**Career Management/ Planning Programs**

According to a [**SHRM study**](https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/trends-and-forecasting/research-and-surveys/pages/2017-job-satisfaction-and-engagement-doors-of-opportunity-are-open.aspx), about a third of workers feel that career growth and learning is extremely important to their enjoyment of a job, but only around the same number feel they are getting the career supports they need.

Employees consistently rank career advancement opportunities among the top reasons why they’d join or leave an organization, yet employers tend to focus on success in a role versus seeing the larger picture of overall growth and development.

**What is Career Management?**

Career management is a process designed to help employees understand career opportunities and chart a career path within their organization. Career management encompasses the strategy, tools, processes, and technology that enable talent development, agility, and mobility. It is important to recognize that career management is a key component of an organization’s total rewards offering.

An effectively designed and implemented career management program delivers benefits to both employees and employers. Employees will have the tools and resources to chart career paths and own their careers. And employers will see a return in the form of a deeper bench of future leaders, a more engaged workforce and an enhanced employment deal, enabling them to attract and retain the best talent.

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| **Employee View** | **Employer View** |
| Career management is the system that enables employees to own their careers. It provides insight into: | Career management generates an ROI in employee development. It provides: |
| * What types of skills are valued?
 | * Career paths that fill a robust talent pipeline
 |
| * Explains how to have the ‘career discussion’
 | * Deeper bench of successors and leaders
 |
| * Access to information on career opportunities
 | * Engaged employees with career aspirations
 |
| * User-friendly tools and career paths
 | * Reduced turnover costs in critical positions
 |
| * Resources to enhance skill sets
 | * Reduced recruiting and new hire training costs
 |

***Source: Towers Watson***

An often-overlooked component of career management process relates to communication. Too often, HR leaders fail to actively communicate viable career growth opportunities to the internal staff. Additionally, we sometimes fail to ‘trumpet’ and properly market the successes of those employees who have made a transition into a different role.  As you will see later in this chapter, career growth opportunities include more than just promotions.

**Key Elements of Career Management**

**The Role of HR**

**1. Start Small**

**There are a variety of reasons why an organization would start a career management program. In some cases, a company would** use a career management program to help address talent pain points (i.e., areas with current or projected talent shortages) or to help valuable employees update their skills in response to a changing work environment. In other cases, an organization may decide to move ahead with a career management initiative in response to employee requests.

A best practice approach is to start a career management program within a specific area of the organization (e.g., within a function such as sales). Once a career management program is launched in one part of an organization, it often generates excitement and buzz so that other areas are shortly asking for their turn as well.

**2. Define Your Strategy**

**An overarching strategy is needed to guide the development of a career management program.** This strategy should capture an organization’s high-level perspective on career management and reflect its talent priorities and strategic business objectives.

It should include the why and how.

Why:

An *overall statement*of what the company believes and wants to communicate about the value and importance of career management. For example, ‘We want to invest in our talent in ways that help us develop and retain our best people.’

How:

A *set of principles*that will guide the direction and execution of career management communications and tools. For example, ‘We encourage our employees to take an active role in their career planning’, -or- ‘Our managers are discouraged from hoarding and hiding their best talent’.

The strategy must also articulate that employees and managers have joint ownership of the career management process. An effective career management strategy will help reduce employees’ feeling they are on their own when it comes to career development and advancement opportunities.

**3. Develop Career Paths**

**A significant percentage of organizations do not have clearly defined career paths.** Career paths help employees to visualize opportunities by illustrating potential movements between roles. A career path is unique to an individual and will vary depending on business needs, career aspirations and capabilities.

There are typically two types of movement that career paths are used to illustrate:

* **Progression** - Movement to a role at the same/ equivalent level as the current role; offers an employee breadth of experience
* **Promotion** - Movement to a job at a higher career level than the current role; requires demonstration of increased competence and additional responsibilities

The intent of a career path is to provide a sense of what’s possible — not to chart every potential course. These illustrations serve as a very effective tool to help differentiate the organization and illuminate the career management strategy.

Even with workable career paths, your managers will likely need some training and support and have the ‘career discussion’ with their staff. An absence of these types of discussion tools can explain why the majority of employees rate their manager as ineffective in holding career development discussions. It is important for organizations to ensure that managers are trained to have effective career conversations with employees.

Regardless of whether these conversations are formally set at certain intervals or occur informally at any point in the year, managers need to be equipped with information on the organization’s career management strategy and tools. This will prepare them to ask the right questions as they guide employees through the process of developing actionable career plans.

**4. Include enabling experiences and opportunities**

These are the experiences and opportunities that help prepare an employee to move from one career level to the next. While enabling experiences and opportunities help guide career development, they are not intended to be used as a checklist for promotion.  For a list of examples, see the 70-20-10 Development Assignment Form on the Catapult site.

**5. Utilize structured mentoring**

Even a well-designed career management program may not sufficiently prepare employees for all the challenges that come with increased responsibility. For this reason, a growing number of organizations are implementing structured mentoring programs. The goal of structured mentoring is to identify the deep and often undocumented knowledge that senior people have acquired over several decades and transfer that knowledge to those with less experience.

Mentoring reduces the risk of knowledge loss when senior employees leave or retire. At the same time, it provides an opportunity for employees to accelerate the learning process and reduce the amount of trial and error they often face in new positions. Overall, a structured mentoring program not only enhances career development, but strategically fosters a culture of rapid learning and growth needed to compete in a complex, fast-changing business environment.

**Wrap-up**

**More so than any activity, a career management program builds employee loyalty.** Such a program is viewed as clear andcompelling evidence that the organization is vested in the success of their employees. Training programs and development activities can ring hollow if not combined with tangible career paths and formalized career discussions.

Train your management teams on how to conduct career discussions. It is important that the employees get a sense that, as a result of those discussions, something is being done to address their aspirations.  Finally, it is difficult to over-communicate career opportunities to the internal staff.

Reviewed for NC/SC law only.