INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that employees who are fulfilling their career aspirations and who are able to maintain a stable and preferred living environment for themselves and their family are more likely to be job satisfied, motivated and productive (QPS, CPMS, 1998). Formalising an organisation’s career development program can do much to increase employee commitment, involvement, and satisfaction in the organisation (Morgan, Hall and Martier, 1979).

This paper will highlight the evolution of career planning activities in the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in recent year commencing with an initiative of the QPS Women’s Advisory Group to implement a pilot mentoring program for women. The paper promotes career planning as a key factor in achieving a successful and satisfying career and mentoring as a strategy to assist members with career planning activities.

The paper will examine some of the specific career development needs of women and the way in which the Career Planning and Management System (CPMS), which has been developed by the QPS, can address these needs.

The paper also provides the rationale for computer applications in career planning and provides an overview of the technology based Career Planning and Management System (CPMS) which was launched by the QPS in September 1998. The aim of the CPMS is to support ongoing personal and professional growth and development of members by providing them with the information they require to make informed decisions about their future career.

In the past, career information in the QPS has been provided from a variety of sources. It is probably fair to say that, although well-intended, such information would be somewhat limited to the first-hand experience of the source. Access to good information would be situational and mostly dependent upon where one worked, with whom one worked, and on what informal networks one was able to access.
BACKGROUND

A number of events have taken place which have influenced the development and implementation of career planning and management strategies in the QPS in recent times.

Firstly In 1996 the QPS Women’s Advisory Group proposed that a pilot mentoring program be conducted for women. This was approved in conjunction with the EEO Management Plan to the year 2000: ‘to implement mentoring for target groups’. The pilot was conducted for 12 months from August 1997. During the evaluation of that pilot, participants indicated that in many instances, members were using mentors for career planning activities.

Secondly, recommendation 66 of the Bingham Review Committee (1998) recommended that ‘the Commissioner establish a QPS Career Advisory Service without delay.’ The recommendation continued that...‘Information needs to be made available to officers and staff members about career structures in the organisation and how this information can be used to plan individual careers.’ This recommendation set the scene for implementing career planning and management into the QPS. In addition, a strategy within the QPS Human Resources Management Plan 1995 - 2000 is to ‘establish a service-delivered career advisory service’ adding human resource management support to the concept of career planning and management.

Thirdly, technological advancement enabled QPS computers to be networked across the State. A technology based career planning and management system which can be accessed by all members of the Service through the QPS intranet was developed.

The notion of using a strategic and holistic approach to career planning by using a technology based system and incorporating mentors to assist members with career planning has evolved.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN

Currently women comprise 42% of the total Australian workforce (Management Today:1999) and 57% of the Public Service (Sector Wide, 1999). Women police officers comprise 16% of the QPS with the large majority being at Constable level. Women staff members (civilian employees) comprise 66% of the QPS with the large majority being employed as administrative officers at the classification level of AO2 or AO3 (Statistics provided by QPS EEO Unit, April 1999).
Significant research has been conducted into the career development of women. According to Osipow (1993) research clearly indicates that women frequently face obstacles that affect pay levels, promotion and accessibility to positions. Herr and Cramer (1996) suggest that members of designated special populations, which includes women, are often impeded by barriers such as stereotyping, discrimination and environmental barriers. In particular where women pursue non-traditional occupations where men form a critical mass women are met with resistance. Herr and Cramer promote mentoring as an effective mechanism for addressing and supporting the career needs of women.

McColl as published in the journal 'Management Today' (1999), suggests that

'Mentoring schemes can especially benefit women. Studies have shown that women’s career advancement can be impeded by their lack of access to the informal world of work. Having a mentor can, for a female mentee, mean having a relationship in which to focus on informal business-skills training and networking opportunities.'

There also appears to be many benefits for the mentor. Mentoring is reported to assist people to become better leaders. McColl further writes that 'modern management has identified mentoring as a key leadership role.... The best leaders are those who mentor.'

Women require their career needs, aspirations and life plans to be continually evaluated and upgraded in accordance with their current situation. There seems to be considerable support that techniques such as mentoring, networking, peer counseling and professional support are especially useful in career development of women.

**YOUR CAREER! YOUR CHOICE! ....BUT PLAN!**

There are many theories about why people make a particular career choice and a snap shot into some of these theories is provided in this section of the paper.

