

## **CAREER DEVELOPMENT – THE INDIVIDUAL PROGRESS PLAN PROCESS**

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**Abstract:** The correlation between human resource planning and career development closely links those factors within an organization focused on meeting the targets established, and getting control of important market shares. The organizations develop career development strategies because establishing the development policy of an organization is impossible without developing the employees' careers. Both theory and practice in human resources management, as A. Manolescu observed in "Human Resources", reveal that the development of new career values and requirements has led to the tendency to leave an ever greater margin for individual choice, while employees tend to show some restraint with respect to their career being planned by others. We believe that employees naturally pass the options through the filter of their own personalities, choosing the "routes" for their own careers, and adopting those choices that are the most suitable. Arguably, career planning promotes freedom of choice in career options by employees, which is achieved by adapting / generating open systems, through which employees can choose different types of jobs / posts, or select the type of training programmes for career achievement.

**JEL classification:** M52, M53

**Keywords:** Individual progress plan, career goals / objectives, professional competences / attitudes.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In keeping with current practice management, career planning is done by means of a complex and systematic process of evaluation / review of employee opportunities and outcomes, a process by which individual employees identify the steps to take in order to achieve their career goals.

The Individual Progress Plan (IPP) is an action plan set by the manager in conjunction with the employee concerned, and aims to restore a dynamics of individual performance.

This means understanding, in the process, the causes of the lack of performance, or of poor performance, and taking action in order to remedy that situation. This tool should be used as a lever for progress, and not as a penalty or a disciplinary measure.

IPP is started on a mandatory basis when:

The individual interview / meeting shows that achievement is inferior to the commitment, and / or the assessment of the way the results have been achieved is poor or inadequate;

The preliminary diagnosis by the manager shows that the reasons for lack of performance, or for poor performance are individual.

If no individual responsibility is addressed and if this gives rise to no doubts, for either of the hierarchies, it follows that the Individual Progress Plan should not be started.

The manager can initiate an IPP in other cases, if he / she considers that an IPP can help an employee / a collaborator to progress more quickly (e.g. a collaborator who has an “accurate” assessment, yet a recurrent improvement point).

The complete process takes about nine months:

the first meeting for the devising of the IPP must be conducted shortly after the Balance, and no later than the end of March;

the IPP balance must be achieved before the next Balance; the mid-year interview / meeting is mandatory in the event of an IPP in progress.

The senior / superordinate manager and the human resource manager must actively follow the IPP. They support the first-level manager in ensuring the most appropriate means for the success of the Progress Plan. The Human Resources Manager must guarantee observance of the process, and advise the manager and the employee, if necessary.

The decisions on any further action taken following an IPP balance will be made in a Careers or HR Committee, which is part of the department or division in question.

## **2. IPP STAGES**

**a) Identifying lack of performance or poor performance** - Identifying poor performance and measuring the distance between expected performance and actual performance are acknowledged, and then validated by the senior management during the Individual

**b) Making a preliminary diagnosis** – To begin with, the manager and the employee review, during the interview, the reasons for poor performance:

if none of the individual responsibilities is controvertible, gives rise to any doubts → the Individual Progress Plan should not be started.

In that case:

- it is the first level management’s role to describe the causes that exclude IPP in the Balance support “*Possible remarks on the context*”;

- is the role of higher management to approve that analysis when signing the minutes of the interview;

- it is the role of the first-level management, accompanied by that of the superordinated management, to implement the **collective corrective actions**.

if that first diagnosis reveals an individual responsibility, the IPP action plan will be established (IPP support) before the end of March, following the process described above;

if the first diagnosis does not cause the (individual or collective) causes to clearly emerge, after an IPP meeting, the latter will be scheduled and conducted to determine the nature of the causes based on the IPP support.

In case there is doubt or dispute over the existence of individual causes, the decision to put into practice or not an IPP rests with the first-level, or the senior manager, if necessary.

**c) *Conducting the interview / meeting***

**Sharing and deepening the diagnosis** - The manager and the collaborator take part in an interview whose aim will be to share the analyses of the specific causes of lack of performance;

- if no individual responsibility is taken into consideration, the IPP consignment will be done, and the Individual Progress Plan will not be started;

- if the conclusions reveal an individual responsibility, the IPP action plan will be established.

**Designing the action plan and IPP formalization**

In case the IPP is started, the manager, along with the collaborator, develops an action plan that they formalize jointly (a standard IPP documentation):

- The description of the situation where performance is lacking, its causes and consequences;

- Identifying the improvement targets;

- Identifying the development activities (working methods, training, mentoring, and other matters considered as developments of the environment, or of the manner of organization...);

- Determining the progress indicators;

- Planning the progress points.

The IPP is signed by the employee, the first-level manager, the senior manager, and the Human Resource Officer.

