatest challenges being ability to differentiate truth from fiction in storylines communicated (57%); and ascertaining informal power hierarchies in operation (41%). Pressure to take sides in office debates were averted by 52%, with 39% taking a stance on issues and regretting their decision.

Mentoring

Mentoring was identified by 85% of new recruits as the cornerstone of successful workplace transitioning to fully embrace organizational priorities, structure, and culture. Results indicated 32% were satisfied with mentoring received; 38% required more concentrated support systems; and 21% received no mentoring. Similar results were received when asked about quality of feedback. New recruits were pleased with formal performance evaluations, with 64% not recommending any changes. However, low grades were assigned to quality of informal daily feedback, with 16% fully satisfied, 36% moderately satisfied, and 35% dissatisfied. Of the 35% dissatisfied, 37% received more criticism than praise, and 40% rarely received any feedback. Seventy-eight percent expected job feedback to pattern academic feedback.

Aggregate data shown to supervisors were met with shock as results were lower than expected. Supervisors cited a range of constraints prohibiting them from offering strong support systems. Given a business landscape of unprecedented and unpredictable change and an HR culture characterized by chronic hours, fatiguing workloads, multi-tasking, and shrinking deadlines, support systems often take a backseat. Supervisors spend exorbitant amounts of time at the boardroom table locked in strategic discussion and devote little, if any time, to new recruits. Junior staff

are typically delegated the task of supervising new recruits, but often are not trained in effective feedback. Hence, new recruits craving feedback to gauge rightness of their directions are left unsatisfied.

New recruits agreed without feedback, time and energy was wasted trying to figure out the basics or focusing efforts in the wrong direction. Proceeding through early career stages with trial and error approaches was identified as career suicide, especially when attempting to make a favourable impression. Feedback was earmarked as the fuel that galvanized effort toward excellence in task completion and in shaping their professionalism. According to Folger and Cropanzano (1998), there is a strong correlation between perception of management support and employee commitment.

Conflict Management

When asked about approaches to resolving interpersonal conflicts and disparities between personal and workplace expectations, 77% were resolute in their conviction not to address concerns with management. Expressed were reservations that raising such concerns would be perceived as having poor conflict management skills and subsequently, reflected in performance evaluations – possibly tarnishing their professional image and hindering promotion into positions demanding exemplary conflict management. Given the signature importance of being a team player able to work through conflict, new recruits did not want questions ignited about their conflict management skills.

To safeguard their professional reputation, new recruits chose to consciously bury issues and focus on assigned tasks (38%), seek advice from colleagues employed elsewhere (36%), or resolve issues under their own steam (23%). New recruits conceded that these approaches temporarily shield discontent, yet over time sustaining the façade was exhausting and gradually began to erode work relations and quality of work. If conflict did not subside, 41% were prepared to resign, with 29% casually scanning the job market for their next career move. Sixty-two percent viewed their first job as a trial run en route to

finding a company with whom to formally launch a long term career.

When asked to rate overall satisfaction with transitioning experiences on a Likert scale, the average response was 5.8 – "10" denoting "outstanding". Sixty-two percent stated their personal lives were submerged by uphill battles to understand their new role, carve out professional identity, and deliver value-added contributions. Although overstretched, with 29% showing symptoms of burnout, new recruits agreed that these were growing pains as they settle into their chosen profession.

Analysis of Results

Inevitably, a more streamlined transition is needed to move new recruits from academia to the workplace. Although new recruits credited academia with providing solid knowledge to launch their careers, work is still required for workplace readiness. Preparation must progress beyond aptitude and interest assessments to find connectivity between person, job, and organization; and on how to be resourceful in one's job search. Although these practices are staples of career preparedness, transitional challenges raised in this study invite more assertive approaches.

