

Career Management: A business imperative

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1

Overview

The benefits of having an integrated approach to career development and management that is part of a performance management system are:

- Higher productivity;
- Increased PR – as an employee benefit, and being seen as an employer of choice in the local and global marketplace; and
- Increased flexibility as individuals move within the organisation, which helps to maintain and protect knowledge management.

An effective approach to career development and management also allows you to:

- Tie your best people to the organisation;
- Safeguard positions where few people currently have the relevant and required knowledge;
- Attract and retain quality people; and
- Keep individuals focused on why they are doing what they are doing and better able to manage or handle change.

2

Potential downturn and the organisational context

It is important to consider what impact the faltering economy will have on individual-level engagement.

Will individuals will be less likely to move? Will the result be more restructuring and potential redundancies?

2.1

Changes in the 'psychological contract'

Will more individuals be looking for security of employment?

The 'psychological contract' can be defined as the implicit agreements that are made between an employer and an employee. It refers to issues such as trust, dependence, mutual commitment and loyalty.

The current economic climate might therefore have a varied impact:

- Individuals may be keener to join organisations with a reputation for looking after staff.
- Career management may be an additional employee benefit used to attract talent in a changing market.

2.2

Fit with performance management

Organisations are constantly exploring the ways in which they manage performance. Individuals can often get 'stuck in a rut' within a role as a feeling of 'better the devil you know' creeps in, especially in times of potential economic decline.

This sometimes means that people are retained through fear, when they may not be fully engaged and motivated, which can lead to a negative impact on performance and productivity.

If career development is not actively discussed (rather than being a box to fill in and forget about) individuals may not believe the organisation is serious about looking after them.

2.3

Engaging with individuals

Organisations that take career management and employee engagement seriously often do well in terms of productivity and profitability as individuals feel more loyal and attached to the organisation.

This helps individuals to be flexible and responsive. It also means individuals are more likely to stick with the organisation in times of change, trusting senior management.

2.4

Retaining key staff

If individuals are focused on their career and see a path within the organisation, they are less likely to seek this elsewhere.

2.5

Right people in right roles

It is easier to plan for succession if organisations are aware of the talent they have within their own ranks. A constant review process breeds this awareness.

For the last few years the workplace has changed at a faster pace than ever before. Individuals can now find themselves doing a role that is no longer sustainable or which needs to change in order to remain relevant.

Career management identifies the particular skills an individual likes to use and suggests where this might be relevant in the organisation, as well as the skills in need of development to remain relevant to the changing organisational context.

2.6

Good P.R.

Highly skilled and adaptive individuals always remain in high demand despite any turmoil about the state of the economy.

It is these 'high flyers' who look to employers to support their development and offer challenging and stretching career paths.

2.7

Increased performance

Engaged individuals, aware of what they need to develop and keen to do so, experience higher levels of motivation. Career management can help individuals to understand what it is that they are really good at and continue to boost their feelings of value, increasing their sense of self worth.

In return you will tend to gain higher degrees of performance with less sickness and absence, and a flexible workforce who are willing to 'go the extra mile'.

2.8

Awareness of internal talent; not depending on one or two 'key' individuals

Whenever we complete career management programmes it is always amazing to discover the participants' many-varied hidden talents.

Most individuals are involved in outside hobbies or interests which develop them in very different ways, often untapped and undiscovered by the organisations in which they work.

Examples are:

- The Territorial Army;
- Volunteer work; and
- Charity work.

While immediate line management might be aware of these character facets, the means of capturing this information at an organisational level are often limited. This might mean that staff-members are overlooked for promotion or sideways moves (if 'silo' working is evident within the culture).

As a further negative, an affected individual might leave to fill the same role within a competing organisation. Or an external individual may be recruited at increased cost (in terms of recruitment fees, training, and time lag to full productivity.)

3

Challenges

Some organisations worry about implementing substantial career development, fearing they will 'open the floodgates for people to leave.' This presents a serious challenge.

In truth, the floodgates may open anyway. The main difference is ensuring that, while individuals are working for you, they are genuinely committed to what they are doing rather than 'treading water' and stagnating.

While ambitious and career minded individuals might be highly motivated, their capabilities often mean they get 'sucked into' the everyday. They lose the ability to stand back and reassess what it is they do well and not so well, and to consider a continuous development plan.

But remember: as individuals undertake career development, you will need to carefully manage their increased expectations.

3.1

Lack of career path within the organisation

Many organisations do not have clear and transparent career paths showing horizontal and vertical moves. This needs to be addressed in an integrated career development structure.

3.2

Silo mentality

Managers can often focus purely on their deliverables instead of looking wider within the organisation. As a result employees are often unaware of options outside their own department or Directorate.