Research suggests that people may be inwardly guided to a particular type of career because of a range of factors. People with similar traits, personality types, interests, or intellect seem to be drawn toward a particular type of career. Research also supports that socioeconomic and political considerations effect careers available at any given time, and therefore effect the types of careers people are able to choose from. The particular stage of life people have reached is also believed to effect career decisions (Herr and Cramer, 1996).
Career choice can be situational. People may choose a career or change career path by reacting to a particular work environment - ‘get me out of here’ - and they take the first job that comes along to get out of a particular situation. Although we can probably all identify with a situation we have been exposed to where we may have reacted similarly, the danger here is that without having planned where we want to go, we may end up ‘jumping from the frying pan into the fire’.

People may choose a specialist type of career and traditionally rise through the ranks in that career. This type of approach to career choice is particularly relevant to policing where there are many specialist careers available, however, this traditional approach to career choice is changing. To quote from research conducted by Sadek and Egan (1995):

*Future scenarios will be very different from the popular ‘upward and outward’ view. People will need increasingly to take ownership of their careers and, in particular, of their own portfolio of skills. They will need to be more flexible in how they view their careers and think in terms of ‘portability’ rather than stability.*

Brown (1984) is of the view that the primary focus of most career choice and decision making models is encouraging self-awareness. Only when people achieve a realistic sense of their own abilities, skills, values and interests will they be able to make some kind of informed decision about the future. Career specialists use a range of career assessment instruments to assist people to develop self awareness. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Myers Briggs, 1977) is used extensively to identify personality types. The Self Directed Search (Holland, 1970) is used widely as a guide to educational and vocational planning. Self-awareness will assist you to appraise your priorities and make better decisions. *Your career is only one dimension in your life and you neglect the others at your own peril* (Sadek and Egan, 1995).

Career planning is an important factor in choosing an appropriate career. Bolles (1998) writes that:

‘*When you choose a career you have got to know what is you want to do, or else someone is going to sell you a bill of goods somewhere along the line that can do irrepairable damage to your self-esteem, your sense of worth, and your stewardship of the talents that God gave you.*’

*We never plan to fail - we just fail to plan.*

(T.S. Eliot)
In addition, people need to maintain flexibility so that they are able to grasp personal and professional development opportunities as they arise. *Allow yourself the right to change your mind* (Sadek and Egan:1995).

A range of factors and reasons why people choose a particular career path have been discussed. It seems that through a process of increasing self-awareness, careful planning, and maintaining flexibility, people may achieve their career aspirations.

**THE CAREER PLANNING PROCESS**

Included on the CPMS is a comprehensive career planning process. This process has the capacity to build a person's self-awareness and identify 'where they want to be' and plan as to 'how they are going to get there'. By completing the career planning process, which requires a significant number of hours of work, QPS members will end up with a comprehensive self-profile and career development plan. The Career Planning Process comprises:

- a number of self assessment exercises;
- information about researching jobs;
- mentoring;
- developing a career action plan;
- creating a career development plan; and
- researching career development opportunities.

QPS members are able to download documents and complete documents at their own pace. Women, in particular, require that their career needs, aspirations and life plans be continually evaluated and upgraded, in line with their current situation and needs.

The evaluation of the QPS Pilot Mentoring Program, which is discussed in more detail later in this paper, indicated that many mentees were using their mentors to assist with career planning activities. Mentors were assisting with identifying careers of interest, goal setting and formulating development plans to achieve those goals, identifying study options, preparing job applications and providing interview skills.

The CPMS provides QPS members with access and profiles of a number of people who have volunteered to mentor others. QPS members can identify a
suitable mentor who can provide advice and guidance with the career planning process through a number of options listed on the CPMS.

More detailed information about information and services included on the CPMS is discussed later in this paper.

**USING MENTORS AS A CAREER PLANNING STRATEGY**

Mentoring has been identified as a very important factor in career success. In particular, mentoring is considered to be an effective mechanism for addressing career needs of designated special populations (Herr and Cramer:1996) which includes women and other members of EEO target groups.

Using mentors as a career planning strategy is not a new concept and it is certainly not unique to the QPS. Mentoring has been occurring on an informal basis throughout the history of the QPS and this has been a very valuable process for those who have had the opportunity to access good mentors. By implementing a statewide QPS Mentoring Program and listing mentors on the CPMS, all members are now able to access the QPS Mentoring Program. In addition, through the CPMS mentors themselves can access appropriate training which will produce more effective mentoring in the QPS.