If no action is taken there are risks that the divide may be sustained or expanded. The business community risks losing status as employers of choice and facing turnover when dissatisfied new recruits resign. Turnover has a crippling effect, especially on bottom line. Costs of turnover stemming from three primary sources – separation costs for departing employees; replacement costs associated with recruitment and selection; and training costs for new hires – are two to three times the monthly salary of departing employees (Mercer, 2002). Recruitment and selection costs alone for an entry level position are $6000 Cdn. (Leibowitz et al., 1991). Costs are likely higher as equations do not include indirect costs, such as decreased morale, lower productivity preceding resignation, and overtime payouts for employees juggling responsibilities of employees who have left.

Turnover perpetuates the cycle of recruiting, selecting, and training which is expensive and robs time and attention

from strategically important work that fulfils the organizational mandate. With the complexion of the workplace constantly changing as a result of a steady stream of new employees, sustaining organizational stability in performance and productivity is challenged; especially critical in consumer-driven landscapes where consistency and excellence in service and product delivery are demanded. Also jeopardized is succession planning that relies heavily on workplace constancy. With short lived tenure it becomes problematic to work with employees on mapping internal career progression and providing requisite professional development, especially for leadership in key functionalities requiring intense mentoring to ensure competence.

Implications for academia take the form of eroded reputation if programs fail to deliver graduates with a full complement of workforce skills. Turbulent workforce initiations may also get communicated through academic grapevines to the next wave of learners preparing for the workplace. If repairs to transitioning potholes are not executed, these messages may snowball and be communicated to potential college entrants, leaving blemishes on the institution's reputation as it tries to compete for star students. This translates into lower enrolment of new students and graduates returning for advanced credentials, reduced capacity to attract funding which leads to reduced budgets for program delivery, and program cuts. It may also impact the calibre of educators attracted to academic institutions which, if profiles of educators are not par excellence, the quality of instruction comes into question.

That which new HR recruits experience during these formative years is what they know and consequently model. Rocky transitions have implications for how new recruits will perform as they progress to senior HR roles, especially how they design orientation programs for new recruits not just in their own departments, but throughout the organization. Hence, a less than stellar transition may be perpetuated throughout organizational entry level positions and, given the impactful first impression it carries, may perpetuate organization-wide turnover.

Repairing the highway traveled from academia to the workplace requires 360-degree involvement from key stakeholders in the transitioning process – educators, community organizations, and new recruits while in their academic role as learners. Although partnerships to some degree exist, they need to be more firmly entrenched and have more prominence in the architecture of academia and business, with all stakeholders pledging joint accountability.

Blueprint for Transitioning

Proposed is a template for fostering academic-business partnerships that capitalizes on learning for and from the workplace. Although the blueprint originates from HR research, it is intended for use in all disciplines.

The objective is to promote phased introduction to the work world by weaving partnerships into academic and business landscapes with more pronounced visibility and earlier in learners' academic careers. Gradual transitioning from learners' sophomore years into employment enables incremental advancement of business knowledge; regular assessment of skills against expected competencies and performance expectations; and builds confidence in the competency profile offered to the labour market. With progressive transitioning, learners conceivably enter the workforce having ironed out questions, concerns, and anxieties which could mitigate the reality shock that immobilizes learners when starting careers.

Heightened contact between learners and supervisors in this partnership advances the business world's understanding of Gen Y. Specifically, business leaders learn about Gen Y needs and expectations; their perceptions of business and recommendations for change; and qualities of work environments and jobs that are enticing. Not only does this enhance how generations understand and communicate with each other, but also gives supervisors the edge in creating work environments that appeal to workforce entrants, hence improving ability to recruit and retain them.

Partnership empowering business to sustain excellence in creating climates conducive to Gen Y needs can be

a competitive advantage when competing for star performers in a shrinking labour pool. Synonymously, academia benefits from elevated image and visibility in the community when they stay current on business expectations and deliver market-ready graduates – earning the coveted distinction of preferred academic institution from which employers recruit graduates.

