



The Single Most Important Success Factor for any Career Development Programme: The Rules

The main source of frustration for many people, with regard to career development today, is essentially about the rules of the game—or, lack of them.

Consider this thought: If we all know the rules, and if the rules apply to everyone and are respected by everyone, then we all have a chance to progress in our chosen field. However, if there are no rules—or, perhaps, only half-baked rules, or a situation where some rules apply to one group but not all, or the rules are respected by some and not all—then it becomes apparent that the only people who can advance in their career are the ones whom management arbitrarily favours or who dismiss the rules.

The latter scenarios do not offer a healthy climate in which an individual can succeed, nor does it provide a solid foundation on which an employer can build and maintain a sustainable career development programme. Ultimately, the most important success factor for any such programme is assurance that not only do rules exist, but also a governance body is in place to monitor how and when the rules are applied or ignored.

The Real World: Rules Exist

An excellent example appears in the sports world, say, tennis. No matter how proficient a player may be, the same rules apply to all players and competitors. The difference between world number 1 tennis player and world number 1,000 has nothing to do with chance or fate, networking with the right people in the field, harming other players in some way to advance one's interest, arbitrary decisions from a referee, or intimidation of other players. In tennis, as in all sports, rules exist, and they are applicable to every participant, regardless of the level of expertise and talent. Essentially, their talent is the distinguishing Factor. In order for their talent to flourish and express itself truly, we need an environment in which the rules are equivalent for everyone. After all, the concept of “equal opportunity” means fair competition.

Sports is just one arena that is useful as an example. Professionals, in fields such as accounting, must abide by very strict rules and procedures to avoid noncompliance with ethical and professional standards. In fact, in nearly



every type of business or association or other entity, some form of rules and management policies are in place—restrictions that all who participate are obliged to honor and comply with.

Career Development Programmes: Rules Are Iffy

Unfortunately, a majority of organisations today do not even consider establishing a set of rules to govern how employees could potentially move forward in their careers. Many do not have a governing body to monitor the programme's success either. The reasons vary:

- The programme might be new and in an infancy stage.
- The professionals in HR might be newcomers, with little or no practical experience in developing and implementing such programmes.
- Management oversight is little to none for any number of reasons: no time, budget, or interest.
- Leadership may only pay “lip service” to offering such a programme to the workforce.
- Internal career development managers might be overwhelmed by daily tasks and unable to focus on enhancing the programme or determining whether it even works.

That said, it takes little effort to create simple and feasible policy rules for any career development programme. A few suggestions might include:

- Management should provide examples of clear career paths for key roles to all employees so that everyone knows how typical careers develop within the organisation.
- Management should ensure that detailed employee career development plans are included in performance reviews.
- Employees and supervisors should have regular discussions every quarter about the individual's progress against career development goals.
- All employees and supervisors must attend at least one information session on the subject during a calendar year.
- There should be regular checks on succession plans to ensure that employees who are considered “potential candidates” actually possess the technical skills, behavioral competencies, and the knowledge required for those succession roles.

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The Bottom Line

The particulars of the rules do not matter as long as they are fair, reasonable, and clearly understood and respected by everyone in the organisation. Establishing a practical and workable set of rules represents a key factor to boost the success of your career development programme.

No matter how much data HR uses, or how scientific and proficient HR professionals believe themselves to be, the real difference in career development programme success depends on the existence and application of programme rules. Any HR programme without a framework of rules is just a fallacy and cannot succeed.

About the Author: Ali Kursun is a Managing Partner at sparkChief & Co., a consulting firm that helps clients develop competitive talent management strategies, career development programs, and rewards solutions.

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sparkChief & Co.

25 Route de Lullier
1254 Jussy, GE, Switzerland

Tel +41 22 346 24 05
inquire@sparkchief.com
www.sparkchief.com

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