

The HR Academy Concept of Promoting Professional Development

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Introduction

The field of human resource management is bracing for a tremendous period of transition, particularly in the public sector. Many top administrative positions are currently held by individuals who, in increasing numbers, are reaching retirement age. Advances in information technology are requiring continual upgrades of administrative software and effective training programs to go along with it. In some areas health and retirement benefits are also being restructured making public sector jobs less attractive to prospective new employees. On top of this is an emerging workforce that, although smart and talented, lacks the experience and the administrative and customer service skills to fill many of the human resource positions being vacated.

In an effort to address these issues, forward-thinking organizations are seeking creative ways to recruit and develop a new corps of professional human resource managers. One approach that is gaining in popularity is the Human Resource (HR) Academy. In the following pages we'll describe what an HR Academy is and how several different institutions are approaching this professional development concept.

What is a Human Resource Academy?

An HR Academy is a comprehensive human resources certificate or endorsement program that provides formal learning opportunities focused on the general and specific needs of human resources professionals and other managers and supervisors. Most programs offer a series of core workshops or courses, each targeting a different component of human resource administration. They are geared toward helping individuals gain a more in-depth understanding of the role of human resources and its relationship to employee productivity and organizational effectiveness.

HR Academies offer participants the option of taking individual courses specific to their role within a human resource setting, or of taking an entire core curriculum covering a broad spectrum of human resource administrative areas. Participants receive either individual course certificates or, if completing an entire core curriculum, a Human Resource Administration certificate.

Examples of some core curriculum courses from various HR Academies include: Arbitration School, Benefits Administration, Developing People – Performance Review Systems, Discipline and Grievance Processes, Employment Law, Equal Opportunity & Diversity, Job Analysis, Position Description Writing, Strategic Planning for Human Resources, and Ethics in Public Management, to list a few.

The ultimate goal of an HR Academy is to promote and create a culture for learning, to help HR professionals develop leadership and supervisory competencies and capabilities, and to strengthen both individual and organizational performance.

Approaches to Developing an HR Academy

In investigating the HR Academy concept, we discovered several different approaches to implementing such a professional development program. These range from utilizing an HR consulting agency or professional organization to provide the training services, to relying on a combination of in-house and external resources, to developing a completely in-house HR Academy. Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages, and our research findings indicate that there is no “one size fits all.”

Additionally, local and regional organizations have also applied the “HR Academy” moniker to one- or two-day professional development seminars organized for the benefit of their local HR professionals. Although these regional seminars often offer continuing education credit, for the purpose of this research project we have focused on the more comprehensive, institution-specific approaches.

Utilizing an HR Consulting Agency or Professional Association

The greatest advantage of utilizing an outside HR consulting agency or professional association is that it reduces the amount of time in-house HR professionals need to commit to developing a curriculum and conducting the associated training themselves. Outside consultants bring experiences from other organizations into the training mix. They can help broaden the scope of the training, reduce the possibility of a “groupthink” mentality and an underlying resistance to change, and challenge a human resources staff to think “outside the box.”

Utilizing an outside consulting organization, however, also presents some disadvantages. Outside consultants seldom come in with a complete understanding of the specific issues facing an institution. This can lead to training that is too generalized to effectively address an HR staff’s real needs. Consultants can certainly spend additional time evaluating an organization to gain a greater understanding of its issues before creating a customized curriculum, but this adds to the overall expense of an already expensive investment.

One organization that specializes in providing consulting services to public sector HR departments is CPS Human Resource Services, based in Sacramento, California. CPS is a self-supporting public agency offering a full range of human resource products and services, with a highly qualified, professional staff providing practical solutions for all levels of government, school districts, colleges and universities, and nonprofit organizations throughout the United States and Canada.

CPS representative William Godsave says his agency started an HR Academy in 2002 because “we recognized that most, if not all, HR training was geared towards the private sector, or was too general in nature to specifically teach public sector HR professionals what they need as government employees. Additionally, HR in the public sector often

employs individuals who are new to HR, so there was a need for a training series to bring them up to speed on a timely basis.” He also noted that the public sector HR is typically governed by more regulations and laws than the private sector, and that such factors are seldom covered in generalized HR training.