The proposed partnership is supported by 81% of supervisors, 76% of learners, and 72% of educators, agreeing the bulk of the transition should not rest on the months proceeding graduation as the learning curve is too steep. Survey results indicated 77% of supervisors preferred "business ready" graduates – trained and positioned for employment without prolonged orientation.

Collaborative Consultation: Setting Partnership in Motion

Quintessential to the academic-business model is collaborative consultation whereby parties exchange needs, expectations, resources, and assets giving clarity to that which is brought to the table and that which drives their involvement. It also provides a venue for business to enlighten academia about current business priorities and challenges; share workplace learning initiatives; and communicate performance standards and employability skills expected of graduates. Correspondingly, academia articulates how instructional design, delivery, and evaluation are tailored to meet business expectations and foster competency development.

To fuel ongoing collaboration, an academic-business advisory committee should be established meeting quarterly to review status of initiatives; explore new directions en route to perfecting the recipe for balancing academic and workplace learning; and tackle challenges that surface. In doing so, stakeholders have a finger on the pulse of the transitioning process so minor derailments are corrected before causing irreparable damage. To give voice to diverse perspectives and to prevent the committee from becoming insular and operating in a knowledge vacuum, 360-degree communication channels can be developed to canvass insights and recommendations from the larger community.

Business Application in Academic Curriculum

Integrating business culture into academia entails comprehensive review of curriculum design, delivery, and evaluation scouting for learning objectives to be enriched by business application. Duly noted, many academic institutions capitalize on business application through workplace practicum, and - provided placements promise application-based orientations - they serve as valuable outlets to pilot run skills and abilities before graduation. Proposed in this blueprint is a more expansive plan whereby business linkages are widely dispersed throughout the curriculum providing a wide swath of activities exposing learners to business diversities and complexities. Consequently, business applications ready learners for both the workplace and practicum demands.

Course assignments necessitating contact with the business community – such as, interviews and surveys to collect data – are befitting for cultivating business-oriented curriculum. Experienced is the richness of diverse research methodologies coupled with synthesizing scholarly works; and a training ground for mastering interview and survey skills for employment marketability.

To augment appeal of these assignments in the eyes of learners, copies of completed assignments can be given to business practitioners for assessment alongside academic grading. Feedback from business leaders should be similar to that which learners would receive if employed by the organization. If assignments take the form of class presentations, business leaders could be invited guests providing feedback. The advantages are two-fold: vicarious learning for the entire class from feedback on each presentation; and plenary debriefing where learners and business leaders dialogue about expectations and practices to perfect skills. Business leaders gain a better grasp of Gen Y disposition and competencies so they can deliberate on how to support preparation for the workforce.

Feedback from business leaders provides learners with a glimpse of how their work is judged in professional arenas. Since business leaders have hiring authority, it is likely learners will be sensitive and receptive to their comments. Learners should be encouraged to reflect on emergent feedback themes to acknowledge strengths – and continue refining development – and map improvements for underdeveloped skills. Preferably, confronting limitations and taking action to perfect skills will unfold while still in academia instead of in the workplace where costly consequences surface in performance evaluations; quality and quantity of projects assigned; and promotions.

Realistic Career Previews

Academia is fraught with continually exploring career alternatives and testing capabilities and interests to ascertain if one is steering in the right occupational direction. Pressure to lock in one's final career choice amidst boundaryless advice and an endless battery of interest, aptitude, and values assessments, can be harrowing.

Narrowing down the decision calls for introduction to the profession through realistic career previews. The aim is similar to realistic job previews – create an accurate profile of the profession so learners are fully cognizant of perks and pitfalls. This can be achieved through job shadowing, panel discussions with representation from diverse HR specialities, facilitation of classroom learning by practitioners, and invitations to networking events sponsored by professional associations. When learners get a taste of front-line opportunities and pressures; and glean first-hand advice from practitioners they weigh the data and make informed decisions about whether HR is their destiny. Previews may also diminish unrealistic career expectations often provoking organizational turnover within initial employment years.