**d) *Follow-up / management***

The IPP must include the points of progress established between the collaborator and the manager according to a schedule developed when the plan was worked out. This course does not replace the mid-year interview / meeting, which is compulsory for a IPP in progress.

In the specific case of a mobility occurring during an IPP, the action plan should be followed by both the new hierarchy and the new HRR, otherwise it must be adapted to the new hierarchy.

**e) *Devising the balance*** - During the last promotion meeting, the manager and the employee work out a balance of the results achieved through the IPP. That balance or estimate is signed by the senior manager for the subsequent actions. The balance must be prepared before having the next individual meeting:

The decision on the further actions is made in the Careers or HR Manager Committee of the department:

if the improvements are significant and sufficient –the Committee decides on the closure of the IPP:

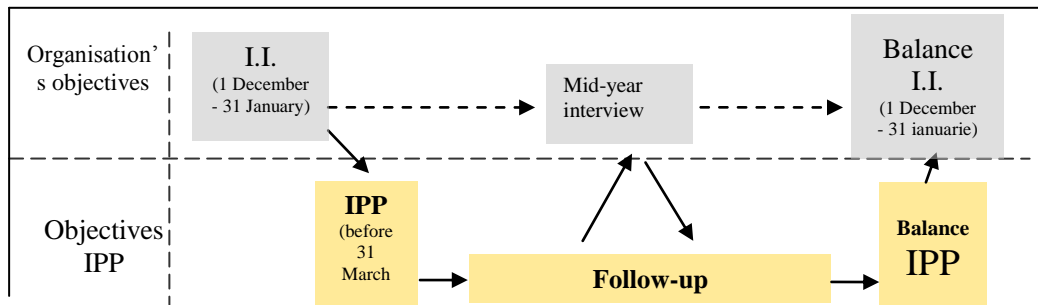
if the employee did not show significant and sufficient improvements – the Committee decides:

- to continue the IPP, with or without modifications;

- continuing the IPP, and refocusing the collaborator towards a post that is more suited to his / her profile;

- the pursuit of another IPP with no object, and that case is submitted to the Department's decision. The manager sees the collaborator, and informs him / her of the decisions taken.

*It should be noted* that IPP is a process started subsequent to an Individual Meeting. The follow-up of an IPP should be conducted in parallel with the normal pursuit of individual goals set in the individual meeting:



IPP is not a solution to all situations of non-performance. The first-level manager and the senior manager, with the support of the HRR, makes the alternative provisions that he will follow.

First of all, it is necessary to ensure an adequate understanding by the collaborator of their mission and objectives, as defined in the individual interview.

The individual interview / meeting is the moment that triggers the IPP, but the manager should not wait for the interview / meeting to give the collaborator a “feedback”. In working out the conclusions of the IPP balance, it is important to take into account the collaborator’s commitment and motivation to progress.

**Defining the objectives / Training:** - The clearly defined goals make full sense, and allow everyone better understanding of their contribution to the success of the organization.

**a) A limited number of objectives for all.**

The number of the objectives is limited: minimum three and maximum five goals for everybody:

- at least one collective goal for the whole team (e.g. the department / division / function / project level);
- at least one objective for which the collaborator is directly responsible.

**b) Specific objectives**, clearly expressed in KPI, in terms of results for everybody.

All the collaborators’ objectives, whatever their level of responsibility or function, should contribute to a KPI (professional attitudes and fundamental managerial competences / skills) of the first-level organization. The declining of the objectives aims at turning the KPIs into the results expected from each party, in order to ensure the company’s priorities.

In setting the objectives, it is necessary to raise the question of the relationship between the objectives and KPIs, and, if that connection is not obvious, the objective in question will no longer be retained. It is important to set goals to which the employee is able to contribute.

The objectives of all employees must be prioritized (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.).

The *objectives* should be *expressible through figures, having a commitment and targets* - set at two levels:

The commitment means taking full responsibility for achieving an objective, which is measurable and quantifiable. The commitment represents, for the team or the collaborator, a binding obligation to achieve the results.

The target is a combination of all the opportunities to exceed the commitment; it represents, for both the team and the collaborator, a more ambitious goal. Reaching it requires surpassing the limits, and must therefore constitute a major progress. Between three and five goals can be set for each employee, which should be consistent and prioritized, formulated in terms of results, and in direct connection with the Organization Contract.

If an employee depends on the man in charge of the project (the project manager), a senior / top manager, or a Transverse Team Pilot, the first-level manager must confer, and agree with those people holding responsibilities before the meeting with the employee / collaborator.

By way of a warning, in the “Objectives for the current year, only the objectives declined from the KPI will be stated; those objectives, meant to improve professional attitudes, or other points, should be specified in “Actions for improvement”.

