

Enhancing Infrastructure for Growth

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ABSTRACT

As many leadership experts suggest, growth happens only when it is intentional. It is vital to the immediate and long term success of our employees as well as our employers. As SAS programming leaders, we have a responsibility to encourage individual growth as well as provide the opportunity. With an increased workload yet fewer resources, initial and ongoing training seem to be deemphasized as we are pressured to meet project timelines. The current workforce continues to evolve with time and technology. More important than simply providing the opportunity for training, individual trainees need the motivation for any training program to be successful. Although many existing principles for growth remain true, how such principles are applied needs to evolve with the current generation of SAS programmers. The primary goal of this paper is to identify critical components we feel are necessary for the development of an effective training program meeting individual needs of the current workforce. Rather than proposing a single 12-step program that works for everyone, we feel identification of key components for enhancing existing training infrastructure is a step in the right direction.

INTRODUCTION

Professional growth only happens when it is intentional. As supervisors, we have a responsibility to our teams to provide opportunities for development. This paper will identify challenges for supervisors, especially those of SAS programmers, and examine some commonly available professional growth opportunities. Self-motivation will be established as a key factor for successful growth and other organizational enhancements and tools for success will be proposed.

KEY CHALLENGES

While many employers recognize the importance of personal and professional growth within their workforce, recent trends have forced companies to operate on much tighter and/or fixed budgets. They are pressured to produce more deliverables with fewer resources on tighter timelines. This often does not leave much time, money, or mental energy available for training and education. Inexpensive and accessible training options are often available, but they may not always be appropriate for the individual needs and aspirations of all employees. Today's workforce is drawn from diverse cultures and backgrounds with varied professional experiences and requires more individualized opportunities for professional development.

OPPORTUNITIES

Professional development opportunities for programmers, and more specifically SAS Programmers do exist to fit many budgets and timelines. They include:

- Attending conferences
- Self-learning
- SAS User Groups
- SAS Global Forum webinars
- SAS Support webinars
- Onsite group instruction
- Off-site programming classes
- Web-based programming classes
- Studying information on personal growth

Although these opportunities exist, it cannot be assumed that all employees will be aware of or independently take advantage of them. As supervisors and managers, we should recognize the importance of professional development within our teams and actively promote awareness and participation in learning and enrichment. While travel to conferences and off-site programming classes may be attractive to employees, they can be expensive, time

consuming, and unrealistic for more than a couple team members each year. More accessible options such as participation in local SAS user groups, webinars, and self-directed learning may be more realistic.

One way to encourage participation and interest is through the implementation of SMART goals which can help define realistic and achievable goals for any experience level. The principles of SMART goals create an environment of success through clear definition and timelines. Goals should be:

- S – Specific
- M – Measureable
- A – Attainable
- R – Relevant
- T – Time-bound

Many organizations have implemented SMART goals as a component of their annual review process. This gives employees the chance to formally define interests and explore ways of addressing those interests with the support of their employers. Timelines can be set. Participation in the learning opportunities described above can easily fit in to the SMART parameters. Employers can further increase the impact of the use of SMART goals by strategically guiding and tying individual goals to company and team goals.

To further promote success in growth and training, it is important that supervisors continue to support and monitor employee efforts. Once goals are defined, protected time should be provided specifically for the participation in development activities. It is very easy for project work and other deadlines to creep into the time allotted for development.

MOTIVATION

Employers can provide many growth opportunities to their employees, but it is impossible to fully reap the benefits without some amount of self-motivation on the part of the employee. Motivation can be induced by either extrinsic or intrinsic factors. While both types of motivation can lead to the successful completion of growth opportunities, it has been suggested that intrinsic motivation will inspire much greater productivity (Pink 2009, 2011).

EXTRINSIC

Extrinsic motivation is usually initiated within an environment of rewards or consequences and generally pushes toward an external achievement rather than an internal sense of accomplishment. Rewards and/or consequences are often a component of the SMART goal process and can include annual bonuses, promotions, or opportunities to attend additional training or conferences. Using rewards and consequences may be useful in getting an employee to explore a new area of interest or define a goal, but they are unlikely to continue to motivate the employee once that goal has been achieved.

INTRINSIC

More important for success than extrinsic motivation is intrinsic motivation. Employees that are motivated by a greater good or self-defined responsibility are more likely to experience continued success in long term growth and development. They will continue to search for greater goals as each step is accomplished and are less likely to be demotivated by challenges along the way. Individuals are more likely to contribute meaningfully to something that matters to them personally or that will benefit the greater good of the team. In searching for ways to encourage intrinsic motivation, consider the following principles of motivation – autonomy, mastery, and purpose – presented by Pink (Pink 2009, 2011) who suggests that intrinsically-motivated employees are more creative, efficient, and satisfied.

Autonomy

Employees with some autonomy over when, how, and with whom work is done tend to feel a greater sense of ownership and satisfaction, work more efficiently, and draw motivation from the ability to determine and implement the most efficient method or completing a task.

When work is done

The lines between work time and personal time have become increasingly blurred as technology now keeps us connected 24/7. That also means that a lot of work, especially programming work, can be accomplished outside of the traditional 9 to 5 schedule. Today's professionals must balance a myriad of personal and professional responsibilities. Giving people more autonomy over their own schedule can allow employees to work at their most productive times which can lead to higher productivity and creativity. Further, more productive, efficient employees may have the ability to schedule more time for personal growth.