As perceptions of the profession crystallize, learners are asked to target three goals with corresponding action plans for moving toward full HR competency. To sustain momentum, in-class discussions are encouraged about progress, challenges, and suggestions for shifting directions. Emergent is a developmental plan serving as a road-map for transition into business. An aggregate profile of goals could prove valuable to academic-business advisory committees enlightening them on learner priorities from which to generate new transitioning pathways.

Learner-Supervisor Consultation: Setting the Stage for Workplace Entry

Career entry is a time of reality testing when job expectations collide with realities of organizational life, giving rise to a stinging reality shock. Learner-supervisor consultation following general employee orientation should be an organizational staple, acclimatizing learners to workplace expectations. Learners comprehend their role on the supervisor's team and how their job links to organizational vision; full extent of accountabilities; and performance standards and expectations that will frame actions. Although overstretched supervisors may be tempted to delegate orientation to junior staff, the temptation should be avoided. If the task is delegated there are not the same assurances that the right organizational tone will be set nor questions answered with the same precision and polish.

Consultation is not intended as an isolated event with a means to an end, but a continuous process woven into learner-supervisor working relationships. Periodic meetings should be scheduled to check progress, raise issues, and contemplate future pursuits. If solid rapport has been built, then a safe haven exists for learners to test their professional wings in offering feedback, suggesting change, and asking questions – even those loaded with business sensitivity. As well, supervisors gain insights into business operations through the lens of new recruits to gauge degree of success in fostering work environments conducive to productivity and satisfaction, and where change is warranted.

Although time consuming, this practice should be extended to all employees. Regularly voicing concerns and working toward minimizing barriers deceases the probability of problems festering and eventually eroding satisfaction and performance. Early detection and response to the need for change are more manageable than attempting to navigate the change process once prob-

lems take flight leaving employees despondent. Making changes based on employee input launches a cyclical feedback process whereby supervisor develop and sustain connection with employees disclosing that which is, and isn't, contributing to workplace efficiency and effectiveness (Rekar Munro & Laiken, 2004).

Project-Based Orientation in Entry Level Jobs

Survey results disclosed learners' preferences for project-based concentration in entry level jobs. Opportunity presents itself for supervisors and learners to dissect existing job structures and collaborate on job redesign to leverage learner and organizational needs.

Job redesign enables supervisors to capitalize on learners' rich competency profiles by stretching walls of job accountability so learners can contribute the full gamut of their talents. Intrinsic satisfiers such as skill variety, challenge, and involvement not only enhance participation, commitment, and productivity, but research suggests employees who embark on challenging projects early in their careers fine-tune professional resources to achieve greater success later in their careers and are less likely to resign (Harter et al., 2002). From management's perspective, new skill sets may fill pockets of unattended departmental needs and resurrect projects that were shelved due to lack of resources. Resultantly, both parties reap benefits of job redesign – organizations acquire high performance from a skilled and committed workforce; and employees exercise unrestrained potential in gratifying careers, and are less likely to leave.

However, questions still loom as to what should be done with administrative duties opposed by new recruits. Job redesign calls for scrutiny of clerical tasks in an attempt to streamline operations for maximum effectiveness and efficiency; and to address what can be automated out. Of paramount concern should be whether full technological capabilities are harnessed in all HR functionalities, especially in manually-driven tasks. This is critical in a digitally advanced era imprinted with lightening advances, and given the arrival of Gen Y known for ultra-technological so-

phistication. Exercising due diligence through e-HR initiatives may alleviate many operational burdens, liberating HR practitioners to reposition themselves in project-based orientations carrying strategic relevance (Rekar Munro, 2007).

Mentorship

Transitional challenges confronted by learners warrant prudent matching of mentor and protégé so experiences span beyond exchanges of knowledge; acclaimed for holistic value. Instituting impactful mentorship programs starts with a competency profile as the basis for selecting mentors. Screening of candidates is imperative as star performers in their designated disciplines are not inevitably predestined to be mentors, since a markedly different skill set is required for the role.

