Development
Systems That Work
Ten Conditions for Success

Conceptual Systems International, LLC. has been designing and implementing award-winning organizational development systems since the late 1970s. Our research and our experience with literally hundreds of companies has shown ten conditions that lead to the success of development systems. These conditions are:

1 **Development must be linked directly to business strategy.** Line managers are much more likely to "buy in" and own the initiative when they see development as a vehicle to help them meet their strategic business objectives, rather than as an employee benefit. Development must become a process that helps both manager and employee take ownership for understanding the business challenges and the skills, knowledge, and experience re-

quired to achieve those challenges. To achieve the strategy you must have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time.

2 **Top management must support development**. It is not enough for top management to "talk the talk" of the development initiative; it must "walk the talk" and display behaviors that promote and support development. Some sample "walk the talk" supporting behaviors include

⑤ Holding development discussions with direct reports

⑤ Holding direct reports accountable for conducting development discussions with their direct reports

⑤ Completing and implementing personal development plans

⑤ Participating in an executive briefing session

⑤ Participating in a manager development workshop

⑤ Actively communicating the strategy and business challenges to the organization

⑤ Kicking off a manager development workshop

⑤ Rewarding and recognizing managers who develop their people, and penalizing those who do not.

3 **Managers must be trained**. Even though development involves empowering employees to take more responsibility for their own improvement, this does not mean that managers may abdicate their role in the process. Managers must be willing and able to communicate business challenges; communicate their impact on the work group; direct employees to available development resources; provide ongoing feedback and information; and provide ongoing support. Managers need training in order to know how to do these tasks. One of the fundamental decisions here involves whether management training will be voluntary or mandatory.

4 **Managers must be held accountable.** It's not enough to train managers and expect that they will behave as intended; an accountability and reward structure must be in place to increase the likelihood that the desired actions will occur. Below are the preconditions for management accountability:

⑤ Communicate the desired behaviors.

⑤ Provide training to teach the desired behaviors.

⑤ Provide feedback on current behaviors.

⑤ Communicate how accountability will be evaluated.

⑤ Measure as part of the overall manager appraisal process.

⑤ Provide feedback.

⑤ Build a reward mechanism to recognize managers who successfully perform their responsibilities.

5 **Employees must be given flexible tools.** Employees must be provided with the knowledge and skills necessary to know how to take more responsibility for their own development. Whether it be competency assessment services, technology-based support, classroom workshops, or some combination of these tools, employees need formal support and training to help them answer the following questions:

⑤ What are my individual skills, interests, and values?

⑤ How do others see me and rate me?

⑤ What career alternatives are available?

⑤ What are my career goals?

⑤ How do I develop an action plan to achieve the goals my organization has set?

⑤ How do I develop an action plan to achieve my personal goals?

⑤ How do I get feedback and support for my action plan?

Moreover, the use of multiple tools and interventions addresses multiple learning styles and needs. Some employees, for example, learn best in a workshop, while others are in remote locations and can't easily attend workshops or prefer a self-paced workbook.

6 **Information about opportunities must be accessible.** By virtue of participating in a development experience, employees begin to think about their personal career opportunities. Even though development emphasizes growth in the current position, it's important to provide information about other opportunities and position openings throughout the organization. When information—in the form of job posting, competency-based job descriptions, and/or competency-based career paths—is not available, employees run into a "development wall." The development experience tends to become a singular event rather than one step in a larger, observable process to help the organization and the individual achieve their goals.

7 **The mission must be centralized, implementation decentralized.** While there needs to be a centralized philosophy or set of principles guiding the initiative in order to

focus on the total organization's strategy, business units or divisions need the flexibility to implement initiatives according to their own needs.

In recent years there has been a shift away from top down, corporate-designed and driven, "cookie cutter" initiatives. Instead, corporate now offers a core philosophy, a set of principles, and supporting resources to business units which then customize the implementation to their own environments while at the same time directly aligning and supporting the corporate philosophy. This newer design invites more realistic partnerships between corporate and line organizations. It also stimulates increased ownership for successful implementation at the business unit level where, in the end, the rubber really meets the road. In this new model, human resources acts as the steward rather than the owner of the process.

8 **The system must be evaluated for continuous improvement.** An essential component of any successful and enduring development system is an evaluation plan that considers how the effectiveness of the initiative will be measured and tracked, thereby allowing for continuous improvement. Like any other business process, development must be evaluated against relevant business outcomes.

9 **The system must be integrated.** Development must be linked both conceptually and operationally to other human resource practices and processes. Linkage involves issues pertaining to timing of events, forms, and the flow of information and data from one process to another.

10 **There must be a clear communication and marketing strategy**. Every effort must be made to publicize development activities. The success of your initial implementation strategy and its continued expansion are much more likely if people know about it. You will need to be prepared to address such questions as, "Isn't this just another training program?" and "What's in it for me?" Examine programs that have been successfully launched in your organization and how they were communicated. Utilize a variety of communication and marketing strategies, including executive briefings,

flyers, brochures, videos, and newsletter stories.

Meeting these conditions isn't easy or quick, but the rewards for successful development systems are worth the effort.

For more information or reprints, contact Conceptual Systems International, LLC, 301.774-9700 or www.concepsys.com.