In terms of future training, the Individual meeting / interview is a good time to jointly decide on the training courses to be planned for the next year, with the support of group training guidelines (e.g. language training, IT tools, etc.), and focusing on the competences and skills deployed in the post, and the skills to be developed for future guidance.

The individual meeting is an expression of the collaborator’s individual training plan. The training needs have to be worded accurately, especially by means of the training catalogue that presents the training offer, with the consent of a career or HR committee.

The following points will be considered:

To select priority targets that the employee knows how to place on a level of achievement on a regular basis;

Not to decline economic objectives at lower levels that could render a complex operation, and imperil their achievement;

To select possible targets with no risk of being revoked during the year;

To ensure, during the interview, a good understanding by the collaborator:

- of the role and objectives set in the individual meeting;
- of the link between each goal and the respective KPI.

To limit the number of indicators: an engagement indicator and a target for each objective;

To ensure coherence between the indicators retained hierarchically.

Some objectives can be shared with the collaborators / employees of a different entity. In that case, the managers of both entities will ensure consistency in terms of the complementarity of the two entities in order to achieve the result desired.

The discussions concerning the instruments employed to achieve their goals can be formalized in the “Comments by the collaborator”.

**Professional competences / skills and attitudes**

These manners of conduct will serve as benchmarks and advance stages for:

- Any employee in his / her every day work (Professional Attitudes);
- Any manager, whatever his / her level of responsibility (basic managerial competences / skills).

Built on a set of principles and practices that the organization wants to encourage, it will constitute a first common referential framework, shared by managers and individual collaborators during the individual interview / meeting, which remains a basic managerial act of the organization.

### **3. AS PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDES, THE FOLLOWING SHOULD BE ENUMERATED**

Priority for obtaining the results the organization wants  
Manifesting interest in the organisation's results;  
Ongoing concern about the economic impact of their actions;  
Supporting, and applying the economic arbitrations within the organisation;  
Choosing the solutions that are of interest for the organization.:  
Customer-orientation  
Taking interest in business and commercial information, and the quality of the organization's products and services;  
Respect of the existing standards, and proposing improvements;  
Managing the work with constant regard to customer satisfaction, including internal customers within the organization.  
Loyalty to the organization  
Supporting the organization's business strategy, its products, and acting as brand ambassador in both the internal, and external environment;  
Observes, and complies with the organization's policies and rules (confidentiality, code of ethics, charter of suppliers, health, environmental charter, fundamental rights charter, security and working conditions ...);  
Implementing the decisions of the organization;  
Respect of their own commitments.  
Transversality and solidarity in achieving performance  
Supporting their colleagues in difficulty;  
Solidarity with the results of their team or the project results, whether good or poor;  
Cooperation with other sections of the company, and recognition of the quality of their work;  
Getting involved in transversal actions to solve problems.  
Transparency  
Expressing views freely and openly;  
Clearly communicating the information needed for the other members' actions;  
Timely reporting difficulties;  
Acknowledging their own errors, and turning them into a factor of progress.  
Adriana Şchiopoiu-Burlea<sup>39</sup> believes that "by training employees' skills urmărească, one must not only try to solve problems, but to achieve a investment, which is profitable in most cases, or indispensable in others."

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<sup>39</sup> Burlea Schiopoiu A., *Managementul resurselor umane*, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2008, p. 149.

**4. CONCLUSIONS**

These concepts are important to the improvement of career management and the relations with other human resource management activities.

Career Management is “process of designing and implementating the goals, strategies and plans that allow organizations to meet human resources needs, and individuals to fulfill their career goals<sup>40</sup>”.

Evolution / career planning is an integral part of human resource planning, and performance appraisal is one of the prerequisites to career development.

For those ambitious and eager for advancement within an organization, any opportunity for advancement is a motivator.

Formalizing the offer of promotion opportunities since the start of their careers is a way to improve company performance.

The career development programme serves a dual purpose: it offers good employees a chance for promotion, and ensures the company’s requirements for expansion and adaptation to market demands.

Lack of personnel policies with clear and concrete objectives, having a legal or factual basis, or promoting false, inadequate policies, lacking coverage in the results obtained, are not good premises for ensuring competitiveness or success in an organization in general, and especially in a firm. The specialists in the field of human resources are tasked to define and develop strategic management policies that, once accepted, must become, or serve as a reference point for staff development programs or procedures, as well as making decisions in this area, decisions intended to operationalize the policy in question.

Strategic career management plays a critical role in defining the psychological contract that reflects what employees and employers mutually expect. These strategies are permanently changing, due to contextual changes, so as to become as realistic and motivating as possible, capitalizing on the changes in organizational culture, and promoting effective organizational behaviour.

Moreover, strategic management serves as a reference point in developing personnel practices, and making decisions necessary, and materializes in the specific programs or procedures that make them possible.

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