3.3

Wanting to keep talent for self

Sometimes managers wish to keep peak performers in the same role in the belief that the high level of quality work being produced will be lost, and the worker is irreplaceable.

This can lead to frustrated individuals unnecessarily leaving the organisation, taking key knowledge with them.

3.4

Lack of time

Many people wonder: doesn't it take a lot of time to manage the careers of individuals who want to engage with this type of programme?

It is true: it does take time, and a genuine interest in helping staff move forward, to make this type of programme work. However, the benefits will usually outweigh this negative, with increased levels of productivity, ideas for improvements and a higher probability of internal promotions.

3.5

Lack of budget

Another frequently posed question is: will an integrated career management programme be expensive?

This depends. Much can be done internally, both in terms of training and development, and integrating practices with the wider performance management system. There may also be hidden costs around other activities – secondments, shadowing, job sharing. But development need not always consist of formal training interventions – classroom or online.

Implementing a career development approach will normally cost far less than recruiting external talent. And more money may be saved through the potential for increased levels of motivation combined with lower levels of absence.

3.6

Limited policies to underpin

Initiatives implemented piecemeal often fail. An effective performance management system allows for career discussions which are meaningful, and are often supported by policies for development interventions such as:

- Secondments;
- Job shadowing;
- Job rotation; and
- Mentoring.

It is important that these additional support structures are in place. If not, expectations may be raised with nothing in place to fulfil them. This increases the likelihood of an individual leaving for your competitors with renewed motivation!

4

How to make Career Management work

Clearly defined career paths, showing the skills and competencies required for different roles and areas, allow individuals to see a 'route' through the organisation.

Secondments enable internal movements. This could also include approaches to job shadowing, rotation and mentoring (both formal and informal).

The key to making this work is transparency. Individuals need to believe the organisation is keen to promote from within and will use internal talents more productively.

4.1

Training management to identify talent

A key reason for individuals leaving organisations is a lack of development opportunities. This is often the result of managers looking purely within their own area rather than from an organisational perspective.

Through our years of working with organisations we have seen or heard of numerous examples where individuals have been retained after someone has looked at opportunities from a wider perspective.

While conducting performance management training, it becomes evident that managers at many levels are uncomfortable about asking career-based questions for any purpose other than to record as data on a form.

Managers also seem less confident about assessing talent and identifying the strengths of individuals, focusing more on development areas within current roles.

Addressing this will increase the likelihood that people remain in the right roles within organisations and are not promoted or pushed into areas which do not match their capabilities (which, for individuals used to success, can have disastrous impacts, including a loss of confidence and status.)

4.2

HR: career development as part of a holistic approach

In order to help managers see opportunities and talent management from a wider perspective, HR needs to have a 'helicopter' approach linked to organisational strategy.

In this way HR can encourage management to address future and current organisational needs.

A career development system linked to talent management and succession planning can assist people to make the transition more successfully, looking at innovative and pragmatic ways of broadening the understanding of what might be feasible within the organisation.

A central 'portal' for careers, which helps managers as well as employees to better plan their careers within an organisation, will generate numerous benefits.

4.3

Integrated within performance management

Career development tends to work best when implemented as part of a performance management structure. This can be fully integrated to ensure managers continually check progress.

Many organisations use the career development element as an optional part of the process as there are employees who wish to do their current job, to the best of their abilities, and yet do not wish to progress. Employees like this can be the bedrock of an organisation, and this needs to be factored in when looking at career development.

4.4

Part of redeployment policies

An important element to consider when assessing the relevancy of career development is the likelihood of restructuring. Employees are put 'at risk' when organisations restructure, often before redeployment opportunities are sought for them.

During this time a proactive approach to highlighting and developing the transferability of their skills can really maximise redeployment, by ensuring individuals project themselves as having transferable skills (as managers might not see these themselves).

Ensuring people are in appropriate roles rather than being shoehorned also minimises the risk of an employee not surviving the probation period of their new role, and the consequent dent to their self-confidence.

4.5

Sideways versus upwards

In modern organisations, individuals need to take a fresh look at career planning. Flatter structures have rendered traditional views of career development, focused on upwards movement, untenable.

The resultant rethink must consider employability and skill acquisition, rather than simply role acquisition. Sideways moves to gain extra skills and depth in other areas have become commonplace, enabling individuals to gain the experience and exposure they require to get the role they ultimately want.

The interview question: "Where do you see yourself in five years time?" provides an interesting challenge to many. We recommend that you only pursue roles that enable you to develop in an area of genuine interest, hence giving you a real reason for wanting to choose a particular path. This makes answering the question a whole lot easier.

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More information

To discuss any of the issues raised in this document in more detail, please contact:

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