Godsave says it took CPS about six months to develop its HR Academy, and that it has provided its Academy training throughout California and in other states. CPS regularly updates its HR Academy curriculum to incorporate new HR trends and legal issues, and it also works with clients to customize its HR Academy curriculum to meet the specific needs of an institution. Once a common curriculum is established, it can be delivered in different geographical locations through webinar and teleconferencing technology.

“It is important that all employees of the same system receive identical or similar training for consistency,” Godsave says, adding that in the public sector, consistency, or a lack thereof, can determine the outcome of a lawsuit.

Although contracting with an outside consulting agency to provide an HR Academy may reduce the initial burden placed on an institution’s own HR management team, as stated previously, it comes at a considerable cost. Godsave says that a six-month course with nine full days of training, and sessions spaced about 25 days apart, would cost approximately \$50,000. A continuous, year-round training program would run about \$100,000 per year. Any customized training materials and booklets created by CPS would also remain the property of CPS and could not be copied by the client to use in the future should it later decide to establish its own in-house HR Academy program.

For more information about CPS and its HR Academy program, visit the agency’s website at: <http://www.cps.ca.gov/ConsultingServices/HigherEdu/>. An overview of how CPS has partnered with Sacramento State College of Education to provide an HR Academy is available at: http://www.cce.csus.edu/programs/hr_academy.htm

One other example of a government agency using outside sources for an HR Academy program is the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (OhioDAS). This state agency contracts with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR) to provide curriculum materials and trainers for its HR Academy. Certifications are aligned with the SHRM’s Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI).

The OhioDAS HR Academy offers eligible employees core curriculum training at no cost, with courses running from one-half day to five days in length. To qualify for the program an individual must be employed in an agency or department of government (i.e., local, county, or state), be employed in one of human resources’ functional areas, be a supervisor or manager in any area, and be employed in a classification exempt from collective bargaining.

Additional courses of study towards “advanced” graduate certificates are also available for a fee, though OhioDAS offers a Professional Development Fund to help individuals

offset the cost. For additional information about the OhioDAS HR Academy, visit its website at: <http://das.ohio.gov/hrd/hra/>

Combining Internal and External Resources

Several universities have developed, or are in the process of developing their own HR Academies by using a combination of internal and external resources. The degree to which each institution is using internal and external resources varies. We will focus on just one example here.

The University of Minnesota initiated a new HR Academy program in the fall of 2007 when it joined the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC), an Arlington, Virginia-based organization whose membership is comprised of “senior executives with a shared commitment to steward enterprise-wide human resource management.” The CLC offers a set of unique services and tools designed to assist human resources leaders with their most pressing managerial, communications, and decision-making challenges.

Carol Carrier, Vice-President of Human Resources at UM, says she and her colleagues have found the Council to be a tremendous resource. The University’s annual fee for Council membership is \$23,000, though Carrier noted that membership fees are based on the size of an organization, so smaller institutions would likely pay less.

When UM joined the CLC, representatives from the Council provided a two-hour presentation about its services and resources to the HR directors of all campuses within the University of Minnesota System. Since that time, Carrier says the University has set up an HR Academy steering committee consisting of HR directors from the various campuses, and it has scheduled 90-minute meetings every six weeks.

To make the new HR Academy effective, Carrier believes “you really need to have the whole community [of HR Directors] buy in to the program.” To encourage participation in the steering committee, she says she’s utilized teleconferencing and videoconferencing technology to make communications easy, and provided participants with free lunches.

According to Carrier, the steering committee has established four pillars or focus areas to support human resource personnel and practices at UM. The four pillars include: communication and networking, tools, education and training, and resources. An attachment illustrating the four UM HR Academy pillars is provided with this paper.

So far, the HR Academy training workshops are being coordinated through a combination of internal trainers and external assistance, including that from CLC. Carrier says her HR staff did not want to simply use generic training provided by professional associations, as “university human resources has so many idiosyncrasies that we felt our HR professionals would be better served by training conducted by experienced in-house HR specialists or by those with university-specific experience.”

