

Are We Playing the Same Game?

Employee vs. Manager Perceptions of Education and Career Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The 21st-century career landscape is increasingly complex and difficult to navigate. The pace at which job skills and even careers become obsolete has reinforced the need for continuous career planning and skill building at all stages of an individual's working life span.

To shed light on perceived responsibilities for career planning and advancement, **University of Phoenix and EdAssist conducted a joint research study to explore perceptions of the role of employers, workers, and postsecondary institutions in career development.**

Using an online survey tool, researchers surveyed 533 workers from diverse industries who were pursuing company-sponsored higher education, as well as 501 managers of such workers, between January and March 2013. Participants considered various aspects of career development, including educational attainment, skill acquisition, and career planning, with a major focus on career development responsibilities of individuals, employers, and institutions of higher learning.

KEY FINDINGS

Survey results revealed key disparities between workers' and managers' perceptions of career development responsibilities and related educational requirements:

- A significant discrepancy exists between the educational credentials employees are pursuing and those that managers want them to have.
- Workers and managers disagree on the role of higher education in career-relevant skill building, reflecting a possibly outdated concept of career development.
- Employers and workers see colleges and universities as less involved in the career planning process than they see each other or themselves. But they also disagree about which aspects should be each party's responsibility, suggesting an unclear combination of roles in the career-preparation process.
- Both workers and managers believe workers are largely responsible for building their own job-hunting skills. Workers overwhelmingly acknowledge their own responsibility for their career development, but separate research indicates an apparent disconnect between the responsibilities workers acknowledge and those they actually fulfill.

- Nearly all workers surveyed said they pursued education for personal and/or professional growth. About two-thirds of workers said some form of company involvement (tuition benefits, managerial or company encouragement) had motivated them to pursue their education.
- The impact of education on workers and organizations is largely unmeasured. Few organizations help workers map their formal education to specific job skills and career paths, or measure the impact of tuition assistance on individual or organizational performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on aggregate research results, the full survey report details the following **recommendations for employers:**

1. Become a more proactive partner in employees' career planning and development, and in measuring the impact of education on individual and organizational advancement.
2. Engage educators by helping institutions to align their programs with the real and anticipated needs of the workplace, and to craft programs that aid students in career planning and job hunting.
3. Elevate tuition assistance strategies to accelerate educational achievement, reduce skills gaps, and build a talent and leadership pipeline.

Overall, the survey revealed a complex and unclear combination of roles in the career- preparation process. Although workers and managers are willing to accept some responsibility, there is confusion over "who's in charge" at various stages of career planning. Perceptions differ over higher education's role in career development, indicating an opportunity for better alignment between educational programs and employment requirements. Opportunities also exist to clarify education-to-career pathways, to define credentialing and skills requirements, and to design better metrics to assess education's impact on workers and organizations.

LEARN MORE

For more information about the study and related research, visit industry.phoenix.edu or contact IndustryStrategy@phoenix.edu.

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