In August 1997 Queensland Police commenced a 12 month pilot Mentoring Program. The program involved 15 mentoring partnerships (a small sample of the QPS). These partnerships comprised 30 members from a variety of backgrounds and geographic locations, ranks/classifications, police officers and staff members. All mentees in the program were women, although mentors comprised men and women.

A comprehensive evaluation included completing questionnaires and conducting focus groups, analysing case studies and a SWOT analysis. Response rates to the evaluation was significant. Findings included that:

- all mentors and mentees involved in the pilot reported a range of areas where personal and professional development had been enhanced;
- mentees indicated that they had learned specific skills through the mentoring process;
- mentor and mentee roles within a policing environment were able to be defined;
• some operational police who participated in the pilot indicated that work demands had created a need to be flexible in mentoring activities and at times they had to re-schedule mentoring or use electronic mediums for mentoring activities; and

• participants were of the view that mentoring benefited the organisation by producing a better skilled, productive, motivated, job satisfied and committed workforce.

One mentor responded in their evaluation questionnaire that after being involved in the pilot mentoring program they *would like a mentor as [they] would benefit from having guidance from someone at a higher level. [They were] considering who they would like to approach [to mentor them]*.

Three significant findings which emerged from the evaluation of the pilot program were that:

• in many instances, mentees in the pilot program had been using mentors for career planning activities;

• mentees in the pilot were also using mentoring for a range of other work related activities such as learning new skills, support and guidance etc; and

• mentoring via electronic medium such as telephone or email was used effectively in the pilot for mentoring purposes.

It was concluded from researching mentoring programs in other organisations and through the evaluation of the pilot program, that if mentoring was to be successfully implemented into the QPS, a formal structure for a Mentoring Program needed to be established. Within that formal structure, however, there needed to be total flexibility within individual mentoring partnerships. For example, the duration and frequency of mentoring meetings and mentoring activities needed to focus on the individual needs of the mentee and flexibility was seen as a key element in this regard.

It was recommended from the evaluation of the pilot that mentoring be implemented statewide, used as a career planning strategy and incorporated into the proposed CPMS.

The statewide QPS Mentoring Program has not been evaluated as yet, but some positive feedback has been received informally. To quote from one police officer:
'I have applied for a number of positions and at first I didn’t get shortlisted or interviewed. I submitted my resume to my mentor to critique and spoke with them about what makes a good officer and about how to write a good job application. I have since modified my resume and am the nominated applicant for 3 jobs.....'

This particular mentoring partnership is conducted electronically and the mentor and mentee have not yet met in person. Although this mentoring partnership seems to be achieving the ultimate outcome of the mentee being successful in applying for a position, performance indicators for the CPMS and the Mentoring Program will be measured by job satisfaction and by having productive staff in jobs which they enjoy.

Another mentor advises that they assisted their mentee to examine options and make a major decision relating to a new position which requires a lateral transfer. Another mentor in a remote area of the State advised that they have been contacted informally on a couple of occasions by members wanting information about policing in country locations. The mentoring seems to be providing members with access to information, support and guidance as intended.

Limerick, Heywood and Dawes (1994), after conducted extensive research into mentoring occurring in organisations, warn that mentoring should be seen as a temporary and problematic response to disempowerment, i.e. in hierarchical organisations where information is not shared and where there are sharp differentials of power. They warn that the long term answer lies in changing the entire organisational system and acting on the societal expectations in which the systems are embedded. It is intended that the QPS Mentoring Program will be continually re-assessed to determine usefulness in a QPS context.

The concept of mentoring in the QPS has become fairly popular. As well as formalising many individual mentoring partnerships, mentoring is being used in whole sections or areas for personal and professional development. Future evaluations should determine the success of mentoring in a QPS context.

CAREER PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (CPMS)

Contemporary trends in career education generally are moving toward the provision of career information which enables people to make informed decisions about their future careers. Having access to relevant, up to date, occupational information is an essential part of the career decision-making process. (Brown:1984).
In line with such current trends, the QPS have developed and implemented a technology based Career Planning and Management System (CPMS) to provide members with career related information.

The CPMS provides...........

**information** and **access**

........to ALL members.

**The CPMS is** a technology based, user friendly, self-paced system which provides members with a range of career related information. The CPMS is accessible statewide through the QPS intranet, the Bulletin Board. As the CPMS is technology based, it is resource and cost effective. There is less face-to-face and less printed material as members can select and download documents for themselves or peruse documents on the QPS intranet.