As it develops its HR Academy, UM is attempting to brand it as the “go-to” HR resource. The University’s orientation program for new employees will soon be under the HR Academy banner. This two-day workshop primarily targets current employees moving into HR roles or those taking on new human resource responsibilities, new employees assuming HR responsibilities, current or new employees within central offices that regularly interface with the HR office, as well as administrators, managers and other employees interested in a refresher course.

Besides revising its orientation program, UM is also developing a new recognition program that will present three awards per year, and it plans to expand its use of a mentoring program. All of these components will become part of its HR Academy services. For additional information on the University of Minnesota’s HR Academy, contact Carol Carrier, Vice-President of Human Resources, University of Minnesota, at 612-626-4515. Directions for accessing an informational website being used by UM’s HR Academy Steering Committee is provided in the Additional Resources section at the end of this paper. For more information on the Corporate Leadership Council, visit: <https://www.clc.executiveboard.com/Public/Default.aspx>

Developing a Completely In-house Program

Two universities that have developed in-house HR Academies include North Carolina State University and Cornell University. NC State is launching a new HR Academy this spring and will offer both core and elective classes. Its program originated out of the office of Barbara Carroll, Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, who identified a need to expand the University’s existing supervisory training series and to develop a more extensive program to meet the policy, business process and leadership needs of current, new and emerging leaders within NC State. In the summer of 2006, Carroll brought a proposal to the Training & Organizational Development Office, which followed up with planning, focus groups and a design of the program, says Program Coordinator Carina Lockley.

The NC State HR Academy website describes its program as “a new certificate program that links participants to subject matter experts in over 26 different HR/ Professional Development areas. Participants of the HR Academy will be exposed to HR functions, legal aspects, NC State policies and procedures as well as related courses that enhance overall knowledge and application of the HR functions.”

It further states that “the program is designed for managers and non-managers and utilizes a flexible scheduling format, which allows individuals to participate in courses that fit their schedules. Participants will have one year from enrolling to complete their certificate program.” The program is ideal for Personnel and other employees serving in HR functions, but Lockley notes that it is open to all NC State employees. Registration for its 2008 program is to begin June 1, with a program cost of \$75. Here is the NC State HR Academy website: <http://www.fis.ncsu.edu/hr/tod/hracademy.asp> An NC State HR Academy Program Summary, provided by Lockley, is also attached with this paper. Additional questions regarding this program can be directed to carina.lockley@ncsu.edu, or 919-515-4280.

At Cornell University, Director of Organizational Development Services Chet Warzynski says his department spearheaded the development of his university's HR Academy. They did not use any outside models or professional association assistance, but relied solely on in-house theoretical research, resources and staff to build a program over about a seven-year period. Now in its thirteenth year, the Academy continues to evolve through trial and error with Warzynski's staff of eleven-and-a-half employees working on it year-around by doing research, building presentations, updating materials and providing training.

In developing an HR Academy, Warzynski repeatedly stressed the importance of setting goals and coming up with a planned approach or strategy. His department analyzed both organizational and departmental goals within the University then designed a system (HR Academy) to accomplish those goals. He emphasized the importance of getting staff and faculty actively involved by making sure everyone is aware of long term and short term goals, as well as managerial issues.

He was also adamant about using technology as the driver for change. In order for it to be effective, however, a computer program capable of driving the change is needed. He believes that Banner, a program commonly used by many institutions of higher education, is outdated and that it no longer has the capabilities to keep pace. In its place, Cornell is using PeopleSoft, which Warzynski says is helping to improve customer satisfaction, reduce administrative costs, create efficient work systems, and enhance productivity.

Unlike NC State's program, Cornell's HR Academy appears to be operated more like a faculty and staff conference than a year-round professional development program. It's a two- or three-day event designed to teach all of the University's faculty and staff about the function of the human resources department, the legal responsibilities and policies that drive it, and to encourage effective methods of both personnel and departmental development.

