



4 Pillars of Successful Career Development Programmes

The Right Career Development Strategy

Career development for individual employees does far more than enhance the person's skills. If effectively implemented, the end result of such a programme is a transformation in the employee's perception of work from "just a job" to "a job that I enjoy and excel in." While the onus for career development traditionally falls on the employer's shoulders, the employee must also play an active part by making the most of the opportunities provided. A successful career development strategy first requires a foundation that focuses on various alignments – between employer and employee goals and desires, between employees and their jobs, between company strategy and employer goals, and between employee performance and practical outcomes. Upon this base, HR professionals can build four pillars that support an effective and efficient career development programme.

Pillar 1: Self-Knowledge—Help Employees to Learn About Themselves

Without self-knowledge, people live and work with their eyes closed and their senses deadened. Those who strive

to achieve self-knowledge take a number of paths—perhaps inspired by a role model, coerced by family pressure, or the need to follow their own passion. Yet, others passively wait for someone else to discover their talents and skills and finally realise their dreams for them.

Those individuals who consider their path haphazardly, attempt various endeavours and fail to realise any satisfactory outcome. Unhappy people become and remain unproductive and inefficient—with everyone paying the price, including the employer.

Only when employees comprehend what makes them tick as individuals will they be able to successfully play their part in an engaged and motivated workforce. To assist their efforts to acknowledge such an active role, leaders need to ask employees these questions:

- What do they, as employees, desire in the workplace? What type of work and environment are they enthusiastic about? How do they envision their future?



- What skills and know-how do they need to acquire in order to achieve what they desire?
- How does their desire match the company's desires and overall mission?
- If they are at odds, what steps do both parties need to take to align their desires?

Despite some skeptics' viewpoint, self-knowledge is not simply a "feel good" factor. Self-aware employees gain the ability to discover the best job for their talents, thereby achieving satisfaction in meeting their own goals, as well as what the company requires of their efforts.

Pillar 2: Career Strategy—Help Employees to Identify the Right Approach

Possessing self-knowledge is only one piece of the puzzle. The employer needs to encourage these self-aware and motivated individuals to identify the right approach to their work life. Hand-in-hand with the employee, HR can guide them toward the career path that offers optimal use of their skills and knowledge, the potential for advancement (whether related to finance, status, or knowledge), and professional accomplishment of their jobs.

The right approach may involve a combination of steps, which employers can offer, such as:

- Appropriate training. Employees can access this education in diverse ways: through internal seminars, external conferences and associations, on-the-job practical training, job sharing, and other methods.
- The right transitions. Not every job change needs to be promotional. In many cases, a lateral move may serve best as a way to broaden the employee's skill base by placing the individual in relevant positions. For example, when grooming talented employees for management spots, lateral moves that enable them to understand (and be able to perform) the jobs for which they would be responsible offers an excellent strategy. Promotions can then follow when the individual is qualified.
- Potential relocation. Moving an employee to another office or plant may be appropriate to fill a key vacancy or skill gap. The transfer is not simply change for the sake of offering the individual something new, but change that will result in an advantage for both the employee and the company.

”The trick—indeed, the magic—is to discover whatever components of an employee development strategy that align the desires of the employee with those of the organisation. Only then can leadership hope to achieve their goals far into the future.”



Whatever approach proves to be the most effective and attractive need not be the most expensive. In fact, it may benefit the company in a multitude of ways, simply by retaining valuable talent.

Pillar 3: Career Opportunities—Help Employees to Select the Right Career Paths

Having a detailed strategy is all well and good, but if there are no opportunities for advancement in position or knowledge, employees will not be inclined to stay with the company. Common sense holds that motivated individuals will not be happy with stagnation, but will seek better and more satisfying jobs elsewhere—often, with the company’s competitors. Such moves would be a severe loss to the employer in terms of the cost of hiring and training a new employee, lost knowledge and experience of the company’s operations and culture, disruption of productivity, and so on.

To develop viable career paths, and match employees’ skills with the right positions, HR professionals should consider the following elements:

- An inventory of skills and descriptive job descriptions that accurately reflect responsibilities and requirements,

without which the match between employee and position is doomed to failure or lackluster results

- A mentoring system that allows give-and-take between an experienced person who is not the individual’s immediate supervisor or manager, thereby injecting objectivity into the workplace dynamic
- Open and timely communication about job openings, without which employees lack the knowledge of possibilities within the organisation

To encourage progress—and then not provide practical opportunities—can only lead to a drop in morale, motivation, and productivity.

Pillar 4: Career Performance—Help Employees to Maximise Their Efforts

All of the above points are meaningless without honest and open dialogue about the employer’s expectations vs. the employee’s performance on the job. Periodic discussion should include feedback from the manager, mentor, colleagues and team partners, and the employee,



too. The resulting well-rounded and objective view of the individual's standing can uncover what works, what doesn't work, and what's next. Going forward, the conversation should develop future steps, in partnership with the employee, that continue to align the employee's efforts with the company's mission.

The Benefits Justify the Efforts

While many of these points are not surprising, what is astounding is that some companies discard them as unimportant. That said, when these four pillars intersect, leadership stands to reap a number of benefits:

- Self-knowledge and career strategy align the right people with the right organisation.
- Career strategy and career opportunities align the right people with the right jobs.
- Career opportunities and career performance align the right efforts with the right outcomes.
- And the right outcomes inform the right strategy for further growth.

HR's job is to attract, motivate, and retain talent—not haphazardly but through a logical system that genuinely strives to develop the individuals in the workforce who are committed to self-knowledge and progress. What works best for an employer may not match the needs of individual employees. The trick—indeed, the magic—is to discover whatever components of an employee development strategy that align the desires of the employee with those of the organisation. Only then can leadership hope to achieve their goals far into the future.

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