In addition, the CPMS is an information resource for supervisors, officers in charge, education and training specialists and human resource management specialists who provide career related information to members of the Service on a regular or ad-hoc basis. Members can be referred to the CPMS to research career information for themselves.

**How does it work?**

In a thumbnail sketch: members of the QPS are able to:

* access the CPMS ->
  
  * complete the Career Planning Process  ->

  * identify a career of interest to them using the QPS career descriptions  ->

  * access a mentor who can assist them with career related activities  ->
 
  * link into other information relevant to career planning activities.

If the member believes there is nothing more the QPS can offer, they can access the 'Leaving the Service' site on the CPMS.

The QPS is in a unique position, as are other policing jurisdictions, of being able to offer a broad range of careers within one large organisation. The CPMS is designed to assist members to plan and manage a successful career within the QPS, with the intended outcome being to increase job satisfaction and productivity, and retain valuable human resources.
The CPMS is customised to the needs of the QPS and provides:

- approximately 190 descriptions of careers available within the QPS.

- a link to the QPS Position Description Database to access more information about a particular career of interest;

- a self-paced, comprehensive career planning process;

- access to mentors who can assist members with work related activities including career planning.

- information about personal and professional development options such as job rotation, multi-skilling, work shadowing and interchange arrangements are discussed on this site;

- a link to education, training and development options available within the QPS, including programs conducted through the Human Resource Development Branch and regional training calendars. This site provides contact information for all Queensland tertiary institutions and the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC);

- a link to relevant human resource management policy such as promotion and transfer policies, part time, relieving and higher duties etc;

- information about leaving the Service.

A process whereby in order to resign, members access a ‘Separations Kit’ from the CPMS ‘Leaving the Service’ site. The concept is that whilst accessing the CPMS site, members will be encouraged to look at other options besides leaving the Service. This process is attempting to reduce the high attrition rates currently experienced by the QPS which results in the loss of valuable human resources.

This site includes pre-retirement information. A number of members who recently retired from the QPS were interviewed. These members provided information about the issues which were most important to them in their retirement and about the issues they wished they had thought about more prior to retirement. Issues such as legal and financial issues, housing, leisure and health issues are discussed on this site.
The CPMS uses information technology to provide members with access to career related information. It encourages members to be proactive in their career planning activities.

**WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

The QPS is currently in the process of formalising career planning activities and have established a Career Planning Unit. The unit will be focusing on identifying, through a wide consultative process, future career development programs to be offered by the Unit and the resources required to support those programs.

The CPMS will always be the subject of ongoing research and development so that members of the QPS will have access the best possible information. The
CPMS will be the main resource base for career development activities in the QPS.

EVALUATION

Over a period of 7 months, there are 5,287 hits recorded to the CPMS home page. 2049 hits are recorded to the Mentoring site, 2080 hits to the Career Descriptions site and 1240 hits to the Career Planning Process site. It is acknowledged that hit rates are a fairly surface evaluation, but these figures indicate that a large number of members of the QPS have accessed the CPMS.

Much positive informal feedback has been received from members about the CPMS generally.

In developing a future evaluation plan for the CPMS the following performance indicators will need to be considered:

- 'hit rate' on the CPMS;
- measure of time invested in using the CPMS;
- usefulness of the CPMS (as perceived by individuals and management); and
- level of satisfaction with personal career development plans formulated through using the CPMS

CONCLUSION

Having the right people in the right job is of paramount importance to any organisation. Effective career planning will enable people to choose the right job for them. Research indicates that satisfied employees are more productive, have a lower rate of absenteeism, have better health and live longer. From an organisational perspective having people in the right job translates to higher productivity.

Research indicates that highly significant correlations have been identified where employees have a favourable perception of the organisation's career development program, their managers' commitment to their career development, their ability to manage their own careers, and their satisfaction
with their career goals and plans - and an employee's commitment to the organisation and their satisfaction with their present job and the more strongly they focus their career development plans within the organisation. (Minor: 1986)

Throughout this paper we have talked about some of the specific barriers women face in their career, the need for them to continually upgrade career plans in line with their current situations. According to research, women wishing to effectively plan and manage their career will benefit from networking and mentoring.

The CPMS is a proactive strategy aimed at encouraging and supporting members in their personal and professional growth and development. The CPMS is customised to the needs of the QPS. The CPMS focuses on careers within the QPS and on developing career plans relevant to the organisation thereby encouraging members to choose careers within the organisation.

The QPS have taken a major step in providing their members with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their own careers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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References


