

Individual Development Plans Discussion: “Who You are” Matters!

The world is made up of an unlimited variety of people. So is the case with any organization. It is the duty of the organizational leaders to help assimilate the myriad learning experiences that each person comes with, filter out the “positive” ones, learn from the “negative” ones, to ultimately create a synergy which takes the organization forward.

It is during one such consulting assignment that I got a chance to meet with a variety of “interesting personalities”. This article is a summary of the lessons learnt, for people on both sides of the table. A group of 25 managers and deputy general managers were made to undergo the Development Center Exercise, post which they had to introspect, envision and discuss with their respective reporting managers their 'Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for the next one year. They were further made to pen down their thoughts, for future reference.

In this exercise, I was involved with one-on-one discussions with approximately 20 such managers across different functions, along with their reporting managers. An hour was spent discussing their individual aspirations, how they can be synced with the organizational goals and further leading them to achieving their individual milestones. In this journey of achieving personal milestones, which strengths they could leverage on and which development areas they need to strengthen was the focus of discussion.

After an hour-long discussion, the reporting manager shared whether the participant needs to make any changes in his key milestones and helped him finalize the path ahead for a year. This discussion was focused on the individuals, their competencies, their development areas, and what could be the puddles they may have to jump over, as they walk this road. Throughout the discussion, a neutral counseling and mentoring tone was used, where the managers had to be questioned, given appropriate feedback about their personality strengths and weakness, and how to work on them. A majority of the population was open to taking feedback and liked the idea of working on it; however there were a couple of cases, who were completely reluctant to

any kind of feedback. They were of the opinion that they had been victims of the whole exercise and despite being technically strong, there was absolutely no need for them to be pulled in a 'soft exercise' like this!

It was observed that one manager was also trying to camouflage his aspiration, by projecting a big goal which was not directly connected to his function, thereby trying to convince his boss that he had much more capability than what was expected of him. Both of us (his reporting manager and me) had to help him understand that projecting a different goal is actually counter-intuitive to what he thinks, and will actually be detrimental to his career progress, as well as the 'recognition' he so desperately desired.

The purpose of the whole exercise, was not only to help managers understand their true potential but also help them align their individual goals with the organizational goals, besides choosing the 'high performers' out of the entire group. The participants were happy about the entire IDP exercise and felt a sense of commitment and excitement post the discussions. Post this exercise, the organization expressed interest in identifying training and coaching needs for the group. There are several lessons that I learnt from this exercise:

- Identify the right people for a Development Center exercise and communicate the purpose of conducting this exercise.
- Same is the case with IDP discussion, the employees will then come in with a frame of mind to discuss and decide their developmental plan. This will help in addressing the resistance which was shown by a couple of employees in this exercise.
- Small and Medium scale organizations today are showing keen interest in 'employee development' and are ready to invest wisely by taking appropriate steps to fuel the organization's upward growth trajectory.