



Chapter IV

Skills and the Worker: Let's Get Real

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Abstract

Technology professionals have real lives, interests, and desires that are affected by rapid changes in the industry. With the decline of the “Organization Man” model, workers are now expected to maintain their skills and manage their careers without employers’ help. With skills that rapidly become obsolete, technologists must prepare continuously for the future. Yet, to maximize the utility of new skills, they cannot prepare too far ahead. This reality creates a dilemma for skills portfolio development. The TechCareer Compass® (TCC) website was designed to solve the problem. The sponsors are industry-leading firms, so workers know the skills portfolio and career information is accurate and reliable.

Introduction

The information and communications technology (ICT) industry gestated in a business environment that supported lifetime employment. When young em-

employees entered a company, they took entry-level jobs with decent pay and excellent benefits, with the expectation of continuous growth and development until retirement at age 65.

Changes in skills or knowledge needed to perform advancing levels of work within the organization were a benefit of long-term employment in the organization. The company provided both the education and time necessary to address the developmental needs of their employees. Training was both a classroom and on-the-job experience that was built into the organization's structure. Successful employees were encouraged to train their own replacements so that in turn they might prepare to move up when a higher-level position became available.

The "Organization Man" was the business model of the post-World War II generation (Whyte, 2002). It is not the model in today's business world. It had all but disappeared by the early 1990s, and Generation X never saw it at all. Generation X entered the workplace with the explicit message that each employee was an independent entity responsible for defining, sculpting, and continually reevaluating his or her own career. This included opportunities both internal and external to the organization.

Members of the baby boom generation, caught between business models, were in a dilemma. They attended schools that taught the Organization Man model of the business world, but what they found instead was that the competitive nature of business was forcing firms everywhere to rethink the Organization Man premise that had been at the core of post-war growth. That older model included the concepts of employability for life and compounding benefits for longevity and loyalty. Employers willingly went outside the four walls of the organizational family to bring in new skills, novel thoughts, and ideas. Buzzwords like "out-of-the-box" thinking expressed values management believed internal employees lacked.

Leading-edge technology skills were lacking as well. For most companies it was cheaper and easier to hire outside expertise to seed ICT efforts than it was to gear up their employees for leading-edge software development. Many feared that costly software skills training would quickly become obsolete on hardware rapidly being replaced. The learning curve for employees was great, the return on the employer's investment in training was questionable, hiring outside consultants was expedient, and frequently employees reluctantly learned new skills they knew were of fleeting value.

The workplace underwent a major revolution. The responsibility for careers and career development shifted. The changes came fast and were implemented

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