Training programs for mentors should be compulsory for universal understanding of expectations and consistency in creating climates conducive to learning. A sample of the training agenda includes: timely and constructive feedback; proactive problem solving; consulting on progress; conflict management; offering developmental assignments and support; linking learners with internal and external networks and resources; support for goal setting and generating options for action strategies; and facilitating career development discussions.

Matching of mentor and protege should be executed with the same precision afforded to training. Both participate in pre-mentoring meetings to discuss expectations, interests, work habits, and preferences to ascertain if there is "working chemistry" as the bedrock upon which to build a working relationship. The final verdict is participant-driven so both are confident there is enough to bond them – integral when managing pressure points that may arise.

Given the global and technological landscape in which business operates, mentoring is no longer reserved for face-to-face mentor-protégé contact. The predominance and ease with which teleconferencing and videoconferencing are used to connect globally present opportunities for on-line mentoring. E-mentoring offers its own brand of value:

educating proteges about inter-connectedness of business operations to achieve global mandate; diversity on environmental, legal, social, economic, and political fronts; and how this intricate web of operations is managed. These experiences are beneficial for those with international career aspirations.

Career Tracking

Career tracking plants clear and realizable visions of potential lateral and horizontal career paths that motivate learners to excel in workplace undertakings in order to satisfy career ambitions; and improve organizational succession planning and reduce threats of turnover. If learners remain fixed on long term vision it is probable they will ride the wave of unfulfilling tasks – despite best efforts in job redesign – cognizant that their compass points in a direction that garners greater satisfaction.

Supervisors provide a goldmine of input to translate career goals into action by identifying prerequisite competencies required for success; mapping academic avenues to upgrade skills and enhance professional marketability; and recommending high visibility workplace and community assignments to enrich one's portfolio and build professional networks. To diffuse the probability of goal setting becoming an academic exercise and enhancing the probability that career strategies have management backing, career management should take its place in performance evaluations. Formal assessments ensure learners and supervisors keep career aspirations on the radar and periodically assess whether revisions are needed to fine-tune career direction.

Evaluation: Where Do We Go From Here?

The whirlwind of transitional activity begs periodic intermissions to evaluate the transformative path pursued. As the steering body for transition, academic-business advisory committees are best positioned to lead evaluation. Major decisions need to be made: identifying performance indicators for assessment and evaluation tools, format, and administration; and determining how far the net will be cast in canvassing feedback from the community.