For instance, one day of workshops may focus on strategic planning. Another day may cover project management, with a third day addressing supervisor development. These same concepts are taught to everyone, from the night janitors to the deans of each of the schools. The reasoning behind this approach: everyone on campus will possess a greater understanding of the far-reaching role of human resources and be more likely to support and participate in professional development efforts across campus.

Warzynski admits that an HR Academy will not change the whole university, but it can greatly enhance an HR department's professional knowledge and its ability to inform and train other employees in human resource-related subject areas. He provided numerous documents detailing his department's theories behind organizational change. We've attached just one of those documents, titled *Reflections on Restructuring Human Resources*, with this research paper. For additional information about Cornell's HR Academy, contact Chet Warzynski, Director Organizational Development Services,

School of Industrial & Labor Relations, Cornell University, at ccw7@cornell.edu or by phone at 607-254-8308.

Conclusion

The researchers on this project are not human resource professionals. Thus, we do not feel qualified to **recommend** which approach would be UA's best option for developing an HR Academy. However, based on our research, we suggest not attempting to create an HR Academy utilizing only in-house resources. This approach would be a considerable burden on UA human resource managers and, without outside input, less likely to infuse creative new ideas and solutions to addressing human resource-related issues.

Contracting with an outside consulting agency such as CPS could make a lot of sense if the costs fit within UA's budget. It would enable UA to initiate and implement an HR Academy in a relatively short time-frame without burdening HR management staff with an additional workload of planning and creating a curriculum, or conducting all of the professional training.

However, a less expensive approach may be to follow the lead of the University of Minnesota by utilizing the Corporate Leadership Council or a similar human resources professional association as a partner in establishing an in-house HR Academy. This approach would combine the extensive knowledge and training expertise of outside human resource professionals with the valuable in-house experience and perspectives of UA's human resource administrators.

As reflected in the experience at UM, this approach could also initiate increased communications and collaborations among the human resources professionals within UA's campus system. It would reflect administration's commitment to its employees and empower them to actively engage in their own professional development.

Whatever approach UA decides to take, it is clear that some sort of HR Academy-type professional development program will go a long way toward helping UA meet the challenges of training and maintaining a knowledgeable and professional human resource management team.

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Additional Resources provided on next page

Additional Resources

To view ongoing communications related to the University of Minnesota's HR Academy development, below is the text of an e-mail we received with log-in and access instructions to its HR Academy Steering Committee website:

Carol Carrier asked me to send you the information about the web site for our HR Academy. We're using U of M instructional technology (called Moodle), so in order to view the information, you need to "register" for the "course."

- 1) The first screen will ask you to log on with a U of M id. You can create a guest id at http://www1.umn.edu/moodle/instructor/guides/guest_access.html and then follow the process to activate a Moodle account.
- 2) The direct link to our course is at <https://moodle.umn.edu/course/view.php?id=1784>. This brings up an enrollment screen. Enter the key HRlearning and click "enroll me in the course."
- 3) For future visits, the link above will take you directly to the site.

The site is just starting up so it doesn't have a lot of content. You can see that we're using it to keep track of meeting minutes, RSVP for meetings, and post notes from the various subcommittees. Please let me know if you have questions about the site and how it's working.

Dee Anne Bonebright, Consultant, Organizational Effectiveness
University of Minnesota, Office of Human Resources
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Other HR-Related Websites

The University of Michigan also purports to have an established HR Academy, but little information on the specifics of this program was available online, and multiple attempts to contact its coordinator were unanswered. At the bottom of its HR Academy website is a notation: "The HR Academy and its related curriculum is currently under reassessment." What this means we are not sure. But Michigan's HR Academy may be worth researching further at some later date at: <http://www.hr.umich.edu/hra/about.htm>.

Here are a few additional HR Academy websites not listed within the research.

Greater Cincinnati Human Resource Council
http://www.gchra.org/profdev_hracademy.php

New York State Department of Civil Service HR Academy news
<http://www.cs.state.ny.us/hracademy/HRAcademyvol10.pdf>

GovernmentExecutive.com Article
http://govexec.com/story_page.cfm?articleid=39346&dcn=todaysnews