How work is done

As supervisors, it is important to recognize that our employees all have different strengths and weaknesses and are more or less productive in different environments. Does someone work better isolated in a quiet room or sitting with a laptop in a coffee shop? Has your employee developed special tools to make her tasks more efficient? Can those tools be shared with the group? When possible, allowing employees to have greater control over how work is done will give them a greater sense of ownership and control and allow the entire team to take advantage of individual strengths and minimize the impact of weaknesses.

With whom work is done

One of the challenges of supervising is recognizing the different personalities of your employees and building teams with personality traits that complement one another. Individuals are often very good at recognizing co-workers with whom they will work most efficiently and creatively. Why not take advantage of this opportunity for self-motivation? Giving your employees some control over whom they work with can also lead to greater efficiency, creativity, and job satisfaction.

Mastery

Mastering a new task or technique can lead to a great sense of personal accomplishment. Finding the motivation to achieve a level of mastery often comes from a desire to make one's life easier or more interesting. It is important to guide your employees to goals that matter to them personally or to focus on solutions to make their assigned tasks easier and more efficient. Goals should be challenging, but achievable so that a level of mastery is possible. Choosing problems that are unsolvable or beyond a reasonable skill set, can quickly lead to demotivation.

Purpose

Most of us have a natural desire to contribute to a cause greater than ourselves. Good supervisors are able to channel that desire into the task at hand by clearly showing and reiterating to their employees how their efforts matter to the team, the company, the outcome of the project, and the impact that the project may have on the betterment of society. Once employees understand their own importance, they may find greater motivation for additional effort and development. To encourage this aspiration and a sense of ownership, it is important to regularly remind employees how their work adds value to the team and company.

ENHANCEMENTS TO GROWTH INFRASTRUCTURE

As supervisors we have a responsibility to our teams to encourage personal and professional development and to our companies to continue to build a satisfied and productive workforce. We need to apply common leadership principles. Our focus should be on promoting the big picture rather than getting caught up in individual tasks. Management of smaller tasks should be delegated when possible. We need to identify and draw on the unique skills and contributions of each employee and beyond that, help our employees define their focus and long term goals and professional development plan.

As employees branch into new skill sets, it is also important that they receive continuous assessment of their skills and improvements through self-assessment and external feedback. This will give tangible evidence of progress and provide correction and redirection when needed. It will reinforce that the task is important and that effort is expected. Providing continued access to knowledgeable and experienced colleagues can make this feedback process more efficient, encourage greater team interaction, and even help the more senior employees recognize the value of their own knowledge and experience.

It is critical that supervisors set aside and protect time for professional growth. It is very easy to let project time take over time allotted to work on personal goals, but success is much more likely if the effort does not have to occur in addition to an already busy work schedule. Formally scheduling growth time also sends a clear message to employees that professional development tasks are important and valued.

Lastly, to encourage optimal growth, it is imperative that supervisors figure out how to motivate their staff to want to accomplish professional development tasks for their own reasons. As noted above, long term growth requires intrinsic motivation. We need to facilitate the identification of purpose and draw on the desire to contribute to a greater good. We also need to provide opportunities that enhance both organizational purpose and career development. It is easier to set aside regular work time for growth if it can be demonstrated that the result will directly benefit the company and team. We need to regularly identify and recognize an individual's contribution to the group to show the value to the greater purpose and encourage others to participate.

PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

Supervisors in the pharmaceutical industry face specific challenges in the implementation of some of the ideas presented above. Programmers cannot have full autonomy in a validated and GCP-compliant environment. They are constrained by many industry requirements including the need to work exclusively in a controlled environment and are often subject to strict timelines.

At CROs especially, responsibilities and priorities may change on a daily basis. Work may have to be assigned simply by a need to meet a deliverable deadline rather than by an optimal assignment plan and programmers may lose control over their planned schedule in order to accommodate unexpected timelines.

Employees may also be forced into leadership roles out of necessity without adequate leadership training. This may be consequential to many other staff members as scheduling and prioritization decisions are made by inexperienced managers. This can affect the availability of time and resources for professional growth opportunities.

In addition to facing the challenge of figuring out how to enhance growth infrastructure within the constraints described here, managers of SAS programmers within the pharmaceutical industry also must solve the problem of trying to fill empty positions when available, qualified applicants are scarce. It is often critical that we are able to motivate, prepare and train existing employees to rise to the task of performing and filling roles above their current level of expertise.

CONCLUSION

Personal growth and professional development are critical for maintaining relevance and productivity within any organization. Growth does not just happen. It needs to be actively encouraged and supported. The existing infrastructure for professional development within any company should be actively reviewed and enhanced. Opportunities for growth do exist for almost any budget, but even so, employee self-motivation is important for real success. Concepts consistent with common leadership principles are a reasonable strategy though constraints of certain industries may present additional challenges. With intentional and thoughtful planning, leaders can help foster and identify strengths and interests in employees to help each excel in an individual manner. There is no easy solution for ensuring growth of a workforce. Finding specific solutions takes focus and deliberate effort.

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- Pink, Dan., April 2011. "*Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us*". New York, NY. Riverhead Books.

RECOMMENDED READING

- Maxwell, John. October 2012. "*The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*". New York, NY. Center Street.
- Covey, Stephen, November 2013. "*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*". New York, NY. RosettaBooks.
- Hardy, Darren. November 2011. "*The Compound Effect*". New York, NY. Vanguard Press.

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