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Product management curriculum geared to better job performance

A curriculum should be driven by the needs of its clients, not the other way around. This is the premise that underlies Network Systems' new product management curriculum.

This curriculum is the first developed specifically for Network System's product managers.

"Our product managers require job-specific training that is tailored to their special needs," explained Gerry Kaufhold, product management curriculum manager, Morristown, N.J. Kaufhold is responsible for the development, implementation and management of the curriculum.

The nature of the product manager's job, he said, is such that training must be:

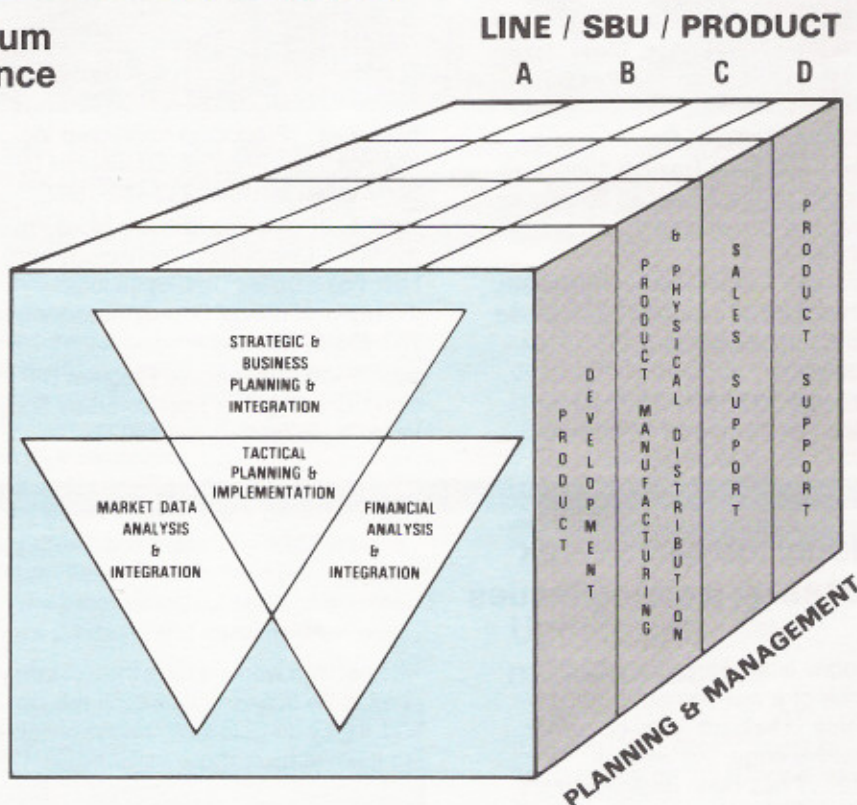
- efficient and minimize time off the job
- directly related to an individual's job assignment
- readily transferrable to job performance.

The new curriculum addresses these needs. When complete, it will consist of 108 modules that teach required skills, stress on-the-job performance, and frequently may be taken on-site.

It was created in three phases. First, a comprehensive training needs analysis was conducted with a sampling of more than 50 first-through-fourth-level managers from all four of Network System's business units.

Each business unit is organized differently and has its own way of assigning job responsibilities. So, it was important that each unit be represented in the analysis, Kaufhold said.

The needs analysis findings were used to develop a product management functional job model. This model incorpo-



The Product Management Functional Model portrays the complex interactions of eight product management functional responsibilities. This model drove the overall design and modularization of the Product Management curriculum.

rates all of product management's target outputs, required tasks and requisite skills and knowledge. It formed the framework for the actual curriculum.

Next, Corporate Education and Training (CET) courses were reviewed with their curriculum managers to identify existing courses that fit product management's skill and knowledge requirements. More than 43 courses met this criterion.

New courses also are being created to fill the gaps. A training advisory board, made up of district- and division-level managers from the four business units, was formed to work with the Product

Management Training Organization. The advisory board sets priorities for the development of new modules in the curriculum. By year end, it is expected that 45 of the missing key courses will have been added.

The curriculum has three categories of courses: product management skills and knowledge, management development, and personal development. These courses all are cross-referenced by topic, title and course number, in a new curriculum catalog.

The curriculum, which is suitable for both new product management em-

continued on page 6

- Computer-based modules that describe AT&T's lines of business, introduce the organizations and key contact people with which product managers interact, and highlight Network Systems' customers and markets.
- Self-paced modules that require supervisor/employee interaction
- Instructor-led, interactive role-playing in a job simulation game.

"It wasn't enough for us just to develop a new curriculum. We had to communicate the curriculum to product management supervisors and give them the tools and training so that they could develop training plans," Kaufhold said.

Using a new, supervisor's curriculum planning guide, supervisors are required to work with their people one-on-one to develop written training plans for them.

First, the supervisor decides which courses are required for a given job. Then, the supervisor and the employee inventory the skills the employee already has mastered, indicate areas that need to be developed, decide which courses are appropriate, and work out a tentative time schedule for fulfillment.

These training plans then become the supervisors' tool for managing the development of their staffs. The plans also provide the Product Management Training Organization with the information it needs to manage the availability of training.

Senior management has endorsed the curriculum and is actively supporting its development. "This commitment is critical if the curriculum is to succeed," Kaufhold said.

"Our goal is to greatly reduce the amount of time it takes to get people proficient on the job. Job performance will be the final measure of the program's success."

For more information, call Kaufhold on 201-631-7084 (Cornet 268).

Curriculum

continued from page 1

employees as well as veteran product planners and managers, features such delivery media as:

- A fictional account, or novel, about the product manager's job, written for new or prospective product management employees.

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