Figure 1: Blueprint for Generation Y Transitioning from Academia to the Workplace
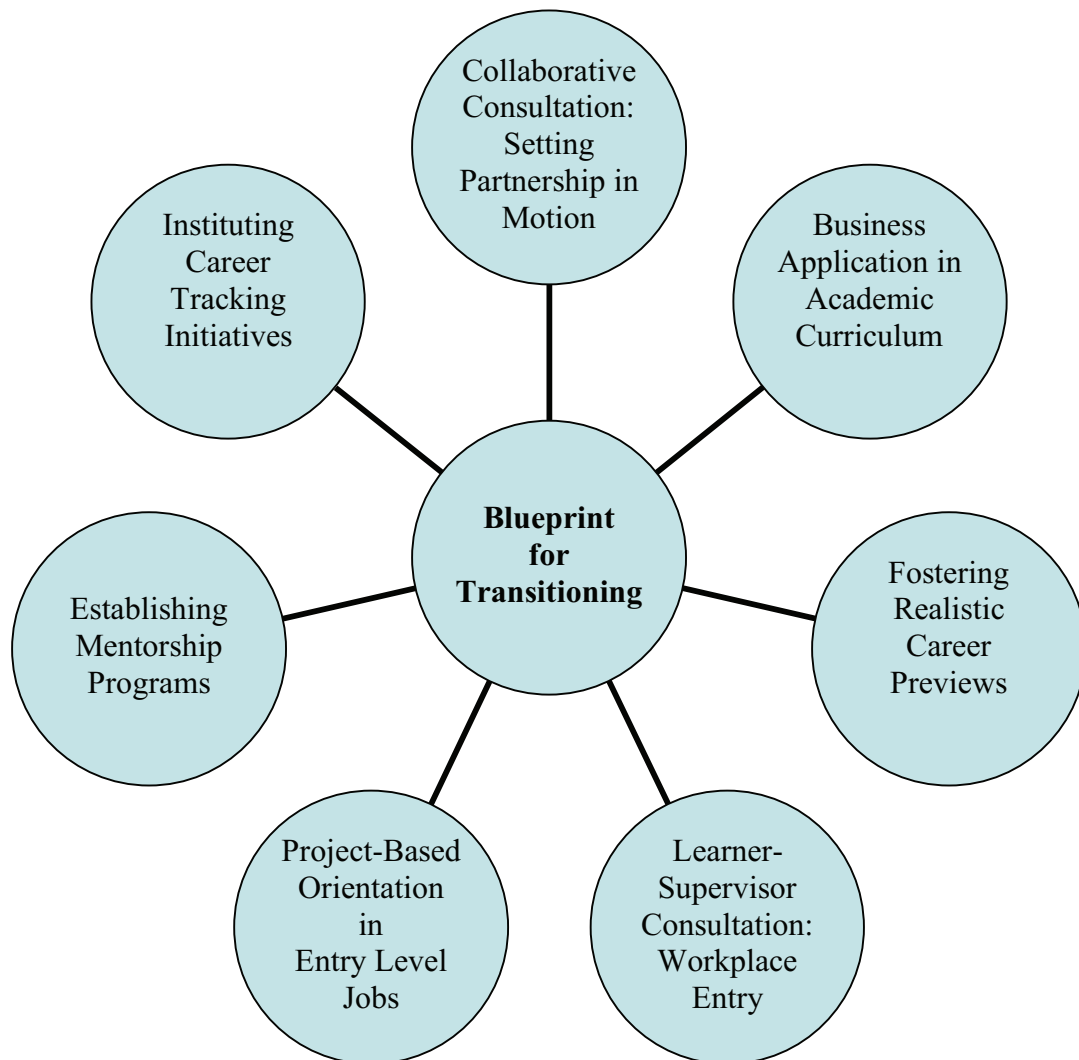
Evaluation affords an opportune time to critique strengths and limitations of each component of the transitional process – learning, development, service, teaching, and partnership. From the strengths, best practices are extrapolated for crafting policies and procedures that perpetuate consistency in how stakeholders define their roles and how they deliver first-class transitioning experiences. Limitations are equally potent developmental opportunities from which to catch areas of dysfunction before they derail the process, and to canvass recommendations for metamorphasizing weaknesses into strengths. Evaluation also ignites questions for generating new research initiatives to advance understanding and management of transitioning pathways.

Feedback creates a surge in momentum from which to raise the bar and progress to the next chapter. Commitment to annual evaluation enhances the likelihood that stakeholders have a finger on the pulse of the transitioning process and are prepared to deliver a pre-emptive strike by shifting in new directions in the face of change.

Conclusion

Partnerships are powerful catalysts for ensuring premier academic and business experiences are delivered to steer Gen-Y HR practitioners into the work world – one of the steepest learning curves in their career lifespan. By comprehending how new recruits experience transition and detecting discontinuities and fractures in current practice, stakeholders can mobilize resources to provide an unparallel, first-class training ground for professional practice. With a high premium placed on transition management new recruits enter the HR profession with a full complement of competencies to advance and perpetuate organizational success; ultimately making transition management the new pillar of organizational prosperity. Some may argue that academic-business partnerships involve distressing expenditures of resources. True – yet indis-

putably imperative as part of society's due diligence in preparing the next generation of knowledge workers under whose leadership global communities will thrive.

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